FOOD AND SECURITY: THE CENTRALITY OF RESOURCE EXPLOITATION AND MANAGEMENT IN JIHADISM SPREADING

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FOOD AND SECURITY:

THE ROLE OF NATURAL RESOURCE EXPLOITATION AND MANAGEMENT

IN JIHADIST QUEST FOR SOCIAL LEGITIMATION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Natural resources and the control over them deeply influence the development, reinforcement and the legitimization of non-state armed groups, in particular jihadist organisations.

In fact, the jihadist phenomenon gradually succeeded in co-opting the socio-economical discomfort in part of the Arab-Islamic world and sub-Saharan Africa thanks to a peculiar expansion strategy.

The popular legitimacy and support to jihadist groups and their ability to provide educational and welfare services both come from the skills that terrorist networks have shown in defending the interests of marginalized communities and in controlling the access to natural resources, including soil, water, crop and livestock.

Thus, the key to neutralize the jihadist phenomenon and depriving it of its fundamental popular support lies in destroying such mechanisms of growth of legitimacy and control over natural resources.

To counter the expansion of jihadist organizations and to support stabilization and conflict prevention mechanisms, a long-term strategy is needed. Interventions aimed at favouring economic development, better management of natural resources, restoration and improvement of community - based structures for the resolution of social conflicts could break the link between resources exploitation and jihadist legitimation and significantly weaken the terrorist networks linked to al-Qaeda and the Islamic State.

INDEX

METHODOLOGY AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Any political organization needs legitimacy to increase its support base and, consequently, to reach power and achieve its goals. In some cases, political organizations challenge the legal framework of the states in which they act and, in fact, place themselves in direct contrast with it, in order to overthrow it and impose a new system of power. Contrast can occur in a peaceful or violent manner and, therefore, resort to tools that include the use of armed force. The means to increase this legitimacy can be different and vary according to the geographical, anthropological-cultural and socio-economic context in which these organizations operate. The most extreme examples of political organizations that use violent means to change the political and legal order of a country or a region are Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs), which are particularly active in vulnerable contexts, characterized by economical (poverty, underdevelopment) and politico-social (denial of human rights, ethnic-religious conflicts, self-referencing of ruling elites, gaps in state governance) distress. Sometimes, the activity of the NSAGs is the cause or multiplier of the factors of vulnerability, while in other cases the factors of vulnerability are exploited by the NSAGs. In both cases, the NSAGs may need natural resources and food to increase their legitimacy and, consequently, increase their power and achieve their political goals.

Natural resources are "those components of land units1 that are of direct economic use for human population groups living in the area, or expected to move into the area: near-surface climatic conditions, soil and terrain conditions, freshwater conditions and vegetation and animal conditions in so far as they provide produce. To a large degree, these resources can be quantified in economic terms. This can be done irrespective of their location (intrinsic value) or in relation to their proximity to human settlements (situational value)"2.

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[1] "Land is a delineable area of the earth's terrestrial surface, encompassing all attributes of the biosphere immediately above or below this surface including those of the near-surface climate the soil and terrain forms, the surface hydrology (including shallow lakes, rivers, marshes, and swamps), the near-surface sedimentary layers and associated groundwater reserve, the plant and animal populations, the human settlement pattern and physical results of past and present human activity (terracing, water storage or drainage structures, roads, buildings, etc.)." (l) This definition conforms to land system units. landscape-ecological units or unites de terroir, as building blocks of a watershed (catchment area) or a phytogeographic unit (biome). Definition taken from: Land and Water Development Division. Planning for sustainable use of land resources. Towards a new approach. FAO land and water bulletin 2 1995. http://www.fao.org/docrep/v8047e/v8047e00.htm

[2] The components of the natural land unit can be termed land resources, including physical, bionic, environmental, infrastructural, social and economic components, inasmuch as they are fixed to the land unit. (4) Included in the land resources are surface and near-surface freshwater resources. Part of these move through successive land units, but then the local flow characteristics can be considered as part of the land unit. The linkages between water and land are so intimate at the management level that the water element cannot be excluded (land as a unit intermixed with water, with its land use in part

Among the hundreds of NSAGs developed since the end of the Cold War (1991), salafi-jihadist3 4 organizations deserve special attention. In fact, in the last 25 years, they not only imposed themselves as the most dangerous and widespread NSAGs, but also demonstrated the most innovative evolutionary tendencies at both the tactical and strategic levels. Their pursuit of political power has led them to constantly seek new operational methodologies, some of which have included unpreceded and unexpected processes of territorialisation and institutionalization5. In the last 10 years, in areas of the world where favorable socio-political conditions existed (lack of territorial control by the State, ethnic-religious conflicts, profound popular discontent), these operational methods have also been manifested through the aware research and achievement of de facto statehood6.

Given that, the aim of this paper is to analyze if natural resources and food, as defined above, and the control over them could influence the development and the reinforcement of jihadist organizations and if and how the control and the management of natural resources allow them to legitimize themselves to local populations.

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depending on access to that water, and the unit at the same time affecting the quality and quantity of the passing water). Only the freshwater harnessed in major reservoirs outside the natural land unit, or pumped from rivers at upstream sites, can be considered as a separate resource. (5) Underground geological resources (oil, gas, ores, precious metals), and deeper geohydrological resources that normally bear no relation to the surface topography such as confined aquifers, are excluded from the group of components of the natural land unit, although it is recognized that some countries consider them as part of individual land ownership (and hence with rights to exploit or sell them). Definition taken from: Land and Water Development Division. Planning for sustainable use of land resources. Towards a new approach. FAO land and water bulletin 2 1995. http://www.fao.org/docrep/v8047e/v8047e00.htm

[3] Jihadism can be defined as an Islamic political and religious doctrine driven by "the idea that jihad (religiously-sanctioned warfare) is an individual obligation (fard'ayn) incumbent upon all Muslims, rather than a collective obligation carried out by legitimate representatives of the Muslim community (fard kifaya). Jihadist are able to do this by arguing that Muslim leaders today are illegitimate and do not command the authority to ordain justified violence. In the absence of such authority, they argue every able-bodied Muslim should take up the mantle of jihad". "Salafi-jihadism is an approach to jihadism that is coupled with an adherence to Salafism. Salafi-jihadists tend to emphasize the military exploits of the Salaf (the early generations of Muslims) to give their violence an even more immediate divine imperative. Most jihadist groups today can be classified as Salafi-jihadists, including al-Qaida and IS. Given their exclusivist view that their approach to Islam is the only authentic one, Salafi-jihadists often justify violence against other Muslims, including non-combatants, by recourse to takfir, or the excommunication of fellow Muslims. For these groups, if Muslims have been deemed to be apostates, then violence against them is licit". Both quotes are taken from S. Hamid, R. Dar Islamism, Salafism, and jihadism: A primer. Brookings 2016 https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2016/07/15/islamism-salafism-and-jihadism-a-primer/

[4] In this paper salafi-jihadist organisations will be referred as jihadist organisations or terrorist organisations.

[5] S. Elden, Terror and Territory the spatial extent of sovereignty. University of Minnesota Press 2009. https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/pais/research/researchcentres/politicaltheory/publications/elden2preview.pdf

[6] Brynjar L. Understanding Jihadi Proto-States Perspectives On Terrorism Volume 9, Issue 4. 2015. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281274357_Understanding_Jihadi_Proto-States

11

In fact, starting from the analysis of such link, the goal of the paper is to illustrate how better management of natural resources in crisis areas has the potential to deprive jihadist networks of one of their fundamental support pillars, undermining their ability to grow and strengthen.

Regarding the connections between food security / insecurity and political instability, the objective of the paper is improving awareness and understanding of the potential role of food and natural resources exploitation and management in legitimizing and sustaining terrorist organizations. Furthermore, a further objective of the paper is to understand the political and economic signals and the cases of mismanagement of natural resources that may constitute a potential breeding ground for the penetration of jihadist organizations.

