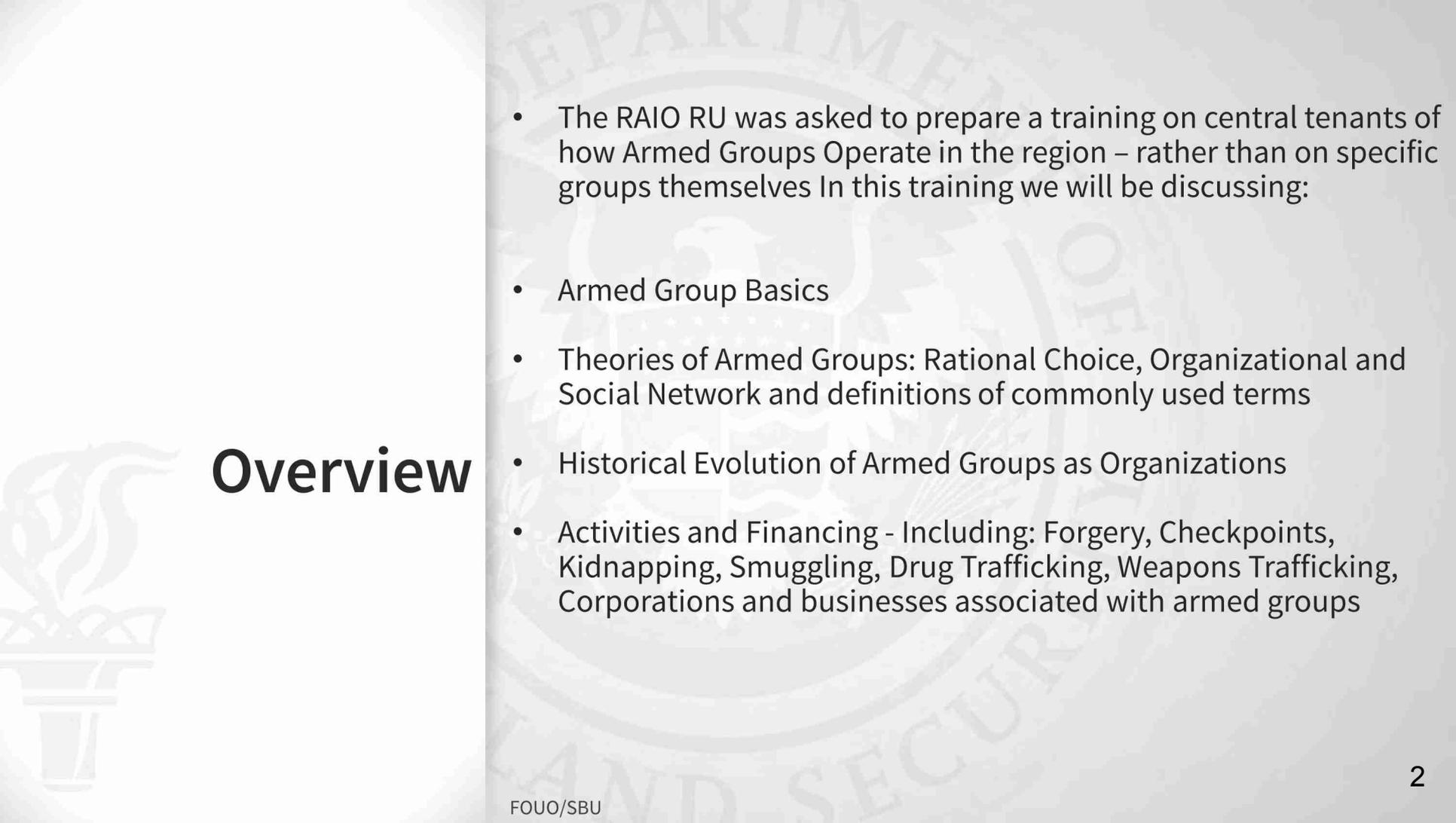# Armed Groups in the Middle East and North Africa

RAIO Research Unit

May 5, 2021

Overview

- The RAIO RU was asked to prepare a training on central tenants of how Armed Groups Operate in the region – rather than on specific groups themselves In this training we will be discussing:

- Armed Group Basics

- Theories of Armed Groups: Rational Choice, Organizational and Social Network and definitions of commonly used terms

- Historical Evolution of Armed Groups as Organizations

- Activities and Financing - Including: Forgery, Checkpoints, Kidnapping, Smuggling, Drug Trafficking, Weapons Trafficking, Corporations and businesses associated with armed groups

Living in an Area with an Armed Group Presence/Under Armed Group Control

Living in an area with an armed group presence/ or under armed group control

- Living in these areas **does not** affect only fighting aged males
- Living in these areas **can affect all** ages, genders, religions, ethnicity and income levels
- This is not just checkpoints and ransoms – armed groups can affect all aspects of life: workplaces, schools, hospitals, public buildings, public transportation, marketplaces, cafes, internet use, social media, religious institutions and even inside the home

Armed Group members as Strawmen: Motivations

Living in an area with an armed group presence/ or under armed group control

- **No** armed groups **are purely** motivated by either ethnicity or religion in 100% of all instances
- While we must analyze the nexus, please do not use Ethnicity and/or Religion as a shortcut for understanding all armed group activity or their motivations

Armed Group members as Strawmen: Motivations

Economic Class and Armed Groups

- How Armed Groups treat individuals from different economic classes is markedly different
- Economic class can be more important to armed groups than: Religion, Ideology, military training, etc.
- Everyone can be targeted by armed groups. Like religion and ethnicity, economic class can provide context and insight for adjudications
- Money: Armed Groups will gladly take money or goods that can easily be converted into money from anyone – even if they have differing viewpoints/beliefs/ideology/ethnicity
- Recruits: Armed groups will target recruitment based on economic class. Members of different economic classes are recruited differently and for different purposes

Armed Group members as Strawmen: Fundamental Misunderstanding

Armed Groups are not all-power and well-organized establishments with infinite resources, and there are still substantial misunderstandings about armed groups

- "Bin Laden and Azzam agreed that the organization successfully created for Afghanistan should not be allowed to dissolve. They established (Al-Qaeda) as a potential general headquarters for future jihad" The 9/11 Commission report, pg 56

في نهاية الثمانينات وبالتحديد في سنة 1988 لاحظ أسامة إن حركة المجاهدين العرب قدوما وذهابا والتحاقا بالجبهات بل وحتى كثرة الإصابات والاستشهاد قد ازدادت دون أن يكون لديه سجل عن هذه الحركة رغم أهميتها وكونها من ألف باء الترتيب العسكري. وكان نقص هذه المعلومات سببا لإحراج أسامة في أحايين كثيرة مع بعض العوائل التي تسأل عن أبنائها بالهاتف أو حتى من خلال إرسال مندوب عنها للتعرف على مصير عضو العائلة الذي التحق بأسامة، حيث أحس أسامة أن نقص هذه المعلومات أمر مخجل فضلا عن إنه خطأ إداري مبدئي. من هنا قرر أسامة ترتيب سجلات للأخوة المجاهدين العرب ووسعت فكرة السجلات لتشمل تفاصيل كاملة عن كل من وصل أفغانستان بترتيب من مجموعة الشيخ. ورتبت السجلات بحيث تتضمن تاريخ وصول الشخص والتحاقه ببيت الأنصار ثم تفاصيل التحاقه بمعسكرات التدريب ومن ثم التحاقه بالجبهة. وأصبحت السجلات مثل الإدارة المستقلة وكان لا بد من إطلاق اسم عليها لتعريفها داخليا، وهنا اتفق أسامة مع معاونيه أن يسمونها سجل القاعدة، على أساس أن القاعدة تتضمن كل التركيبة المؤلفة من بيت الأنصار ومعسكرات التدريب و الجبهات

