



ISIL, JAN and the war economy in Syria

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'ISIL is depriving us from the barrels of oil while the government is dropping barrel bombs', the message from Kafranbel depicting the situation in opposition-controlled areas where there is a severe shortage of fuel after the battles with ISIL which interrupted the flow of crude oil from ISIL-controlled territories. *Picture Courtesy of Kafranbel signs facebook page*

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ACRONYMS

AOG	Armed opposition groups
PYD	Democratic Union party
FSA	Free Syrian Army
GAC	Governorate Administrative councils
ISG	Interim Syrian Government
IDP	Internally Displace Person
IAPS	Islamic Administration of Public Services
IAPS	Islamic Administration of Public Services
ISIL	Islamic State in Iraq and Levant
JAN	Jabhat Al Nusra front
LAC	Local Administrative councils
MOC	Military Operations Command
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
SARC	Syrian Arab Red Crescent
SNC	Syrian National Coalition
SNAP	Syrian Needs Analysis Project
SYP	Syrian Pound
WFP	World Food Program

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It would have been unthinkable that organisations like Islamic State in Iraq and Levant (ISIL) and Jabhat Al Nusra (JAN) would expand into and within Syria had there not been a war in the country. Those Syrian lands contested between government and opposition are the areas that are falling into the hands of ISIL and JAN.

This paper is based on original empirical research drawing on interviews with a range of respondents who live both inside and outside ISIL held areas in Syria. It explores how the collapse of the state and the spread of the war economy enable ISIL's expansion and JAN's infiltration in Syria with particular focus on ISIL and it presents options to counter this dynamic.

The most important thing Syrians lost because of the conflict is simply their state, which is exactly what ISIL is attempting to provide by reversing the process of state collapse. The key to its success is that it plans and acts like a state. When it dominates an area and considers it part of the Islamic State it acts as the one sole actor in charge. It ensures that it has complete monopoly over the use of force in the area, and it has developed a comprehensive model for running a proto-state; a model that includes governance and the provision of public services, for example, judiciary system, policing, education, an army, an ideology and indeed intelligence. It offers a surprisingly effective and adaptive governance model. Its reputation for governance is one of its key recruiting tools for both civilians and fighters.

All other actors in Syria, individually or collectively, have so far failed to develop a similar strategy. Even JAN, the closest inside Syria in ideology and composition to ISIL, fails to present such a model. Instead JAN acts like an actor among other actors, and its record on governance and public service provision is poor. ISIL also seems to plan for the long-term, reinforcing its state-like character. This contrasts with other groups in Syria that tend to be trapped in emergency short-term planning.

The war has also destroyed the local legitimate economy, especially in opposition-controlled areas, and has led to the rise of illicit economy that is centred on violence. ISIL and JAN are benefiting from

the war economy in Syria in two ways. First, the overall collapse of state control, the formal economy and the governance of borders are providing ISIL and JAN with opportunities to fund themselves from all kind of illicit activities such as trading in looted antiquities, extortion and ransom.

Second, areas dominated by the war economy environment are very vulnerable to ISIL expansion and JAN infiltration. The extremely high levels of unemployment, together with very high prices and the absence of other sources of income, has left men of fighting age, who typically have to provide for their families, in a very exposed position and vulnerable to recruitment by extreme organisations. ISIL pays the highest combatant salaries in Syria starting from USD 400 per month. It is followed by JAN which pays around USD 100 per month whilst most other armed groups struggle to match even JAN's salaries. The salary system for fighters in ISIL reflects the fact that most of its high and mid-level leadership is composed of valued Arab and foreign fighters, who are much better paid, ideologically driven and strongly believing in the proto-state. The bulk of its fighting force is composed of Syrian men who are paid less, not believers in the 'state' but had very little choice. To adapt to the fact that the vast majority of Syrian combatants are very unlikely to subscribe to the ideology and views of ISIL, it has developed different scales of Bay'ah, the oath of allegiance given to ISIL by new recruits. The highest in the bay'ah scale is the Khelafah one which means that those giving this oath subscribe to the full views and rules of ISIL. A more Syrian targeted type of bay'ah is the war oath of allegiance which is literally a contract in which the entity or the person who is giving the oath pledges to fight common enemies with ISIL in return for financial and logistical support. The common enemy is not necessarily the Syrian government. This does not appeal to all Syrian armed groups which is why they also developed *Bay'at Kital Al Netham*, meaning an oath of allegiance to fight the regime.

ISIL seems to give priority to the control of strategic resources in all of its military moves inside Syria. This includes controlling oil resources, power plants, water resources and all that is needed to provide bread including silos, mills and bakeries. This has meant that other Syrian actors become dependent on ISIL especially for the provision of oil. The lack of any legitimate sources of much-needed diesel and other types of fuel in the countryside of Idleb and Aleppo

has given ISIL the opportunity to sell crude oil to these areas, to make them dependent on it. The Syrian government is also dependent on ISIL's control of strategic resources. It is reported to be buying oil from ISIL, it paid it transit fees for allowing wheat trucks from Hasaka to cross its areas and it struck deals with it to ensure the provision of water to government-controlled areas in return for providing electricity for ISIL controlled areas.

The conflict has left Syrian society deeply divided and susceptible to control, fragmentation or manipulation. The rifts have enabled ISIL to play people from certain communities or areas off against each other. The conflict has also weakened social cohesion. The paper gives examples of how areas that have maintained a relatively strong sense of social cohesion, such as in Daraa, are far more resistant to the infiltration of both JAN and ISIL.

ISIL controls four areas in Syria with a strong Arab tribal presence. Tribes in these areas were affected by different elements in the crisis as well as experiencing their own internal conflicts. ISIL exploited these conditions and divisions for its own benefit. It also developed different specific types of Bay'ah for tribes in these areas to establish its control over them. Methods such as bribery and revenue sharing have also been used to play tribes against each other and in some cases to play members of one tribe against another.

The collapse of the governing system in Syria opened up a political and ideological vacuum that was there for ISIL and JAN to exploit. ISIL is one of few actors who had active preachers reaching out to the community and organizing events to market their ideology. ISIL puts most of its effort into recruiting and brainwashing children rather than adults and thus building the foundation for a future generation and society that is deeply embedded in its extreme ideology. This is one of the most dangerous aspects of ISIL's destructive actions.

The danger of these activities by ISIL is severely underestimated and the consequences are far-reaching. Current strategies and measures by leading players in the coalition against ISIL, namely the U.S. and the UK to combat ISIL in Syria are still quite inadequate to confront the real danger of this organisation. The nature of ISIL and its ability to recruit based on economic needs is not something that can be countered by aerial bombardment.

The paper suggests that international efforts to squeeze the external funding resources of ISIL are not sufficient as they propel the organisation to adopt increasingly violent means to control additional resources. Also, cutting off ISIL funding requires more collaboration among the various actors that pose as the enemies of ISIL.

The paper suggests that the main aim of any strategy to counter ISIL's proto-state building approach must be legitimate state building. To reverse the process of state un-building in Syria the most important step is to end the conflict. Any contested area in Syria is a potential region for ISIL expansion. Ending the conflict requires serious commitment to an inclusive political solution that is supported by regional and international consensus. Very strong emphasis also needs to be put on restoring governance in opposition-controlled areas, especially those most vulnerable to further ISIL expansion. Support for governance and civil society by members of the international community should be within the framework of supporting peace and stability and not supporting parties to the conflict.

The paper also proposes measures to counter the logic of war economy in Syria. This includes reviving the legitimate economy and imposing much stronger controls on the borders of ISIL areas with Turkey and Iraq. To decrease the dependency on ISIL the paper stresses the urgency of providing fuel for opposition-controlled areas in a legitimate way and at a reasonable price and to make jobs available for men of fighting age to reduce their vulnerability to combatant recruitment.

Relatively secure zones in opposition-controlled areas should also be supported to sustain security and restore services and the local economy for the benefit of the locals and IDPs.

There is also a need for a strict policy on ransoms by all actors and countries and not accepting any hostage release by paying ransoms to ISIL and JAN, even if a third-party volunteers to pay the ransoms.

The paper suggest that support that enhances the humanitarian situation for civilians should not be cut from areas that have presence of JAN, since the termination of such support make civilians even more dependent on JAN.

1 INTRODUCTION¹

1.1 AIM OF THIS PAPER

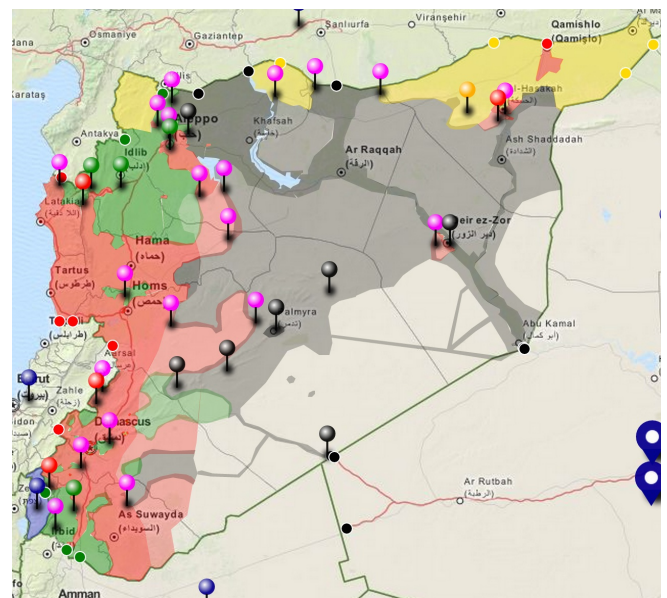
The Syrian conflict is now characterised by a well-established war economy, which is linked to the collapse of the state and governance in many parts of the country. The aim of this paper is to examine how these two factors are enabling extremist organisations, Islamic State in Iraq and Levant (ISIL²) and Jabhat Al Nusra (JAN), by allowing them to expand, reinforce their power, finance their activities and recruit more people to fight with them. This paper will look at options as to how to protect areas currently not under ISIL/JAN control from falling under such control in the future. The paper looks mainly at the economic appeal that such groups present for civilians and unemployed youth as opposed to other factors such as ideological, religious, military and political. This report does not detail how these organisations are financed. A good review of ISIL's financing mechanisms and the measures that can be taken to deprive ISIL of these financial resources is available from The Financial Action Task Force (FATF); "Financing of the Terrorist Organisation Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant".³

As part of this analysis this paper presents options to reinforce and strengthen those areas under a significant threat from future pushes by ISIL and JAN. It aims to highlight lessons from those areas that have been most successful in protecting themselves from the multifarious competing fighting groups. The

main focus of this paper is on ISIL, but where relevant JAN will also be discussed.

