The Apocalyptic and the Sectarian: Identity, 'Bare Life' and the Rise of *Da'ish*

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Within the context of upstream operations, one must engage with events within particular boundaries of space and time. Understanding processes within these areas can also result in awareness of the emergence of particular groups and ideas. To understand the emergence of Da'ish in the summer of 2014, it is imperative to explore the fragmentation of Iraq and the increasingly sectarian attempts to fill the post-Saddam vacuum. This article considers political organisation in Iraq across the 20th century, focussing upon the rise and fall of the sovereign state and suggests that by considering events through the lens of sovereignty, we are better equipped to understand and engage with events. The argument begins by looking at the early years of the Iraqi state before turning to the events of 2003 and the invasion of Iraq, considering the process of deba'athification, which resulted in a Shi'a government in Baghdad, mass unemployment and the onset of sectarian violence. It is then necessary to consider the penetration of the Iraqi state by external actors, namely Saudi Arabia and Iran, whose geopolitical agendas – framed within the context of support for sectarian kin – fed into the continued fragmentation of the state. From this, it is possible to see how Sunni communities became marginalised and securitised, resulting in what Giorgio Agamben (1995) has termed 'bare life'. It is these conditions that gave rise to the emergence of Da'ish.

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> The spark has been lit here in Iraq, and its heat will continue to intensify – by allah's permission – until it burns the crusader armies in dabiq. (al Zarqawi, *The Return of Khalifa,* 2014)

Introduction

The emergence of Da'ish in the summer of 2014 is the story of the mobilisation of an apocalyptic vision and response to – and continuation of – the marginalisation of sectarian identities across the Middle East. These stories, when taken together, can explain how a group of people - emerging from the embers of Al Qaeda in Iraq - was able to gain control over territory in Syria and Iraq that was larger in extent than Great Britain and conduct terrorist attacks across the world. A growing number of people have begun to focus upon the first story, the tale of an apocalyptic vision (see McCants, 2015), but this article focuses predominantly upon the second story, of the politicisation and securitisation of a range of identities across the Middle East. While the capital of the self-proclaimed caliphate is the Syrian city of Raqqa and the Syrian Civil War has played a prominent role in helping the group to gain traction and support, this article focuses on Iraq for four reasons: First, the group's roots can be traced back to Al Qaeda in Iraq, the group led by Abu Musa al-Zarqawi. Second, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of Da'ish is an Iraqi citizen. Third, a large number of the group's leading members were prisoners in Camp Bucca, the American prison in Iraq. Fourth, as Abu Musa al Zarqawi noted above, the spark was lit in Iraq and as such, while analysis can be extended to events in Syria, this article will focus solely upon events in Iraq.

To facilitate awareness of the emergence of *Da'ish*, the article begins by exploring ideas of sovereignty, albeit couched in a Western philosophical tradition. In doing so, it is possible explore a number of important issues that shed light on the nature of political interaction within a particular territorial area.[1] It then considers political organisation in Iraq across the 20th century, focussing upon the rise and fall of the sovereign state. The argument then turns to the events of 2003 and the invasion of Iraq, considering the process of deba'athification, which resulted in a Shi'a government in Baghdad, mass unemployment and the onset of sectarian violence. The spread of religious identities across the region means that it is necessary to consider the penetration of the Iraqi state by external actors, namely Saudi Arabia and Iran, whose geopolitical agendas – framed within the context of support for sectarian kin – fed into the continued fragmentation of the state. From this, it is possible to see how Sunni communities became marginalised and securitised, resulting in what Giorgio Agamben (1995) has termed 'bare life', the exclusion from the political realm that shapes daily life. This exclusion is not limited to high politics, rather, also refers to the deprivation of resources and opportunities, restricted by

[1] A different understanding of sovereignty is found when considering salafism, which holds that sovereignty couched in *tawahid*, the oneness of God. Fundamentally, this view means that democracy and power-sharing are incompatible with Islam. This position is at the core of Da'ish's ideology and much be acknowledged, but political understandings of sovereignty reveal a great deal more about dynamics on the ground in the Middle East.

formal and informal structures. It is these conditions that gave rise to the emergence of *Da'ish*. From here, the argument turns to an exploration of the different types of support that the group is able to mobilise, from the active to the passive. In attempting to defeat the group, it is essential to engage with these questions.

As per other articles within this special issue, the argument contributes to discussion about the concept of upstreaming, by questioning what the rise of Da'ish can add to these debates. Upstreaming, a term initially found within the oil industry, deals with a range of processes with different objectives, but shaped by different temporal, geographical and scaler factors. Typically these are comprised of small military teams operating at early stages of conflict curves. Within debates on the topic, it is clear that streams are rarely linear in one direction, either geographically or dimensionally, be that in terms of flows of people, finances, arms, ideas or contraband.

Sovereignty, 'Bare Life' and Political Organisation

To understand the rise of Da'ish it is important to locate it within the context of the political transition across Iraq that emerged following 2003 war which reversed decades of political marginalisation and discrimination and resulted in a Shi'a government in Baghdad. As such, it is important to consider the long-standing grievances that were reversed in the aftermath of the toppling of Saddam Hussein. To this end, the following section provides a brief genealogy of the history of political organisation in Iraq after the formation of the state in 1921, although formal independence from British rule was only achieved in 1932. Yet before embarking on this survey, it is useful to consider ideas of sovereignty as a means of exploring political organisation and of locating the position of identity groups within the state along with understanding the nature of power relations with the sovereign.

