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Omar Abdulaziz Hallaj
Common Space Initiative

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In November 2015, the United States and the Russian Federation convened the main international stakeholders engaged in the Syrian conflict to broker the Vienna Accords. The unfolding political process culminated in the issuing of UN Security Council Resolution 2254. Since then the situation has evolved rapidly, ushering in a new outlook for the resolution of the six-year-old civil war. The conflicting parties in Syria have not yet fathomed the momentum of this deal. Some progress has been made as part of successive attempts to establish a "cessation of hostilities," but there have not yet been any major breakthroughs because the negotiating parties, supported by regional allies, are resisting the process every step of the way. The war has created new geographic realities: governance structures, political economies, and cultural paradigms. These geographies will not be easily bypassed. Dealing with the fragmented situation will hinder the prospects of a top-down solution, particularly because none of the negotiating parties has full control over its constituency. This article focuses on understanding this new geography. Arguing that the emergence of radicalized actors on the scene is not an accidental feature of the conflict dynamics, it shows how, instead, the territorial patterns of control by the different actors have used and exploited the territory to advance their positioning. Subsequently the article argues that these patterns, intended or not, have fostered the radicalization of the armed actors on all sides, imposing in the meantime asymmetrical patterns of territoriality that will seriously undermine the top-down approach of the Geneva process.

The conflict in Syria has exposed the fragility of the territorial order of the nation-state in the Near East. The civil war raging in the country for the past six years has evolved new patterns of territorial control used by the different actors to assert their position. While most international observers have focused on territorial acquisition as the main paradigm for assessing the relative strength and weakness of the different parties (and subsequently on their readiness to engage in the political process), this article focuses on different techniques for controlling the terrain, or what it calls territoriality. It also looks at spatial economies of control and the symbolic and etymological instruments used to legitimize action. In this regard, it examines the consequences of spatial action by both local and international actors (including the humanitarian actors).

Omar Abdulaziz Hallaj is a consultant on urban planning, development, and local governance. He is a senior coordinator of the Syria Project at the Common Space Initiative in Beirut, where he is engaged in facilitating various dialogues and research projects for peace building and recovery planning in Syria. Formerly, he was the CEO of the Syria Trust for Development and served on the boards of several nongovernmental organizations and public commissions. His professional and research work relates institutional, financial, and political frameworks to the production of built environment. In 2007, he was the recipient of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture as team leader of the Shibam Urban Development Project (GIZ). He subsequently served on the master jury and the steering committee of the award.

This article, however, is not about the Syrian armed conflict per se. That subject has been covered by numerous other studies.[1] Instead, it charts how the Syrian territory was constructed over the years after the breakdown of the Ottoman Empire. It then examines how that territorial order was progressively dismantled during the ongoing war, enabling the emergence of new forms of territoriality serving mainly the radical and radicalized actors. The article proposes three parallel processes of deterritorialization. First it looks at how the terrain was fragmented through the dissolving of governance institutions, then how the political economy of aid contributed to the dismantling of local resilience, and finally how a new symbolic order of radicalization was imposed on the terrain. Rather than presuming to indict any one set of actions or claim to know the intentions of individual actors, it examines the different spatial strategies used by all actors to put forward the proposition that the collective impact of their actions has created ample ground to foster radicalization. Armed actors as well as humanitarian and civil actors have contributed to the emergence of a new political economy that exploits the terrain. The article concludes with recommendations that would steer interventions in Syria toward building a more sustainable peace based on concrete social and economic foundations rather than on the abstract liberal peace-building model advocated in the Vienna agreement and codified through UN Security Council Resolution 2254 (SC Res. 2254).

Introductory Note

The political boundaries of the Near East evolved progressively in the nineteenth century at a time when the Ottoman Empire was falling behind as a world power. Western colonial enterprises had set their eyes on dividing the remnants of the "sick man's" territories. This was also a time when the West was grappling with its own global order and the balance of power among the largest power houses in Europe. Political theory was struggling between expansionist visions and the need to avoid further wars in Europe.[2] The notion of territorial demarcations among states, which hitherto had been only nominally a matter of concern for the European monarchs, became part and parcel of the idea of the nation-state. Delimitation and demarcation of national territories became a dominant pillar of the emerging order in the post-Napoleonic era. Nations invested heavily in reinventing themselves within clear national borders. But territories were not to be taken for granted. Various power strategies and techniques for reinforcing the state had to be instilled at all levels.[3] The UN charter of 1945 further reinforced the idea that to avoid further war and ensure the stability of the world order national territorial integrity must be respected.[4] Today we take national territories for granted because myriad international bodies and cultural and sports events are organized to reinforce the imagined communities bounded by an artificial boundary under the banner of the nation-state.[5]

While national territorial boundaries have had a wide range of instruments (international as well as national) to reinforce them and normalize their presence, other forms of territoriality did not simply vanish. On one hand, colonial powers moved away from territorial expansion to exercising their hegemony through internationally sanctioned civilizational missions (the post–World War I mandates), transterritorial instruments (defense treaties of the 1950s and 1960s), and progressively since the second half of the twentieth century, economic and knowledge monopolies. On the other hand, we have seen the emergence of new global networks dominated by nonstate actors. These networks encompass transnational corporate entities and global resistance movements. The increasingly globalizing world enabled and empowered by the opening of the World Wide Web have allowed for new forms of territorialities to emerge: supranational as well as subnational. Along with these new forms of territoriality, new identities emerged, requiring new

instruments to mitigate the contestation that these identities have unleashed against the national territorial order.[6]

Yet, it is premature to talk of the end of the nation-state. Stakeholders that have for over a century reinforced their positions by manipulating the political economy of the nation-states are not ready to give up. The volume of international flows, magnificent as it is, has not been able to accumulate in the hands of bodies and institutions that can challenge the political and economic interests aggregated on the national level. The sacred alliance that began to emerge between subnational and supranational actors fostered under the banner of the multilevel governance is facing major challenges.[7] Whether the current trend of rejecting the European project (e.g., Brexit) and the recent reversion of voters to right-wing nationalistic politics is a last stand against globalization or a return to nineteenth-century global world politics only time will tell. What is clear, however, is that a great deal of the modern-day violence and warfare is no longer taking place across national frontiers but along the fracture lines within the nation-state. In the Near East these wars have also been greatly influenced by the emergence of regional nonstate actors working vehemently to redraw the map.[8]

State actors in the Near East have often supported terror groups against each other to exert political pressure. Today, however, within a rapidly globalizing world order, both state and nonstate actors are sponsoring different brands of radicalized networks as a way to create conditions conducive to the advancement of their interests.[9] These interests range from geo-strategic positioning to creating new demands for anti-terror instruments and measures. Yet, terror does not manifest itself only as an externally driven phenomenon; terror networks have developed independent strategies that exploit the differences of interests between state and nonstate actors. Rupture points are occurring across internationally recognized political borders, where years of purposeful neglect and compromise with radical ideologies provide ideal conditions for terror networks to recruit and operate.[10] Different generations of terror groups have moved their focus from infiltrating fragile states to destabilizing entire regions. In doing so they have played on multiple spatial strategies that undermine national territorial systems and foster new forms of territoriality.

A Brief History of the Syrian Territorial Order

The Syrian territory is as artificial as any in the world. To understand how it has become fractured today, one must start by looking at how it was constructed through various state-building and territorial-demarcation strategies. A hundred years ago British and French negotiators sat down together to demarcate the post-Ottoman territory into zones of influence in what became known as the Sykes–Picot Agreement. That infamous 1916 agreement, however, was neither the first nor the defining moment of the emerging national territory of Syria. It was one part of a long political process that culminated in the creation of an independent state in 1946.

From the onset, "Syria" as a nomenclature was a colonial reinvention of a vast territory in the eastern Mediterranean that had for centuries been divided into administrative subdivisions of the Ottoman Empire, none of which was known by the name Syria. The name, however, does appear frequently on French and other European maps from the late Middle Ages into the nineteenth century. These maps often used a biblical toponymy to designate lands that have for centuries been called by other names. The French colonial pundits began speaking of the Syrian question in 1858 when sectarian tensions in the region culminated in pogroms against the Christians in Mount Lebanon and many other cities of the interior. The Syria in question consisted of the coastal strip and some of the larger urban centers just east of the coastal mountain range. The hinterland was

not relevant to the civilizational mission of the French colonial enterprise or its trade. Defending the Christians of the Levant corresponded perfectly well with the need to draw further trade concessions from the Ottoman sultans.[11]

The clear colonial ambitions of the West alarmed the subsequent Ottoman sultans, beginning in the early years of the nineteenth century. The challenge of splintering their territories (with Western support) necessitated a strengthening of the social contract with their heterogeneous subjects through a process of reforms known as the tanzimat. Local governance and representation in a pan-Ottoman assembly created chances for a new and invigorated Ottoman identity among local elites.[12] But the Ottoman attempts to reaggregate their terrain did not satisfy the many aspiring nationalist voices from the Levant. Political repression of these aspirations failed to stem these growing voices; rather, it helped gradually to sway public opinion in their favor. Yet these proto-nationalistic aspirations were not linked to a specific territory as much as to a grander pan-Arab movement. The 1913 conference held in Paris by students and delegates from the different countries of the Levant and Egypt was a milestone in defining a need for secession from the Ottoman Empire but a far cry from defining what would replace it.[13] For all their intellectual and emotional vigor, these emerging voices failed to create grass-roots political and social structures to amass organizational support for the idea of a new state.[14] The Ottoman administration and social control remained firmly engrained until the eve of World War I.