The methodology of the analysis has been focused on open source research based on UN/NGO organizational reports and specialized literature review. The analysis has been structured as a comparative research based on three case studies: 1) Islamic State and the wheat market in Syria / Iraq; 2) jihadist networks and the manipulation of conflict over natural resources in the Sahel; 3) Boko Haram activities in the Lake Chad Basin. In addition, the report has tried to identify possible future scenarios in which natural resource conflict or mismanagement could help the rise or enforcement of jihadist organizations, accelerating existing conflict or even create new ones.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to analyse if natural resources and the control over them influence the development and the reinforcement of jihadist organisations and how the control and the management of natural resources allow them to legitimize themselves to local populations.

In fact, regarding the analysis of the role of natural resource control on the growth of jihadist organisations and on the capability to increase their popular support, the objective is to illustrate how better management of natural resources (i.e. soil, water, livestock, rangelands, agricultural commodities amongst others) in crisis areas has the potential to deprive such groups of one of their fundamental support pillars, undermining their ability to grow and strengthen.

Regarding the connections between food security / insecurity and political instability, the objective of the paper is improving awareness and understanding of the potential role of agriculture and natural resources in legitimizing and sustaining terrorist organisations and positing policy recommendations that those findings imply.

The analysis of the link between the exploitation and management of natural resources and sustaining of jihadism inevitably leads to a strategic reflection on the use of non-military means in the processes of stabilization and conflict prevention. In particular, if in some areas of the world jihadist organizations get enormous benefits from the exploitation of natural resources and the absence of adequate protection for discriminated minorities, consequently the improvement in the management of agricultural, food and water resources could seriously limit their spectrum of action and possibility for traction.

In this sense, the role of international organizations, including the United Nations and its various agencies, is fundamental not only to tackle humanitarian emergencies and to contribute to the stabilization of areas previously affected by war, but to address the social and economic root-causes of conflicts.

If the disruptive action of propaganda and the evocative capacity of extremist ideology were the two main instruments so that, from the beginning of the 1980s up to 11 September 2001 and since, the jihadist phenomenon gradually succeeded in co-opting the identity and cultural discomfort of part of the Arab-Islamic world, its expansion in sub-Saharan Africa in the early 2000s was the result of a peculiar economic, political and social action.

In fact, by exploiting the weak capacity of territorial control by a number of African and Middle Eastern governments and their Armed Forces, the social and political marginalization of certain ethnic minorities and the economic underdevelopment of vulnerable regions, the jihadist movements have established themselves as privileged and legitimate interlocutors of the local population. Organizations such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, also through their African branches, have built para-state sys-

tems able to administer territory through a quasi-authentic bureaucratic machine, manage economic resources, build a productive and commercial system around them, and guarantee an alternative welfare structure (but no less efficient) to the official one.

In some cases, the process of territorialisation and institutionalization of terrorist movements and the growth of their popular legitimacy could be linked to their ability to offer concrete solutions to the humanitarian emergencies of the regions at risk or to exploit ethnic divides, lack of State presence on the territory and poor levels of governance.

However, it is worth pointing out that there is no causal relationship between the growth of terrorist groups and the control of resources. In some areas of the world, specifically Africa and the Middle East, terrorist groups have used natural resources as a political tool to increase their legitimacy and power. For example, in Syria and Iraq, the Islamic State (IS), strong of a specific strategic agenda aimed at modifying the borders and the political structures in Middle East, has imposed from above the control on natural resources, on their management and on the production and marketing of food. In this case, controlling the resources was an obligatory step for an organization that, wanting to replace the State and having to take over its functions, necessarily needed to control natural resources through a bureaucratic and rational mechanism, just as it did for other sectors of public life such as justice, defence and international relations.

The Islamic State (IS) showed an unprecedented ability to use basic agricultural products to root itself in the social fabric of Syria and Iraq, to acquire legitimacy and, eventually, to establish a proto-state. Indeed, the attention IS devolved to production and distribution of wheat, barley and bread, has been instrumental in competing with other non-State armed groups (as in Syria) as well as in winning "hearts and minds" of the local population. Thus, staple food became a central tool of governance. In this regard, IS displayed a nuanced strategy. On the one hand, it forged a social pact whereby specific public goods are provided in exchange for political compliance. On the other hand, IS used the control of vital food supplies to implement divide and conquer tactics, such as providing them only to local communities and tribes who pledged loyalty. Thus, food became also a driver of IS sectarian policies.

In other parts of the world, such as Sub-Saharan Africa (Sahel region and Lake Chad region), jihadist organizations did not initially have a strategic agenda comparable to that of IS in the Middle East. Therefore, their relationship with the exploitation of natural resources has been profoundly different. In fact, both in the Sahel and in the Lake Chad basin, the terrorist movements did not initially show the will to manage natural resources directly, relying on illicit traffics as the main instrument of financing. However, due to the lack of state governance, persistent ethnic conflicts, intercommunal clashes and progressive reduction of water and agricultural resources, ji-

hadist groups have set themselves the role of mediators or apparent defenders of vulnerable social categories.

The phenomena of degradation of the environment, the processes of desertification and the reduction of agricultural resources have exacerbated the conflict between communities dedicated to farming and communities dedicated to agriculture. The lack of good governance and rule of law in the Sahel region and the collapse in the legitimacy of the ancient tribal mediators and local chiefs, custodians of customary laws, has opened the door to the penetration of jihadist networks which, step by step, have become the only authority recognized by discriminated minorities in a growing number of provinces. In this sense, the case of the semi-nomadic Fulani herders, widespread throughout Sahelian Africa and little protected by the state authorities seems particularly worrying. This ethnic group, frustrated by the lack of adequate state policies in defence of its interests, has gradually swelled the ranks of the jihadist movements, potentially turning into its best recruiting pool for the foreseeable future.

JIHADIST ORGANISATIONS, STATEHOOD AND NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

By Marco Di Liddo

In the last decade, jihadist organizations have been characterized by a clear evolutionary process that has transformed them from subversive ideological movements operating in the margins of society to complex structures with a strong territorial imprint. Taking advantage from weaknesses of governance and fragility of some vulnerable States and capitalizing the identity, social and economic discomfort of marginalized minorities, jihadist organizations have imposed themselves as actors able to control and administer huge territories. This means managing economic resources of various kinds (including natural ones) and create a bureaucratic, educational and welfare system alternative to the legitimate governmental institutions. Doing that, in the end, jihadist organisations have been able to reach political legitimation and social support by those vulnerable minorities[7].

To increase their power and popular legitimacy, terrorist organizations have used different and flexible tactics and methodologies, adapting to the social, ethnic and economic context in which they operate. So, where they deem it necessary, the terrorist networks have tried to institutionalize and achieve de facto statehood. In some cases, the processes of institutionalization were inextricably linked to the exploitation, management and redistribution of natural resources (in particular water, agricultural products and food) as a source of income, as well as a source of political and social legitimacy for jihadist activities. Indeed, in some cases, such as the Sahel belt[8], it was precisely the management or the exploitation of natural resources that allowed terrorist movements to transform themselves into highly territorialized organizations and obtain the support of local populations. Moreover, various jihadist organizations have succeeded in obtaining control and management of natural resources in precise historical moments, coinciding with the simultaneous presence of profound elements of political and economic vulnerability. In detail, jihadist organizations became resource managers when there is a scarcity of resources, for example following traumatic events such as droughts, natural disasters or war, and when traditional legal structures and state power were not able to resolve conflicts between different communities for their exploitation. Where anarchy and poverty reigned, the brute force of the jihadist organizations brought order and mechanisms for equitable and predictable food and water redistribution. In situations of extreme humanitarian crisis, with

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7 S. Elden, Terror and Territory the spatial extent of sovereignty. University of Minnesota Press 2009. https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/pais/research/researchcentres/politicaltheory/publications/elden2preview.pdf
8 See Chapter "Conflict over land and radicalisation process: the case of Fulani in the wider Sahel region"

both states and International Organisations unable to provide sufficient or adequate support to civilian population, people have been constrained to accept the iron fist of jihadist organizations rather than long lasting conflicts for resources or state exploitation and vulnerability to predation[9].

