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Conflict and Countering Violent Extremism: Case Studies



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General Introduction

This paper is part of a research project commissioned by DFID in June 2015 on the relationship between Islamist violent extremism and conflict. The research question we were asked to investigate was: **What is distinctive about violent Islamist extremism in conflict situations, and what features does it share with other ideologies or movements involved in conflicts?** This paper considers the question in three country case studies: Kenya, Nigeria, and Syria/Iraq. The countries were selected by DFID and other UK government experts at a meeting in June 2015.

The method used in the analysis is comparative. We set out to compare Islamist and non-Islamist groups, focusing particularly on how they have influenced and been influenced by conflicts. In the case of Syria/Iraq, and at the request of DFID experts, we compared different Islamist groups, including Shia ones, rather than (as we originally proposed) to compare a secular and Islamist group. This reflects the nature of the Syrian and Iraqi civil wars, as well as British governmental priorities. We also feel that this approach has been of analytical benefit, as it has demonstrated the differences among Islamist groups in conflict situations.

Each case study follows a similar structure to facilitate comparisons. It sets out the background to the conflict and the main groups involved in it, then examines the aims and objectives of the groups, the drivers and enablers for radicalisation and recruitment, how the groups have interacted with conflict, and implications for interventions. Conclusions summarise, amongst other points, what we believe makes IVE groups different from others in conflict situations. At the end of the report is a summary table setting out the characteristics of the groups we have considered.

This paper has been informed by the findings of our literature review, and its conclusions are reflected in our paper on the implications of this research. They are also summarised in the executive summary which accompanies this report.

Kenya

Key Points

- Conflict associated with Islamist groups in Kenya is more similar to conflict associated with non-Islamist groups than it is different.
- While conflict and Islamist Violent Extremism (IVE) in Kenya cannot be understood without taking into account the dynamics in neighbouring Somalia, where the primary IVE group operating in Kenya, Al-Shabaab, has been conducting a fully-fledged insurgency for several years, many factors that influence the aims and behaviour of IVE and non-IVE conflict actors are context-specific to Kenya.
- The aims of the leaders of Al-Shabaab and its Kenyan affiliates for conflict in Kenya are highly and uniquely influenced by a regional Salafi-jihadist agenda, especially since Kenya's invasion of Somalia in 2011 and Al-Shabaab's internal purge of more Somali nationalist-orientated leaders that culminated in 2013.
- However, these aims and their supporting narratives remain quite localised to Kenya as opposed to the global jihadist movement and are equally linked to traditional power goals of gaining and holding territory, pushing an enemy army out of one's sphere of influence, ensuring the movement's survival by any means, and defending the community the movement claims to stand for (Muslims and Somalis) from oppression. These latter two share much in common with non-IVE conflict groups in Kenya's past and present.
- While the presence of extremist Islamist rhetoric and recruitment to conflict framed in Salafi-jihadist terms are unique as conflict drivers and pulls to participation in Al-Shabaab and its affiliates, the broader drivers and enablers that this rhetoric is deeply connected to reflect push factors on individual, communal and structural levels that are consistent to most if not all conflict in Kenya, including those groups reviewed here.
- IVE groups in Kenya have interacted with conflict in ways that are very similar to non-IVE groups, from the structure of their organisation, to their engagement in organised criminality, to their exploitation of local conflicts and tensions, to the impact of their violence and their methods used.

- Attempted suicide attacks may uniquely be increasing and participants have been drawn from a much wider cross-section of Kenyan communities through the increasingly pan-ethnic appeal of Islam than more locally-recruiting non-IVE groups, but these unique characteristics are on the whole in the minority.

Introduction

This case study examines several conflict actors in Kenya, both past and present, to determine whether Islamist Violent Extremist (IVE) groups there have unique aims, motivations, behaviour and impact compared to non-IVE groups. This is intended not only to provide a better understanding of IVE in conflict situations but also to highlight implications for development work, countering violent extremism (CVE), conflict resolution and peace-building programming in Kenya. Kenya provides an interesting case study in comparison to the Syria/Iraq and Nigeria cases also included in this project, given that the cycle of conflict associated with either IVE or non-Islamist conflict actors has not reached the same stages and levels of either (the former in particular). The different nature of conflict in Kenya, therefore, has implications for engagement with CVE, conflict resolution and peace-building in Kenya.

This case study compares IVE groups – the operations and supporters of Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahidin (Al-Shabaab) in Kenya and affiliated or sympathetic groups like Al-Hijra – with two contemporary groups – the armed wing of the Mombasa Republic Council (MRC) and the Mungiki – and a historical conflicts – the Mau Mau movement. In so doing, this study outlines several key themes related to the activities and background of these groups and conflicts, including their aims (where identifiable), drivers and enablers of participation, and interactions with conflict dynamics in terms of their organisation, participant profiles, narratives, tactics and scale of impact.

Background of the Groups

Islamist Violent Extremism: Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen (Al-Shabaab) and Kenyan affiliates

While domestic IVE groups have developed in Kenya in recent years, such as Al-Hijra, the origins of the primary IVE conflict actor in Kenya, Al-Shabaab, are rooted in neighbouring Somalia. IVE has a history in Somalia dating back to the 1980s. Insurgency designed to gain power for creating an Islamist state emerged in the chaos of the collapse of the Somali state in the early 1990s under the guise of Al-Itihaad al-Islamiya (AIAI) and its global jihadist connections to Al-Qaeda. By the mid-2000s, through leaders such as Hassan Dahir Aweys, this had developed into the broader-based Islamic Courts Union (ICU) in an attempt to bring stability under Sharia Law from Somalia's civil war. Al-Shabaab emerged as a jihadist and nationalist insurgent youth movement from the remnants of extreme elements of the ICU that was crushed by the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF) in 2007.¹

Its immediate targets, alongside other Islamist insurgent groups that splintered from the ICU and later joined the group, were Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG), the ENDF, and the subsequent African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) as obstructing their project of building Somalia into an Islamic caliphate. By 2011, the group controlled an area of Somalia the size of Denmark. Since coming under pressure by AMISOM and Somali TFG forces from 2011, however, internal tensions have led to a reorientation of the group's ambitions under leader Ahmed Abdi Godane and his successors towards a more regional focus beyond Somalia.²

Since just before and especially after the Kenyan military's intervention against it in southern Somalia in 2011, the group has increasingly conducted, orchestrated or inspired attacks in Kenya. Islamist extremism has a well-established recent history in Kenya dating back to the 1980s and 1990s. The likes of AIAI and other Islamist extremist groups in Somalia established financial connections to sympathisers in Nairobi's predominantly Somali Eastleigh district, Kenya's Somali-dominated north-east, and among Swahili and Arab Muslim communities along the Kenyan coast down to Mombasa,

¹ Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group, 2005-2012* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 15-30.

² Ibid, pp. 49-72.

drawing on the growing presence of Salafism in some Kenyan mosques. Islamist violent extremists from Al-Qaeda – with local Kenyan support – carried out terrorist attacks against western targets in Nairobi and Mombasa in 1998 and 2002.³ Yet IVE-led conflict has far less of a track record compared to Somalia – whether organic or introduced externally.

More recently, Al-Hijra – formerly the community-based Muslim Youth Centre formed in 2008 – has emerged based in Nairobi and with branches in several other cities, becoming an underground group affiliated to Al-Shabaab from 2012. Its pursuit of and engagement in terrorism and conflict in Kenya thus far remains far more restricted than Al-Shabaab's, though it has aided several of the latter's attacks in Kenya and has acted as a recruiter and funder for Kenyan-Somalis in particular to fight in Somalia. Its support base has primarily come from Eastleigh and the Swahili Muslim coast.⁴

Mombasa Republican Council (MRC)

The MRC officially formed in 1999 as a separatist group on the Swahili Muslim coast. Though not an IVE group in its aims or framing ideology, it overlaps with support for Al-Hijra and Al-Shabaab to an extent through its emergence out of long-standing Swahili Muslim separatism on the coast and grievances of several coastal Muslim ethnic groups. Led by Rando Ruwa, it is both a community and political movement campaigning against political and economic discrimination against Kenya's coastal peoples and, since 2008, complete secession from Kenya based on long-standing separatism from the interior. It has a more militant wing that may be growing and that has been tied to violence, especially around and since the 2013 general election. To date, however, it has not been implicated in acts of terrorism though given its epicentre on the coast and recruitment from the same Swahili Muslim communities from which Al-Hijra and Al-Shabaab have been recruiting, it is often perceived – with little evidence – to be linked to these IVE groups.⁵

³ Arye Oded, *Islam & Politics in Kenya* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), pp. 135-62; International Crisis Group (ICG), 'Kenyan Somali Islamist Radicalisation', Policy Briefing: Africa Briefing No. 85, 25 Jan 2012, p. 6; ICG, 'Kenya: Al-Shabaab – Closer to Home', Africa Briefing No. 102, 25 Sep 2014, pp. 8–9.

⁴ Matt Bryden et al., 'Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea pursuant to Security Council resolution 1916 (2010)', S/2011/433, 18 Jul 2011, pp. 146–48; Fredrick Nzes, 'Al-Hijra: Al-Shabab's Affiliate in Kenya', *CTC Sentinel*, 7, 5 (May 2014), pp. 24-26.

⁵ Arye Oded, 'Islamic Extremism in Kenya', Research on Islam and Muslims in Africa (RIMA) Occasional Papers, 1, 14 (Jul 2013), <<https://muslimsinfrica.wordpress.com/2013/07/05/islamic-extremism-in-kenya-dr-arye-oded/>>; Anneli Botha,

Mau Mau

The Mau Mau movement was in fact several loosely affiliated, predominantly ethnic Kikuyu grassroots violent movements that emerged around 1950 in central Kenya as a militant splinter from more moderate Kikuyu elites and Kenyan nationalists pushing for land reform, improved socio-economic opportunities, and more inclusive political influence (or even independence from) the central colonial government. This built on decades of growing and increasingly exclusive exploitation of prime land in the central highlands and Rift Valley by white European settlers in the Kikuyu heartland, backed by the government in Nairobi, which by the late 1940s was having increasingly severe effects on young, disadvantaged and landless Kikuyu in particular. Violence had increased from the late 1940s, but it was not until the government imposed a State of Emergency to quell this in 1952 that Mau Mau violence erupted into an insurgency from 1953-56. The conflict also reflected a civil war within the Kikuyu community, with Mau Mau targeting the many better-off elite 'loyalists' with closer ties to the colonial state just as much as government representatives and white settlers.

Mungiki

Mungiki, meaning 'multitude' in the Kikuyu language, is part organised criminal gang, part Kikuyu religio-cultural revival movement, and part private political army connected to more informal mobilisations to ethno-political violence around elections or key issues. In a legacy of the Kikuyu civil war of the 1950s, since its underground emergence from the late 1980s it has framed its purpose, in a vacuum of a state failure of support, as defending the rights of those more disadvantaged Kikuyu of the kind who fought in Mau Mau against other ethnic groups and the central government. These groups have not gained in terms of land rights or socio-economic opportunities from the post-conflict and post-colonial settlement of the 1960s compared to those more elite Kikuyu who did not support the movement. Moreover, it has supported a return to indigenous African traditions which it considers have been corrupted by westernisation and colonialism, including Christianity. Commencing as more of a rural movement, it moved from the 1990s into Nairobi's disadvantaged Kikuyu slum neighbourhoods. There it gained increasing membership, influence through violence and

'Radicalisation in Kenya: Recruitment to al-Shabaab and the Mombasa Republican Council', ISS Paper 265, Sep 2014, pp. 1-3.

its political wing, the Kenya National Youth Alliance, criminal funding, and connections with certain politicians seeking campaign support in the 1992, 1997, 2002 and 2007 general elections.⁶

Aims and Motivations

While Al-Shabaab's primary goals in Somalia are well-established – to ultimately form a strict Islamist state – its objectives in Kenya are less clear-cut. On the face of it, its leadership before late 2011 sought to operate on Kenyan soil for two main reasons: to recruit more fighters to its cause in Somalia; and to raid the north-east Kenyan coast for economic support. While both remain the case – especially the former – two main factors have influenced an evolution of these aims. The growing influence of leader Godane's more internationalist jihadist ideological agenda since 2011 over the more Somali-nationalist focused elements of the leadership in Hassan Aweys and Mukhtar Roobow and the Kenyan military's invasion of Somalia to reduce Al-Shabaab's security threat to Kenya in late 2011 have meant that operations in Kenya have increasingly become not just a means to an end in Somalia but an end in and of themselves.⁷

Principally this has been to force the Kenyan military back out of Somalia: attacks like that in 2013 on Nairobi's Westgate Mall have been framed in this light. But Al-Shabaab's stated ambitions – whether actually intended or as a framing narrative for recruitment – have also become more expansionist since 2011. It claims its fight is also to liberate 'all Muslim lands under Kenyan occupation', including 'north-eastern province and the coast' to join its intended Islamist state, and to take revenge against historical injustices against Kenyan Muslims. Nevertheless, rather than simply interpreting this

⁶ David Anderson, 'Vigilantes, Violence and the Politics of Public Order in Kenya', *African Affairs*, 101 (2002), pp. 531-55; Peter Kagwanja, 'Facing Mount Kenya or Facing Mecca? The Mungiki, Ethnic Violence and the Politics of the Moi Succession in Kenya, 1987-2002', *African Affairs*, 102 (2003), pp. 25-49; Jacob Rasmussen, 'Mungiki as youth movement: Revolution, gender and generational politics in Nairobi, Kenya', *Young: Nordic Journal of Youth Research*, 18, 3 (2010), pp. 301-19; Adams Oloo, 'Marginalisation and the rise of militia groups in Kenya: the Mungiki and the Sabaot Land Defence Force', in Wafula Okumu and Augustine Ikelegbe (eds), *Militias, Rebels and Islamist Militants: Human Insecurity and State Crises in Africa* (Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 2010), pp. 147-82; Jacob Rasmussen, 'Inside the System, Outside the Law: Operating the Matatu Sector in Nairobi', *Urban Forum*, 23 (2012), pp. 415-432.

⁷ Botha, 'Radicalisation in Kenya', pp. 1-3; David M. Anderson and Jacob McKnight, 'Kenya at War: Al-Shabaab and its Enemies in East Africa', *African Affairs*, 114, 454 (Jan 2015), p. 1.

through a global jihadist lens, this language and intention – if truly held – also chimes with pan-Somali nationalist and irredentist slogans of the 1960s and 1970s that fed into and out of the ‘Shifty War’, examined below, between the Kenyan state and Somali insurgents in the north-east who wanted that region to join Somalia. Moreover, its leaders’ apparent desire to protect members of their community (Muslims) from discrimination and ill-treatment in Kenya accords closely with the community-based protectionist aims of Mau Mau, Mungiki and the MRC.⁸

Given Al-Hijra’s clandestine nature since its shift from the Muslim Youth Centre in 2012, it remains difficult to determine its leadership’s precise goals – whether they match Al-Shabaab’s for Kenya or are more localised still. The primary goals of its predecessor had been very community-based, providing social and economic support for the mainly Somali Muslim youth in Nairobi’s Majengo and Pumwani slums who felt discriminated against. Its support for recruitment for Al-Shabaab’s insurgency in Somalia can in part be put down to the religious ideological sympathy for jihad by its leaders like Sheikh Ahmad Iman Ali (who since 2012 has led Al-Shabaab’s battalion of Kenyan fighters in Somalia). This became particularly so after the Kenyan state invaded Somalia in 2011. Its support for violence in Kenya through networks designed to facilitate Al-Shabaab operations is similarly framed in terms of defending Muslims against Kenyan state aggression through jihad, but to what ultimate end remains unarticulated and debated: simply to help get Kenyan forces out of Somalia or to spark a longer-term jihad against non-Muslims and form an Islamist caliphate?⁹

In some respects Al-Shabaab’s aims are quite similar to the MRC leadership’s aim for secession of part of Kenya (the coastal province rather than the north-east) for more autonomous rule from the central Kikuyu-dominated government. Rando Ruwa declared that his movement’s objective was to improve the situation of the coastal people and to ‘save’ them from what he called the ‘neo-colonial government of Kenya’. This remains the case even after the major political and constitutional reforms

⁸ ICG, ‘Kenyan Somali Islamist Radicalisation’, pp. 2-3; Cedric Barnes and Abdullahi Abdille, ‘Al-Shabaab’s Kenyan Ambitions’, ICG, 15 Apr 2015, <<http://blog.crisisgroup.org/africa/2015/04/15/al-shabaabs-kenyan-ambitions/>>.

⁹ Christopher Anzalone, ‘Kenya’s Muslim Youth Center and Al-Shabab’s East African Recruitment’, CTC Sentinel, 5, 10 (Oct 2012), pp. 9-13; Anneli Botha, ‘Assessing the vulnerability of Kenyan youths to radicalisation and extremism’, Institute for Security Studies (ISS) Paper 245, Apr 2013, p. 9; Nzes, ‘Al-Hijra’, pp. 24-25.

in 2013 that delegated far more power to county governments, indicated by the MRC's formal motto: 'Pwani si Kenya' ('the Coast is not Kenya' in Swahili).¹⁰

Like the IVE groups operating in Kenya, the MRC is seeking to push back against perceived injustices by the central state in Nairobi. Despite having historically been associated with the Sultanate of Zanzibar, coastal peoples have since independence come under the sway of Nairobi with little to show for it in terms of political influence and a loss of land and economic resources to 'outsiders' from the up-country interior. An identity that associates less with inland Kenyans than fellow coastal Swahili Muslims have fed into these aims, just as they have for Somali Al-Shabaab followers in north-east Kenya. Only secession, the MRC's leaders argue, can now fully tackle these deep problems. Despite these similarities and drawing to an extent on an identity of Muslim separatism, a key difference with Al-Shabaab and Al-Hijra is that the MRC's stated autonomy remains largely secular and focused more on local coastal identity rather than a more regional pan-Muslim or pan-Somali identity and project on theocratic grounds.¹¹

The precise and formal aims of the Mau Mau movement, like Mungiki, are harder to pin down. As it was a collection of movements from the Kikuyu heartlands, it had no uniform objectives stated in writing by militant leaders. Reclaiming land rights and accessibility for Kikuyu cultivation and socio-economic opportunity (especially among the young and poor) from increasing ownership by outside (white European) settlers and elite Kikuyu was one fundamental goal. Political goals of reducing marginalisation by the central (British colonial) government in Nairobi and gaining greater inclusivity and independence featured too, but these were much stronger aims for the non-violent Kenyan political nationalists who had a tenuous relationship with Mau Mau at most.¹² This opposition to marginalisation by the central government and efforts to effect a change in state behaviour towards the community the movement claimed to be defending provides a degree of commonality with IVE aims and motives in Kenya (as well as the MRC and Mungiki).

¹⁰ Oded, 'Islamic Extremism in Kenya'; Botha, 'Radicalisation in Kenya', pp. 3-5.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa*, Vol. II (London: John Currey, 1992), pp. 446, 451-54; Tabitha Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau 1905-63* (London: John Currey, 1987), pp. 169-74.

One legacy of Mau Mau has been the social and political tensions that divided its predominantly poor and landless Kikuyu members from the more elite Kikuyu conservative nationalists and ‘loyalists’ to the then colonial state who have dominated the central Kenyan state and politics since independence. This has in part manifested in Mungiki, whose leaders saw in Mau Mau a precedent for violent protest against the Kikuyu elite who have failed to redistribute wealth and opportunity among the ethnic community this elite claim authority over. However, whilst this may have been Mungiki’s original aims, the sect has increasingly taken on the hallmarks of an organised crime group, with criminal aims of gaining illegal income for the sake of its own existence rather than in service of broader goals.¹³

Drivers and Enablers of Radicalisation and Recruitment

Enabling environment

The broad enabling environment for multiple forms of violence, violent extremism and organised crime in Kenya applies just as much to IVE as other actors. Organised crime and violence for achieving political, social and economic goals has flourished due to poor governance and state failure to deliver services and security. This has created a vacuum of permissibility into which conflict actors have moved and in which violence and crime have become normalised. This enabling environment has been further fed by the politicisation of a range of community grievances due to the fractured nature of Kenyan politics along ethnic and religious lines, for which violence has increasingly become a recourse for address, and other systemic facilitators such as corruption. The same was true of the colonial state to some extent before 1963, whose vacuum or services and security was filled in the Central Highlands by Kikuyu militant nationalism, and has been since independence throughout the country but especially in the north-east and coast provinces, acting as both driver and enabler of Al-Shabaab in Kenya, its affiliates, the MRC and Mungiki.¹⁴

Identity, discrimination, marginalisation and inter-communal strife

¹³ Anderson, ‘Vigilantes’; Kagwanja, ‘Facing Mount Kenya’.

¹⁴ Expert comments at joint DfID-FCO Workshop on Conflict and Countering Violent Extremism in Kenya, Old Admiralty Building-Nairobi, 29 Sep 2015.