1.2 ISIL THREAT AND ITS STRATEGY

At the time of writing, June 2015, ISIL is estimated to be in theoretical control of half of Syria and all the border crossings between Iraq and Syria. Its forces had just captured Palmyra in the centre of Syria only days after taking Ramadi, the capital of Anbar province in western Iraq. Despite nine months of coalition aerial bombardment and continued conflict with the Iraqi government forces, Kurdish groups, the Syrian government and opposition forces, ISIL successfully captured a major urban centre and a site of major cultural heritage.



MAP 1 Map showing territorial control in Syria on 1 June 2015. The grey areas are ISIL-controlled areas, the yellow areas are controlled by Kurdish forces, pink are government-controlled areas and green are opposition- and JAN-controlled areas. The intensity of the colour reflects the strength of control in these areas. Courtesy of deSyracuse maps of the Syrian civil war.⁴

Although American officials described it as no more than a 'setback', the views of local people and experts in the region indicate that it was a significant expansion of ISIL's area of influence and attests to the threat ISIL poses to additional areas, including in western Syria. The performance of both the Syrian and Iraqi government forces were heavily criticised

¹ This project is funded by the United Kingdom's Conflict Prevention Pool and the European Research Council. The contents of the report are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Kingdom Government nor the European Commission. I am grateful to Mary Kaldor and Sam Vincent for comments.

² The acronym "ISIL" is used in this paper to represent the Islamic State in Iraq and Levant. ISIL is also referred to in the literature and media as the "Islamic State" (IS), which the group now calls itself and also as "Islamic State in Iraq and Syria" (ISIS).

³ "Financing of the Terrorist Organisation Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant", FATF, February 2015.

⁴ De Syracuse Syria civil war Maps.

regionally, and questions were asked about the ability, and even willingness, of coalition forces to intervene to prevent the fall of both cities.⁵ Many international commentators and politicians have called for a rethinking of the anti-ISIL coalition's strategy.⁶

ISIL's declared strategy is to "remain and expand". Expanding is even part of its defence strategy as argued in the recent report by the Institute for the Study of War.⁷ So far the strategies to counter ISIL focus on areas where ISIL plans to 'remain' and neglects areas where it plans to 'expand'. ISIL's expansion into and within Syria would have been unimaginable had there not been a war in the country. For this reason it is crucial to understand what aspects of the conflict are enabling this expansion. This paper focuses in particular on how Syria's war economy enables ISIL's expansion.

1.3 METHODOLOGY. EMPIRICAL DATA AND PARTICIPANTS

This paper relies on field data and interviews conducted with various actors, in addition to research gathered via a substantive literature and media review on the subject. Empirical evidence is drawn from 41 interviews undertaken for the '*Countering the logic of war economy in Syria; evidence from three local areas*'⁸ paper, which focused

⁵ For example "*Seizure of Palmyra and Ramadi by Isis reveal gaping holes in US jihadi strategy*". The *Guardian*, 21-5-2015. "*The collapse of the Iraqi army in Ramadi is a replay of the Mosul debacle*" Washington Post 21-5-2015 and "*Why does the Iraqi Army Keep Running Away from ISIL?*" Joan Cole, *Informed Comment*. 19-5-2015, and "*Islamic State Gains New Leverage in Syria*", *WSJ*, 21-5-2015

⁶ See for example comments by senator McCain: in Jan 2015 "*There is no strategy to defeat ISIS*" and also "*U.S. Rethinks Strategy to Battle Islamic State After Setback in Ramadi*" in *WSJ*, May 2015.

⁷ "*The ISI Defense in Iraq and Syria: countering an adaptive enemy*", Middle East security report 27, Institute for the Study of War, May 2015.

⁸ "*Countering the logic of war economy in Syria; evidence from three local areas*". LSE, July 2015, Kaldor, Turkmani, Ali and Bojicic-Dzelilovic.

on the Daraa, Idleb and Aleppo countryside. In addition to this, 38 in-depth interviews were conducted between January and June 2015 primarily with people who live inside Syria or who have lived there during ISIL and JAN's presence. The vast majority of people interviewed were either civil society and Local Administrative Council (LAC) members or people who worked in ISIL- and JAN-controlled areas such as doctors, lawyers and merchants. Additionally, interviews were conducted with key tribal leaders in Hasaka and Al-Qamishli, businessmen in Daraa who have been involved in talks or negotiations (e.g. with JAN and Syrian and Jordanian governments), as well as actors from the transport sector who are knowledgeable about the movement of trucks across the borders and through opposition and ISIL-controlled areas. Interviews were also undertaken in Raqqa, Palmyra and Tell Abyad with people who had just left ISIL-controlled areas. In addition, we interviewed members of LACs and civil society figures who are active in the northern countryside of Homs, an area which is very vulnerable to ISIL expansion.

The information from the interviews was cross-checked but it remains difficult to verify the information from the areas under ISIL control given the lack of reliable information in these zones. Most of the information given to us regarding ISIL was consistent across interviews. However some of the information on JAN is contradictory and respondents shared competing views about its role and activities. This can be attributed to the fact that JAN does not have sole control of large areas. It often works in collaboration with other groups in different areas and its relationship to other actors and to the local population varies from one area to another. The views about JAN also appeared to be more positive shortly after they made an advance against government forces, but this positive view did not seem to last long.

We focused also on interviewing civil society figures that were active inside Daraa and Idleb from the early stages of the conflict. We found the information and analysis resulting from these interviews to be the most consistent and reliable, and the least likely to be biased towards any of the conflict parties.

We agreed to preserve the anonymity of those we interviewed. For this reason, we do not give specific sources. The information provided in this report is

based on two or more sources, unless otherwise specified.

Where possible we looked for evidence in the media of the information provided to us in the interviews and we have added references to relevant media reporting in the footnotes.

2 EXPANDING ON THE RUINS OF A STATE

The most important thing Syrians lost because of the conflict is simply their state⁹, which is exactly what ISIL is attempting to provide. Building a completely different type of state requires, to begin with, a failed or fragile state from which to reconstruct the new 'state' model. ISIL is taking advantage of the environment created by the war, and proving successful in rapidly restoring a more secure, better governed and more economically stable environment in the areas that it captures. It then attempts to ensure that people in these areas are not going to turn against ISIL or make alliances with other actors, at least in the short run. For this reason ISIL is far more likely to expand into areas where governance is weakest. These are often the areas least accessible to support from the international community, such as the northern countryside of Homs. In contrast, other armed actors such as JAN attempt to partially restore order and to compensate for the absence of some of the state services, without much success. JAN's declared aim is not to be the sole power over large territory in Syria but to remain one actor among other actors which collectively control the country. All other actors, individually or collectively, have so far failed to present a comprehensive model to restore stability and governance in areas they control.

The conflict in Syria has created conditions that enabled ISIL's expansion and made it possible for JAN to infiltrate certain areas in Syria. These conditions can be described as:

1. Weak governance and the absence of one authority in charge of planning and the public good.

⁹ Evidence of this comes out in the *"Countering the logic of war economy in Syria"*, *supra*, note 8.

2. A war economy which destroyed the local legitimate economy so that many people had no other source of income except through joining an armed group, and in which access to resources depends on violence.¹⁰
3. A divided society that is susceptible to control, fragmentation or manipulation.
4. A political and ideological vacuum that was there for ISIL and JAN to fill.

These factors are interdependent, but we will probe each of them separately, with particular focus on the war economy and governance.

2.1 POOR GOVERNANCE

Addressing the UN Security Council on 24 September 2014 in the High-Level Summit on Foreign Terrorist Fighters, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon identified the crucial role good governance plays in the fight against terrorism saying, *"missiles may kill terrorists. But good governance kills terrorism"*.¹¹

The collapse of governance in opposition-controlled areas in Syria led to the formation of Local Administrative Councils (LACs). These LACs compensate partially for the absence of the state and dearth of service provision. But despite their relative success, they still function in the absence of a state framework that can provide them with what they need to carry out their work including a legal framework, security and sustainable funding. They are operating in an environment dominated by diverse actors, most of which are armed, and where there is no single authority responsible for providing public services. They are faced with the challenge of regulating their relationship with multiple actors, some of which are in conflict with one another. The LACs attempt to respond to urgent local needs, but their funding requests to international donors tend to take time to be processed and are often subject to the prevailing political mood of the donors. Insofar as public money is raised locally, it is often captured by armed groups and ends up feeding violence. A recent

¹⁰ *Ibid*

¹¹ Secretary-General's remarks to Security Council High-Level Summit on Foreign Terrorist Fighters, New York, 24 September 2014

study by Local Administrative Councils Unite (LACU)¹² shows that only 5% of LAC projects supported by international donors have been completed successfully, 28% are in progress, 20% of the LAC projects are considered to have had very poor results, and the rest have been terminated prior to completion. In a very few cases LACs have been able to charge the population they serve for the services they provide.

2.1.1 ISIL AND GOVERNANCE

One of the least discussed aspects of ISIL is its practice of governance. ISIL's governance highlights a pragmatic side backed up by effective planning, and is informed by an awareness of the impact that poor governance would have on its ability to hold on to power. Governance is more important to ISIL than JAN because the sole control of territory is at the core of ISIL's vision. It seeks to impose itself as the only legitimate actor, the state, the actor who has monopoly over violence and the only one in charge of the public good as it defines it. It thus assumes responsibility for governance, which in itself becomes a way for ISIL to reinforce its control. Its reputation for governance, centred on security provision and delivery of basic services, is a key recruiting tool not only for fighters but also for civilians to move to or remain in their areas. The local populations in areas under ISIL control fear the consequences of rising up against the new oppressor but also see no urgent need to, as they are frequently more secure under ISIL control.

ISIL enters areas afflicted by weak governance, an active war economy and ongoing conflict with the intention of changing this situation and imposing control. This is done not for the benefit of the people but as a means to ensure longevity of its rule. 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. No other parties are permitted to carry weapons, with the exception of tribes that have sworn allegiance to them and were allowed to keep their arms under the condition that they are not used against ISIL. Unlike in the rest of Syria, there are no rival militias or any

other form of power to rival the dominant one in ISIL-controlled areas. 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.¹³ Even tribal disputes seem to have decreased.

ISIL has achieved this through tough, brutal but organised security measures, adopting both hard and soft power measures. ISIL has established *Makhfars* that function as police centres. These serve to resolve conflicts and issue incident reports. Disputes are referred to *Dar Al Qada'a*, the House of Justice. They have also established Religious Police, *al-Hisba*, which carry out patrols, control the prices in the market and other violations of their rules. In some areas such as Aleppo and Raqqa there are also local ISIL police, which function with *al-Hisba* as the executive body for the Shar'ia court. Crucially, ISIL members are subjected to the law and are held accountable by *Dar Al Qada'a* if they violate ISIL's rules. ISIL also established the Islamic Administration of Public Services (IAPS) to oversee various public services especially bakeries. ISIL uses a highly strict interpretation of sharia law. It detains people arbitrarily and uses torture; abuses of human rights in its detention centres are rife. ISIL prisons, such as the one in Manbij and Al Bab, are reported to be not much better than those of the Syrian government itself.¹⁴ They have also established a Religious Outreach and Proselytization (Da'wa) Department and their own education system.