The Ottoman administrative subdivisions featured very little in the colonial discourses on Syria and were irrelevant to the demarcation lines that eventually were used to create the nation-states of the Near East after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. When the two negotiators, the British Mark Sykes and the French François Georges-Picot, signed their famous map they focused very little on the type of governance that would emerge once these territories were no longer part of the Ottoman Empire. The British favored some form of local self-rule (since they had been negotiating with the sherif of Mecca to be the ruler of an emerging Arab state under British protection), while the French cared only for direct control of the coastal area. Various options could have been acceptable for the governance of the region, including small semi-independent states under the nominal umbrella of a reformed Ottoman khalifat, independent states under the protection of the British and French colonial administrations or as full colonies.[15] What mattered most in that deal was establishing a testing ground for a realpolitik policy of intertwining French and British interests to prevent further military competition between the two superpowers.[16] The French would get 25 percent of the oil, concessions (including archaeological digs), and expert commissions in the British zone of influence, and the British would get reciprocal concessions in the French zone.

The first modern political map marking the birth of Syria was thus not a territorial map but a map of colonial territoriality. The subsequent maps that emerged in the wake of World War I delineated that territory progressively as the colonial powers narrowed down their options for future governance in the region. The treaties of Versailles, Sevres, Lausanne, San Remo, and Ankara were further steps toward the final delineation of the territory, a process that took several years of negotiation between the French and the British on one side and the French and the Turks on the other. The process of delineation, however, was not immediately matched by a parallel process of demarcation on the ground. That process was defined by several factors: (a) the British campaign to subdue the Iraqi tribes from 1918 to 1921, (b) the battle of liberation led by Kemal Ataturk to push the French back and recapture territory that was supposed to remain with Turkey after the signing of the armistice, (c) the preference of the French to allow the majority Christian enclave of Lebanon to become an independent state in its own right and to merge several of Damascus's traditional agricultural hinterland to that nascent state, and (d) the subduing of the

Kurdish national aspirations in the northeastern part of what became Syria (what the Kurds still define as Roj-Ava or Western Kurdistan). The final borders of Syria bear little resemblance to the lines drawn earlier by the Sykes–Picot Agreement. The core of the Syrian state that was eventually bestowed with a territory of some 185,000 square kilometers and put under the civilizing mission of the French mandate was defined by a coastal strip and the main hinterland cities lying behind the coastal region; the rest of the territory required a lot of work to be incorporated in the Syrian national imagination.

The artificial borders imposed on that territory cut off all traditional trade routes and supply lines (Aleppo to Mosul and Damascus to Beirut and the Lebanon) and ruptured tribal lands (Horan with Northern Jordan, Deir Zor with western Iraq, and the Alawi and Kurdish ties to southern Turkey). The state that emerged in the post-Ottoman period was not a nation but a mosaic that comprised multiple fragments that left almost every component of its citizenry yearning for a missing part of its identity.[17] Those with strong Arab affiliation aspired to a greater Arab nationhood, those still clinging to their Muslim identity reminisced about the greater Muslim khilafat, and the Kurds and Armenians wondered why they were cheated in the grander map-making exercise of the region. Faysal bin al-Housain, the Hashemite prince brought from Mecca to become the ruler of this new state, expected to rule a much wider terrain. He saw the French in the coastal region to the west and the British in Iraq as interim forces and waited to be handed the reins of the whole Levant and Iraq in keeping with his father's communication with the British during the war, while the French saw him simply as the local ruler who would manage the self-administration of the interior cities of Syria.[18] The clash of expectations plagued the development of the Syrian nation for years and defined the core political issues in the country. Many of the efforts to consolidate the territory were fraught with misunderstandings of that initial founding moment.

Various short-lived interim local governance arrangements were put together during the mayhem that resulted when the Ottoman armies surrendered to the French and British forces in the Levant.[19] Faysal eventually established his presence in Damascus, but his control over the rest of the terrain remained nominal and based mainly on the undefined expectations that some national entity would soon be formed. In 1920 delegates from different regions gathered for an ad hoc meeting in Damascus to draw up the new state's constitution. The delegates had no clear mandate that defined their responsibilities or their power of representation.[20] Ideologues would try for years to guess what the actual conditions were that brought these delegates together and to define the collective national identity that formed the basis of their congress.[21] The only concrete outcome of that meeting was a federal constitution that proclaimed a constitutional monarchy and defined a proportional system of representation (to ensure that minorities were not overtaken by majorities). The state to be governed by this new constitution had no defined borders and the districts that were supposed to make up the national body still had not been demarcated.[22] The nascent government lived but a few days, until the French forces led by General Henri Gouraud moved east from Beirut to capture Damascus and proclaim the French mandate.

The French subverted the federal constitution of Syria by delineating five small states that poorly reflected the real ethnic and sectarian diversity of the country and attempted to create imagined sectarian enclaves where the local traditional elites would be clients of the mandate authority.[23] The terms of the Lausanne treaty clearly handed the French the responsibility of overseeing the creation of a new nation called Syria, but several years of negotiation and intrigue would be required before the territorial organization of that Syria would take shape.

The French needed to homogenize their colonial administrations and reduce the cost of managing their vast colonial territories. That goal was achieved in part by fostering loyalty to the French administration among the local governments, which helped to subdue political unrest, and in part by adopting a highly complex set of urban and land management regulations that were designed to provide a normative rationalist standard to facilitate territorial control.[24] The regulations included laws to administer the demarcation and delineation of private property (laws 188 and 189 of 1926). The French authorities also issued laws to regulate state public lands (law 144 of 1925) and state private property (law 275 of 1926) and other laws to further normalize the different types of traditional land tenure systems into a single framework of private property. The Ottomans had attempted to normalize the land management system starting with the 1858 land reform law, but they failed to develop a homogenized bureaucracy to administer the system, and great local variations prevailed across the Ottoman lands.[25] The French administration deployed a process of air photography combined with land triangulations to establish the basis of the land cadasters constituting the backbone of the land registry still in place today. This point is important to remember because one of the principle strategies of the deterritorialization strategies adopted by radical forces in Syria has been to dismantle this land management system.

Effectively, the French normative administration created the territorial management tools that would eventually enable the unification of the territory and the bringing together of the different fragments into a single political body. Territorial normalization, however, was not restricted to land management. Regulating such matters as hygiene, schooling, tax collection, transportation, and management of antiquities contributed to the creation of a homogenized terrain. One can follow the logic set by Benedict Anderson[26] that, despite the attempt at creating a political narrative for a sectarian Syria, the normative administration created a de facto imagined community out of a territory that had no recognized border and lacked a historical raison d'être and whose primary traditional local identities were disrupted by artificial borders.

The national elite soon capitalized on the new bureaucracy to redevelop alternative ways of asserting their economic power, while the new state created a local market for their nascent agribusiness, textiles and, most important, new urban services. Indeed, the elites needed a singular market to compensate for their lost economic networks, because traditional trade and supply patterns were disrupted by artificial state borders. The need to create a singular market coincided with the need to forge a definitive national identity for the emerging state. The national consensus to accept the new national boundaries and drop previous aspirations for alternative identities (pan-Arab and pan-Islamic) emerged slowly, though it was often challenged by small ideological drives for alternative modes of imagining the state (Kurdish nationalism, communism and greater Syria). The success of the national bourgeoisie in 1930 to extract a concession from the French mandatory authorities to establish a new constitution based on a central parliamentary political system did not go unchallenged and required many concessions by the elite political parties to ensure continued French rule in Syria.[27] The elite relied in part on the economic crisis of 1929 to mobilize the masses.[28] The sectarian federal system crumbled because of the alignment of nationalist aspirations with dire economic needs to overcome the trade barriers between its components. The dividing lines that were left behind, however, were never managed in the nationalist discourse.

The nationalist movement that continued the struggle for independence swept sectarian and ethnic differences under the rug and made any talk of such identities taboo. The emergence of the independent Syrian state after 1946 was enshrined in a discourse of national identity intertwined with a moralizing language of propriety and public order. Ironically, the French normative system of governance enabled the creation of a homogenized territorial administration that eventually

overthrew the French mandate. The emerging elite used the normative power of the state to gain a moral high-ground for the pro-Syrian narrative. Yet, in reality, the new state lacked the necessary institutional depth to administer the territory. The ideals of the elite notwithstanding, the only viable institution to actually provide law and order in the country was the army. Thus, contrary to some nostalgic sentiments among many Syrians about the golden years of democracy in the immediate postindependence era, the reality of the matter is that Syrians were charmed by the ability of the army to provide order, while the political elite were quibbling about their interests and ideals.[29] The army intervened on various occasions to impose order. Syria was plagued by one coup after another for years; some were internally driven while others reflected the interests of foreign powers in aligning Syria to their grander regional schemes.