Unresolved low-level tensions and violence between Muslim Somali and Swahili communities and other Kenyan (mainly non-Muslim) ethnic groups in the North-East and Coast provinces – Boran, Samburu, Orma, Pokomo – have continued since independence over inter-communal issues like land use rights.¹⁵ Deep-rooted frustrations and grievances are also directed outwards by Somali and non-Somali groups alike towards those ‘up-country’ Christian Bantu groups – in particular the Kikuyu – that have dominated central political power since independence. They have felt politically and socio-economically marginalised either on the basis of ethnic or Muslim identity. All of these inter-communal tensions and resentment of an ‘alien’ central government have provided fertile material for exploitation by conflict actors including, but not limited to, Al-Shabaab and its affiliates.¹⁶ Many IVE and MRC leaders and followers in coastal communities consider the central Christian government and its colonial forebear complicit in undermining the once far superior socio-economic situation of coastal ethnic groups and Muslims by excluding them from political power (such as by banning the Islamic Party of Kenya in the early 1990s), ‘invading’ to obtain control of prime coastal land use rights, and other discriminatory practices. Many MRC recruits share their leaders’ strong secessionist sentiments that are linked to these grievances. The idea that the coast has been ‘colonised’ by non-coastal Kenyans politically, economically, and culturally therefore, is a well-entrenched recruiting theme among violent and non-violent and IVE and non-IVE movements alike on the Coast, driving participation with several conflict actors.¹⁷

Kenya’s north-east and in particular its Somali population has a similarly troubled history based on a perceived inequitable outcome of the post-colonial independence settlement. Separatism has played a role, linked to conflict over the national border separating Kenya from Somalia and dividing the

¹⁵ ICG, ‘Kenyan Somali Islamist Radicalisation’; Rift Valley Institute, ‘Managing Development and Security in north-eastern Kenya: A discussion with parliamentarians from the north east’, Rift Valley Institute Meeting Report, Nairobi Forum, 27 Sep 2013.

¹⁶ Botha, ‘Assessing the vulnerability of Kenyan youths to radicalisation’.

¹⁷ Oded, *Islam and Politics in Kenya*, pp. 137-38, 142-43; Janet McIntosh, *The Edge of Islam: Power, Personhood, and Ethnoreligious Boundaries on the Kenya Coast* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2009); Justin Willis and George Gona, ‘Pwani C Kenya? Memory, documents and secessionist politics in coastal Kenya’, *African Affairs*, 112, 446 (2012), pp. 48–71; Justin Willis and Hassan Mwakimako, ‘Islam, politics and violence on the Kenya coast’, *Note 4, Observatoire de la Corne d’Afrique*, Jul 2014, <http://www.lam.sciencespobordeaux.fr/sites/lam/files/note4_observatoire.pdf>; ICG, ‘Kenya: Al-Shabaab – Closer to Home’.

north-east's Somalis from their ancestral homeland. From the moment of Kenya's independence in 1963, a number of these Somalis commenced a rebellion against their newly independent government in protest at the failure to gain a merger of their region (formerly the Northern Frontier District) with Somalia and away from the new multicultural Kenya dominated by 'Kikuyu Christians' in which they felt they had little stake. The Shifta War that followed led to a highly repressive response by the government's security forces against armed irredentist groups supported from Somalia and a state of emergency in the region that lasted into the 1990s. Islam and pan-Somali nationalism and identity merged as factors encouraging these Muslim Somali groups to fight. The insurgency was only ended through military means, with no formal peace agreement or closure to the grievances that had fed it. The similarities with motives of members of these north-east communities fighting with Al-Shabaab in Somalia and Kenya are notable – and have been influenced by this past history of conflict and state repression in instrumentalised narratives. Additionally, however, there is now an even stronger emphasis on Salafi-jihadism to protect fellow Muslims as a more extreme overlay in encouraging participation in violence; pan-Somali irredentism in north-east Kenya is not as strong as it used to be.¹⁸

In addition to the ethnic politics of identity in the north-east, some Kenyan-Somalis have been attracted to IVE on the linked grounds of a long-term failure by the central state to ensure the region's security and allocate national resources for its development. Like on the Coast, this has led to significantly more deprivation and insecurity relative to elsewhere in Kenya. When the state's security forces have conducted operations there over several decades, conducting security sweeps to check the status of the north-east's inhabitants and deport thousands to Somalia as 'aliens', these have tended to adversely impact many ordinary Kenyan-Somalis. Such actions have reinforced feelings of discrimination and harassment that have existed on legal grounds too. Kenyan-Somalis have been required to carry special identity cards to 'prove' their 'Kenyaness' since the late 1980s and have faced institutionalised hurdles put in place for all Muslims seeking to gain ordinary identity

¹⁸ ICG, 'Kenyan Somali Islamist Radicalisation', pp. 2-4; Botha, 'Radicalisation in Kenya', pp. 7-8; Vincent Bakpetu Thompson, *Conflict in the Horn of Africa: The Kenya-Somalia Border Problem 1941–2014* (Lanham, M.D.: University Press of America, 2015), pp. 107-212.

cards and passports. For a number of recruits from this region, Al-Shabaab has been providing new means for both expressing this deep-seated discontent and attempting to do something about it.¹⁹ Discrimination of the kind Muslims have experienced in Kenya acted as a similar source of growing anger that fed into the Mau Mau movement. Increasing protests, some violent, had developed during the late 1940s against state requirements like the *kipande*, a registration certificate that all African adult males were legally required to carry with them at all times. A number of those who would subsequently join Mau Mau took part in mass burnings of this *kipande* in protest against this institutionalised discriminatory system of pass laws. This system reflected a broader denial of access to education, land, state institutions and public services by the central state that left Kenya's many non-European ethnic groups socially alienated, economically marginalised, and politically disenfranchised.²⁰

While Somalis from the north-east and Nairobi's Eastleigh district and coastal Muslims have certainly constituted a significant proportion of those from Kenya either joining Al-Shabaab or domestic IVE groups, in recent years an increasingly substantial proportion have also come from a range of Kenya's non-Somali and non-coastal ethnic groups, including recent Muslim converts.²¹ This diverse background strongly indicates that participation in IVE in Kenya is not solely predicated on Somalis' and coastal Muslims' push factors but also other and broader drivers in Kenyan society.²² The politics of land use rights and concomitant discord between different ethnic groups and between these groups and the central state governing from Nairobi has been a consistent driver of conflict throughout Kenya, from the north-east, to the central highlands, to the western borders, since the colonial era and Mau Mau.²³ Youth in the different communities affected have often been the hardest hit and most willing, therefore, to take more extreme measures.

¹⁹ Oded, *Islam and Politics in Kenya*, pp. 139-42; Human Rights Watch, 'Screening of Ethnic Somalis: The Cruel Consequences of Kenya's Passbook System' (Sep 1990); Botha, 'Radicalisation in Kenya', p. 8.

²⁰ Frank Furedi, *The Mau Mau War in Perspective* (London: James Currey, 1989), p. 104; Daniel Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau, Creating Kenya: Counterinsurgency, Civil War, and Decolonization* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), pp. 6-7.

²¹ Botha, 'Radicalisation in Kenya', p. 10.

²² Ibid, pp. 11-13.

²³ Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*, Vol. II, pp. 265-468; Al-Amin Mazrui, 'Ideology, Theory and Revolution: Lessons from the Mau Mau of Kenya', *Monthly Review*, 39 (Sep 1987); Lonsdale, 'Authority, Gender and Violence', pp. 52-58; Caroline Elkins, *Britain's Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005), pp. 12-15; Catherine

Lack of opportunities for youth

The situation of youth in the north-east, Coast and more broadly in Kenya has exacerbated a number of these grievances. Since Mau Mau they have consistently been those most affected by the problems feeding into these grievances, such as lack of socio-economic opportunities and crises of identity – both macro-level (conceptions of being Kenyan, Somali, Swahili, Muslim) and micro-level (position in family and local community). In this regard, it is no surprise that Botha has found recruits to both IVE and non-IVE actors alike have reported an increasing sense of belonging and firmer sense of identity in these groups than they felt they had before, a frequent finding in research on recruitment to tight-knit conflict and criminal groups around the world. This goes for Mungiki too, as Rasmussen has shown. Moreover, given the deprivation of many but not all of these youths, Al-Shabaab's offer of far more substantial income than they can get anywhere else has proved a strong allure for some. This is aiding the expansion in recruitment beyond north-eastern Somalis and coastal Muslims.²⁴

Another consistent finding across IVE and non-IVE groups in Kenya is that youth disposed to activism on a certain issue or grievance have often been more inclined to more extremist and violent avenues of protest and action. This is due in part to conceptions that their elders and communities' established representative institutions are too moderate, conservative or close to the central state to achieve change or lacking in avenues for youth to participate with influence. This was the case with Mau Mau, where the majority of the fighters were disadvantaged youth and who considered traditional community leaders and Kenya African Union nationalists as either too self-interested in their relations with European settlers, traders and the government or unable to accomplish much through political means.²⁵ This has also been the case with IVE networks in Kenya. The perceived

Boone, 'Land conflict and distributive politics in Kenya', *African Studies Review*, 55, 1 (2012), pp. 75-103; Catherine Boone, *Property and political order: land rights and the structure of conflict in Africa* (Cambridge, CUP, 2014), pp. 139-56, 190-99, 261-67.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 7; Rasmussen, 'Mungiki as youth movement', pp. 315-16; Tom Burrige, 'Funding jihad: Al-Shabab cash lures in young Kenyans', *BBC News*, 12 Dec 2014.

²⁵ Furedi, *The Mau Mau War in Perspective*, pp. 105-06; John Lonsdale, 'Authority, Gender and Violence: The War Within Mau Mau's Fight for Land and Freedom', in E.S. Atieno Odhiambo and John Lonsdale (eds), *Mau Mau & Nationhood: Arms, Authority & Narration* (Oxford: James Currey, 2003), pp. 52-58.

illegitimacy of the Supreme Council of Kenyan Muslims (SUPKEM) as the official representative of this community by more extreme Islamists on the grounds of being too close to the political power (the Nairobi government) doing wrongs to Muslims has encouraged participation in less mainstream, more radical (and violent) channels of activism.²⁶

Repression by the security services

Repressive government security crackdowns against Somalis in the north-east and Nairobi's Eastleigh district and Muslims along the Coast for decades have accentuated distrust towards the central government, a sense of persecution, and a more entrenched perception of themselves as not Kenyan. The effects of security sweeps through north-east Kenya on local civilians were noted above. 1984's Wagalla Massacre of 384 Somalis remains a particularly infamous incident in the region's history of state repression. Similarly, repression of political activism in the name of coastal Muslims' rights since the early 1990s has repeatedly fanned the flames of more extreme and violent actions.²⁷ This has manifested more recently in demonstrations in Mombasa by supporters of both IVE and the MRC following allegations that prominent local radical Muslim clerics have been assassinated by Kenyan security agencies. Imbalanced hard security responses targeting suspect communities wholesale have had an inverse impact on security, galvanising support for both IVE actors and the MRC.²⁸ The British central government's repression of grassroots activism from the late 1940s, arrests of leading nationalists in Kenya in the early 1950s, forced land evictions by the police, and a declaration of Emergency powers that led to collective punishments against whole Kikuyu communities had a similar galvanising effect on those considering joining the Mau Mau movement.²⁹

Socialisation of violence and state failure

Radicalisation and mobilisation to conflict and violent extremism throughout the country may reflect gradual exposure to and socialisation towards extreme behaviour at both the individual and community level. This has occurred through family and especially friends, pressure from social

²⁶ Botha, 'Radicalisation in Kenya', pp. 8-9.

²⁷ Oded, *Islam and Politics in Kenya*, pp. 141, 152-54.

²⁸ Anderson and McKnight, 'Kenya at War', p. 1; Human Rights Watch, *Insult to Injury: The 2014 Lamu and Tana River Attacks and Kenya's Abusive Response*, Jun 2015, pp. 10-12.

²⁹ Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*, vol. II, p. 370; Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau*, pp. 138-40; Furedi, *The Mau Mau War in Perspective*, pp. 107-08, 116-118.

superiors and peers to join violent extremist groups, and increasing legitimisation of the use of violence to achieve political ends. Botha's research into the influence of these factors on decisions to join Al-Shabaab and the MRC on the Coast demonstrates this clearly.³⁰

These individual, community and structural drivers of socialised participation in conflict and marginalisation and discrimination on lines of identity and political geography are strongly linked to central state failure. Into this vacuum in the north-east, the Coast, Nairobi's slums and elsewhere have stepped alternative actors – both IVE and non-IVE. Despite having different agenda, Al-Shabaab and Al-Hijra on the one hand and the likes of the MRC on the other are tapping into similar frustrations and grievances, offering a form of security where none is forthcoming from the state.³¹ Many of those individuals and groups that have been cooperating with Al-Shabaab in its Kenyan operations on these grounds in the north-east and Coast may have been doing so as a temporary means of convenience rather than having been fully radicalised into the aims and ideology of the group. But there may be a risk of this cooperation incubating and evolving into a more established Al-Shabaab-led insurgency or protracted terrorism in these regions.³²

Commonalities

The findings of a 2008 lecture series at the Goethe-Institut Kenya on the 2007-08 violence between Kikuyu (including Mungiki) and other ethno-political groupings like the Luo and of the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission report in 2013 to learn from this are notable for the similarities between the drivers of violence they deduced and those of IVE in Kenya. Poor governance, law and order and a history of repressive actions by Kenyan security agencies, Parliament's failure to ensure accountability from the Executive and linked corruption, linked socio-economic marginality and uneven distribution of national resources and services, land-use rights, inter-communal tensions and

³⁰ Ruth Wangeci Ndungu, 'Socialization and Violence: Ideas and Practices in Kenya', in Mbugua wa-Mungai & George Gona (eds), *(Re)membering Kenya Vol 1: Identity, Culture and Freedom* (Nairobi: Twaweza Communications, 2010), pp. 110-125; Botha, 'Radicalisation in Kenya', pp. 4-7; expert comments at joint DfID-FCO Workshop, 29 Sep 2015.

³¹ Oded, *Islam and Politics in Kenya*, pp. 139-42; Botha, 'Assessing the vulnerability of Kenyan youths to radicalisation and extremism'.

³² Anderson and McKnight, 'Kenya at War', p. 3; Human Rights Watch, *Insult to Injury*, pp. 10-12.

dilemmas of identity reflecting the fractious nature of the Kenyan 'nation' are all found to play a role in fostering and encouraging Kenyans' participation in conflict.³³

Adams Oloo also highlights these factors in relation to the leaders and followers of Mungiki, the Saboot Land Defence Force (SLDF) around Mt. Elgon (formally fighting against discrimination in allocation of land-use right and natural resources by more dominant ethnic groups), and the rise of militias more generally in Kenya. Political leaders have frequently exploited these powerful grievances that have divided communities in much the same way as IVE actors like Al-Shabaab to mobilise people by calling on cultural markers (a common history, language or religion) to engage them at a group level. The formation of political parties on these ethnic lines has been accompanied by the formation of militant groups that claim to safeguard the interests of their specific communities, like Mungiki. Yet given the need to survive the harsh economic disparities in Kenya, several of these militias comprising mainly young, unemployed men have over time turned against their own communities. This has been enabled in part by the government's inability to provide security, weak state penetration and the formation of 'ungovernable areas' (from urban slums to the north-east).³⁴

Religious ideology

Despite the several similarities of leadership aims and motives and drivers to participation, the unique role of religious ideology in informing Al-Shabaab and Al-Hijra's conflict aims in Kenya and attraction of recruits cannot be overlooked. Islam has been more of a marker of identity and marginalisation that has reinforced a sense of coastal separateness than a guiding ideology for the MRC's leaders and followers, who also include Christians and followers of traditional beliefs. Al-Shabaab's members, in contrast, are almost exclusively Muslim, generally more conservative in their views of matters like religious diversity and Muslim exclusivity, and are more prone than MRC members to viewing their religion as under threat by the government in particular.³⁵

³³ Ndungu, 'Socialization and Violence', pp. 111-12; Kenya Transitional Justice Network, 'Summary: Trust, Justice and Reconciliation Commission Report', Aug 2013.

³⁴ Oloo, 'Marginalisation and the rise of militia groups in Kenya', pp. 147-49.

³⁵ Botha, 'Radicalisation in Kenya', pp. 8-9.

In framing their desire to gain redress for Muslims in Kenya and introduce Sharia Law into Muslim communities to protect them from the vices and excesses of the secular Kenyan state, both Al-Shabaab and its Kenyan affiliates have drawn on a strain of radical Salafist Islam that has gained traction among a minority of Kenyan Muslims since the 1980s and since the 1990s an even smaller strain of Salafi-jihadist adherents.³⁶ This latter strain has supported the global jihadist ideological goals of Al-Qaeda and the AIAI and, despite being small, has provided the primary recruiting channel since the mid-2000s for mobilising Kenyans to conflict in Somalia. AIAI's narratives also had a strong pan-Somali nationalist flavour, suggesting religious ideology was not the only factor at work but interlinked with ethnicity and identity issues. This has been the case to an extent with Al-Shabaab in Kenya too, though increasingly it has framed its narratives at Muslims more generally to broaden its potential recruitment net.³⁷ Botha's research has shown the unique prominence of the protection of Islam in Al-Shabaab and Al-Hijra's aims and narratives and the significant recruiting role of religious leaders, which has accorded with those who feel discriminated against as Muslims. Whether these indicators reflect an ideological commitment to IVE leaders' Salafi-jihadist narrative, a more basic desire to protect their way of life and fellow Muslims, or a mobilisation to fight alongside those of a similar Muslim identity remains contested.³⁸

Mau Mau and Mungiki aims and drivers to participation have also contained strains of religious ideology or rhetoric. Yet these have been inextricably bound with local Kikuyu culture and did not have as dominant roles to play as the likes of land use grievances. Mau Mau's ritualistic oath-taking ceremonies more reflected a growing socialised determination to fight local injustice and create unity of purpose in doing so rather than a religious ideological guide to aims and violence as the colonial government first assumed.³⁹ Mungiki's religio-cultural rhetoric, most analysts concur, has similarly been more a means of legitimising the group, garnering sympathy and recruiting members attracted

³⁶ ICG, 'Kenyan Somali Islamist Radicalisation', pp. 5-8.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Botha, 'Radicalisation in Kenya', pp. 8-12.

³⁹ Furedi, *The Mau Mau War in Perspective*, pp. 108-09, 140-41; David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), pp. 279-88.

by that side of it than an actual guide and inspiration for its actions, which are in practice more linked to rectifying marginalisation, deprivation and a lack of political influence.⁴⁰

Interactions with Conflict

Interaction with conflict dynamics

A significant factor in developments in IVE activities in Kenya has been the Kenyan government's commencement of military operations in southern Somalia against Al-Shabaab since October 2011.⁴¹ Together with the ENDF in central Somalia and more proactive operations by the AU's AMISOM and its Somali government and militia allies, Al-Shabaab's hold over sizeable territory and strategic assets in south-central has been significantly eroded. Moreover, its leadership has during this time been depleted through intelligence-led US air strikes and commando raids, culminating in Godane's death in September 2014.⁴²

Yet Kenya's incursion has afforded the group a new narrative to justify attacks in Kenya and support for those Al-Shabaab leaders who struggled from 2011 until a successful purge in June 2013 to achieve a fundamental 'reinvention' of aims, strategy and tactics. This reinvention has moved the group away from its formerly heterogeneous leadership encompassing nationalist Somalia-focused and politically pragmatic figures such as Aweys and Roobow towards a more narrowly internationalist agenda dictated by Godane and his successors, with a stronger element of Al-Qaeda-affiliated global jihadist ideology. Indicative of Al-Shabaab's history of strategic adaptability, as the group's balloon has been increasingly squeezed in Somalia it has expanded into Kenya to relieve pressure and survive, utilising long-standing Islamist extremist networks there and Kenya's enabling environment

⁴⁰ Oloo, 'Marginalisation and the rise of militia groups in Kenya', pp. 155-58.

⁴¹ Bronwyn Bruton and Paul D. Williams, *Counter-insurgency in Somalia: Lessons learned from the African Union Mission in Somalia 2007–2013* (Tampa, F.L.: US Joint Special Operations University, 2014), pp. 55-9, 61-2; Anderson and McKnight, 'Kenya at War', pp. 4-13.

⁴² Matt Bryden, *The Reinvention of Al-Shabaab: A Strategy of Choice or Necessity?*, A Report for the CSIS Africa Program (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, Feb 2014), p. 1.

for conflict. This explains Al-Shabaab's aims in Kenya as much as a long-term plan for any Islamist caliphate based on a Greater Somalia.⁴³

Organisation

Al-Shabaab in Somalia has been both a highly bureaucratic and hierarchical organisation, far more than a traditional terrorist group.⁴⁴ Since it began operating in Kenya, however, its structure has been looser and more akin to a cellular terrorist existence – as has the underground Al-Hijra's even more so – though coordinated to some extent by the group's structured and insulated Amniyaat special operations unit in Somalia. This reflects the different conflict and security environment in Kenya in which Al-Shabaab has had far less influence than in south-central Somalia.⁴⁵ In this sense, IVE actors in Kenya are similar to Mau Mau and Mungiki, both characterised by decentralised loose structures and somewhat independent bands and cells.⁴⁶

Engagement in organised criminality

Al-Shabaab's flexibility and responsiveness to changes in surrounding political, economic and conflict dynamics has for several years transcended the leadership's factionalism between Somalia-first nationalists and more internationalist global jihadist elements.⁴⁷ This, Anderson and McKnight argue, has enabled Al-Shabaab to react speedily to opportunities – including new criminalised sources of

⁴³ Bronwyn Bruton and J. Peter Pham, 'The Splintering of Al Shabaab: A Rough Road From War to Peace', *Foreign Affairs*, 2 Feb 2012, <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/africa/2012-02-02/splintering-al-shabaab>>; Bryden, *The Reinvention of Al-Shabaab*, pp. 1-2; Ken Menkhaus, 'Al-Shabaab's capabilities post-Westgate', *CTC Sentinel*, 7, 2 (2014), pp. 4-9; Stig Jarle Hansen, 'An in-depth look at Al-Shabaab's internal divisions', *CTC Sentinel*, 7, 2 (2014), pp. 9-12; Paul D. Williams, 'After Westgate: Opportunities and challenges in the war against Al-Shabaab', *International Affairs*, 90, 4 (2014), pp. 907-23; Jarat Chopra et al., 'Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2111 (2013): Somalia', S/2014/726, 13 Oct 2014, pp. 18-21; expert comments at joint DfID-FCO Workshop, 29 Sep 2015.