Conventional understandings of sovereignty make a distinction between internal sovereignty and external sovereignty, with the former engaging in questions of political organisation within clearly defined territorial areas and the latter engaging with ideas of non-interference. Western approaches to sovereignty have shaped global understandings of questions about the nature of political organisation, grounded in the work of scholars such as Thomas Hobbes (1651), Max Weber (1919), Carl Schmidt (1922), Stephen Krasner (1999), James Caporaso (2000), Michel Foucault (1976), and Giorgio Agamben (1995). These approaches, while different in the nuance involved, typically share a number of component parts, namely citizenship, territoriality, authority, and autonomy. The idea of sovereignty, while remaining contested in practice, is largely accepted as a form of political and social control, with the continuation of sovereignty as an end in and of itself.

Problems arise when considering exceptions – and challenges - that are found within the state rather than as the external manifestation of another. Given the fractious nature of identity politics within a number of Middle Eastern states, ideas of sovereignty that are found in the more conventional approaches, grounded in ideas of citizenship and inclusivity become problematic. From this problem, it is important

to consider alternative ways of engaging with political organisation. Underpinning this, of course, is the ability to control life, or, as Michel Foucault articulates, "the right to *take* life or *let* live" (1976: 136).

For Carl Schmidt, sovereignty refers to a power that is able to determine when the law should be suspended and a 'state of exception' can be declared (1922). The sovereign is then able to determine who remains inside and who is excluded, delineating the nature of political organisation in terms of people rather than territory. Such a position contains within it several assumptions about the ontology of such a form of political organisation, which become contested in the Middle East by competing sources of authority. Although Foucault's notion of sovereignty provides an integral underpinning to political organisation across the region, the other aspects - as outlined by Caporaso - are increasingly in tension with one another, particularly so when considering questions of citizenship and authority.

Moreover, when considering the supra-state nature of identities across the region, through tribal and religious affiliation, the idea of systems of governance within neatly defined territorial areas appears problematic and inappropriate. As John Agnew (1994) argues, such a conceptualisation of a state as a fixed unit of sovereign space is hugely problematic. For Agnew, "Social, economic, and political life cannot be ontologically contained within the territorial boundaries of states through the methodological assumption of 'timeless space'" (1994: 77). Such problems are compounded in the Middle East, when fused with the existence of tribalism and religious affiliation, which also have the capacity to challenge a regime's authority.

Foucault and Agamben seek to offer such an alternative, starting from the "decisive abandonment of the traditional approach to the problem of power" (1995: 5) and grounded in biopolitics, a Foucauldian approach to understanding the regulation of life by the state. Although for Foucault and Agamben, such conditions emerge from modernity and the capitalist system, with explicit reference to Western states, these ideas are also applicable in the non-Western world where different socio-economic conditions have given rise to a different form of political organisation, underpinned by religion. Biopolitics, as conceptualised by Foucault, suggests that human life is targeted and regulated by the organisational power of the state, yet for Agamben, there is a hidden tie between the sovereign power and biopolitics, born out of exceptionalism emerging from state sovereignty.

Agamben begins his exploration of sovereignty with a discussion of Schmidt and ideas of a state of exception, which play an integral role in the emergence of the condition of 'bare life', where political life and all that comes with it is stripped from them (discussed in detail below). It is through the enactment of the exception – and the suspension of the law - in which the conditions of bare life emerge. In a Western context, "the rule, suspending itself, gives rise to the exception and, maintaining itself in relation to the exception, first constitutes itself as a rule" (Agamben, 1995: 18). Clearly, this is predicated upon the existence of a system within which the rule of law operates, for it is the suspension of the law that brings about the conditions of bare life. Yet such conditions may arise in non-Western contexts, where a state of

emergency has been declared following the deterioration of the domestic security situation. The law is used to regulate behaviour, determining which people are able to become involved in politics and gain access to identity cards.[2] Across his work, Agamben argues that politics is the process of rendering people vulnerable and maintaining a control over decisions of life and death, which can be applied in a range of political contexts, occurring beyond the formal structures of the state. If one accepts this, the status of bare life can be created in authoritarian states, although the journey to the destination differs from the Western context.

For Agamben:

> The realm of bare life – which is originally situated at the margins of the political order – gradually begins to coincide with the political realm, and exclusion and inclusion, outside and inside, *bios* and *zoe,* right and fact, enter into a zone of irreducible indistinction. At once excluding bare life from and capturing it within the political order, the state of exception actually constituted, in its very separateness, the hidden foundation on which the entire political system rested. (1995: 9).

From this, Agamben argues that it is the state that makes the distinction between *bios* and *zoe,* articulating a distinction between those recognised as fully human, who are participating in political life and those who are of a lesser classification, of bare life. Agamben's discussion takes place in *Homo sacer*, with the title a nod to such an individual, from ancient Rome, who is banned and may be killed by anybody, but not in a religious ritual, as his or her life is worthless (1995: 72). Yet their life is still controlled by the state, which retains the power of life and death over them. Whilst those existing in bare life would most likely reject the idea that they are 'no longer human', this argument helps to locate and explore grievances and contexts that can marginalise people in a range of different ways including - but not limited to - power relations, questions about identity and inclusion, citizenship, control and ultimately, the conditions that give rise to violent groups.

The Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Rise of the Sovereign State

In June 2014 a Norwegian-Chilean man, Bastian Vasquez, stood on the border of Syria and Iraq and uttered the following words:

> Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim. As you can see right now, I'm on the border of Iraq and al Sham. Right now I'm inside of As sham. As you can see this is the so-called border of Sykes-Picot. Alhamdulillah, we don't recognise it and we will never recognise it. Inshallah this is not the first border that we will break and inshallah, we shall break all the borders, but we shall start with this, inshallah. […] Alhamdullilah there is nobody now except the soldiers of dar al Islam. So alhamdulillah inshallah we cross the border. Bismillah. […] As you can see, this is under our feet right now. […]As Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi used to say 'He is the breaker of barriers'. Inshallah we will break the barrier of Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, all the county[sic] inshallah. Until we

[2] In 2007 a 1975 rule was overturned that prevented people of the Bahai faith from gaining identification cards.

> reach Quds. This is the first of many barriers we shall break inshallah. (Bastian Vasquez, 2014).

Vasquez spoke of the agreement reached between Sir Mark Sykes and his French counter-part, Francois Georges-Picot, in 1916 (Barr, 2009). Sykes and Picot sought to reach an agreement about how best to control land in the Middle East following the end of the Ottoman Empire. Yet as Sykes himself acknowledged, such an agreement never emerged. For Sykes, "imperialism, annexation, military triumph, prestige, White man's burdens, have been expunged from the popular political vocabulary; consequently Protectorates, spheres of interest or influence, annexations, bases, etc. have to be consigned to the Diplomatic lumber-room"(Dodge, 2005: 13).

Yet as Toby Dodge (2005) argues, the narrative is all too often used to explain the roots of discontent across the region, despite its inaccuracies. Such a position leads to a number of serious problems when understanding the Middle East, reducing political affairs to religious organisation. Despite this, in dismissing the narrative entirely out of hand, one risks throwing the baby out with the bathwater; the Sykes-Picot narrative highlights the extent of the "perfidious interference" (Dodge, 2014) of colonial powers in the region and it is here where the narrative gains much of its traction. Indeed, by stating the intent to destroy the Sykes-Picot agreement, Vasquez really demonstrated the intent to destroy the colonial legacy in the region.

After the redundancy of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, the victorious Allied powers convened a conference at San Remo in 1920, which determined the allocation of mandates following the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Under the Treaty of Sevres, signed 4 months after San Remo, Turkey was stripped of its Arabian possessions, ending colonialism with the establishment of mandates. As such, although the Sykes-Picot Agreement was not implemented, the legacy of external actors in Iraq is prominent. In tracing the history of modern Iraq one must begin with the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the involvement of the British in shaping the early years of political organisation. Indeed, this starting point serves to highlight the power of the narrative of colonial interference, resulting in claims such as that made by Bastian Vasquez.

British involvement in Iraq began as a consequence of strategic aims during the First World War, but the presence of oil across the Middle East would make the region increasingly important to London. Gaining control of territory following the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of a mandate, the British quickly concluded that a monarch was essential to create stability in Iraq (Tripp, 2007: 43-50), yet they also sought to maintain their influence, choosing Faisal, the son of Sharif Hussein of Mecca, for the task. In doing so, a Sunni monarch was imposed to rule over a predominantly Shi'a population.

The challenge facing Faisal in the formative years of the Iraqi state quickly became apparent. T.E. Lawrence noted Faisal's concerns about the lack of a coherent Iraqi identity:

> There is still – and I say this with a heart full of sorrow – no Iraqi people but unimaginable masses of human beings, devoid of any patriotic idea, imbued with religious traditions and absurdities, connected by no common tie, giving ear to evil, prone to anarchy, and perpetually ready to rise against any government whatsoever (Lawrence, 1917).

To counter this, Faisal sought to build both a state and a national identity, two projects that were complementary yet difficult to achieve simultaneously whilst also retaining political power. This quest to fuse a state-building project with attempts to develop a coherent national identity, along with pushback from a range of sources that emerged from such a quest, would be a prominent feature of politics in Iraq. Domestic unrest would characterise the formative years of Faisal's rule and efforts to transform the lifestyle from the tribal nomadic, rural organisation to a sedentary, urban life would only add to these tensions. Sectarian divisions would become increasingly fractious, as these identities became politicised as a means of ensuring control over key institutions and, ultimately, maintaining control over the state. This is perhaps best highlighted in the case of the Iraqi army at this time, in which an overwhelming percentage of officers were Sunni, with very little Shi'a representation in the officer class (Tripp, 2007: 111).

Such schisms deepened as the political landscape of Iraq changed. The series of *coups d'etat* that shaped Iraqi politics in the 1950s and 1960s – ending monarchical rule in favour of military dictatorship - continued with recourse to the manipulation of sectarian dynamics, along with a number of draconian efforts to ensure the survival of particular regimes in the face of political flux (Quinlivan, 1999). The rise of Saddam Hussein to power in 1979 ended the political turmoil that had plagued the upper echelons of Iraqi politics by purging Shi'a actors out of the political realm. Moreover, in order to get access to jobs – and influence – one had to be a member of the Ba'ath party, a fact largely missed in the aftermath of the 2003 invasion. Saddam faced a number of challenges that had become commonplace for rulers of Iraq to negotiate, namely questions of national identity and the integration of Shi'a and peripheral communities into the fabric of the state (Mabon and Royle, 2017).

