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**The Shadow of the Past: The Rise of the Islamic State
and a Return to Instability**

**Presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of M.A. Politics (Honours)**

University of Glasgow

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Abstract

The events of summer 2014 in Iraq and Syria took the world largely by surprise. A relatively unknown group began to unleash a campaign marked by excessive torture and brutal tactics in order to declare an Islamic caliphate. They quickly became known as the Islamic State. Since then, the group have dominated newspapers and media channels throughout the world. However, little attention has been paid to the origins of the group or what fuels their campaign. This project aims to explain the rise of the Islamic State through a historical account of numerous critical factors which triggered a reactionary sequence of events that led to the rise of the IS, as well as the spread of regional instability. By positing that foreign interventions, declining military relations, failures of government and the systematic abuse of human rights contributed to the creation of space in which extremist forces could grow, this project shall develop the basic theory that 'history matters'.

Introduction

This project will address the rise and root causes of the transnational armed terrorist organisation the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria. Since the summer of 2014 the group have gained control of large swathes of territory and committed to the organisation of a 'caliphate' stretching across areas of Iraq and Syria. Their goal is to expand to Yemen, Egypt and Algeria under its leader and 'caliph' Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Their campaign has "thrust the Middle East even deeper into turbulence, confusion, instability, and sectarian violence", as well as having "dramatically altered the region's political and security landscape" (Barnes-Dacey et al, 2015: 5). The size and potential threat of the IS, who until 2014 shared links with al-Qaeda is relatively unknown. The CIA have estimated that fighters have reached numbers of up to 31,500; however Faud Hussein the chief of staff of the Kurdish President has stated it as closer to 200,000 and estimated that IS "rules a third of Iraq and a third of Syria" (Cockburn, 2014). The group have become "one of the most ruthless and influential rebel groups on the Syrian battlefield" and has "morphed into a truly transnational organisation that has thousands of members on both sides of the Iraqi-Syrian border", with successful new land gains in Libya as of February 2015 (Charles River Editors, 2014). Since January of this year a US-led coalition of more than 60 countries have been fighting the IS through a series of coordinated air strikes. However, the group is still undefeated and continues to grow.

There is a myriad of factors which have contributed to the IS's rise, as well as pushed people to support them and in some cases, join their campaign. While the "horrific acts committed by IS are difficult for anybody to support", in a region plagued with sectarian violence, "its goal of establishing a caliphate is certainly attractive in some

corners of Islamic thought” (BBC News, 2014). This project aims to explore some of these elements by presenting a path-dependent explanation of certain international and domestic factors from 2000-2014 which have contributed to the groups rise and to the spread of instability across the region. Through focussed case studies, the critical factors of the failures of government under Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki in Iraq and President Bashar al-Assad in Syria, as well as their support from foreign actors shall be analysed. Foreign interventions into the region shall also be discussed, including the poorly implemented occupation of Iraq by the US beginning in 2003 and the current US-led intervention in Syria. The focus shall then turn to the decline of government-military relations in both Iraq and Syria and the effects defections and declining loyalty had on the regimes use of force and ultimately, radicalisation of the opposition. The systematic abuse of human rights shall be the last factor under examination, with the project focussing on exclusion and the oppression of civil liberties as a push factor in the radicalisation of groups within the population.

Ultimately, these factors shall be presented as a path-dependent reactive sequence of events. This shall be explained through the lens of historical institutionalism, suggesting that “critical junctures” in the histories of Iraq and Syria triggered a path of reactive factors, which paved the way for the rise of extremist forces including the IS (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007: 341). Additionally, it will look at what lessons can be drawn from these contributing factors and how they could be remedied or prevented before giving rise to further extremist groups. Lastly, it will consider the future of the IS and the lessons which must be drawn from the current foreign intervention to defeat them.

Justification

The rise of the IS is an event which is still unfolding. The armed rebellion against Syria and Iraq has engulfed both states into a complex conflict which is continuing to grow increasingly brutal. In August 2014, thousands from the Yazidi community were viciously targeted by the IS and fled up Mount Sinjar to escape, resulting in the death, torture, and abuse of hundreds (Dearden, 2014). A recent United Nations Security Council report lists the horrors that Syria's children have suffered, both at the hands of the IS and the Assad regime. Their stories include beatings; sexual violence; mock executions; sleep deprivation; and exposure to the torture of their relatives, as well as the recruitment and use of children in combat and support roles (UNSC, 2014).

The increasing brutality of this campaign, and the current inability to defeat it, makes the study of the IS, their root causes, and their ambitions incredibly important. This project is among the first generation analysing these events as they occur and thus has an important role in documenting and academically analysing the crisis as it unfolds. It is imperative to understand how past behaviours and interventions can lead to conflict in order to recognise when future conflict situations emerge and how to remedy them. Understanding how these behaviours, interventions and their unintended consequences have led to these situations; where human catastrophe prevails; is of paramount importance in reducing these events. Once understood and remedied, the prospects for peace building in regions of instability will undoubtedly increase.

Background

Syria and Iraq have been plagued with instability throughout history, however their modern history has seen a myriad of rivalries, wars, and episodes of widespread political instability. Hafez al-Assad rose to power by way of a military coup against Nur al-Din al-Atasi in 1970. The early years of his presidency in Syria were marked by riots and widespread discontent at his Alawaite religion, to which he responded with a heavy-handed military campaign and extremely autocratic rule. The 1970's saw Syria go to war against Israel and intervene in the Lebanese Civil War in 1976 and by 1980 Hafez had sided with Iran at the start of the Iran-Iraq war. In response to an attempted coup, Hafez al-Assad quashed the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood by way of the 1982 Hama massacre, when the army crushed a rebellion with brutal force and killed an estimated 20,000 civilians (Rodrigues, 2011). The massacre is upheld to be "the single bloodiest assault by an Arab ruler against his own people in modern times" and "remains a pivotal event in Syrian history" (Rodrigues, 2011). His death in 1994 saw his second son Bashar become President: This is the point from which the case study of Syria in this dissertation shall begin.

The modern history of Iraq weaves a similar narrative. Saddam Hussein's single-party Ba'athist regime undertook the bloody Iran-Iraq war of 1980-1988, the legacy of which "continues to haunt the Islamic Republic and shadow nearly all of its deliberations, as well as "cultivating a culture of martyrdom" (Takeyh, 2010: 383). Despite virtual bankruptcy Saddam invaded Kuwait in 1990, prompting the first Gulf War. The short invasion was met by an overwhelming US-led military campaign and Saddam withdrew Iraqi forces in 1991. The humiliation of losing to Iran and the US fuelled anti-Western resentment among a war-weary Iraqi population. However, the increasingly oppressive regime under Saddam, along with worsening economic and

social conditions, led to the rise of anti-government groups within the population. Iraq's relations with the international community continued to sour as they sought to disarm the Iraqi regime without war. Diplomatic and economic efforts failed, and in 2003 the US invaded Iraq to overthrow Saddam Hussein. The subsequent occupation is the point from which the Iraqi case study in this dissertation shall begin.

While the IS is relatively new to Iraq, its history is rooted in Syria. The group has gone by many names “because it has rebranded itself numerous times in the past” (Charles River Editors, 2014). Emerging “from the ashes of the jihadist struggle against foreign forces in Iraq”, the group originated as an al-Qaeda-inspired Sunni Islamist group (Charles River Editors, 2014). It then became a full-fledged al-Qaeda branch, and then evolved into a “religiously motivated army”, and in 2014 split from al-Qaeda into the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant before most recently changing to the Islamic State group of today (Charles River Editors, 2014). These changes reflect the fluid and adaptable nature of what has now become a transnational armed rebel group engaged in a brutal conflict that appears to be spreading further across the region.

Literature Review

The aim of this literature review is to engage with the information surrounding the topic of this dissertation: The rise of the IS and return to regional instability. Due to the recent and unfolding nature of the topic, academic literature is lacking. Thus, available academic literature shall be examined, while also taking academic blogs, magazine and news articles into account.