⁴⁴ Roland Marchal, 'The rise of a jihadi movement in a country at war: Harakat al Shabaab al Mujahiddin in Somalia' (CERI Research Paper, Sciences Po, Paris, Mar 2011), pp. 22, 64-75; Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, ch. 6; Brynjar Lia, 'Understanding Jihadi Proto-States', *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 9, 4 (Aug 2015), pp. 34-36.

⁴⁵ Nzes, 'Al-Hijra', pp. 24-26.

⁴⁶ Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*, Vol. II, pp. 402-03, 447-49; Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau*, pp. 139-40; Rasmussen, 'Mungiki as youth movement', p. 311.

⁴⁷ Marchal, 'The rise of a jihadi movement in a country at war', pp. 41-48; Bryden, *The Reinvention of Al-Shabaab*, pp. 2-3.

financing – ‘without allowing ideology to impede its progress.’⁴⁸ All conflict actors under review have had significant links to organised crime, either from their genesis or in response to opportunities that have developed. Al-Shabaab and IVE groups in Kenya have had numerous links to criminal activities in order to sustain themselves, from protection rackets in Eastleigh to taxing smuggled contraband in the north-east.⁴⁹ A sizeable proportion of Mau Mau fighters either came directly from organised crime groups in Nairobi like the post-war ‘Forty Group’ of Kikuyu ex-servicemen or were mobilised by figures with close connections to these groups.⁵⁰ The Mungiki has been every bit an organised criminal group as a political conflict actor, arguably even more so during its existence. Its method of imposing protection rackets on local communities in Nairobi’s slums to raise taxes – as other militias like the SLDF have – is very similar to how Al-Shabaab has operated in Somalia.⁵¹ The MRC, with its political links to influential figures in Mombasa, has been frequently accused by the government of being closely engaged in the rampant criminal trafficking of contraband in and around the port of Mombasa, though attempts to delegitimise the movement feed into this.⁵²

Participation and narratives

The predominant profile of those engaged with Al-Shabaab and Al-Hijra in Kenya has been Somalis and other non-Somali Muslims, in particular from the north-east, Coast and Nairobi. However, as noted above, an increasing number of recruits have come from outside of these areas or have been recent converts from a range of ethnic groups. IVE in Kenya has attracted more participants from across the country than the far more localised participation in the MRC (coastal groups like Swahili Muslims), Mau Mau (central highlands and Rift Valley Kikuyu) and Mungiki (Rift Valley and Nairobi

⁴⁸ Anderson and McKnight, ‘Kenya at War’, p.3.

⁴⁹ For Al-Shabaab’s flexible financing strategies, see Valter Vilkkio, ‘Al-Shabaab: From External Support to Internal Extraction: A Minor Field Study on the Financial Support from the Somali Diaspora to Al-Shabaab’, Mar 2011; Tom Keatinge, ‘The Role of Finance in Defeating Al-Shabaab’, RUSI Whitehall Report 2-14, Dec 2014; Tom Maguire and Cathy Haenline, ‘An Illusion of Complicity: Terrorism and the Illegal Ivory Trade in East Africa’, RUSI Occasional Paper, Sep 2015, pp. 23-32.

⁵⁰ Lonsdale, ‘Authority, Gender & Violence’, p. 57; Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, pp. 35-37; Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau*, p. 6.

⁵¹ Rasmussen, ‘Inside the System, Outside the Law’, pp. 415-32; expert comments at joint DfID-FCO Workshop, 29 Sep 2015.

⁵² Emmanuel Kisiangani, ‘Kenya’s Mombasa Republican Council: liberators or nascent radical fanatics?’, *ISS*, 27 Jun 2012, <<https://www.issafrica.org/iss-today/kenyas-mombasa-republican-council-liberators-or-nascent-radical-fanatics>>.

Kikuyu). This may in part reflect Al-Shabaab and its IVE affiliates' posturing to help address a range of grievances that affect more than just its Somali core.⁵³ Many – but not all, as the Garissa attack showed – of these have been socio-economically disadvantaged young males, a common profile across all the conflict actors addressed.

'Foreign fighters' have in the past constituted a significant fighting influence in Al-Shabaab in Somalia, where over 1000 such fighters from outside Somalia – many from Kenya and the majority from the international Somali diaspora. This may have begun to change since 2012 for several reasons.⁵⁴ In Kenya, the dominant profile of any such fighters are Somalis from Somalia. While unique compared to the other more locally recruited groups, there is a long history of Somalis from Somalia engaging in conflict in Kenya separate to any IVE cause or group, such as during and after the Shifto War. Non-Somali foreign fighters have formed a very small minority of Al-Shabaab participants in Kenya thus far, with IVE conflict there not having gained a regional or global recruiting attraction on either identity or Salafi-jihadist grounds.

Most Al-Shabaab and Al-Hijra narratives about conflict in Kenya, even while infused with global jihadist ideology, have remained largely anchored to local concerns, reinforcing this trend in recruitment and participation. With Al-Shabaab's consolidation of leadership and shift of aims certainly came changes in narrative and recruiting that had implications for conflict in Kenya. Hitherto primarily nationalistic rhetoric was twisted to become more global and ideological, pledging allegiance to Al-Qaeda and promoting Somalia as a destination for participating in global jihad.⁵⁵ The increasingly active recruiting campaign in Kenya that accompanied this may not merely reflect this ideological shift. A pragmatic appreciation of reverses in fortunes in Somalia and the need for reinvigoration not only of purpose but also of manpower may equally explain Al-Shabaab's attempts

⁵³ Lonsdale, 'Authority, Gender & Violence', pp. 54-55; Rasmussen, 'Mungiki as youth movement'; Botha, 'Radicalisation in Kenya', pp. 8-13.

⁵⁴ Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, Shiraz Maher, and James Sheehan, 'Lights, Camera, Jihad: Al-Shabaab's Western Media Strategy' (International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR), 2012), p. 1; Raffaello Pantucci, 'Bilal al-Berjawi and the Shifting Fortunes of Foreign Fighters in Somalia', *CTC Sentinel*, 24 Sep 2013, <<https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/bilal-al-berjawi-and-the-shifting-fortunes-of-foreign-fighters-in-somalia>>; Hansen, 'An in-depth look at Al-Shabaab's internal divisions', pp. 9–12.

⁵⁵ ICG, 'Somalia's Divided Islamists', Africa Briefing No. 74, 18 May 2010, p. 6.

to source more fighters from within Kenya and encourage them to further undermine the Kenyan state's ability to provide security and services in the north-east and coast.

In so doing, though, it is noticeable that intertwined with its jihadist rhetoric, Al-Shabaab has explicitly targeted the many local grievances of Kenya's marginalised communities in its increasing Swahili language propaganda (stepped up significantly after Kenya's 2011 invasion). This has focused recruitment on Kenya rather than more internationally and reveals an awareness that potential participants will not be attracted purely on ideological grounds but instead in relation to their more practical grievances.⁵⁶ Evidence from the Mpeketoni attacks in the summer of 2014, for example, indicates Al-Shabaab recruiting narratives sought to exploit Muslim disaffection and inter-communal tensions in local coastal politics in the Lamu area to support its operations.⁵⁷ More broadly, Al-Shabaab has increasingly been targeting Christian Kenyans living in the north-east and Coast, purposefully separating them out from Muslim members of their communities to help foster the narrative of restoration of ancestral Muslim (and Somali) rights over this land. This represents a very different tactic and narrative to Al-Shabaab's targeting of Muslims in Somalia, where its terrorist attacks have been far more indiscriminate.⁵⁸

While Al-Shabaab is not exploiting pre-existing fully-fledged conflict in Kenya as such, like such actors have in Syria and Iraq, it is certainly manipulating and entrenching well-established tensions that have fomented conflict in the past. Furthermore, Al-Shabaab and its Kenyan affiliates are doing so on a scale that far outstrips the activities of the other conflict actors under review, with far more sophisticated and incessant propaganda disseminated through a combination of physical Islamist extremist networks, radio and social media.⁵⁹ Yet political figures in Kenya have for decades exploited local grievances to mobilise groups to violence. Mau Mau and Mungiki leaders to some extent have done so on a very localised level. John Lonsdale and Daniel Branch have both emphasised the

⁵⁶ Anzalone, 'Kenya's Muslim Youth Center', p. 10; Botha, 'Assessing the vulnerability of Kenyan youth to radicalisation', p. 8.

⁵⁷ Dennis Okari, 'Mpeketoni attacks: four possibilities', *BBC News*, 17 Jun 2014; Anderson and McKnight, p. 2; Human Rights Watch, *Insult to Injury*, pp. 10-12.

⁵⁸ Gwen Ifill, 'Why al-Shabab is trying to inspire Muslim backlash against Kenya – Interview with Prof. Ken Menkhaus', *PBS Newshour*, 2 Apr 2015, <<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/al-shabab-trying-inspire-muslim-backlash-kenya/>>.

⁵⁹ Anzalone, 'Kenya's Muslim Youth Center', p. 12.

patchwork of local grievances that fed into and out of the violence associated with Mau Mau and its conflict with Kikuyu loyalists, drawing on identity cleavages at micro, meso and macro levels and re-shaped them to their own ends.⁶⁰ There are distinct similarities with the patchwork of very localised grievances across north-east and coastal Kenya that are feeding into and being exploited by Al-Shabaab and other IVE groups more meso and macro level conflict narratives.

Scale, impact and conduct of conflict

Godane's acquisition of complete leadership of Al-Shabaab brought a 'forefronting' of expressive ahead of instrumental violence in line with more Salafi-jihadist rather than nationalist IVE groups and a greater acceptance of the 'takfiri' ethos that legitimises the killing of other Muslims including civilians.⁶¹ This trend of increasing violence is apparent in the University of Maryland's Global Terrorism Database: in Somalia between 2007 and 2014, Al-Shabaab conducted more than 1700 of what the database classifies as terrorist attacks, rising from less than 10 in 2007 to over 800 in 2014 and accounting for more than 4000 deaths and 4000 wounded military, political and civilian victims. The number of attacks it has conducted in Kenya have also gone up significantly, from 37 in 2013 to 80 in 2014 in a total of 213 attacks since 2008. These have accounted for an estimated 520 fatalities and over 1000 wounded. Overall, Al-Shabaab has been responsible for over 60 per cent of designated terrorist attacks in Kenya between 2008 and 2014. The numbers associated with the MRC are far smaller and despite clashes with security forces, its leadership still maintains it is a non-violent movement.⁶²

⁶⁰ Furedi, *The Mau Mau War in Perspective*, pp. 104-14; Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*, Vol. II, p. 295; Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau*, pp. 14-15.

⁶¹ Bryden, 'The Reinvention of Al-Shabaab', p. 2. For expressive versus instrumental use of violence by 'abstract/universal' IVE groups versus more nationalist-separatist groups, see James A. Piazza, 'Is Islamist Terrorism More Lethal?: An Empirical Study of Group Ideology, Organization and Goal Structure', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 32, 5 (2009), pp. 406-19.

⁶² Amy Pate, Erin Miller, and Michael Jensen, 'Background Report: Al-Shabaab Attack on Garissa University in Kenya', National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), University of Maryland, April 2015, <http://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/STARTBackgroundReport_alShabaabGarissaU_April2015.pdf>; Ifill, 'Why al-Shabab is trying to inspire Muslim backlash against Kenya'; Kisiangani, 'Kenya's Mombasa Republican Council'.

Noteworthy, however, are the numbers associated with Mau Mau by comparison. In the four most extreme years of the conflict from 1952-56, Mau Mau fighters killed 32 European settlers, 63 European combatants, 170 black Kenyan members of the official armed forces, and at least 1,800 black Kenyan (predominantly fellow Kikuyu) loyalist opponents of their insurgency.⁶³ Similarly, the number of casualties associated with Mungiki and the 2007-08 elections violence, let alone the group's wider history of violence, place the impact of IVE in Kenya into perspective. Over 1000 Kenyans died as rival militias fought running battles against each other. Mungiki was not responsible for all of these deaths, but it certainly was the principal actor involved.⁶⁴ The argument that violent extremist groups infused with a religious (in particular Islamist) ideology that tolerates or even encourages more unconstrained violence as a sacred duty are inherently more destructive does not appear, at the moment at least, to be the case in Kenya.

This is reinforced by current tactics employed by IVE groups in Kenya. Al-Shabaab's operations there have been largely conducted through small arms and grenade attacks. Several small improvised explosive device (IED) attacks have also occurred.⁶⁵ The exception was the assault on the Westgate Mall in the planning and scale of financing (estimated around \$100,000). The attack on Garissa University in April 2015 that killed 147 people – mainly civilians – also demonstrates the potential lethality of well-planned small arms attacks. The majority of attacks, nevertheless, have caused far fewer casualties.⁶⁶

Moreover, unlike in Somalia where Al-Shabaab's use of suicide terrorism has been increasingly commonplace since its introduction of the tactic in 2006⁶⁷, not one successful Al-Shabaab or other

⁶³ Elkins, *Britain's Gulag*, pp. 192-93; Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, pp. 279-81; Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau*, p. 5.

⁶⁴ Oloo, 'Marginalisation and the rise of militia groups in Kenya', pp. 160-62.

⁶⁵ Anderson and McKnight, 'Kenya at War', p. 2; Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Henry Appel, 'Al-Shabaab's insurgency in Somalia: a databased snapshot', *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, 3 April 2014, <<http://journal.georgetown.edu/al-shabaabs-insurgency-in-somalia-a-data-based-snapshot/>>.

⁶⁶ Gartenstein-Ross and Appel, 'Al-Shabaab's insurgency in Somalia'; Barnes and Abdille, 'Al-Shabaab's Kenyan Ambitions'.

⁶⁷ Since the first recorded suicide bombing in September 2006, there have been 88 such attacks in Somalia, 61 of which have been claimed by or traced to Al-Shabaab. There was a significant trend upwards in suicide attacks in 2011 and even more so in 2012 in line with Al-Shabaab's use of this tactic to rates that have so far not dropped: Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism, 'Somalia: 1982-2015', data as of 17 Aug 2015, CPOST Suicide Attack Database, University of

IVE orchestrated or inspired suicide attack has yet taken place in Kenya in the same period. The only two such attacks on Kenyan soil – the 1998 US embassy bombing and the 2002 Mombasa hotel attack – were carried out by Al-Qaeda and against ostensibly non-Kenyan, western targets. The second of these did involve, for the first time however, predominantly Kenyan nationals including the two suicide bombers. Kenyan nationals have also been involved in suicide attacks in Somalia and helped support those in Kampala in 2010.⁶⁸ This finding also does not take into account foiled plots, of which there have been several at varying stages in 2015 allegedly linked to a ‘suicide terrorist cell’ for Kenya being trained and encouraged by Al-Shabaab’s Amniyaat.⁶⁹ The Kenyan attackers at Garissa are also all reported to have been strapped with suicide vests in addition to their small arms.⁷⁰ This may signal an intention by Al-Shabaab and a greater willingness by Kenyans to use this tactic in Kenya more frequently, a tactic not used by Mau Mau, Mungiki or the MRC.

Despite the number of casualties associated with Mau Mau, its leaders attempted to impose strict military discipline on fighters and social control on violence. Its guerrilla tactics were bloody at times, especially when they targeted fellow Kikuyu deemed traitors or colluding too closely with the state. Extreme incidents led the central authorities to interpret Mau Mau fighters, quite wrongly, as ‘inhuman’ and ‘homicidal lunatics’.⁷¹ Mau Mau leaders in fact disowned the barbarism and thuggery of this minority of ill-disciplined bandit fighters. They considered these groups’ more indiscriminate

Chicago, <http://cpostdata.uchicago.edu/search_new.php>; Marchal, ‘Rise of a Jihadi Movement in a Country at War’, pp. 53-56.

⁶⁸ Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism, ‘Kenya: 1982-2015’, data as of 17 Aug 2015, CPOST Suicide Attack Database, University of Chicago, <http://cpostdata.uchicago.edu/search_new.php>; Botha, ‘Assessing the vulnerability of Kenyan youths to radicalisation’, pp. 5-8.

⁶⁹ Ben Adam Avraham, ‘KDF Counterterrorism Operation Nabs Six Would-Be Suicide Bombers; Dismantles Al Shabaab Recruitment Network’, *Intelligence Briefs*, 27 Mar 2015, <<http://www.intelligencebriefs.com/kdf-counterterrorism-operation-nabs-six-would-be-suicide-bombers-dismantles-al-shabaab-recruitment-network/>>; ‘Kenya: KDF Arrests Two Suicide Bombers Going to Nairobi’, *The Star*, 30 Apr 2015, <http://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2015/Apr/99368/kenya_kdf_arrests_two_suicide_bombers_going_to_nairobi.aspx>; Rachel Bluwstein, ‘Imminent Threat Of Suicide Attack In Kenya’s Capital’, *Intelligence Briefs*, 21 May 2015, <<http://www.intelligencebriefs.com/imminent-threat-of-suicide-attack-in-kenyas-capital/>>.

⁷⁰ Tom Odula, Rodney Muhumuza, Khalil Senosi, ‘Al-Shabab militants kill 147 at university in Kenya’, *Associated Press*, 2 Apr 2015.

⁷¹ Elkins, *Britain’s Gulag*, pp. 192-93; Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, pp. 279-81.

violence and ‘illegitimate’ killing as disastrous to their cause, which rested on the support of wider Kikuyu rural communities. Thus they tended to attack guard posts not villages and farms for livestock and food crops, not to kill the owners.⁷² Such measured conceptions of the use of violence have not characterised IVE attacks in Kenya, nor for that matter Mungiki attacks like during the 2007-08 elections violence, where its victims were maimed, raped, forcibly circumcised, beheaded and bludgeoned to death.⁷³ Even IVE groups’ conduct of conflict in Kenya has not reached such levels.

Conclusion: What is different about Islamist Violent Extremism?

With several exceptions, IVE engagement in conflict in Kenya has far more in common with other forms of conflict and conflict actors there – past and present – than it does unique qualities. Salafi-jihadist or global jihadist rhetoric is certainly far more visible in the narratives and articulated aims of the leadership of and recruiters for Al-Shabaab. But while being tenuously linked to the global jihadist movement through their affiliation with Al-Qaeda, far more important local factors are at play in terms of their aims, drivers and interaction with conflict, factors that have been just as important to non-IVE conflict actors.

The drivers of conflict for these IVE groups, Mau Mau, Mungiki and the MRC have much in common, from the enablers of conflict in Kenya to the individual, community and structural motives participants have had for joining these movements. These include poor governance, corruption, marginalisation and discrimination, identity crises, socio-economic exclusion and competition over land-use rights, and mobilisation to violence for political grievances along ethnic lines that exploit inter-communal strife. All have been important to greater and lesser degrees for individual leaders and participants, at different times, in different places and for different groups. But the consistent presence of some if not all of these factors across the cases examined highlights their entrenched influence on conflict in Kenya.

⁷² Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*, Vol. II, pp. 440-41, 447, 452-55; Lonsdale, ‘Authority, Gender & Violence’, p. 61; Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau*, pp. 140-41.

⁷³ Catrina Stewart, ‘Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta “funded and orchestrated” violence of feared Mungiki’, *The Independent*, 20 Jan 2015.

Drivers of some of these conflicts have also fed into others, either concurrently (as on the Coast recently) or from the past to the present (the Coast, the Shifta War and its fallout in the north-east for IVE groups and the MRC; and Mau Mau to Mungiki). The influence of Salafi-jihadist ideology that has grown in importance in Al-Shabaab's leadership in the past few years and been espoused by a small number of acolytes in Kenya is a new addition to these drivers and is unique to Al-Shabaab and Al-Hijra. But its draw as a recruiting tool and driver of conflict is inextricably tied to several of the other above drivers, it may be more effective on the grounds of Muslim identity rather than ideology, and there is little evidence to suggest it is a more influential factor on its own than these other drivers.

The aims of the leaders of Al-Shabaab and its affiliates are more unique in some respects in their grounding in a drive to create the conditions wherein local Muslims can live more 'pure' and 'authentic' lives according to Sharia Law, safe from the harassment of apostate regimes and *kuffar* (non-believer) discrimination. And yet achieving this – at least from Al-Shabaab's perspective – is equally founded on traditional power aims of acquiring and holding territory in Somalia and Kenya, pushing a rival army out of its area of influence, and maintaining its own survival at any cost. Moreover, a number of their apparent aims – those of Al-Hijra and fellow Al-Shabaab affiliates are far from clear – are linked to the common underlying drivers and grievances, such as protection of those in your perceived community (Muslims), rectifying historical injustices, and reducing the control and influence of the central state and government in Nairobi. These are not founded upon Salafi-jihadist ideology but are very much context specific and similar to the grievance-linked objectives of the other actors reviewed.

Al-Shabaab and its affiliates' behaviour, impact and interaction with conflict in Kenya share many commonalities with the MRC, Mau Mau and Mungiki. While Al-Shabaab in Somalia is highly bureaucratic and hierarchical, in Kenya it and Al-Hijra have a cellular and networked organisation with individual guerrilla bands conducting attacks. Mau Mau and Mungiki have been and are very similar. The profiles of participants in these IVE groups is a little more unique in a Kenyan context, for they have drawn on a much wider range of ethnic groups from a wider geographical area in Kenya than the MRC, Mau Mau and Mungiki. This reflects their wider appeal to those of a Muslim identity and ideology (no longer concentrated as in previous decades to north-eastern Somalis and coastal

Swahilis) than the others who, given their aims and grievances, have been far more locally-focused in their pull. Nevertheless, few foreign fighters beyond Somalis from Somalia have engaged in IVE in Kenya. This reflects again the relatively more context specific motives for participating in IVE conflict in Kenya compared to Somalia at the height of foreign fighter participation there or, even more so, IVE conflict zones in the Middle East. This is also reflected in the IVE narratives in and about Kenya: while infused with Salafi-jihadist rhetoric, they predominantly focus on and exploit local concerns and conditions.