These tensions are perhaps best highlighted by the Halabja massacre (Hilterman, 2007), where chemical weapons were used against the Kurdish population in 1988. Kurdish insurgencies had proved successful during the 1970s, resulting in distrust of Kurdish communities, and fearing defeat in the Iran-Iraq war, Saddam was limited in terms of resources to suppress the Kurdish offensive, resulting in the decision to use chemical weapons. The marginalisation and persecution of Shi'a communities continued, including the execution of Muhammad Baqir Al Sadr and a crackdown on radical groups such as Al Da'awa, which gained popularity amongst the persecuted Shi'a whilst also increasing Iranian influence within the state.

The 2003 Iraq War and the fall of the Sovereign State?

The idea of a sovereign state in the Middle East, free from external interference and led by a regime that was able to define the exception and determine which lives can live within a clearly delineated territory has become problematic. Tensions between

regime and society became increasingly fractious, erupting in the Arab Uprisings of 2011, stemming from a frustration at socio-economic conditions across the region. This frustration was furthered by the denial and erosion of space for political discourse - and civil society – and with it, the channels for expressing political opposition and dissent.

In Iraq tensions were precipitated by the 2003 invasion and the removal of the Ba'ath regime, which increased scope for dissent. Ultimately, the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 would be fundamental in facilitating the rise of *Da'ish* through facilitating conditions that would allow an Al Qaeda franchise to engage in violence across the state. The invasion would also open up internal schisms within the state that would allow militias to gain power and influence, resulting in conditions that would prove integral to helping the group gain support from dissatisfied Sunnis.

In an attempt to prevent the resurgence of the Ba'ath Party, the Coalition Provisional Authority began a process of De-ba'athification, stripping out the institutional fabric of the state and in doing so, creating large scale unemployment and a Shi'a government in Baghdad. Under the Prime Ministership of Nouri Al Maliki, the leader of the Shi'a *Da'wa* party that had long opposed the regime of Saddam Hussein, Iraqi politics took on an increasingly sectarian agenda, reversing decades of anti-Shi'a persecution. Following the Deba'athification of Iraq, many prominent opposition figures returned to Iraq, although, as Charles Tripp argues, it would be a mistake to "suppose that 'politics' returned to Iraq with the ingathering of the exiles"(Tripp, 2007: 280). Rather, the return of figures such as Haider Al Abadi and Ahmed Chalabi would provoke a number of tensions amongst Shi'a communities, many of who had remained in Iraq to oppose Saddam's regime.

Under the Coalition Provisional Authority and both the Al Maliki and Al Abadi regimes, Sunni Iraqis were increasingly subjected to persecution whilst facing existential threats. They were marginalised politically, socially and economically and often found themselves caught between opposing coalition forces and the Shi'a government and militias. With the fragmentation of the state and the failure of key institutions to provide for the basic needs of the Iraqi people, an alternative set of structures emerged, run by sectarian militias, designed to ensure the survival of their sectarian kin. A number of militias gained prominence at this time, notably the Badr Corps and the Jaish al Mahdi (Ucko, 2008) also known as the Mahdi army, which was led by the firebrand cleric, Muqtada Al Sadr. While both militias were Shi'a, the Badr Corps were formed in Iran during the 1980s and as such, received large-scale financial support from Tehran. Both engaged in conflict with coalition forces, yet it was within the context of Iraqi politics that their influence was most felt, with increasing sectarian violence emerging.

The influence of the militias was perhaps best noted by Jawad Al Hasnawi, who suggested that "the street is stronger than the Council of Representatives"(08BAGHDAD239_a, 2008). The emergence of a number of powerful militias would have an undeniable impact upon the political landscape of post-invasion Iraq, especially as the state forces were much weaker than the militias (Semple, 2006). In

the North and West of Iraq, Sunni and Shi'a militias regularly clashed. However, in the Shi'a dominated south of the state, violence was intra-sect, driven by a desire to influence domestic politics (Bruno, 2008).

At the same time as this burgeoning inter-militia rivalry, AQI was orchestrating a violent insurgency campaign against coalition forces. Simultaneously, it was targeting Shi'a groups in an attempt to drive apart Iraqi communities and, ultimately, to increase support for AQI. In an effort to counter the insurgency, Sunni tribal groups, self-generating, fought back against AQI, albeit unsuccessfully. Later, the US military sponsored a number of these groups to form a coalition to increase security in their local areas. Beginning in 2005, the so-called Sunni Awakening required groups to stop engaging in violence against coalition forces, instead, using their presence to maintain security against other insurgent groups. To continue with this, Awakening groups would be given financial incentives, paid for initially by the US military, and then, over time, by the Iraqi government under Al Maliki (Long, 2008). Such a move led to serious problems.

Several serious errors fed into the fragmentation of the Iraqi state and the emergence of conditions that would help Da'ish emerge. The marginalisation of Sunni tribal leaders following the process of Deba'athification and the failure to bring the leaders of the Awakening movement into the fabric of the state was a serious miscalculation by Al Maliki and his key advisors, leaving influential Sunnis on the periphery of governance across strategically important provinces. After the US occupation, the security situation in Anbar deteriorated, yet Baghdad was either unable or unwilling to improve it, fuelling grievances amongst the Sunni tribes.

