

REBEL GOVERNANCE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE CASES OF THE LIBERATION TIGERS OF TAMIL EELAM AND OF THE ISLAMIC STATE OF IRAQ AND SYRIA

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INSURGENCY AND GOVERNANCE: INTRODUCTION

When insurgent groups usurp governments in state building activities, their actions can result in the amelioration of civilians' quotidian lives. For the purpose of this essay, rebel governance will be conceptualised and operationalised as the full range of practices that contribute towards consolidating territory - including taxation - the provision of public goods and the establishment of a series of political rules which regulate life for citizens living under the rebels' control (Weinstein, 2009). The presence of determined population attributes and rebel group characteristics across different rebel groups account for the variation observed in their behaviour and, subsequently, the tendency for some to engage in governance activities within the territories they control (Arjona, 2011). The cases chosen for the purpose of this essay are the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) who, as they operate in de facto states, share the same over-arching objective of seceding from the government (Buhaug, 2006; Klem and Maunaguru, 2017). Consequently, according to current theory, they should be incentivised to demonstrate their capacity to proficiently govern the territory under their control to local populations (Martínez and Eng, 2018). However, given their parallel objectives, the variation in terms of their governing priorities and the extent of provisions

undeniably emerges as a puzzle and it is for this reason that they have been selected.

This essay will begin by providing a brief contextual outline of the governance carried out by the LTTE and ISIS. It will then consider the significance of secession from the parent state as a long-term objective which demands that rebel groups engage in governance practices to consolidate their power. This strategy is intricately connected to the core ideological foundations upon which the groups came into existence. Thereafter, it will discuss the most relevant factors explaining ISIS' and the LTTE's propensity to govern and acknowledge the observable variation in their behaviour, analysing the extent to which these cases corroborate the theoretical claims summarised by Arjona (2011). In line with this framework, it will consider state penetration and the expectation of civil resistance as influential population characteristics. The essay will then proceed by considering access to resources and external support, namely financial and military, as explanatory factors for motivating or disincentivising state-building practices. Finally, it will look at the potential competition from other factions and periods of ceasefire which prove relevant for promoting governmental behaviour in each case. The article will then conclude with a discussion to briefly compare the cases of ISIS and the LTTE, analysing the disparity observed, and suggesting the stronger impact that access to immobile resources and external support

may exert on state-building tendencies.

CONTEXTUAL OUTLINE: THE LTTE & ISIS

According to Mampilly (2011), the process of achieving effective governance involves engaging in a range of institutional practices initiating with strategic services (police and judicial forces), then evolving to provide technical services (primarily health and education), with the final stage being the development of legislative bodies which will represent the interests and meet the subsequent demands of civilians. These stages are intrinsically connected to the three fundamental characteristics of modern governance – security, welfare, and representation (Mampilly, 2011). In its prime, the LTTE maintained a de facto state administration in northern Sri Lanka. This consisted of some basic revenue collection and various economic initiatives with a predominant focus on developing an intricate and extensive network of judiciary and police services (Aryasinha, 2001). Within the confines of their 25-year war with the Sri Lankan state, the LTTE prioritised the internal and external security of their territory (Stokke, 2006). Therefore, through the establishment of these rigorous security institutions and the maintenance of core services, the LTTE was successful in garnering local support and legitimising their rule. With that being said, the expansion of their economic activities and welfare provision was lacking in comparison. These areas undeniably assumed a subordinated role in the insurgent group's agenda. Whilst some research has indicated the presence of very basic services offered across the health and education sectors, they were severely limited and underfinanced, or offered directly by the parent state government (Stokke,

2006).

Conversely, ISIS' governmental structures have evolved to a greater extent with even some discernible instances of civilian representation (Ünver, 2018). At the rebel group's most advanced phase of governance, the institutions were not only comprehensive and sophisticated in nature, but also contained hierarchical structures within them, conveniently reflecting government departments already in place (Al-Tamimi, 2015). The stronghold, Raqqa, represents ISIS' most developed government infrastructure, with a variation of services ranging from the implementation of checkpoints to the introduction of dispute courts (Martínez and Eng, 2018). In less strategically important areas, ISIS demonstrates a more frugal deployment of resources and establishes more temporary programmes, such as Islamic workshops which aim to educate children on Islamic practises (Caris and Reynolds, 2014). Yet, once territory had been consolidated, ISIS was inclined to pursue more intricate and specific programmes under the religious police and education institutions as a means of indoctrinating the next generation of their de facto state (Zelin, 2014). The provision of welfare spans to include soup kitchens and even medical services which offer vaccinations against polio (Brown, 2015). The expansion of an elaborate tax system and the implementation of robust infrastructure corroborates ISIS' long-term strategy of proficiently governing these areas (Caris and Reynolds, 2014; Ünver, 2018).