The villages in ISIL-controlled areas tend to be subject to less governance and oversight than the cities and towns. They are left to be run by the local people with allegiance to ISIL. There are no *al Hisba* or *Makhfars* there. According to those we interviewed, this is mainly because ISIL does not have the capacity to cover all the villages and because it does not see many of them as strategic at this stage.

¹² Report published by Local Administrative Councils Unite LACU in June 2015.

¹³ "*Zaman al Wasel observes ISIL methods in administrating areas it controls*" 17-9-2014.

¹⁴ "*ISIL prisons are not better than Palmyra prison*" Raqqa News. 7-6-2015.

In terms of security and governance, ISIL-controlled areas benefit positively in comparison with other areas of Syria. Many areas controlled by opposition forces have a reputation for lawlessness, corruption and gangster-like rule.

As described above, in opposition-controlled areas, the newly emerging governing structures, mainly the LACs, have struggled within an environment of diverse actors and differing ideologies. They have had to rely on varying and unstable sources of funding. The relationship of the LACs to the political, armed and economic actors is not one that fits into the model of a coherent state, and at times these actors become enemies or competitors. ISIL, on the other hand, has the advantage of presenting an integrated model where the ideology, governance and military are all intertwined into one comprehensive system supported by one economy and central planning. The system of governance that ISIL has built is also very well integrated with all its other aspects as described in the Middle East Security Report on ISIL's governance¹⁵ "*ISIS has built a holistic system of governance that includes religious, educational, judicial, security, humanitarian, and infrastructure projects, among others.*"

ISIL coordinates hospitals, bakeries, humanitarian aid and the running or repair of infrastructure of all kinds, from the water pipelines to large dams and power stations. It ensures that civil servants paid by the Syrian government actually carry out their work, which again is not the case in all areas of Syria. All this is to ensure that, just as it secures a monopoly over the use of force, it has a similar monopoly over vital services.

ISIL's management of water and power is a prime example of how it ensures proper service delivery to those under its control; it does so with the ambition of creating an air of normalcy. In Deir Al Zour, people we interviewed reported significant improvement in the provision of water and electricity in the area. They said that before ISIL arrived they would typically have had several consecutive days without electricity but after ISIL's takeover, people had been

getting at least ten hours of electricity a day. ISIL's IAPS had also fixed water pipes, managing to provide water even to villages that had not had water for years, such as Quria village in the eastern countryside of Deir Al Zour. Water supplies had been repaired for agricultural areas, enabling farmers to farm again. People we interviewed who had escaped Palmyra weeks after ISIL had taken it over reported to us that ISIL, very quickly after it had entered the city, took over the main automated bakery in the city; ISIL offered free bread for people while also working on restoring services and fixing water pipes. They had also rapidly deployed their *al-Hisba* police forces. We were told that typically ISIL starts by providing all these services for free when it enters a new area and later charges people fees for services.

ISIL also seems to plan for the long-term, reinforcing its state-like character. This contrasts with other groups in Syria that tend to be trapped in emergency short-term planning. Take for example the health system. ISIL medical services do not deal just with emergency cases but also with primary health care issues. ISIL-run hospitals are reported to be well run and kept very clean. People who attended ISIL hospitals report meeting American, British and Pakistani doctors. We interviewed a Syrian specialist doctor who had just fled Raqqa to Turkey. He had worked in ISIL-run hospitals. They were paying him USD1500 per month in addition to housing and other benefits and were very keen to keep him working there, despite the fact that he did not swear allegiance to them. He described how eager ISIL were to keep specialist doctors because most of the other doctors who worked for them were inexperienced and some had just finished medical school. He told us that to address this gap in medical expertise, ISIL has established a medical school where students take three years to graduate.¹⁶ ISIL's failure to keep this Syrian doctor highlights its vulnerability. As he was becoming ever more valued and his influence was growing, ISIL approached him and asked him to swear allegiance. At this stage, he decided to run for

¹⁵ "*ISIS governance in Syria*", C. C., Caris and S. Reynolds. Middle East Security Report 22, Institute for the Study of War. July 2014.

¹⁶ This has been reported in the news as well with images of a student recruitment poster. For example "*ISIL open medical school amid doctors shortage in its areas*". Syria Mubashar, 3-5-2015.

his life with his family because he knew rejection was not an option.

In Manbij, ISIL gives medical financial assistance for people to purchase medicine, and assists cancer patients financially. One interviewee reported that ISIL sends cancer patients from Syria to a specialist hospital in Mosul.



PICTURE 1. Footage aired by ISIL showing ISIL members distributing WFP aid claiming to be the Zakat.

Humanitarian assistance is another service ISIL offers when it first intervenes in a community, partly, according to the Institute for the Study of War¹⁷, to create a culture of dependency. For example, it provides lower-priced food to impoverished areas of high need. ISIL’s control of bakeries also allows it to feed local populations and maintain this dependency. In rural areas where ISIL cannot regularly provide aid and bread it offers people the opportunity to restore their livelihoods, for example by installing water pipes for agricultural use in villages. International aid is being delivered regularly once a

week to ISIL-controlled areas through Tel Abyad crossing.¹⁸ It is difficult to know whether this aid is distributed according to need in this area, but there is evidence that ISIL has abused supplies of international aid. For example, ISIL is reported to use this aid to pay its fighters as a way of rewarding them for their services. Tribal figures we interviewed also reported to us that ISIL distributes aid to the tribes in return for loyalty. Lately ISIL aired footage (Picture 1) showing ISIL members distributing what they claimed to be the Zakat, which is the Islamic tax paid from the rich to the poor. A camera zoom into the boxes they were distributing shows the UN WFP logos. Other images showing ISIL distributing UN WFP in February 2015 also raised serious concerns.¹⁹

ISIL’s capacity to reconstruct a state-like entity does not necessarily mean that ISIL is capable of building a viable enduring state. It is isolated and inherently exclusive; two factors which make long-term rule extremely difficult in the context of globalisation. As the *ISIS Governance in Syria* report notes²⁰ “*In the process of establishing its governance project, ISIS has dismantled state institutions without replacing them with sustainable alternatives. The immediate provision of aid and electricity, for example, does not translate into the creation of a durable economy. The consequence of ISIS’s failure, however, may not be the dismantling of the Caliphate, but rather the devastation of the cities and systems that comprise Iraq and Syria such that they never recover.*”

What ISIL’s success thus far has highlighted is that security and governance are issues that matter to civilian populations who are impoverished and fear for their lives. Ideologically, ISIL has not been widely or fully embraced but as an organisation with state-like operations it provides short-term relief from

¹⁸ This was reported to us by OCHA in April 2015, since then Tel Abyad was liberated from ISIL and the arrangements of delivering international aid to ISIL-controlled areas may have changed.

¹⁹ “*World Food Programme Alarmed By Images Showing ISIS Distributing WFP Food In Syria*” WFP news, 2-2-2015.

²⁰ “*ISIS governance in Syria*”, supra note 15.

¹⁷ “*ISIS governance in Syria*”, supra note 15

many of the horrors of the Syrian and Iraqi crises. ISIL's challenge, which it appears to be well aware of, is to develop a sustainable long-term way of forging loyalty to its fledgling entity that is not based on immediate expediency. Those who oppose ISIL will have to counter efforts to build this medium to long-term horizon by demonstrating that ISIL does not have a monopoly on providing security and services.

2.1.2 JAN AND GOVERNANCE

Unlike ISIL, JAN's declared strategy is not to have sole control of territory, to declare a state or to be the sole power in future Syria.²¹ They do not come with one comprehensive model, instead claiming that they just aim to be part of a political future of which no one yet knows the outcome. Their increasing military power is competing with a high number of active armed groups as well as civic actors many of them are supported with yet other layers of complex regional and international actors. In the areas in which JAN operates, there is neither a unified legal framework nor a known political authority, whether legitimate or not.

The one aspect of governance that JAN seems to be most interested in is the judiciary system. Two interviewees reported to us that in the current negotiations over administering the city of Idlib after it was taken over by a coalition of forces--which included JAN--JAN demanded control of the judiciary system in the city through its sharia courts. In return JAN offered to allow other forces to control other aspects such as policing.

Many of the participants in our interviews described JAN's presence as disruptive to the function of the LACs and relief organisations.²² Even when JAN took over areas where illicit activities were very common, they tried to restore security and offer people bread for reasonable prices. While they initially met with some success, they failed to maintain standards and in some cases there have been demonstrations

²¹ This has been emphasized in their literature and most recently in an interview at Al Jazeera TV with the Al-Julani, the head of Jan in May 2015.

²² This was also reported in the media. For example "JAN threatens relief organisations and relief workers in liberated areas" Al Aan TV, 1-5-2015.

asking them to leave these areas.²³ In one of the villages in Idlib, an interviewee said that when JAN took over Jabal Al Zawia in Idleb they took measures against people who were smuggling diesel, claiming that they wanted to end the practice. Then they ended up controlling the smuggling of diesel themselves. In another town in Daraa participants reported that the situation had deteriorated after JAN took over from FSA. This was because the LACs used to have a good relationship with the FSA who were seen to be from within the area, whereas JAN was seen as an outside force with which the LAC did not manage to build good relations. In Maarat al-Numaan, people spoke of a situation of fear and insecurity that was created after JAN took over from Jamal Marouf brigades. This was because many of the civic actors, especially members of LACs, were associated with the Marouf brigades. They were afraid to move around in light of all the JAN checkpoints and feared arrest because they were seen to be associates of Marouf. In one of the villages JAN forces took over in Golan, they tried to confiscate the bakery that was owned and run by a civil society organisation. The organisation appealed to various local dignitaries, the local sharia court and figures from other brigades in the area to help them in getting back the bakery, which had originally cost them USD15,000 to buy. Their lobbying worked and they regained the bakery but moved it to another village where JAN was not present.

2.2 WAR ECONOMY

In Syria, actors of all kinds are benefitting, deliberately and otherwise, from the state of the unfolding war economy throughout the country. By "war economy" we are referring to a range of economic activities that depend on the violent context. The dynamics and extent of war economy in opposition-controlled areas in Syria is studied empirically in the "*Countering the logic of war economy in Syria*" paper.²⁴ Actors that benefit from the war economy include both ISIL and JAN. It has become a key element not just of their survival as

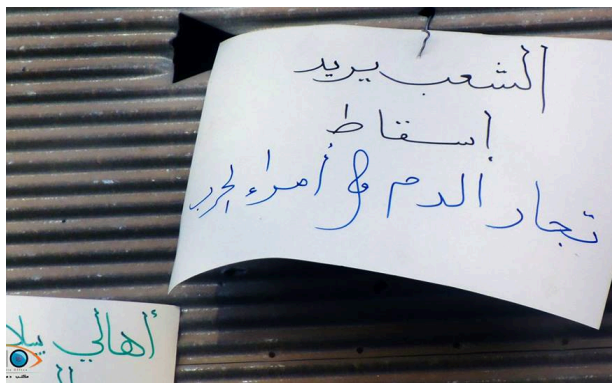
²³ "*Syrian Idleb countryside rebels against JAN*" Elaph, 20-02-2015.