Armed Group members as Strawmen: Fundamental Misunderstanding

"At the end of the eighties, and specifically in the year 1988, Osama noticed that the Arab Mujahideen Movement came and went and joined the fronts, and even the many casualties and martyrs had increased without having a record of this movement despite its importance and being from A to B in the military arrangement. The lack of this information was a reason for Osama's embarrassment at many times with some families asking about their children by phone or even by sending a representative to find out the fate of the family member who joined Osama, as Osama felt that the lack of this information is a shameful matter as well as an initial administrative mistake. From here Osama decided to arrange records for the Arab Mujahideen brothers And expanded the idea of records to include full details of everyone who arrived in Afghanistan, arranged by the Sheikh group. The records were arranged to include the date of the person's arrival and joining the Ansar House, then the details of his enrollment in the training camps, and then his joining the front. The records became like an independent administration, and it was necessary to name them in order to identify them internally, and here Osama agreed with his assistants to call it the al-Qaeda registry, on the basis that al-Qaeda includes all the combination of the Ansar House, the training camps and the fronts"

Armed Groups: State Actors Versus Non-State Actors

- **Definition of A State:**
- "State monopoly on violence, in political science and sociology, the concept that the state alone has the right to use or authorize the use of physical force. It is widely regarded as a defining characteristic of the modern state."

- "In his lecture "Politics as a Vocation" (1918), the German sociologist Max Weber defines the state as a **'human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.'** Under feudalism, no lords, including the king, could claim a monopoly over the use of violence, since their vassals promised to serve them but remained free to exercise power in their fiefdoms. Moreover, the king and the landed nobility had to share power or compete with the Roman Catholic Church. The modern state, according to Weber, emerged by expropriating the means of political organization and domination, including violence, and by establishing the legitimacy of its rule. "

Armed Groups: State Actors Versus Non-State Actors

Aspirations of State Power by Non-State Actors

- "State monopoly on violence, in political science and sociology, the rewards for becoming a state actor are clear. Financial gain is an obvious one. As an oil-rich rentier state, the Iraqi central government is a major source for revenue. Its annual budget, $111.8 billion in 2019, is one of the largest in the region. As a PMU (Popular Mobilization Front/Hashd Al-Sha'abi) checkpoint commander put it:

'You can make a lot of money from checkpoints. But if you control one ministry in the government, you can make ten times more.'"

Kleptocracy and Armed Groups

The Emergence of Armed Groups in countries with the appearance of Government Corruption & Kleptocracy

"in a kleptocracy criminal behavior is not individual, opportunistic, or sporadic, but rather collective, systematic, strategic, and permanent. It is a system in which all the high-level government officials are complicit, where they deliberately work to enrich themselves, and then use their accumulated wealth to perpetuate themselves in power. For the kleptocrats the common good and people's needs are secondary and only looked at when they are at the service of their primary goal: to fatten their fortunes and make sure they stay in power."

Country	2019 Corruption Perception Ranking out of 180
Iraq	162
Libya	168
Yemen	177
Syria	178

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Three Theories for Understanding Armed Groups

- **<u>Rational Choice</u>** – this approach views "fragmentation as driven by armed groups' response to external threats or incentives- state repression or co-potation; battlefield losses or victories; the individual weight of rebel factions within winning coalitions."

- **<u>Organizational</u>** - this approach "stress(es) the organizational logic of armed groups- resource mobilization, recruitment and efforts to establish control or cohesion – as determinants of their actions and trajectories"

- Both Rational Choice and Organizational theories "start from the assumption that armed groups are discrete actors, defined by particular preferences in the case of (Rational Choice) and their internal structure in the case of (Organizational)"

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Three Theories for Understanding Armed Groups Continued

- **<u>Social Network</u>** – "the constraints and capabilities of actors emanating from their ongoing social relations...the relevant unit of analysis may not be armed groups as much as networks straddling political elites, community leaders, members of armed groups and their quotidian relations, such as their families, friends and neighbours – in other words, the social networks in which members of armed groups are embedded."
- It is also worth noting that:
    - "To varying degrees, armed groups are embedded in, or isolated from, their social surroundings. Depending on their extent of social embeddedness, the ties linking their members to people outside their fighting group may be decisive in shaping their constraints and capabilities, as well as their interests and identities"

Common Terms and Definitions

- **Conservative** - "tending or disposed to maintain existing views, conditions, or institutions"
- **Extremist** - "a supporter or advocate of extreme doctrines or practices"
- **Fundamentalist** - "there is no universally agreed upon definition for the term "Islamic fundamentalism." In general, the phrase is applied to Muslims who are thought to adhere strictly to ancient doctrines, to literal readings of the [Qu]ran, and are determined to resist modernity and modernization. It is also used for Muslims who want to use the traditions of Islam as a blueprint to build a more just society through the application of [Qu]ranic law."
- **Islamic** – "connected with the Muslim religion, or with people or countries who follow it"
- **Islamist** - "a person who believes strongly in Islam, especially one who believes that Islam should influence political systems"

Common Terms and Definitions

- **Islamism** – "Islamism is not a form of the Muslim faith or an expression of Muslim piety; it is, rather, a political ideology that strives to derive legitimacy from Islam."
- **Jihadi** - "a Muslim who is fighting for Islam, especially a radical (= someone with extreme views) who believes in using violence to achieve religious and political aims"
- **Salafism** - "the idea that the most authentic and true Islam is found in the lived example of the early, righteous generations of Muslims, known as the *Salaf*, who were closest in both time and proximity to the Prophet Muhammad. Salafis—often described as "ultraconservatives"—believe not just in the "spirit" but in the "letter" of the law, which is what sets them apart from their mainstream counterparts."
- **Wahhabism** - "the term "Wahhabism" is broadly applied outside of the Arabian peninsula to refer to a Sunni Islamic movement that seeks to purify Islam of any innovations or practices that deviate from the seventh-century teachings of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions."

Armed Groups as Rational Actors

The Rational Actor Theory of Armed Groups:

- Evolved from scholarship on Afghanistan in the 1970s- early 2000s and Lebanon from 1975-1990

- Good for explaining older conflicts that were highly sectarian

- Focuses primarily on state-insurgent conflict

- Has difficulties explaining conflict between insurgent groups

- Has difficulties explaining conflict once when there is no state/ after the state has collapsed

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Armed Groups as Organizations

An Organization is "(a) social unit of people that is structured and managed to meet a need or to pursue collective goals. All organizations have a management structure that determines relationships between the different activities and the members, and subdivides and assigns roles, responsibilities, and authority to carry out different tasks. Organizations are open systems--they affect and are affected by their environment."

This model is particularly helpful for understanding Iraq, and Syria and major multi-national armed organizations such as Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State

Armed Groups as Organizations

Important aspects of the organizational model include:

- Internal Structure

- Institutional Change

- Institutional Learning

- Diffusion

- Recruitment

- Competition with other armed groups

- Funding

- Goals

Armed Groups as Organizations

<u>The Organizational Theory of Armed Groups:</u>

- Evolved from scholarship on armed groups that operate in a multi-national context focusing primarily on Al-Qaeda and ISIS but also encompassing other organizations such as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and the Popular Mobilization Forces/Units

- Frequently discusses armed groups as businesses and uses business terminology to discuss organizational arrangements such as: Franchise, Merger, Split, Conglomeration, Acquisition, etc.

- Explicitly discusses how organizational structure mirrors business networks but falls short on explaining the financial and operational repercussions

- Most helpful for understanding conflicts in Iraq and Syria from 2003 until 2017

Armed Groups as Social Networks

<u>Social Network Theory</u>

- Armed Groups are outgrowth of the "social embeddedness, the ties linking their members to people outside their fighting group (which) may be decisive in shaping their constraints and capabilities, as well as their interests and identities."