Geopolitics, Sectarianism and the "Iranian City of Basrah" (08BAGHDAD239_a, 2008)

Rising violence along sectarian lines in recent years has propelled the academic exploration of sectarianism. While debates about the nature of the term continue (See: Wallis, 1975; Potter, 2013; Ismael and Ismael, 2010; Haddad, 2013; Mabon and Royle, 2017), a number of assumptions that come along with the term are generally accepted, including notions of othering and suspicion. Despite this, there is nothing inherently violent about sectarian difference; rather, it is when sectarian identities are securitised and politicised that differences can turn violent. It does, however, raise questions about the ontology of identity, whether such identities are primordial or whether they are constructed over time. As different sects have been able to co-exist peacefully at different times in history, the notion of sectarian difference being inherently violent should be rejected for it suggests that other factors must drive violence between different sects (Ismael and Ismael, 2010). The fragmentation of political organisation within Iraq presented external actors with the opportunity to pursue their own agendas within the state. The penetration of Iraqi society adds to this process of marginalisation and securitisation, with external actors engaging in this process in pursuit of broader geopolitical goals. To this end, it is important to examine the actors involved in the penetration and manipulation of sectarian groups along with the methods that actors have used to achieve this.

At the heart of this external penetration of the Iraqi state – and also a number of other Middle Eastern states – is a rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which, although couched in religious terms, is geopolitical in nature. Since the 1979 revolution in Iran, the two have become embroiled in a fractious rivalry that is increasingly taking place along sectarian lines. The two states have sought to support sectarian kin across the region and the fragmentation of political order across the region has provided opportunities for Riyadh and Tehran to do this, demonstrating the increased use of religion as a tool of geopolitics (Mabon, 2013).

As US diplomatic cables released by Wikileaks document, Saudi Arabia was concerned as to the potential for increased Iranian influence in Iraq:

> The US "should not leave Iraq until its sovereignty has been resorted, otherwise it will be vulnerable to the Iranians. He said the Saudis will not support one Iraqi group over the others and that the Kingdom is working for a united Iraq. However, he warned that, if the U.S. leaves precipitously, the Saudis will stand with the Sunnis. (06RIYADH9175_a, 2006).

This fear stems from events in the aftermath of the revolution, where it was suggested that Iran was involved in a series of *coups d'etat* orchestrated to undermine regional stability.[3] In the aftermath of the revolution, a spiral of vitriolic rhetoric emerged, escalating tensions across the Gulf. Ayatollah Khomeini stated that Iran would

> export our experiences to the whole world and present the outcome of our struggles against tyrants to those who are struggling along the path of God, without expecting the slightest reward. The result of this exportation will certainly result in the blooming of the buds of victory and independence and in the implementation of Islamic teachings among the enslaved nations (The New York Times, 1987).

The legacy of Shi'a thought would play a prominent role within the foreign policy of the newly established Islamic Republic. In particular, the narrative of events at Karbala, where Hussain was killed by corrupt members of the Yazid court, plays a prominent role in explaining Tehran's support for oppressed groups across the region (Worrall, *et al*, 2015). This narrative was enshrined within Article 3.16 of the new Iranian constitution, which articulated an obligation to support the *mustazefin* of the Muslim world and can be seen in action through Iran's support for groups such as Hizballah.

Following the revolution, Iranian support for Shi'a groups would be a cause of much consternation across the Middle East, resulting in the perception that Shi'a minorities were 5th columns, possesing greater loyalty to Iran than to their host states. Coupled with this, demographic conditions across the region meant that Shi'a groups were often minorities or in positions of relative weakness compared to Sunnis and thus, Tehran's support was against the status-quo. In Lebanon, the Qods

[3] See events in Bahrain, Lebanon and the perception of involvement in Saudi Arabia and Iraq.

Force was instrumental in the establishment of Hizballah and continues to have a strong relationship with the Party of God (Worrall *et al*, 2015). In Bahrain, often considered the epicentre of sectarian tensions, an attempted *coup d'etat* undertaken by the International Front for the Liberation of Bahrain – a Shi'a organisation - was foiled in 1981. It later transpired that the coup was orchestrated by members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Qods Force.

Concern at the potential for Iranian manipulation of Bahrain's Shi'a majority led to the building of the King Fahd causeway, to facilitate easy access for Saudi forces to support the Al Khalifa, which was used in 2011 (Mabon, 2012). Moreover, it was believed by many in Saudi Arabia that Iran was behind the unrest in the Eastern Province of the Kingdom which broke out during the 1980s, inspired – rather than directed – by events in Iran. Tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran became more fractious during the Iran-Iraq war, which saw Riyadh side with Saddam Hussein's Iraq in an attempt to prevent Khomeini's revolutionary goals from spreading (Furtig, 2002).

Since the events of 1979, the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran has been increasingly fractious, with a number of events escalating the tensions between the two. In July 1987, 400 pilgrims on the *Hajj* were killed and debates as to where blame should lie led to the breaking of diplomatic ties between Riyadh and Tehran. On the 25th June 1996, a blast destroyed the Khobar Towers in Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. The attack was attributed to Hizballah Al Hijaz who were found guilty of the bombing in 2006, along with Iran (Leonning, 2006). Five years later, the US District Attorney, Eric Holder, revealed details of an Iranian orchestrated plot to assassinate the Saudi Arabian ambassador to the US. In January 2016, the execution of the Shi'a cleric, Nimr al Nimr, caused Iranians to storm the Saudi embassy in Tehran, resulting in the severing of diplomatic relations.

