

Unity under Allah? Cohesion mechanisms in jihadist organizations in Africa¹

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Abstract

This article explores mechanisms fostering cohesion in jihadist organizations in relation to territorial presence. This article takes four types of territorial presence as its point of departure. First, a clandestine network-based presence. Second, an accepted presence where the organization is tolerated by a state. Third, a semi-territorial presence, where the organization is allowed some control between phases of enemy offensives and withdrawals. Finally, a relatively permanent territorial presence, where the organization fully controls the territory in which it has bases. The article argues that each of these types of territorial presence opens up for different ways for organizations to create cohesion. Cohesion mechanisms thus vary according to type of territorial presence.

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Introduction

The rise of the Islamic State (IS) sent shockwaves through the international community. From 2013 to the time of writing, IS conquered a territory the size of Denmark and governed it to the extent that Brynjar Lia labeled it a form of proto state (Lia, 2015). Adding to the confusion was the fact that IS soldiers fought on the battlefield with a level of cohesion much higher than for example their opponents in the Iraqi army, which often collapsed in the face of war (Astore, 2014; Smith 2010; Walsh 2016). Massive amounts of resources and training have been committed to building up the Iraqi and other armies fighting the likes of Boko Haram and Harakat Al Shabaab, but the jihadists often prevail despite many hardships, while the Western-backed allies tend to under-perform. Al Shabaab, Boko Haram, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, Ansar Dine, and the Taliban, all have at some point established forms of relatively permanent territorial control, most of them creating governance institutions in the process (Hansen, 2018).² In many ways, their forces more closely resembled regular armies than the small group networks often studied in previous research of jihadist organizations. In this article, ‘jihadist organizations’ are defined as organizations publicly claiming that they fight an armed struggle required by the creed of Sunni Islam. Such groups share ideological traits – one important trait being the resurrection of the caliphate, or the drive to achieve a state-like status (Byman, 2015).

Arguably, one of the problems of past analyses of jihadist organizations has been the artificial binary differentiation between terrorist and insurgent organizations (Khalil, 2013). An organization that only employs terrorism is rare amongst jihadists – even Al Qaeda fought conventional battles early in its history, while also using terror to achieve its targets. An example of this is the 1996 battle of Gedo, Somalia, where al Qaeda fighters supported other militias. Yet

² Ansar Dine here refers to the Malian organization previously led by Iyad Aghali.

this side of Al Qaeda has often been ignored in the literature on jihadist organizations. Studies of cohesion in terrorist groups have tended to focus on the type of small groups that implemented terror attacks in the 1970s and the dynamics of the smaller cells of Al Qaeda in Europe or United States. This produced important knowledge, but did not really cover cohesion in the large units fielded by the Islamic State, for example, in the battle for Kobane in 2014-2015; or by Al Shabaab during the Ramadan offensive in 2010. These two battles were more similar to a First World War campaign than a terrorist attack (Hansen 2013; Cockburn 2015).

When the cohesion mechanisms of jihadist organizations have been studied, the studies have tended to focus on small group dynamics. The proposed mechanisms often describe how a good leader could pull a group together; how the elimination of a leader could end a group; or how repression, negotiations or implosion could end the terrorist group (Cronin, 2010; Weinberg & Perliger, 2010; Jordan, 2009; Jones & Libiki, 2008; Alonso, 2011; Altier et al, 2014; Ashour, 2011; Barelle, 2015; Bertram, 2015; Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009; Della Porta & Diani, 2006). Previous studies has also focused on how group interaction leads to the creation of a group psychology.

A few articles have in fact studied the effects of hierarchy on jihadist organizations, for example, Aaron Zelinsky & Martin Shubik in 2009, but even these contributions failed to explore why such hierarchies developed over time. Additionally, the effects of hierarchy on cohesion were not explored. However, Zelinsky & Shubik argued, as will this article, that centralization became more likely when an organization had a secure base of operations (Zelinsky & Shubik, 2009).

This article argues that if one introduces the variable of territorial control, military cohesion literature becomes an important untapped resource in the study of jihadist groups. It should be noted that well-known jihadist organizations such as Al Qaeda and Al Shabaab have not only implemented terrorist attacks, but at times have also served in a more traditional ‘military-like’

role (Coll, 2004; Hansen 2013). Most jihadist groups have in fact both implemented terror and wielded larger military units that resembled a conventional army in many ways, including Ansar Dine, Boko Haram, the Islamic State, Al Shabaab, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Les Marabouts, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and others. Some of these organizations, such as Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, Ansar Dine, the Islamic State, Al Shabaab, and Boko Haram, have controlled large territories over a significant period of time, establishing more traditional mechanisms of cohesion and recruitment. Thus, in order to study such formations, it becomes natural to draw upon the literature studying traditional military cohesion.