Through the succession of civilian and military governments in Damascus, the political and military elite clung to the nationalist discourse of a unified Syria as a form of a political compromise. The nationalist discourse provided a political ideal against which the various political actors would justify their power. But that ideal was hindered by the limited capacity of the state to manage its territory effectively and to construct the infrastructure for the creation of a unified national narrative. Thus, the nationalist ideal was constantly challenged. Years after independence in 1946, sectarian and ethnic grievances continued to take subverted forms. The national state had to face the challenges of small, esoteric cults like the Murshidiyeh (an offshoot of Alawi sect), the Greater Syria movement led by Antoun Saadeh, the diverse Kurdish formulas ranging from co-existence with to independence from the central government, the Muslim Brotherhood compromise to work within the confines of the national order while extending links to the wider international network of the Brotherhood, communists striving for a universal "International," and most important, pan-Arabs enchanted by Egypt's Gamal Abdulnasser's charisma as the foremost embodiment of the pan-Arab "corps-politique." This enchantment led to a short-lived unification experiment with Egypt that was driven by the inability of the Syrian state to meet its financial obligations as much as the bankruptcy of the Syrian nationalist discourse. Yet, the centralizing administrative system of the United Arab Republic (particularly that of its security system) soon forced most political actors in Syria to reconsider their position. Even the most ardent pan-Arab party, the Baath, was involved in setting up the secession from the United Arab Republic in 1961. But the Baath did more than contribute to the secession. In 1963 it organized the March 8 coup that secured its handle on power ever after.

To understand how the Baath ensured control over Syria, one has to understand how it structured the territory and developed a multilayered governance system that creates vertical systems of control supported by horizontal systems of patronage and clientelism across the whole Syrian terrain. Syria had always lacked the internal elements of economic sustainability that would allow it to impose itself as a strong player on the regional level. Among these were the instruments to extract revenues from its territory and transfer these resources into a sustainable nation-building project. The Baath, in contrast, was able to put in place a mechanism for extracting national wealth and differing economic problems. It certainly used the heavy hand of the state and its security devices to quell dissent and impose its symbolic and ideological hegemony.[30] But among the most important instruments of control it created was a political economy of patronage.[31]

What the Baath managed to do, however, goes one step deeper. It created centralized administrative channels that extracted national resources and collected them into the hands of the state, allowing Syria for the first time to amass sufficient resources to impose a universal geometry of territorial control. The system allowed each urban area to feed off the riches of its rural hinterland while appeasing the rural constituencies through patronage and state employment.

Urban riches were in turn usurped by the central cities, and Damascus usurped the riches of the whole system through centralized revenue extraction instruments. Administrative control, however, worked in exactly the opposite manner, from the top down. The national budget provided allocations for state bureaucracy at each level of governance that could be redistributed through a complex horizontal web of clientelism. Such a system would soon have collapsed if it were not for the critical, regular recalibration of power. In essence, while the Baath professed to revolutionize Syria and to impose a socialist homogenizing order, on the ground it worked through traditional systems of loyalties (through coercion or bribery).

The governance system was designed in such a way that its three branches of power (the state bureaucracy; the Baath Party; and the security agencies, which include four main agencies and a dozen other specialized ones) competed with and complemented each other. Each branch was centralized within its own internal reporting structure, though locally each branch fostered its own horizontal set of loyalties. Thus, it was not unusual to see a governor aligning himself with a specific head of the security agencies and some of the larger urban bureaucrats, while the Baath Party chief may have aligned himself with other security heads and other urban bureaucrats. The mayor of the largest city may have been part of yet another network, and so on. Each of these networks then fostered horizontal loyalties to traditional local elites. These networks acted to offset each other and to ensure that no local power could be aggregated against the central state. State favors and access to bureaucratic resources were spread horizontally to a very wide range of local clients. Each local patron-client network covered part of the traditional elites and ensured the loyalty and that of their constituencies to the system. The system was calibrated regularly through the transfer of personnel from one province to another. It created a pyramidal system of deferring entitlements and slowing down the pace of expectations for succession within the system, a proven technique in mitigating authoritarian control.[32] On the national level, the system fostered similar complex webs of patronage among top bureaucrats, party leaders, and security chiefs with top business leaders.[33] The net result was a system that depended on very rigid vertical administrative hierarchies and very flexible horizontal patronage networks both on the national and the local level.

Local elites competed also for national and local elections. While everyone knows that elected bodies had very little real power in Syria, they still represented an important symbolic positioning. A single electoral district based on simple majorities allowed coalitions fostered by the Baath to win parliamentary and local elections. While elections were often hindered by the indirect interference of the Baath and the security agencies in the determination of who was allowed to run and who was not, the election law secured the Baath's majority in any governance body and ensured that independents could never form a reasonable block to counterbalance the Baath. The Baath's electoral tickets were unified through internal elections before the national ones. Independents had to compete in a wide pool of candidates. Their coalitions had to contend with dividing the remaining votes. In effect, only people loyal to the system could get in as independents tagged in on the Baath's ticket. Here again the informal patronage networks interfered to ensure that local elites from the different patronage networks were voted into these not-so-effective but rather prestigious bodies, a phenomenon that is not restricted to Syria but is endemic in local governance in the whole region.[34]

The complex intertwining of power structures had clear territorial implications. The concentration of populations, economic resources, and services in cities led to the rapid rural-to-urban migration that characterized most of the 1970s and 1980s and showed no signs of slowing down till the late 1990s.[35] The two main cities of Damascus and Aleppo together accumulated the bulk of the local gross domestic product, causing a major discrepancy between cities and their

hinterlands and among different regions. Government spending per capita varied drastically among the different regions of Syria and clearly created some cause for concern as the national planning authorities scurried to offset the structural biases in the distribution of resources.[36] The central extraction system coupled with a redistribution based on political clientelism failed to calibrate itself.

The system produced areas in the country where the private economy dominated the local GDP and other areas where state budgets were more dominant, in essence, where a rentier economy based on political patronage was in place. State budgets were divided relatively equally among major and minor provinces but very inequitably with respect to populations and needs (see Fig. 1).[37] Homogenizing state bureaucracy meant that big provinces were treated similarly to small ones. Cities were classified on the basis of their ranking within the system and not on the basis of their population; therefore a town such as Douma in rural Damascus was a secondary city though its population superseded that of primary cities such as Tartous and Daraa. The local governance system was endowed with a minimal bureaucracy and therefore with few independent budgets and, most important, a limited capacity to provide jobs within its skeletal administration. This discrepancy between the homogenized bureaucracy and the heterogeneity of the territory meant that large parts of Syria were controlled by informal economies, because the nominal state budgets and minimal bureaucracy could not keep up with population growth and increased demand.
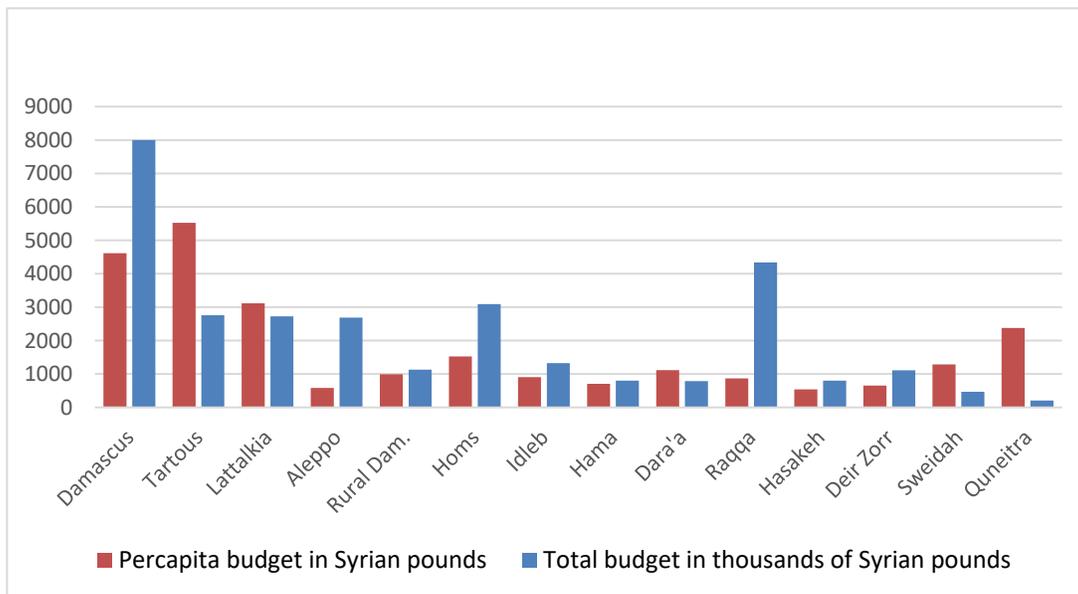

Figure 1. Total and per capita distribution of the independent provincial budgets in Syrian pounds in 2010 (internal memo by the Ministry of Local Administration and the Central Bureau of Statistics in Syria, 2011)

Another failure of the system came as a result of surplus labor. The state embarked on a series of land reforms that created a cap on agricultural properties. This cap was one of the main instruments the Baath used to buy the loyalties of the rural population. Agricultural cooperatives were set up in almost every village and their funding continued to increase even when state spending on social services and subsidies was shrunk as part of the economic reforms adopted by the state after Bashar al-Asssad ascended to power as president in 2000.[38] Yet two generations of demographic growth and inheritance fragmented agricultural lands further and further, making

agricultural production very costly. The state embarked on a plan to subsidize basic grain production under the guise of food security, buying wheat and other cereals at above-market prices. But this measure did not prevent massive labor surpluses. Most of the redundant labor was absorbed in informal-sector jobs on the periphery of the big cities. Yet a substantial part of the surplus labor, along with a surplus of academic graduates,[39] went to the Gulf states, creating another form of territoriality in Syria. Migrants brought back with them alternative ideologies and images of different forms of territoriality. While migration enabled the Syrian state to defer the question of labor redundancy and draw on expatriate remittances,[40] it caused a serious threat to the Baath's formal ideology.