Although the strategic will to increase political legitimacy has been unitary in the global jihadist landscape, the relationship between resource management and power and management methodologies have been different and tailored to the different geographical regions. Specifically, regarding the relation with natural resources, jihadist organizations have used three main tactics: systematic management, predatory exploitation and the hybrid management (something in between the two previous ones). This classification, made by Ce.S.I., comes from the observation and the analysis of the behaviour of jihadist organisations in Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa and refers strictly to the case studies of Syria and Iraq, the Sahelian belt and Lake Chad Basin regions.

The systematic management describes a situation in which the jihadist organisation is able to fully control natural resources, manage the mechanisms of access to them and regulate food production and distribution. This tactic took roots in geopolitical contexts where jihadist organizations were very well structured and ideologically mature. In fact, in these areas, the control of resources represented an explicit and concrete action part of a precise general political plan aimed at creating new statehoods, redefining the old state borders and redesigning the regional political order. The most obvious example of this tendency is offered by the experience of the Islamic State (IS) in Syria and Iraq. In fact, in this region of the Middle East, the organization of Abu Bakr-al-Baghdadi intended to build an authentic Caliphate, a new state reality that would erase the ones existing deriving from the 1916 Sykes-Picot agreements. To do this, IS had a centralized and efficient political and administrative structure that replaced those of the Iraqi and Syrian governments, annulled laws, destroyed social and labour mechanisms to impose new ones. In this context, the control of the production and marketing of cereals and bread played a primary role in the affirmation of the power of IS on the territory, guaranteeing the certainty of the distribution chain in areas of crisis afflicted by the war. Between 2015 and 2016, during its two-year peak, IS has succeeded in taking over all the functions of States torn by internal conflicts, and therefore unable to exercise their authority, and make up for the lack of actions by international organizations in providing adequate support to populations in humanitarian emergency.

Predatory exploitation describes a situation in which the jihadist organisation is not able to directly manage natural resources, the access to them and the food production and distribution. In this case, jihadist movements just exploit and steal resources or forcibly tax social groups for the ownership of them. It is evident that predatory

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9 Brynjar L. Understanding Jihadi Proto-States Perspectives On Terrorism Volume 9, Issue 4. 2015. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281274357_Understanding_Jihadi_Proto-States

exploitation is symptomatic of an embryonic phase in the process of institutionalisation and control of the territory, as well as responding to short-term needs such as the immediate obtainment of material or financial resources for the support of the terrorist group.

The hybrid management describes a situation in which the jihadist organisation alternates elements of the two previous tactics. Militias can systematically manage resources and food in restricted areas of a region and their authority do not apply to all social communities. In the areas in which they are weaker and do not enjoy the support of locals, the jihadist militias use the predatory exploitation tactic. Hybrid management show how the jihadist organization already benefits from a good level of political legitimacy, popular support and non-negligible control of the territory, as well as demonstrating long-term objectives, such as the consolidation of a de facto statehood ready to oppose in a harsh way the one of the states.

The predatory exploitation and the hybrid management have occurred in geopolitical contexts characterized by strong tribalism and lack of well-structured and ideologically mature jihadist organizations, such as in sub-Saharan Africa. It is appropriate to underline how, in these areas, the control and management of resources did not represent the culmination of a precise political plan, but a contingent opportunity well exploited and functional to the increase of the financing flow and of the basin of recruitment of militias. Indeed, in many crisis theatres in sub-Saharan Africa, the processes of institutionalisation and territorial control of terrorist organizations, despite coming from the exploitation of favourable factors (governance gaps, ethnic-tribal conflicts, socio-economic conflicts) did not prove a precise strategic will. In this sense, the jihadist networks have been able to take advantage of the political and economic critical issues of marginalized minorities and have proposed to them as alternatives to corrupt or inadequate state and traditional institutions, as defenders of the rights of those categories forgotten by everyone. Thus, the control of the territory and the process of institutionalisation have been made possible by co-opting the political and economic agendas of these minorities. As a result, even if in these areas the process of radicalization was blander, the social legitimation became stronger. In such contexts, the relationship between jihadist organizations and resources become predatory when, through the use of coercion and violence, militiamen demanded the payment of taxes for access to fertile land or waterways, when they taxed livestock, harvest or fishery products, when they stole cattle, harvest or fishery products to resell it to the local markets. A concrete example of this operational approach is offered by the experience of Boko Haram in the Lake Chad basin. In fact, the terrorist group, born as an educational and welfare sect active in Borno Federal State (Nigeria) and in its capital Maiduguri, has progressively expanded throughout the Nigerian north east and in the neighbouring regions of Cameroon, Niger and Chad exploiting the absence of the state and the scarcity of resources to carry out raids and forcibly tax the activities of semi-nomadic herders, farmers and fisherfolk. These communities, already divided by decades of fratricidal struggles, have had to bow to the harassment of Boko

Haram, preferring to suffer their arbitrariness and their bullying rather than be forced to lose what little they possessed.

However, over the years and thanks to the lesson learned transmitted and shared by twin organizations active in the Middle East, African jihadism has also gradually included elements of the systematic management model in its traditional predatory approach, creating the base for the adoption of a hybrid management tactic. So, instead of simply looting resources or demanding taxes for their ownership, access and marketing, jihadist organizations have progressively started to actively manage water, agricultural and food resources. By exploiting the rivalries and conflicts between semi-nomadic herders and farmers for the exploitation of land and the loss of authority of the ancient mechanisms of dispute resolution, these organizations have acquired a monopoly in the administration of justice and regulation in access to resources. Also in this case, it is sub-Saharan Africa that offers the best examples.

Specifically, the hybrid management tactic appeared in the Lake Chad region, especially after the consolidation of the pro-IS faction of Boko Haram, and in the entire Western Sahel belt, from Mauritania to Chad, thanks to the Group for the Safeguard of Islam and Muslims (GSIM) and its different ethnic branches. The goal of jihadist proselytism and penetration were the communities of semi-nomadic Fulani pastoralists (or Fula people or Peul people), discriminated by the laws of the countries of the region (generally favourable to farmers) and with compromised livelihoods due to increased climate variability and the process of desertification affecting pasture availability. In fact, the decrease of land destined to pasture and water resources has increased the conflict between pastoralists and farmers, prompting the first to accept the support of jihadist organizations rushed in defence of their interests and able to regulate access to the disputed resources. However, it should be stressed that this is not a "pure" systematic management tactic as in the Middle East, either because of the lack of a highly bureaucratized jihadist structure or because of the tendency of local terrorist groups to still use, in some cases, the method of predatory exploitation.

In fact, in these cases, the systematic management is feasible where there is a high level of political and social legitimacy, while predatory exploitation is frequently used where communities oppose the arbitrariness of jihadist organizations. In the first case, the mechanism of popular legitimization is fast and evident, while in the latter it is absent and is replaced by coercion and intimidation. In any case, with both tactics, jihadist organizations achieve their goal of strengthening and growing in number and power.

WHEAT AND BREAD: ISIS IN IRAQ AND SYRIA

By Lorenzo Marinone

In the context of the tactics of exploitation of natural resources used by jihadist organizations to increase their power and legitimacy, the Islamic State (IS) is the best example of so-called systematic management.

It must be recalled that IS is just the latest manifestation of the jihadist phenomenon in the very heart of the Middle East. This organization took its first steps right in the aftermath of the war in Iraq under the leadership of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Swiftly, the insurgency against US and allied forces and provisional Iraqi institutions grew stronger. By 2004 Zarqawi's group had built a relation, albeit shaky, with Usama bin Laden, and had become widely known as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). While AQI has been absolute protagonist of the Iraqi scene since then, rebranding as Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) in 2006, its expansion in neighbouring Syria was only made possible in late 2011, at a time when Bashar al-Assad was losing grip because of country-wide unrest and Damascus wasn't able anymore to guarantee tight security measures, especially in the proximity of the border with Iraq[10]. By 2013 ISI and its widely autonomous branch in Syria, known as Jabhat al-Nusra, were increasingly at odds over matters of strategy. When Nusra refused a merger, ISI changed its name to ISIS (thus incorporating also al-sham, the Levant) and effectively took over large parts of Eastern and Central Syria.