This exploitation of local conditions – including local conflict and tensions – is not unique to Al-Shabaab and its adherents either. At varying levels of ‘locality’, from the individual to the sub-clan to the communal to the regional level, Mau Mau, Mungiki and the MRC have also done so, as have Kenyan political leaders seeking to mobilise violence to tackle political grievances. All have – or may have done in the MRC’s case – engaged in organised criminality or exploited such criminality either to enable their operations or to survive. Finally, the scale of violence and impact associated with IVE in Kenya is as yet not unique. Similar if not more casualties can be attributed to Mau Mau and Mungiki, though the MRC is so far been much less violent. Its use of asymmetric guerrilla tactics utilising small arms, grenades and small IEDs is not unique either, nor its targeting of Kenyan civilians. The prevalence of suicide bombings and martyrdom operations in Somalia has not yet crossed into Kenya on anywhere near such a scale, though there are indicators that attempts to use this tactic – not employed by Mau Mau, Mungiki or the MRC – may be increasing.

Implications for interventions

A significant unique complication for conflict resolution, negotiated settlements, and peacebuilding with regards to Al-Shabaab in Kenya is that this group’s aims and behaviour, unlike the other conflict actors under review, is inextricably bound to its situation in another country, Somalia. From the outset, thus, any efforts to support a peaceful settlement will involve additional actors than the Kenyan government and civic bodies on the one hand and Al-Shabaab on the other, including the Somali TFG, the African Union, anti-Al-Shabaab Somali militias, and local governments like that in Jubaland. Additionally, attempting to engage with Al-Shabaab in this way and doing so with its affiliates in Kenya like Al-Hijra may have to involved different approaches, despite their respective leadership being closely aligned, due to differing local circumstances and grievances.

Whether these IVE leaders would even be open to negotiation, or whether the Kenyan government would countenance doing so, is a further question that the literature on IVE and conflict in Kenya has not yet addressed. The global jihadist mindset and objectives of several Al-Shabaab and Al-Hijra leaders may well be too beyond the pale for this to be possible, wedded to removing apostate and pro-western governments in Somalia and Kenya and establishing universal Sharia Law. While they have in the past proved willing to be flexible in their tactics and strategy in terms of compromising on this ideology in order to maintain power, they have little track record of any willingness to compromise on their jihadist objectives through a negotiated settlement. But their ideological position is not the only problem. Their desire for the Kenyan military to leave Somalia is certainly an outcome that could be considered by the Kenyan government under the right conditions. But the scope of their ultimate aim of destabilising the Kenyan north-east – a region that features highly in the government’s long-term economic planning – to protect Al-Shabaab’s power in southern Somalia and even establish an Islamic caliphate that includes this region cannot be countenanced under any circumstances.

Yet beyond this small hard-core of ideologues, there may be room for negotiation, disengagement and rehabilitation of both more pragmatic leaders and followers not so wedded to global jihadism as an aim itself. In Al-Shabaab, the isolation of more Somalia-focused nationalists during and after the 2013 purge has encouraged several high-level ‘defections’ in Somalia, including former leader Hassan Dahir Aweys and Zakariya Ahmed Ismail Hersi, the group’s former head of military intelligence. Press reporting suggests a number of other senior commanders may now be negotiating their disengagement as part of the Somali TFG’s amnesty programme.⁷⁴ The key is to build a system of much improved trust, where those considering disengaging can do without fear of retribution from either side and with the knowledge that some of the grievances (individual, communal or national) that drove them to participate in violence are being addressed.

⁷⁴ Shukri Mohamed, ‘Defection of senior al-Shabaab official rekindles debate over amnesty programme’, *Sabahi Online*, 3 Jan 2015,

<http://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2015/Jan/97602/defection_of_senior_al_shabaab_official_rekindles_debate_over_amnesty_programme.aspx>; Abdulaziz Billow, Dan Joseph, ‘Somali President Renews Amnesty Offer for Al-Shabab Members’, *VOA News*, 28 Jan 2015, <<http://www.voanews.com/content/former-al-shabab-commander-urges-others-to-surrender/2616855.html>>; Andrew Harding, ‘Somali defector: Why I left al-Shabab’, *BBC News*, 20 May 2015.

This applies just as much to Kenya as Somalia, in terms of both Kenyan fighters in Al-Shabaab and domestic IVE groups on Kenyan soil. In the wake of the Garissa attacks, the Kenyan government commenced a short amnesty programme in an attempt to persuade young Kenyan fighters in particular to disengage and enter ‘rehabilitation’ programmes. This is too recent a phenomenon to have been studied with any great surety or detail, but early reporting on the response has ranged from a number of Kenyans taking up the government’s offer to very circumspect reactions at best.⁷⁵ What factors explain why those have disengaged have done so remains open to debate, but far more must be done to create the environment of trust and engagement on key issues of grievance – such as Muslim/Somali discrimination, marginalisation, land-use rights, and inter-communal tensions – before the Kenyan ranks of these IVE groups can be reduced and other Kenyans dissuaded from taking their place. Thus, while interventions must take into account dynamics in Somalia in terms of Al-Shabaab’s leadership and fortunes there, separate measures specific to Kenya will be needed irrespective. As Anderson and McKnight conclude, even if Al-Shabaab is militarily defeated as a fully-fledged insurgency in south-central Somalia – which they deem ‘inevitable’ – in terms of mitigating IVE conflict in Kenya, such a victory may be ‘irrelevant to Kenya’s ability to make a political settlement with its Somali and wider Muslim communities at home.’⁷⁶

Given that, as noted at the beginning, the conflict cycle is not as advanced in Kenya as in the other case studies under review, a further complication is that traditional conflict resolution and negotiation measures do not apply so readily to IVE groups in Kenya. Al-Hijra and other smaller affiliates of Al-Shabaab in Kenya are not formal conflict actors with a clearly defined leadership and agenda but rather informal, loose, underground and cellular networks more akin to traditional terrorist organisations. Much as Mau Mau’s loose confederation with little connection to political

⁷⁵ Yassin Juma, ‘Kenyan Shabaab fighters divided over amnesty offer’, *The Anadolu Agency*, 17 Apr 2015, <<http://www.aa.com.tr/en/politics/kenyan-shabaab-fighters-divided-over-amnesty-offer/56514>>; Nguru Njoro, ‘No youth took up government amnesty offer due to fear of being killed’, *Kenya Monitor*, 27 May 2015, <<http://www.monitor.co.ke/2015/05/27/no-youth-took-government-amnesty-offer-due-fear-killed/>>; Xinhua News Agency, ‘Kenya says 85 radicalized youth surrender under amnesty offer’, *Global Post*, 29 May 2015, <<http://www.globalpost.com/article/6565042/2015/05/29/kenya-says-85-radicalized-youth-surrender-under-amnesty-offer>>; Margaret Williams, ‘Marginalization Lies at Heart of Kenya’s Insecurity: Q&A with Moses Onyango’, IPI Global Observatory, 24 Aug 2015, <<http://theglobalobservatory.org/2015/08/kenya-somalia-al-shabaab-radicalization-garissa/>>.

⁷⁶ Anderson and McKnight, ‘Kenya at War’, p. 1.

nationalists and Mungiki's cellular existence made either suppressing or negotiating with them very difficult, encouraging blunt hard security responses against whole communities, the same challenge exists for domestic IVE actors in Kenya today.⁷⁷

However, any of the gains from successful strides towards encouraging disengagement and CVE work to dissuade others in Kenya from joining IVE groups are likely to be short-term and ephemeral unless the long-term and wide-ranging enabling environment for conflict and organised crime in the country is more adequately addressed and tackled.⁷⁸ Gains will be unsustainable in the absence of more genuinely inclusive political settlements and much improved state capacity that distributes services, security and political inclusivity far more equitably, as the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission called for in 2013. Poor governance, corruption, marginalisation and discrimination, socio-economic exclusion, and mobilisation to violence for political grievances along ethnic lines have both encouraged and enabled participation in militias and terrorist groups in Kenya for decades, irrespective of their ideology.

In the context of IVE more specifically, this especially applies to Kenya's Muslim communities in the north-east, Coast and elsewhere, where an attraction to violence in the name of protecting fellow Muslims and Islam more generally draws on an interlinked combination of ideological teaching, discriminated and marginalised identity as Muslims, Somalis and coastal peoples, state security forces' repression, lack of socio-economic opportunities and access to resources compared to other more powerful ethnic and religious groupings, and histories of socio-political separatism that reflect the fractured nature of the Kenyan 'nation'. As so many of these factors are inextricably linked, interventions cannot simply focus on countering the pull of Salafi-jihadist ideology, for far fewer Kenyans would join and remain in IVE groups were it not for these more endemic push factors. Thus, reform of madrasas away from promoting hard-line teaching and working with more moderate local Islamic civic institutions to encourage Kenyan Muslim youth down alternative paths to violence is important, but this must go hand in hand with measures to tackle much broader and fundamental conflict drivers in Kenya.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Elkins, *Britain's Gulag*, p. 28; Oloo, 'Marginalisation and the Rise of Militia Groups in Kenya', pp. 155, 164-65, 174.

⁷⁸ Expert comments at joint DfID-FCO Workshop, 29 Sep 2015.

⁷⁹ ICG, 'Kenyan Somali Islamist Radicalisation', p. 11; ICG, 'Kenya: Al-Shabaab – Closer to Home', p. 2.

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Nigeria

Key Points

- Although Boko Haram presents itself as following a pure Islamist ideology, its founder Mohamed Yusuf drew inspiration from a variety of sources, including Shia Islam.
- MEND's programme is grievance-based and so is perceived as fundamentally rational. The grievances capitalized upon by MEND ensure group cohesion.
- Boko Haram frames its actions in religious and cultural terms, and is often perceived as irrational, uncompromising or even psychopathic. However, many Boko Haram members are also motivated by grievances. Nevertheless, the group is becoming less responsive to community needs and its attacks are becoming more indiscriminate. As a result, the ready cadre of recruits is diminishing – resulting in coerced recruitment.
- Yusuf's death in 2009 has resulted in the fragmentation of Boko Haram, with different factions following different programmes.

Origins

Jama'atu Ahlus-Sunnah Lidda'Awati Wal Jihad (Boko Haram)

The background and ideology of Boko Haram has been well documented. Although only emerging recently, the group's founder Mohamed Yusuf, gained inspiration from Usmandan Fodio's jihad in the early nineteenth century which led to the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate, as well as the more recent Maitatsine Riots in the 1980s. It began as an opposition movement to the dominant Islamic ideology in northern Nigeria in the early 2000s. Mohamed Yusuf was involved with several prominent Islamic groups in the region, but eventually distanced himself and started his own movement. Yusuf was originally influenced by the prominent Shia cleric Ibrahim el-Zazaky's Iranian-funded Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) as well as the Salafi scholar Jafa'ar Mahmoud Adam. However, Yusuf diverged from his teachers to join with Nigerian Sunni Muslims who were protesting at the increasing influence of Iran (Østebø, 2012). After becoming involved with two prominent Salafist groups, whose

infrastructure he exploited to recruit followers, Yusuf became dissatisfied with the implementation of Sharia Law in Nigeria, forming a new movement – Ahlul sunna wal'jama'ah hijra (Zenn, 2014).

Eager to carve his own ideological path, Yusuf pushed the group in an anti-Western direction, condemning Western education and civilization as evil (Pantucci and Jespersen, 2015). The group was renamed Jama'atu Ahlus-Sunnah Lidda'Awati Wal Jihad (People Committed to the Prophet's Teachings for Propagation and Jihad). The meaning behind its popular name, 'Boko Haram', is disputed. 'Haram' means 'forbidden' in Arabic, 'Boko' literally means 'deception' (not, as popularly believed, 'book') (Newman, 2013). It was used to describe Westernised education during the colonial period in the compound 'Boko Ilmin' ('fraudulent education'), in contrast to 'Ilmin Islamiyya' ('Islamic education') (Waldek and Jayasekara, 2011).

Boko Haram was initially a peaceful movement. It served as a platform for Yusuf to promote his ideas on Islam and how it should be promoted in northeastern Nigeria, and attract followers. By the end of 2003 however, the group began engaging in violence. Initial attacks on police stations and public buildings in Yobe State heralded a period of low-level violence that continued until Yusuf's death in 2009. This brought it into confrontation with the Nigerian state, which responded with excessive force (Comolli, 2015). From 2009, the group became more radical and violent; attacks became increasingly indiscriminate, targeting Muslims and non-Muslims alike (Comolli, 2015). Abubakar Shekau, Mohammed Yusuf's deputy, initially thought to have been killed by the police in the 2009 uprisings, proclaimed himself as the new head of Boko Haram and promised vengeance: "do not think the jihad is over. Rather, jihad has just begun". Significantly, Shekau threatened attacks not only against the Nigerian state, but also against outposts of Western culture, and the group became more visibly aligned to jihadist efforts globally (Pham, 2015). Since 2012, the group has shifted again, becoming more unpredictable and resembling an insurgent group more than a terrorist group.

Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND)

MEND was formed in 2005 as a coalition emerged of armed groups fighting in response to the same grievances: the exploitation and oppression of Niger Delta populations linked to the public-private partnerships created to process and export oil from Nigeria.

Violent uprisings in the region were not new – in 1966 a 12-day uprising sought to create a distinct Niger Delta republic. Resistance was revived in the 1990s in response to the impact of the IMF/ World Bank Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), the collapse of the oil sector, prolonged misrule and the continued neglect of the Niger Delta region (Coulson, 2009). Various ethnic groups established non-violent protest movements that were brutally repressed by Sani Abacha's military regime, most notably the arrest and execution in 1995 of the environmental activist Ken Saro-Wiwa. Following Saro-Wiwa's execution, many towns and villages were razed by government forces. In response to these military excesses, a number of groups began engaging in violent tactics, which were at times manipulated by political forces, resulting in inter-ethnic tensions.

By 2005, the resistance became much more violent and sophisticated with many groups uniting under the MEND umbrella. Tactics of this new umbrella movement included sabotage, theft, property destruction, guerrilla warfare and kidnapping (Hanson, 2007). In 2009, a government sponsored amnesty, with stipends for demobilized fighters, brought an end to violence.

Aims and Objectives

Boko Haram is motivated by the conviction that the Nigerian state is filled with social vices, thus “the best thing for a devout Muslim to do was to ‘migrate’ from the morally bankrupt society to a secluded place and establish an ideal Islamic society devoid of political corruption and moral deprivation” (Onuoha, 2010). This ideal society is a reinstated Caliphate across northeastern Nigeria, to be established using violent means.

However, the ideology of the group is much more complex and dynamic than this would suggest. Pamphlets and sermons from Yusuf promoted specific views on education, healthcare, employment and government. While education was presented as a major issue, Yusuf criticise not only Western-style education for corrupting Muslims and society, but also modern Islamic schools (Loimeier, 2012). Prior to late 2003 the group was peaceful, and focused on promoting a reformist programme. Even after violence commenced in 2003, its violence was targeted and directly linked to the aims and objectives of the group. Thus it was clear whom the group was fighting, in part driven by Yusuf's clear leadership.

After Yusuf's death, the group's stated ideology changed dramatically, with shifting allegiances first to Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and most recently ISIL. However, it is unclear whether these allegiances are anything more than verbal support. Some Boko Haram fighters have been trained in AQIM camps, and the group made an offer of weapons and other support (AFP, 2012). However, despite rebranding themselves as the Islamic State's West African Province in mid-2015, there is no evidence of material support in either direction between Boko Haram and ISIL.⁸⁰

Under Shekau's leadership, there have also been internal divisions over ideology, as well as tactics and aims, resulting in offshoots such as Ansaru, which condemned the attacks against Muslims and innocent non-Muslims and vowed to "restore the dignity of black Africans" (Sahara Reporters, 2012). The shift has been evident in the targets of attacks. Muslim communities were originally forewarned if attacks were planned in their areas. Since Yusuf's death, attacks became more indiscriminate. Although Shekau had always been part of the leadership, many of the older members saw him as too extreme (Zenn, 2012). While Shekau took the group in a new direction, many remained loyal to the original aims and objectives set forth by Yusuf.

Using our definition as ideology as 'a worldview or set of beliefs that guides individual or collective action', it could be argued that MEND is driven by ideology as much as Boko Haram. However, MEND's ideology is more instrumental, explicitly focusing on the grievances of groups in the Niger Delta and driven by equality and social justice. Strategies and tactics evolved to further the aims of the group, but the actual ideology itself remained stable and consistent. It served to unify the MEND coalition which embraced a range of ethnic groups.

Ganiel (2012) argues that "[r]eligion is often a response to the failure of the state to deal with human security", pointing to the example of Boko Haram which emerged after the Nigerian state spectacularly failed to provide for the security of its population. This suggests that Yusuf and Shekau were able to set out such different agendas because the core driver of the group was grievance rather than religion. This has parallels to the MEND case, in that MEND brought together various ethnic groups disenfranchised after decades of state neglect. The difference lies in how the two

⁸⁰ Expert comments at joint DfID-FCO Workshop on Conflict and Countering Violent Extremism in Nigeria, 10 Sep 2015.

groups frame their programmes: MEND's was directly linked to the grievances, while Boko Haram's was framed in religious and cultural terms.

The contrast between the rhetoric and the lifestyle of Mohamed Yusuf also suggests that ideological purity may not have been the foundation of the group, at least in its earlier phase. Mohamed Yusuf enjoyed all the "trappings of Western life and good living – his life was Western in all but name. He lived in affluence while the majority of his followers suffered abject poverty and were forbidden to work in the formal sector of the Nigerian economy" (Onuoha, 2010). This also suggests a difference in motivation between the leadership and followers, with each involved for different reasons.

The activities of both groups are instrumental, in that they are designed to achieve the respective motivations and aims. This suggests that both groups act rationally. However, this is not how Boko Haram has been perceived, and this perception derives from the relationship between grievance and action. Because the demands of MEND were supported by international advocacy on the damage caused by the oil industry, their demands and their tactics were seen as rational, even if there was strong disapproval of the latter. In contrast, because Boko Haram does not base its actions on the grievances faced in Northern Nigeria but frames them in religious and cultural terms, it has received no support or credence for its actions other than from fellow travellers such as AQIM, and tends to be perceived as irrational, uncompromising, or even psychopathic (Comolli, 2015).

However, although Boko Haram's aims can be seen as rational, its recent decisions have not been strategically sound. The group does not provide any governance structures or support for communities in north-eastern Nigeria. It appears to have no long-term plan. What began as an attempt to enhance social welfare has mutated into an incoherent programme, while the group's shifting allegiances appear to depend on trends in violent Islamism elsewhere. For example, the group's recent pledge of allegiance to ISIL has resulted in the reassertion of the desire for a Caliphate, yet strategies to meet the needs of supporters remain a low priority. This pledge therefore appears to be more of a marketing strategy than a relationship of material support or ideological unity (Al Jazeera, 2015).

Perceived rationality is, then, a key difference between Boko Haram and MEND. It is possible that Boko Haram projects irrationality as a political or military tactic, in order to excite more fear in its enemies and provoke counter-productive responses.

Drivers And Motivations

Drawing on the demands of member groups, MEND argued for more benefits from the oil industry to remain in or return to the region through royalties, employment, infrastructure and compensation for damage caused by oil companies (Hanson, 2007). This evolved from the response of communities in the Niger Delta to the ecological damage caused by the oil industry in the region and the brutal military response to non-violent protests. Different ethnic groups began engaging in violent tactics independently. However, they came together under a united platform as it was thought to increase the chances of success.

Boko Haram's actions are also informed by grievances. Northern Nigeria has the lowest level of socio-economic development, infrastructure and employment in the country. Rather than seeking reparations for this inequality, however, Boko Haram has blamed the Nigerian state and offered an alternative Islamic utopia, promising better alternatives to existing opportunities in Northern Nigeria (Pantucci and Jespersen, 2015). This aligns with its aim of creating an Islamic caliphate that is removed from the vices that made the Nigerian state politically and morally corrupt (Onuoha, 2010). In contrast to MEND, which seeks reparations from the government, Boko Haram offered an alternative. From the state's perspective, this makes them more dangerous as they challenge the premise of the state's leadership.

The cohesive drivers of MEND ensured that leaders and followers were essentially united and were fighting for the same goal. However, within Boko Haram there are significant divisions between leadership and followers. Many followers are driven by grievance and may not even understand the ideology propagated by the leadership.⁸¹ At this level, militancy is a response to deprivation and lack of access to the state. As such, it is unclear how many actively support ideals such as an Islamic caliphate. Not all fighters are willing participants either, as an increasing number are coerced.

⁸¹ Expert comments at joint DfID-FCO Workshop on Conflict and Countering Violent Extremism in Nigeria, 10 Sep 2015.

Although the kidnap of the Chibok girls was widely publicized, many boys are also kidnapped to become the footsoldiers of Boko Haram.⁸² Gangs in Niger have even been paid to engage in fighting for Boko Haram, and other individuals in towns across the northeast are paid to act as informants (Fessy, 2014).

For the leadership, Islam has been a rallying point, with Sharia an agreed goal with varying understandings of what this means. Yusuf and Shekau each had a different focus and different interpretations on the aims and motivations of the group. While Yusuf engaged with the aim of a caliphate drawing on the Sokoto Caliphate, this aim went into abeyance before resurging after ISIL's caliphate declaration in 2014.