The IS – Nature and Threat

The dominant theme emerging from literature on the IS is the type of threat they pose to the West and Middle East. Daniel Phillips (2014) and Andrew Phillips (2014) both discuss the threat of the IS to US security and the international order. A. Phillips presents the IS as a ‘multidimensional challenge’ due to its success at the Iraqi state-level, regional and systemic level (2014). The group are “challenging the legitimacy of the prevailing order” within the Middle East, and the “foundational principles of today’s global order” of state sovereignty by declaring a caliphate (Phillips, 2014: 496). D. Phillips and Stansfield both present the threat to the US and UK, however disagree fervently on the options available to defeat them. D. Phillips promotes further intervention, arguing that “Washington should cooperate more closely with the Kurds” by way of air support and the supply of “sophisticated weapons” (Phillips, 2014: 351). On the other hand, Stansfield outlines the dangers of the potential UK policy trajectories towards Iraq, including air strikes and engagement with the government, stating they must “start at least considering...unintended consequences that may well be predictable”, given past failures (Stansfield, 2014: 1350). This harmonises with the focus of this project which analyses the unintended consequences of past interventions and resulting conflict, outlining how this indicates potential outcomes of the present involvement.

A major issue in the literature and within the media on the IS is the discussion of “chinks in ISIS’s armour” and the over exaggeration of their threat (Sisco, 2014). D. Phillips outlines that “we would be unwise to exaggerate its strategic power”, and projects that the group will fall to “the division that besets the jihadist demi-monde” (2014: 497). Weinberg (2014) and Hubbard (2014) agree, suggesting that beheadings

and hostage-cases are not threatening enough to warrant the current military action. What these scholars fail to recognise however is that the IS functions like a state: It “requires territory to remain legitimate, and a top-down structure to rule it...It’s bureaucracy is divided into civil and military arms, and its territory into provinces” (Wood, 2015). An empirical study of official IS documents found that exploitation of these vulnerabilities is insufficient to eradicate them due to their “organisational structure” being “robust enough that it could go to ground and when the right political circumstances presented themselves, come roaring back” (Jung et al, 2014: 8). This is a consequence of their “highly sophisticated set of tools to track and analyse operations and finances”, as well as their transnational scope aiding recruitment and territorial expansion (Jung et al, 2014: 11). An understanding of their organisational structure is paramount to this project as it highlights the complex and adaptable nature of the group, thus explaining how they continue to reform and persist.

Rubin outlines that it is paramount to understand the ideological threat they pose, as when the IS claimed to be a political unit, they had a “new platform from which they [could] present their messages” (2014). In using this ideology, they can counter-frame the political challenges presented by the domestic governments and thus, promote “a religious doctrine that transcends borders and facilitates mobilisation in other countries”, as they have successfully achieved (Rubin, 2014). As such, that the group’s campaign is continuing to spread and is still undefeated purports to show that their threat should not be underestimated.

Terrorists and Rebels

Following 9/11, a plethora of literature emerged on terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism and the threat they posed through hating “our freedoms – our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other” (Bush, 2001). Richardson outlines issues within this budding literature, noting that the lack of distinction and definition of ‘terrorism’ led it to become “almost meaningless”, with distinctions necessary “if terrorism is to be analysed in any meaningful way” (2006). This is true also of other forms of political violence, including irregular and guerrilla warfare. The IS is best defined as a transnational armed rebel group: a fact consistently overlooked by some scholars and most media outlets, who overstate the links between the IS and the terrorist organisation al-Qaeda (Freeman et al, 2014; Jung et al, 2014; Stern 2014).

Cederman, Wimmer and Min define armed rebel movements as “composed of mobilised and militarised organisations that challenge the government” (2010: 93-94). Consistent with this definition, Weinstein also emphasises the importance of the variations and structures within rebel groups and governance. He outlines two distinct dimensions found in rebel governments as *power sharing* and *inclusiveness*, stating that “like rulers, they exercise a monopoly over the use of force. They control territory – becoming stationary bandits – because repeated interaction offers the promise of far greater rewards” (Weinstein, 2007: 169). While his analysis is crucial in offering this project an understanding of how the IS exercise control and continue to strengthen, his idea that the rebel “structures of civilian control exhibit the characteristics of democracy” is not applicable to the IS (Weinstein, 2007: 164). “Raqqqa is Being Slaughtered Daily”, a campaign launched by non-violent activists in Raqqqa, highlight

the extreme oppression of life under the IS (2015). Reports encompass frequent executions of civilians for crimes including smoking cigarettes and adultery. The brutality of their rule is exposed also by a man who fled Mosul stating “I was one of the people who hated [Nouri al-Maliki’s] army, but now I would like the Iraqi army to come back...Anybody would be better than Isis, even the Israeli’s. We are dying” (Cockburn, 2014). As evidenced, there is no democracy under the IS.

Much of the literature on transnational rebel groups focuses on their recruitment strategies (Obayashi, 2011; Richards 2014) and financing (Weinstein, 2003; Burch 2013). Burch argues that “rebel groups adopt transnational criminal financing to fund violent challenges”...which “creates incentives that not only lengthen conflicts, but also increases the probability of conflict recurrence” (2013). However, Burch’s lack of focus on ideological goals as recruiting incentive is disproved with regard to the IS. An empirical study by Jung, Ryan, Shapiro and Wallace finds that “ideology played a key role in motivating fighters” and that the IS did not pay competitive wages, disregarding economic incentives as an explanation for the IS’s recruitment successes (2014: 21). Theda Skocpol outlines the power transnational relations have had throughout history, stating that they “have contributed to the emergence of all social-revolutionary crises and have invariably helped to shape revolutionary struggles and outcomes” (1979: 19). Relating historical transnational rebel movements to the IS is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, the successes of the IS are not by chance, and their strategic feats and land gains have undoubtedly been shaped by the success and legacy of previous Islamic militant groups.

Why Do Men Fight?

This question underpins this dissertation. An understanding of the push factors which led individuals to rebel against their government is paramount in pinpointing the crucial tipping points and critical junctures which led to the eruption of violence and insurgency in the respective states of Iraq and Syria. Ted Gurr pioneered in seeking to provide an answer, outlining three foundational principles to explain 'Why Men Rebel' (1970). Firstly, he outlines popular discontent (relative deprivation) and its sources. Secondly, he outlines the role of "peoples justifications or beliefs about the justifiability and utility of political action, and thirdly, "the balance between discontented people's capacity to act...and the governments capacity to repress or channel their anger" (Gurr, 2011). The relationship between a discontented population and an upheld circle of elites is at the centre of his explanation, with this relationship a factor in the failures of the Iraqi and Syrian governments also, as this dissertation shall present. Gurr's analysis was the first to take an individual-based approach to the causes of rebellion: "focussing on the diverse identities, desires and beliefs of individuals within a group; what good and bad they experience in society, be it economic or social structure-orientated"; the mobilisation of groups of people and how communication of ideas and personal mobility can transform political action (2011).

Many authors seeking to explain the same question disagree with Gurr. Theda Skocpol argued that we "should begin explanations by examining social and political structures" (Gurr, 2011). This pioneered the explanation of revolutions as a result of a series of junctures within a 'punctuated equilibrium' of the state's history, with these punctures often leading to state change and stability (Campbell, 2004: 26).

Furthermore, Bray outlines that "rational choice theory offers many benefits to

policymakers attempting to prevent political violence” and suggests that rational choice can explain the role that revenge plays in individuals’ choices to engage in conflict (2009: 1).

Modern literature focuses mainly on what drives terrorists and their actions, concentrating particularly on poor socio-economic and political conditions, as well as a lack of education within authoritarian regimes (Campos & Gassebner 2009; Al-Tamimi, 2010). World leaders have often recounted poverty and unemployment as causes of terrorism: Bill Clinton stated “these forces of reaction feed on disillusionment, poverty and despair” (Al-Tamimi, 2010). However, the majority of scholars have found little correlation between poverty and terrorism (Abadie 2004; Kreuger 2007; Pipes 2002). Kreuger argues that “many of these explanations have been embraced entirely on faith, not scientific evidence” (2007: 4). Pipes challenges the links between poverty and terrorism even further by suggesting that militant Islam may result from wealth rather than poverty, outlining the “universal phenomenon that people become more engaged ideologically and active politically only when they have reached a fairly high standard of living” (2002). Lastly, both Kreuger, (2007) and Berrebi (2007) find that individuals partaking in terrorist activities tend to be highly educated, thus disproving low education as a driving force.