In the decades-long evolution of contemporary jihadism, IS and its precursors showed an unprecedented tendency towards trying to legitimise statehood. This tendency was crucial for IS' genuine interest in the administration of natural resources. Thus, the exploitation of these resources (including related agricultural activities) must be regarded not simply as a driver for IS expansion, but above all as an essential pillar of its state-building efforts (including for funding purposes) and of the quest for legitimacy in the eyes of local population.

As far as the Iraqi scene is concerned, the real breakthrough happened back in 2006-7, at a time when the then AQI evolved into ISI, thus declaring its willingness to be perceived as a "State" in its own right. A related step was the establishment of a first cabinet of ministries in April 2007, a sort of "shadow government" of, but alternative to, the official Iraqi institutions. One of the keys IS ministries was the Agriculture and

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[10] A sound overview of the evolution of ISIS in both Syria and Iraq can be found in M. Weiss – H. Hassan, ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror, Regan Arts, 2015. See also A. Soufan, The Black Banners: The Inside Story of 9/11 and the War Against al-Qaeda, W. W. Norton & Company, 2011; and A. Soufan, Anatomy of Terror: From the Death of Bin Laden to the Rise of the Islamic State, W. W. Norton & Company, 2017.

Fisheries Ministry[11]. The agricultural sector is Iraq's second largest industry, employing nearly one-third of the population. In parallel, IS correctly understood that it could champion the deep grievances Sunni population held against Shia-dominated institutions in Baghdad. It comes to no surprise that IS was able to root itself in Sunni majority areas where agriculture is crucial to local economy. Indeed, in the Western governorate of Anbar nearly 25% of citizens depended on agriculture for a living in 2004, this sector being also the main economic driver of the province. After being nearly defeated in Anbar by the US surge and the experience of the Sahwa councils in 2007-8, by 2011 IS had successfully rooted itself in the North-Western governorate of Ninewa (which became its main hub), where a quarter of Iraqi wheat and more than half of Iraqi barley is produced.

However, it wasn't until 2013-4 that IS developed capabilities to actually govern over a territory. Back then, its status was more akin to an organised crime organization. Against this background, for the rise of IS was instrumental the chance to exploit the Iraqi food program (the Public Distribution System, PDS). PDS is the one of the few universal non-contributory social transfer systems in the world, and the single largest safety net among Iraq's population. By firstly infiltrating the PDS delivery system, and then by mirroring it, IS was able to posit itself as an increasingly reliable provider of basic commodities. Thus, it replaced Iraq central authorities as far as a substantial part of welfare provisions is concerned, gaining higher and higher degrees of legitimacy. Notably, the more this system became widespread across Iraqi society, the less easy was to control it, to preserve its efficiency, and to prevent its illegitimate mismanagement. Iraq's continuous reliance on a mammoth subsidized food system, one that Iraqi governments have long been unwilling to reform fearing huge backlash in terms of consensus, can thus be identified as a root cause of the rise of IS and of its endurance.

Moving forward to the expansion of IS in Syria and its relation to agricultural resources, a striking difference in the jihadist group's behaviour compared to Iraq is noteworthy. In fact, when Jabhat al-Nusra (and then IS) first appeared on the scene in late 2011-2013, an already deteriorated social and tribal texture in Eastern Syria could be swiftly and easily exploited to acquire the needed legitimacy. Indeed, a knotted complex of political developments, extreme climate events, and lack of credible economic alternatives allowed armed groups (including IS) to successfully establish a presence in the region. The Middle Euphrates River Valley (MERV) has the largest tracts of arable lands in Syria and is considered the agricultural backbone of the country. From 2007 to 2010, the MERV experienced an unprecedented drought[12].

[11] A. al-Tamimi, The Evolution in Islamic State Administration: The Documentary Evidence, in Perspectives on Terrorism, 9:4 (2015), available online at http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/447/html

[12] M. Ali, Years of Drought: A Report on the Effects of Drought on the Syrian Peninsula, Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, 2014. Available online at https://lb.boell.org/en/2014/03/03/years-drought-report-effects-drought-syrian-peninsula-environmental-justice

Semi-nomadic Arab tribes lost most part of their yearly revenues, while the same dynamics weakened the clout of tribal leaders, both in rural and in urban areas, for it was upon them to oversee a distribution of wealth deemed fair by the tribes[13]. Beneath the surface, emerging grievances pointed also to precise agricultural policies implemented by the Baath party and the Assad family. While dating back to the '60s, these policies consistently shared the same interest in exploiting agriculture reforms and reassignments of plot of lands with the overall goal of favouring the emergence of a class of powerful landowners loyal to Damascus[14]. The wave of liberalization measures in early 2000s only exacerbated this trend by replacing nearly feudal dynamics with rampant crony capitalism[15].

Therefore, it comes to no surprise that most of the disenfranchised people in the MERV quickly established close links with armed groups in 2011, and with al-Nusra and ISIS, out of a deep desire of revenge and a will for scattering Assad's political economy in the region. Thus, notwithstanding international aid coming from WFP, the absence of adequate mitigation measures put timely in place during the drought, as well as the inability of the State to provide credible income alternatives, unless through migration towards industrial hubs such as the city of Aleppo, can be considered a fundamental prerequisite factor in the rise and expansion of IS in Syria.

During the following years, IS showed an unprecedented ability to improve and raise its means of control of the territory across Iraq and Syria. Among them, there were psychological ones (terror over civilian population), social ones (enforcement of strict religious and social codes), administrative ones (creation of a new burocratic architecture) and, of course, economical ones. Regarding the latter, a special mention deserves the tactic to use basic goods such as wheat, bread and other agricultural products to increase popular support and enhancing re-distribution mechanisms. At the time of its maximum expansion, the organization led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi controlled a land the size of Britain and ruled over 8 to 12 million people. Coupled with military action, the attention IS devolved to production and distribution of wheat, barley and bread, has been instrumental in winning the competition with its rivals (both state and non-state organizations) and ultimately driving them out.

Indeed, IS didn't expand in a vacuum but in a dense environment where other non-state actors and state institutions had been vying with each other for power and control for years. After years of fighting in the Syrian civil war, armed groups shared a common, albeit varied, tendency to institutionalization. Providing welfare assistance, re-distributing resources, administering justice and regulating everyday life were ac-

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[13] M. Ababsa. Contre-réforme agraire et conflits fonciers en Jazîra syrienne (2000-2005), Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée, Université de Provence, 2007, pp.211-230.
[14] M. Ababsa, Crise agraire, crise foncière et sécheresse en Syrie (2008-2011), Maghreb-Machrek 215, 2013/1, p. 101-122. DOI : 10.3917/machr.215.0101
[15] R. Hinnebusch and T. Zintl , eds., Syria from Reform to Revolt, Volume 1: Political Economy and International Relations, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2015.

tual drivers of legitimization of their role in front of the population[16]. At the same time, local institutions in several Sunni-populated Iraqi provinces (especially Anbar and Ninewa) developed an increasing sense of mistrust toward the federal government in Baghdad, whose policies were often deemed discriminatory[17]. IS skilfully shaped its tactics with regard to the specific contexts in which it was operating.

In Syria, the Assad army regularly bombed bakeries in the villages under rebel control in order to disrupt their ability to emulate functions typically associated with the state. Thus, upon taking control of urban centres or small rural villages, IS steadily re-opened bakeries and even distributed bread and staple food for free[18], a tactic that IS employed regularly in order to assert control over one of the very core needs of the population. By focusing primarily on staple food, IS showed a sound understanding of this "democracy of bread"[19], a peculiar kind of social pact in which public goods are provided in exchange for political compliance that is engraved especially in rural dwellers' mind.