²⁴ "*Countering the logic of war economy in Syria*", *supra*, note 8.

military actors in the conflict but their ability to flourish as political, social and economic players as well. For ISIL it is a vital component in their strategy to maintain what has increasingly become a semi-functioning state in eastern Syria and north and western Iraq.

ISIL and JAN are benefiting from the war economy in Syria in two ways;

1. Areas dominated by the war economy environment are more vulnerable to ISIL expansion and JAN infiltration.
2. The overall collapse of state control, the formal economy and the governance of borders is providing ISIL and JAN with opportunities to fund themselves.



PICTURE 2 'People want to overthrow blood traders and warlords'. A protest sign in Babbeela, south of Damascus.

2.2.1 WAR ECONOMY TO 'EXPAND'

The war in Syria and the decentralised war economy that it generated has left most of the contested areas in a very fragile state, dominated by an economy based on violence. This fragility is one of the main reasons why ISIL had been able to expand. In order to develop appropriate plans for strengthening and reinforcing these fragile areas as a means to counter ISIL, it is vital to first have a clear understanding of how ISIL has exploited the war economy in Syria in order to expand, recruit fighters and other specialists whilst remaining an extremely well-funded actor.

CONTROL OF STRATEGIC RESOURCES AND CO-DEPENDENCY ON ISIL

ISIL seems to give priority to the control of strategic resources in all of its military moves inside Syria. This includes controlling oil resources, power plants, water resources and all that is needed to provide bread including silos, mills and bakeries. This not

only gives ISIL the ability to control people in its own territories but also gives it the opportunity to control people and actors in other areas. There is both dependency on ISIL, such as the dependency on its oil as explained in section 2.2.2, and co-dependency created because of its control of these resources; the latter often leads ISIL to strike strategic deals with other actors.

For example through negotiations mediated by a civil society organization, ISIL struck a deal with the Syrian government to allow government access to the main power plant in Aleppo in return for the government continuing to provide electricity for areas in Aleppo where ISIL is present.²⁵ ISIL is also providing water for Aleppo in return for the government continuing to provide electricity for some areas in the Aleppo countryside under ISIL's control.

UNEMPLOYMENT AND COMBATANT RECRUITMENT

In most of our interviews for this research, people from opposition-controlled areas reported very high levels of unemployment, ranging from 60% to 90%. This, together with very high prices and lack of other sources of income, has left men of fighting age, who typically have to provide for their families, in a very exposed position and vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups.

In the countryside of Idlib and Aleppo, the almost 'free market economy' resulting from the absence of regulations combined with the war economy has led to a new stratification of the society.²⁶ At the bottom is a class that benefits least from the new economic situation and is also the least accessible to aid agencies. People in this class are the most liable to be recruited as combatants.

ISIL's wealth allows it to offer highly competitive salaries not just to fighters but other specialists required to run the proto-state. Most other brigades

²⁵ "*Hungry for Peace: positives and pitfalls of local truces and ceasefires in Syria*" Turkmani et al. LSE, May 2015.

²⁶ "*Countering the logic of war economy in Syria*", *supra*, note 8.

in Syria are able to pay their members salaries varying from USD 30 to USD 100 per month²⁷ (the average is USD 50 a month); in besieged areas even the salary is not guaranteed and the only attraction for some men to join is the brigade's ability to feed its combatants. ISIL provides high and stable salaries to its recruits in addition to other benefits (e.g. foreign fighters sometimes receive accommodation and medical services, and even cars and fuel).

As of July 2014²⁸ ISIL was reported to have recruited 6,300 fighters in Syria. Around 5,300 of them are Syrians. This took place shortly after ISIL took over Mosul, which gave them access to additional economic resources and enabled them to recruit by paying lucrative salaries. In January 2015 in Al Hajar Al Aswad in the outskirts of Damascus, ISIL was reported to have recruited 700 fighters by paying them 45K SYP a month (around USD 250) in addition to providing them with fuel and food.²⁹

The salary system for fighters in ISIL reflects the fact that most of its high and mid-level leadership is composed of valued Arab and foreign fighters, who are much better paid (with salaries starting from USD 800 and increasing according to experience), ideologically driven and strongly believe in the proto-state. The bulk of its fighting force is located lower down in the pyramid and is composed of Syrian men who are not believers in the 'state' but had very little choice. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights told us that they estimate the percentage of Syrian fighters within ISIL forces to be 60%, the vast majority of them in the lowest ranking positions with a few exceptions like Hassan Abboud, the commander of Dawood brigade. Notably, Abboud had taken part in the fight against the American forces in Iraq and he returned to Syria after the beginning of the uprising.

Syrian fighters typically receive USD 400 per month.³⁰ Syrians carrying out civil servant roles for ISIL receive around USD 200. In addition to salaries ISIL pays USD 100 for each wife and USD 50 for each child (USD 40 for children of Syrian fighters). The salary seems to increase in less secure areas. ISIL-affiliated Syrian fighters in Aleppo receive USD 600 to compensate for fighting in high-risk areas. New Syrian recruits in Deir Al Zour were offered USD 600 to encourage them to join.

If we compare this to salaries offered by all other armed groups in Syria, including the regime itself and JAN, then ISIS is by far the most competitive. A recent Carnegie paper³¹ noted this element in its 'Human dimension of life under Islamic State' report:

'ISIS also took advantage of economic destitution to lure people to its ranks. By way of example, in southern Turkey, the Danish Refugee Council offers around USD50 per month to each Syrian refugee who is assessed to be in need. In comparison, the Islamic State offers Syrian fighters monthly salaries of at least USD300 in addition to USD50 per child and other allowances for wives and housing—more than what any other group, including the regime, the FSA, and Jabhat al-Nusra—offer their members. For those whose livelihoods were destroyed by the war, the promise of significant economic support can cause them to lock their values away in order to feed their children.'

Recent measures aimed at curbing ISIL finances as well as the challenges of administration in the context of rapid expansion may have weakened ISIL's capacity to finance new recruits as reported in the NY Times: *'There are complaints about salaries and living conditions, disputes over money and business opportunities, and allegations that commanders have left with looted cash and other resources.'*³²

²⁷ *Ibid*

²⁸ *"ISIL recruit fighters at a record pace"*, Reuters, 19-8-2014

²⁹ *"Syrian regime withdraw from the road to Daraa leading to FAS against ISIL clashes"* Al Araby Al Jadeed, 15-1-2015.

³⁰ This was reported to us by interviewee.

³¹ *"The Human Dimension of Life Under the Islamic State"*, Carnegie Middle East Center, 4-3-2015

³² *"Battered but Unbowed, ISIS Is Still on Offensive"* The New York Times, 13-03-2015

SCALES OF BAY'AH FOR ISIL

In Arabic, *Bay'ah* means a sale or commercial transaction. Within the Islamic context it is used to refer to the oath of allegiance. One type of *Bay'ah* that ISIL relies on to recruit fighters and forge alliances is *Bay'at al Harb*; The war oath of allegiance. This type of *Bay'ah* is literally a contract that regulates the relationship between allies and across the chain of command during war-time. The entity or the person who is giving the oath in this contract pledges to fight with the entity he is giving the oath to in return for financial and logistical support including being 'armed and equipped'.

The common enemy that the two parties agree to fight is not necessarily the Syrian government. This does not appeal to all Syrian armed groups which still see the fight against the Syrian government as the priority, which is why they developed *Bay'at Kital Al Netham*, meaning a specific oath of allegiance to fight the regime. The other type of *Bay'ah* is *Bay'at Al Khelafa*, the Caliphate oath of allegiance. The person or entity who takes the oath subscribes to the entire ISIL system including its ideology, commits to adhere to all its rules and laws and to fight for its when needed. The defection of Al-Julani (head of JAN) from Baghdadi (head of ISIL) was justified by JAN's religious figures who claimed that the *Bay'ah* which Al-Julani had given to Baghdadi was merely a war *Bay'ah* and not a *Khelafah* one.³³ This then justifies their separation over ideological and strategic differences. Depending on the situation, ISIL seems to be developing different 'contracts' of *Bay'ah* with people and social groups in its area; for example, it agrees that certain social groups like the tribes will not fight with ISIL but asks them to commit to not fighting against ISIL itself and to not supporting its enemies. Most Syrian groups or fighters prefer to give ISIL the war oath of allegiance rather than the *Khelafah* one because it does not oblige them to adhere to all the rules of the ISIL proto-state and thus they can be excused for not adhering to it.

These different types of contracts reflect the very adaptive nature of ISIL, its intelligence and knowledge, and ability to mobilise and control the

³³ This appeared in many articles and discussions, for example in muslm.org.

society based on the particular needs and fears of each area and other social components.

2.2.2 THE WAR ECONOMY TO FUND ISIL AND JAN

Several papers and reports have been written on the funding resources of ISIL. Many of these funding resources would not have existed had there not been a well-established war economy in the area. Recent UN SC resolutions³⁴ address ways to restrict ISIL funding but many sources of revenue remain.³

ISIL is raising revenue from 'transit' services it offers to the Syrian government. This has been reported in the media³⁵ and confirmed to us by several people we interviewed. One important source of income-generation for the Syrian economy is the grain harvest in the Hasaka province, which is still under government control but disconnected from other parts of Syria by ISIL-dominated areas. ISIL has reportedly allowed the transit of trucks loaded with wheat from Hasaka through its areas to the government-controlled areas in the west of Syria in return for 25% of the actual load of each truck.

Trading in antiquities is also a major source of income for ISIL. Its dramatic stunts in destroying archaeological sites and statues can be understood as public relations moves to reinforce a particular image; in reality they only destroy traceable items, and attempt to sell the rest. They are also involved in digging archaeological sites in search for new antiquities to sell.³⁶ It is difficult to estimate the income that ISIL makes from selling Syrian antiquities. Information revealed from memory sticks obtained after an arrest of ISIL members in Iraq revealed that they made 36 million dollars from selling antiquities from only site in Al Nabek area in the Syria.³⁷

³⁵ "*ISIL working on Transit trade*" Al Hal Al Souri, 6-3-2015.

³⁶ "*ISIL starts excavating for antiquities in Der Al Zour*" Sound and Picture news web site, May 2015.

³⁷ "*How an arrest in Iraq revealed Isis's \$2bn jihadist network*", The Guardian, 15 June 2014.