Overall, the focus within the literature is concerned with what drives men to terrorism and commits them to traditional terrorist actions, such as suicide bombings (Hassan, 2009). The Suicide Terrorism Database in Flinders University, Australia found through their study of suicide bombings in the Middle East and Asia that “it is politics more than religious fanaticism that has led terrorists to blow themselves up” (Hassan 2009). These findings are useful in understanding that politics play an important role

in driving terrorist action, aligning with this project's presentation of historical political events playing a crucial role in the rise of the IS. However, its focus on suicide terrorist action cannot be used to explain the brutality of the IS campaign. While the campaign does contain terrorist activities, it does not rely on suicide bombings. Therefore, this dissertation aims to fill a gap by explaining how politics and religious exclusion played a role in the emergence of the armed-rebel group which does not rely on or promote traditional terrorist activities to further its cause.

Historical Analysis and Path Dependent Explanations

Most studies of path-dependence focus on economic and policy evolution, as well as the path to conflict settlement. Ruane and Todd find that a change in context was imperative to resolution in Northern Ireland, with the context consisting “of a long-term path dependent pattern of relationships within which a particularly intense and violent pattern was locked in for three decades” (2007: 449). Zahar and Clarke’s study focuses particularly on the critical juncture of the Cedar Revolution which led to the “unshackling” of Lebanon “from the web of its deeply divisive and destabilising sectarian politics”, while suggesting that further research into negative cases of historical institutionalism needs to be conducted (2015: 15). However, some study of path-dependence and conflict escalation has been undertaken. Weinberg’s study of path dependence and rebel groups finds that “violence becomes the natural outcome of a path or organisational evolution rather than a strategic choice made in response to changing conditions on the ground” and focuses largely on the internal dynamics of rebel groups which shape the trajectory and membership of rebel groups overall (2007: 21). Path-dependent explanations of conflict within Post-communist states (Koinova, 2013) and Central America (Mahoney, 2001) have been undertaken. Both

embed their case studies within the theories of historical institutionalism and path dependence to explain both the persistence of violence and its resolution. This is useful for this project in setting an example of how to comprehensively process-trace sequenced events.

Overall, there is a distinct lack in research and literature on path-dependent historical institutionalism's role in conflict escalation: Koinova's 2013 study is the most recent and developed to date and shall be explored within Chapter 3 of this project.

Furthermore, there is a distinct lack of research into path-dependence and Middle Eastern conflicts, perhaps due to the on-going instability in the region. As such, this project aims to fill this gap through a study of the path-dependent historical institutionalist explanation of the rise of the IS by way of focussed case studies on the countries and conflict-prone contexts they have emerged through in Iraq and Syria.

Methodology

This dissertation shall adopt a largely qualitative approach; however certain quantitative analyses shall also be adopted, including graphical information.

Integration of both approaches has been hotly debated, however the overarching view is that the combination can be used to complement the strengths of each, using the different methods "for different but well-coordinated purposes within the same overall research project" (Morgan, 1998: 366

The central research focus of this project shall be focussed case studies on Iraq and Syria from 1991-present day, through the theory of path-dependent historical institutionalism. These case studies were the only available option, given that they

were the geographical locations of the group under examination in this project at its beginning. They shall be supported with document and textual analysis of primary and secondary sources, which are crucial in gaining a wider knowledge of the root causes and aims of rebel groups such as IS, as well as to gain a deeper understanding of the factors which have led to regional instability.

Path-Dependent Historical Institutionalism

The lens through which this dissertation is presented is historical institutionalism and the method of path dependence; “one of the most important theoretical underpinnings of historical institutionalism” (Clarke & Zahar, 2015: 3). Expanding on the basic theory that ‘history matters’ (Pierson, 2004), path dependence presents a “moving picture” approach which depicts “not only *what* matters and *why*, but *when* it happened and *how* this affects the outcome of interest” within political life (Koinova, 2013: 7). The Syrian and Iraqi paths shall be presented as a reactive sequence. These are defined by Koinova as “chains of temporally ordered and causally connected events”, which in this case led to political vacuums in which extremist forces, including the IS, could grow (2013: 17). Historical institutionalism emphasises this process, with institutions and their arrangements emerging from and “sustained by the political and social context” and becoming entrenched on a path trajectory that is difficult to change (Clarke & Zahar, 2015: 3).

Literature on institutionalism outlines that “once a set of institutions is in place, actors adapt their strategies in ways that reflect and reinforce the logic of the system” (Zahar & Clarke, 2015: 3) as well as reproducing and magnifying “particular patterns of power distribution in politics” (2013: 4). These feedback processes can become ‘locked-in’ and self-perpetuating (Koinova, 2013). This accounts for why violence

can persist and re-emerge after foreign interventions to resolve conflicts, as shall be used to explain the rise of rebel groups in Syria and Iraq (Koinova, 2013: 6).

Historical critical junctures and tipping points are key concepts within path-dependence and shall be applied in this project. Junctures are “short periods during which significant changes produce different long-term legacies in different cases” becoming “critical if they turn out to be choice points between alternatives and if they place institutional arrangements on trajectories that are then difficult to alter” (Koinova, 2013: 7). These are often pivotal where “there is high volatility in political relationships amid fundamental transformations of institutions and structures”, as well as new political strategies and environments (Koinova, 2013: 7).

Through an examination of these critical junctures, the tipping points and the negative path trajectories, which were impacted by the critical factors under examination in this project, it shall be presented that the rise of the IS and subsequent escalation of instability across the region was a result of a reactive sequence of “long-term causal processes of continuity and change” in levels of violence and exclusion in Iraq and Syria (Koinova, 2013: 6). This shall be fully assessed and analysed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

Chapter 1

Case Study: Iraq

9/11 led to President George W. Bush embarking on the War on Terror, beginning by attacking al Qaeda and not ending “until every terrorist group of global reach has been

found, stopped and defeated” (Bush, 2001). By 2002, Bush declared Iraq as “a regime that [had] something to hide from the civilised world”, which he saw to be weapons of mass destruction (Bush, 2002). Intent on their removal, Bush and his allies invaded Iraq in 2003. The subsequent occupation was a critical juncture in Iraq’s history and led an already politically and socially unstable Iraq down an extremely negative trajectory of development.

1.1 Foreign Intervention

Erica Chenoweth outlines four criteria for a successful intervention. Firstly, it must be carried out under the pretext of peacekeeping, secondly it must be multilateral, thirdly, it must be multidimensional and fourthly, the combatants must be ready to negotiate and consent to the intervention (Chenoweth, 2013). These criteria were all unfulfilled in the US-led invasion of Iraq. Firstly, it was not carried out in the context of peacekeeping with “well-resourced boots on the ground to protect civilians and enforce the peace” (Chenoweth, 2013). The Bush administration “was never willing to commit anything like the forces necessary to ensure order in post-war Iraq”, and as a result the poorly-resourced troops “stood by helplessly, outnumbered and unprepared, as much of Iraq’s remaining physical, economic and institutional infrastructure was systematically looted and sabotaged” (Diamond, 2004). Furthermore, the institutions created “lacked the understanding and organisation” of the fault lines and sectarian divides within the Iraqi population, with the new Iraqi police force “withered from haste, inefficiency, poor planning and sheer incompetence” quickly recognised as easy targets for terrorist attacks (Diamond, 2004). Chenoweth’s second criterion of multilateralism, which is “providing further credibility to enforcement and legitimacy to the cause” was also unfulfilled (2013).