Initially, many Boko Haram members were Islamic clerics and students, professionals and students of tertiary institutions (Aghedo and Osumah ,2012). This suggests religion was a key driver, particularly as Aghedo and Osumah (2012) also highlight how school drop-outs enrolled with the sect for Quranic education. However, religion is only one driver behind Boko Haram's recruitment. Because of the limited economic and educational opportunities in Northern Nigeria, many have been drawn to the group in exchange for cash. For instance, as noted above lookouts are recruited to report military presence in towns across the North in exchange for 5000 naira. Gang members from Diffa in Niger and other towns near the Nigerian border have also been recruited to carry out specific acts (Fessy, 2014).

Boko Haram has at times been able to call upon a ready cadre of individuals willing to sign up for its cause – in part driven by heavy-handed government responses that tend to victimise communities rather than individuals. Establishing itself as the protector of these communities and as a fighter against the oppressive authorities, Boko Haram has been able to recruit from a broad base of willing individuals. In particular, Yusuf drew on the narratives of anger at the perceived Western support of southern Nigeria and the perceived failure of the Islamic leadership in the north of the country (Pantucci and Jespersen, 2015).

⁸² *Ibid.*

Recruitment for Boko Haram therefore has many parallels to MEND, where individuals join groups in protest at the socio-economic conditions. However, recruiting on the basis of grievance is not as successful as it used to be for Boko Haram. Before 2012, the group identified with local communities and their needs. The rise of indiscriminate attacks has dissuaded potentially sympathetic Muslims from joining.⁸³ This has prompted coercion into the lower ranks of the group.

Interaction with Conflict

The tactics of Boko Haram and MEND are similar. Both groups have adopted the tactics of guerrilla warfare and propaganda. Although the targets have been different – for instance MEND targeted oil facilities, while Boko Haram targeted churches – the structures of the group show similarities. A prominent feature of both has been a franchise system, where different sub-groups launch operations independently (Osumah, 2013). While both MEND and Boko Haram have a supreme leader, their sub-groups operate semi-autonomously. For Boko Haram, this has resulted in disagreements over strategy and focus. However, MEND has remained relatively cohesive.

The cohesiveness of MEND can be attributed to its overarching goal to enhance economic development in the Niger Delta. Accordingly, it did not attack or abduct locals, only expatriates linked to the oil industry. Boko Haram's violence was initially targeted, reflecting a clear sense of the group's enemies (i.e. non-Muslims and the Nigerian state). Attacks were launched against government forces including police, as well as churches and Christian institutions. From 2011, however, attacks broadened. In May 2011, Muslim cleric Ibrahim Birkuti, a critic of Boko Haram's killing of dozens of security agents and politicians, was shot by a gunman on a motorbike (BBC News, 2011). This marked the beginning of attacks against critics and opponents. At the same time, the group began to seek territorial gains and conducted raids on villages that killed civilians. In 2011, there were also two bombing attacks in Abuja, on the National Police Headquarters and UN Headquarters. These attacks also marked the group's adoption of suicide attacks, presumably in emulation of Al Qaida, with which Boko Haram was then in alliance. In 2011 and 2012, around twenty suicide attacks were launched against religious (both Christian and Muslim), military and other government targets (Roggio, 2012).

⁸³ Expert comments at joint DfID-FCO Workshop on Conflict and Countering Violent Extremism in Nigeria, 10 Sep 2015.

At first glance, Boko Haram appears similar to many other terrorist groups – coherent, ideologically driven with a clear chain of command. Boko Haram has even borrowed tactics from other terrorists – such as kidnapping from AQIM – and the aim for an Islamic Caliphate was revived in line with the media focus on ISIL and its goals. Yet it is no longer clear that the group is as coherent an entity as was initially believed. Mohammed Yusuf’s original programme is now largely forgotten as the group has evolved to become a more nebulous entity whose direction and aims are sometimes difficult to identify. This evolution resulted in part from the death of Yusuf, and Shekau’s different approach. But the conflict has also played a role, and has driven the group to become increasingly violent and intractable. This evolution has also resulted in fragmentation and new groups emerging, such as Ansaru, with different aims and tactics. The fault-lines appear to be the differing motivations of militants that become engaged in Boko Haram, which can be broadly characterized as ideology versus grievance.

In contrast, despite being an umbrella group consisting of ethnically diverse communities, MEND was much more stable. Driven by clear motivations, its constituent parts were united by a common agenda. The ideology of Boko Haram in contrast does not have a fixed origin, arising instead from Yusuf’s engagement across the spectrum of Islamic politics. Yusuf’s death in 2009 has resulted in the fragmentation of the group, with different interpretations of its aims and drivers.

Implications for Interventions

Because of its criticism of the state and state institutions, Boko Haram may be less open to negotiation than MEND. MEND’s demands could only be granted by the Nigerian state. Although its violent tactics targeted the state, its aim was to negotiate with its enemy from a position of strength. The demands of MEND may have been undesirable to the state, but they were grounded in genuine grievances that have been validated by the international community. Many international NGOs, such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, have been outspoken about the ecological and social damage caused by oil companies in collusion with the Nigerian government in the Niger Delta region, and the need for reparations. Even individuals who were kidnapped by MEND reportedly

understood the rationale for violence. The group's political orientation thus made it a willing party in negotiations and hence a party to a future political settlement.

In contrast, calls for an Islamic Caliphate from Boko Haram present a much more fundamental challenge to the state. States are rarely willing to relinquish territory, particularly in response to extremist violent tactics, even if this is sometimes the outcome of political processes. But the ideological claims of a Caliphate challenge the premise of the Nigerian state – a state whose authority cannot be recognized by Boko Haram's leaders even if it sought to compromise, as Boko Haram claims to reject its principles (including democracy) as well as its practice. In this case there is no space for compromise.

However, the divisions within the group, particularly the different motivations of leadership and followers, means that some factions may be more open to negotiation. This may be particularly the case with followers who are motivated by grievances, where material settlement may be enticing. In contrast, leaders are unlikely to consent to the kind of settlement which worked with MEND, when an amnesty was agreed with terms including a stipend to militants. For MEND, the amnesty was linked to their demands by contributing to their economic needs and returning some of the benefits of the oil industry to the region. This may appeal to Boko Haram members frustrated at the lack of socio-economic development in Northern Nigeria, but not the leaders.

Conclusion

Although there are many similarities between Boko Haram and MEND, in terms of the underlying drivers, tactics and recruitment, ideological differences are significant and have implications for responses. The presentation of their respective narratives is different: MEND's narrative is explicitly based on grievances, whereas Boko Haram has subordinated grievances to religious and cultural opposition to the state. What divides the groups is ideology – or, more specifically, the way that ideology is framed.

The change in Boko Haram's leadership brought about by Yusuf's death has resulted in a shift in approach, which some members resent leading to the emergence of splinter groups such as Ansaru.

While all MEND members can agree on their economic grievances, in Boko Haram there is a lot of variation in motivations and worldviews which means the group is inherently unstable. While the leadership may be firmly attached to the belief systems, their followers become engaged for a variety of reasons.

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Iraq and Syria

Key Points

- The proximate cause of the current conflict in Iraq was the collapse of the Iraqi state and its institutions after 2003, and the subsequent failure to re-enfranchise the Sunni Arab population. The proximate cause of the Syrian civil war was the 2011 revolution and the Syrian regime's ultra-violent response. In both cases, Salafi-jihadist extremists – Al Qaida and what is now called ISIL – entered the conflicts from outside and deliberately and systematically radicalised them.
- The Salafi-jihadist extremists have aggravated, escalated, and prolonged these conflicts. One group – ISIL – has gone further and has transformed these conflicts through its programme of utopian state-building. Its programme is now being exported to other conflicts.
- The extremism of these groups is unarguable. However, they have presented themselves successfully as the answer to the legitimate grievances of Sunni Arabs in both countries. Those grievances derive from catastrophic failures of governance – which must be addressed if there is to be any chance of limiting and reducing these groups' support.
- Many Sunni Islamist violent groups in Syria do not share ISIL and Al Qaida's ambitions and are focused on a political solution for Syria that is acceptable to Sunni Arabs and compatible with Islamic law. Even though they are not, in Western terms, 'moderate', these groups should be distinguished – and treated separately – from the Salafi-jihadist extremists.
- Shia Islamist extremists – backed by the Iranian government – are present in both countries, both as elements within the security forces and as independent militias. Shia militias are also symptoms of the governance failures in both countries, are contributing to sectarian polarisation, and are contributing to narratives of existential threat among Sunni and Shia Muslims.
- ISIL (and to an extent JaN) are attempting – with some success – to create establish governance and security in areas under their control. This puts them in direct competition with governments and NGOs aspiring to state-build in Syria and Iraq.

Introduction

This case study examines the conflicts in Iraq (post-2003) and Syria (post-2011). The project's advisory group ask us not to restrict ourselves to the two groups identified in the scoping study, but to take a broader view. On the advice of an expert panel, we focused on three Sunni Islamist groups: ISIL, Jabhat Al Nusra (JaN), and Ahrar al-Sham (AAS). Following a request from DFID customers, we have also included Shia militant groups in Iraq, such as the Badr Organisation.

As a result, this departs somewhat from the approach used elsewhere in the project of comparing Islamist and non-Islamist groups. However, as will become clear, this is appropriate as the many Islamist groups (Shia and Sunni, Salafi-jihadist and others) show some clear distinctions which are instructive and significant to our research questions.

The bulk of the case study is an analytical section that compares the various groups we have studied. In view of the complexity of (and copious literature on) these conflicts, we have framed this with a narrative account of the development of the conflict and the emergence of some of the main Islamist extremist groups. Because many would argue that the roots of the conflict are deeper than the 2003 invasion of Iraq and onset of civil war in Syria in 2011, we also include a brief historical survey in the Annex.

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The Origins of the Conflicts

The proximate causes of the current conflict in Iraq are generally agreed to lie in the 2003 invasion and occupation of the country, and the subsequent attempts to establish a democratic, representative government. Some historians, however, suggest that the conflict has deeper roots. The Syrian civil war began with mass protests against the regime in 2011 but is also, arguably, rooted in the country's colonial and post-colonial history. These histories are summarised in Annex A. The following account focuses on how ISIL and other groups emerged from the post-2003 Iraq invasion and Syrian civil war.

The 2003 Invasion of Iraq and Its Consequences

The American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 had 'regime change' as an explicit objective: only by removing Saddam Hussein and his apparatus of coercion, it was argued, could Iraq return to the community of nations and be disarmed of its weapons of mass destruction. The invasion was therefore followed by a US-led multilateral occupation, with a governing body – the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) – created to oversee the transition from dictatorship to democracy. The rights and wrongs of this sequence of events are highly controversial but what matters here is that, despite its economic and military weakness, Iraq remained until 2003 a highly centralised, disciplinary state controlled by Saddam and his top tier of administrators and generals. Displacing this militarily and then administratively – the CPA decided in 2003 to dissolve the army and the Baath Party, and to ban all members above a certain rank from holding public office – plunged Iraq into chaos (Dodge, 2012: 32).

The CPA's decisions had at least four effects. The first was to mobilise Iraq's 'deep state' into an insurgent force. The second was to destroy the state's capacity to govern and maintain discipline, as it "put 300,000 armed young men out of work at a stroke, stopped the pensions of tens of thousands of ex-officers and purged the slowly recovering government ministries of roughly 30,000 people, including their most experienced administrators" (Tripp, 2007: 282). The third was to encourage those unemployed young men to form or join militias. The fourth was to encourage the formation of new power structures, with factions controlling ministries, militias proliferating and becoming increasingly powerful, and violence becoming one of the primary means to ensure that ethnic or sectarian communities were able to defend themselves or command resources (Tripp, 2007: 277-8).

Most damaging of all was the sectarian dimension to the post-war contention. Sectarianism was not new to Iraq but, under Saddam, it usually took the form of the brutal oppression of minorities (e.g. the Kurds) or, especially after an abortive revolt in 1991, the majority Shia. During the 1980-88 Gulf War, Saddam had also attempted to promote a Sunni religious identity to his regime – most visibly by incorporating the Arabic for ‘God is Most Great’ into the nation’s flag – and after defeat in the 1990-91 war he instituted a ‘Faith Campaign’, promoting religious teaching in schools, instituting *hudud* (fixed punishments prescribed in Islamic law for serious offences) and co-opting members of the *ulema* (Haddad, 2011: 33). Some believe that, in the process, Saddam unwittingly promoted a Salafist strain in Iraq’s society that had previously been absent, and that this helps account for the remarkable fusion of Baathism and Islamism that can be seen in the top ranks of ISIL (Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 23-4).

The invasion, occupation, and attempted democratisation of Iraq overturned the Sunni hegemony on which the state was founded (see Annex A for more details). Some Sunnis feared that the Shia population’s numerical advantage would lead to Sunni disenfranchisement, or worse; the country’s Shia and Kurdish populations saw an opportunity to free themselves from more than eighty years of oppressive Sunni rule from Baghdad. Both communities saw a need to claim power and status through armed force, a problem exacerbated by the involvement of Iran through its paramilitary intelligence service, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), which was deeply involved with one of the main Shia militias, the Badr Organisation, the armed wing of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iran (SCIRI). After the invasion, the most powerful militia was initially the Mahdi Army, led by the young Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, which was particularly strong in the impoverished Sadr City (formerly Saddam City) area of Baghdad. As well as reportedly persecuting Sunni Arabs living in or near its strongholds, the Mahdi Army’s 60,000 or so fighters openly confronted Coalition and Iraqi army forces. But the Sadrists and the Badr Organisation also began to compete for the community’s leadership, culminating in an upsurge in intra-Shia violence in 2007 when the two camps turned on each other (Dodge, 2012)

Iraq’s Sunni politicians and tribal leaders mostly rejected the toppling of the old Sunni hegemony, leading to a widespread Sunni boycott of the 2005 general and local elections. The boycott turned the community’s sense of disenfranchisement into political reality, as Shia politicians and militia

leaders consolidated their hold on the instruments of power and influence at national and local levels. As a result, by 2006 “there were many more Iraqis under arms than there had been in the final years of the old regime — but they were now serving a variety of masters, often mutually hostile, whether in the state security forces, or in the militias controlled by the ruling parties” (Tripp, 2007: 306). As a result of the destruction of administrative structures and the state’s monopoly of military force, and the resurgence of sectarian enmity, the situation faced by Coalition and Iraqi government forces from 2003 to 2006 was an exceptionally complex one, combining resistance, insurgency, and civil war (Kilcullen, 2009). Sunni insurgents included groups of former Baathists, Iraqi nationalists, disenfranchised tribal leaders, and both domestic and foreign Islamists; on the Shia side were Iranian-backed militias, Iraqi nationalists, and Shia Islamists such as the Mahdi Army. Private and highly localised militias added further complexity. Given the underlying conditions, it is likely that some form of civil war would have prevailed even if Al Qaida had not succeeded in establishing itself in Iraq in 2003. However, Al Qaida did succeed and it quickly influenced and was influenced by the civil conflict.

Al Qaida in Iraq

Al Qaida’s first leader in Iraq was Ahmed Fadeel al-Khalayleh, better known as Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian former criminal who discovered Salafi-Jihadism in a Jordanian prison and established a terrorist training camp in Afghanistan in 1999. In both Afghanistan and Iraq, al-Zarqawi operated semi-independently of the Al Qaida organisation and had a difficult relationship with its leaders. Chased out of Afghanistan after the Coalition invasion of 2001-02, al-Zarqawi established himself in the Kurdish Autonomous Region from where he reportedly plotted terrorist attacks; after the 2003 invasion of Iraq, he and his band of foreign fighters, using the name Tawhid wal-Jihad (Monotheism and Jihad), moved to the Sunni heartlands of Iraq where, under the name of Al Qaida in Iraq, they began a new project. In correspondence with Al Qaida’s leaders, al-Zarqawi set out his vision for a new and secure base for the jihadists whose fate throughout the 1980s and 1990s had been to be chased from one location to another. Al-Zarqawi reasoned that the jihadists could only thrive in conditions of perpetual warfare in which they were seen as the protectors of the embattled Sunni population. “He had to devise a grand strategy to win over parts of the population and attract internal and external support”, so he recruited Arab fighters from across the MENA region to fight against the Americans, the Iraqi armed forces, the Kurds, but above all Iraq’s Shiites: “sparking

sectarian warfare become the centrepiece of his grand strategy” (Hafez, 2014: 443-4). By attacking the Shia, AQI successfully turned the insurgency into a civil war. Zarqawi thus capitalised on existing conditions in Iraq, and instrumentalised sectarianism through a campaign of extraordinary provocation, targeting not only Shia communities but also Shia holy sites, culminating in the bombing of the al-Askariyya Mosque in Samarra in 2006 which led to a ferocious backlash against the Sunni community in which a thousand civilians were killed within hours, and which partly accounts for the subsequent trebling of Baghdad’s murder rate – 2006 saw the deaths of 34,452 civilians (Dodge, 2012: 58-9).

The evidence shows that sectarian warfare was not an accident but a deliberate strategy. An Al Qaida document known as ‘The Management of Savagery’, published online in 2004 under the pseudonym of Abu Bakr Naji, announced that “savagery and chaos” and “the absence of security” were necessary precursors to a jihadist victory (Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 40-1). At around the same time, al-Zarqawi told his Al Qaida superiors that the Shia were “the key to change. I mean that targeting them and hitting them in [their] religious, political, and military depth will provoke them to show the Sunnis ... the hidden rancour working in their breasts. If we succeed in dragging them into the arena of sectarian war, it will become possible to awaken the inattentive Sunnis as they feel imminent danger and annihilating death” (qtd. In Hafez, 2014). These “inattentive Sunnis” – and their equivalents among the Shia – became exemplars of what Kilcullen (2009) calls ‘accidental guerrillas’: individuals forced by circumstances to take up arms. From small beginnings – by 2005 it comprised only 14 per cent of the Sunni insurgency (Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 28) – AQI came to dominate the other Sunni Islamist groups through its control of an umbrella organisation, the Mujahidin Shura Council. Its dominance derived from the breadth of its targeting strategy and the intensity of its operational tactics. Al-Zarqawi deplored the insurgency’s reliance on traditional guerrilla techniques and imported Al Qaida’s method of suicide bombings, but in addition to occasional spectacular attacks on iconic targets, he developed an almost industrialised programme of frequent, smaller-scale attacks.

ISIL and Al Qaida

Al Qaida was never fully in control of its Iraqi franchise, Al Qaida in Mesopotamia (AQI). AQI's founder, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, was from the outset an independent jihadist. He gave 'bay'a' (allegiance) to Usama bin Ladin as a tactical move, and worked under the Al Qaida brand when it suited him, but he frequently defied, or ignored, the advice and instructions of his theoretical superiors. Al-Zarqawi was told to stop targeting the Shia, to put on hold his ambitions to found an Islamic state, and to rein in his preference for extreme, performative violence (such as filmed beheadings). Al-Zarqawi refused. After al-Zarqawi's death, AQI and its front organisation, the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), sought to remain within the Al Qaida family while focusing on its main goal, that of seizing and holding territory – in order, ultimately, to create an Islamic state.

Matters came to a head with the outbreak of the Syrian civil war. With Al Qaida's encouragement, AQI/ISI sent a force into Syria to join the battle and to develop a bridgehead for ISI. This force became Jabhat al Nusra (JaN) which quickly established itself as the most formidable jihadist group in Syria, beginning with a suicide bombing in Damascus in January 2012 which killed 26. By the end of 2012 it had been declared a terrorist organisation by the UN, the US, and the UK among others. Then, in 2013, ISI's leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared that JaN and ISI had merged to form the 'Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham' (ISIS or ISIL). JaN's leader publicly repudiated this announcement, and appealed to the judgement of Al Qaida's leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, who ruled in JaN's favour. When ISIL rejected al-Zawahiri's judgement, the two organisations were effectively at war — something apparently confirmed when the emissary appointed by al-Zawahiri to negotiate between the two groups was killed, presumably by ISIL, in a suicide bomb attack in February 2014 in Aleppo.

After its capture of Mosul and declaration of the Caliphate in June 2014, ISIL began to claim that Al Qaida had become a subordinate organisation. In its propaganda, it frequently mocks the Al Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, while appearing to venerate his predecessor, Usama bin Ladin.

Sources: Weiss and Hassan, 2015; Stern and Berger, 2015; Atwan, 2015

AQI's highpoint was 2006. From 2007 the organisation was in retreat. Al-Zarqawi was killed in 2006 but it was the combination of an improved counter-insurgency strategy from the United States, and a tribal revolt known as the '*Sahwa*' (awakening) which was partly motivated by AQI excesses among the Sunni strongholds, that removed much of the source of its support among the Sunnis (Kilcullen,

2009). AQI turned the Mujahidin Shura Council into a new body, the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) under the leadership of Abu Omar al-Baghdadi: AQI's new leader claimed to be only a partner in this joint enterprise, but most researchers agree that it was largely an AQI front (Weiss and Hassan, 2015). The creation of ISI signalled two important developments that would come to shape the current landscape: its state-building ambitions – though these were not taken seriously at the time, either by supporters or by Western analysts – and its transition to a more indigenous organisation. Some among the Sunni insurgent groups opposed these developments, seeing them as Al Qaida's "attempt to hijack the political channel of the Iraqi insurgency", according to one jihadist leader who then joined the *Sahwa* movement (Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 63). But al-Zarqawi's efforts to radicalise the insurgency had paid off, and created a new generation of indigenous, Salafi-Jihadist insurgents, many of whom had been imprisoned in American-run prisons such as Camp Bucca. It was in these prisons that AQI detainees met former regime loyalists, whose skills in administration and war-fighting proved to be invaluable to the group, and helps to explain why there are so many former army, airforce and intelligence service officers in ISIL's senior ranks (Barrett, 2014; Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 124-6). So important were the prisons to AQI's development that, according to one senior US army officer, it even began to infiltrate the prisons in order to cultivate recruits (Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 83). From 2007 to 2010, AQI appeared to be a spent force, but subsequent events showed that it was, in fact, quietly regrouping.