However, the article argues that the military cohesion literature have to be applied with care, as jihadists groups take various organizational forms, not always similar to regular armies, or insurgents, as with other groups using terror. This is easier to see when dealing with some traditional groups mostly employing terrorist tactics. For example, it becomes hard to classify the Red Army Faction as an insurgency or as military unit, it was simply too small, and did focus on other tactics than conventional or guerilla attacks (Aghai, 2011, 171). Jihadist organizations, as will be shown later, might also not engage in combat or terrorism in the state that host them. In fact, in some cases the jihadist organization might only attack targets outside the borders of its host state, or train other groups active outside the borders of the state that host them. This makes some jihadist organizations different from insurgents, but also from a regular army, the latter being a part of the formal state apparatus, while the former being outside, as for example Al Qaeda in its Sudan years. Some jihadist organizations also different from how Kalyvas (2006) and Staniland (2012, 247) sees insurgency, as having segmented which (“each side controls some territory”) or fragmented territorial control which “both sides have presence throughout the area under contestation”. Jihadist organizations are in some stages not able or willing to contest territory, as

for example the Al Qaeda in the west. In fact, Jihadist organizations might not have territorial control of any of these forms; rather the jihadist organizations always have a territorial presence. If they are to exist in a territory, they have to must have members there.

This article takes into consideration variations in such presence amongst jihadist organizations. Drawing on Hansen (2018), four stages of territorial presence serve as a point of departure for the analysis. The first is a clandestine network-based presence, where the organization operates illegally in a territory more or less controlled by an efficient state. The second is an accepted presence, where the organization is tolerated by the state, these two states being different from common definitions of an army or insurgent group. The third is a semi-territorial presence, where the organization is allowed some control between phases of enemy offensives and withdrawals; while the state cannot control these areas on a permanent basis, it can still defeat the jihadists in open battles. The last type of territorial presence is relatively permanent, where the organization controls territories. The cohesion mechanisms available to an organization will vary between these four stages of territorial presence.

This article will not focus on the mechanisms of transformation between the stages, done in Hansen (2018), nor will it focus on ideological transformations, but explore the equally important variations of the mechanisms of cohesion between each stage. The article basically argues that each of these types of territorial presence open up for different ways organizations can create cohesion, organizational hierarchy for example becoming more important in the later stages.

What is cohesion?

The origin of the term 'cohesion' is twofold. As discussed by Kähkö in the introduction to this special issue, the term cohesion was imported to the English language in 1590 from the French

word 'coherence' by none other than William Shakespeare, who took it to mean a 'non-material association'. It is also traceable to Thomas Hobbes' use of the term 'cohesion', as "the action or condition of 'cohering', cleaving or sticking together". Leon Festinger, Stanley Schachter and Kurt Back defined 'cohesiveness' as "the total field of force which acts on members to remain in a group", seeing cohesion as a sort of cement that keeps a group together (Festinger et al, 1950).

The field of cohesion studies was in many ways pioneered in studies of the Second World War by Shils and Janowitz (1948), and Marshall (1947). In these studies, the most important element was group loyalty at a primary group level. Traditional studies of terrorism also focused in general on small group dynamics, even though this field started long after World War II (in the 1970s), and had few connections with the literature on military cohesion (Gilsinan, 2015). The exact mechanisms that are supposed to keep smaller groups together has varied in military cohesion literature. Charles Moskos suggested that it is self-interest in combination with a form of social contract, where the probability for individual survival is enhanced by the loyalty created by cohesion (Moskos, 1975). Others have suggested that small-group mechanisms form social identities that function as a 'glue' to bind units together, as common rituals create common bonds. A small group then acts as a peer pressure group, in which deviant behavior is punished socially. Such mechanisms have also been observed in relatively new guerilla armies during the Arab spring (Whitehouse et al, 2014).

However, several scholars expanded their focus beyond the primary group level. They saw primary group dynamics as, for example, socially engineered by a larger organization. This line of thought posits that secondary group cohesion (organizational and institutional bonding) has to be created at a higher secondary level (Siebold & Lindsay 1999; Siebold 2007; Siebold 2011). Staniland emphasized that the social networks in which leaders are embedded before the war are

important for cohesion. Leaders might convert their pre-war social bases into wartime organizations, contributing to organizational cohesion (Staniland, 2014). Siebold (2007) suggested that institutional bonding depends on macro-level organizational processes. Loyalty is created over time by, for example, payment of benefits by the organization, training by the organization, and/or the possibility of promotion within the organization. To produce these mechanisms of cohesion, a larger organizational structure than the primary group is essential. Malešević in turn argued that centrifugal ‘ideologization’ fosters strong linkages within pockets of genuine micro-solidarity. Successful social organizations have to manage the integration of thousands, and even hundreds of thousands, of small-scale group interactions into an organizational machine (Malešević, 2010). If this does not happen, fragmentation might ensue, as small groups might work for their own group interests in contradiction to larger organizational goals.