The Baath propagated a national narrative of the Syrian state as a temporary step toward Arab unity. The judiciary system ruled not in the name of the Syrian people but in the name of the Arab people in Syria. The school system promoted this pan-Arab narrative, and most publicly sponsored cultural programs talked about Arab culture as opposed to Syrian culture. Yet, the state administration and bureaucracy coupled with the informal patronage power relations betrayed that narrative and fostered micro-scale identities. Syria lacked a coherent national narrative that correlated with its territorial boundaries, and it fostered an inconsistent system of territorial governance that professed a normative homogeneity while depending on a highly unsymmetrical pattern of political patronage. Ethnic and sectarian groups had no formal rights and no major advantages or grave disadvantages in the system, yet the Baathist state was preoccupied with managing local identities as it coerced local elites within its sphere of influence. Those who obliged were duly compensated and those who resisted were severely punished, including some of the conservative urban Sunni Muslims in Hama and Aleppo in 1982 and the Kurds in 2004. The governance system, with all its contradictions, was kept in balance by the Baath Party's complex strategy for distributing state favors and resources broadly.

Spatial Techniques of Radicalization

This territorial reality was the backdrop for the 2011 uprising. The uprising started with different groups bringing their grievances against the state, though these manifestations had no strong ideological or political agenda. The tide of the Arab Spring was still fresh and many young people, enthralled by the example set by other Arab countries, sought to follow. But rather than delving into how the uprising started or examining all the theories about the root causes for the rebellion, this article focuses on the types of territoriality that emerged during the past six years. To that extent, however, it does not divide those six years into the three distinct phases—pacifist, early militarization, and radicalization—that several researchers have proposed.[41] Such periodization does not help to explain how the geography has evolved. Instead this article looks at the different processes of fragmentation of the territory and the trajectory of each one of them with respect to the others.

When the Syrian protesters took to the streets in early 2011, their chants included a slogan that translates roughly as, "The Syrian people are one." This phrase proposes certain assumptions that until now have not been fully analyzed: that Syrians view their country as a unified territorial unit; that the state operates the same way throughout Syria, thus enabling an uncritical narrative to emerge that this was a revolution of a people against a regime; and that the Syrians have a unified vision of how they want to live together in the future. The experience of the past six years has shown this last assumption to be the farthest from reality. Furthermore, the signifier "Syria" has multiple interpretations. It is a contested field that cannot be taken for granted. Yet Syrian

stakeholders have raised it to such a symbolic level to avoid answering critical questions about the social and political dynamics that actually shape the conflict. The main theory of change driving the Arab Spring revolutions was regime change. In other words, the narratives of change have focused on a unified, centrally controlled territorial body that requires no more than replacing the center to improve. Peace-building efforts in Syria have also focused on the simplistic notion that a liberal peace can be established that will appease everyone and create change from the center out. The Geneva Communiqué, the Vienna accord, and SC Res. 2254 all make this assumption. Yet because the conflict grew beyond the national borders and evolved into a full-fledged proxy war, it is important to re-evaluate the assumptions underlying the simplistic narratives that framed the Syrian conflict.

The approach shall be to look at three parallel processes of territorial transformation. These processes are neither complementary nor exclusive of each other. Their combined effect is a progressive opening of the territory to radicalization. Answering the critical questions about peace building and deradicalization depend to a great extent not on the central process of political transformation in Damascus but on how these territorial transformations can be reversed, each on its own terms.

Deterritorialization: Erasing Borders and Obliterating Institutions

The first manifestations that took place in different Syrian cities and towns were small, and, considering the ferocity of the Syrian security apparatus, they seemed to defy logic. The demonstrators could not trust any form of political or social organization to unify their voices, so they relied on small local networks of trust. Thus, solidarity could be secured only at that micro level.[42] To effect expansion from one region to another, the demonstrators developed crude, basic organizational structures drawn from models propagated by social media and the formal broadcast media.[43] The Baath's complex network of vertical hegemony and horizontal patronage meant that any attempt to create obvious territorial outreach was doomed to failure. Yet that did not stop some shy initiatives to cross-fertilize local action through minor exchanges of know-how and resources. Most of these cross-territorial transfers were carried out through small personal efforts that often relied on informal social relationships (kin, city of origin, friendships) and were not on the level of political organizing. If anything, political structures were assumed to be often infiltrated by the Baath's complex antennas of social control.

That early mode of action grew into a basic geometry of social organizing. Small solidarity networks evolved into local coordination committees (LCCs). Since there was no clear standard by which to organize and aggregate their work, the LCCs created informal ways of consolidating their political messages through virtual voting for the slogans of the major demonstrations organized every Friday after the Friday prayers, in what became known as the Friday slogans.[44] But LCCs operated differently. Some were open to participation by women, while others developed around very conservative and traditional values, which called for excluding women from the public sphere.[45] In some parts of the country, the LCCs grew more tolerant of militarization, while in other parts they remained basically civilian. Also, within a span of less than two years most LCCs developed different degrees of religious overtones. Many were later transformed into local administration councils (LACs).[46]

The LACs developed along different models of governance. And it took about two years before some normative level of administration became acceptable. At first more than a thousand LACs were identified because many neighborhoods and small villages developed ad hoc committees to oversee local services. Eventually many were consolidated into more viable units,

and now roughly four hundred councils with varying technical and financial capacities operate in the rebel-held areas.[47] Money donated to support the provision of services brought with it certain externalities. Among these was the development of divergent models of local governance following the international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that were providing the funds. The Local Administration Councils Unit (LACU) set up in Gaziantep, Turkey, which was loosely affiliated with the opposition-led Syrian Interim Government, decided in 2014 to adopt a slightly modified version of the law for local administration issued in Damascus in 2011. Despite differences in the level of military control, gradual homogenization of the standards of local governance occurred across the opposition areas. Some armed groups in some regions (Aleppo and Dara'a) allowed LACs in their areas to formally affiliate with the provincial councils led by the exiled Syrian Interim Government, while others, especially in areas controlled by hard-line Islamist groups, such as Nusra Front, Ahrar, and Jaysh al-Islam, tolerated only a technical exchange between the local councils and the LACU.

What did not vary, however, was the basic geometry. The local organizational structures remained aterritorial and did not evolve upward into provincial or national bodies. With rare exceptions that occurred late in the game (Eastern Ghouta in rural Damascus and more recently the western part of the Aleppo Province), bottom-up territorial governance structures were unheard of, if not downright resisted by donors and politicians alike. Eastern Ghouta towns had to develop collective governance for their services because the whole region was put under siege by the central government and the different towns had no choice but to consolidate their resources to create an economy of scale to survive. Western Aleppo Province was aggregated only to reduce the burden of support provided by Nour al-Din Zenghi brigades, the one armed group that controls the region. The military command needed to rationalize its subsidy to civilian bodies. It is an exceptional small enclave where only one armed group has a more or less unified control over a territory. In all other instances, the terrain remains contested among the armed groups (more on that later).[48]

The opposition that would be favored by international bodies to represent the voices of dissent in Syria evolved through different iterations. The effort focused on forming a national body that would challenge the authority of Damascus. The Syrian National Council, then the Syrian Coalition of Oppositional and Revolutionary Forces, the Syrian Interim Government, and most lately the Higher Negotiation Council were all set up as national structures without recourse to the grassroots for legitimization. To ensure the survival of communities, local bodies had to develop their own processes of legitimization. Yet there was no formal or informal way to legitimize the national oppositional structures. The terrain that was to be conquered from the central government through military action evolved into a territory only in the narratives of the revolutionaries but not through concrete social and political action. The terrain became known as the liberated areas, but beyond the fact that the central government is no longer enforcing its rules and regulations there, there has been little effort to consolidate the territory.[49]

The strong link between the Baath and the state institutions created a natural reaction among the rebels. State institutions became synonymous with the Baath regime. While a minority of socially conscious activists tried to protect these institutions (some desperate efforts were made to preserve court, civic, and cadastral records), the momentum of the uprising was to dismantle them and improvise alternatives to governance.[50] The idea of "liberating the terrain" inadvertently created an undue burden on the opposition forces to provide services to their constituencies and to take on the charge of protecting these services. In many instances, attempts were made to persuade state employees to stay put and run the nascent alternative institutions. But because the

management of the public service was so much a part of the Baath's patronage system, most administrators, fearing for their lives, abandoned the opposition-held territory, leaving behind only rank-and-file local employees.[51] Thus, not only did the territorial divide create areas of asymmetrical devastation and damage from military operations, it created asymmetrical capacities to administer the territory.