The Impact of the Syrian Civil War

The conflict in Syria, which grew from local protests in Deraa in 2011 into a full-scale civil war, influenced and was influenced by the Sunni Islamist insurgency in Iraq. Bashar al-Assad's oligarchical, Alawite-dominated regime saw the 2003 invasion of Iraq as signalling an existential threat from the United States, and so it embarked on a largely covert policy of support for elements of the insurgency – an instance of what political scientists call 'balancing', as states seek to maintain a balance of power in the surrounding regions (Salloukh, 2009). Early accusations from the US that Syria was funnelling fighters across the border into Iraq were denied, but there appears to be ample evidence of substantial support for Sunni and Shia insurgents in Iraq from the Syrian state. American analysts judged that this came in three waves — shortly before the 2003 invasion, during 2004, and after Syria's ignominious exit from Lebanon under international pressure in 2005; by 2008 Syria's support

was largely in the past (Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 99-101, 110). These fighters required cross-border logistical networks, and both fighters and the networks were revitalised after 2011.

Two other important groups joined the fray after 2011. The first were Islamist political prisoners released in 2011 from Sednaya prison. This was proclaimed by the regime as a gesture of reconciliation, but is widely to have been a cynical move to ensure that Islamist radicals joined the civil war, and thereby support the regime's narrative that the popular uprising was in fact a terrorist campaign (Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 145). Among the 2011 cohort of prisoner releases were three men who each went on to lead an Islamist militant group in the civil war: Zahran Alloush (Jaysh al-Islam), Hassan Aboud (Ahrar al-Sham) and Ahmed Abu Issa (Suqour al-Sham). The second were foreign fighters. While attention has focused on Western Europe as a source of foreign fighters, the Middle East and particularly North Africa has been a far more significant source in terms of numbers but also skills and experience. Some of those who reached Syria after 2011 were battle-hardened Libyan veterans of the uprising against Gaddafi; others were young Salafists from countries such as Jordan and Saudi Arabia; a contingent of veterans of the Chechnya conflict played important roles.

As the violence in Syria escalated, so the conflict became more complex, mirroring the escalation and fragmentation of the post-2003 conflict in Iraq. Its drivers were political (i.e. opposition to the regime), social (opposition has been strongest in socially and economically deprived areas), and sectarian (i.e. opposition to Alawite hegemony and contention between the Sunni majority and pro-regime minorities), and these have become more entwined and complex (Balanche, 2011). The minoritarian regime, desperate to preserve itself as it believed neither it nor the Syrian Alawite community could survive defeat, turned to Iranian-backed irregulars – Shia militias from Iraq and Hizbollah cadres from Lebanon – as well as '*Shabiha*' ('ghost') militias recruited from the Alawite community to supplement the regular army. Opposing Assad were a bewildering range of militias ranging from small, local groups of resistance fighters, to nationalist army veterans, to transnational jihadist groups such as JaN. The Free Syrian Army, a coalition of largely nationalist groups with a political and military leadership based in Turkey, aspired to lead the opposition but failed to become coordinated, let alone united. An Islamist alternative, the Syrian Islamic Front, led by Ahrar al-Sham and coalescing around a Salafist programme, was been more successful militarily (it was replaced by a similar entity, the Islamic Front, in 2013).

The Syrian Civil War was crucial to the rise of ISIL from the ashes of AQI and ISI. In 2010, ISI was refreshed by new leadership: Ibrahim Awwad Muhammad al-Badri al-Samarrai, better known as Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (see box below), provided religious authenticity and charisma, while a more hidden cadre of former Baathists, such as the former Iraqi Army colonel and intelligence officer Samir Muhammad al-Khlifawi ('Hajji Bakr'), developed the organisation strategically, administratively, and militarily. (Both men were former inmates in Camp Bucca, where it is presumed they met.) But the developing chaos next door provided immediate, cross-border, tactical opportunities and, increasingly, strategic depth as the organisation could build in one state and deploy in another. Its change of name to ISIL or ISIS ('the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham/the Levant') reflected growing ambition. It built its first stronghold and then *de facto* capital in the Syrian city of Raqqa which it used as a springboard for the assault on Mosul in 2014. In the process of expansion, it asserted and then lost control over JaN, its Syrian spearhead, and with it the patronage of Al Qaida's leadership (see box, 'ISIL and Al Qaida'), but in the longer-term the contest between ISIL and Al Qaida is perceived to have worked to the former's advantage.

The conflicts in Syria and Iraq have created the conditions in which both JaN and ISIL can flourish. In Syria, these conditions have been identified as weak governance, a war economy, a divided population, and an ideological and political vacuum (Turkmani, 2015), and much the same could also be said about Iraq.

Ibrahim Awwad Ibrahim al-Badri (Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi) — ‘Caliph Ibrahim’

Al-Badri was born in Samarra in Iraq in 1971. He claims direct descent from the Prophet Mohammed and his family appears to be devout – although some of them joined the ruling (secular) Baath Party and two of his uncles even served in Saddam’s notorious security services. He studied the Quran at the University of Baghdad and then took a master’s degree in Quranic recitation at the new Saddam University for Islamic Studies – an institution created as part of Saddam Hussein’s post-Gulf War ‘Faith Campaign’. After receiving his second degree, he enrolled on a doctorate programme at the same university.

In the late 1990s, al-Badri gravitated towards the Salafist-jihadist movement in Iraq which already comprised several members of his close family. After the fall of Saddam, al-Badri founded an Islamist insurgent group, Jaysh Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jamaah (Army of the People of the Sunna and Communal Solidarity). He was arrested and detained for eight months in 2004, although his American captors do not seem to have realised that he was an insurgent leader. He was detained in Camp Bucca along with AQI members and thousands of former Baathists who had joined the insurgency: it appears likely that he met some of the former regime figures who went on to help found ISIL.

In 2006, Al-Badri agreed to move his group into the ‘Mujahideen Shura Committee’ which evolved into the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), an umbrella group for Iraq’s jihadist organisations that was dominated by AQI. Al-Badri’s theological credentials – he received his doctorate in Baghdad in 2007 – meant that he was appointed head of ISI’s Sharia Committee. In 2010, the ISI’s top leaders killed themselves during a US raid, and Al-Badri was elected leader of ISI under the *kunya* Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

Under al-Badri’s rule, ISI (later ISIL and then ‘Islamic State’) reorganised itself with extraordinary efficiency. Much of this is down to Al-Badri and his colleagues in the leadership which comprise seasoned jihadists and experienced former Baathists.

He has been reported on at least two occasions to have been injured in coalition airstrikes since late 2014.

Source: McCants, 2015

Aims and Objectives of the Militant Groups

ISIL

ISIL's principal aim appears clear: to establish and expand its proto-state, what it calls the Caliphate – which will be a state for 'true' (i.e. sympathetic and Sunni) Muslims and a bulwark against the enemy. Its mission statement – '*baqiya wa tatamaddad*', remaining and expanding – appears to encapsulate this aim, while the character of the state is implicit in Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's division of humanity into two camps: "the camp of the Muslims and the mujahidin" and "the camp of the Jews, the Crusaders, their allies" (Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 1). In other words, its aim is to gain and govern territory according to Islamic law. It therefore follows the strategic direction of Al Qaida, whose principal theorist Ayman al-Zawahiri declared in 2001: "Victory by armies cannot be achieved unless the infantry occupies territory. Likewise, victory for Islamic movements against the world [Zionist-crusader] alliance cannot be attained unless these movements possess an Islamic base in the heart of the Arab region" (al-Zawahiri, 2001). Short-lived jihadist statelets were established in Yemen, Somalia and even, back in the 1990s, in Bosnia, but only ISIL has succeeded on any scale. In the process, it claims to be erasing borders established by the colonial powers which inscribe the 'Zionist-crusader' rule over the lands of the Islamic world (see box, 'ISIL and Skes Picot').

However, ISIL's approach goes further than Al Qaida believes necessary or feasible. Al Qaida's programme places the Caliphate – an international Islamic government based on Shariah – as a distant goal: al-Zawahiri was clear that conditions had to be met first, principally the removal of US influence from the Muslim world. ISIL has been heavily criticised for its premature project not only by Al Qaida but also by the founding intellectuals of the Salafist-jihadist movement, notably Abu Muhammed al-Maqdisi, who mentored al-Zarqawi in the 1990s but later criticised his pupil's excesses

(Sowell, 2015).

ISIL and Sykes-Picot

On 29 June 2014 ISIL proclaimed itself to be the Caliphate — a worldwide Islamic government — with ISIL’s leader Ibrahim Awwad al-Badri (‘Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’) as Caliph. On the same day, it released a propaganda video on YouTube entitled ‘The End of Sykes Picot’, which followed a Twitter campaign using the ‘hashtag’ #SykesPicotOver. The frame within which ISIL situated its declaration of the Caliphate was thus both historical and geopolitical.

Sykes-Picot refers to a secret agreement in 1916 between Britain, France and Russia to demarcate the Middle East into respective zones of control and influence (the name derives from the British and French officials who negotiated it). In fact, the agreement was never fully implemented, not least as the Russian Revolution and the formation of the League of Nation changed the geopolitical landscape – although it certainly influenced what was eventually agreed at the conferences and in the treaties following the First World War which allocated Transjordan, Palestine and Mesopotamia to Britain, and Syria to France. From these allocations emerged the states that today are called Israel, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. Although the agreement was one part of a complex process, it has passed, along with the 1917 Balfour Declaration which promised British support for a Jewish state in Palestine, into the cultural memory of the region as evidence of Europeans’ self-interested and hypocritical ambitions for the Middle East.

ISIL’s use of ‘Sykes-Picot’ is intended to evoke this cultural memory. ‘Sykes-Picot’ stands for both Western intervention and the artificial demarcation of territory, both of which ISIL’s new Caliphate will reverse. In the video, a militant using the name Abu Safiyya stands on what he calls the “so-called border” between Iraq and ‘Sham’ (Syria) and shows that it has been breached — a process that will continue until the Caliphate reaches Al-Quds (Jerusalem). Implicit in ISIL’s propaganda is the empowerment of the region’s Sunni Muslims over their various oppressors to overcome the political and geographical legacy of Western

To garner greater legitimacy than earlier failed experiments in governance were able to attain, ISIL has capitalised on a current within jihadist movements in Syria that AQI helped to nurture: a recognition of the eschatological as well as historical and geopolitical significance of the Levant (Filiu, 2011). Al-Zarqawi was fond of citing prophetic Hadiths which suggested that battles within the region

he aspired to dominate would signal the ‘end of days’ (Weiss and Hassan, 2015), and the Syrian jihadist theorist Abu Musab al-Suri devoted the final chapter of his monumental study of ‘leaderless jihad’, *The Global Islamic Resistance Call*, to the military-political implications of these prophecies (Lia, 2008), but it was the Syrian civil war which gave new impetus to the apocalyptic strain within jihadism. ISIL capitalised on this excitement, naming its English-language online magazine after Dabiq, the obscure northern Syrian town where one of the most important battles in the prophecies is foretold to occur. ISIL has also legitimised some of its worst excesses – such as the enslavement of Yazidis – as necessary because they have been prophesied. Thus ISIL has positioned its campaign within a cosmic frame, projecting its power not simply in military and political terms, but as a divinely foretold necessity.

However, the Caliphate may be as much a means to an end as the end itself. Although there is considerable debate over how far ISIL’s project is grounded in religion,⁸⁴ our assessment, and that of the experts we consulted, is that ISIL’s fundamental aim is more immediate and practical than might be suggested by the theology that attracts so much attention: its primary aim is obtaining and projecting power. There is no doubt that it learned much from observing and – for the former Baathists in its leadership cadres – helping to run Saddam Hussein’s authoritarian state: it is similarly totalitarian, and its techniques have much in common with those of Saddam’s ‘republic of fear’ (for which see Makiya, 1998). ISIL’s ‘cosmic ideology’ gives it an ability to recruit but its real aims are, we believe, more mundane.

This is evident in another of its strategic aims — to be the dominant Sunni Islamist group in Iraq and Syria, and to destroy any nationalist alternative to its proto-state in either country. Observers are often surprised by the resources invested by jihadist groups in internecine warfare but ISIL’s attacks on its rivals make strategic sense in the light of its need to dominate and be seen to be dominant. In the process, in the areas under its control it has established the monopoly on armed force which is required for its governance project. And, in order to achieve its aims, ISIL has continued the strategy

⁸⁴ For an example of the controversy over ISIL’s ‘Islamic’ credentials among journalists and opinion-formers, see Graeme Wood, ‘What ISIS Really Wants’, *The Atlantic* (March 2015) and its many subsequent rebuttals such as Mehdi Hassan, ‘How Islamic is Islamic State’, *New Statesman*, 10 March 2015.

first developed by al-Zarqawi of exploiting sectarian contention in Iraq so as to provoke civil war and be seen as the only group able to defend the Sunni population from its historic enemies.

JaN

JaN began as an AQI/ISI franchise, and its leaders aimed firstly to establish an AQI presence in Syria and then – following al-Zarqawi’s strategy in Iraq after 2003 – to radicalise and ultimately dominate the conflict. As JaN’s leader Abu Mohammed al-Jolani stated in 2014, “The regime was grossly oppressive and people were far away from the idea of picking up arms against it [...] So this uprising removed many of the setbacks and paved the way for us to enter this blessed land” (qtd. in Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 151) It is, like its estranged sibling ISIL, cosmic in ideology – although it has, to an extent, repositioned itself as a ‘nationalist’ group without international ambitions (Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 162). Initially functioning as a terrorist organisation, it had evolved into an insurgent group by late 2012. “Two-and-a-half years later [...] Jabhat al-Nusra is one of the most powerful armed groups in Syria. Its consistent balancing of ideologically driven jihadist objectives with local sensitivities and revolutionary ideals has placed Jabhat al-Nusra in an advantageous position” (Lister, 2015). This balancing has been evident in its conduct in Idlib, where it has played a leading role in the Jaish al-Fateh coalition that defeated the Syrian armed forces in the governorate in the spring of 2015. JaN previously declined to join such coalitions, so its change of policy suggests pragmatism. Its military contribution shows that it is a capable insurgent group. And its killing of 23 Druze civilians in the governorate and other atrocities shows that it remains committed to a highly sectarian, exclusivist vision for the future of Syria (Lister, 2015).

It aspires to govern territory according to the Al Qaida model – which has become smarter as Al Qaida and its affiliates have learned from experience (e.g. in Yemen, and from working with and observing the Taliban). As al-Zawahiri proclaimed in 2013, in order to ensure the long-term survival of its “safe bases”, Al Qaida’s franchises should focus on *maslaha* (welfare) and *mafsadah* (averting harm), which in practice means not attacking religious minorities or civilians, while focusing on attacking the West as its top priority (Lister, 2015). In contrast to ISIL, the state which JaN aspires to govern is not a Caliphate — a supranational and supreme theocratic state — but a more modest emirate, i.e. a more geographically limited entity governed by an emir (prince). Moreover, “despite Jabhat al-Nusra’s apparent pragmatism, it remained a self-identified al-Qa’ida affiliate and its

transnational vision still existed, at least within its leadership, its foreign fighter contingent, and some of its Syrian rank and file” (Lister, 2015).

AaS

AaS is a jihadist group in a state of flux. On its foundation in late 2011 its leaders, Syrian Salafists including the former political prisoner Hassan Aboud, declared the group’s aim was to establish an Islamic state in Syria. One of its leading founder members was reported to be a veteran jihadist who was selected by Ayman al-Zawahiri’s to be Al Qaida’s mediator in the dispute between ISI and JaN (Lund, 2014a). It is the prime mover behind the Islamic Front, a coalition of mostly Salafist Islamist militant groups whose rhetoric was, initially at least, nakedly sectarian. Its ideology, therefore, should be considered to lie within the Salafist-jihadist spectrum.

However, AaS’s leadership also contains moderate Islamist and nationalists, and it presents itself as a popular revolutionary movement. Regional actors such as Qatar and Turkey believe they can work with the group. Most importantly, since late 2013, AaS “has been moderating its ideological and political outlook” (Lister, 2015): its 2014 Revolutionary Covenant disavowed any ambitions to establish a Caliphate, it called in July 2014 for a dialogue with the United States, and it agreed in August 2015 to work with the Turkish government in its plans to establish a safe zone in northern Syria. The Islamic Front, which it dominates, has moderated its sectarian rhetoric. AaS’s leaders have included some who were veterans of the Fighting Vanguard’s disastrous confrontation with the state in the late 1970s/early 1980s (Lund, 2014a). Its policy of pragmatic idealism may thus be derived in part from the lesson that direct confrontation and radical ideology may not be the best route to success. All of this is summed up in its mission statement, published on its website: “The Islamic Movement of Free Men of the Levant is an Islamist, reformist, innovative and comprehensive movement. It is integrated with the Islamic Front and is a comprehensive and Islamic military, political and social formation. It aims to completely overthrow the Assad regime in Syria and build an Islamic state whose only sovereign, reference, ruler, direction, and individual, societal and nationwide unifier is Allah Almighty’s Sharia (law)” (Chabkoun, 2014).

AaS has, in common with other jihadist groups, succeeded in acquiring and governing territory, and is adopting an increasingly ‘Syrian nationalist’ programme as evidenced by its signing of a ‘covenant

of honour' in late 2014 in which it disavowed any global-jihadist pretensions. Despite suffering repeated attacks from the regime and jihadist rivals, it has become and currently remains the *de facto* leader of the opposition in Syria, and is the only opposition group with national reach.

Shia Militias

Shia militias in Iraq can be broadly categorised as Sadrists and SCIRI groups. The former derive from the Mahdi Army of Muqtada al-Sadr (see above); the latter are part of a Shia Islamist organisation, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (now renamed as the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq), which was established in Iran during the 1980-88 Gulf War and remains heavily backed by Iran. Until 2007 SCIRI's principal militia was the Badr Brigade, later renamed the Badr Organisation and now semi-independent. Both Sadrists and SCIRI groups are now seeking to act independently of Iran, and to forge a distinctive 'Iraqi Shia' identity, although there is no doubt that Iran's paramilitary intelligence service, the IRGC, remains heavily involved: the Badr Organisation's social media accounts frequently feature its leader Hadi al-Ameri photographed with the infamous IRGC commander Qassem Suleimani (George, 2014). At a leadership level, therefore, the aims of the Shia militias are at least partly geopolitical.

Both Sadrists and SCIRI groups have aggressively asserted Shia identity, while many have been responsible for persecuting Sunni Muslim civilians and their representatives. The Mahdi Army, for example, sought to dominate Baghdad and push Sunni Muslims out of mixed areas during the 2005-07 civil war.

Iran's influence is also evident in Syria, where Hizbollah fighters from Lebanon are used by the Syrian regime, with Iran's blessing, as proxies, especially in areas bordering Lebanon's Bekaa Valley.

Drivers and Enablers for Recruitment and Radicalisation

ISIL

For the Sunni population in Iraq, the drivers of recruitment into militant groups were initially foreign occupation and the loss of social authority and power that followed the 2003 invasion: removing US forces and restoring some form of Sunni-Arab hegemony were, according to most writers, the main

motivations at the outset (see for example Weiss and Hassan, 2014: 25-26, 63; Tripp, 2007). AQI then sought deliberately to change the nature of the conflict by spreading its Salafist-jihadist ideology and the tactics of a pan-Islamist insurgency by targeting not only the occupying forces but also international institutions and religious/ethnic groups to create and intensify a civil war between Sunni Arabs and the rest (Hafez, 2014). AQI developed from a group of foreign fighters led by a Jordanian who had emigrated to Afghanistan; until 2006 AQI overwhelmingly comprised Arabs from outside Iraq — and Saudi Arabia especially (Hafez, 2014: 443). Documentary evidence shows the group was highly successful in recruiting foreign fighters from other Arab countries in the first years of the Iraq insurgency (Fishman and Felter, 2007).

However, AQI was also successful in radicalising elements of Iraq's Sunni insurgency — including former Baathists — and, after al-Zarqawi's death, Iraqis increasingly took leadership positions in AQI, not least as the foreigners were looked upon with increasing disfavour by indigenous insurgents (Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 84). As a result, by the time it relaunched itself as ISI it had become a largely indigenous group, which then succeeded in attracting significant support from Sunnis — including those who had previously joined the Sahwa movement which had fought AQI/ISI — who were disaffected by the increasingly chauvinistic and corrupt administration in Baghdad (Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 91). Nonetheless, after 2011 ISI sought to capitalise on the attraction of the Syrian civil war to foreign fighters, both from the MENA region and further afield: whereas AQI was constituted by foreign fighters, ISI/ISIL instrumentalised them. For this reason, non-Iraqis now are rare in ISIL's senior ranks — the military chief Abu Omar al-Shishani ('the Chechen') being the notable exception.