Castillo developed a new model of cohesion, suggesting that so-called ‘messianic militaries’ are superior to other fighting forces in war. Following this logic, messianic militaries are influenced by ‘high regime control’, a term that also refers to the supply of an uncontested ideology that gives meaning to the sacrifices of the soldiers, propagated through the regime’s nodes of information, over which it has a monopoly. In this model, ideology is combined with harsh punishment for defection, and autonomy for the armed forces on the battlefield. (Castillo, 2014: 32). This ideology has already dominated the pool of recruits, making them ready-made for military recruitment (ibid 33). Castillo highlights Nazi Germany, North Vietnam and Imperial Japan as examples of such mechanisms. He argues that “authoritarian militaries” will be disadvantaged in comparison to messianic militaries, as they are directly controlled and have less autonomy on the battlefield, which renders them weaker. “Professional militaries” will have a weaker ideological foundation. This is because the latent ideology – the justification for why the

soldier fights – will be weaker. However, training will be very efficiently employed, partly because of the military's autonomy, which gives it the necessary independence to structure such training efficiently, partly compensating for weak latent ideology (ibid 34). Cohesion in professional militaries will decline, though slowly. The last ideal type highlighted by Castillo is the “apathetic military.” This type is characterized by a regime that has little military control, in terms of both ideology and autonomy for the military in question, which will lead to a low standard of training and lack of freedom of operation.

Yet all of the above theories have their problems. Firstly, in general, jihadist organizations have not been taken into account in these theories. Secondly, as expressed by Ilmari Käihkö, these scholars generally (though not always) have focused on a specific time-period, overlooking changes in the tool kit available to create cohesion over time. Käihkö also correctly highlights that many studies oversimplify several of the parameters within which the studied organizations exist (Käihkö 2016, 25). Much of the above literature has also neglected the safety that membership in a military organization can provide in an anarchic society – for example, how redistribution of resources can save members from poverty; it is important to note that this focus goes beyond a mere ‘greed’ argument, creating bonds of loyalty because of gratitude, helping to avoid marginalization (Hansen 2003; Käihkö 2017). Additionally, the above literature has not considered organizations with loose borders with other social entities. This concern is especially relevant in cases where clan/tribal membership forms the basis for loyalty towards an armed group, but also in cases where elements of an armed group are co-opted by such effects (Dukhan 2016; Hansen 2013). Lastly, the above literature has overlooked cases where the differentiation between public and private is blurred, in which networks of power holders and channels of power run parallel to

the state. At times, power holders will even operate outside the state, as is well described in Reno's work on "warlord politics" (Reno 1998).

Finally, there is one more problem with attempting to understand jihadist organizations through the traditional cohesion literature: the forms taken by such organizations vary significantly. At times, they exist as a small clandestine network; at times as a guerilla-like movement; and at other times, they may even have a rudimentary monopoly on violence in a territory. The traditional cohesion literature highlights variables and capabilities that can be used directly to create cohesion. The key, however, becomes contextualizing these variables, and understanding that the available means to create cohesion might vary from time to time. The particularities of jihadism need to be recognized, but it must also be recognized that the mechanisms of cohesion will change with the context. In order to do this, the article bases itself on the four ideal types of territorial presence presented by Hansen (2018) the clandestine network, the accepted presence, the semi-territorial presence, and territoriality.

The classic example: the clandestine network

Much of the existing research on terrorism has focused on only one type of territorial presence. This type is the clandestine network presence, where small jihadist groups exist in states that have a relatively functioning police and security apparatus. The state and its allied forces have an efficient reach throughout the territory in question, and efficient investigation capacities. As a result, they can maintain a degree of monopoly on the use of violence. This is in many ways the type of territorial presence that has been employed by organizations such as the leftleaning Red Army Faction (founded in Germany in 1980) and the left leaning Weathermen (also known as the Weather Underground Organization, founded by students in United States in 1969), as well as Al

Qaeda's pre-September 11 presence in the West (Townshend, 2011). Therefore, this is the classical example of the small clandestine groups that implemented, for example, the September 11th attacks – although they were planned by a somewhat stronger organizational hierarchy in Afghanistan.