- Social network theory explains armed group formation and fragmentation "beyond organizational splits" and views this process through a lens of a "multiplicity of competing political and military actors emerge and continue to proliferate, preventing the maintenance or establishment of a credible claim to the monopoly on the concentrated means of violence"

- Most helpful for explaining recent events in Libya, Yemen and Iraq and Syria after ISIS's loss of its primary territorial holdings, which tends to be more complex

Theories of how Armed Groups Evolved from the Rational Actors to Organizations

Evolution of Armed Groups: Rational Actor → Organization

- Armed Groups examples that were used to create the Rational Actor were highly sectarian and evolved to form quasi-states or proto-states

- The origin of being highly sectarian made for clearly-defined in-groups and out-groups as well as simplistic goals, such as having their ethnic or religious group in power

- The evolution from armed group to quasi-state resulted in an evolution from just a rational actor wanting their clearly defined group to have power- to the creation of an organization that now needs to operate and function at a different level

Historical Examples of the Evolution of Armed Groups as Organization

- The next few slides will highlight some non-exhaustive key historical events that have shaped armed groups in the region and effect how they think and operate today

- These ideas have diffused through the region and armed groups have intentionally learned by example

- There is a tendency in Armed Groups of competition between groups and one-upmanship

Historical Examples of the Evolution of Armed Groups as Organization

The Creation of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO)

- The PLO was founded in 1964. When it was founded it was a centralizing organization for many disparate groups that had disagreements about many smaller details but could agree on a central premise of the creation of a Palestinian State
- From 1964- 9/9/1993 the PLO engaged in violence and leadership in the PLO espoused violence
- On 9/9/1993 the PLO renounced violence and terrorism
- In 1968 FATAH created a training program called Ashbal (Lion Cubs). Training for the boys began at age eight and included military training and political indoctrination. The children in Ashbal are taught to fire a variety of automatic weapons, to compete in various sports such as volleyball, soccer, judo, and boxing
- Saddam Hussein took the idea and created Ashbal Saddam
- ISIS took the idea and created Ashbal Khalifa

Historical Examples of the Evolution of Armed Groups as Organization

The 1977 Egyptian Bread Crisis

- In 1977, Nine out of ten Egyptians lived in poverty. Half the male population was unemployed
- In Egyptian Arabic the word for bread and the word for life are the same 'Aish
- In 1977 as part of economic reforms, President Anwar Sadat cut public subsidies for flour, cooking oil, and other staples
- The result was two days of intense rioting which was seen as one of the greatest threats to one of the regions most stable governments until 2011, after 2 days of rioting Sadat reinstated the subsidies
- Terrorist groups and dictators alike learned from Sadat's mistake. While Jaysh Al-Mehdi sold cooking gas to poor families in Southern Iraq from 2005-2008 and the Kurdish groups in Northern Syria run bakeries these are overarching strategies that any group who wants to control a territory in the MENA region will engage in

Historical Examples of the Evolution of Armed Groups as Organization

The Iranian Revolution of 1979

- This was a popular uprising in Iran in 1978–79 that resulted in the toppling of the monarchy on April 1, 1979, and led to the establishment of an Islamic republic with a mixed system of government where ultimate power rested with the Shi'a religious leadership

- The justification for Iran's mixed system of government can be found in the concept of wilayat al-faqih, as expounded by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the first leader of post-revolutionary Iran.

- Khomeini's method gives political leadership—in the absence of the divinely inspired imam—to the faqīh, or jurist in Islamic canon law, whose characteristics best qualify him to lead the community

- Following this uprising the Iranian Government actively sought to 'export' their revolution to countries with large Muslim populations (Sunni or Shi'a)

Historical Examples of the Evolution of Armed Groups as Organization

The 1979 Invasion of Afghanistan and the 'Mujahedeen' Response

- The 1979 Invasion of Afghanistan originally sparked a resistance by dispossessed notables from the Communist People' Democratic Republic of Yemen

- One of the primary recruiters and eventual leaders was Osama Bin Laden who was notably very wealthy

- This morphed into a self-declared Jihad that attracted all nationalities

- Social class restrictions were lessened as the movement grew and diversified but the original Al-Qaeda never really transcended the social class issues among their members

Historical Examples of the Evolution of Armed Groups as Organization

September 11, 2001

- On the morning of 11 September 2001, 19 hijackers took control of four commercial passenger jets flying out of airports on the east coast of the United States.

- Two of the aircraft were deliberately flown into the main two towers (the Twin Towers) of the World Trade Center in New York, with a third hitting the Pentagon in Virginia.

- The fourth plane never reached its intended target, crashing in Pennsylvania. It is believed that the passengers and crew overpowered the hijackers and took control of the plane.

- Al-Qaeda was deemed responsible for the attack and the US Government offered a 25-million-dollar reward on information leading to the capture of Al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden

Historical Examples of the Evolution of Armed Groups as Organization

The Reward Money- Zarqawi: The birth of franchising

- On July 1, 2004, the US Government raised the reward money for Abu Musab al-Zarqawi from 10 million to 25 million

- At that point in time, only Bin Laden and Zarqawi had bounties that high

- The only other person in Iraq who at that time had ever had a bounty that high was Saddam Hussein

- At this time Zarqawi was running a terrorist network, an Al-Qaeda Franchise, and this raised bounty gave him new legitimacy and prestige that raised him to the level of Bin Laden among a peer group that did not previously hold him in the same level of esteem and pushed the franchise model of terrorism into a new era in the MENA region

Historical Examples of the Evolution of Armed Groups as Organization

Armed Groups Mimicking State Behavior: AQAP 2011 takeover of Abyan

In Yemen, as soon as Arab Spring protests started in Change Square in Sana'a on 27 January 2011

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) was waiting and by 31 March 2011 the entire province of Abyan was now an 'Emirate' under the control of AQAP and ruled the territory until June 2012
*Despite AQAP control of the territory the Yemeni government maintained control of the oil infrastructure and oil money

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Historical Examples of the Evolution of Armed Groups as Organization

In Amenas 2013

From early in the morning of 16 January 2013 until late in the evening of 19 January 2013, Mokhtar Belmokhtar and his armed forces took over the natural gas factory at In Amenas, Algeria despite government and corporate protection of this facility which provides a significant amount of the GDP of Algeria

- Belmokhtar took 800 hostages and for the first time was able to overrun and take a major petroleum/natural gas facility from an Arab Government.

Understanding the transition from Al-Qaeda to the so-called Islamic State (ISIS)

- 10/8/1999 the State Department declared Al-Qaeda a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO)

- 12/17/2004 the State Department declared Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) an FTO

- In October 2006, AQI publicly re-named itself the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI)

- In 2013, the group started to refer to itself as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)

- On May 15, 2014, the Department of State amended the Foreign Terrorist Organization designation of AQI to add several aliases, including ISIS & ISIL

- As ISIS's reach expanded into other regions the group began referring to itself only as the Islamic State (IS)

- AQI→ISI→ISIS/ISIL/DAESH→IS

Understanding the organizational transformation of AQI to ISIS: The Franchise Model

Definition: *"A continuing relationship in which a franchisor provides a licensed privilege to the franchisee to do business and offers assistance in organizing, training, merchandising, marketing and managing in return for a monetary consideration. Franchising is a form of business by which the owner (franchisor) of a product, service or method obtains distribution through affiliated dealers (franchisees)."*

"TERROR FRANCHISE: The UNSTOPPABLE ASSASSIN!!. America and its foolish allies based their so called war on terror on a few expired (wishful thinking) principles. Summed in: 1) that terror operations must be directed and planed by a specific person or group from one or two spots on the globe!! 2) Stereotyping those who execute such operations!! 3) That the means (knowledge and material) used to inflict death and terror can be narrowed and hence either be blocked or watched over in markets!! "
~ Abu Saleh Al-Somali former AQ external operations chief

Understanding the organizational transformation of AQI to ISIS: The Franchise Model

"Let us (1) divide into completely disconnected, INVISBLE, INFINITE TASKFORCES (2) every taskforce completes the part of the mission which it is best at (3) Then make the ready component[S] available by all means, resources, options and methods so that the final Executing Taskforces all over the planet earth can easily assemble the effective product (DEATH AND TERROR), and distribute it (in the market economy) to those who DESERVE IT!! This paper is not going to deal with why we should terrify Americans and their blind allies, for there are countless history-long records in all forms known to mankind that answer this (somewhat silly-outdated) question!! This Paper is concerned with the vital aspect of HOW we CAN ALL TERRIFY Allah's enemies.