The limited qualitative evidence available suggests that ISIL recruits join for a wide range of reasons. According to one analysis, ideological purists are outnumbered by recruits or conscripts from rival militant groups which have been absorbed, confronted or defeated by ISIL: it has offered amnesties to fighters in rival organisations who choose to defect, and the capture of Mosul in 2014 reportedly led to a surge in defections to the group (Lund, 2014b; Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 161). ISIL can and does persuade individuals to accept its worldview rationally — as shown by several of those interviewed by Weiss and Hassan (2015: 154-5), one of whom declared he had been impressed by ISIL's "intellectualism and the way it spreads religion and fights injustice". Weiss and Hassan's interviewees also included a Sunni Kurd from Halabja — which, after Saddam's assault on the town

with chemical weapons in 1988, became a centre for Islamist proselytisation. There is also increasing evidence of a programme of recruitment and indoctrination of youths and even young children (Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 174, Horgan, 2015; Turkmani, 2015). Then there are those who see a purely pragmatic need to support ISIL because of Iraq's failures of governance and the sectarian nature of the conflict for whom ISIL is simply the only credible available force to protect the community and provide governance (Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 163-5; Fromson and Simon, 2015: 20). Finally, there are likely to be those who cooperate or work for the regime because they have little choice to do otherwise. ISIL's apparent success in recruiting after it has conquered territory (estimates vary between around 20,000 to 200,000) suggests that a large proportion of its forces have effectively been co-opted: "The bulk of its fighting force" in Syria "is composed of Syrian men who are not believers in the 'state' but had very little choice" (Turkmani, 2015: 14). Turkmani also suggests a range of motivations for fighters in Syria to join – disappointment with fragmented or ineffective opposition forces; need for money; religious/ideological sympathy; fear of oppression by ISIL's enemies, such as the Kurdish parties in Hasaka governorate; and, most simply, survival. But ISIL's supporters and co-optees are not only fighters. Women are actively recruited from within Syria and Iraq as well as overseas: "Women are particularly important for ISIL and their long-term plans of state building. They are seen as the potential mothers of a new generation" (Turkmani, 2015: 23).

This range of drivers and motivations is broadly consistent with Gupta's model of participation in political violence, in which he distinguishes between 'mercenaries', who join the conflict in order to gain some kind of reward, 'true believers', who subscribe to an ideology that is relevant to the conflict, and 'captive participants' whose "presence can be accounted for by their fear (cost) of not going along with the group" (Gupta 2005: 19) – a category akin to Kilcullen's 'accidental guerrillas' (2009). The former Baathists and some of the foreign fighters can be characterised as mercenaries, the most active recruits as true believers, and the rest as captive participants (Fromson and Simon, 2015: 25). The literature (albeit lacking empirical detail) suggests the latter group may be the most numerous and the most significant, reflecting the sectarian politics of the two conflicts. Sunni Arabs in both Syria and Iraq evidently consider themselves to be fighting a war of survival, fearing a newly enfranchised Shia majority in Iraq, and a minoritarian regime in Syria that will lay waste whole neighbourhoods in order to ensure its continued survival. However, Gupta's characterisation of such a constituency as 'captive participants' may be insufficient to capture the full extent of broad,

popular support for ISIL in regions of both Iraq and Syria which have suffered spectacular failures of governance (Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 223-4).

One factor not addressed by Gupta is pay. As has been widely reported, ISIL controls significant resources in Syria and Iraq, its leaders signing off a \$2 billion budget for 2014/15. With control over oil, the sale of antiquities and, most importantly, tax revenues, ISIL can afford to pay its fighters sums that would simply be unobtainable elsewhere – an average of \$400 per month in a country where youth unemployment is 60-90 per cent and other militias can afford to pay on average only \$50 per month (Turkmani, 2015).

JaN

JaN's leaders – for all their apparent pragmatism – have remained wedded to the global jihadist project. However, there appears to be contention over the relative importance of fighting the Syrian government and pursuing longer term objectives of attacking the West – with hardliners and pragmatists jostling for authority in the group (Lister, 2015). Its followers are more mixed, comprising global jihadists, attracted by JaN's 'cosmic' ideology, and insurgents/revolutionaries who see JaN as an effective vehicle for fighting the Syrian government (Lister, 2015). Among the former are a significant component of foreign fighters: some estimates suggest that as many as 30% of its members may be non-Syrian. That said, JaN is more distinctively Syrian than ISIL, despite its origin as an offshoot of ISI: "The group's majority Syrian makeup [...] contributes to a crucial level of social grounding", while its "strict and highly selective foreign fighter recruitment policies have ensured an ongoing supply of high-caliber muhajireen [emigrants]" (Lister, 2015).

AaS

AaS's significant steps towards moderation have not gone entirely unopposed. Its religious leadership has objected to the group's accommodation with Western and Syrian nationalist interests, although the outcome of this dispute could result in further moderation (Lister, 2015). As for the group's members, it seems likely from the group's progressive moderation that its rank and file are more nationalist than global jihadist, while one study, based on interviews of members and questionnaires, states that "Ahrar members themselves emphasize the movement's internal diversity. They say it includes members who lean towards less orthodox Sufi Islam or the politics of the Muslim

Brotherhood, and that most of its foot soldiers are religious but not particularly ideological” (Heller, 2015). This suggests that motivations are nationalist and pragmatic – but the group also offers religious authenticity.

Shia Militias

There are an estimated 44 Shia militias in Iraq, with an estimated 70,000 fighters. The Badr Organisation alone is estimated to comprise 10,000 men (George, 2014). The Shia militia movement, already widespread in Shia majority areas of Iraq, received a major boost with Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani’s fatwa on 14 June 2014 encouraging Shia to join militias in order to fight a “righteous jihad” against ISIL (Stansfield, 2015). Following this fatwa, many of the Shia militias in Iraq, including those that fought the US during the 2003-06 insurgency, formed into the Hashd Shaabi – people’s militias – to combat ISIL. These developments demonstrate the extent to which sectarian politics have become entrenched in the current conflict in Iraq: “not only does Daesh fight as Sunnis rather than Iraqis, but the Hashd is equally sectarian, fighting Daesh as Shi’as rather than Iraqis” (Stansfield, 2015). It also indicates the extent to which the religious leadership in Iraq (and also in Iran) can command the loyalty of militants and citizens.

In Iraq, the Shia militias are effectively in competition with the Iraqi army, and appear to be winning: militias offer better weapons and more generous pay and benefits (George, 2014). But they are also in competition with each other, competition which became violent in 2007 (Dodge, 2012: 104).

In Syria, Lebanese Hizbollah has executive control of the counter-insurgency. Syria’s jihadists were making major gains until Hizbollah was mobilised – its success presumably the result of its own competence in fighting a guerrilla campaign. An Israeli think tank estimated in 2014 that there were “actually more foreign Shia fighters helping Assad than there were foreign Sunni fighters trying to overthrow him” (Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 141).

Interaction with Conflict

ISIL

AQI saw the Iraq conflict as a means to an end, but for it to achieve that end it had to change the conflict's character. It did so largely through ruthless sectarian targeting and the industrialised use of suicide attacks. As al-Zarqawi himself put it, "People cannot awaken from their stupor unless talk of martyrdom and martyrs fill their days and nights" (Hafez, 2014: 446). In the first years of the Iraq insurgency, these techniques enabled it to achieve a prominence out of proportion to its size: it was responsible for 42 per cent of suicide bombings despite only having 14 per cent of the manpower in the Sunni insurgency (Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 28), while a different study put its share of suicide bombings at 90% (Dodge, 2012: 61). AQI thus developed and implemented a conflict strategy which combined terrorist techniques with insurgent aims.

ISIL is now reaping the benefits of this strategy and has developed it still further as it has responded to the opportunities and challenges of the battlefield. It has recognised, for example, that inducing fear is useful not just in a political context (i.e. as terrorism) but also as a military strategy. Techniques such as heavily mediated brutality towards prisoners have enabled it to project its military power and undertake audacious military operations of which the conquest of Mosul in June 2014 with a vastly outnumbered force is the most prominent example. But ISIL has consistently shown an ability to match tactical skill with strategic intent. This was evident, for example, in its 'Breaking Down the Walls' campaign in 2012-13, when eight prisons were attacked to liberate ISIL supporters (as well as potential recruits), followed by its 'Soldiers' Harvest' campaign which saw a planned and systematic series of attacks on Iraqi security forces. It is also notorious for its gross human rights violations. Rape, for example, is a common tactic in war but what has shocked many is the group's codifying and systematising of rape (e.g. by producing a market-price schedule for Yazidi girls).

However, it is important to widen the focus beyond ISIL's excesses and performative violence. Although it may now be facing considerable challenges in governance, it nonetheless has shown itself to be in important respects competent – and perhaps even adept. For example, its leaders have skilfully navigated Sunni culture in Iraq (more effectively perhaps than the government in Baghdad)

and increasingly in Syria, including the important area of tribal relationships (Weiss and Hassan: 208-9). In this it seems to have learned from the mistakes of AQI which alienated some of the Sunni tribes in 2006-07 (see below). Its decision to leave government employees in place in the areas of Syria and Iraq which it dominates was also astute, allowing it to benefit from their administrative capacity and, incidentally, from taxing their government incomes. This is also a refinement of an older strategy: AQI/ISI made governance one of its priorities from 2006, when it created 'shadow' ministries for oil, agriculture and health for the territory which it controlled or influenced (Weiss and Hassan, 2015: 64).

ISIL's approach to governance combines repression, effective bureaucracy, and uncompromising law enforcement to establish and maintain order: "The imposition of law and order is always the first priority. This ensures that like a state, ISIL has a monopoly on the legitimate use of force. [...] As a proto-state ISIL provides its own police, security services and even its own intelligence. Robbery, extortion and murder are reported to have almost disappeared in ISIL-controlled areas" (Turkmani, 2015). And ISIL's competence goes beyond its capacity to provide security: utilities, hospitals, food distribution and other services are reported to improve rapidly in areas of Syria taken over by ISIL, partly because of its willingness to retain experienced staff in this sector even if they are unwilling to declare allegiance, but largely because of its ruthless tactics of control and co-optation (Turkmani, 2015). Such is the degree of ISIL's pragmatism that it is reported to be engaged in deals with the Syrian government over power supply, food distribution, and fossil fuel sales (Turkmani, 2015).

ISIL has also shown exceptional competence in infiltration, intelligence, and influencing its environment. A senior US military figure involved in the anti-ISIL coalition commented that the group's skill in shaping the battlefield through prior infiltration is exceptional,⁸⁵ while other sources attest to ISIL's investment in intelligence gathering, infiltrating government and civil society institutions, and establishing covert logistical networks both as a prelude to a military offensive, and to maintain a regional intelligence and logistics network. The extent and sophistication of ISIL's investment in these structures was revealed in documents obtained by *Der Spiegel*, which showed plans for the 'Islamic State' drawn up by former Baathist Samir Muhammad al-Khlifawi ('Hajji Bakr')

⁸⁵ Private (unattributable) briefing to RUSI, 22 January 2015..

featuring an elaborate bureaucratic which prioritised intelligence gathering, infiltration, and ideological coordination (Reuter, 2015).

To become an effective authority in the areas which it governs, ISIL has put in place an elaborate and comprehensive legal code which derives its legitimacy from being anchored in Islamic law (March and Revkin, 2015). Our panel of experts suggested, however, that ISIL may be changing under the pressures of governance: previously permissive about its citizens leaving, it now restricts movement severely, and in 2015 began to restrict Internet access. These developments suggest that it fears losing manpower and expertise, and is concerned about its subjects' ability to communicate with the outside world.

JaN

JaN began as a terrorist organisation seeking to radicalise the conflict, but from 2012 began to operate more as an oppositionist/insurgent force, targeting the Syrian regime with both suicide attacks and conventional armed assaults. A notable development was its joining the Jaish al-Fatah coalition in Idlib in 2015: this pragmatic move demonstrated a willingness to work with partners far removed from its purist ideological programme. Nevertheless, some analysts warn that its programme remains intact: it wishes to establish territorial control in order to create a safe haven for attacking the West (Lister, 2015). In other words, its pragmatism under the pressure of conflict should not be mistaken for moderation.

Although JaN aspires to establish an emirate, it does not match ISIL's ambitions to control all aspects of military and civil activity. JaN-administered areas in Syria do not have the 'police state' atmosphere of ISIL-controlled areas, although JaN does aspire to control the courts and judiciary in areas it helps to administer (Turkmani, 2015). Nor has JaN matched ISIL in the degree of support or acquiescence it garners from civilian populations: JaN is reportedly unpopular in areas it administers in Idlib, and in some parts it has reportedly become embroiled in criminal activities such as diesel smuggling (Turkmani, 2015).

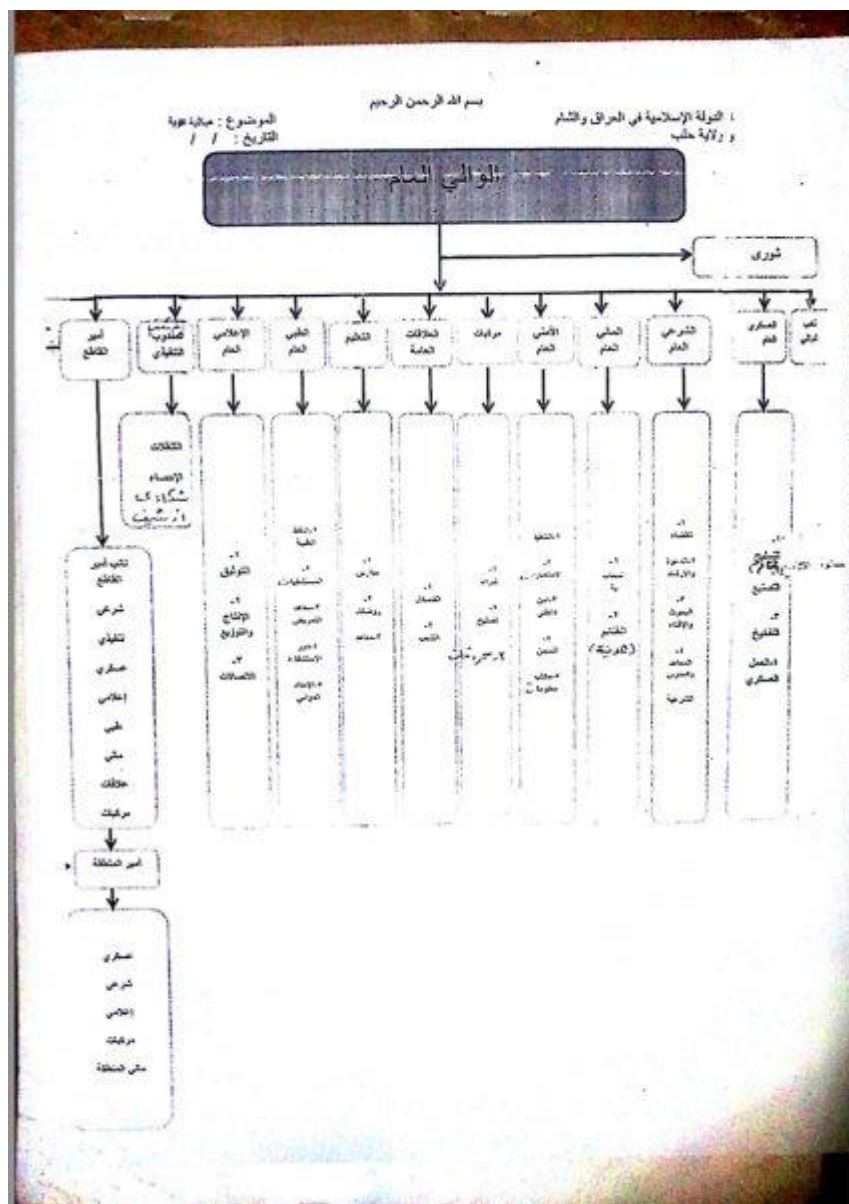


Figure 1: Sketch for the organisation of the ‘Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant’, reportedly created by former Baathist Samir Abd Muhammad al-Khlfawi (Hajji Bakr). Source: *Der Spiegel*

AaS

AaS has come under more pressure than most of the fighting groups in Syria, and as a result has changed the most. Whilst it would be a mistake to see it in Western terms as ‘moderate’, it has had to withstand the enmity of the regime and of other jihadist groups such as ISIL – any one of which could have been behind the assassination of over two dozen of AaS’s leaders in a bombing in 2014. In response, it has succeeded in absorbing small groups such as Suqour al-Sham while continuing to dominate the Islamic Front. Therefore, the group’s inclusiveness, reformist programme, and

openness to compromise has proven to be highly successful: it is a resilient organisation that continues to be effective on the ground.

AaS's leaders, both hardline and pragmatist, now condemn not only ISIL and al-Qaida, but also their whole "manhaj" ('programme') developed by the Salafist-jihadist ideologue Abu Muhammed al-Maqdisi (Heller, 2015). However, it still firmly belongs to the broader jihadist movement and its brand of revisionism is taking it back to the theories of the original, global-jihadist thinker, Abdullah Azzam. AaS's former leader Hassan Aboud described the group shortly before his death as being a 'mujahid' (religiously authorised fighting) organisation rather than a jihadist one that seeks to pursue fighting as an end in itself. Ideologically, this has meant abandoning the traditional jihadist doctrine that an ultra-violent elite or vanguard is the means to Islamist revolution in favour of a broader-based, populist approach that depends on *al-hadina al-sha'abiyya* (literally, 'the popular incubator' but roughly equivalent to the English term 'hearts and minds') (Heller, 2015). In practice, this means exercising restraint and fighting as narrow a range of enemies as possible while building partnerships with other fighting groups.

AaS has thus been shaped by the violence of the Syrian battlefield so that it has withdrawn from its initial belief in a 'cosmic' global-jihadist solution, and now favours one which is populist as well as revolutionary. In contrast to ISIL, its battlefield jurisprudence has progressively moderated. That it has done so while still maintaining its religious authenticity, albeit in a more pluralist form than that of the Salafist-jihadists, shows that religion can be a dynamic force in conflict. Moreover, AaS's reformism demonstrates that Islamist militant groups can genuinely compromise, moderate on matters of principle, negotiate, and build partnerships.

Shia Militias

The existence and tactics of the Shia militias supports ISIL's narrative that the Iraqi government and its allies represent an existential threat to the Sunni community, both directly and indirectly. The militias themselves have been extensively accused of engaging in abuses and atrocities, most recently against Sunnis believed to have collaborated with ISIL, for example after the defeat of ISIL forces in Tikrit in 2015 (Human Rights Watch, 2015). Shia militias are also widely reported to be engaged in criminality, including kidnapping for ransom and extortion. Less directly, from 2003 Shia militias were

variously absorbed into or covertly infiltrated the Iraqi military, police and paramilitary forces, which then acquired a well-evidenced reputation for sectarian killings and massacres (Dodge, 2012: 63-5). In parallel, the Shia militias legitimately succeeded in placing officials in positions of responsibility (George, 2014; Dodge, 2012: 63); al-Ameri himself was formerly minister for transport in Nouri al-Maliki's government. The strength of the Shia militias' political influence and control over the levers of legitimate and illegitimate violence thus evidences ISIL's argument that the government and its security forces are not Iraqi but Shia. More generally, we were told that posters displaying of Hadi al-Ameri and Qassem Suleimani can be seen in many parts of Baghdad, suggesting that they, not the elected government, are really in control. Therefore, the Shia militias have repeatedly used the opportunities of conflict to entrench their position as the victors of the Iraq conflicts from 2003 to the present.

Implications for Interventions

Syria and Iraq provide little evidence for what might be effective in limiting or reducing, let alone ending violence. Iraq however did experience a substantial reduction in violence from 2007 to 2010, after the Mahdi Army was contained (and ultimately disbanded) and AQI/ISI appeared to have been largely broken. Hailed at the time (and by some even now) as a masterpiece of counterinsurgency, the US's 'surge' and the Iraqi tribal '*Sahwa*' made gains that were not, evidently, consolidated.

Nonetheless, there are some instructive points from the 'surge' and the *Sahwa* in accounts such as Kilcullen's (2009). First, AQI contributed to its own setbacks by overtaxing the populations under its influence – literally and, through its preference for violent methods, figuratively too. In the process, it paid insufficient attention to maintaining tribal loyalty (e.g. by demanding brides for jihadist fighters in defiance of tribal custom). Second, Coalition leaders went out of their way to build bridges to the Sunni communities, and tribal networks in particular, taking considerable security risks in the process. Third, the prospect of participation in a new political settlement persuaded tribal leaders that their communities could be re-enfranchised (Dodge, 2012: 90-1). As later events showed, the failure of the al-Maliki government to make good on this third point forced the tribes, and the Sunni community more generally, to support a resurgent ISI after 2011. The lessons for counter-insurgency

are, then, not new: the parties which can command most support among the civilian population are most likely to prevail (Rowley, 2013).

The lessons of the *Sahwa* are even more relevant for governance as they are for counter-insurgency. The *Sahwa*'s gains were unsustainable in the absence of a genuinely inclusive political settlement. Although al-Maliki was personally blamed for presiding over a Shia chauvinist regime that deliberately excluded Sunnis from participation, the problems were more systemic: a workable polity that commands widespread assent, without descending authoritarianism and sectarianism, has yet to be envisaged for Iraq. More acutely, many among the newly powerful (mostly Shia) elites in Baghdad benefited from, and were complicit, in the sectarian violence that the *Sahwa* was designed to reduce, and judged that a more inclusive settlement would be to their detriment. The *Sahwa* was therefore dependent upon the US and, once authority was handed over to Baghdad, the *Sahwa* was deliberately dismantled (Dodge, 2012: 98-101).

Until a workable, inclusive polity is designed and delivered, it is unlikely that Iraq's profound problems with violent extremism will go away. Sectarianism is a consequence, not a cause, of a conflict whose proximate cause is "the collapse of the state and the subsequent security vacuum" (Dodge, 2012: 35). The Iraq case illustrates that violent extremism is fundamentally a problem of governance, which suggests that it is in improving state capacity and political inclusiveness that the remedies lie.