The groups in question here are exposed to a relatively efficient security apparatus that is attempting to dismantle them. Hence, they have to maintain secrecy, a hidden organizational structure, and internal cohesion in order to survive. As suggested by Aaron Zelinsky & Martin Shubik, the lack of a secure base weakens organizational hierarchy, and in this situation, such large secure bases are indeed lacking. (Zelinsky & Shubik, 2009). In such a situation, an organizational strategy focusing on small groups with limited interaction between each other becomes advantageous for survival. Such a type of organization will insulate parts of the organization from being imprisoned/killed when other parts of the organization are caught. Captured individuals do not know enough to reveal other cells, in many ways similar to the way various resistance movements in Western Europe during WWII operated. With this type of territorial presence, it is actually advantageous if various group leaders have limited contact and knowledge of each other. Personal relationships become important, and there is a lack of bureaucratization in general, as a bureaucracy is easy for the security apparatus to dismantle. Defections can have serious ramifications, so there are important incentives to control group membership. In this situation, it takes an effort to join the organization, and new recruits will face potential legal consequences by the local police and security apparatus if their activities are discovered. One also has to gain contact and respect from these networks in order to join, as the groups are afraid of being caught and are thus careful with the people they choose to recruit. They are selective, and recruits need to volunteer because of a need for belonging and/or a belief in ideology. Recruits also have to be seen as useful, genuine and dedicated to avoid the risk of defections, which can seriously damage the

organization if they lead to detection of the group's presence by hostile state institutions that, at this stage, can easily defeat the organization. For this reason, clandestineness is of utmost importance to organizations with this network-style presence.

An Accepted Presence

It is easy to forget that many jihadi organizations have had a accepted presence. A jihadist organization might be tolerated, and even encouraged, by a state entity. Boko Haram serves as a good example. The organization had existed for at least four years as a legal entity before it was banned by the Nigerian state in 2009. During this pre-ban period, Boko Haram was isolated from society, and had problems with the regional police. However, Boko Haram was simultaneously at times encouraged and supported by the local political elite, involved in governance processes, and used as violent 'henchmen' by regional political leaders (Harnischfeger 2014; International Crisis Group 2014). In this sense, the political leadership accepted it (Hansen 2018). Boko Haram is not the only example of such a relationship with a state – Al Qaeda in Sudan was accepted by the Bashir government from 1991 to 1996, its members even used as instructors for insurgent movements supported by the Sudanese (Caruso 2001). If one accepts the Taliban as the sovereign government of Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001, the relationship between Afghanistan and Al Qaeda appears to be similar (Chancer, 2005).³

In the case of Boko Haram, the group segregated itself from wider society in Nigeria from 2003 onwards, gaining a sect-like quality (if one defines a sect as a group of people forming a distinct unit within a larger group by virtue of certain distinctions of belief or practice). This is

³; Pakistan and Saudi Arabia accepted Taliban as the government of Afghanistan from 1997, no other countries did. On the periphery of this category lies examples as Shabaabs existence under the Sharia court movement in Mogadishu in 2005 to 2006, and President Saleh and Zia Ul Haqs acceptance of radical jihadist inspired groups as political allies in Yemen and Pakistan respectively.

also apparent in the way Al Qaeda held a different outlook on foreign policies than both Sudan and Taliban/Afghanistan when it held some prominence in these territories. These organizations each formed a separate entity with a distinguishable ideology (Taylor & Elbushra 2006; Schott 2012; Hansen 2018).⁴ The entities acted as stormtroopers for the political elites, and were segregated from the common population. In the case of Al Qaeda, this was because of a widely different background than the Sudanese and Afghani societies. In the case of Boko Haram, there was a will to isolate, though they also reached out to the wider society through propaganda and charitable efforts. Hansen (2018) names this type of territorial presence as an accepted presence. The jihadist organization have a relatively secure existence, but given that excessive violence can still trigger serious sanctions from superior government forces, these groups do not have a fully secure base area. Organizational structures can be more overt, rather than clandestine, and a more direct hierarchy can be established. Information that reaches the members of the organization can also be controlled, and indoctrination is relatively efficient.

Semi-Territoriality

Both the case of an accepted presence and the case of a clandestine network occurs in a situation where the state has full territorial control. In these cases, the state has the capacity to prosecute jihadists, impose security relatively effectively and to establish some degree of a monopoly on the use of violence. This is not always the case. The Westphalian ideal type of state does not always exist. In some cases, states can only govern some areas of a territory (as in Yemen today). In other cases, the state has no capacity to do so at all (as in Somalia from 1993 to 2007). State power might