Terror operations usually fall into three or four broad categories (1) assassination using (common or improvised) weapons or more effectively toxicants (Cyanide, Ricin, Phosgene etc) (2) seizure (e.g..highjacking Planes, buses, remote civic hauls etc) (3) explosive destruction of a major asset, usually accompanied by substantial loss of life (4) unconventional operations (such as ramming rock filled trucks into high speed trains rail crossings) etc." ~ Abu Saleh Al-Somali former AQ external operations chief

Understanding the organizational transformation of AQI to ISIS: Master Plans

In 2005 AQI, later known as ISIS created a 7 stage Master Plan for their organizational Goals

- **The Awakening Stage (2000-2003)** – Began with 9/11 and was "designed to provoke widespread conflict between the West and Jihadis by compelling the United States to strike at targets in the Middle East"

- **The Eye-Opening Stage (2003-2006)** – Started with US Troops entering Baghdad. "During this period, Al-Qaeda aimed to 'prolong the confrontation' with the United States to illustrate that governments in the Middle East were in league with the United States"

- **The Stage of Standing Upright (2007-2010)** – "Would see the Jihadis expand their networks from Iraq across Syria into Lebanon, and ultimately be able to strike Israel and Turkey"

Understanding the organizational transformation of AQI to ISIS: Master Plans

- **The Stage of Recuperation (2010-2013)** – "Predicted that Jihadis would overthrow regimes across the Middle East while targeting the United State Economically"
- **The Stage of Declaring a State (2013-2016)** – "predicts that the caliphate will be declared in the Levant between 2013-2016."
- **The Stage of Absolute Confrontation (2016-2018)** – "was to begin immediately after the declaration of the caliphate, which in practice occurred in June 2014. According to the master plan, the caliphate's declaration would divide the world into two camps and precipitate an unprecedented, 'all-out confrontation' between 'the forces of faith and the forces of atheism'"

Understanding the organizational transformation of AQI to ISIS: Master Plans

In 2005 AQI, later known as ISIS created a 7 stage Master Plan for their organizational Goals

- **The Stage of Final Victory (2018-2020)** — "is not described in detail but the core concept is that the world's 'more than 1.5 billion Muslims' would rally under a single banner to overthrow the remaining 'apostate' Muslim regimes and destroy Israel. Meanwhile, the caliphate would show the world 'the real meaning of terrorism'...This stage, according to the plan, would culminate in 'final victory'- the destruction of Israel and the elimination of Western influence over Muslims — by 2020."

The Evolution of Jabhat Al-Nusrah to Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham

Understanding the organizational split between AQ and local actors

- **Jabhat al-Nusra → Jabhat Fatah al-Sham → Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham**

- "When Jabhat al-Nusra ("Support Front") first emerged in January 2012, it did not officially declare any formal ties to al-Qaeda out of a fear of losing local support. In not doing so, it acted similarly to other jihadist groups that had emerged in the region in the wake of the Arab Spring, such as the Ansar al-Shari'a movements in Tunisia, Libya and Yemen. The propaganda on jihadist forums, however, revealed that Jabhat al-Nusra was aligned with a broader transnational jihadist movement."

- "Rumors of a breaking of ties with al-Qaeda mounted as talks emerged of a joint U.S.-Russian campaign against Jabhat al-Nusra. Finally, on 28 July 2016, Jabhat al-Nusra was rebranded as Jabhat Fatah al-Sham in an attempt to signal that ties with al-Qaeda had been broken. This event marks a key point for consideration when it comes to assessing the history and evolution of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham."

- "Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham ('Organization for the Liberation of the Levant', subsequently HTS) is the most powerful single entity in the Syrian insurgency today. The group exerts control over most of the insurgency's epicenter in the northwestern province of Idlib, including the province's capital of Idlib City. Indeed, the province is the main area administered by the rebel group today"

TAHRIR AL-SHAM

3 Islamist Opposition factions with Jabhat Fatah Sham & Ansar Al-Deen Front merged completely under a new formation: Tahrir al-Sham

Date of merging: Jan 28, 2017

FORMATION OF TAHRIR AL-SHAM | JAN 2017 | SYRIA   archicivilians.wordpress.com

Understanding the organizational conglomeration of HTS

The Evolution of Jabhat Al-Nusrah to Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham

- **Jabhat al-Nusra → Jabhat Fatah al-Sham → Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham**

- HTS, formed on 28 January 2017 when five major rebel groups - Jabhat Fatah al-Sham, Harakat Nur al-Din al-Zinki, Liwa al-Haq, Jabhat Ansar al-Din, and Jaysh al-Sunnah) - joined forces with smaller groups.

- In early January 2019, HTS began attacking strategic towns in Idlib Governorate, in violation of the September 2018 ceasefire established by Russia and Turkey.

- On 10 January 2019, HTS reached an agreement with the Turkey-backed National Liberation Front (NLF) giving HTS' Salvation Government control over most of Idlib.

Armed Groups and Economic Markets in the MENA Region

- "Business activities in conflict zones often involve a combination of licit and illicit types of industry, including smuggling, racketeering, narcotics sales, arms trading, and human trafficking"
- "business relies and trust, and all civil wars are low trust environments…civil wars (also) create lucrative new opportunities in illicit business…(but) Social divisions also hike up transaction costs, limit access to markets and prevent expansion of industry"
- "while ethnic and tribal warlords can only plausibly sell security to businesses in their own kin groups, Islamists can often offer protection across these divisions…(and) lower security prices for a wider pool of customers. Incentivized by these lower costs, the business class pulls out of its expensive and suboptimal relationship with ethnic (or tribal) warlords, and opts into the cheaper Islamist alternative"

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Clan/Tribe Based Armed Groups

In the MENA Region, some armed groups are formed around Tribal systems

Figure 1.1: An 'ashira is made of a number of fakhdhs, in turn divided into many hamulas, comprising a number of bayts, then ailas.