The time horizon of an insurgent group was identified by Arjona (2011) as a potential explanatory factor for the variance observed across rebel strategies. However, the benefits that accompany the act of ruling over populations are not instantaneous (Weinstein, 2009; Kasfir, Frerks and Terpstra, 2017).

Therefore, predatory actors who are motivated by immediate rewards will not invest the time or money into developing governmental infrastructure (Arjona, 2011). However, in the cases of the LTTE and ISIS, their parallel objectives of secession become the most significant aspect in initially demanding a basic supply of governance, whilst the establishment of key institutions proves fruitful in the long term (Klem and Maunaguru, 2017). In each of these cases, ideology assumes an important role in directing rebel strategy, which may promote the provision of services to satisfy the basic needs of their populations. On the one hand, the LTTE was driven predominantly by the perceived need to serve the oppressed Tamil people and in doing so, they displayed remarkably comparable behaviour to that of a traditional nation-state (Mampilly, 2011). On the other hand, ISIS is compelled to represent the Islamic cause and, ultimately, establish the Caliphate in order to unite Muslims under a supranational government (El Damanhory, 2019). Therefore, it becomes apparent how these ideological considerations contribute to the insurgent groups' propensity to govern. In the case of ISIS, their strict adherence to Islamic rule could potentially be responsible for a stronger urge to provide more extensively for their local population. For both insurgencies, the development of infrastructure is undoubtedly related to the desire to derive legitimacy from the social contract implemented and the need to ensure longevity of the rebel rule.

POPULATION ATTRIBUTES

As far as pre-existing government characteristics are concerned, state penetration emerges partially responsible for influencing the variation observed across rebel governance. If the

bureaucratic state has profoundly penetrated into the public psyche, and subsequently displayed competence in the provision of public services, then the population will be habituated to a certain reciprocal relationship and expect a similar standard of governance from the insurgent group (Arjona, 2011). With regard to the population living under the rule of the LTTE, their expectations were high as a result of their previous experiences with the Sri Lankan government (Mampilly, 2011; Klem and Maunaguru, 2017). Consequently, this put some pressure on the rebel group to deliver, at the very least, some minimal services. Equally, these civilian expectations would have influenced ISIS' behaviour, where the opportunity to undermine the state would have also motivated their provision of welfare. In Iraq, the quotidian experiences of Iraqi central administration were etched on society's expectations of the government, and this contributed to the subsequent demands articulated by civilians. However, a slightly different situation was discernible in Syria, where the breakdown of government and heavily restricted services meant that civilians would be inclined to support any group that delivered public goods, regardless of their quality and quantity (Martínez and Eng, 2018). Bearing in mind these considerations, habituation to state-building competencies generates greater demands from civil society, and it is in the rebels' interest to satisfy these in order to ensure compliance and stifle potential uprisings. Consequently, deep state penetration in the case of the LTTE and ISIS in Iraq specifically has led to stronger patterns of governance (Arjona, 2011).

Expanding on the notion of state penetration, a tactic to mitigate the possibility of civilian resistance and to facilitate an easier transition of power is for the rebels to co-opt pre-existing institutions and insert themselves into current

power structures (Arjona, 2011). Moreover, motivated by the possibility of exploiting and benefiting from current infrastructure, insurgent groups would be encouraged to partake in government activities. This practice is illuminated in both cases. The LTTE assumed control of the most viable state institutions which proved relevant to their initial implementation of strategic institutions, and fundamental to their securing of the territory (Aryasinha, 2001). Where other sectors were concerned, predominantly education and health, the LTTE ensured the continual delivery of these by the parent state. Consequently, the LTTE's reluctance to reject or replace these existing institutions resulted in a dual and multi-layered government structure within their alleged territory (Stokke, 2006). ISIS pursued a similar tactic, subjecting the local councils to their rule and restricting their resources according to the needs of the insurgency (Al-Tamimi, 2015). With co-optation, there is a stronger possibility that civilians will willingly accept the power transition if it does not present such drastic alterations to their current way of life. Following on from this, state penetration in both instances has fed into each of ISIS and the LTTE's respective long-term strategies and seems to have contributed towards their propensity to expand state infrastructure, offering the possibility to legitimise the rebel's influence whilst minimising the incurrence of unnecessary costs.