The makeup of the armed groups that took to resisting the central government followed the same pattern at first. Brigades came together in small numbers to defend towns and neighborhoods. Though some used standard military terminology (battalions, brigades, divisions, etc.) to describe themselves, these units had no uniform definition and no homogeneity of command and control protocols. A brigade or a division could be large or small; it could shrink and expand in response to the availability of funding. Alliances were created under a variety of pretexts, some ideological, others based purely on who was funding at the time.[52] While local units were solidly tied to their home turf, the larger alliances were not concerned about specific terrain. They were interested only in consolidating access to local resources, such as oil, local tithes, and border-crossing points.[53] The logic of territorial control for larger alliances was less about turf than it was about asserting their relative presence in the battlefield.[54] In many instances, when the larger alliances, which felt no location attachment, were squeezed for resources or were forced on the battlefield to relinquish some areas under their control, they soon relocated to other areas to continue their work, leaving local fighters to fend for themselves. The larger alliances realized early on that they must stake their reputation on their ability to win battles, not to hold territory. Thus, each alliance would normally send a few brigades to fight in the bigger battles around Syria, because the fighting was driven by a desire to respond to the call for jihad and an interest in sharing in the loot of military munitions.[55] The concept of loot often merged with early Islamic principles for dividing the spoils of war.

The larger rebel alliances created an overlapping territory, with each alliance staking a share in the different terrains rather than trying to forge a single turf for itself. Naturally this practice led to squabbles over resources. To resolve the emerging conflicts, the armed groups needed some form of arbitration. Lacking any viable judiciary authority, they resorted to establishing arbitration courts and designating trusted arbiters to run these courts. The most trusted authorities were local clerics and the courts were soon dubbed "the religious authorities." The author's mapping of some of the early formations of the religious authorities in the province of Aleppo reveals that particular armed groups tended to aggregate around specific authorities. The authorities were not location specific as much as they were stakeholder specific.[56] While the hardening of the fight and ideological and funding realities were instrumental in the radicalization of the rebels, the pattern of aggregation should not be underestimated in this regard.[57]

The armed groups tried to delegate a larger governance role to the religious authorities. But in many cities and towns parallel governance bodies emerged, often competing for legitimacy and resources.[58] On one hand were the governance structures that evolved organically from the LCCs to become LACs, as described earlier, and on the other hand were the religious authorities. The separation of duties and jurisdiction among the typologies of local governance is still not resolved in most areas, though there is a tendency to gradually stratify the roles, allocating to the civilian bodies the responsibility of providing services, while keeping the policing and the courts in the hands of the religious authorities. A tacit understanding is gradually emerging whereby the armed groups are acknowledging the ability of civilians to attract western donor funds to support the provision of services and encouraging them to do so. In that regard the small funds provided by the Syrian Interim Government and the nominal coordination between the LACs and the provincial

governorate councils that work closely with the Syrian Interim Government are tolerated. But the religious authorities jealously guard the courts and the adjudication of justice.

The insistence on the courts has a complex rationale. As discussed later, most radical religious opinions tend to demarcate the fine line between the Abode of Islam and the Abode of War in terms of the institution of the court and not that of the prince. Therefore, to attract funds from radical nonstate actors, one must clearly demonstrate that one is running the courts. Ironically, once the ownership of the courts was securely in the hands of the religious authorities, they found themselves the recipients of substantial USAID funds aimed at strengthening law and order and providing stability, perhaps as a counterweight to the draw of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to Islamic-leaning fighters.[59] Territorially, however, the effect of this allocation of funds is that the governance of basic civilian services in the opposition-held areas is run according to an administrative hierarchy (state, provincial government) while other aspects related to policing and justices are run on the basis of intraregional military alliances. Local service provision through the LACs is thus fragmented to the lowest common denominator of satisfying immediate local resources without the possibility of linking service providers and creating economies of scale.[60] While the war and the pressure by the central government can be blamed for much of the failure to establish viable governance bodies in the opposition-held areas, the competing modes of territoriality (supported by competing donor interest) seem to have had the upper hand in setting up the opposition to fail to create homogenous territoriality. In the quagmire, radical groups have found fertile ground to exploit the situation and ISIS has emerged as a better manager of local governance (more on that later).

In a different direction, the experiment of the Kurds in the north and northeast of the country is an exception. The central government abandoned Kurdish majoritarian areas just as they abandoned many other areas in Syria. The Kurds, however, negotiated a status quo that allowed state institutions to continue to run despite the growing political divide. The coalition led by the Democratic Union Party (PYD) in conjunction with local tribal and sectarian entities created areas of self-rule on a political level and not an administrative level. Basic service provision was left in the hands of state institutions.[61] The Kurds had to pay a political price for such a deal, with many in the opposition thinking of them as allies to the central government, when in reality they managed to avoid carrying the burden of administration alone.

The Kurdish-dominated self-administration zones have created a dual system of governance. One part is concerned with services left to the local institutions (no attempt at reinventing the wheel here), the other with political governance, which is determined by the practical need to protect the terrain from intrusions, especially from radical Islamic groups (first by Nusra Front and then by ISIS). Through coercion of traditional local forces or mutual fear of external intruders, the different components of the community were brought together to create the political pact known as the Social Contract of Roj-Ava. The preamble to the Charter of the Social Contract defines the constituents of the "Democratic Autonomous Regions" as "Kurds, Arabs, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Arameans, Turkmen, Armenians and Chechens," not as citizens, and the full text defines a power-sharing deal between the most powerful and well-organized Kurdish faction (the PYD) and the other components that lack strong organizational capacities. In essence, it further reinforces traditional local elites in their local role without allowing local actors the ability to consolidate their political impact on a broader territorial level.[62] Only the PYD has the power to exercise such territorial control in the autonomous self-administration areas.

Regardless of the morality and legality of such a political pact, the model advocated in these zones constitutes another model of territoriality that should be carefully examined because it will

pose yet another challenge to the consolidation of the national territory in a postconflict period. For now, however, this additional model of local administration is only creating further asymmetry of governance and contributing to the fragmentation of the territory at the most basic level, which will make resolving the conflict from the top down along the liberal peace-building model proposed by SC Res. 2254 even more complicated.

The central government did not at first seem to be bothered by losing a certain part of the terrain as long as it could maintain its hegemony over the territory. The central government territoriality was maintained by exercising three levels of control: national, provincial, and local. On the national level, as long as the Security Council was deadlocked on Syria, the central government was assured that it could always depend on the international order to maintain its borders and did not need to invest in protecting those borders itself. Thus, the central government abandoned most border crossings without any serious resistance and, in doing so, shifted the burden of protecting the borders to the regional and international arena while maintaining the sovereign right to exercise control over the border when it suited Damascus. The UN bodies must, as part of their mandate, coordinate with the state parties. The Syrian case was a first-time challenge. Syria could not be put under the Chapter Seven provision of the UN Charter (i.e., placing the responsibility of governance in Syria in the hands of the UN) without bypassing the Russian veto. Thus, the central government maintained full control over the presence of the UN on the Syrian territory (retained the territoriality without investing in controlling the territory). Furthermore, only government-issued formal identification and other administrative documents would be acceptable internationally. All attempts by the International Friends of Syria to create a legitimate alternative to the government of Damascus remained nothing more than symbolic gestures with little legal value.

On the provincial level, the Syrian government abandoned many positions in rural areas, knowing well that the rural areas lacked the ability to administer themselves without the larger cities.[63] While it is not entirely true that the uprising in Syria is a rebellion of the countryside, the central government promoted that narrative to reinforce the schism. Narratives of the urban/rural divide created an important rallying point for the government in Damascus. The effect of these narratives is only now being observed by the international media,[64] but they were an essential part of how the central government consolidated its power over cities. The central government also ensured from the beginning that the cities under its control would remain open to internally displaced people (IDPs) leaving devastated war zones under opposition control. Today, various estimates put the remaining Syrian population at about seventeen million inhabitants, down by about six million who left the country altogether.[65] While there are no formal statistics, it is estimated that cities have become home to more than two-thirds and perhaps as much as three-quarters of the remaining population. Urban areas have become the harbingers of stability in the country and the majority of these cities lie in the hands of the central government. Most maps of the Syrian conflict use color to demarcate the terrains controlled by the different belligerents.[66] On those maps, the government appears to be losing terrain. But had the mapmakers looked at the growth and shrinkage of populations, had they looked at the accumulation of local GDP, or had they followed the volume of expenditure on public services, the picture would look completely different. Again, the central government abandoned territories but retained a high level of territoriality.

On the local level, the government created emergency measures to consolidate local governance and delegate responsibilities to the local governors to make decisions. While at the beginning of the conflict the government seemed interested in moving reforms toward

decentralization by issuing law number 107 late in 2011, the law was hardly implemented. In theory, it redesigned the geometry of the Syrian territory to enable the state to move to a high level of decentralization within five years. Abandoning the previous emphasis on the governorates (the provincial governments) and their subdivisions (districts and subdistricts), the new law elevated the role of municipalities and defined a very broad base of authorities and responsibilities to the elected councils of the cities, towns, and townships. The governorate councils would become coordinating bodies among municipalities and not one hierarchical oversight body as they were previously envisioned.