'ashira (tribe)
fakhdh (clan)
hamula (lineage)
bayt (house)
aila (family)
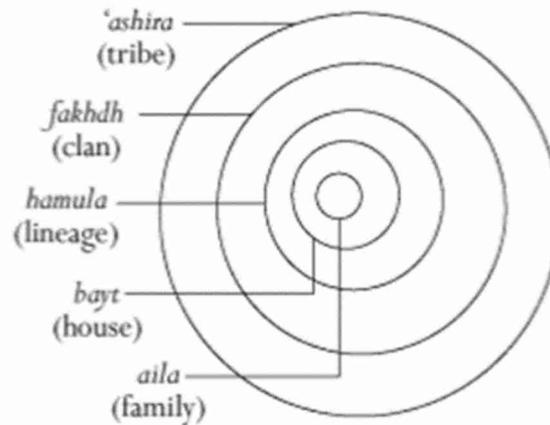
Clan/Tribe Based Armed Groups

Example: Doghmush Clan of Gaza – Jaysh al-Islam

- The Doghmush clan of Gaza and their armed group Jaysh al-Islam is an example of a clan based armed group

- Splintered from Hamas- membership (originally) and now leadership, is largely restricted to members of the Doghmush family

- The groups is lead by Mumtaz Doghmush (aka Abu Muhammad al-Ansari)

- In 2017 the Jaysh al-Islam pledged allegiance to ISIS, previously they had a relationship to AQ but no formal ties

- The group is notable for their engagement in smuggling and tunnels between Sinai and Gaza – including, but not limited to, the smuggling of weapons and explosives

In the MENA Region, some armed groups are formed around Tribal systems -

Clan/Tribe Based Armed Groups
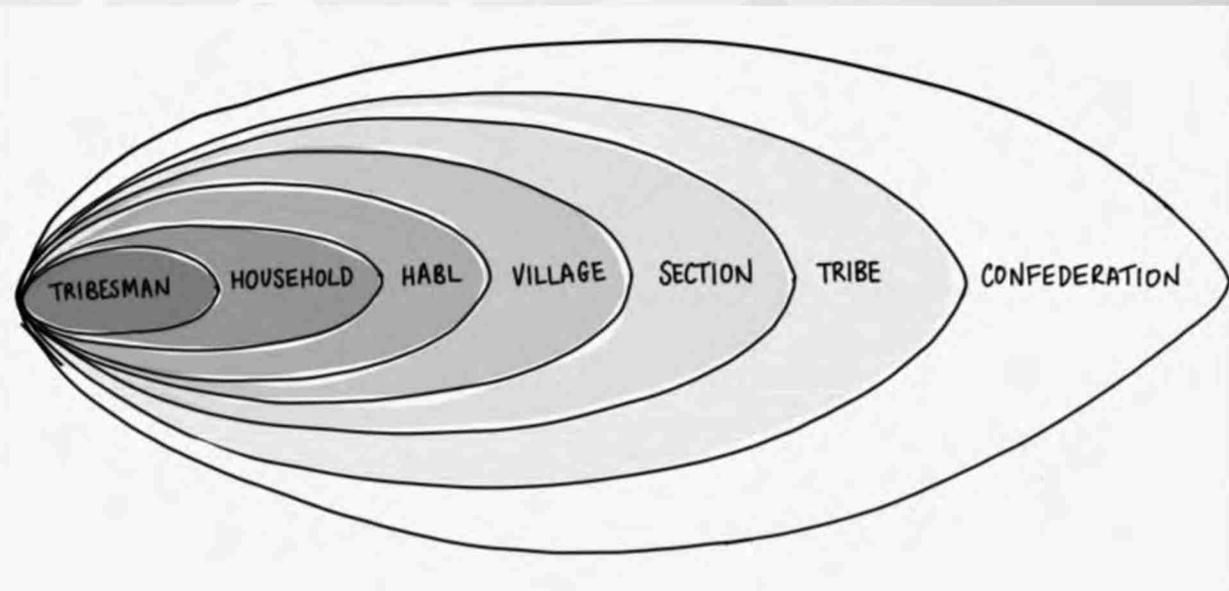
Clan/Tribe Based Armed Groups

Example: The Houthis/ Ansar Allah

- There are 3 supra-tribal confederations in Yemen: Hashid, Bakil and Madhaj

- The Houthi family does not belong to any one tribal confederation which assisted them to be able to form alliances across tribes in Yemen and employ a rhetoric about the return of the Zaidi Imamate

- Although the term "Houthi" historically referred to followers of Abdel-Malik and Hussein al-Houthi, as of April 2019 the Houthi label was applied to "an unruly quasi-coalition spanning religious, geographic, and political spaces and hierarchies allied in their opposition to the Saudi-led intervention." According to analysis by Yemen expert Sama'a al-Hamdani, many Houthis support the group out of immediate self-interest, with "pragmatists" reportedly making up the most substantial faction of the Houthi organization today

Clan/Tribe Based Armed Groups

RELIGIOUS DIVISIONS

Sunni
Shia (Zaidi)
Shia (Isma'ili)

Armed Groups in Complex Systems: Economic and class-based considerations

The next few slides are going to some examples of major economic activities of armed groups in the MENA region

"(M)ost existing civil war research overlooks the role and agency of local business actors and focuses instead on natural resource endowments. Yet a civil war economy is much more than the measurement of available material resources; rather, it is an elaborate social world made up of living breathing human beings, each of whom makes calculated choices amid chaotic violence… All economic activity in conflict zones-whether aid distribution, arms trafficking, heroin smuggling, or precious gemstone mining- is managed by local economic actors. These business elites are not just a channel for material resources but are political players in their own right. These moneyed elites use their wealth to finance armed groups and transform conflict dynamics behind the scenes, thus determining the future and the fate of the pollical contenders who seemingly rule over them"

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# Tier I Activities in the MENA Region

Some Examples from the 2019 DOS Report

- **Al-Qa'ida Arabian Peninsula–** "AQAP took advantage of Yemen's deteriorating political and economic environment following the Houthi take over – and exile of the Government of Yemen – of the capitol, Sana'a. In April 2015, AQAP stormed the city of Mukalla, seizing control of government buildings, releasing terrorists from prison, and stealing millions from the central bank."
- **HAMAS –** "increased its use of tunnels to smuggle weapons into Gaza through the Sinai and maritime routes"
- **ISLAMIC REVOLUTIONARY GUARD CORPS–** " printed counterfeit Yemeni bank notes, which were used to support its destabilizing activities in Yemen."
- **Palestinian Islamic Jihad** – "its militants were smuggling weapons, including Gaza-made rockets and mortars, through tunnels in Gaza."