⁴ Al Qaeda had large variations from Turabism when it came to gender issues, the general takfirism of Wahhabism, and with Taliban on global scope and the far enemy. Max Taylor & Elbushra ,M. (2006) Research Note: Hassan al-Turabi, Osama bin Laden, and Al Qaeda in Sudan

be limited by geography. In the Sahel region, states often lack the capacity to fully secure their vast territories, leaving space for organizations like Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb to exist and operate. At times, a jihadist organization might become powerful enough to establish some form of permanent presence. The government might have superior military forces, but might also lack the will to secure the countryside. Some territories may not seem worth the cost of securing them properly, especially if the government has limited resources (Mampilly 2011). An example would be the Allied Democratic Forces in Congo (and, previously in Uganda), which for twenty years pulled back in the face of government offensives, returning when government forces later left the area (Titeca & Fahey, 2016). However, such situations might also be produced by casualty-averse strategies, where states attempt to minimize losses by creating strongholds and staying inside those strongholds, limiting confrontations with the Jihadist organization in question. Jihadist organizations can then easily create a form of semi-territorial presence. This means that the jihadist organization controls territories day to day, but is unable to maintain control in the face of direct attacks and/or prolonged campaigns by state security forces. The jihadists are inferior to their enemies in open combat, but their enemies (often, the state) do not have enough resources, or will, to permanently secure the area by maintaining a presence outside their own strongholds. Often, the army or police will after counter insurgency campaigns, allowing the jihadist organizations to renew control. In Somalia, one of the consequences of this is that potential government supporters in the countryside (outside the state's strongholds) are deterred from participating in actions in support of the government, since they know it is likely that they will face repercussions from jihadist groups after government forces leave their villages following the end of their military operations (Hansen 2018).

Jihadist organizations can wield many tools of suppression against the local population. Semi-permanent territorial control allows these organizations to practice forced recruitment, as locals know that they can be punished for disobedience. This type of control also enables extensive taxing, as again, locals know that they can be penalized for disloyalty towards the jihadi cause when government forces are not there. A semi-permanent presence is also critical for controlling export and imports, thus enabling taxation or other direct involvement in illegal trade (for example, of diamonds, ivory, or drugs). Admittedly, clandestine networks are able to do much of the same, but cannot tax as efficiently, as security forces are more able to disrupt illicit trade on almost a daily basis. In a semi-territorial scenario, the jihadist group might end its illegal activities during government offensives, only to resume them once the government forces have withdrawn. They can also move these activities into areas where the government has no presence during these offensives.

Locals have to interact with a semi-territorial jihadist organization in order to promote their own safety. They could employ strategies such as intermarriage with leaders in order to promote their own security. Another way to achieve security for locals could be infiltration of the organization through a supplement of local recruits loyal to other social groups, such as clans or tribes.

This type of territorial presence enhances the jihadist's 'tool kit' for creating cohesion: sanctions against potential recruits by enemies are harder to implement, command hierarchies can be clearer, as can command lines and redistribution channels within the organization.

A relatively permanent territorial presence

The last ideal type of territorial presence is when a jihadist group operates with the kind of permanent territorial control that resembles a state, creating what Brynjar Lia (2015) calls a “proto state”. The Islamic State in Syria exemplified this form of presence during 2011-2016. Other jihadist organizations have also exercised this type of control: Al Shabaab did so in southern Somalia from 2009 to 2013, and Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula held certain regions in Yemen from 2011 to 2013, as well as parts of Hadhramaut in 2015-2016. Very often, this type of full territorial control is a product of military-style victories, and/or of weaknesses in the armies of the jihadists’ opponents.

Territorial control of this level of permanence is accompanied by a certain sense of status, and most jihadist organizations do seek to achieve forms of this state – whether through claims of a ‘resurrection of the caliphate’, as seen from both Al Qaeda and the Islamic State, or through de facto conquest, as seen from Al Shabaab. It should be noted that Al Qaeda, though claiming that they fought for an Islamic state, or caliphate, was hesitant to sanction any state on behalf of for example Al Shabaab or Ansar Dine, because they saw that specific criteria for an Islamic State defined by Al Qaeda were not fulfilled (Hansen 2013). Despite permanent territorial control being a prestigious goal for jihadist organizations, not all of them can reach it; relatedly, the various phases outlined above are not linear in or one-directional. An organization’s territorial presence can, as in the case of Al Shabaab and Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, go from full territorial control back to a semi-territorial presence. Additionally, the dominant type of territorial presence for a given organization does not preclude the organization from employing other forms of presence in its various areas of operation –for example, from 1996-2001 Al Qaeda existed as an organization in Afghanistan while maintaining small clandestine cells in Europe, the United States, and Africa.