The presence of civilian resistance is a feature considered to adversely impact the likelihood that rebels will engage in governance. The theoretical underpinning of this assumption claims that if there is substantial civilian disobedience, then the insurgent group will have to direct resources towards enforcing

compliance, by deploying a mixture of coercive and persuasive tactics (Terpstra and Frerks, 2017). Consequently, this will consume potential resources that could be otherwise invested into developing further institutions and providing better welfare services, resulting in an overall expected decrease of governance. Furthermore, if a hostile relationship exists, civilians will be less inclined to play their societal part in guaranteeing the continual smooth running of institutions and services. Specifically considering the case in Sri Lanka, the LTTE faced little resistance from their population as they quickly declared themselves to be the sole representatives of the Tamil cause (Klem and Maunaguru, 2017). The group frequently deployed coercive tactics, but simultaneously managed to succeed in acquiring legitimacy due to their effective police and judicial institutions (Mampilly, 2011). Furthermore, the initial support garnered was further enhanced when the rebels' capacity to protect the population and serve their needs surpassed that of the parent state's. The degree of civilian compliance can be deciphered by considering the numerous volunteers who joined the movement and the sheer volume of Tamil families who offered financial assistance and/or shelter to LTTE cadres throughout the conflict (Terpstra and Frerks, 2017). Conversely, concerning ISIS, the balance between coercion and legitimacy has not been as well achieved. In one instance, the harsh condemnation of political activists and brutal treatment of everyday civilians has catalysed protest in the form of an online campaign, *Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently* (Caris and Reynolds, 2014). Potentially, this civilian dissatisfaction could construct a fundamental obstacle to ISIS' capacity to proficiently run state institutions, namely extraction in the form of taxation, and consequently the provision of basic services would be detrimentally impacted. However, Caris

and Reynolds (2014) have indicated that aid projects in a severely underfunded and impoverished state are still highly unlikely to generate civilian resistance. Overall, the continuation and exacerbation of civilian resistance would reduce the legitimacy of ISIS' rule and institutions, which may result in a stronger need to depend on coercion, dramatically decreasing the sustainability of their reputation as anything more than a bandit rebel group (Terpstra and Frerks, 2017). However, in the case of the LTTE, substantial civilian compliance has potentially enabled the insurgent group to prioritise investing time and money into the security infrastructure which facilitated the continuation of their fight against the state.

REBEL GROUP CHARACTERISTICS AND WAR DYNAMICS

Access to assets strongly influences rebels' behaviour and their short-term strategies. However, the direction of influence on state building practices is entirely contingent upon whether they are mobile or immobile assets (Terpstra, 2020). Generally, according to theory, environments which host an abundance of exploitable assets will drive rebels towards predation rather than state-building, as there is reduced motive for them to establish a functioning state apparatus for revenue generation (Martínez and Eng, 2018; Terpstra, 2020). ISIS has demonstrated a desire to capitalise on the numerous oil fields across its territory, developing lucrative industries so that oil now constitutes a primary source of revenue for the rebel group (FATF, 2015). This contributes to ISIS' financial security and, therefore, to its capacity to strengthen its social contract with civilians.

Theoretically, with regard to immobile assets, rebels should be incentivised to stimulate economic growth by developing industries around these resources (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). In particular, the agricultural industry has been subject to ISIS' domination, presumably due to it constituting a sustainable means of facilitating food security. Furthermore, silos have also proven to be a strategic financial asset when other sources of income are compromised (Jaafar and Woertz, 2016). Being in control of the distribution of food also provides another opportunity for ISIS to coercively articulate their potential, impeding supplies to whom they perceive to be non-cooperative citizens - namely Christians and Yazidis who may oppose their ruthless imposition of Islamic rule (FATF, 2015). The attention paid towards these agricultural industries demonstrates the rebels' commitment to the long-term governance of the territory. In addition, the tendency of ISIS to tax even these industries exposes a fundamental tenet of their strategy that goes beyond raising revenue: that is, the ideologically driven desire to inculcate certain beliefs and behaviours in their civilians, inspired by the Islamic notion of charity - *zakat* (Ünver, 2018). In this instance, ISIS' practices reveal a divergence from the theoretical framework given that, in spite of access to an abundance of oil, they have still chosen to assume control of immobile assets and have developed intricate patterns of governance around these. As such, underlying ideological considerations may be driving the rebel group to pursue a governance strategy which prioritises the tax regime and civilian welfare, in line with their long-term objective of seceding from the Syrian and Iraqi states.