Over time, Riyadh became concerned about rising Iranian influence across the region and the onset of a number of proxy conflicts ensued. Iraq and Bahrain were of paramount importance to Saudi Arabia, given the proximity of both to the Kingdom and the establishment of a Shi'a government in Iraq evoked fears that Iran would galvanize a "Shi'a crescent" across the Middle East. These suspicions were raised by King Abdullah in a diplomatic cable released by Wikileaks:

> The King said he had "no confidence whatsoever in (Iraqi PM) Maliki, and the Ambassador (Fraker) is well aware of my views". The King said he had met Maliki early in Maliki's term in office, and the Iraqi had given him a written list of commitments for reconciliation in Iraq, but had failed to follow through on any of them. For this reason, the King said, Maliki had no credibility. "I don't trust this man," the King stated, He's an Iranian agent." The King said he had told both Bush and former Vice president Cheney "how can I meet with someone I don't trust?" Maliki has "opened the door for Iranian influence in Iraq" since taking power, the King said, and he was "not hopeful at all" for Maliki, "or I would have met with him" (09RIYADH447_a, 2009).

The US diplomatic cables document many such fears about Tehran's penetration of the Iraqi state along with broader concerns about regional activity. This penetration and attempts to exercise influence in Iraq occurred in a number of different guises, ranging from support for the Al Maliki regime through formal channels to the more informal support for Shi'a militias. One cable documents how "Iranian sources, including the IRGC-QF, reportedly supported SCIRI and its affiliates with approximately $100 million; $45 million was specifically allocated to its militia arm, the Badr Corps" (05BAGHDAD3015_a, 2005). The same cable suggested that Iranian supported actors are "implicated in the intimidation and assassination of Sunni Arabs in the southern provinces and in on-going attempts to penetrate and control the Basra police forces" (05BAGHDAD3015_a, 2005). Clearly, such penetration – if true – has serious implications for the strength of the Iraqi government along with perceptions of the government. Indeed, such penetration resulted in a much weaker government of Iraq and an increasingly strong set of militias, the existence of which challenged the sovereignty of the state (Mabon and Royle, 2017).

The extent of the perception of Iranian penetration and influence across Iraq also caused Shi'a parties to distance themselves from Tehran:

> A growing anti-Iran sentiment among the Iraqi populace is compelling Shia parties to distance themselves publically from Iran […] Even in Shi'a strongholds in Iraq, such as the southern province of Basrah, public sentiment about Iran is often characterised by suspicion and resentment (10BAGHDAD22_a, 2010).

For Sunnis, this served to fuel grievances about the manipulation and marginalisation of their identities by external actors. These grievances would ultimately create fertile breeding ground for Da'ish to emerge and to gain control.

The Rise of *Da'ish* and Bare Life in Iraq

When tracing the roots and emergence of Da'ish, Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) under the leadership of the Jordanian Abu Musab Al Zarqawi, provides a useful starting point. Indeed, many members of Da'ish had also been members of AQI and had served time in the American prison, Camp Bucca (Chulov, 2014). Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi, the self-proclaimed caliph, was born in Iraq and at the time of the 2003 invasion, is believed to have been a cleric in a mosque in Samarra, a city characterised by sectarian cleavages. It was at Camp Bucca where Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi was able to develop a network of contacts that would – along with former regime loyalists and disenfranchised Sunnis – become Da'ish.

Al Qaeda in Iraq was a splinter group from the main Al Qaeda organisation, often clashing with Osama bin Laden and Ayman Al Zawahiri over tactics and goals. Both AQI and Da'ish drew upon Salafist ideas but the latter would deviate from AQI and bin Laden, making brash claims about the *takfirs* and infidels that would result in an increase in sectarian violence that began under the leadership of Al Zarqawi. Rivalries with AQ and Al Nusra, the AQ affiliate in Syria, over ideology and methodology would spawn a more virulent Da'ish movement. While many suggest that the fundamentalist vision at the heart of Da'ish locates the group in the 7th

century, such claims neglect the fact that the group embraces modern technology to spread its vision. In addition, both AQI and Da'ish group's leadership would propagate the narrative that the end of days was approaching, which resulted in tensions with Al Qaeda (Wood, 2015). The seizure of the Syrian town of Dabiq would only serve to play into this narrative, as it is said that the 'Army of Rome' will be defeated there and, in this defeat, will bring about the countdown to the apocalypse. Of course, with the Da'ish's military defeats across the second part of 2016, such anachronistic and apocalyptic claims are discredited.

The onset of the Syrian Civil War in early 2011 would also provide an opportunity for Da'ish and other violent Islamist groups to gain strength and territory. The outbreak of war followed the violent repression of protesters in Syria who had called for the Assad regime to undertake political reforms. Of course, the ferocity of the government's response forced many to take up arms to protect themselves. The seizure of the cities of Ramadi and Mosul would gain the group much attention, by this point, controlling an area of land bigger than the United Kingdom. As violence intensified across Syria and Iraq, the conflict became increasingly internationalised, with media (and social media) outlets documenting the brutality of the conflict, increasingly fought along sectarian lines. From this a number of individuals crossing the Syrian-Turkish border to fight with groups opposing the Syrian regime.[4]

Over time, the rising power and influence of Da'ish led to declarations of allegiance from a range of actors across the Middle East and Africa. The emergence of Da'ish affiliates or *wilayats* would add an extra dimension to the internationalisation of the conflict. To date, groups in Egypt, Tunisia, Somalia, the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen and Algeria have declared allegiance to Da'ish, extending the influence of the group. Whether such allegiance has been accepted and the extent to which the group's leaders maintain control over action is uncertain.