The Ministry of Local Administration then issued ordinance 1378 in 2011 to demarcate the new administrative boundaries of the new municipalities. The decision created 1,341 administrative units divided into 157 cities, 502 towns, and 682 townships. The ratio of cities to towns and townships differed greatly from one province to the next because of variations in the number of cities. But the aggregation of Syria's more than 6,000 smaller villages into townships had an altogether different rationale behind it. Each township was to be endowed with future budgets of its own, allowing the state to spread its patronage even deeper into the local community of the rural countryside. Lattakiya Province (population of slightly less than 1 million inhabitants) had 4 cities, 30 towns, and 64 townships, while Aleppo Province (population close to 5 million) had 24 cities, 111 towns, and only 20 townships. Clearly, in the loyalist province of Lattakiya, the rural community was the backbone of support to the Baath. In Aleppo Province only the urban areas were perceived as solidly progovernment and rural areas were already being suspected of going rogue. Local elections were held on December 12, 2011. About 43,000 candidates competed for 17,629 seats, a very low ratio even by Syrian standards. About 15 percent of the councils could not be filled, and a great many others did not have enough candidates to fill the local seats.[67] Even by that early stage, the government in Damascus was being detached from the local level.

Yet, beyond creating the new administrative units and setting up the local elections in 2011, the government did not move ahead with the implementation of the law. The powers of the local municipalities remained seriously curtailed by the intervention of the provincial governors and the governorate security committees. The shrinking of the buying power of the Syrian pound and the diversion of the state budget to support the war effort meant that investment budgets on the local level were almost eliminated and municipalities were reduced to the minimal role of solid-waste management and sewer maintenance. Any larger expenditure required budgets that only the governors could move. In effect, rather than decentralization, the situation created the opposite trend of concentration of power at the provincial level.

But while the central government could still exercise relatively strong territorial control at the level of the governorates, it found it necessary to decentralize its local military control. Private militias were set up to aid the government in critical military operations, and recently the government has even increased its reliance on foreign forces. Retaining the flexibility to move across the territory and between different front lines to match the flexible maneuvering of the rebel groups necessitated outsourcing the local law-and-order operations. Local militias were encouraged to arm themselves to defend and protect their neighborhoods. In areas where the sensitivities of local minorities were high, young men could choose to serve in these local militias, known as Popular Committees, rather than be recruited into the army. The Popular Committees were then organized under the National Defense Forces to give them some control, though they remain very local in their composition and loyalty.[68]

These militias often set up their own checkpoints around their neighborhoods, creating physical barriers between the different zones of larger metropolitan areas or conurbations.

Different security branches were also encouraged to set up checkpoints to control critical local junctions in cities and towns. Such actions, however, took them beyond their formal mandates and fragmented the terrain even further, reducing economic flows and subjecting the cities and towns to tithes and illegal duties. Also, inadvertently, these checkpoints created a sort of barrier against the flow of civic-based activities that concentrated and justified communitarian-based solidarity. These checkpoints created a negative form of social capital based on local leadership and reduced the ability of civilians to move across the territory. In that regard their social impact is similar to the effect of the local armed brigades that control opposition areas, reducing the civilian and civic capacity to flow through the territory and aggregate territorial fluxes in the hands of the armed actors.[69]

The net effect of the different types of emerging territoriality is an asymmetrical geometry that differs from one part of the country to the next. Each political stakeholder has its power situated in and dependent on a different type of territoriality (see Fig. 2). This asymmetry will constitute the first challenge for the peace process because the interests and power of each of the actors are clearly situated at different ends of the scale. But at a more fundamental level this section has shown how the fragmentation of the territory goes beyond the skirmish lines separating the warring factions. It affects the ability of civilian actors to move across the territory and monopolizes the territorial control in the hands of the armed actors even within each area of control. Moreover, it fosters negative models of social capital based on communitarian solidarity. Radicalization must therefore be mapped at this fundamental social transformation as a result of the breakdown of the territory, and in that sense it is not specific to any one group. All social groups started hardening their positions as their ability to move across the terrain was reduced. This is the first strain of radicalization that needs to be observed.
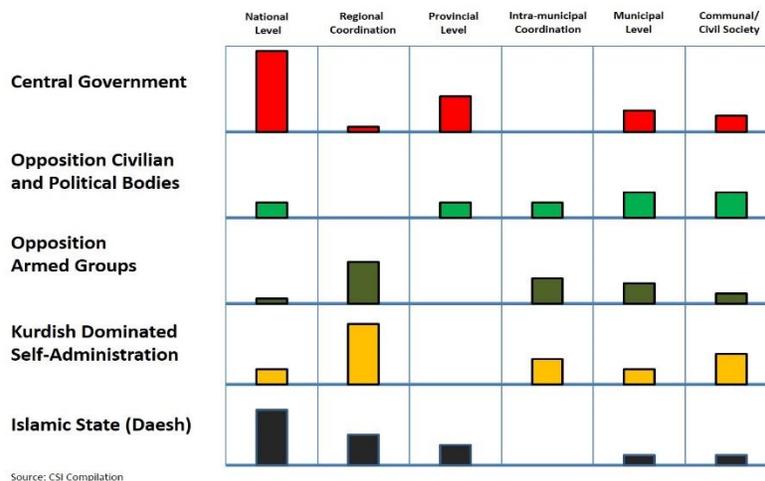

Figure 2. Viability of governance institutions

Aid Networks and the Political Economy of War

Much has been written about the war economy and how it is fueling the conflict in Syria.[70] This article examines only the spatial implications of that economy and the impact it has had on the increased radicalization in the country. The focus is on the spatial patterns and the types of flows involved. In that regard, the flow of international aid, often looked at in purely humanitarian terms,

affects economic and power patterns and gets entangled in the political economy of the war on many levels.[71]

The humanitarian aid to Syria has been a contested issue since the first days of the conflict. The UN was deadlocked in the Security Council over what to do in Syria. Without a clear political mandate, the UN organizations could operate at only the most basic level: humanitarianism. As early as the first days of 2011, many UN programs were brought to a quick halt or were allowed to die out without extension. The only focus for the new programming was the delivery of humanitarian aid; development aid ceased altogether and was not brought back in earnest until 2016 under the guise of supporting livelihoods. European contributions to UN programming was earmarked for humanitarian needs. The European Union, which took an early stance against the human right records of the central government, put forward no aid beyond serving the immediate needs of displaced communities. Even the early programming of the European Union that was geared for direct spending through such programs as Tahdir and Madad focused on humanitarian issues.[72]

While humanitarian aid had a major role in saving lives, it had two externalities. It fostered a climate of dependency and entitlement because viable local production was sidestepped to deliver aid more efficiently, leaving behind a great number of people unserved and dependent on radical networks to support them. It also fostered localism by empowering the more radical actors to shape the local political economy and take charge of the flow of aid between the different locations. This section explores these two externalities and attempts to map their spatial impact.

The first wave of IDPs and refugees was small, but everyone wanted to show that they were ready to take them in. Early IDPs were housed in collective shelters and provided with complimentary services; the standards set for these early shelters created a certain bar that was impossible to replicate once large numbers of IDPs started to flow. Today, it is estimated that IDPs make up more than a third of the Syrian population still living in Syria.[73] Yet, the proportion of funding going to help the IDPs find jobs remains miniscule compared with the amount of humanitarian aid delivered.[74] The problem with humanitarian aid is that it is never enough. The UN's own assessment of people in need (PIN) varies considerably from one organization to the next. The UN organizations operating in different sectors (water, shelter, food, etc.) have not managed to put together a convincing combined index for need. The Humanitarian Need Outlook reports issued every year must contend with suboptimal definitions of "need." Often the solution is to take the largest number of PIN in any sector in any given subdistrict to be the PIN number in that area. In that regard PIN numbers for Syria lose granularity and accuracy when considered for area-based planning and are only relatively more accurate when considered for sectoral planning.[75] Despite these shortcomings, the UN estimated that in 2016 more than 13.5 million people were in need of aid in Syria.[76] Until then, the combined volume of funds to keep people alive in Syria had never been clearly articulated. Planning for the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) was input based and not impact based. But even at 2 USD per person per day (the figure needed to keep people above abject poverty), the bill would amount to about 10 billion USD a year. And if we add just the larger donors' published figures we are not likely to get a total larger than a third of the actual need. The question to be raised now is, who gets served and who does not? Earlier, the important question, how do we leverage aid to serve everyone by helping a peace economy to emerge and employ people again? was never seriously asked, at least not in formal published policy papers.