They have also been reported³⁸ to buy cannabis from the Bekaa valley. Farmers reported having sold one ton of cannabis to ISIL, which in turn resells it for profit. The same report points out that JAN is also benefiting from the cannabis farming after gaining control over farms on the Syrian/Lebanese borders.

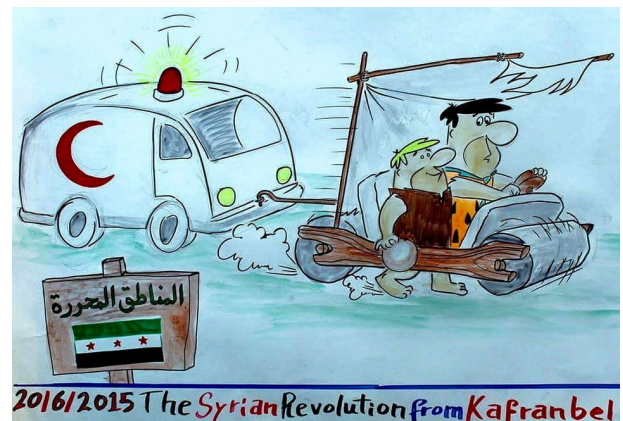
Ransoms are another major source of funding for ISIL. FATF estimate that in 2014 ISIL raised between 20 million USD to 45 million USD from ransoms³. As discussed in section 2.2.2, following the increased pressure on the external funding of ISIL and JAN, receiving ransoms for the release of hostages has become a lucrative way of financing these groups and with the connivance of some of the international donors. The usual scenario is that ISIL or JAN would kidnap a westerner (or 'buy' them from other armed actors) and openly demand extremely high ransom in exchange for his/her release. The governments of the countries of the hostages refuse to pay ransom but then a Gulf donor will step in and offer to make the payment, which they then pay to these groups.

The war economy in Syria is enabling the continuation of supply for ISIL through the Syrian/Turkish borders. In one interview we were told that many of the trucks arriving in Syria through the Turkish borders are entering ISIL-controlled areas through Manbij or Jarablus and from there reaching as far as Mosul.

OIL

Oil is another major source of income for ISIL. Apart from local use, ISIL is selling crude oil to the Syrian government, to traders who smuggle it to Turkey and to the opposition-controlled areas. Participants in interviews reported to us that since the increased attention lately by the international community to the funding resources of ISIL following the Charlie Hebdo attacks, the trading of oil from ISIL-controlled areas into Turkey has declined and what is left now is only smuggling that is difficult to control. The same situation probably prevails regarding the sale of oil to government-controlled areas, but there are no reports to confirm this.

The lack of any legitimate sources of much-needed diesel and other types of fuel in the countryside of Idleb and Aleppo gave ISIL the opportunity to sell crude oil to these areas, to make them dependent on it and to open communication channels with actors in these areas. Crude oil from ISIL-controlled areas is the major source of fuel arriving in opposition-controlled areas in northern Syria, the rest coming from Kurdish-controlled areas.³⁹ Part of this oil gets refined and consumed locally, and the rest makes its way to Turkey. Some of the refined diesel is also being smuggled to Turkey for the benefit of JAN and other armed groups since it can be sold there for a higher price. The recent clashes between the opposition and ISIL in the northern countryside of Aleppo led to a sudden sharp increase in the price of diesel in opposition-controlled areas because the delivery route was interrupted. This had a major impact on life in those areas where diesel is needed to operate electricity generators, which are the major source of electricity not only for civilians but also for hospitals and health centers. In many areas, access to water from wells and other resources also requires diesel to run the water pumps. The few remaining agricultural activities were also heavily hit by fighting. The interruption of crude oil supply also affected thousands of families in the area who now make a living from transporting, refining or trading crude oil and its products.



PICTURE 3 Cartoon poster dating 20 June 2015 from Kafranbel in opposition-controlled areas in the north west of Syria. It depicts the situation in opposition-controlled areas where there is a severe shortage of fuel after the

³⁸ "This Is Where ISIS Gets Its Weed", Jesse Rosenfeld, The Daily Beast, 21-4-2015.

³⁹ "Countering the logic of war economy in Syria", *supra*, note 8.

battles with ISIL which interrupted the flow of crude oil from ISIL-controlled territories. Courtesy of Kafranbel signs page.⁴⁰

ISIL also trades oil as a means of gaining loyalty. It devoted part of the revenue from oil to certain tribes, families and dignitaries in order to buy loyalty and avoid conflict with them. ISIL pays for allegiance by allowing access to resources, for example, in return for their oath of allegiance ISIL allowed tribes in Hasaka to trade in crude oil and refine it locally and in return they were given access to its areas in Raqqa, Deir Al Zour and Iraq. This resulted in a form of economic prosperity in the western countryside of Hasaka and a substantial drop in unemployment.

3 SOCIAL DIVISIONS AND SOCIAL RESISTANCE

The conflict in Syria has left society deeply divided. The political fault-line is not the sole issue that has polarised society: the crisis has also awakened old dormant disputes, such as the Kurdish/Arabic sectarian tensions and other inter-tribal disputes. Many of these disputes are identity-related, which is a typical characteristic of such wars⁴¹ where identity becomes a means for social mobilisation. These rifts have enabled ISIL to play people from certain communities or areas off against each other. In most of its wars, ISIL has used people from the area at the forefront of its attacks against their own area. In the battles for Kobani, for example, ISIL used Kurdish recruits. One of the interviewees from Hasaka reported to us that ISIL used members of the Sheitat tribe in attacking the Sheitat and they participated in committing the horrific massacres against the tribe. In Palmyra, people reported to us that the day after ISIL entered Palmyra, their men went around the houses asking people to show their IDs. When they spotted people whom they were after, they would assassinate them in the street. In these groups patrolling houses there were people from Palmyra itself who had joined ISIL upon its arrival in Raqqa and assisted the organisation in its subjugation of the city.

⁴⁰ [The signs of occupied Kafranbel Facebook page](#)

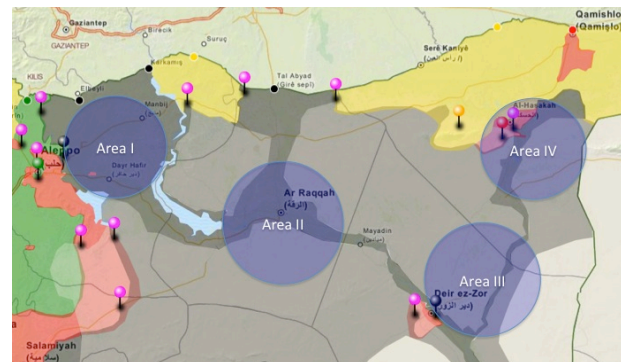
⁴¹ See “New and Old Wars: Organised Violence in a Global Era” Mary Kaldor. Polity, September 2012.

The “new war” situation has also weakened social cohesion. Areas that maintained a strong sense of social cohesion, such as in Daraa, are far more resistant to the infiltration of both JAN and ISIL as described below.

3.1 ISIL AND ‘TRIBAL AFFAIRS’ IN SYRIA

ISIL dominates four main areas of Syria that have a strong tribal presence. These are the eastern countryside of Aleppo, Raqqa province, Deir Al Zour countryside and parts of the countryside of Hasaka (see Map 2).

The Arab tribes in these four areas were subject to different elements in the crisis as well as experiencing their own internal conflict. ISIL exploited existing divisions to its own benefit. This meant that different Arab tribes had differing motivations as to why they decided to swear an oath of allegiance to ISIL, or indeed on occasions to fight against it.



MAP 2 Map showing different zones of tribal presence in ISIL-controlled areas in Syria as per 1 June 2015. The colour coding is the same as in Map 1. Original map courtesy of deSyracuse maps of the Syrian civil war⁴, tribal zones added by the author.

ISIL has taken tribal issues very seriously. It has its own tribal affairs department, an *Amir* to run it and has successfully mediated many inter-tribal disputes. Other methods such as bribery and revenue sharing have been used to play tribes against each other and in some cases to play members of one tribe against another. Nevertheless, it is not clear how the role of tribes fit into ISIL’s long-term strategy, as their loyalty cannot be taken for granted.

The majority of the tribes in the main four areas have tried to avoid taking part in the bloodbath and preferred not to side with one party or another, with the exception of the initial armed resistance to ISIL by tribes in Der al Zour. They have all suffered, like many other Syrians who have been affected by the

war, from extreme poverty caused by the collapse of agriculture largely due to violence, the lack of diesel and fertilizers, the looting of essential water pumps as well as the spread of diseases due to the use of crude oil. The four areas have remained with limited health care for over two years, and they are heavily dependent on humanitarian aid.

Several agreements took place between ISIL and different Arab tribes. Despite the different conditions and mechanisms, the content remains the same: declaring an oath of allegiance to ISIL, the acceptance of ISIL preacher sheikhs in the mosques in exchange for the tribe retaining its arms and the safety of its members. This is what happened for example with the Baggara tribe in the northern countryside of Deir al-Zour, the Ghanem tribe in Aleppo countryside and in Raqqa with a section of the A'fadela tribe. Such agreements do not mean that the members of the tribe are expected to fight with ISIL. However, ISIL has managed to recruit some individual members of these tribes without requiring permission from their family and clan. Some individuals also join for purely financial reasons.

We were told that ISIL monitors mosques in tribal areas and picks up young people who do not turn up for prayers in the mosque. They then arrest them and compel them to undergo an indoctrination course that lasts from one to three months. After the course many get recruited to join ISIL, and at this stage it is almost impossible for the tribe or the family to interfere as the tribe or the family lose their ability to influence their members at such stage.

In the following four sections we describe the different contexts in each area and how local divisions and failures of other actors facilitated ISIL's expansion.

AREA I: EASTERN COUNTRYSIDE OF ALEPPO

Residents of this area have suffered from insecurity, kidnappings and chaos because of the fragmentation of the Free Syrian Army (FSA). This is the main reason why people have acquiesced in the presence of ISIL, as it has brought relative order. Typically, people from the area are not ideologically supportive of ISIL. Those that we interviewed from the area stressed that ISIL had no social incubator in this region, although there are small but influential

numbers of Syrian Wahabis⁴² who were residing in Saudi Arabia and returned after the revolution turned into armed conflict. Despite this, some tribal leaders swore allegiance to ISIL out of fear, in order to protect their clan or simply because they sought influence. Some small tribes pledged allegiance because they were in dispute with other tribes in the area, an issue that worsened during the period of FSA dominance because clashes over land ownership were exacerbated by the absence of state authorities.

The type of individuals who had joined ISIL to fight for them in this area, as reported to us by tribal leaders we interviewed, included:

1. Enthusiastic young revolutionaries who were disappointed with FSA and other armed opposition groups. ISIL took advantage of their passion and manipulated them for its own ends.
2. Young people who no longer had financial resources.
3. Returning Syrian Wahhabis (as explained above).

In contrast, JAN is somewhat more acceptable than ISIL to the society in the countryside of Aleppo, but only when compared to other actors.