Beyond concerns of prestige, full territorial control has several positive aspects for a jihadist organization. It enables good extraction possibilities, as extraction can take place in the open, with little need for secrecy or protection against government offensives. It gives an organization the possibility to act as a stable income provider in the territory controlled, and incentivizes long-term planning and ‘good governance’, while limiting the practice of outright predatory behavior that can ruin future income possibilities. Full territorial control provides an ideological advantage to accompany the status elevation, as seen by the Islamic State, who used its territorial control to reinforce its mythological Islamic ‘end-times’ narrative (Adams 2014). Additionally, it facilitates recruitment of foreign sympathizers through both a sympathetic attraction from abroad and education at home – including larger and more stable indoctrination camps for both local and foreign fighters. Full territorial control also enables the ability to design school curriculum for pupils and re-educate civil society leaders, tribal leaders and even religious leaders. However, jihadist organizations that achieve full territorial control may find themselves required to practice pragmatism as well, as such organizations will have to contend with, participate in costly governance of other social groups (as for example tribes), and interact in some form with neighbors, who may be their enemy.

Full territorial control can also be disadvantageous to jihadist organizations. To maintain permanent institutions overtly, to field an army instead of a guerilla movement, indeed simply to hold territory opens an organization to vulnerabilities. Developing a state structure is not cheap: funds that could be used by the military may need to be diverted to creating a territorial administration. In addition, if the organizations’ permanent territorial presence compels larger and superior forces to intervene, loss of prestige is inevitable as it becomes increasingly more difficult to gain and/or control territory. At the time of writing, it seems that the Islamic State is struggling

with this problem. Despite its obvious benefits and the clear desire of jihadist organizations to achieve this stage, a permanent territorial presence can thus also make an organization vulnerable.

Cohesion and group structures under the surveillance of a state

We now have a model with four distinct categories of territorial presence for jihadist organizations. Instead of focusing only on the category that is already extensively covered in the literature on studies of terrorism (the clandestine network category), we can categorize such organizations according to their type of presence: illegal clandestine networks, an accepted presence, organizations with semi-territorial and organizations with relatively permanent territorial control.

In the case of Boko Haram, the organization became illegal in Nigeria in 2009, it entered into a phase as a clandestine network. When this happened, its formal command hierarchy was drastically weakened, indeed disappearing from or losing contact with many parts of the organization (Castillo 2014). The organization became severely fragmented, and only slowly managed to build up a weak central command hierarchy in the aftermath. It developed small groups, or cells, that had to survive and work together under relatively high pressure from state security services. Group dynamics play a major role in such an environment – the primary group is stronger than the hierarchical organization, as hierarchical organizations can be exploited to trace and prosecute members.

Organizations at this stage also attract highly motivated recruits. Potential recruits will face prosecution if caught, and that any economic rewards are likely to be negligible (in part, because channels to transfer money are constantly under surveillance and attempts to gain income by blackmail is limited by the fact that victims can take such cases to the police). Moreover, leaders can do much damage to such groups that become unpopular because they do not follow the group's

dominant ideology, and/or because they take advantage of other group members. Similarly, personal conflicts within the group (perhaps over lovers or money) can have deadly results and lead to the demise of the group. The organizational hierarchy (if it exists) will often be too weak to reign in such conflicts, and sanctions will be limited because of government surveillance as sanctions might lead to defections and such defections become more important as police and security services easily can take advantage of them. A small and closely-knit group structure can also lead to what Cronin calls the 'generation gap', in which more-senior group members fail to transfer their knowledge to the next generation of potential leaders (Cronin 2010). Stigma and societal disapproval; losing faith in the ideology or politics of the group; loss of status; a sense of exhaustion – these are all factors that Cronin posits are troublesome for cohesion of clandestine networks. The inefficiency of clandestine recruitment procedures and the group's limited size are other vulnerabilities that create a lack of cohesion. This is perhaps several of the reasons why Cronin claims that terrorist organizations often fail to survive. Many of these difficulties can combine to create a general sense of insecurity that can lead to internal mistrust, and attempts by leaders to isolate or remove potential rivals. This again creates destabilizing conflicts within the groups that make up clandestine jihadist networks.

Nevertheless, small group sizes can also make the bonds between members stronger: everybody knows everybody, intra-group relationships become very personal, and peer pressure and the threat of punishment can all contribute to group cohesion. Boko Haram survived the clandestine network stage in a relatively orderly fashion despite some defections. So did Al Qaeda's East African cell. Small group cohesion, then, may be a particularly strong force – though it is certainly challenged by a general weakness of organizational hierarchy which makes it difficult for these groups to achieve their strategic purposes and for central leadership to communicate their

orders, especially when the jihadists' communication channels are discovered through surveillance activities conducted by enemy state authorities (Warde 2007).