Within the context of this political fragmentation across Syria and Iraq, where individuals faced existential threats on a daily basis and acts of violence were conducted against them seemingly with impunity, individuals sought to escape such conditions. Da'ish was able to capitalise on these conditions and draw support from those communities marginalised by the state. In light of the fragmentation of Iraq and the attempts by external actors to manipulate identity groups within the state to achieve their own ends, political communities in the state bore the brunt of this violence. While the existence of direct violence is undeniable, structural violence against a range of communities across the state was also occurring. This structural violence, while initially perpetuated by the state, was also instigated by militias operating across Iraq, adding to the growing instability facing Sunni communities.

The nature of sectarian politics pursued by the Al Maliki government would have a detrimental impact upon the nature of identity politics within Iraq, inverting decades

[4] It is worth noting that the foreign fighter phenomenon is not restricted to Da'ish or Isamist groups; rather, a range of individuals and groups have also travelled to fight against the group or in support of others involved in the conflict (See: Mabon, 2015).

of Shi'a marginalisation at the expense of the Sunni minority, many of whom were also experiencing serious socio-economic challenges following the Deba'athification process. Although the economy was decimated by the legacy of sanctions following the Gulf War in 1991, the restructuring of the state following the 2003 war would pose serious problems to a number of communities across Iraq.

An International Crisis Group report documents the destruction of Sunni communities and the inclusivity of political organisation within Iraq. The extent of this destruction demonstrates the intent behind it:

> Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has implemented a divide-and-conquer strategy that has neutered any credible Sunni Arab leadership. The authorities also have taken steps that reinforce perceptions of a sectarian agenda. Prominent officials – predominantly Sunni – have been cast aside pursuant to the Justice and Accountability Law on the basis of alleged senior-level affiliation to the former Baath party. Federal security forces have disproportionately deployed in Baghdad's Sunni neighbourhoods as well as Sunni-populated governorates (Anbar, Salah al-Din, Ninew, Kirkuk and Diyala). Al-Iraqiya, the political movement to which Sunni Arabs most readily related, slowly came apart due to internal rivalries even as Maliki resorted to both legal and extra-judicial means to consolidate power (International Crisis Group, 2013).

This penetration and control over Iraq included the security sector, with Shi'a officials dominating the prominent positions. Moreover, state institutions increasingly fell under the control of Shi'a militias, further adding to notions of marginalisation and persecution that were taking hold amongst Sunni communities. This 'sectarianisation' of state security institutions was documented by a US diplomatic cable that noted how "Police brigades are controlled not by the MOI but by ISCI/Badr, particularly in Karbala, Diwaniyah, and Nasiriyah" (08BAGHDAD239_a, 2008).

Such conditions had a serious impact upon younger members of Sunni communities, which, when coupled with suspicions about connections to Al Qaeda, will feed into longer-term grievances. These concerns were exacerbated by the violence conducted by militias across the state. The rising violence orchestrated by groups such as the Badr Brigades and JAM involved the targeting of Sunnis across the state, often undertaken under the guise of being state officials, resulting in the onset of bare life. Violence against Sunnis was not restricted to direct violence, with instances of structural violence also feeding into – and facilitating – marginalisation and persecution. Structural violence also serves to aid the process of dehumanisation, which is a prominent part of the transition into bare life.

When coupled with socio-economic conditions and the growing existential concerns facing the Sunni minority, it is hardly surprising that hatred and violence along sectarian lines became increasingly prominent in Iraq. As Abu Muhammad Al Adani, a spokesperson for Da'ish stated, we "need to settle our differences with you […] These differences go back a long way. We will settle our differences not in Samarra or Baghdad, but in Karbala, the filth-ridden city, and in Najaf, the city of polytheism" (Bazzi, 2014). While there are clear theological aspects inherent in Al Adani's comment, the policitisation of sectarian identities and the changing security

environment meant that such a message found resonance amongst Sunnis, many who had been subjected to increased violence over the past decade. As noted previously, sectarian difference need not necessarily be violent, but when such identities – even names - become securitised, the descent into violent behaviour appears all but inevitable.

From this, it is easy to see how conditions of 'bare life' emerge across Sunni communities in Iraq. Of course, one may easily suggest that this can be understood as a lack of representation, or fear, yet this should go much further. The organisation of religious communities within the state meant that certain provinces were predominantly occupied by members of one sect. Anbar Province, for instance, is dominated by Sunnis, meaning that conditions of bare life could easily emerge in particular areas. The marginalisation of Sunni communities from political life diminishes the role of Sunnis within the state and the increasing levels of structural and direct violence highlights the challenges facing many across the state. The interaction of normative and economic factors, plus an apparent existential threat to life along with the perceived reluctance of the ruling elite to protect them, it is possible to get a much greater awareness of the transition from *zoe* to *bios*. Perhaps most importantly, however, is that the identification of factors that lead to bare life can help to create appropriate responses.