The legality of the Iraq invasion continues to be a debated topic, with some recognising it as justified as an act of self-defence. However in 2004, Kofi Annan declared the war as illegal within the frame of the UN Charter (Scott & Ambler, 2007: 68, 69). Furthermore, the reality that no weapons of mass destruction were found de-legitimises the intervention even further.

With regard to multidimensionality, US efforts at rebuilding fell short of involving “extensive efforts at state capacity-building, humanitarian assistance, refugee resettlement, economic development, election monitoring” and so on (Chenoweth, 2013). This placed Iraq on an extremely unstable trajectory with regard to future development. The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) which ruled from 2003-2004 before handing relative control back to Iraq was plagued with inefficiencies and resulted in the creation of rushed and flawed institutions including the security forces. A document within the currently unpublished Chilcot inquiry revealed that Sir David Richmond, a former British representative, outlined that in the immediate aftermath of the invasion “a virus of insecurity and instability was let loose”, with the growing unpopularity of the occupation, the security problem and the failure to ensure an electricity supply the most obvious signs of CPA failure in 2004 (Norton-Taylor, 2011). Furthermore, the hastily introduced process of de-Ba’athification, which banned all government officials and senior party members because they were “true believers and adherents to Saddam’s regime”, led to the exclusion of the leadership “and top technical capacity for universities, hospitals, transportation, electricity and communications”, effectively drained Iraq’s public sector (Pfiffner, 2010: 78, 79).

Lastly, the criterion that combatants are “ready to negotiate and consent to the intervention” was wholly unfulfilled (Chenoweth, 2013). As aforementioned and indicated by Table 1, terrorist groups became much more active throughout the US-led intervention as a result of the CPA’s failure to provide general security and basic services to the Iraqi population. The exclusion of many Sunni’s by the CPA is indicative of their failure to engage with a large proportion of both the rebel groups and Iraq’s population overall. The critical juncture of the invasion, supposed to lead Iraq down a path to democracy, instead pivoted towards an extremely negative trajectory through a “cataclysmic eruption of sectarianism”, fuelled by inadequate security systems to regain control (Grappo, 2014). This created a security vacuum in which extremist groups could flourish, as depicted by the rising suicide attacks under US control. Many officials removed through de-Ba’athification and the disbanding of the army were driven “into the ranks of the Sunni opposition, including a number of extremist groups such as the Naqshabandi Army” (Grappo, 2014).

1.2 Failures of Government

Following the boycotted elections of 2005 by Sunni Arabs the US “helped midwife” a new constitution for Iraq which included many democratic and decentralising principles (Romano, 2014: 548). It was approved by referendum despite more than two-thirds of voters in two largely Sunni Arab provinces rejecting it and by December of 2005 Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki had been elected (Freedom House, 2013:2). Initially, the government sought to re-introduce many former Ba’athists “to the jobs they had lost, and the government granted amnesty to thousands of mainly Sunni Arab prisoners” in an attempt to resolve the insurgency (Freedom House, 2013: 2). However by 2014, Maliki had “assiduously worked to concentrate power in his own

hands” as “American policy makers continued to back him almost unconditionally” (Romano, 2014: 548). Corruption increased exponentially under Maliki. Transparency International ranked Iraq as 170/175 in their 2014 Corruption Perceptions Index (2013). De-Ba’athification continued throughout his rule. In the 2010 election, over 500 candidates were banned from participating and Iraq’s Shi’a parties “used a second round of de-Ba’athification to bar candidates who had won seats in the election” (Sullivan, 2013: 31).

Maliki systematically excluded the Sunni population of Iraq. In 2005, the US-led Multi-National Force-Iraq “began recruiting, arming, and paying Sunni Arab tribes to turn on al-Qa’ida in Iraq and support the government in Baghdad” in order to stabilise the sectarian conflict within the state (Romano, 2014: 563). However, as the Sunni’s “demonstrated a willingness to try and trust the central government”, Maliki broke all promises following the American withdrawal in 2011: “salaries stopped being paid and...Sunni tribal militias loyal to the central government, were not integrated into the Iraqi security forces. Instead, campaigns of arrests of Sunni leaders and repression of Sunni protests began” (Romano, 2014: 563). As Romano argues, “had the Sunni governorates been permitted to become a region or regions, they could have been responsible for their own security”, which may have prevented the Sunni rebellion of 2014 (Romano, 2014: 562).

1.3 Human Rights Abuses

Throughout the US occupation and under the Maliki regime the human rights of the Iraqi population were systematically abused. Those targeted included prisoners, detainees, and many within the Sunni population. After the 2003 invasion “the US-

dominated coalition of occupying forces created their own legacies of human rights abuse, for which there is yet to be full accountability, and failed to implement new standards that fundamentally changed the mould of repression set” by Saddam Hussein (Amnesty International, 2013: 7). The most famous example are the photographs of April 2004, which depict severe violent abuses against Iraqi detainees in the Abu Ghraib prison. Despite condemnation by the US, “only a small number of mostly low ranking US military personnel were prosecuted for committing abuses against detainees at Abu Ghraib”, a fact which fuelled anti-Western attitudes across the region (Amnesty International, 2013:13). Furthermore, the Chilcot report, detailing the UK’s similar human rights abuses, is due to be released in May of 2015, and is purported to reveal extensive abuse by British forces.

Under Maliki abuse continued. The 2010 Human Rights Watch Report outlined that conditions remained extremely poor “for displaced persons, religious and ethnic minorities, and vulnerable groups such as women and girls, and men suspected of homosexual conduct” (2010: 501). Civilian attacks were prevalent following the withdrawal of US forces from cities to their bases, with 700 Iraqis, mainly Shia, killed in the first six weeks (Human Rights Watch, 2010: 502). These attacks were mostly carried out by Sunni Arab insurgents whose popularity grew exponentially following the occupation.

Maliki’s response to the 2012 Sunni protests about the arrest of Finance Minister Rafi’ al-‘Isawi were overwhelmingly brutal and continued in this way until his fall in 2014. By late 2013, as these protests intensified, “Iraqi Army vehicles began running over protestors to disperse them and eventually...Baghdad’s troops began firing on

protests” (Romano, 2014: 552). By July 2014, predominantly Shi’a Iraqi security forces and militias related to the government executed 255 prisoners in six Iraqi cities, of which all were Sunni and 8 were boys under the age of 18 (Human Rights Watch, 2014). These human rights abuses led to widespread public anger and triggered further escalation of the already deeply divided sectarian conflicts raging within the country.

1.4 Decline in Government-Military Relations

The security forces and Iraqi Army have been unstable since the disbanding of the army by coalition forces following the 2003 invasion. This action “threw hundreds of thousands out of work and immediately created a large pool of unemployed and armed men who felt humiliated and hostile to the US occupiers” (Pfiffner, 2010: 80). The vacuum created by a lack of security forces led to a state of lawlessness, with a range of groups grappling to win power. Weiler outlines the path that led to the insurgency, which began with former Iraqi military leaders begging “for meetings and reconsideration” of the disbanding decisions” (2009: 15). Their pleas were ignored and this led to protests of over 5000 former soldiers in which the US fired on the crowd killing two following violence, which soon led to large and regular demonstrations of violence beginning in 2003 (Weiler, 2009: 16).

Following Maliki’s election, the widespread violence ceased momentarily as the country’s economy and social conditions began to improve. However, as the decentralisation of power and increasingly autocratic rule began, sectarian violence increased once again. Maliki continued to replace competent army officers and soldiers with any affiliation to the former regime with largely Shi’a recruits, as well as

“by ones whose greatest virtue was political loyalty to Maliki” (Romano, 2014: 554). The 2014 response to protests led to the disintegration of the regimes relationship with the military. When the government ordered the mostly Kurdish 16th Brigade of the Iraqi Army to respond to Sunni protestors in 2014 “the commander of the unit refused the order – leading to his dismissal, followed by the brigade’s defection to the KRG’s security force”, the *peshmerga* (Romano, 2014: 553). Defections grew increasingly common. Many of the current emirs of the IS former major generals are from the Hussein regime and recruited soldiers from Maliki’s army (Suleiman Ali, 2014).