In Iraq, IS adopted a much more assertive approach and regarded mainly food-related infrastructures such as silos as strategic assets. After having confiscated nearly 25% of national wheat and barley stockpiles, IS began depriving its opponents of vital food supplies while providing them only to local communities and tribes who pledged loyalty. With this divide and rule tactics, IS mirrored the Iraqi Public Distribution System (and Iraqi public administration as a whole), while also rebalancing it along its sectarian policies and created clientelistic bonds. Days after the takeover of Mosul in 2014, IS officials ordered all Sunni personnel of the Department of Agriculture to come back to work in order to keep all the bureaucratic system up and running[20]. At its maximum expansion in 2015-6, IS controlled 60% of the croplands in Iraqi province of Ninewa (where more than half of Iraq barley is produced) and 75% in Kirkuk, along with the most productive Syrian provinces of Raqqa, Aleppo and Hasakah where 77% of Syrian wheat and 72% or barley was produced before the war[21].

The management of agricultural resources also guaranteed to IS a sizeable, and most of all renewable stream of revenue that made the group economically independent

[16] S. Abboud, Social Change, Network Formation and Syria's War Economies, Middle East Policy, 24:1, p.92-107, 2017. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/mepo.12254

[17] H. Al-Qarawee, Iraq's Sectarian Crisis: A Legacy of Exclusion, Carnegie Middle East Center, April 2014, http://carnegie-mec.org/2014/04/23/iraq-s-sectarian-crisis-legacy-of-exclusion-pub-55372

[18] A. Barnard and H. Saad, ISIS Alternates Stick and Carrot to Control Palmyra, The New York Times, 28 May 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/29/world/middleeast/isis-alternates-stick-and-carrot-to-control-palmyra.html

[19] L. Sadiki, Towards Arab Liberal Governance: From the Democracy of Bread to the Democracy of the Vote, Third World Quarterly 18:1, p.127–148, 1997. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/01436599715091

[20] R. Callimachi, The ISIS Files: When Terrorists Run City Hall, The New York Times, 4 April 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/04/04/world/middleeast/isis-documents-mosul-iraq.html

[21] H. Jaafar and E. Woertz, Agriculture as a funding source of ISIS: A GIS and remote sensing analysis, Food Policy, vol.64, p.14-25, 2016. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodpol.2016.09.002

from external donors. If the one-time confiscation of grain stockpiles accounted for some 200$ million of revenues in 2014, taxation of every single step across the whole supply chain (from renting confiscated fields to harvest tax, from highway tolls for transport to the grinding of grains into flour at mills) provided a constant flow of cash. In a leaked financial document of the IS administration of Deir ez-Zour province, wheat and barley accounted for 60% of monthly agricultural taxes ("zakat") in December 2015 / January 2016[22]. According to the same batch of documents, the ratio of money earned from taxes versus oil stood at 6:1, while other documents retrieved in Mosul show that ISIS collected $1.9 million from the sale of barley and wheat just in a single 24-hour period in 2015[23].

[22] H. Jaafar and E. Woertz, cited.
[23] R. Callimachi, cited.

CONFLICT OVER LAND AND RADICALISATION PROCESS: THE CASE OF FULANI IN THE WIDER SAHEL REGION

By Marco Di Liddo

The Fulani (or Fula people or Peul) are an ethnic group of about 25 million individuals spread over 21 African countries, from Mauritania to Sudan, and particularly present in the Sahel belt of West Africa. Islamic believers, the Fulani devote themselves mainly to the nomadic breeding of cattle, a livelihood that requires long and almost constant movements in search of pasture and water resources. This semi-nomadic nature has traditionally made their census and that of their cattle very difficult and prevented their full settling and integration in the political and bureaucratic structures of the states in which they are present. Consequently, therefore, the Fula people constitute one of the most obvious examples of a nation without a state. Generally, the Fulani communities are well armed (machetes, AK-47) to protect their herds from thieves, wild animals and other threats. As nomadic people, they follow the traditional trans-humance routes that head south from the north, in the period after harvest, to take advantage of crop residues and fertilize the soil before the next sowing. By doing that, Fulani herders traditionally developed a symbiotic relation with farmer communities, based on the principle of mutual benefit.

The impact of climate change on environmental balance and the reduction of water resources and pastures in the Sahel have changed the symbiotic relationship between Fulani and agricultural communities, transforming it into a competitive and conflict-ual one. In fact, starting in 1960, due to the processes of desertification, drought and soil erosion, Fulani herders began to invade agricultural areas during the whole year, destroying crops, and, above all, travel to regions where they had never gone. On the other hand, the improvement of cultivation technology and the expansion of cultivation areas have allowed the increase of farming in the corridors and lands once used for grazing. In this general context of scarcity of resources, the states of the Sahel belt have not been able to safeguard the interests of the two communities in an equitable manner, preferring to protect farmers (which are settled and therefore politically more influential). Moreover, the traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution through compensation and mediations have collapsed, both because groups of herders have come to places where they do not have contacts with local tribal networks and be-cause they accuse farmers of thefts and killing of livestock. Abandoned by the gov-ernmental institutions and deprived of protection by tribal mediators and customary leaders, Western Sahel Fulani adopted more and more armed violence for self-

defence and private justice, creating a "non-declared war" against farmers communities[24].

Today, the conflict between pastoralists and farmers and the "Fulani issue" continue to grow and spread throughout the Sahel belt, proceeding hand in hand with the deterioration of environmental conditions, the increase of desertification, the decrease of food, agricultural and water resources and the inadequacy of state policies on land management and distribution. In this regard, the cases of conflicts in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso are particularly indicative.

In Mali, legal practices to regulate the exploitation of natural resources and soil derive from the so-called "Diina" system, created more than 200 years ago by the Fulani Massina Empire of Sekou Amadou (1800). Since then, the control of 30 grazing areas has been assigned to the "djowros", tribal leaders coming from Fulani aristocratic families who, together with the tribal leaders of the agricultural communities, established the different periods of exploitation of the land. The process of modernization following the French colonial domination and post-colonial period has challenged this social organization. In fact, customary rights have largely been ignored by both French colonial and Malian legal systems, while development strategies have clearly been geared to the growth of the agricultural sector, to the detriment of the interests and needs of herders. At the same time, since the 1990s, the administrative and bureaucratic construction of the Malian state, based on the principle of decentralization, has institutionalized power to traditional leaders, including the families of the djowros, in order to strengthen the influence of Bamako in peripheral regions. However, once integrated into the Malian legal system, the djowros have ceased to exercise their neutral role as mediators. In fact, the Malian government has turned them into administrators who had the task of applying state law and not traditional customary law.

The final result of these legal and political processes was the loss of protection and state tutelage by the Fulani and the growth, in the community of semi-nomadic pastors, of a feeling of mistrust, aversion and questioning of the legitimacy of both public institutions and customary ones. In this way, the Fulani self-defence militias, such as Ganda Koy and Ganda Iso, once with a clear pro-government orientation, have assumed an increasingly subversive posture, up to clash with any actor (governmental or not) who threatens their access to water and soil resources.

If in Mali the Fulani claims come from the breaking of the previous customary order, in Niger the communities of semi-nomadic herders show a greater degree of political and identity polarization, asserting the exclusive property of specific areas of the country. In fact, the Nigerien Fulani consider themselves the "original inhabitants" and, therefore, the legitimate owners of the Tillabéri region. Nevertheless, the land

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[24] International Alert (2018) If victims become Perpetrators. Factors contributing to vulnerability and resilience to violent extremism in the central Sahel https://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/Sahel_VulnerabilityResilienceViolentExtremism_EN_2018.pdf

does not belong to them and often conflicts over natural resources oppose them to the Zarma peasants and even to the Tuareg breeders of the Daoussakh tribe.

Exactly as in Mali, also in Niger the customary law is ambiguous and generates misunderstandings, an element that pushes the Fulani of Tillabéri to turn to the state courts to try to defend their rights. However, such attempts are opposed by the clan leaders, who believe that Niger's justice penalizes their community due to corruption and collusion between the judiciary and the dominant ethnic groups (Hausa and Tuareg). This sentiment is, however, supported by the frequent cases of "bad justice", first of all the complete impunity of the Tuareg Daoussakh for the thefts and killings of the Fulani-owned cattle for over 20 years. Abandoned by the institutions and at the mercy of environmental deterioration and scarcity of resources, the Fulani lost faith in peaceful conflict resolution mechanisms and decided to rely on their armed militias and get justice on their own[25].