Tier I Funding Sources in the MENA Region

Some Examples from the 2019 DOS Report

- **HIZBALLAH** – "Profits from legal and illegal businesses. These include smuggling contraband goods, passport falsification, narcotics trafficking, money laundering, and credit card, immigration, and bank fraud"
- **ISIS** – "Most of its funding (is) from a variety of criminal activities in Iraq and Syria. Criminal activities included extortion of civilian economies, smuggling oil, and robberies."
- **AL-NUSRAH FRONT** – "Variety of sources, including kidnapping-for-ransom payments, taxes and fees on border crossings it controls…The group also generates revenue by collecting fees from commercial traffic entering and exiting Idlib."
- **ARMY OF ISLAM** – "receives much of its funding from a variety of criminal activities in Gaza"
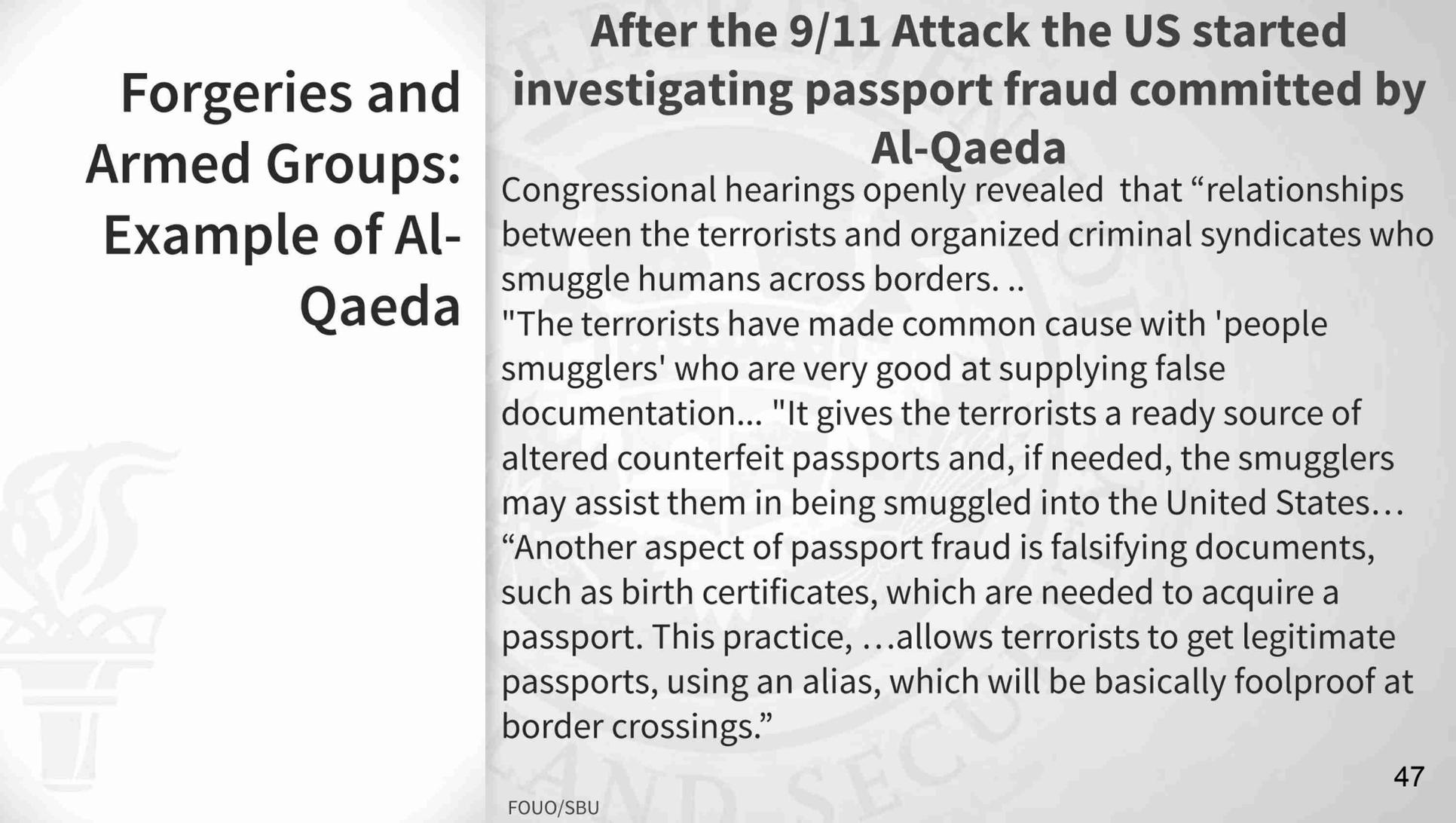
Forgeries and Armed Groups: Example of Al-Qaeda

After the 9/11 Attack the US started investigating passport fraud committed by Al-Qaeda

Congressional hearings openly revealed that "relationships between the terrorists and organized criminal syndicates who smuggle humans across borders. ..
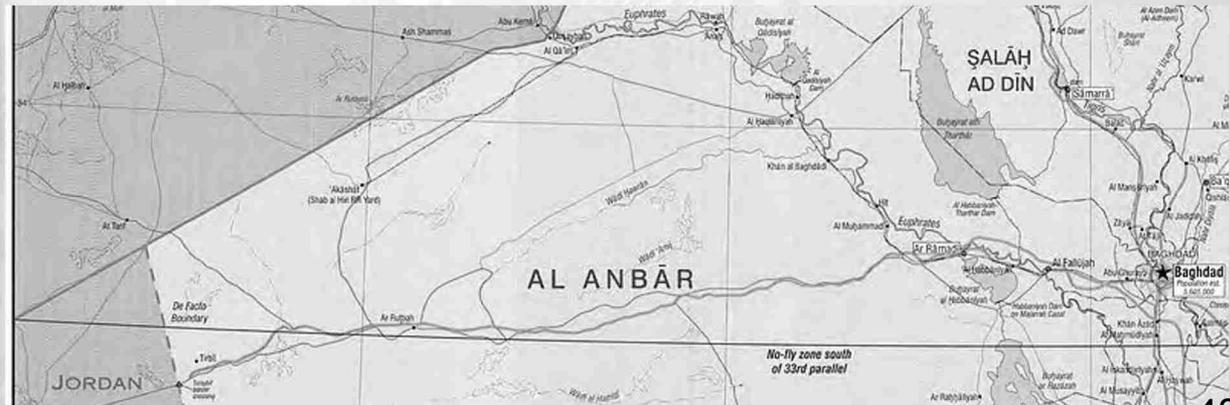
"The terrorists have made common cause with 'people smugglers' who are very good at supplying false documentation... "It gives the terrorists a ready source of altered counterfeit passports and, if needed, the smugglers may assist them in being smuggled into the United States…

"Another aspect of passport fraud is falsifying documents, such as birth certificates, which are needed to acquire a passport. This practice, …allows terrorists to get legitimate passports, using an alias, which will be basically foolproof at border crossings."

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Smuggling Routes and Armed Groups

Anbar, Iraq: Al-Qaeda and the Sahwa/Anbar Awakening/Sons of Iraq Movement

Smuggling has always been a main source of income for the tribes in Anbar, possibly second only to government salaries. Smuggling into Syria, Jordan and Saudi Arabia as well as smuggling phosphates kept tribes in power. After the state weakened in 2003, AQI fought local tribes (specifically the Abu Nimr Clan/Foukhd) for control of smuggling routes, which resulted in tribes fighting AQI – not because of terrorism but because AQI was trying to dominate their long-held smuggling routes

Examples from Yemen

Weapons Smuggling and the Violation of End User Certificates
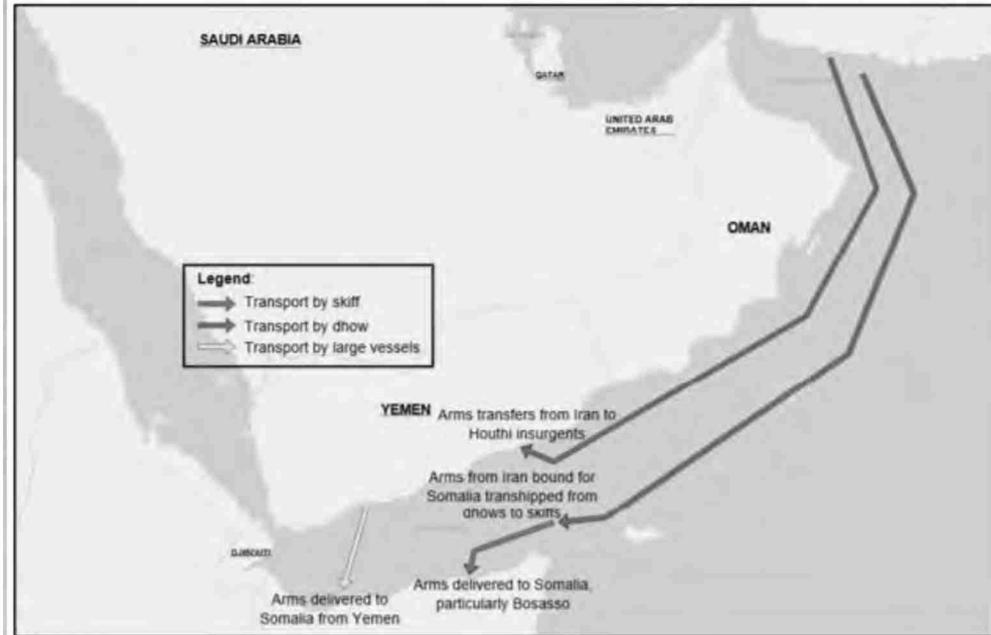
- Common Weapons Smuggling routes- current as of 2018

Smuggling and AQIM

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)

Circa 2003 AQIM "derived its resources primarily from the kidnapping of foreign nationals for multi-million dollar ransoms. However, extensive analysis of the group shows that AQIM has begun to rely more on its substantial smuggling networks across the Sahel and Sahara, leveraging tribal alliances and cooperation with other militant groups in the region." As of 2017, "Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) likely earns tens of millions of dollars each year from illicit activities, such as taxing West Africa's booming trade in illegal drugs, as well human trafficking and the smuggling of contraband including arms and cigarettes."