When recipients consider aid an entitlement, there is always the question, who deserves it and where does it actually get spent? There is also an endless flow of allegations of corruption and

favoritism.[77] The UN was obligated under its charter, and lacking a clear mandate by the Security Council to do otherwise, to coordinate its aid with the central government. That meant that all employment in UN agencies, the procurement of aid material and delivery trucks, and so on all took place from the territories controlled by the central government. Once the Security Council authorized cross-border delivery, some flows went in, mainly from Turkey to the north. But, in contrast to peace-time delivery, a large part of humanitarian budgets go to cover the cost of logistics. Thus, indirectly, the delivery of humanitarian aid empowered certain actors, mainly in the government areas. These actors include the administrative staff of the UN, urban-based NGOs with access to the terrain, and the providers of logistics (delivery trucks, security, etc.). To avoid perceptions of favoritism and to improve economies of scale, procurement was done in bulk outside the areas in need or outside Syria altogether. The products delivered then competed with local production and often drove local producers to close down their businesses.[78] Moreover, since aid was not calibrated with local needs, many of the products that were delivered as aid were redundant and resold at below market prices, further competing with local production.

Those who did not get access to aid still felt entitled to it. When LAC administrators and local NGO volunteers working on aid delivery in different parts of the country were asked in interviews with the author about their ability to raise local contributions to cover the cost of services in their community, the initial response was that the people are too poor and cannot contribute. But when pressed further about why it is that in other poor countries people do contribute in kind, the answer was always along the line of, "Our people expect that our deliveries to be free because they know that aid money is responsible for covering their needs, and if we ask them to contribute they will accuse us of stealing the aid money."[79] A circle of dependency has been created. Radicalized actors exploit the situation by (a) delivering minimal products but spread to a wider constituency of recipients to demonstrate a more equitable norm for the distribution, (b) involving the community in delivery and creating local structures of patronage in the process, and (c) extracting communal contributions under the guise of religiously mandated taxes (alms and tithes). These practices are not new and have been observed in Gaza and other places.[80]

ISIS in particular understood the power of levying taxes under Islamic pretexts. While the amounts raised were not enough to cover its tremendous war machine and sizable administration, ISIS affirmed the hegemony of its brand of state and provided people with a slightly above-average service when compared with what was happening in other parts of non-government-controlled Syria.[81] Moreover, the taxes were meant to encourage merchants to bring in trade and exchange goods freely in their areas. ISIS areas were governed with an iron fist but with very clear governance standards. If a merchant paid his dues, he was free to conduct his trade. This practice allowed a great deal of economic flows to go through ISIS territory (not just oil) and to be traded within their different provinces. But, more important, its ability to provide for an "Islamic" model of territorial governance allowed it access to international nonstate-actor funds.[82] Radical funding to ISIS was concentrated in the hands of the central financial structures of the Islamic State.[83] Those structures ensured that other service providers, be they international organizations or the remaining bureaucracy of the central government in Damascus, work under their own control to legitimize their patronage.

Spatially, international aid delivery has created three observable patterns. The first pattern is that the areas controlled by the central government were given priority in the delivery of aid, and as a result, they have been favored by the secondary effect (the hiring of staff, procurement of goods, and hiring of delivery services). The second pattern is the emergence of certain new locations and towns as nodes where exchanges take place between the different geographies. At

these nodes, armed actors and, increasingly, the radicalized actors from all sides have taken control over the transfer of goods and collected local tithes to finance the war economy.[84] By increasing the apparent risk for these transactions, the most ardent fighters have been able to increase profits at these nodes and ensure that they are the better party to mitigate these risks.[85] The third pattern is the breakdown of intercity trade and its replacement with cross-border deliveries from Turkey and Jordan or cross-line deliveries from Damascus, which have had the effect of creating dependency on the outside. Again this last observation has to be correlated with the emptying of the territorial dimension from civilian action and limiting territorial actors to the hardened armed groups.

The second externality of humanitarian aid was its fostering of local political economies. Some of the largest aid programs that went beyond the humanitarian level to work on empowering local government and delivering services in opposition-held areas focused on promoting stability through good governance.[86] Strengthening the delivery of services was seen as a countermeasure to ISIS's and other radical groups' increased attractiveness to local communities. Yet, in meetings with a large number of administrators who worked on the delivery of European- and US-based programs in Syria, this author heard repeated expressions of doubt about the validity of the theory that work on local stabilization and good governance can reduce radicalization. Much of the work that was done to empower LACs seems to have had no sustainable impact.[87] More important, because funding and resources were so limited, these efforts failed to counteract radicalization. To understand the reasons for this failure, it is important to look at how aid was delivered.

In many parts of the country no longer controlled by the central government, aid groups often supplemented their service-delivery programs with capacity-building programs for local councils. Almost all major donors provided resources to support LACs. Most of these programs focused on empowering local civilian actors, most were not directly related to governance on a normative level, and most offered standardized packages of services and did not involve the community in designing localized solutions. This last point may be questioned by some donor programs because they worked specifically on establishing local committees to assess needs and develop solutions.[88] But a close examination of the workflows reveals that the focus was on solving individual problems rather than looking at the full picture and the surrounding conditions that affect the problem. Thus, the resolution of an issue such as a water shortage might not go beyond fulfilling the immediate humanitarian need by providing water. Related issues, such as the sustainability of the water source, the availability of gasoline to pump the water (the gasoline was often purchased from ISIS areas), the recycling of the water, and the economies of scale involved in serving multiple communities through one project were not typically addressed in the donor beneficiary talks.[89]

Setting up infrastructure that would serve multiple communities was a complex undertaking. It raised the issue of the ownership of the service and the lack of governance bodies that could operate and maintain it. More important, a wide set of armed actors had to agree to guarantee the safety of the new infrastructure. Negotiating such an agreement required some local actors to defer to other local actors and seek compromises with them. The easiest and most expedient way to deliver supplies and implement programs was to act locally where the set of actors was limited and manageable. In each locality a religious authority coordinated the interests of the local armed groups. These religious authorities often responded to the standards set by the most powerful of the local armed actors, who tended to be the more radical groups on the scene. The religious authorities exercised a strong say in the selection of the local councils. What is often presented as an election process of the local councils is not the type of election that western democracies are

used to. Instead, the "electoral operation" in most places resembles a consultative process to select a general assembly of elders that eventually will elect the council.[90] In opposition areas very few councils actually hold real elections, though the phenomenon is more common in the Kurdish-dominated self-administration zones. In return, the local councils and the armed groups tend to favor certain local NGOs and community-based organizations with their partnerships; these are often kin-based relationships or are based on local patron-client relationships where local elites exercise a high level of influence on the local council.

Funds in the hands of armed groups made up most of the resources any given community received. These funds were often provided by nonstate actors who supported the armed groups for their hardline religious jihadist stances. The armed groups contribute to the welfare of the community by providing military and police protection.[91] They also contribute a portion of their own funding to the LACs as a way of legitimizing their operation and consolidating their power. Many of the local councils indicated that they depended on the armed actors to cover as much as 70 percent of their budgets. Thus, the donor funds, important as they are to cover investment and installation costs for infrastructure, provide a small fraction of the funds needed for the general maintenance and operation costs of infrastructure projects. In other words, donor funds are introduced into a closed patronage network dominated by the armed actors, particularly the more powerful radical groups. Despite efforts by the donors to brand their work as civilian and humanitarian, it was delivered through structures that the recipient communities see as part of the governance structure and dominated by the more radical forces (see Fig. 3).
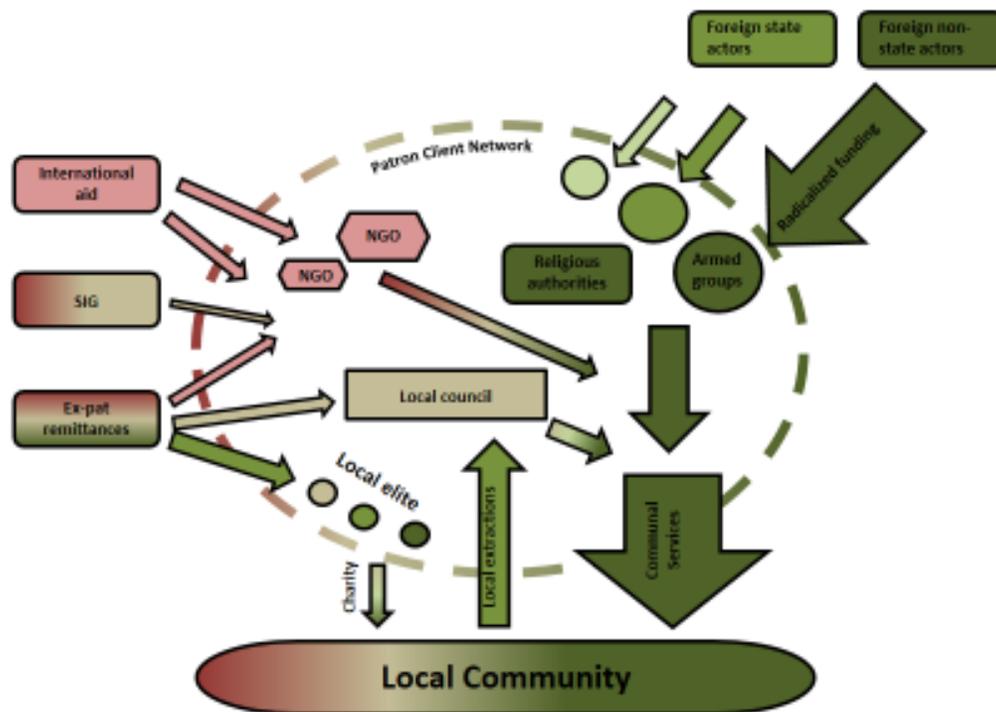