However, a jihadi organization does not necessarily need to hide; it can be accepted by a state. A accepted presence has several advantages and disadvantages when it comes to creating cohesion. First, it is able to not only openly engage in recruitment, but it is also able to employ economic incentives – such as providing micro-credit to the families of recruits – to aid these recruitment efforts. Second, this category, despite being legal, is often separated from society, which can also have positive effects. Central to Castillo's argument on messianic militaries is that they are influenced by 'high regime control', which includes the dominance of an uncontested ideology. This provides members with a meaning for their sacrifices, a narrative that is propagated and filtered through the organization's nodes of information, over which it has full control. This ideological control creates a strong sense of loyalty to the organization itself, which encourages a close command hierarchy. However, a disadvantage is that it is not free to punish defectors, as the state controlling the territory in which the organization operates might intervene if such punishment becomes too severe; the state may also try to take advantage of defectors to establish or maintain some form of control over the organization. Despite substantial mechanisms to foster cohesion, organizations do not seem to be able to harness the mechanisms for cohesion as presented by Castillo (2014).

In this, state the organization to propagandize its societal critique to a wider audience. For example, Boko Haram heavily criticized Nigerian government corruption, promoting itself as a 'just alternative' while keeping the negative consequences of its own ideology and practices hidden from those outside the organization (Hansen 2018). This advantage can become problematic if the organization is under scrutiny, for instance, from journalists – but generally, organizations will be

less prone to this complication than if the organization holds territory on a more permanent basis, as organizations remain less visible to the rest of the society due to their separation. The advantage can also be problematic if the organization is targeting the state that shields it, creating a tense relationship that in a worst-case scenario can end the acceptance. Nevertheless, it is possible to use this strategy. Pre-2009, while Boko Haram existed as an organization in the Borno State of Nigeria, it used this advantage to create a positive image for itself amongst many citizens by focusing its propaganda on anti-corruption (ibid). At this time, it was also very closely-knit, seemed to have few problems with internal cohesion, and was quite popular in its territory.

Following the literature on cohesion, mechanisms for creating cohesion include direct control over information, self-selection, small size, and latent ideology. Positive interaction with others in an organizations' surrounding territory can also create sympathy for the organization in the wider society. However, the limited ability of an organization to autonomously penalize defectors does limit cohesion. Yet as evidenced by Boko Haram and Al Qaeda when they have adopted this type of territorial presence, the above mechanisms can create a surprisingly high level of cohesion. This cohesion enabled Boko Haram to survive the harsh campaign against it in 2009, when the Nigerian government outlawed them; similarly, Al Qaeda survived the transfer of its operational base from Sudan to Afghanistan circa 1996 and the subsequent US-led intervention against it in 2001. The organization structure of these organizations might also have fostered the pre-war social networks that Staniland (2014) argues are necessary to ensure the successful creation of cohesion in wartime.

Cohesion and 'jihadi armies'

Both a semi-territorial presence and full territorial control negate the effects of any government attempts to disrupt income gathering activities as well as indoctrination/educational activities. As the organization now operate with de facto control over territories, it can more openly and efficiently punish defectors, as well as opponents outside the organization. Without protection from the state, businesses also become easily taxable to jihadist organizations.

The importance of these organizations also extends to the everyday life of ordinary people, who now need to deal with it on a more permanent basis. There are several strategies to do so. One includes having a son join the organization, or marrying a daughter to a jihadi leader. Both strategies theoretically increase security. Considering that these organizations also control many resources in their territory, physical safety is far from the only reason to associate with them. Illicit trade of humans, cigarettes, cocaine, or hashish can provide significant profit for members of such jihadist group who can operate more in the open. For example, Mokhtar Belmokhtar, leader of the African jihadist organization Al Mourabitoun and former military commander of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, became known as “Mr. Marlboro” for smuggling cigarettes (Hopperstad et al, 2015). Conversely, this activity could weaken the cohesiveness of a jihadist organization by drawing opportunists into its ranks. Weinstein suggest that organizations can be divided into “resource-wealthy” and “resource-poor”, and that the former will attract opportunists while the latter will require more “social endowments” such as ideology or religious identity to bring in recruits (Weinstein 2007).