External financial support is another characteristic which has been highlighted in connection with decreasing a rebel group's propensity to govern. Generally, such assistance

reduces the likelihood that an insurgent group will be required to set up a taxation system as an additional source of revenue (Kasfir, Frerks and Terpstra, 2017). Specifically considering the LTTE, their initial financial sponsorship from predominantly India over a four-year period granted them the opportunity to redirect their attention towards securing their territory and sustaining themselves in the fight against Colombo (Stokke, 2006). In the process of doing so, they managed to consolidate their monopoly of violence across northern Sri Lanka, predominantly through the strengthening and reinforcement of judicial and police institutions. Corroborating this theoretical tenet is the event of India eventually withdrawing funding in 1987 (Hashim, 2013). Consequently, this impelled the LTTE to develop their own viable industries and expand the versatility of their network of financial sources. In order to offset the loss, they began to pursue other lucrative enterprises, predominantly narcotics smuggling, human trafficking and money laundering (Aryasinha, 2001). In addition, their successful targeting of the large Tamil diaspora for both voluntary and forced donations also compensated in part for their loss of financial support from India (Hashim, 2013). Following this, the LTTE attempted to develop their taxation regime to include formal as well as informal extraction. In spite of the slow and uneven nature of its expansion, the taxation system targeted different sectors of society, from Tamil public servants to agricultural labourers who could donate in the form of cash or produce (Stokke, 2006). Conversely, from the outset, ISIS has shown substantial self-sufficiency in its finances, deriving the majority of its revenue from the industries it has established or seized, with oil profits and taxation accounting for 80% of its income (Jaafar and Woertz, 2016). Previous

research has identified significant contributions to the Islamic cause from wealthy private donors in the Gulf countries (FATF, 2015). Moreover, there has been suggestions that, despite officially opposing the terrorist organisation, Saudi Arabia and Qatar may also be funding ISIS (Jaafar and Woertz, 2016). Nonetheless, this potential income is dwarfed by their industries and tax regime, contributing to the theory that they may have been driven to engage in greater governance as a means of maximising revenue, due to limited external financial support at the onset of the movement.

Concerning other forms of external assistance, military support may inspire the rebels to grant more attention to the military facet of their strategy (Mampilly, 2011). In doing so, they make a conscious decision to overlook the state-building agenda, and consequently dismiss the demands of the local population (Kasfir, Frerks and Terpstra, 2017). This is exemplified through the LTTE who, as well as financial assistance, were also in receipt of equipment and expertise from India and the regional government of Tamil Nadu in the preliminary stages of their rebellion (Hashim, 2013). As a result, they prioritised the military aspects of their governance which contributed to strengthening and sustaining the whole movement (Mampilly, 2011). However, the direction of this relationship may also be reversed as external military assistance may enable the rebels to readjust their focus so that it also encompasses welfare and the development of legislative bodies (Terpstra, 2020). This is illuminated in the case of ISIS, who recruited volunteers in the form of foreign terrorist fighters that arrived equipped with valuable material resources such as gun parts, cartridges and military supplies (FATF, 2015). In this instance, the military support, despite not being directly supplied from another state, facilitated greater governance as the additional

military support freed up resources so that ISIS could invest more money and effort into meeting the demands of the population. Generally, this functioned to enhance the legitimacy of the social contract between ISIS and the population they govern, and consequently, they may receive greater support for their military cause which could increase the probability of successfully recruiting from the local population. Equally, external military support could increase the rebel groups' competence in stifling potential opposition groups, also contributing to the substantiation of their rule.

Similar to the impact of external military support, fragmentation can influence rebel governance in both directions. Mampilly (2011) highlights the limitation that infighting, as a result of fragmentation, may exert on a rebel group's capacity to establish appropriate statelike infrastructures. However, the converse effect that fragmentation can engender seems more applicable in the cases of the LTTE and ISIS. The logic behind this outcome is that factions will exploit the strengthening of key institutions as a platform upon which to compete, generally resulting in a greater quality of services for the local population (Grynkewich, 2008; Kasfir, Frerks and Terpstra, 2017). From relatively early on, the LTTE declared to be the only representative for the Tamil population, publicly condemning competing factions whilst relying on brutal tactics to prevent them emerging as potential threats (Klem and Maunaguru, 2017). This simultaneously functioned to guarantee the obedience and compliance of the general Tamil community, presumably through implementing a rule of terror, allowing the LTTE to continue strengthening their strategic services and

security infrastructure (Klem and Maunaguru, 2017). Interestingly, in the case of ISIS, continual infighting provoked the insurgent actors to redirect resources, withdrawing from ambiguous territory and instead concentrating on consolidating Raqqa and Eastern Aleppo. This resulted in ISIS participating in extensive state-building activities in these defined areas - demonstrating significant competence and assuming more statelike features in the process (Al-Tamimi, 2015). In these strongholds, they could easily impose their rigid expectations of public conduct and idealised morality. Equally, the strict police forces, within ISIS proclaimed territory, have severely constrained the possible emergence of competing factions who may attempt to undermine ISIS' perceived authority (Al-Tamimi, 2015). In both cases, the initial presence of competing factions encouraged the insurgent groups to bolster security institutions, which had the dual effect of also consolidating their territory.