Typologies of Support

While Da'ish has been able to cultivate support from those existing in bare life, it would be inappropriate to suggest that all of this support is the same. To this end, it is important to question the different levels of support that the group is able to draw upon. In embarking on this task, Brandon Boylan suggests that it is important to make the distinction between "behavioural (active and passive) and induced (enticed and coerced) continuums of support" (2015). To facilitate this it is important to break up the supporters of the group into a number of different categories.

At the heart of the group are the core ideologues, led by the caliph Al Baghdadi, while underneath are four councils: the Sharia, Shura, Military and Security (Lewis, 2015). This structure is replicated across the *wilayats* and attempts to create an Islamic and secure system of governance. Supporting this group are the devout followers of the ideology espoused by Al Baghdadi and those operating at the heart of the group's governance structure. Many of these individuals spent time in Camp Bucca or other US-run prisons, having previously been members of AQI. These members fill prominent positions within governance structures, having demonstrated loyalty to the cause.

Supporting this group is a growing number of foreign fighters who travelled to the caliphate to join the group and fulfilled a range of different roles. Within 18 months, by the end of 2015, it was estimated that there were 27,000 foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria, from 86 states (The Guardian, 2015). There are a number of reasons as to why people wanted to travel to Syria and Iraq to participate, ranging from sectarian concerns to a crisis of modernity. The brutality of the conflict and extreme violence

facing sectarian kin would be a key motivation for a large number of those who travelled. Others struggled to find meaning in the West, where struggles for certainty within the context of a crisis of modernity made the strengthened the appeal of Da'ish's message (Mabon, 2015). It is worth stressing that while people wishing to participate in the conflict in Syria and Iraq had a range of different groups that they could join, the fundamentalist implementation of the Salafist interpretation of the Shari'a meant that a majority of those who travelled from Europe and beyond sought to join Da'ish.

In addition to this, a distinction must be made between the behavioural supporters and the induced supporters, with each category then subject to further clarification. The behavioural supporters can be broken into the active and the passive on the grounds of their involvement within the group's range of activities and distinctions should be drawn between individuals who fight for the group and individuals who work in hospitals or schools. Within the context of Iraq, many of the residents of Sunni cities would fall within the definition of passive supporters, located within the territorial borders of the caliphate, pushed to the group as a consequence of militia and government oppression yet not necessarily sharing the group's ideological vision.

For those supporters who were induced, another distinction must be made between those who were enticed and those who were coerced. Those who were enticed to support the group do so for reward or gain while those who were coerced to do so act under duress. Such an acknowledgement – and categorisation of support - helps to gain insight into the inner workings of the group, although empirical data to help differentiate between this support is currently lacking. It is pertinent to note that not all of the people located within the territorial dimension of the caliphate are supporters of the group, in whatever form. Indeed, a number of individuals have engaged in acts of resistance against Da'ish, perhaps best documented by the blog *Mosul Eye.* For them, Da'ish governance structures have now also created bare life.

Conclusions

Upstream operations, by their very nature, involve the interaction of a complex set of variables, within particular boundaries of time and space and when considering the case of Da'ish, a number of factors must be considered. Boundaries of time and space are integral to understanding the challenge facing an upstream operation, yet these boundaries are rarely clearly defined and as such, interactions can draw in a range of different actors (and agendas) from a number of different times. Causal relationships within these bounded areas need not necessarily be direct; rather, indirect causal links can play a powerful role in determining the nature of the environment within which the operation is occurring. Thus, those engaging in an upstream operation would be well reminded to consider neighbouring environments to the arenas to which they are operating within. Moreover, to identify direct and indirect links between actors within arenas in close proximity.

To understand the emergence of *Da'ish*, it is clear that one must look at a number of different interpretations and consider how they interact. The fragmentation of political organisation across Iraq resulted in a number of basic needs not being met. When coupled with serious threat to life – actions seemingly conducted with impunity – the emergence of bare life forced people to turn away from the state to a range of alternative actors in search of security and basic needs. Such an acknowledgement can help to discover how groups such as Da'ish are able to cultivate support from local communities and from this, it is possible to develop strategies that can reduce their influence. While the desire to defeat the group is undeniable, such efforts fail to explore the conditions within which it was able to emerge and thrive.

The establishment of a caliphate and implementation of a system of governance derived from a fundamentalist interpretation of the Shari'a would ultimately feed into the cyclical process of bare life. This demonstrates the cyclical nature of bare life within Iraq, evolving from conditions impacting on the Shi'a, to Sunnis, to opponents of Da'ish within the caliphate. Although grounded within a Western philosophical tradition, the concept allows for an exploration of the conditions within which violent groups can emerge. Moreover, through such an acknowledgement, responses to violent groups can be developed, aimed at reducing the support received from more passive facets of the support base.

One possible response to the group is to empower Sunnis in Iraq, much like what happened in the Sunni Awakening in 2007. Yet all need to learn lessons from the failings of the Awakening movement, namely the failure to integrate the movement within the governance structures of the state. From this, the need to engage with conditions from which such groups emerge is paramount and ultimately, to defeat Da'ish it is imperative to remove the conditions that have facilitated their growth. In doing this, individuals will escape the conditions of bare life that Da'ish are able to prey upon.

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