AREA II: RAQQA

There is no social incubator for ISIL in Raqqa, meaning there is no innate sympathy that can be built on for them by the society, especially as the people of the province were mainly supportive of the Syrian government. Few of the tribal leaders were allied with the revolution and the FSA. The same conditions in the eastern countryside of Aleppo explained above, apply to them, although the economic factor was much more significant as they had even fewer resources and they are further away from areas under government and opposition control. Allegiance to ISIL was their only route to survival.

AREA III: DEIR AL ZOUR COUNTRYSIDE

In this area, tribal balance and the access to oil were the decisive factors. Although initially some tribes in

⁴² Members of Wahhabism; ultra conservative religious Sunni movement originating in Saudi Arabia in the 18th Century. It is the primary form of Islam in Saudi Arabia today.

Deir Al Zour fought ISIL, interviewee reported that the Deir Al Zour countryside seemed to be more accepting of ISIL than the other areas. Many had supported JAN before as well. Most of the residents of the city of Deir Al Zour city moved either to Hasaka, to Damascus or fled to Turkey and the Gulf States.

AREA IV: COUNTRYSIDE OF HASAKA.

The situation in Hasaka is radically different from the other tribal areas. The main reason for the pledge of allegiance or affiliation with ISIL is the fear of the creation of a Kurdish entity and the conflict with the Democratic Union Kurdish party (PYD).

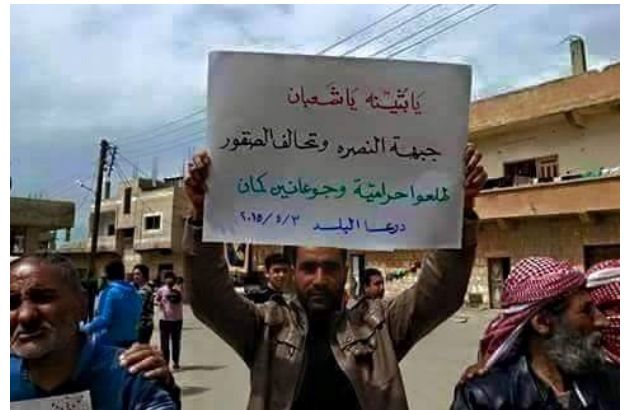
Most of the tribes of Hasaka are pro-Syrian government but the alliance of the government with some of the Kurdish parties and forces made these tribes feel marginalized and exposed. Added to this was the fact that the Arab tribes in this area were already at a disadvantage as most of the economic and educational power in this area is held by Christians and Kurds. The Arab tribes in this area did not have any political affiliations other than the Baath Party, whereas the Kurds had their own well-established political movements.

With the exception of the Shammar tribe (a traditional ally to the Kurds in this area), the Arab tribes felt that the Kurdish alliance with the government ran contrary to their interests. As tribal leaders from this area explained to us, this is the main reason why they supported ISIL, despite the fact that they can in no way become a social incubator for ISIL nor JAN. This however applies only to the current generation. The new generation is subject to the indoctrination of ISIL and could develop a different position. Despite desperate economic needs, the fear of the Syrian government-Kurdish alliance remains the main motivation. The tribes in this area did their best to protect their younger members; some of them have sworn allegiance to ISIL while some others joined the Syrian government forces and others supported the Kurdish forces. JAN has no social incubator in this area.

3.2 SOCIAL RESISTANCE TO ISIL AND JAN IN DARAA

Daraa is an area where the community is socially cohesive and supported by a tribal and family structure. A network of expat businessmen from Daraa was also strongly involved in overall decision

making in the opposition-controlled part of this province, together with local social and armed leaders. Daraa only saw an influx of Al Qaeda-affiliated foreign fighters in the second year of the conflict in Syria, but since mid-2013 the increased restrictions of movement across the Jordanian/Syrian borders strongly limited the inflow of both people and arms linked to JAN or ISIL. JAN forces arrived in Daraa after they were forced to withdraw from Deir al-Zour by ISIL. Overall the situation in Daraa is less chaotic than in the north where ISIL and JAN found more fertile ground for their expansion.



PICTURE 4 Man at a protest in Daraa holding a sign saying that JAN turned out to be greedy thieves, May 2015

These factors, together with the fact that the people of the area are not known to be very strict religiously meant that the area was in a position to resist the expansion of extreme organisations like JAN and ISIL. JAN's ability to stay in Daraa has been based on its ability to offer good salaries, exploiting the fact that unemployment is extremely high in an area with increased needs, and that other brigades were unable to match its salaries. We present here some examples of the social resistance to JAN in Daraa:

REFUSING TO FACILITATE RANSOMS

After the increased pressure on outside funders in financing ISIL and JAN, paying ransoms for the release of kidnapped people, especially foreigners became an indirect way of financing terrorism in Syria. In many cases, extremist armed groups would kidnap a westerner, or even 'buy him' from another armed actor, and ask for several millions of dollars in ransom. The governments of the countries these kidnapped people come from refused to pay ransom but usually Gulf interlocutors and donors (the cases we interviewed people pointed at interlocutors and

donors from Qatar) would step in and offer to make the payment which they then pay to these groups without complaints from the international community.

In Daraa however this funding strategy for JAN has failed, mainly because of the strong opposition of the people of Daraa. In a recent case JAN offered to release kidnapped Swedes in return for 4 million USD. Sweden's policy is not to pay ransoms. According to two people we interviewed on this case, interlocutors from Qatar offered to pay this ransom and they asked an influential social leader whom we interviewed to facilitate the exchange. He was alerted to the significance of such funding going to JAN, and he refused to facilitate the exchange or to let it take place. Given the nature of the area and the strong social ties it would have been difficult to see how this exchange could take place without the knowledge and consent of the people of the area. Eventually the exchange did not take place. Since then the "kidnapping and exchange market" has not seen many transactions and subsequently the level of kidnapping declined sharply.

REFUSING TO COLLABORATE WITH JAN

On the 12th of April 2015 the leadership of the Southern Front in the FSA issued a statement refusing any collaboration with JAN or any other Takfiri-type organisation.⁴³ Shortly after that they attacked some of the offices of JAN and arrested some of its members. Although some analysts claimed this move against JAN was ordered by western supporters and donors, three people we interviewed stressed that the pressure had come mainly from the community of Daraa expat businessmen, together with dignitaries from Daraa who were concerned about the destiny of the province should JAN expand its power there. Concerns about the continued violations by JAN in the south were also reported to be behind this move, including an incident that took place shortly before the release of the 12th of April statement that shifted the public mood in Daraa against JAN. JAN members had stormed into the house of a fighter from one of the FSA brigades. They arrested him, claiming that he

had sworn allegiance to ISIL. His mother was present and she appealed to JAN not to arrest him, stressing that he was innocent of the charge. JAN forces treated her violently and pushed her back and she fell on the ground. This behaviour in particular played a big role in shifting the local emotions against JAN. A friend of the arrested man, and a member of the same clan and brigade, confronted JAN about what they had done and they arrested him as well. The clan to which these two men belong and the brigade they fight for immediately responded with serious pressure on JAN, including armed attacks on its premises. Before long the two men were released and the one accused of dealing with ISIL was referred to the Justice House, which is the judicial entity that all brigades in the area, including JAN, have adopted as the legal authority. The house of Justice in its turn declared this man to be innocent and released him.

WOMEN'S POWER

The village of Ghousem, 30 km to the east of Daraa is under opposition control. In March 2014, JAN decided to expand its influence to this village, claiming that the people of Ghousem were not religious enough. On the first day in the village, JAN forces occupied a large house originally owned by a government official. They raised their flag over the house and fortified it with arms. The people of the village, men and women, reached out to the JAN members and asked them to leave the village but they refused. The next day, the women of the village took the matter into their own hands. They surrounded the house themselves. They sat on the ground and announced that they were not moving until JAN moved out of the village. Two days later, having not moved an inch, JAN reached a conclusion that if the women of the village were like this then they had little chance of exerting control and preaching their ideology. They took their arms and left the village. Participants reported other cases where women took the lead in deterring JAN in Daraa, including a protest they held in the Tareeq Al Saad area of Daraa city in 2013 against JAN, which led to JAN leaving the area.

3.3 IDEOLOGICAL VACUUM

Before the conflict, the Ba'ath party imposed its own ideology and beliefs on all Syrians. Brainwashing started in schools from early childhood and continued throughout the education system. Any other movements, including religious ones, were suppressed. Even the tribal structure was challenged.

⁴³ *"Opposition forces in the south of Syria refuse to collaborate with JAN"*. Aljazeera, 14-4-2015

This system collapsed very quickly with the withdrawal of the government from the areas now controlled either by ISIL or other armed groups. Not many actors on the ground were able to fill the subsequent ideological vacuum. ISIL is one of few actors who had active preachers reaching out to the community and organizing events to market their ideology. Moderate religious figures whom we interviewed said that they had very little space or tools to be able to counter the way that ISIL reaches out to young men. One civil society activist reported that, through discussions and persuasion, he was able to convince a Syrian fighter who joined ISIL to leave them. He expressed his concern that hardly anyone is reaching out to engage or communicate with this section of ISIL recruits.

ISIL puts most of its effort into recruiting and brainwashing children rather than adults. A middle aged man who fled Raqqa told us that they are not very concerned about changing the minds of men of his age and they do this only when they are interested in this person's fighting potential. ISIL'S main interest, he says, is in grooming children, especially boys, who are sent to special camps after which they become so loyal to ISIL that they turn against their parents and community for ISIL's sake.

The danger of these activities by ISIL is severely underestimated and the consequences are far-reaching. The results are not only a threat to Syria and the region itself but are also a global security threat. This again is not an action that can be countered by aerial strikes.

4 THE CASE OF MANBIJ

The story of how ISIL took over Manbij, the first city it gained total control over, is a fine example of the way ISIL exploits existing divisions and economic needs. It shows the way ISIL prioritized the take over of strategic resources important for people's lives, mainly fuel, bread, water and electricity. The narrative of the Manbij takeover was reported to us by three civil society and LACs members from Manbij whom we interviewed. Their accounts were corroborated in the media.