1.5 Path Dependence

All of these critical factors combined to create a reactionary sequence of events which led to the rise of rebel groups, particularly the IS, in Iraq. The order of the factors indicates their sequence within the process of path-dependence which led to the IS in Iraq, as depicted by figure 1.

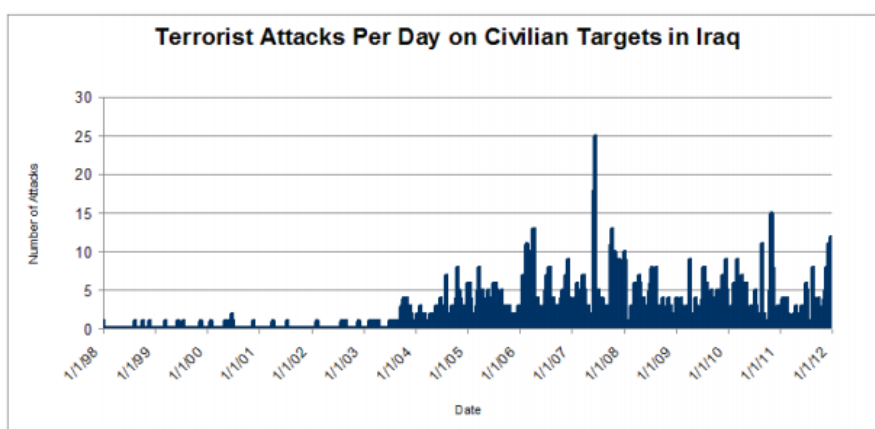
Figure 1: Path Dependence in Iraq.



The poorly implemented invasion and occupation was a critical juncture which produced a negative long-term legacy in Iraq (Koinova, 2013: 7). Historical institutionalism outlines that choices made within critical junctures are “consequential because [they] lead to the creation of institutional patterns that endure over time” (Mahoney, 2001: 112-113). This echoes the consequences of the flawed and exclusionary institutions created by the CPA which turned Iraq down a negative trajectory of development and triggered a reactive sequence of events (Mahoney,

2001: 112-113). Firstly, the juncture triggered escalation of violent sectarian conflict and the growth of a political vacuum in which rebel forces could grow. Table 1 indicates the number of terrorist attacks per day on civilian targets in Iraq, highlighting how the security situation under US occupation declined significantly as the newly created security regime failed to combat extremism and anti-US groups (Stern, 2013: 2).

Table 1: Terrorist Attacks Per Day on Civilian Targets in Iraq (Stern, 2013: 2).

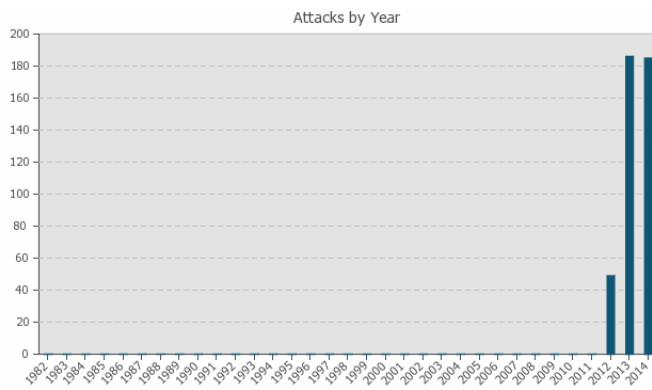


Secondly, in their attempt to prevent any former remnants of the Baath party from regaining power, the US created institutional arrangements which brought the Shi'a PM Maliki to power in 2006. Within this transition was a window of opportunity for elements of democracy to be established. However, disregard for the Constitution and Maliki's failure "to integrate Iraq's Sunnis into the political process...left them open to revived jihadist overtures", and further institutionalised exclusionary arrangements within his government (Phillips, 2014: 495).

The large-scale oppression and abuse of human rights under Maliki's regime led to the communal counter response of majority-Sunni protests beginning mainly in 2012. The brutality of his response to initially peaceful protests led to the disintegration of his relationship with the military. Many defected from the Iraqi army and joined rebel forces, including the IS. This was a crucial tipping point in Iraq, with the fall of its

army to the armed-rebel group signalling the end of Maliki’s regime and the beginning of a new juncture in Iraqi history. Furthermore, the US withdrawal of 2012 led specifically to an increase in the IS’s campaign. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced the “Breaking the Walls” campaign soon after “which triggered a massive launch of suicide attacks, simultaneous bombings, jail breaks, and assassination attempts” (Charles River Editors, 2014). Table 2 indicates the large escalation of anti-government attacks from the beginning of these protests and US withdrawal in 2012 until the resignation of Maliki in 2014, highlighting the reactionary impact these sequence of events had on the conflict dynamics within Iraq overall (Chicago Terrorism Database, 2015).

Table 2: Attacks by Year, Iraqi Rebels vs Iraqi Government and Allies (Chicago



Terrorism Database, 2015).

The incompetence of the Iraqi Security Forces under Maliki continued in the fight against the IS in 2014 and after his resignation. Following “months of grinding conflict against a resurgent militant movement”, the fall of Mosul to the IS led to soldiers and commanders abandoning their bases, “all but ceding Iraq’s second largest city to extremist fighters” (Fahim & Al-Salhy, 2014). Reports of thousands of “men laying down their arms, gutting front-line units across the country” were common (Fahim & Al-Salhy, 2014).

Chapter 2

Case Study: Syria

In contrast to Iraq, Syria has endured a hereditary succession of presidency for over 40 years. The current President Bashar al-Assad's father, Hafez al-Assad led "the most stable, cohesive and resilient authoritarian system of the Middle East" from 1970-2000 (Trombetta, 2014: 24). This resilience was largely in part to the "Cadre management...based on the appointment of Alawis belonging to clans allied with the al-Assad's to top regime positions" while the "regime's power base was widely dominated by Sunni representatives from rural areas" (Trombetta, 2014: 26). Hafez spent years accumulating his personal power, "sitting atop the power pyramid of the new State", articulated in both exposed and hidden levels of power which allowed him to maintain his rule (Trombetta, 2014: 26). That the Assad family are of the Alawite religion has been a contested issue among Syrians since they took power, with Alawis representing between just 8% and 15% of the population, and Sunni Muslims comprising of about 75% (BBC, 2011). Trombetta outlines that the Syrian uprisings of 2011 were the outcome of Bashar al-Assad's failure to uphold the strong structural foundations of the Syrian regime which allowed his father to maintain control, as well as the increasing oppression of the Sunni religious majority (2014:24). These uprisings led to the subsequent civil war in Syria, as well as the creation of a vacuum in which extremist groups were able to strengthen their power.

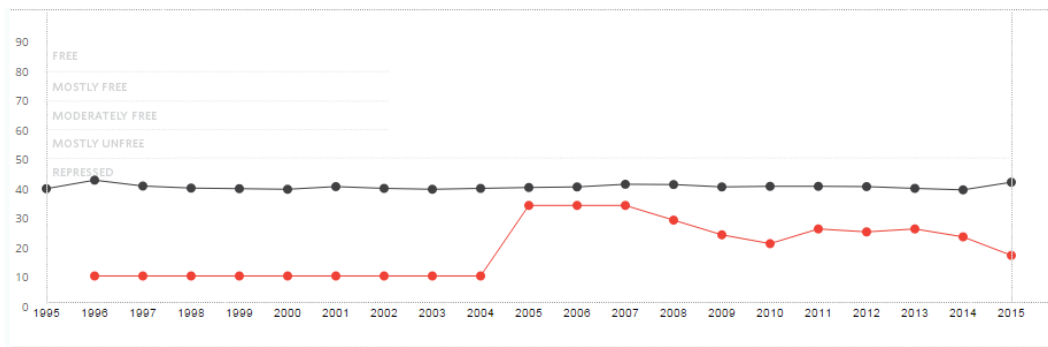
2.1 Failures of Government

The transition of power from Hafez al-Assad to Bashar al-Assad in July 2000, was a critical juncture in Syria's history. Bashar's rule has been a "frustrating puzzle for both his people and the outside world" as he has adopted both "the mask of a modern

leader, encouraging the world to engage with him and Syrians to wait endlessly for his reforms, while in practice behaving like a thug” (Khalaf, 2012). Despite recognising inefficient administration as “the greatest impediment in the way of our march towards better development” (al-Assad, 2000), Bashar quickly fell into the same style of oppressive rule that “relied heavily on clientalist networks and the use of patronage” (Heydemann & Leenders, 2013: 10). He created a new circle of elites and, in exchange for their support, offered prominent positions of power to relatives including his younger brother Mahir as officer of the presidential guard and his brother-in-law ‘Asif Shawkat as head of the military secret service (Becker, 2005/06: 68).