Finally, even in what was once the peaceful Burkina Faso, social and economic tensions have triggered a dangerous mechanism of radicalization of the political agenda of semi-nomadic herders' communities. As in Mali and Niger, also in the "Country of Virtuous Men" and, in particular, in the province of Soum, the Fulani have had to face the reduction in the availability of grazing areas, the legislative shortcomings of the Burkinabe legal system and the progressive loss of authority by tribal leaders, custodians of customary law but accused of predatory behaviour or subjection to corrupted government institutions. Specifically, both the djowros and the marabout, religious leaders belonging to noble families, are harshly criticized for their corruptibility and for the extortion practices to which they subject the civilian population[26].

Along the social, political and economic fractures created between communities of Fulani semi-nomadic herders, farmers and state institutions, the action of the jihadist movements has been inserted. In fact, the terrorist networks wanted to expand their power, their strength and their influence through the growth of support and popular legitimacy. To do this, it was necessary to co-opt the economic, social and political agendas of the discriminated minorities and satisfy their needs. Since these needs are linked to the exploitation of natural resources and to the management of access mechanisms to them, the Sahelian jihadist organizations could only direct their actions in that direction.

It should be noted that the systematic strategy of penetration of terrorist movements from North Africa to the Sahel began in the early 2000s, through the travels of the Algerian salafist ideologist Mohamed el-Para and had as a clear goal the co-optation of

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[25] International Alert (2018) If victims become Perpetrators. Factors contributing to vulnerability and resilience to violent extremism in the central Sahel https://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/Sahel_VulnerabilityResilienceViolentExtremism_EN_2018.pdf

[26] International Crisis Group Africa Report N°254 (2017) The Social Roots of Jihadist Violence in Burkina Faso's North https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/254-the-social-roots-of-jihadist-violence-in-burkina-faso-s-north.pdf

discriminated ethnic minorities such as the Tuaregs and the Fulani, two peoples united by the harassment of their economic and political rights and, for that, vulnerable to recruitment south of the Sahara.

Looking for new recruits in the Sahel belt, the Algerian jihadists have manipulated the political and social agenda of the Fulani communities, presenting themselves as the defenders of their interests threatened by the agricultural communities and state institutions, both labelled as infidels or apostates. Therefore, it is evident that propaganda, ideology and jihadist operative structures have served to amalgamate and organize the jagged Fulani protest front, taking on the functions of true syndicate based on the use of political violence. On the other side, for the jihadist militiamen, the Fulani represent a huge reservoir of armed and highly mobile combatants, with a deep knowledge of the terrain and desert routes, an element which guarantees enormous tactical and operational advantages in the conduct of guerrilla activities[27].

The co-optation and the recruitment of the Fulani by jihadist organisation was possible thanks to their ability to offer welfare service, protection against the alleged abuses of authorities and tribal leaders, former custodians of the customary laws, and order in a conflict area. Specifically, exploiting the scarcity of resources and the weak presence of state institutions, the jihadist groups have adopted the previously described hybrid tactic, combining and alternating elements of predatory exploitation with those of systematic management. Where possible, terrorist militias have taken control of oases and fertile land, regulating access, taxing their use and acting as a judicial body in the event of a dispute between different social communities. In other words, the Sharia courts have replaced tribal leaders, djowros and marabouts as legal landmarks in the area. In other cases, terrorist militias have simply robbed herders and farmers. The latter behaviour was adopted when local communities rejected the authority of jihadist organizations and the brutality of their methods, leaving the militias to use violence as an ultimate solution to impose its power. In both cases, the resources obtained through the management and those obtained through the theft were used to support the welfare system reserved for members and facilitators of the jihadist network[28].

Although the jihadist penetration in the Sahel began in the early 2000s, the adoption of tactics aimed at using natural resources to increase popular support and legitimacy took place systematically starting from the two-year period 2010-2012. In fact, during that period the western Sahel belt has been hit by one of the most terrible waves of drought, as well as by severe food insecurity. The social instability followed to humanitarian emergency and parallel to economic underdevelopment, combined with the insufficiency of governmental and international actions, has allowed jihadist

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27 McGregor A. (2017) The Fulani Crisis: Communal Violence and Radicalization in the Sahel, CTC Sentinel vol. 10 issue 2 https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2017/02/CTC-Sentinel_Vol10Iss223.pdf
28 Fulton K., Nickels B. (2017) Africa's Pastoralists: A New Battleground for Terrorism https://africacenter.org/spotlight/africa-pastoralists-battleground-terrorism/

groups to act as relief organizations. It seems appropriate to underline how the humanitarian emergency of 2010-2012, most likely was one of the contributing factors to the exacerbation of the old regional political conflicts and to their violent explosion. It is no coincidence, in fact, that the strengthening of the terrorist networks occurred at the same time as the outbreak of the Malian civil war and the popular protests that led to the dismissal of President Blaise Compaorè in Burkina Faso. Therefore, the imposition of jihadist organizations as resource managers and their co-option of the political and economic agendas of discriminated minorities have been possible thanks to three strategic errors made by regional governments and international organizations in precise historical moments. The first one, made since the 60s and 70s, was presented not effective intervention to combat desertification and soil erosion. In this way, the scarcity of resources has increased and with the conflicts between different communities for their exploitation. The second mistake, started during the decolonization processes of African countries, was not to offer adequate legislative support to regional governments in the creation of national legal frameworks that included ancient customary laws and that would equally protect the rights of farmers and those of semi-nomadic breeders. By deciding to protect farmers, the governments of the Sahelian States have alienated the support of pastors and have increased their distrust to state institutions. Finally, the third mistake was made in the 2010-2012 period and in the following years, when both regional governments and international organizations did not offer adequate solutions to the humanitarian emergency due to drought and severe food insecurity. These loopholes in supporting vulnerable populations have become even more decisive in the immediate aftermath of the Malian civil war, when strategies for reconstruction, national reconciliation and counter-terrorism have not adequately considered the economic criticalities of the country, leaving many of the root causes of the conflict unaltered.

The ability to combat instability, redistribute resources and establish fair and shared compensation mechanisms represented a strong incentive for Fulani recruitment and, in some cases, for the creation of authentic Fulani jihadist military units. Today, Fulani jihadist movements are integrated both in the al-Qaeda and Islamic State networks in the Sahel belt, especially in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger.

As for the al-Qaeda network, represented by the Group to Support Islam and Muslims (GSIM), there are two Fulani movements. In Mali, the Macina Liberation Front, founded and commanded by Amadou Kouffa, is active in the rural areas of the centre of the country (Mopti, Konna) and has about 4 000 militiamen. Born in 2015, the group has participated in numerous complex terrorist attacks, including those of Bamako (2015) and those against the Malian and French armed forces (Operation Barkhane). In Burkina Faso, Ansarul Islam, founded in 2016 and led by Abdoul Salam Dicko, a disciple of Amadou Kouffa, is active mainly along the border with Mali and in the Soum province and counts on about 2 000 fighters.

As regards instead the Islamic State network, the main threat connected to the Fulani insurgency is the Islamic State in the Province of the Great Sahara (ISGS). The ISGS

was born in 2015 as a breakaway unit of the Movement for the Oneness of God and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO, later become al-Mourabitun). ISGS is active throughout the Sahel, although its action has been concentrated in recent months in the Niger regions of Tillaberi and Tahoua. Right here the group perpetrated its most resounding attack, namely the ambush on the joint Nigerian-US patrol in Tongo Tongo on the 4th October 2017, which caused the death of 4 Green Berets[29]. Since now, fortunately, only a small part of the Fulani community has embraced the jihadist ideology and has decided to turn its militias into terrorist katiba (brigate). However, if the economic and social benefits offered by the action of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State continue to strengthen and be superior to those offered by government institutions, there is a risk that increasing numbers of semi-nomadic pastoralists will decide to join the Front of Liberation of Macina, Ansarul Islam or the ISGS. Or, in the worst case, one could witness the progressive radicalization of the Fulani even in geographic areas still virgin, such as the Middle Belt of Nigeria, the north of Chad and Sudan.