The city of Manbij in the north-east of Aleppo province came under opposition control as early as

July 2012. Opposition actors then conducted civic activities in an attempt to govern the city and revive civil society life in it.⁴⁴ Manbij's original population is estimated to be around 650,000 people and it now hosts around 220,000 IDPs. The people of Manbij managed to keep many of the state institutions running, including civic courts. The city has large mills with a capacity of 425 tons per day⁴⁵ that provided flour to the entire countryside of Aleppo. After an initial period of relative calm, the city could not remain protected from the turmoil due to its location in a heavily contested area. The civic court, operating under the LAC, was attacked by brigades from the neighboring town of Al Bab. Members of their brigade had been arrested by the court because they allegedly kidnapped people from Manbij. Shortly afterwards, in early 2013 the opposition brigades active in Manbij formed a Sharia court. Internal fights between the opposition brigades led some of them to seek the help of JAN in March 2013 to enter Manbij along with an Ahrar Al Sham brigade to help them fight rival brigades. They fought several battles against opposition brigades. Shortly after this, the split between JAN and what later became ISIL took place, in April 2013. JAN forces which were in Manbij changed allegiance to join ISIL. It was not long before the local population and actors became alert to the danger of ISIL. In July 2013⁴⁶ they were already protesting, calling for ISIL to leave Manbij. ISIL started forcing the mosques to accept its own preachers to take over addressing the people after prayers. When Sheikh Muhammed Saiis Aldibo, the Imam of the central mosque in Manbij, refused their request they arrested and killed him. Such moves concerned even those who initially brought JAN to Manbij and they turned against it. ISIL continued to expand its power in the city and it took over the cash rich Animal Feeds company (owned originally by the government). They rapidly made a fortune from selling the animal feeds. This put them in an empowered position to recruit more people and further expand in the city. They suppressed all

⁴⁴ *"The Manbij Experiment: Rebels Make a Go of Governing in Liberated City"* Der Spiegel, 2-10-2012

⁴⁵ [General Company for Mills in Syria web site](#)

⁴⁶ [The first demonstration against ISIL in Manbij was on 19-7-2013.](#)

demonstrations of civil society activity in Manbij and targeted members of civil society, starting with media groups. They also took over the aid warehouses of the relief organizations.

ISIL found its best recruiting community in Manbij to be that of the IDPs who had escaped the violence of the neighboring town of Safeera. They were marginalised and in dire need of aid and assistance. There were significant tensions between them and the host community, especially armed opposition forces who had attempted to expel them from the schools where they took refuge; allegedly this was in order to operate the buildings as schools again. This move was supported by demonstrations calling openly for the expulsion of the Safeera IDP community from these schools.⁴⁷ This, coupled with the severe economic needs within this IDP community, made them the main source of ISIL's fresh recruits in Manbij. This further exacerbated the rift between the host and IDPs community⁴⁸ which again served ISIL's interests. For example, one popular page in the Manbij newspaper published a post on 9 February 2014 shortly after ISIL had taken complete control over Manbij. It addressed the Safeera IDP community in Manbij saying *"Is this the reward for our support for you and for hosting you? You support ISIL against the revolutionaries?! Now most of the recruits in ISIL are from those displaced from Safeera...Do not forget that the revolutionaries will be coming back and they will not show mercy to traitor agents like you"*.

ISIL's next strategic move to take control of Manbij was to fight for the control of the mills. This put them in further direct confrontation with opposition brigades. All the other opposition brigades joined forces to publish a recorded statement⁴⁹ on August

2013. They asked ISIL to act like any other brigade in Manbij and not to interfere in the running of civic life and to stop interfering with private and public assets and hand them over to the revolutionary council. In August 2013 an agreement⁵⁰ was reached between ISIL and opposition brigades stating that the management of the mills was going to be delegated by ISIL and the armed opposition to what they called the "Islamic Administration". This agreement was meant to end the fight over control of the mills, but for ISIL it was only a temporary measure while they advanced their control over other important resources in Manbij. Notably they focused on the production of bread. They continued their battles against Jund al Haramen brigade, the largest opposition brigade in Manbij and they took over the silos and the automated bakeries under the Jund al Haramen's control⁵¹ in November 2013. Shortly after this ISIL took full control of Manbij, but this did not last for long. A surge to fight ISIL in the area and increased coordination amongst opposition brigades managed to expel ISIL from Manbij on 5 January 2014 and the Emir of ISIL in Manbij was arrested.⁵² ISIL, which was still in control of all the roads leading to Manbij, imposed a complete siege on the city which lasted for a week. It also sent additional forces to regain the control of Manbij.⁵³ On 23 January 2014, ISIL again took full control of Manbij, which it continues to hold at the time of the writing of this paper. The walls that were previously decorated with the optimistic paintings and slogans of civil society in Manbij were all painted black. ISIL imposed its brand of extreme punishment and public beheadings started occurring regularly. They imposed their strict rules including limiting the movement of women. They took over the control of the power plant in Der Hafer which feeds Aleppo and its countryside, including Manbij, and took over the control of Teshreen dam in Manbij. Once they were in control

⁴⁷ The activists from Safira published a [statement](#) in 12-7-2013 denouncing the demonstrations in Manbij calling for their evictions from schools.

⁴⁸ For example the one popular page for Manbij news published a [post](#) in 9-2-2014

⁴⁹ The video was published on youtube titled: *"The statement of the revolutionary and military council and other fighting brigades in Manbig"*. Available under:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pK1KBVtZdGw>

⁵⁰ *"Agreement is reached between ISIL and FSA to end dispute about mills and bakeries"* Aks Alser, 9-9-2013.

⁵¹ *"ISIL finished Jund Al Haramen brigade in Manbij"*. Arabi online. 3-11-2013.

⁵² *"FSA drives ISIL from Atmeh and Manbij and arrest their Emir in Aleppo"*. Alaan Tv news 5-1-2014.

⁵³ *"ISIL heads to Manbij"*, Syria direct, 20-01-2014.

of the fuel supply from the oil wells and in control of the supply of bread, water and electricity, ISIL's overall control and authority became unquestionable. They then moved quickly to regulate the governance of the city and to charge people for services.

All the promises they pledged to people in order to gain their support, including cheaper bread and free services, evaporated shortly after they took complete control. Abu Muhammed the German, ISIL's head of the electricity supply authority in Manbij, even called on people to pay all their unpaid electricity bills dating back to mid-2012 just as Manbij came under the control of the opposition.⁵⁴ The same applied to water and the price of bread increased considerably. They even raised the rents and imposed taxes on shops. The properties of most of those who were affiliated with the opposition were looted and confiscated. ISIL deployed their police and *al Hisba* forces and imposed a sense of much yearned for basic security in the city.

5 ISIL AND WOMEN

Although ISIL has a fully justified reputation for brutality against women, particularly against non-Sunni Muslim females, a careful analysis of their actions show that the group attaches particular importance to women in maintaining power.

Women are particularly important for ISIL for their long-term plans of state building. They are seen as the potential mothers of a new generation who must be brainwashed by ISIL from birth. It is noticeable that the majority of the public executions are against men. While Reuters very recently reported "Islamic State beheads female civilians for first time in Syria,"⁵⁵ in both cases the women were beheaded with their husbands. ISIL makes particular efforts to recruit women to come to ISIL-controlled territory, with the main selling points being a secure life with stable income. The prominent women's rights activist Amal Nasser, whom we interviewed,

reported to us many cases she came across of women in government-controlled areas being recruited to live in ISIL territory, saying, "[t]hey particularly target widows who lost their husbands during the conflict and who have young children to look after. They promise them regular salaries which increase with the number of children and all their relocation costs. These women are particularly vulnerable especially with the absence of any other type of support amid rising living costs." Once in ISIL territory, the children are enrolled in ISIL indoctrination camps and schools. The women are likely to marry one of ISIL's loyal members to produce more offspring for the growing state.

On January 2015, ISIL's all-female Al-Khanssaa Brigades published a document entitled "Women in the Islamic State: Manifesto and Case Study."⁵⁶ The semi-official manifesto on women denounced the universal human rights of the "western civilization" - in particular gender equality - and focused on a woman's role as a mother: "*The greatness of her position, the purpose of her existence is the Divine duty of motherhood. Truly greatness is bestowed upon her, and it is God's will that her children honour her*". In return, ISIL promised women security and justice. "*Many of those who went to Mosul since the establishment of the caliphate, even enemy journalists, saw the sense of security that has washed over the land and now reached all corners.*" In addition to welfare and justice; "*Muhaajirat [women migrating to ISIL areas] families in Raqqa live in peace and are untouched by hunger, the cold winds or frost. The caliphate fairly divides money among all the people, migrant and non migrant.*"

6 U.S. AND UK STRATEGIES TO DEFEAT ISIL

The key failing of both UK and U.S. strategies to defeat ISIL in Syria is the continued lack of political strategy and the focus mainly on military action. The US and the UK have helped to restore governance in Syria by funding the LACs but as shown in the paper *Countering the logic of war economy in Syria; evidence*

⁵⁴ "*Living under ISIL, Eqtsad observes people's life in Manbij*" Eqtsad news, 28-4-2014.

⁵⁵ "*Islamic State beheads female civilians for first time in Syria*". Reuters, 30-6-2015.

⁵⁶ "*Women of the Islamic State; a manifesto on women by Al-Khanssaa Brigade*". Translated and published by the Quilliam Foundation. Feb. 2015.

from three local areas⁵⁷ this top-down funding does not necessarily translate into governance and stability. It is more donor-driven than needs-driven. Moreover, the US and UK's ability to provide support for governance and civil society in many of the opposition-controlled areas has been hampered by the reluctance to provide support in areas where JAN has a presence.

Both countries stress the importance of drying up ISIL's resources. As stated in U.N. Security Council Resolution 2170 (August 15, 2014), this involves "reducing ISIL's revenue from oil and assets it has plundered; limiting ISIL's ability to extort local populations; and stemming ISIL's gains from kidnapping for ransom and disrupting the flow of external donations to the group."⁵⁸ Some of the coalition aerial strikes have hit oil installations, power plants and silos but this has often increased the pressure on various actors to acquire resources through other means related to violence, such as extortion or kidnapping.

More importantly perhaps, this focus on countering the war economy does not seem to extend to areas in Syria not yet under ISIL control. This is where, as explained in section 2.2.2, there remains a need for the oil provided by ISIL and where conditions are favourable for ISIL to swiftly move in and extort the local population.

Other key elements of the U.S. and UK strategies are supporting UN efforts, working with the Iraqi government supporting the Kurdish regional government, military support in Iraq, counter-terrorism initiatives at home and providing humanitarian aid to those in need who have fled from ISIL.

U.S. POLICY

The United States and its allies have set the defeat of ISIL as a key priority. This has even included the return of U.S. forces to Iraq after the painful

experiences of the Iraqi occupation. U.S. airpower is being used to target ISIL in both Iraq and Syria.

The American counter-ISIL strategy, however, does not seriously address the governance and political solution in Syria, publicly restricting strengthening governance only to the situation in Iraq. The main form of support is merely the provision of aid rather than specific measures to strengthen governance, increase stability, reduce unemployment and encourage social cohesion in opposition-held areas. In the Iraqi theatre, there has been some modest success in reforming the political governance situation with the forced resignation of the Iraqi Prime Minister, Nouri Al-Maliki. In Syria, the debate over the transition of the current Syrian government as outlined in the Geneva communiqué of June 2012⁵⁹ has still not been resolved.