Smuggling and AQIM

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: Main Sources of Funding

KIDNAPPING FOR RANSOM
- AQIM has likely made more than $100 million from ransoms.
- Most of these ransoms have been paid by Western countries.

DRUGS
- Illegal drug trade is an increasingly important funding source.
- AQIM tends to tax drug routes, rather than buy and sell drugs directly.

SMUGGLING AND TRAFFICKING
- AQIM has been actively smuggling people into Europe since at least 2009.
- Regional governments have been complicit in allowing smuggling.
- The group smuggles cigarettes, people, arms, and more.

LOOTING AND SPOILS
- AQIM claimed significant weaponry from Libya after Gaddafi fell in 2011.
- The group looted arms from Malian forces in 2012.

TAXATION AND EXTORTION
- When in control of Mali in 2012, AQIM taxed local residents.
- The group also taxes smugglers going through their territory.

DONATIONS
- Donations are likely a minor source of funding.
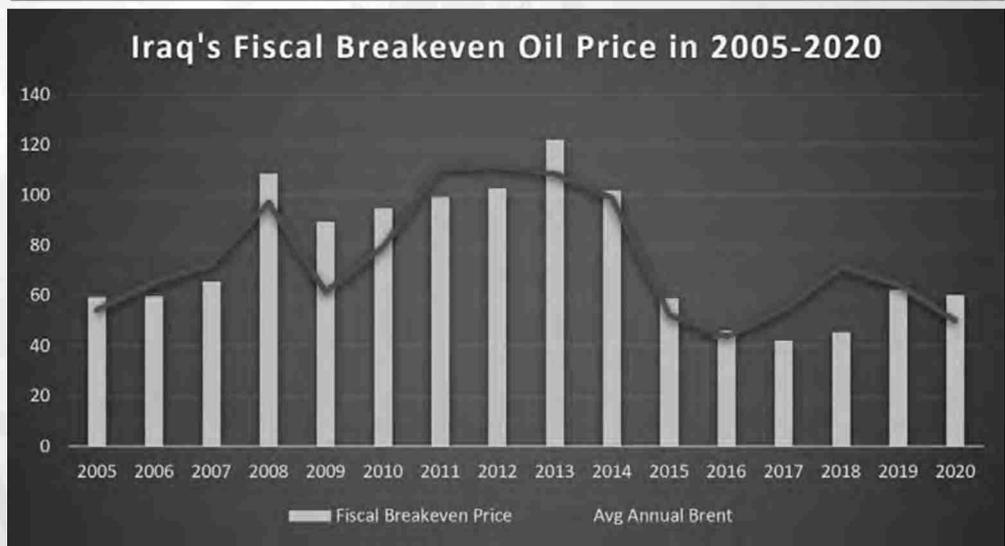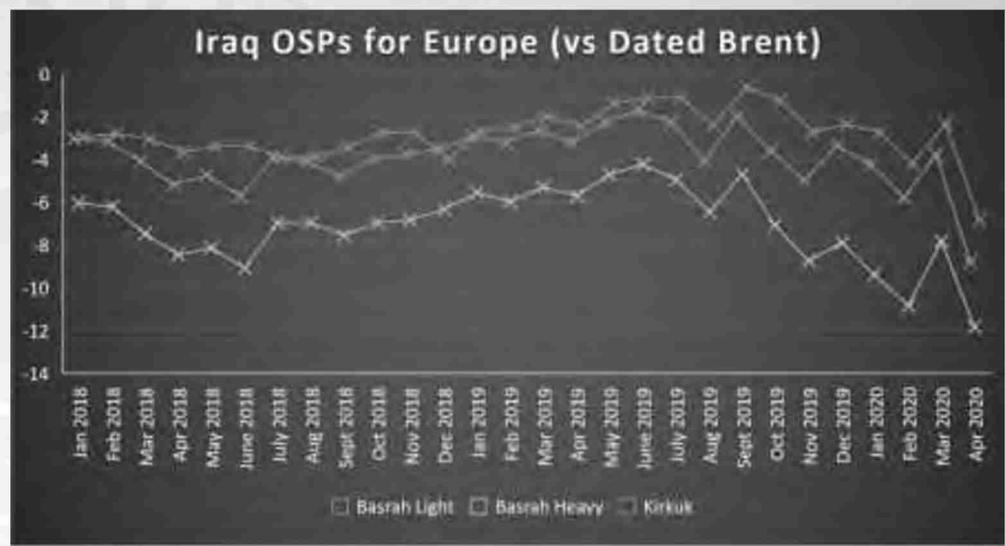- Money comes globally, including from Western Europe.

COMMERCIAL ENTERPRISES AND AGRICULTURE
- A Guinea Bissau-based cell raised funds for the group in 2016 by selling luxury vehicles.

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State Financial Resources – Oil Official Selling Price (OSP)

Iraq OSPs for Europe (vs Dated Brent)

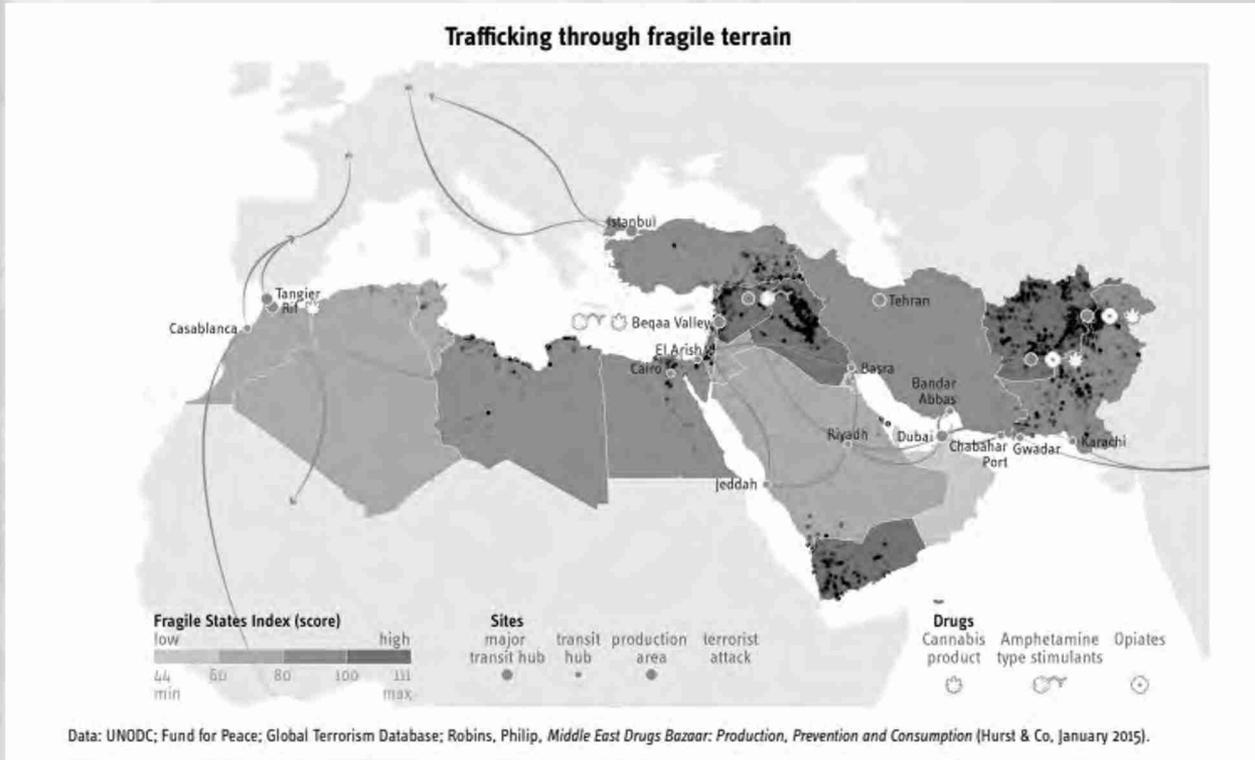Iraq's Fiscal Breakeven Oil Price in 2005-2020