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[29] McGregor A. (2017) The Fulani Crisis: Communal Violence and Radicalization in the Sahel, CTC Sentinel vol. 10 issue 2 https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2017/02/CTC-Sentinel_Vol10Iss223.pdf

FOOD INSECURITY AND RESOURCE UNCERTAINTY AS A CONFLICT TRIGGER IN THE LAKE CHAD BASIN: THE CASE OF BOKO HARAM

By Marco DI Liddo

As seen in the first chapter, the process of territorialisation and institutionalization of terrorist movements in Africa and the growth of their popular legitimacy and power could be linked to their ability to exploit social, economic and political vulnerabilities in volatile regions. The popular legitimacy and support to jihadist groups and their ability to provide educational and welfare services both come from the skills that terrorist networks have shown in defending the interests of marginalized communities and in controlling the access to natural resources, including soil, water, crop and livestock.

In this sense, the action of Boko Haram in the Lake Chad basin, one of the most vulnerable regions of whole Africa, makes a paramount example of two different tactics of using natural resources for founding and gaining political support and legitimacy: the predatory exploitation and the hybrid management.

The Lake Chad basin, which includes the Nigerian Federal States of Yobe, Borno and Adamawa, the Cameroonian province Far-North, the Niger region of Diffa and the Chadian region Lac, is the largest endorheic basin in West Africa, as well as the demarcation between the arid Sahel and the Western Sudanese Savana. A land of transit for nomadic herders and merchants, the Lake region is crucial for the sustenance of local communities, 90% of which are involved in farming, fishing and, to a lesser extent, to agriculture. Since the 1960s, due to drought and desertification, the extent and water flow of Lake Chad has been reduced by 90%, devastating the regional economy and significantly worsening life of the local population. To date, of the more than 40 million people living in the basin area, 10.7 million need humanitarian assistance and 7 million suffer from malnutrition and acute food insecurity. This insecurity is further exacerbated by the presence of 2.4 million refugees and IDPs[30].

The gradual decrease of fertile land, grazing areas, water and agricultural resources, caused by the expansion of the desert towards south, has increased competition and conflict between local communities. The two socio-economic categories most affected by the environmental crisis are the semi-nomadic herders and the fishermen of Lake Chad. The former, belonging mainly to the Fulani ethnic group, gradually began to move South in search of pastures and water for their livestock, entering into competition with farmers for the exploitation of fertile land. Farmers accuse herders of destroying crops and taking water, while the herders accuse farmers of killing their

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[30] Lake Chad Basin crisis Response strategy (2017–2019) Food And Agriculture Organization Of The United Nations Rome, 2017 http://www.fao.org/3/a-i7078e.pdf

livestock, preventing access to water resources and preventing the creation of exclusively grazing areas and corridors[31].

The conflict between farmers and Fulani herders was further exacerbated by the regional governments' incapacity to create a legal architecture and a system of equitable access to resources, capable to satisfy the interests of both. In fact, governments have proved more inclined to protect the claims of the most numerous and politically influential agricultural communities because of their sedentariness, compared to those of semi-nomadic herders.

Alongside these conflicts thrived the action of propaganda, proselytism and recruitment of extremist organizations.

The first symptoms of the spread of radicalization appeared in the 1970s and 1980s when, especially in the North-East of Nigeria, the Yantatsine sect ("those who curse") led the insurrection of the Kanuri and the Fulani against the central institutions, preaching the alleged return to the original roots of Islam and the struggle against the so-called infidels. It is no coincidence that Yantatsine's insurgency has grown in parallel with the great droughts and famines of the 1970-1980 decade, which were extremely harmful for agriculture and livestock and a harbinger of conflict between the various social categories. In that case, many individuals belonging to the Fulani and Kanuri communities joined the Yantatsine sect, because it guaranteed their survival, as well as channelling their anger against the inefficiency of government policies to respond to humanitarian crisis.

Similarly, thirty years later, the jihadist organization Boko Haram ("Western education is a sin") has exploited the same economic and social criticalities in the Lake Chad basin both to increase its financial flow and to gain support and popular legitimacy. Also in this case, the exponential growth of Boko Haram coincided with the impoverishment of the north east of Nigeria and with the worsening of the environmental (desertification, drought) and food emergency in the 1995-2005 decade. In fact, since the end of the 90s, Boko Haram has established itself as an organization able to alleviate the suffering of the civilian population by providing humanitarian assistance, education and basic necessities. At this embryonic stage in its history, Boko Haram used peaceful methods and sometimes managed to mediate in social conflicts between different communities, including those between semi-nomadic pastoralists and farmers.

The humanitarian action of Boko Haram compensated for the shortcomings of the government of Abuja and had pushed the local community to recognize itself as the only legitimate political interlocutor. To counteract the strengthening of an organization that could compete with the state, Nigerian authorities opted for a muscular solution and, in 2009, during a massive and brutal military operation, they tried to dismantle Boko Haram. On that occasion, the Nigerian military killed the founder of the

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[31] International Crisis Group, Africa Briefing N°126 (2017) Instruments of Pain (IV): The Food Crisis in North East Nigeria https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/b126-instruments-of-pain-iv-nigeria.pdf

sect, Mohamed Yussuf, triggering the mechanism of political radicalization of the members and the transformation of Boko Haram into a terrorist organization.

During the period 2009 - 2014, under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau and in the most intense and violent moment of its insurgency campaign, Boko Haram adopted the model of predatory exploitation. In fact, in an attempt to flesh out the group's finances and eliminate all the social and political actors considered close to the government, the terrorist organization behaved like a band of marauders. At that time, the control of the territory was fleeting and the recruitment basin was mainly composed of urbanized Kanuri. Thus, the militiamen of Boko Haram went to rural areas to raid cattle or harvest and forcibly tax the ownership of herds and cultivated lands. These criminal behaviours were made possible by the lack of adequate forms of protection by the State, engaged in an anti-terrorist campaign based mainly on the military instrument and not on that of social and economic prevention. As a result, herders, farmers and fishermen preferred to pay Boko Haram in order to survive its violence.

However, starting in 2015, thanks to the growth of contacts with the global network of the Islamic State, Boko Haram has changed its strategy. Expelled from the cities, forced to relocate in rural areas and determined to regain popular support weakened by the brutality of Shekau's methods, the terrorist organization was constrained to evolve. The merit of this evolution was of Abu Musab al-Barnawi, son of Mohamed Yussuf and main supporter of the affiliation of Boko Haram to the Islamic State. In fact, Barnawi had guessed that the survival of Boko Haram was intimately connected to the provision of services and to the protection of the interests of discriminated minorities, in this case the semi-nomadic Fulani herders of the Lake Chad region. The strategic evolution and the drive towards territorialisation promoted by Barnawi has changed the relationship between Boko Haram and the use of resources. In fact, the terrorist organization has adopted the hybrid model, combining predatory exploitation with elements of systematic management[32].

Specifically, the systematic management model was applied in those regions with a higher rate of social conflict, where the lack of adequate dispute resolution mechanisms and the inaction of state institutions offered Boko Haram ample room for manoeuvre. In detail, the Barnawi-led faction of Boko Haram, re-nominated Islamic State in West Africa (ISWA), began to support the interests of some Fulani clans of herders, providing para-military training, humanitarian assistance and, gradually, absorbing their armed militias. Using its own armed force and the alliance with local criminal organizations, Boko Haram increased its territorial presence and co-opted the agenda of Fulani community. It began to control access to water resources, regularly attack the villages of farmers, forcing them to flee and allowing the use of confiscated lands

[32] Piesse M. (2017) Boko Haram: Exacerbating and Benefiting From Food and Water Insecurity in the Lake Chad Basin https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Boko-Haram-Exacerbating-and-Benefiting-From-Food-and-Water-Insecurity-in-the-Lake-Chad-Basin_0.pdf

to Fulani herders. In some cases, the Sharia courts of Boko Haram have administered justice, establishing rules on the use of soil and water and resolving disputes between herders and farmers. In this way, the commanders of Boko Haram have supplanted the role of mediation, once a prerogative of local tribal leaders.