High levels of clientalism and patronage triggered increased levels of corruption. The Assad family and their inner circle are estimated to own a major proportion of the economy; however the true extent is unknown. Table 3 indicates that Bashar fulfilled his promises of tackling inadequacies within the institutions to a certain extent from 2004-2007, however as outlined these promises were unkept and the freedom from corruption began to decline once again (Index of Economic Freedom, 2015). That the declining levels of freedom from corruption were at their worst at the time of the uprisings indicates that it was a contributing factor in what moved the population to protest, evidenced further by the protests in Daraa where demonstrators “chanted for freedom and for the end of corruption” (Arar, 2011).

Table 3: Freedom from Corruption - Syria.



2.2 Decline in Government-Military Relations

While the Syrian regime continues to be well situated to fight the civil war currently taking place, it lost the counter-insurgency programme following the 2011 revolution. This was a direct cause of Bashar al-Assad's inability to uphold the counter-insurgency approach his father had relied upon (Holliday, 2013: 7). While he was President, Hafez al-Assad was commander in-chief of the army and surrounded his Alawi position with two rival Sunni deputies, as well as other Sunnis in prominent positions (Holliday, 2013: 3). Bashar upset this system by becoming supreme commander of the army; and by replacing the senior Sunni figures with mostly Alawi members. The "first Sunni to appear in this hierarchy" did so "as the seventh or eighth most influential person" (Holliday, 2013: 3). This removal of senior Sunni's within the military led to widespread Sunni discontent and also high levels of 'unregulated patronage' within the elite groups in power to "evade Syria's heavy trade regulations" and to commit large-scale corruption without accountability (Holliday, 2013: 3). A former member of the Syrian Special Forces expressed the resulting tensions, exclaiming: "How do you explain that, in a country where 80 per cent of the population is Sunni, only 20 per cent of army recruits hailed from this denomination?" (Selvik, 2014: 5).

Despite Bashar al-Assad's regime ensuring that "soldiers were heavily monitored to effectively discourage group defections", following the 2011 uprisings, many began to defect to the Free Syrian Army and other armed rebel groups (Albrecht, 2014: 13). Holliday outlines the "devolution" of Assad's security institutions as his "deep reliance on a hard core of trusted military units and pro-regime militias" which "limited the regime's ability to control all of Syria simultaneously with sufficient forces" and resulted in a "broadly cohesive, ultra-nationalist, and mostly Alawite force" (Holliday, 2013: 10). The counter-insurgency approach relied almost entirely on elite formations as a result of large-scale defections. The number of defectors is difficult to depict, with estimates ranging from 50,000 to 100,000 (Holliday, 2013: 10). These widespread denunciations of loyalty led to the regime using all power necessary to maintain control.

2.3 Human Rights Abuses

The uprisings of 2011 saw millions of Arabs across the Middle East decide "that they had wasted enough time being oppressed, frightened and excluded in their own countries, and finally called time on their dictatorships" (Bowen, 2012: 10).

Throughout Bashar al-Assad's rule human rights abuses in Syria were widespread, with no Arab state having "a more brutal or ruthless police state than Syria's" (Bowen, 2012: 14). Human Rights Watch found in 2010 that common abuses included the violation of civil and political rights of citizens, the arresting of political and human rights activists, censorship of internet information, the detaining of bloggers and imposed bans of travel (2011).

The abuse of human rights reached a tipping point in the government response to initially peaceful protests throughout Syria against the Assad regime as Bashar attempted to maintain his threatened role. The protests began in the southern region of Daraa in March and spread quickly to various other parts of the country. Human Rights Watch reported that the security forces “responded brutally, killing at least 3500 protestors and arbitrarily detaining thousands, including children under the age of 18, holding most of them incommunicado and subjecting many to torture” by November of the same year (Human Rights Watch, 2012). By 2012 the counter-insurgency had transitioned from the 2011 revolution into civil war.

By 2013 the situation had grown increasingly grave. Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey had been flooded with over 341,000 refugees (Human Rights Watch, 2013). The government’s response grew increasingly violent, firing indiscriminately at densely populated areas and enforcing several large-scale mass killings (Human Rights Watch, 2013). By August 2013 Syrian opposition activists claimed that in attempts to rid the Ghouta region of rising rebel forces, the Assad regime had deployed a large-scale chemical weapons attack. Footage was released showing “thousands of victims of the attack...whose symptoms were typically body convulsion, foaming from mouths, blurry vision and suffocation” (Kawashima, 2014). Assad denounced these allegations; however evidence suggested that there were over 1000 people killed in a single attack (BBC, 2013). The release of declassified intelligence assessments from France led to US consideration of a military response, however intervention did not occur. The Syrian regime announced a programme of dismantlement which lasted until April 2014. By this time, over half of their chemical stockpile was estimated to have been removed. The Assad regime however, was

found to still be using chlorine gas against the opposition leading to further economic sanction and trade-blocks by Canada, the EU, Switzerland, Turkey and the US.

2.4 Foreign Intervention

Though not intervening militarily, Syria received support from Russia and Iran both in response to the threat of US intervention in the civil war and in the decades before the 2011 uprising. Iran has long supported Syria as it has “long been Iran’s closest state ally” as well as providing “crucial access to Iranian proxies, including Lebanese Hezbollah, Hamas, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, allowing Iran to move people, weapons, and money to these groups through Syrian territory” (Fulton et al, 2013: 9). Throughout the counter-insurgency and escalating civil war, Iran has sought “first and foremost to preserve the Assad regime for as long as possible” (Fulton et al, 2013: 26), largely through support to Syrian pro-government militias and paramilitaries (Fulton et al, 2013:19). An analysis of Russian support tells a similar story. Russia has supported Assad because of profits from exporting arms to his regime, securing its naval facility at the port of Tartus and by Putin’s “fear of state collapse” which Putin confronted in the secession of Chechnya between the years of 1999-2009 (Hill, 2013: 2). This foreign support has enabled and helped ‘lock in’ Assad’s authoritarian control throughout his rule, as well as against the opposition since the 2011 uprisings (Koinova, 2013).

The arming of ‘moderate’ rebels by foreign governments including the US throughout both the civil war against Assad and most recently in the US-led military campaign against the IS has been the source of much debate. In June 2014, Obama sought \$500 million for the US military to train ‘vetted’ and ‘moderate’ Syrian rebels, raising

many questions about the dangers of giving arms to violent groups and surrounding the true meaning of “moderate” in terms of militia fighters (Ackerman, 2014). That Obama has led a military campaign alongside Assad to fight the IS has fuelled much anti-Western sentiment throughout the Syrian population. Furthermore, that he has selected and supported certain rebel groups has made future resolution of the conflict significantly more unlikely. This is made even more difficult in that Assad has consistently relied upon pro-regime militias such as the *shabiha* and the Popular Committees throughout the fight against opposition in the civil war and the IS (Holliday, 2013: 19). This means “both types of militias” are “thus likely to continue resisting the ascendant majority-Sunni opposition whether or not Assad remains in power” (Holliday, 2013: 19).

2.5 Path Dependence

The critical factors outlined led to the spread and escalation of the IS and their campaign, rather than its rise from the beginning in Syria, as depicted by Figure 2.

Figure 2: Path Dependence in Syria.