Many Syrians who oppose the government and external supporters of the opposition fear that the struggle against ISIL has distracted from the need for Syrian political process and negotiations over how to implement the Geneva communiqué. Those groups who wish to overthrow the "Assad regime" are angered and believe that the U.S. and its allies are no longer supportive of this aim. This has reduced U.S. credibility and increased doubts about the U.S. ability to come up with a convincing political strategy that offers stability and a safe and secure future. On the contrary; air strikes are reportedly helping ISIL to mobilize more supporters. One civil society activist from Aleppo reported to us that even some secular-leaning fighters in opposition-controlled Aleppo seriously considered fighting with ISIL after the onset of the attacks of the international coalition against ISIL began. Their logic was the bitter disappointment of waiting so long for the west to interfere in Syria against the government, which did not happen, and then seeing the west move against other forces in Syria.

In 2014, the U.S. Congress provided the President with authority and funds to overtly train and lethally equip vetted members of the Syrian opposition for

⁵⁷ "Countering the logic of war economy in Syria", *supra*, note 8.

⁵⁸ More on the U.S. strategy can be found at the web site of Operation Inherit Resolve, the name given to the U.S. led operation against ISIL.

⁵⁹ Action Group for Syria, Final Communiqué, 30.06.2012.

several purposes including fighting ISIL.⁶⁰ The aim, according to President Obama in June 2014 was “defending the Syrian people from attacks by the Syrian regime, facilitating the provision of essential services, and stabilizing territory controlled by the opposition” and in September 2014 it was amended to include the goal of combating ISIL. By the time it came to implementation the goal seem to be limited to combating ISIL, which led to criticism and frustration amongst members of Syrian armed opposition.⁶¹ Many of those who had been vetted for the program and even those who had begun participation, chose to withdraw from it.

Obama’s original request for stabilizing opposition-held areas and providing services in them was transformed into “securing territory controlled by the opposition” in the enacted legislations, which was interpreted as a shorter-term commitment than the initial “stabilizing” aim.⁶² The enacted legislation also declared promoting conditions for a negotiated settlement to end the conflict in Syria as a purpose of U.S. assistance, but it does not spell out what these conditions are. As noted by the Train and Equip Program for Syria: Authorities, Funding, and Issues for Congress report⁶³ “Administration argues that pressure must be brought to bear on the government of Bashar al Asad in order to convince its leaders to negotiate a settlement to the conflict that might or might not result in their departure from office. Administration officials have not publicly described the precise nature of any such pressure that the United State intends to use, the specific terms of its potential application, or how Congress and the public might measure the potential success for such pressure in achieving related strategic ends”. This ambiguity in the political vision led to more scepticism about the

⁶⁰ “Train and Equip Program for Syria: Authorities, Funding, and Issues for Congress”. Congressional Research Service, June 9, 2015

⁶¹ “Syrian Rebels Say US Train And Equip Program Lacks Clarity, Support” International Business Times, 7-5-2015.

⁶² *Supra* note 60.

⁶³ *Ibid*

train and equip programme by experts and by many Syrians.⁶⁴

UK POLICY

In the evidence taken before the Parliamentary Liaison Committee in December 2014, the UK Prime Minister expressed clear understanding of the core difference between ISIL and any other terrorist organisation. “This is not a terrorist body that has found a willing host. It is a terrorist body that runs a state, has oil revenues, has weapons, has land, has money and all the rest of it.”⁶⁵

This understanding of ISIL’s state-like nature is also reflected in UK strategy to defeat ISIL. The UK Prime Minister opened the House of Commons debate on ISIL by saying “this strategy also involves political efforts to support the creation of a new and genuinely inclusive Government in Iraq and to bring about a transition of power in Syria that can lead to a new representative and accountable government in Damascus so that they, too, can take the fight to ISIL.”⁶⁶ Despite this more advanced understanding of the nature of ISIL in comparison to that expressed by U.S. officials, there are no clear signs of any serious UK effort to reach a political solution in Syria, and not enough emphasis on local governance and stability.

As it stands, the UK government only has parliamentary permission to conduct strikes in Iraq, though seeking an extension to taking action in Syria has not been ruled out.

The Defence Select Committee published its Seventh Report of Session 2014-15 on *The situation in Iraq and Syria and the response to al-Dawla al-Islamiya fi al-Iraq al-Sham (DAESH)* (HC 690) on 5 February 2015. The Government’s response was received on 17 March 2015. In this response the UK Government stated ‘We also intend to make a substantial contribution to the planned US-led programme to train Syrian moderates at regional training centres.’

⁶⁴ *Supra* note 61.

⁶⁵ UK Government, Oral evidence taken before the Liaison Committee, 16 December 2014, HC (2014-15) 887, Q1

⁶⁶ UK Government, House of Commons debates, 26 September 2014, Column: 1258.

The report also stated the intention of finding ways of 'cutting off ISIL's access to financing and funding.'⁶⁷

7 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ISIL is trying to replace what Syrians have lost and need the most: a state. The collapse of the state in other areas and its ability to reconstruct a 'state' is one of the main reasons behind ISIL's ability to expand. The absence of law and order and the collapse of governance, all resulting from the war, led to the development of a war economy. This drew many Syrians who had no other means available, into combat recruitment and weakened Syrian social cohesion making the society far more vulnerable to ISIL and JAN infiltration and more in need of the services they provide.⁶⁸ To counter this dynamic, legitimate state building needs to be the aim of a new strategy. This is not an action that can be achieved by aerial bombardment and provision of aid.

Any contested area in Syria is a potential expansion region for ISIL. The bigger the vacuum and the more people in need, the more likely ISIL is to expand into it. Areas in the northern countryside of Homs such as Talbeeseh and Houleh are very likely to be the next areas ISIL moves into, and probably without the need to launch any battles unless swift and effective measures are taken to address the particular needs of this area.

Efforts to dry up the external funding resources of ISIL are not enough. Such measures merely push the organisation to adopt increasingly violent means to control more resources in Syria. This can be seen in ISIL's latest moves to control Palmyra and the phosphate mines nearby. Cutting off ISIL funding requires more collaboration among the various actors to ensure that the pressure on one front does not translate to expansion on another. So far there are no signs that such steps are being taken and no indication of the strong commitment that is needed

⁶⁷ Defence - Twelfth Special Report, "The situation in Iraq and Syria and the response to al-Dawla al-Islamiya fi al-Iraq al-Sham (DAESH)" 18 March 2015

⁶⁸ "Countering the logic of war economy in Syria", *supra*, note 8.

in order to end the crisis, mitigate the colossal humanitarian suffering, or challenge the global security threat ISIL poses.

In the "Countering the logic of war economy in Syria" paper⁶⁹ we put forward recommendations for combating the war economy in Syria. Most of these recommendations are very relevant to the fight against ISIL and JAN, especially those relating to border governance. Here we add more specific recommendations that are relevant to the issues discussed in this paper:

- I. **State-building:** the process in Syria needs to be reversed from state failure to state building, and this includes:
 - a. An inclusive Syrian political solution. Talks need to continue with the various parties and should encompass local voices, especially civil society. It is important to promote regional and international consensus. The main beneficiaries from contestation within Syria are ISIL and JAN.
 - b. Governance: Strong emphasis should be put on restoring governance in opposition-controlled areas, especially those which are threatened by further ISIL expansion. The LACs in Syria should be encouraged to adopt one legal framework, which should ideally be the Syrian law, and encouraged to establish clear rules about their relationship to armed, political and civic actors. Support to LACs from members of the international community should ensure that it is not subjecting these LACs to further fragmentation and the need to follow different external policies. Where possible public resources should be put in the service of public good, such as financing services, and not allowed to be exploited to fund more violence.
 - c. Any support given must be directed towards supporting a solution and not the parties to the conflict. Supporting governance and order in opposition-controlled areas, for example, should be in the framework of stabilisation towards a solution and not in the framework of

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

‘supporting the opposition’. Such support should be more inclusive and address the entire community, rather than targeted at empowering particular armed or political actors.

II. **Decreasing dependency on ISIL and JAN:** Steps should be taken to eliminate the need for ISIL and JAN, especially in the areas that fall in the margins of ISIL’s domains. This includes:

- a. **Providing fuel for opposition-controlled areas** in a legitimate way and at a reasonable price to eliminate the need to buy oil from ISIL.
- b. **Supporting jobs on the ground** rather than boots on the ground: There is an urgent need for ‘cash for work’ and ‘job creation’ projects in opposition held areas focussing on men of fighting age, especially in ISIL target recruitment areas. Such projects should be adapted to the conflict situation and be designed in such a way that creating jobs is a way to end the conflict rather than something that happens post-conflict. Whenever possible such projects should focus on restoring the local economy, such as agricultural and farming projects. Civil society, community organisations and independent figures are best suited to evaluate the need for such projects and best positioned to implement them with collaboration from the LACs.
- c. **Supporting *de facto* safe zones** inside opposition-held areas, by helping locals to maintain the security of these areas and restore services and the local economy for the benefit of the locals and IDPs. These are areas that have been spared the violence either because they are near the borders or because they didn’t demonstrate opposition to the government.
- d. Not to deprive or terminate support to LACs and civil society organisations working for the benefits of the civilians in areas with JAN presence. There also needs to be political pressure to allow international aid to enter difficult-to-reach areas. The lack of such aid is making these areas yet more dependant on JAN and ISIL.

III. **Enhancing social resilience** and empowering Syrian society to address the threat of extremist mentalities in its own organic ways including:

- a. Filling the ideological vacuum: Syrians should be empowered to address the ideological

vacuum themselves. This is particularly the case with members of the younger generation who are being groomed to become ISIL recruits, not least in Syrian IDP camps near the Turkish borders. Independent moderate Syrian social figures, including religious and tribal figures, should be given space and means to be able to address the ideological questions arising in the minds of potential recruits to ISIL.

- b. Focus on education: steps also need to be taken to ensure that children are not indoctrinated by the alternative schools that are being formed to replace Syrian state schools. A modified version of the Syrian curriculum that is freed from any indoctrination could be the best option for unified curriculum.
- c. Empower women as key actors in combating extremism.

IV. **Curbing the fight over resources:** Additional steps need to be taken to dry up ISIL funding including:

- a. Imposing much stronger controls on the borders of ISIL areas with Turkey and Iraq. This means exerting pressure particularly on Turkey to ensure that ISIL is not smuggling oil and antiquities through its borders or receiving support and supplies through these borders.
- b. Committing to a strict policy on ransoms and not accepting any hostage release by paying ransoms to ISIL and JAN, even if a third-party volunteers to pay the ransoms.
- c. Issuing a UN Security Council Resolution to protect the Syrian and Iraqi heritage and consider damaging cultural objects a war crime that has to be prosecuted. This should be more robust than the UN GA resolution on Iraq (“Saving the cultural heritage of Iraq”⁷⁰ adopted in May 2015).

⁷⁰ UN General Assembly 69th session, A/69/L71, 21-5-2015