However, the model of predatory exploitation continued to survive as a form of pressure towards those communities and ethnic groups unwilling to accept the yoke of Boko Haram. For example, during conflicts within the Fulani clans, Boko Haram has been used as a coercive tool. One of the two clans involved in conflict hired the jihadist militiamen to carry out murders and raids of livestock. The same tactics have been utilised towards the fishermen of Lake Chad, belonging mainly to the Budma ethnic group. As in the case of fertile lands, even the reduction of the lake's waters has led to the significant downsizing of fish stocks and to greater competition for resources. In this sense, the Nigerian jihadist organization has exploited the economic difficulties of the Budma and the absence of government protection to impose itself as a dominant force in the region. Specifically, Boko Haram acts as a criminal organization, regulating the access of fishermen to the lake and controlling the fish market. To carry out their activities, the fishermen are forced to pay taxes to the militiamen, while those who refuse to do so are systematically killed.

So far, the response of the states of the lake Chad region has shown numerous shortcomings. The riparian countries have chosen a muscular approach to problem solving, based on the use of armed force through the Multinational Joint Task Force, useful to remove Boko Haram from the main urban centres but not adequate to neutralize it in rural areas. Furthermore, some abuses by the military alienated the civilian population and increased support for the jihadist movement. Specifically, in some cases, villages where there was the suspect of Boko Haram militiamen presence were completely razed to the ground, while in other cases the Armed Forces blackmailed communities of herders and fishermen asking for a levy in order to carry out their productive activities.

The case of Boko Haram's penetration in the Lake Chad region makes it possible to understand how the expansion of the jihadist organization's activities has been possible thanks to two factors: the increase in environmental degradation (desertification, drought) and the consequent humanitarian emergency (food shortage and famine) and the lack of state and international support for vulnerable populations. As in the case of the humanitarian crisis in the Sahel belt, even in the Lake Chad region the processes of radicalization of ethnic minorities and the progressive growth of jihadist movements have developed along with emergencies and thanks to state and international organisations difficulties in resolving them. Analysing the historical trends, it is clear that the spread of African jihadism has greatly increased since the 70s and has accelerated considerably since the mid-90s, i.e. when the processes of desertification have decreased the availability of agricultural and food resources and radicalized the conflicts between semi-nomadic herders and farmers. In the 1970s and 1990s, the effects of climate change, environmental degradation and its impacts on community life

have not been adequately addressed. Interventions on the territory (reforestation, improvement of water distribution, rationalization of crops) and legal mechanisms of protection for the interests of herders and farmers have not been sufficient. Specifically, the absence of the state and the gradual loss of authority of the ancient tribal mediators, custodians of customary laws, have created a legislative and political gap that has led to anarchy and the increase in inter-communal violence. This gap has been filled by jihadist organizations which, in the eyes of the impoverished populations, have become the antidote to anarchy.

From an economic, legal and social standpoint, until now the regional governments' approach appears to be insufficient or even harmful. The lack of an adequate policy of division and exploitation of fertile lands between farmers and herders, the decision to block the borders and prevent the sale of livestock coming from areas at risk of terrorism could have the effect of even weakening the economy of the Fulani and exacerbate conflict with communities engaged in agriculture.

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis of the case studies of Syria-Iraq, Sahel and Lake Chad Basin highlighted how natural resources exploitation could be crucial for jihadist organizations to increase their wealth, their power and their political legitimacy. The need to control these resources, in a systematic, predatory or hybrid way, is directly proportional to the will of institutionalization and to the achievement of de facto statehood. The progressive and growing entrenchment of the subversive ideology of terrorist groups and the grip of their propaganda would not be possible without the realization of an effective political, economic and social agenda. If the jihadist movements have gone from being fanatical cells dedicated to proselytism to para-military organizations to, finally, complex structures able to claim their own statehood, it is thanks to a deep and complex action on the territory. The examples illustrated in this paper show how such groups have legitimacy and popular support because they addressed part of the social and economic problems of vulnerable communities and marginalized minorities. Specifically, defending the interests of semi-nomadic Fulani herders, controlling and regulating access to water resources, resolving conflicts regarding access to land and managing the wheat market are all instruments that create stability in unstable areas and which encourage the civilian population to accept the domination and authority of the jihadist groups. In Syria-Iraq, Sahel and Lake Chad Basin, without this ability to control natural resources, protect the interests of the marginalized and restore order in areas harassed by anarchy, terrorist networks would not be as influential as they are now.

It should be emphasized that this capacity is inextricably linked to the degradation of the environment, the increase in desertification phenomena and the consequent growing conflicts over access to more and scarcer natural resources. In such a context, the shortcomings of the state, the lack of long-term policies to favour the equitable access to resources by the different social communities and the legislative gaps on the use of fertile land do nothing but offer further room for manoeuvring to jihadist organisations. In short, if the state does not act, there is and there will be someone to replace it.

In the near future, the risk of further increase and intensification of conflicts linked to access to resources and the risk of radicalization of entire social categories appear very high. In fact, the effects of climate change and the speeding up of desertification processes will continue to erode the percentage of fertile lands, especially in Africa and in the Middle East. At the same time, population growth and the intensification of global food demand will require more natural resources and will increase the demand for fertile land for agricultural activities. The combination of these factors of crisis could generate an authentic "perfect storm" in the most fragile areas of the planet, starting with the Sahel.

The competition for the land and the conflict between semi-nomadic herders and farmers seem destined to increase and intensify their violence, as witnessed to some evident signs today. For example, over the past 5 years, in Nigeria, clashes between semi-nomadic herders and farmers in the so-called Middle Belt (Kwara State, Kogi State, Benue State, Taraba State, Plateau State, Nasarawa State, Niger State, Adamawa State, Federal Capital Territory) have claimed more victims of the Boko Haram terrorist campaign and are the main threat to the stability of the country.

The analysis of the case studies has highlighted how these social conflicts widens the basin on which jihadist ideas can take root and find fertile ground.

The mistake made by both governments and international organizations has been to underestimate the social conflicts and their potential for the growth of jihadist organizations. Environmental degradation and its impact on the life of local communities has been addressed only when the humanitarian emergency has reached unsustainable levels and when the conflicts linked to it have exploded violently. The cases highlighted in this paper are united by the absence of prevention and long-term interventions strategies. In the Sahel and in the Lake Chad Basin, terrorist organizations could not have spread so vehemently if the management of resources had been more rational, fair and supportive. Today, jihadism continues to spread thanks to the economic and social critical issues that emerged over 30 years ago and are still unresolved. The absence of the state protection and the crisis of traditional mechanisms of mediation and peaceful resolution of disputes have increased the local demand for justice, order and stability. A question satisfied, to date, more from al-Qaeda and the Islamic State than from internationally recognised governments.

Therefore, in order to prevent the growth and diffusion of terrorist movements, it is necessary to resolve those social, economic and political-juridical crises that feed popular discomfort that jihadism feeds on. Within a holistic and multi-dimensional approach to the stabilization, de-radicalization and anti-terrorism processes, social and humanitarian instruments play the same role as the military and security ones.

For these reasons, it would be recommendable:

I.   To support the action of Sahel countries governments and international organizations in combating environmental degradation and the processes of desertification and destruction of natural resources by allocating more funds to reforestation and biodiversity protection.
II. To improve the mechanisms of fair access to natural resources by social groups competing for them;
III. To engage local communities and traditional tribal leaders in decision making process on land rights;
IV. To create a mechanism to include customary law on land rights in State legislation;
V.   To improve the mechanisms of peaceful settlement of disputes and mediation on land and water resources use, supporting and monitoring the action of tra-

ditional tribal leaders and establishing new forums for dialogue between semi-nomadic herders and farmers;

VI. To promote the creation of protected rangeland areas for grazing;

VII. To promote the control and tracking mechanisms of livestock of semi-nomad communities;

VIII. To support the governments of vulnerable regions in improving the legal architecture dedicated to the regulation of land use and water resources.

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39

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