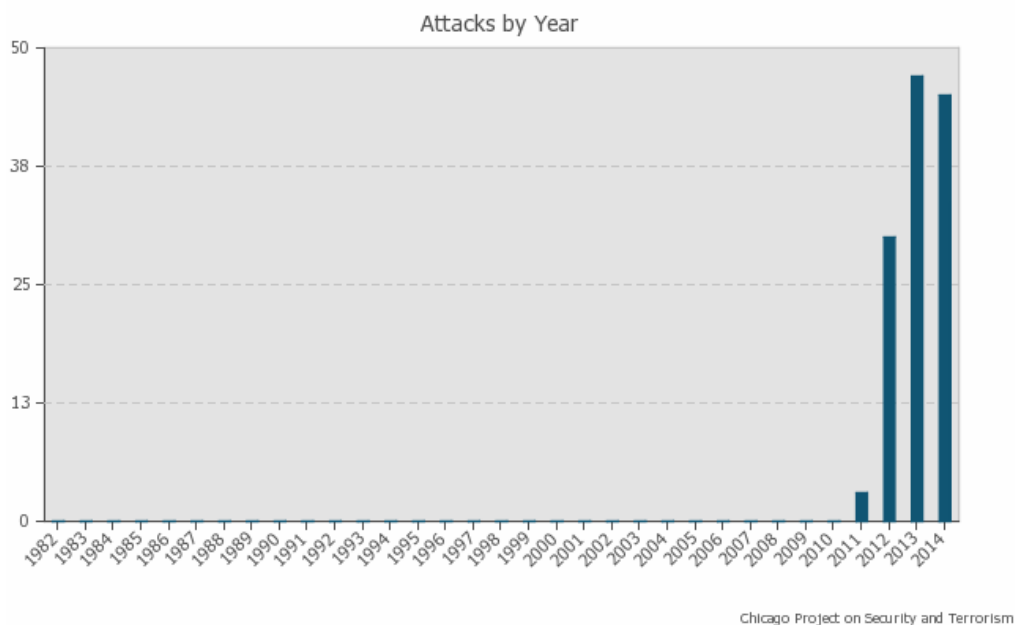


The path begins with a critical juncture in Syria’s history: the transition of power from Hafez al-Assad to his son, Bashar. Bashar failed to uphold the coup-proofed, elite-based and carefully constructed “power pyramid” of the Syrian state, carefully shaped around intersections of “formal-informal powers and hidden-exposed powers” including his secret security forces (Trombetta, 2014: 26). Where his father had reduced sectarian exclusion in fronting institutions with a range of demographics, Bashar destabilised the structure by replacing Sunni executives and Sunni military

officers with those loyal to both him and the Alawi population, thus institutionalising an unrepresentative regime.

This entrenched corruption and autocracy within institutional arrangements led to the escalation of sectarian tensions and brutal violence, as well as pivoting the state of Syria down an extremely negative trajectory for development. This is indicated by Table 4, which depicts the number of attacks against the Syrian regime and its allies from 2011 – 2014 (Chicago Terrorism Database, 2014).

Table 3: Attacks by Year, Syrian Rebels vs Assad and Allies (Chicago Terrorism Database, 2014).



Furthermore, the mass collective mobilisations of 2011 revealed to Assad the damage the decentralisation of power to mostly Alawi and family elites had had on his control over the military, largely contributing to the failures of the security forces combating the counter insurgency. His response to the 2011 protests and use of chemical weaponry against both the opposition and Syrian civilians proved to be the crucial

tipping point, in which the window for any opportunity of resolve with his population was destroyed.

Furthermore, it was at this point that the IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi “saw his chance and almost immediately opened a branch” in Syria, renaming the Islamic State of Iraq to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, before making “strategic gains in key territories, taking over border crossings, supply routes, and oil fields” (Charles River Editors, 2014). Table 4 indicates the exponential increase in suicide attacks, many of which were attributed to this campaign (Chicago Terrorism Database, 2015). The security and political vacuum mobilised the transition of the insurgency to a civil war, highlighting another critical juncture as the result “of a power struggle between powerful actors”: Assad and his loyalists, and the springing up of old and new armed rebel groups competing to topple the regime and seize control (Clarke & Zahar, 2015: 4). The future trajectory of the Syrian state is made even more difficult by the arming of chosen rebel groups by foreign governments and the Assad regime, who may continue to fight for power whether Assad falls or not. Unintended consequences are already emerging just months after the onset of the intervention, with a study showing that various US supplied weapons have wound up in the hands of ISIS” (Boyd, 2014). Only with time will the success and legacy of this intervention be known.

Chapter 3

Assessment Analysis

The theory of path-dependent historical institutionalism is how the rise of IS has been traced in this research, as well as the foundations upon which each critical factor could be analysed. The overarching aim of this project is to analyse how each of the

critical factors under examination relate to the other and how these contributed to the rise of the IS. These factors are defined as: failures of government; decline in government-military relations; human rights abuses; and foreign interventions. The argument presented is that they formed a “reactive sequence” of events which led to widespread discontent, domestic instability and subsequently to the rise of the IS and regional instability (Koinova, 2013: 18). Koinova’s comprehensive interpretation of path-dependent reactive sequences is paramount in this analysis.

3.1 Reactive Sequence

The reactive sequences that have been applied in this project are “chains of temporally ordered and causally connected events” which are bound by the “reaction of each element in a sequence to the antecedent events in a chain” (Koinova, 2013: 7). These sequences have been combined with path-dependent conflict dynamics, which “become informally institutionalised through self-reinforcement mechanisms” (Koinova, 2013: 17). These dynamics include “advantage of political incumbency” and “adaptive expectations”, both of which refer to positive feedback mechanisms through which those in power can establish their roles and “establish the basis for future decisions” within state institutions (Koinova, 2013: 17). These occur most commonly within the ‘critical juncture’ period of a state, which is the period in which new institutions, policy programmes and the relationships between majorities, minorities and international agents are established. The “drift” mechanism, which is “the divergence from established rules by using the gap between rules and their minimal enforcement”, is embodied within the cases of Syria and Iraq (Koinova, 2013: 17). It constitutes the transition from the normal rule laid out in state constitutions or institutional documents which results in the “normalisation of

corruption”, including the decentralisation of power to elite groups (Koinova, 2013: 201). Koinova argues that the drift mechanism in combination with reactive sequences contributed to the perpetuation of conflict in post-communist states following the formative period (Koinova, 2013: 201). This applies also to the cases of Iraq and Syria.

Figures 1 and 3 depict the reactive sequence of events presented in this project.

Critical junctures mark the beginning of the path analysis, with the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 presented as the historical juncture which pivoted Iraq towards a negative trajectory of development. This was outlined and assessed in Chapter 1. Within this period the US employed the “advantage of political incumbency” by consolidating their power through the creation of the CPA and various flawed institutions, as well as through the disbanding of prior institutions such as the army (Koinova, 2013: 17). This led to the election of the Shi’a PM Maliki and US support for his own institutionalisation of power, as well as a “drift” from the democratic principles outlined in the 2005 Constitution to the “normalisation” of increasing autocracy (Koinova, 2013: 201). This triggered a widespread escalation in sectarian violence as depicted in Table 1, Chapter 1 (Stern, 2013: 2)

Figure 1: Path Dependence in Iraq.



Adaptive expectation mechanisms were visible throughout Maliki’s rule. His regime, its interactions with the excluded majority-Sunni population and international support from the US reinforced and ‘locked in’ the “informal rules of appropriate behaviour” which began within the critical juncture (Koinova, 2013: 201). This included

exclusion, de-Ba'athification and a disregard for human rights. The policy of Sunni-exclusion, corruption and embedding of autocracy, despite the 2005 Constitution, all became normalised which became “a focal point for attacks by agents external to the corrupt political order who had benefitted little from it” (Koinova, 2013: 179).

This echoes the sequence within Syria also. This is depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Path Dependence in Syria.



Assad’s regime contained all of the same dynamics. The critical juncture of his transition to power was followed by his “advantage of political incumbency”, enabling him to ‘lock in’ his strategies of clientalism, patronage and majority-exclusion (Koinova, 2013: 17). Similarly to Iraq, this became “a focal point for attacks by agents external to the corrupt political order” (Koinova, 2013: 179).