However, the emergence of ISIL presents a particular challenge to the peace-building/state-building approach. Although its whole strategy is founded on the assumption that it generates strength and stability through conflict, ISIL (and to an extent JaN) are nonetheless seeking to build states which enjoy a high level of internal security. They are therefore in direct competition with governments and NGOs which aspire to state-building in Syria and Iraq. Peace-building and state-building interventions in Iraq and Syria therefore are likely to be viewed by these groups as a threat.

Conclusion: What is Different about Islamist Extremist Violence?

Certain types of transnational Islamist violent extremists are attracted to conflict and tend to make those conflicts. In Iraq and Syria, Al Qaida-linked groups — also labelled Salafi-jihadists or global-jihadists — have succeeded in their aim of radicalising these conflicts. They did not cause them and without their involvement, it is possible that these conflicts would still be raging. But they have clearly made these conflicts worse in a number of ways. They have made them more lethal – by importing techniques of suicide attacks as a deliberate strategy. They have made them more intractable, by deliberately provoking sectarian violence on an appalling scale, capitalising on but also creating inter-communal grievances. They have sustained them through a policy of attracting foreign fighters through professional propaganda campaigns – while governments and media in the West have unsurprisingly focused on European foreign fighters, battle-hardened veterans of conflicts in Libya and Chechnya are much more significant. They have elevated these wars in the minds of supporters and opponents not merely into existential battles but into cosmic wars by tapping into apocalyptic prophetic traditions.

One group – ISIL – is seeking to establish facts on the ground that will unalterably change the political and confessional character of the territories it controls. It has learned from previous experiments in governance by jihadist groups in Algeria, Yemen and Somalia, as well as the personal experience of the ex-Baathists in its high command of running a highly repressive authoritarian state, and succeeded in creating an Islamist extremist polity that will come under increasing military pressure but, at least for now, appears viable and even robust, commanding the assent of a large proportion of those it governs. ISIL is not unique in being an Islamist militant group governing territory and seeking to govern more. It is unique in the extent of the territory and population it governs, and in being a merger of Islamist ideologues and (formerly secular) administrators and military officers.

However, it would be a serious mistake to assume that Islamist violent extremists are all the same. Al Qaida's franchise in Syria, JaN, has separated from its parent organisation with great (and bloody) acrimony; ISIL has disowned the Al Qaida leadership in South Asia. This shows that there is contention, rivalry and opposition even among the Salafist-jihadists — and even within groups, as reports of divisions within JaN testify. Moreover, the intellectual originators of the Salafist-jihadist

movement have denounced ISIL's declaration of a Caliphate as hubristic and theologically improper. Islamist violent extremism is fragmented, contentious, and diverse.

Most importantly, we must distinguish between the global jihadist groups (principally ISIL and JaN) and those jihadist groups which restrict themselves to a local or regional agenda. AaS has reined in any ambition to extend its reach beyond Syria, has embraced fighters from a diversity of traditions, and increasingly sees itself as part of a broad-based popular revolution. It is far from being a trustworthy partner for Western intervention but it shows that violent Islamist groups are not necessarily uncompromising.

Nor are Islamist groups incapable of pragmatism. JaN has entered into military alliances with secular groups that do not share its aims. Even ISIL is capable of dealing with its ideological enemies (such as the Syrian government) in order to maintain or increase its grip on power. Although frequently portrayed in the West as barbaric, pathological and apocalyptic, ISIL should be seen as a supremely rational actor that recognizes the political and military benefits that can come from removing cultural and ethical constraints in the application of violence.

Less attention is paid to Shia militias active in both countries, such as Hizbollah in Syria and the Badr Organisation in Iraq. Both of these militias are heavily influenced if not controlled by Iran and, although Iran has put aside its earlier ambitions to foment (Shia) Islamist revolution worldwide, these groups retain an Islamist revolutionary aim, and are increasingly drawing on a sense of global Shia identity, just as Al Qaida has sought to mobilise a global Sunni identity. There is nothing inherently better or worse about Shia Islamist violent extremism in comparison to Sunni violent extremism. In many respects, ISIL and the Badr Organisation resemble each other. However, conflicts are likely to become more entrenched and intractable when Shia and Sunni strains of violent extremism are parties to a conflict that has a significant sectarian dimension.

Our main finding from this case is that a sub-set of Islamist violent extremists are different from other conflict actors in certain respects – namely, their global ambitions, transnational participation, cosmic framing of the conflicts, and record of entering these conflicts from overseas and radicalizing them. In other respects, however, we find participants in these conflicts, whether Islamist or not, to

be broadly similar: violent groups participating in them are concerned with defending their constituencies, controlling populations, acquiring and distributing resources (including territory), recruiting troops, and projecting their power militarily and through propaganda.

Can these conclusions be generalised? We advise caution. This case study, and the others that complement it, suggest that each conflict is particular and Iraq and Syria may be exceptional in yielding evidence of the Salafist-jihadist success in radicalising and globalising conflicts. Algeria in the 1990s offers one possible precedent (Maher, 2015), but in general, even when violent groups declare allegiance to Al Qaida or ISIL, they tend to remain locally or regionally focused (cf. Boko Haram and Al Shabaab). Nonetheless, the record of the Salafist-jihadists shows that they have the potential to repeat their success elsewhere.

Annex A: Syria and Iraq's Troubled Histories

The modern states of Syria and Iraq are less than a hundred years old but their short histories have been characterised by conflict, foreign occupation, and repression. Created from the remains of the Ottoman Empire by the victorious European powers after the First World War — albeit under the nominal authority ('mandate') of the new League of Nations — the geography, institutions and policies of both states were designed to serve their western creators, Britain and France. Both powers created their Middle-Eastern 'mandates' in their own image — a British-run monarchy in Iraq and a French republic in Syria — and ill-feeling about the processes which led to European domination of the region still runs deep and inflects the current conflict (see box, 'ISIL and Sykes-Picot'). In both cases, borders were drawn in new ways and which altered the delicate ethnic and religious patchwork of the region. In Syria, the French policy of 'divide and rule' aimed to privilege the region's Catholics and suppress nationalist opposition by fragmenting the country: France created a new state (Lebanon) as well as short-lived statelets for the Alawites and the Druze, and (breaching the terms of its mandate) ceded the province of Alexandretta to Turkey in 1939 (McHugo, 2015). Britain created Iraq by combining the oil-rich province of Mosul, with its substantial Kurdish population, the Sunni-majority Baghdad province, and the largely Shia province of Basra; it

centralised power in the capital and installed a foreign Sunni king to rule over a state in which the Shia were in the majority. (Sunni Arabs comprise around 20 percent of modern Iraq, Sunni Kurds around 17 percent, while Shia Arabs constitute around 65 per cent).

The Europeans also left a legacy of coercion. In Iraq, the Royal Air Force was used to put down a tribal rebellion in 1920 (and its use of poison gas was an ominous precedent for Saddam's use of gas against his Kurdish subjects in 1988); a nationalist uprising in Syria in 1925-27 was brutally quelled by the French. More importantly, perhaps, in both mandates the power-brokers became favoured elites in which the military loomed large: the British in Iraq, for example, "delivered into the hands of those who staffed the state machinery and who commanded its resources a powerful instrument for the acquisition of land, the preservation of privilege and the maintenance of a landscape ordered to suit particular networks of favour and interest" (Tripp, 2007: 74). Although Iraq and Syria became nominally independent in 1932 and 1943 respectively, the imperial influence lingered until the end of the Second World War, after which a series of short-lived governments, coups, and counter-coups (some of which were supported or provoked by Western states) became the norm. Both countries experienced profound change in 1958, when Syria joined Nasser's Egypt to become the United Arab Republic, and Iraq violently became a republic after Nasserist officers led a revolution in which the King, Crown Prince, and Prime Minister were murdered.

Both Syria and Iraq found a measure of stability under authoritarian governments which were theoretically aligned to a pan-Arab, reformist, and putatively socialist movement called Baathism. The Baathist regimes in the two countries were, however, separate and frequently mutually hostile. But one feature both had in common was the subordination of party ideology to the practical necessities of dominating what had been fractious and highly unstable countries. In Syria, an internal coup within the Baath Party saw Hafez al-Assad, an Alawite air-force colonel, take over in 1970. Al-Assad gained a reputation for exceptional wiliness, managing the internal politics of Syria with a combination of dexterity and ruthlessness, skilfully navigating the complexities of Middle Eastern alliances and enmities (intervening in neighbouring Lebanon during its 1975-90 civil war so as to become its occupying power until 2005), and forging a pragmatic alliance with the Soviet Union (which explains why Russia's only Mediterranean naval base today lies in Syria) (McHugo, 2015). Al-Assad's pragmatism was most strongly evidenced by his support for the US-led liberation of Kuwait in

1990. His ruthlessness, on the other hand, was most clearly demonstrated by one of the most brutal episodes in modern Middle Eastern history when the town of Hama was largely destroyed in 1982 in order to crush an Islamist rebellion led by a wing of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood: the number killed in less than a month is estimated in the thousands or tens of thousands (Lefevre, 2013). But while Al-Assad's capacity for brutality was often hidden, the Baathist strongman who came to power in Iraq in 1979 went to considerable lengths to advertise his willingness to terrorise both his rivals and his subjects. Saddam Hussein demonstrated his strength and ruthlessness through public executions, show-trials and, most notoriously, chemical weapons attacks during a genocidal campaign against the Kurdish minority in the north of the country; with the maintenance of a personality cult that was extreme even by the region's standards, he showed a remarkable ability to survive despite accumulating powerful enemies and committing catastrophic mistakes. These mistakes included provoking an eight-year (1980-88) war with Iran — the twentieth century's longest conventional war — that left around a million dead, and, barely a year after its end, invading and occupying Kuwait which led not just to military humiliation and the effective loss of Iraqi Kurdistan in 1990 but to more than a decade of crippling sanctions. But while Saddam was an extreme case of the Middle Eastern autocrat, he and his dictatorship were nevertheless prefigured in Iraq's short history: they "were the manifestations of a particularly potent narrative in the history of the Iraqi state — one in which exclusivity, communal mistrust, patronage and the exemplary use of violence were the important elements, woven into a system of dependence on and conformity with the will of a small number of men at the centre in the name of social discipline and national destiny" (Tripp, 2007: 186-7).

Nominally republics, both states would be better described as oligarchical monarchies. Hafez al-Assad groomed his oldest son, Basel, for the presidency but when Basel died in a car crash his second son, training as an ophthalmologist in London, was called back to Syria and became its president on the death of his father in 2000. Until his deposition, Saddam presumably intended to hand over power to his sons, Uday and Qusay, who were notorious for their personal taste for violence. But it would be a mistake to see power in either state as having been wholly vested in the figure of the president. A small elite of family members, generals, intelligence chiefs and businessmen ran both countries, with occasional disturbances when individuals became too ambitious or powerful and were quietly, or publicly, eliminated. The oligarchical nature of Syria's regime was evident, for example, in the events

following Bashar al-Assad's accession to the Syrian presidency: a programme of political and economic reform (the 'Damascus Spring') was announced by Bashar in 2000 but by 2001 it had been reversed by the Syrian 'deep state'. Some economic reforms – those which benefited the elite – were permitted, but these only exacerbated existing socio-economic grievances as members of the oligarchy grew rich on the proceeds of privatisation and deregulation (Dahi and Munif, 2012).

Iraq and Syria in the twentieth century were states that never succeeded in developing for any length of time a polity based rule of law, civil rights, legitimate institutions, or popular representation. Both were set up to fail by imperial powers which structured them to fit their immediate and largely material interests, and which ruled them through force; when the imperial powers left, they bequeathed a legacy in which power was equated with force, and discipline could only be maintained by coercion.

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Characteristics of Militant Groups in Syria/Iraq, Nigeria and Kenya

	Aims and Objectives	Drivers and Motivations	Structure and Demographic Composition	Tactics and Methods (especially violence)
ISIL	1. Establish/ expand proto-state ('Caliphate'). 2. Dominate other opposition groups. 3. Project power globally. 4. Destroy or remove non-Sunni populations from its territory.	Regain Sunni Arab hegemony. Pursue 'global jihad'. Defend against/attack Shia and others. Absence of alternatives. Earn a wage.	Sophisticated proto-state with bureaucracy, military etc. Has overseas provinces bound to it by oath. Was set up by foreign fighters but leadership now mostly indigenous.	Notorious for performative violence. Capable of sophisticated military operations; also pragmatic in withdrawal from hard-to-defend areas. Extensive use of suicide bombers.
JaN	1. Defeat Assad regime. 2. Attack Western enemies.	Attack impious regime. Defend against opposing forces. Establish Islamic law in Syria. Pursue 'global	Elaborate structure based on 'Al Qaida model'. Active across Syria but most successful in Aleppo	Extensive use of 'conventional' military techniques and suicide bombings to attack regime

	<p>3. Establish emirate and govern on 'Al Qaida model'.</p> <p>NB: contention between opposing factions on whether globalist or nationalist strategy is needed.</p>	jihad'.	<p>and Idlib governorates.</p> <p>More distinctively Syrian than ISIL. Working in collaboration with other opposition groups as pragmatic (possibly short-term) measure.</p>	<p>directly and seize/hold territory in alliance with other groups.</p> <p>Plans 'external operations'.</p>
AaS	<p>1. Defeat Assad regime.</p> <p>2. Establish new state in Syria with Shariah law (but has agreed to secular constitution).</p>	<p>Defeat impious and brutal regime. Defend against opposing forces (including ISIL).</p>	<p>Has 'military' and 'civilian' structure. Leadership includes hardline Islamists and Syrian nationalists.</p> <p>Has absorbed other groups and dominates Islamic Front. Almost exclusively Syrian.</p>	<p>Conventional military attacks. Not known to use suicide attacks.</p>
Shia Militias	<p>1. Protect Shia populations.</p> <p>2. Attack ISIL.</p>	<p>Protect Shias against ISIL and other Sunni groups. Loyalty to Shia religious leadership</p>	<p>Comprise a wide range of groups, from Hizbollah – Lebanon-based militant</p>	<p>Tactics range from sophisticated counter-insurgency (e.g. Hizbollah) to</p>

	<p>3. Defend Shia hegemony in Iraq and Assad regime in Syria.</p> <p>4. Promote Iran's geopolitical interests.</p>	in Iraq and Iran. Earn a wage.	<p>group and political party – to Iraqi militias that have been absorbed into the state's security forces. In Iraq have formed hashd shaabi ('popular mobilisation forces').</p> <p>Leadership ranks include powerful politicians; rank-and-file reflect broad range of demographics in the region. Many if not most are backed by Iran.</p>	<p>brutal urban warfare.</p> <p>Widespread criminality (such as kidnapping for ransom) in Iraq.</p>
Boko Haram	<p>Originally to promote a particular form of Islam and reinstate the Caliphate. Current aims:</p> <p>1. Create an</p>	Restore Caliphate, sense of injustice, absence of alternatives	Based on a franchise system with an overarching leader and subgroups that operate autonomously. Breakaway groups have also formed.	<p>Initially very targeted.</p> <p>Attacks have broadened to include Muslim as well as Christian targets. Raids on villages have killed numerous civilians. Suicide</p>

	<p>alternative to the Nigerian state, which is at times conveyed as a Caliphate</p> <p>Remove Western influence in northeastern Nigeria, particularly on the education system</p>		<p>Early members were clerics, students, professionals. Many fighters have signed up in response to the lack of opportunities and/or heavy handed government responses, some are now also coerced.</p>	<p>attacks have also become common.</p>
MEND	<p>1. Expose the exploitation and oppression of Niger Delta populations linked to the oil industry</p> <p>2. Increase the benefits from the oil industry for the region</p>	<p>Exploitation and oppression, violent repression of protests, devastation of livelihoods by the oil industry.</p>	<p>An umbrella group that brought together different ethnic groups. An overarching leader with many subgroups working towards the same goal.</p>	<p>Sabotage, theft, property destruction, guerrilla warfare and kidnapping.</p>

	through royalties, employment, infrastructure and compensation for damage caused by oil companies			
Al Shabaab	<p>1. Push Kenyan (& AU) forces out of Somalia & remove Somali TFG</p> <p>2. Establish Islamist state in Somalia</p> <p>3. Destabilise Kenya's north-east and Coast to force KDF out, increase recruitment for Somalia, & expand desired state to these Muslim majority areas of Kenya to defend</p>	<p>1. Permissive enabling environment of vacuum in state security & service provision & socialisation of conflict over decades to achieve social, economic & political goals applies to all groups.</p> <p>2. Somali & Kenyan leaders supportive of Salafi-jihadist cause (but on local/regional scale)</p> <p>3. This has influenced some</p>	<p>1. Highly bureaucratic & hierarchical in Somalia in line with attempted proto-state, more cellular & networked in Kenya through underground affiliates & community movements</p> <p>2. Exclusively Muslim, significant proportion Kenyan-Somali from north-east or Eastleigh and Swahili Muslim from</p>	<p>1. In Somalia, combination of conventional military & guerrilla operations, expressive & instrumentalist violence, strategic withdrawals from hard to defend settlements</p> <p>2. In Kenya, largely guerrilla tactics by roving bands in north-east & Coast who attack and withdraw to 'safe havens'</p> <p>3. Individual terrorist attacks</p>

	<p>Muslims & Somalis (also linked to historical grievances re: 'Greater Somalia') N.B. Former divisions between Somali nationalists and global jihadists</p>	<p>followers, but inextricably tied to discrimination and marginalisation of Muslim identity in Kenya, pressure to defend fellow Muslims from repression by unrepresentative Christian Kikuyu state, lack of socio-economic opportunities, & inter-communal tensions which Al-Shabaab has exploited</p> <p>4. Sense of belonging</p> <p>5. Moderate established Islamic elders not achieving much – youth mobilised to more extreme action</p>	<p>Coast</p> <p>3. Increasingly wider cross-section of Kenyan ethnic groups from across the country beyond just these core areas</p> <p>4. No associated political movement or front</p>	<p>tend to be with small arms or grenades & occasionally small IEDs</p> <p>4. Little use of suicide attacks in Kenya yet compared to Somalia, but may be on the rise</p> <p>5. Has killed a number of Muslims, but increasingly seeking to separate out Christians for death from Muslims as part of divisive strategy in north-east & Coast</p>
MRC	1. Secession of Coast province from Kenya	1. Many of the same drivers as followers of Al-Shabaab &	1. Primarily political community-based	1. Predominantly non-violent protests

	<p>(historical grievances re: coastal autonomy)</p> <p>2. Protection of coastal ethnic groups (including majority Muslims) from marginalisation and discrimination by 'outsiders' (up-country groups & state)</p> <p>Despite protection of Muslims, secular agenda and locally focused</p>	<p>Kenyan affiliates' – especially marginalisation & lack of sense of 'Kenyanness', lack of opportunities & land use rights, and perceived interference & repression by up-country unrepresentative state</p> <p>2. Defence of fellow community on ethnic over religious grounds features more highly</p> <p>Sense of belonging</p>	<p>movement with small (but potentially growing) militant wing</p> <p>2. Majority Muslim, but sizeable Christian and traditional religion minorities</p> <p>Almost exclusively focused on coastal ethnic groups, including Swahilis, Arabs etc</p>	<p>2. Asymmetric attacks on security forces with small arms have caused small losses of life so far</p> <p>May be training in safe haven to become more sophisticated & deadly</p>
Mungiki	<p>1. Defend rights and traditional culture of disadvantaged members of ethnic</p>	<p>1. Sense of belonging</p> <p>2. Mobilised to political violence by political leaders of ethnic group (Kikuyu)</p>	<p>1. Cellular and disaggregated with past tenuous connections to local politicians</p>	<p>1. Unsophisticated roving swarms of attackers more akin to gang violence, using light arms and machetes but</p>

	<p>group (Kikuyu) – historical grievances from ill-balanced post-Mau Mau conflict settlement</p> <p>2. Redistribute wealth & opportunities from elite Kikuyu in power</p> <p>Ensure survival through organised crime</p>	<p>3. Lack of socio-economic opportunities – greater gain through militia/gang</p> <p>Forced participation</p>	<p>Mainly disadvantaged Kikuyu from Nairobi slums & Rift Valley towns</p>	<p>inflicting brutal individual level violence & willingness to use mass rape & forcible circumcision as demonstrations of power</p> <p>Has targeted other ethnic groups’ civilians and own community’s civilians as well as state representatives</p>
Mau Mau	<p>1. No uniform objectives</p> <p>2. Reclaim land rights & accessibility for ethnic group (Kikuyu) use from ‘outsiders’ (European settlers & state) & elite Kikuyu</p>	<p>1. Decreasing access to land due to outsiders domination, thus lack of opportunities for development & maturity</p> <p>2. Discrimination by state & state repression</p> <p>3. Sense of belonging</p>	<p>1. Loose confederation of independent bands and movements</p> <p>2. Some attempted hierarchy, but mainly cellular</p> <p>3. Loose connection to wider political nationalist</p>	<p>1. Independent bands of fighters largely uncoordinated</p> <p>2. Operated from safe havens using light arms</p> <p>3. Leadership attempted to keep tight control on use of violence, in terms of</p>

	Reduce marginalisation by central state & increase political inclusivity & autonomy	4. Moderate elders not taking action, youth more mobilised to violence Forced participation	movement, but little coordination or direction Mainly Kikuyu & related ethnic groups (Embu, Meru) from rural highlands, Rift Valley & Nairobi slums	avoiding unnecessary civilian casualties and approving deaths of elders, but difficult with disaggregated movement Targeted state security forces, places of economic value (farms etc), and fellow community (Kikuyu 'loyalists') in particular – the latter tended to involve the bloodiest encounters
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