Finally, Mampilly (2011) has indicated, in the context of warfare, how a period of ceasefire will inevitably provide rebels with an opportunity to continue expanding statelike apparatuses and engage in other relevant governance activities. This is exemplified through the case of the LTTE, whose twenty-five year armed struggle only benefited the local population during periods of ceasefire (Stokke, 2006). Particularly after the third war, there was a dramatic shift in their priorities, from military-orientated ones to developing and enhancing basic political infrastructure (Klem and Maunaguru, 2017). The new state-building agenda, rooted in economic considerations, offered new hope of a potential solution as the threat to physical security subsided (Stokke, 2006). As such, the situation on the ground of the LTTE corroborates the theory that periods of ceasefire will inspire rebel groups to turn attention inwards as they look to

cultivate statelike provisions.

DISCUSSION

In comparing the two cases, it is undeniable that local population attributes, rebel group characteristics, and war dynamics during ISIS' insurgency were more favourable to their state-building agenda (Arjona, 2011; Caris and Reynolds, 2014). In particular, environmental conditions differed between the LTTE and ISIS, given that the latter had access to immobile assets which has spurred on governmental activities. Undoubtedly, this has encouraged the development of viable industries, where the produce proves reliable and lucrative in the long-term. Another divergent characteristic identified is the external assistance – financially and militarily - that was provided to the LTTE. The considerable dearth of this in the case of ISIS would have been instrumental in determining the need to implement a taxation regime, which would constitute a dependable source of income and strengthen their social contract with the local population. In turn, this may have functioned to enhance their legitimacy and potentially generate a recruitment pool for their military cause. Furthermore, in the case of ISIS, a few divergent characteristics emerge which may contradict the current theoretical framework. In spite of the presence of an abundance of oil, ISIS was still incentivised to deliver welfare to local citizens, and even the instances of civilian resistance were not sufficient in inhibiting this aspect of governance. Therefore, in these instances, it is possible that ISIS' ideology may have assumed an influential role in still encouraging the care of its citizens. However, it is also likely that other characteristics, such as the lack of external support and the presence of immobile assets,

had a stronger impact in promoting ISIS' initial engagement with a variety of government activities (Lia, 2017). Conversely, for the LTTE, given their limited access to mobile assets, they would theoretically be more inclined to expand their government activities in order to generate a reliable financial source, but India's assistance instead likely compensated for such a loss. Nonetheless, welfare provisions and economic activities have assumed a subordinate role in the LTTE's agenda. Their financial extraction was substantially limited and, inevitably, by extension, so was their delivery of services. Instead, the LTTE were more oriented around the military aspects of their ruling, and particularly concerned with the constant perceived security threat to their territory.

CONCLUSION

Initially, ISIS' undeniably more expansive and varied government infrastructure emerges puzzling given that the LTTE's predominant objective was also secession from the Sri Lankan state. This was vital in determining some basic level of provision in the first instance whilst also necessitating long-term bureaucratic commitments from each of the rebel groups. However, after analysing the characteristics of each rebel group according to the appropriate theoretical framework, it becomes clear how such divergent circumstances would inevitably engender different behaviours. The divergent approaches to state-building observed between the LTTE and ISIS were not only due to the presence or absence of key characteristics, but also to the result of the varying combination of these, where certain characteristics took precedence over others. In particular, it would be reasonable to suggest that the most influential factors for explaining ISIS' greater propensity to govern are the presence of immobile assets and the lack of external

support. Both characteristics resulted in a greater investment of resources. This allowed ISIS to develop lucrative industries and, ultimately, provide more extensively for the local population in terms of health and education. Furthermore, for both groups, it is likely that the ideological underpinnings of the movements may also have driven them to expand statelike apparatuses in order to ensure that some degree of protection was provided to their citizens, whether that be physical or financial. In their engagement with statelike activities, the LTTE and ISIS established a de facto social contract with the local population, which proved fundamental in attributing some degree of legitimacy to their behaviour (Lia, 2017). Ultimately, this reduced the need to resort to complete coercion, whilst simultaneously enabling the rebel groups to undermine the parent state's competence through the usurpation of their governance duties (Grynkewich, 2008).

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