Country-wide protests throughout 2010-2011 were examples of the mass discontent in the region and triggered mobilisation whereby people “chanted for freedom and for the end of corruption” (Arar, 2011). The human rights abuses by the government in response to public protest triggered an exponential rise in violence, both by the government and rebel forces. The impact of non-intervention in Syria in 2013 undoubtedly allowed the situation to fester and for a political vacuum to form. Within this vacuum, Assad slowly lost control of large swathes of territory, including Raqqa, which fell to the hands of the IS.

3.2 Path Dependence

The reactive-sequence of events outlined is embedded within the wider framework of path-dependent historical institutionalism. Each factor, beginning with the critical junctures in Iraq and Syria triggered a negative response institutionalising a myriad of

unintended consequences and normalising corrupt and oppressive regimes. This theory offers a particularly rigorous and comprehensive analysis of the conflict-dynamics and self-reinforcing mechanisms which allow authoritarian regimes to endure, despite collective discontent

However, certain mechanisms within the theory have been critiqued, such as the concept of critical junctures. Capoccia and Kelemen outline that “caution and clarity in the use of the concept are vital, particularly given “how ubiquitous the term and its synonyms are” and posit that work using the concept has “done so rather casually...not considering all the implications of the definitional and conceptual choices” (2007: 368). They emphasise the importance of ‘contingency’ in its application, stating that “the reconstruction of plausible counterfactual scenarios” is key (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007: 368). The application of this to Iraq and Syria is problematic. Firstly, contingency applies better to Iraq in that the critical juncture was easily identified, with the invasion leading to a total overhaul of Iraq’s political society and foundational structure. In Syria, the transition of power was far less invasive, with no major direct consequences of the physical transition of power in 2000, other than mild protests. Rather, the process of the reactive-sequence was slower to begin following the critical juncture of Bashar’s rise to power, with the rest of the reactive events triggered more speedily following the government response to the protests of 2010-2011.

Another issue within this project is the question of the generalizability of path-dependent historical institutionalism in explaining the rise of ethnic-violence and in this case, the rise of transnational armed rebel groups. The case studies of Iraq and Syria were chosen on the grounds that this was the geographical location of the IS and

their campaign at the time of writing, thus quelling any potential critiques of selective bias and choice for ease of geographical proximity. The comprehensiveness of the theory in explaining the reactive series of events which led to the political conditions in which rebel forces, including the IS, could grow. This indicates that it can be applied to various instances of crises and conflicts. This is evidenced further by the range of regions and conflicts to which the theory has been applied, including post-communist states (Koinova, 2013) the Central Americas (Mahoney, 2001) and other Middle Eastern regions (Zahar & Clarke, 2015).

The last issue to be presented is that the IS's campaign and the campaign to defeat them are not yet finished. This leaves the path within this project incomplete.

Furthermore, as the campaign becomes increasingly sophisticated it is also expanding.

The transnational-group are now "beginning to assemble a growing international footprint" (Graham-Harrison), with affiliates in Algeria, Egypt, Libya and reports of support in South Afghanistan and Pakistan, where reports of IS-supporting graffiti, flags, pamphlets are common and where "12,000 people from...two hotspots of Sunni-Shia sectarian conflict" were reportedly recruited (Amir Rana, 2015: 1).

Hindsight will lend itself to this project in years to come, where the full path to their rise and potentially, resolution, can be determined and analysed.

3.3 Limitations

As in any study, there are several limitations within this project that must be addressed. Firstly, an obvious weakness is "constraints on access to the frontlines in Iraq and Syria" which "make it unusually hard for researches to ground assessments in evidence-based approaches (Jung et al, 2014: 1). These difficulties were

experienced by Jung, Ryan, Shapiro and Wallace in their research of official IS documents (2014). Furthermore, this project is particularly reliant upon secondary sources and qualitative analysis carried out by others. This means that any flaws in their research or data collection could impact the reliability of arguments within this project.

Additionally, due to the relatively small scope of this project as an honours undergraduate dissertation, it has been impossible to acknowledge previous historical junctures or reactive events which could have played a role in creating the path from which this project began. While this must be addressed, it must also be recognised that a path-dependent study of a state could be infinite and that process-tracing events throughout history to the beginning of time is unfeasible if not impossible.

Conclusion

The rise and spread of the IS took the world largely by surprise in summer 2014. The use of extremist tactics and the rapid onset of the campaign has destabilised the fragile Middle East further and has entrenched Iraq and Syria into another brutal conflict.

However, the IS did not form by chance and this dissertation has presented that the origins and development of the IS have been emerging for some time. This has been presented through the theoretical framework of path-dependent historical institutionalism, which projects that the group's origins and success lie within a sequence of reactive historical events which paved the way for its development.

The flaws and failures of the Iraqi and Syrian governments, foreign interventions, the abuse of human rights and decline in government-military relations were critical

events that created a vacuum in which the IS could recruit, train and grow. The critical juncture of the US intervention in Iraq in 2003 led to a “normalisation” of flawed, exclusionary and oppressive strategies of rule (Koinova, 2013). The US supported Maliki even as he “assiduously worked power into his own hands” and disregarded all democratic principles of the 2005 Iraqi constitution that they “helped midwife” (Romano, 2014: 548). Corruption and Sunni-exclusion further weakened the inadequate Iraqi government, which disintegrated following Maliki’s brutal response to the peaceful protests of 2012. Similar reactionary events occurred within Syria’s recent history. The transition of power to Bashar al-Assad was the critical juncture within which he ‘locked in’ the processes which institutionalised his corrupt regime (Koinova, 2013). The brutal response to the 2011 uprisings triggered collective mobilisation and was quickly opposed by a myriad of rebel forces. The crucial tipping point in both situations was the government response to initially peaceful protests in 2010-2011 in Syria and 2012-2014 in Iraq. Within this subsequent political and security vacuum the IS grew from a relatively unknown group to the transnational force visible today.

The examination of these critical factors embodies and develops the basic premise that ‘history matters’ (Pierson, 2004). The myriad of unintended consequences that led both Syria and Iraq down a troublesome trajectory of development triggered the collective mobilisation of entire populations. This is evidenced by the widespread protests and opposition violence the world has witnessed since 2011. The result of these reactive sequences is the current crisis of the IS’s brutal campaign of terror that the world continues to face today.

The threat of the IS continues to grow with their propaganda campaign becoming “a sophisticated effort directed at winning hearts and minds within as well as beyond the borders of the caliphate” (Bonzio, 2015). This is evidenced by the hundreds of foreign citizens travelling to Syria to join their campaign. Furthermore, at the time of this writing, the IS have seized hundreds of Christians in Syria and Egypt. The group have threatened to kill them in the coming days; however their fate is still unknown.

The groups defeat remains elusive as long as we fail to recognise their origins, what drives them to fight and what pushes people to support them. Muslim sheikh Abdullah bin Bayyah recently stated “the problem is that even if you defeat these ideas militarily by killing people, if you don’t defeat the ideas intellectually, then the ideas will re-emerge” (Khan, 2015). Therefore, the actors involved in the current intervention underway must draw lessons from the part they played in paving the way for the rise of the IS, in order to prevent another negative legacy and future conflict within the region.

Thus, future study must draw from the current fight against the IS and how best to minimise unintended consequences. A more multidimensional approach, as Chenoweth outlines, may be of more success than the military-dominated intervention that is currently taking place (2013), and given that coalition weapons have already fallen into the IS’s hands, the issues surrounding the arming of moderate rebels must be taken into account (Boyd, 2014). Furthermore, research must be developed in understanding what drives these men, women and foreign citizens at an individual and collective level to fight for this group, as well as the impact negative historical legacies have on the collective mobilisation of discontented populations overall. Until

these questions are answered the IS and any future armed-rebel groups which rise from the backdrops of oppressive and exclusionary regimes will remain undefeated, and further human misery will prevail.

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