Additionally, other social and ethnic groups (such as tribes or clans) might attempt to co-opt or control parts of an organization. Because an organization with a semi- or permanent territorial presence can employ violence against civilians on a relatively large scale, these other groups may find it tempting to use the jihadists to settle scores between themselves, thus entangling

a jihadist organization in local conflicts. This sense of embeddedness can also lead an organization to develop deep ties to the inhabitants of a territory, which may consequently enhance recruitment. However, this situation may lead to recruitment of locals that do not fully share the ideology of the organization, thereby weakening its ideological cohesion at the subordinate level. It is even possible that an entire jihadist organization could be ‘hijacked’ by an alternative agenda stemming from one of these social/ethnic groups, or fragment into factions due to inter-group conflicts – and these alternative agendas and conflicts can result in leaders losing focus on the original goals of the organization, or even abandoning the shared concern for organizational survival. For example, Marehaan clan militias tried to take control of Al Shabaab around the city of Kismayo in 2008-2009 by strategically joining the organization in large numbers (Hansen 2013). In this situation, the bonds between the jihadist organization and the local community may be strengthened and its ranks may swell, but the highly diversified pool of recruits might make it more difficult to build cohesion within the organization itself, leading to defections and competing interests. We might find what David Kilcullen called the accidental guerilla, a person who joins not because of ideological reasons, but because of poverty, a need to settle scores in other conflicts, prospects of income, or a need to guarantee safety (Kilcullen 2009). This might damage cohesion.

Semi-territorial presence can also be disappointing for organizations such as the Islamic State, which seek to control territory out of a desire for prestige, or to prove an ideological point. It is hard for such organizations to create permanent indoctrination centers and training camps, as larger facilities must be abandoned in the face of superior forces during government campaigns, thus interrupting the recruitment process. The organization’s back-and-forth competition for territorial control with security forces might leave relatives of recruits vulnerable to sanctions during government offensives, thus making recruitment more dangerous for those joining and

more inconsistent for the organization – a distinct disadvantage in comparison to organizations with permanent territorial control.

A jihadist organization with a permanent territorial presence is more similar to a regular military force when it comes to cohesion. More permanent institutions for training, taxing and governance can be created and maintained (See Arjona et al, 2015 for examples) At the same time, the ideology of the movement can be openly propagated to a wider audience – though this visibility can backfire on the organization if its brutal governance practices are also broadcast to a wider audience. It becomes more difficult to hide double standards and inhuman results of governance based on an inhuman ideology. Taxation is also a double-edged sword, as it ensures that opportunists will join the movement, as will individuals who are simply seeking a stable income. As with a semi-permanent presence, recruitment mechanisms ensure a broader and more heterogeneous recruitment base than if the organization only had an accepted presence in a host state or existed as a clandestine network, with the aforementioned positive and negative possible impacts on the organization. However, another advantage of a permanent territorial presence is that a more-extensive training apparatus gives the organization more tools to counter the effects of such heterogeneity in recruits. Al Shabaab, for example, tried to control the regional schooling system in order to homogenize its recruits (Hansen 2013).

With both semi-territorial control and permanent territorial presence, the primary group mechanisms indicated in past cohesion literature remain important. However, in these categories of territorial presence the organization's 'tool kit' also includes economic redistribution, stronger command hierarchy, and increased opportunities for deterring defection. The quality of the command hierarchy increases in its importance as well, as it plays a greater role in the organization's cohesion. In addition, because the organization does not need to operate

clandestinely, significant growth is much easier to attain – though this growth can come with the risks that accompany recruitment of opportunists and others with non-ideological motivations.

Conclusions

What does all of this mean? It is highly likely that primary group dynamics remain more important for a jihadi organization when it exists as an organization or clandestine network, partly because command hierarchy is so weak at this stage, and the positive effects of hierarchy on cohesion are harder to harness. Hierarchical sanctions against poor leaders or organizational mediation attempts to address conflicts that potentially can break up the primary group, as well as to coordinate sub-groups, are beneficial for group cohesion, but not fully available for clandestine networks. Yet, there are advantages, in the clandestine network mode, recruitment will in general ensure that the members are highly motivated and share an ideological belief.

At the semi- and permanent stages of territorial presence, cohesion mechanisms include those similar to that of a regular army – primarily a stronger hierarchy, which increases central command's ability to influence the primary groups. However, recruitment at this stage seems to be more heterogeneous, and an organization's embeddedness in local populations may entice opportunists to join it. Consequently, external conflicts might be internalized despite the fact that they likely will not be in the interest of the organization as a whole. In these latter stages of territorial presence, the literature on cohesion in military units has a lot to contribute to the study of jihadist organizations. This research agenda should be promoted, as it may lead to critical insights and expose vulnerabilities in jihadist organizations that security forces can use to their advantage. Understanding that the mechanisms jihadist organizations use to foster cohesion change depending on stages of territorial presence highlights two important points: firstly, it

emphasizes that these organizations do indeed change – in presence, in structure, in command hierarchy, etc.; secondly, it acknowledges that the cohesion mechanisms important in one stage of an organization's existence might be less important in another. As a jihadist organization changes in territorial presence, so do its mechanisms of cohesion – this means that strategies to fight it should vary as well.

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