The Blurring of Criminal Networks, Armed Groups and State Actors

Example: Hashd Al-Sha'abi (PMF/PMU)

"Criminal networks and some militia groups, operated with 'relative impunity' … Criminal networks were reportedly to be involved in sex trafficking of Iraqi women and children, while **criminal gangs have also exploited children for drug trafficking and dealing purposes and migrants for forced labour.** Refugees and IDPs were also targeted by traffickers. Alleged official complicity occurred in recruitment of child soldiers and sex trafficking…Corruption is also described as 'rampant', existing at all levels with 'organised corruption syndicates' protected or involved with those in power and **government decisions strongly influenced by bribery, nepotism, tribal, political influence, family and religious considerations…, '"armed groups, tribes, criminal gangs … all control positions" within the state and security forces.'** PMUs were reportedly engaged in criminal activities and abuses against civilians"

Hashd Al-Sha'abi and accusations of Drug Trafficking

Iraq's Drug Crisis: Basra

Trafficking through fragile terrain

Fragile States Index (score)
low — high
44 min — 60 — 80 — 100 — 111 max

Sites
major transit hub · transit hub · production area · terrorist attack

Drugs
Cannabis product · Amphetamine type stimulants · Opiates

Data: UNODC; Fund for Peace; Global Terrorism Database; Robins, Philip, *Middle East Drugs Bazaar: Production, Prevention and Consumption* (Hurst & Co, January 2015).

Advantages of cryptocurrency and Disadvantages of local currencies
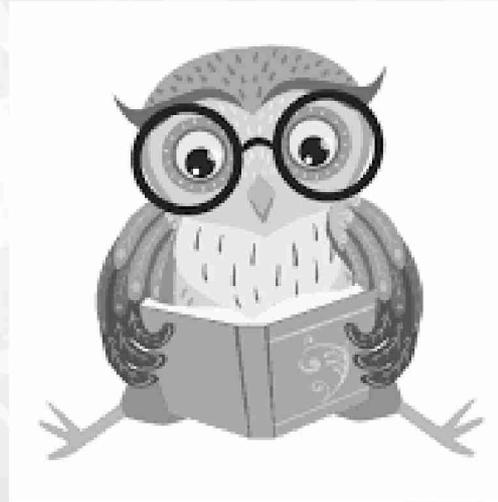
Cryptocurrency and Bitcoin

Figure 1. The Rate of the US Dollar Relative to the Syrian Pound on the Black Market and the Official Rate in January Each Year[31]
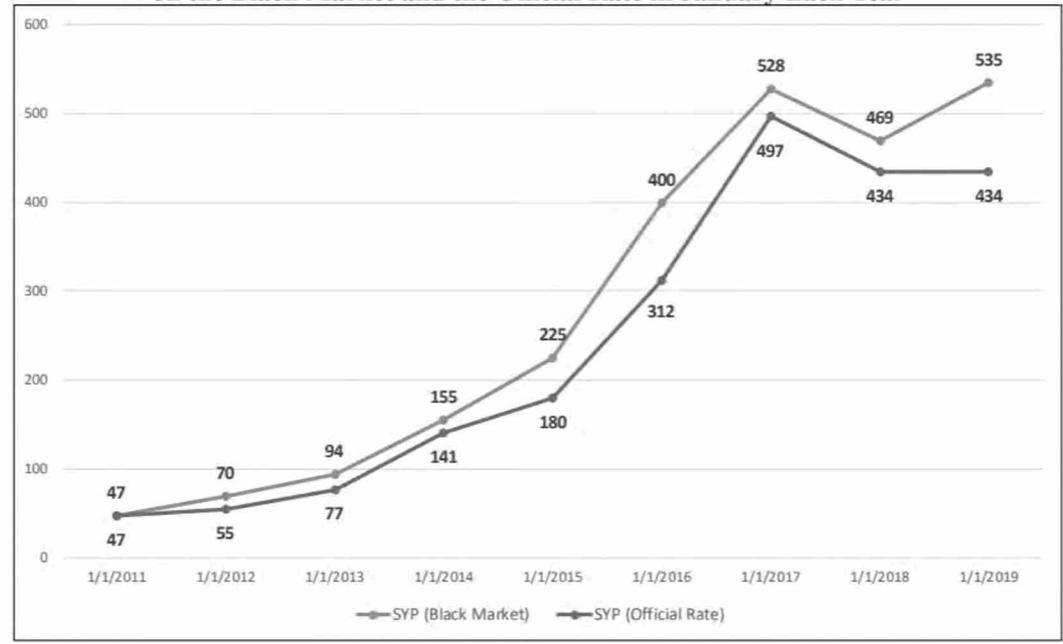
Source: Central Bank of Syria and The Syria Report[32]

COI Resources

Foundational COI Resources (non-exhaustive)

- RAIO RU ECN
- Refworld
- ECOI.net
- Human Rights Watch
- Amnesty International
- Asylum Research Consultancy
- Department of State Reports and Reciprocity Tables
- CIA World Factbook
- Foreign Government COI Offices
- IOM

- World Bank
- EOIR COI Page
- Pro-Quest
- ReliefWeb
- Council on Foreign Relations
- Brookings Institute
- USIP
- UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - Situation Reports
- Jadaliyya
- SOHR - Syria Local News

Jane's Terrorism Events & Intelligence Events database

https://janes.ihs.com/TerrorismInsurgencyCentre/Home

Things To Know:

- DHS has subscription to this database
- Group Profiles: collection of information on armed groups
- Events Database: lists and maps terror events in towns and neighborhoods
- Sources are verified. You can cite this database in adjudications.
- Jane's recorded training on how best to use these two databases is available on the RAIO Research Encyclopedia of Online Resources

When To Use (Examples):

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Protected Internet Exchange (PiX)

https://www.pixtoday.net/

Things To Know:

- US Government-sponsored website approved for sharing Unclassified, **For Official Use Only (FOUO),** and **Sensitive But Unclassified (SBU)** information
- Must register with your government email address
- PiX has Syria and Iraq Conflict Trackers
- PiX USCIS-RAIO Portal

When To Use (Examples):

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https://tac.dodiis.mil/aws

Things To Know:

- US Government-analytic tool that can provide open source unclassified reporting
- Must register with your government email address
- Uses Boolean logic in its search function and searches must be composed using certain parameters
- Registration is required to gain access, depending on level of access training may also be required
- Opensource.gov information will still be available on TAC after the June 2019 decommissioning of opensource.gov

When To Use (Examples):

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https://acleddata.com/

ACLED
Bringing clarity to crisis

Things To Know:

- Big Data Mapping Tool
- Coverage Dates – North Africa is covered from 1/1997 to present
- All other Middle East Countries except Syria is covered from 1/2016 to Present.
- Syria is covered from 1/2017 to present

When To Use (Examples):

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Stanford's Mapping Militant Organizations

https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants

Things To Know:

- Created by Stanford University
- Read The Profiles: Summaries of various militant groups
- Well-cited source
- See The Maps: An interactive timeline of military groups, their formation, their splinters or merges, and their alliances

When To Use (Examples):

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