Figure 3. The political economy of local governance: how external aid is channeled to foster radicalization (SIG = Syrian Interim Government)

More important, donors did not coordinate their inputs into the opposition areas. Each donor specified local governance guidelines within its own administrative procedures. (Half a dozen

booklets detailing guidelines were circulated by the different donors.) No efforts were made to develop territorial coordination of aid programs or infrastructure projects. Programs supported either the local councils or the Syrian Interim Government and its institutions, including the provincial council. Little was done to coordinate between the two levels or to create bottom-up links to hold the upper-level governance structures accountable to the lower ones. For example, the Syrian Interim Government and the provincial councils consistently describe the local councils as "branch councils." In that regard they seem to have replicated the attitude of the central government in Damascus, which used access to central resources to impose its will over the lower governance bodies. The situation is awkward at best because it allows every side to live and propagate its narrative without having to face the reality of the situation or to develop a common narrative. The donors believe they are funding good governance and humanitarianism, the Syrian Interim Government believes it has branch governance bodies on the ground, and the armed groups are able to submit to their nonstate radical donors that they are actually in charge of local governance because they have local governance bodies that receive funds but do not have to be branded as part of the Syrian Interim Government. Though some donors are changing direction and paying more attention to the territorial dimension of aid,[92] they are tending to focus on provincial-level governance. They are not developing a link between the local and the provincial, and they are not trying to mitigate middling levels of territoriality to help civilian actors offset the armed groups' decision-making power at that middling level between the local and the provincial (refer back to Fig. 2).

The process of localization that took place with regard to the delivery of aid in government- and Kurdish-controlled areas did not affect radicalization in the same manner. While civilian actors continued to play a mitigating role in offsetting the armed actors in those areas, radicalization was affected by other factors related more to ideology and identity politics.

Reshaping the Imagination: The Symbolic Structures of the Territory

As observed earlier, Syria as a territory has always been a place of contestation when it comes to ideology and identity politics. The current war brought many of these contradictions to the surface when the formal structure for imagining the state came under attack. Many Syrians believed that they were immune to identity-based divisions, as evidenced by the early slogans of the uprising declaring that the Syrian people are one and the counterslogans of the loyalists declaring that Syria is protected by God and shall not be divided. Now, six years into the war, no Syrian faction will accept talk about separation from the Syrian state. Almost all of the charters that were produced through track two dialogues start with a statement that the participants agree about the territorial integrity of the Syrian state and the unity of its people. Even the Kurds in Syria have always insisted on their being part of the Syrian state. Though they want to see guarantees to protect their rights as a minority in a majoritarian Arab country, and though they see those guarantees provided only in a federal political system, they have never called for secession. Though the idea of unity is well established, however, the Syrians agree on little else. The principle of equality before the law is interpreted differently by the different stakeholders. The minorities often want groups' rights, the liberals want individual rights, and the groups speaking in the name of the Muslim Sunni majority often speak about complementary rights between majority and minority groups. More important, the history of pain and sorrow in Syria has many narratives. While those in the opposition speak about the loss of freedoms under the Baath since 1963, many minorities recount histories of pogroms perpetrated by the majority against their people that go back centuries. Furthermore, the state failed in its education and cultural programming to forge unifying

narratives. For the most part it was forbidden to talk in public about these grievances, which were swept under the big rug of the Baath's ideology of pan-Arabism.

While the rebellion did not start out as a sectarian cause, and many on the opposition side came from minority religious and ethnic groups that may or may not have been secular, once the uprising transformed into an armed conflict, Sunni Muslims made up the overwhelming majority of the armed insurgents. Donors from the Gulf states provided abundant funding for armed groups on condition of branding themselves with Sunni identity markers. Only in 2016 did some voices in the opposition raise the question who stole the revolution?[93] Some international observers had pointed to the phenomenon early on,[94] though the international debate in policy-making centers in the West continued to play with the notion of the radical versus the moderate armed insurgents. This article does not make any claims about who is radical and who is not, nor does it define the phases of the radicalization of the rebellion.[95] Instead it looks at how the radicalized ideologies of all belligerents in the conflict have appropriated space and cultivated a new image of the Syrian territory.

Leaving ISIS to the end, this section begins by examining how the Syrian government narrated the conflict and represented the Syrian territory. The Baathist model of modernizing the Syrian state made subtle use of sectarian politics and calibrated it periodically.[96] The primary objective of the Baathist policy was to achieve better control of the terrain and to counterbalance the different communities to prevent any serious challenges to the system from within any particular sectarian group. During the early years of the conflict, the formal discourse of the state often focused on the national unity of the country. In interviews and public speeches the president spoke consistently about the need to reconquer the whole of the Syrian land and to cleanse it of the terrorists. His discourse permeated official media and private media loyal to the government in Damascus. Beginning in the early days of the uprising, the official Syrian flag gained considerable prominence over the Baath flag (perhaps to keep the opposition from raising the old Syrian flag that had been used during the mandate period and into independence). Formal discussion of sectarian grievances was prohibited in public media (despite the fact that a disproportionate number of Alawai army men were killed in the fighting). The image of the state as a nonsectarian institution that respects all beliefs was officially maintained.

As the morale of soldiers started to drop, however, and as the Alawi community began to feel the burden of its young men dying in large numbers, informal manifestations of sectarianism appeared. Sectarian narratives, symbols, and slogans became more prevalent. Also, as more and more Shia militiamen were brought to Syria by the Iranian government to support Damascus in asserting its control, sectarian slogans became increasingly loud, first in the battlefield and later in the major cities in parades of fighters who had returned from battles. An esoteric ideology of death and redemption started to emerge and with it the use of overt sectarian icons and amulets among the fighters.[97] The fighters developed different techniques to claim the public space and demonstrate their increasingly radicalized religious zeal. Posters, parades, pictures of the martyrs, and loud religious chants emanating from loudspeakers became common identity markers in many cities, particularly in those such as Homs where the sectarian cleavage lines are predominant. In the early days of the militarization of the conflict the government found it necessary to identify specific neighborhoods and areas of the cities and designate them as sectarian-protected enclaves. The flagging of sectarian symbolism, however, goes beyond the demarcation of turf to actually asserting and demonstrating territorial control. The government also allowed all minorities, not just the Alawi minority affiliated with the personal sect of the president, to establish their own local militias. Christian-based militias were established in the predominantly Christian region of

Wadi al-Nasara in the western part of the Homs governorate. Also, Sweidah Province was encouraged to establish local Druze militias to protect its towns and villages. The hardening of the sectarian front lines in response to the activities of the local militias created further social fragmentation of the territory, making the central state in Damascus more of an arbiter among communities and further reducing social capital in favor of a dependency on the state as the territorial cement.

On the opposition side, many will be pressed to make strong disclaimers about the Islamization of the territory. The phenomenon crept up on the secular activists.[98] Yet, the radicalization of the territory was manifest in symbolic and ideological terms from an early phase, though the signs had to be carefully read within the language and discursive practices of jihadi narratives. Again, this article does not attempt to define who is radical and who is moderate in the armed opposition groups. The focus is on how the territory was appropriated by radical groups and how their codes were imposed on the landscape to overshadow and sideline other possibilities for imagining the terrain.

Ever since the dismantling of the khilafat in 1923, the Sunni Muslims have grappled with the notion of governance and the legitimization of the state. While people such as Ali Abdulrazek made early attempts to rationalize the principles of Islamic governance and legitimize any sovereign who would uphold those principles, others, such as Rashid Rida, insisted that the khilafat was the only legitimate form of governance, though with some qualification to meet quasi-democratic standards. Discourses on governance revolved between these two limits until some activists in the late 1940s and early 1950s, feeling alienated from secular nationalism, started promoting the idea that Muslims today are no longer living in Islamic states and that it is not enough for the state to be predominantly Muslim to justify its inclusion in the Abode of Islam (dar al-Islam).[99] In a clear break from the previous practice of demarcating Muslim territory in moral and physical geography and through social practice and the endowment of the terrain with social meaning, the new jihadist ideologies focused on the Abode of Islam in aterritorial terms. The identity markers of the Muslim territory are not geographical (related to specific sites) but jurisprudential (related to where certain codes of conduct are upheld).[100]

Muslims living in lands not governed by Islamic principles might as well be living in the Abode of Alienation (dar al-hijra) or the Abode of War (dar al-harb). The radical Salafi-Jihadist discourses disagree on the obligation of Muslims to engage in transforming territories of alienation and war to territories of Islam. Some advocate revolutionary and violent means and others advocate coexistence with the rulers to advise them to make the transformation peacefully. Many started in the first category and reverted to the second when they saw the futility of armed resistance.[101] Yet, most Salafi-Jihadist discourses today still believe in armed struggle as the only form of establishing the Abode of Islam. Their inability to establish a clear terrain under the banner of an Islamic khilafat prompted many to call for a decentralized process of jihad to carve enclaves where specific Islamic principles and jurisprudence would demarcate the terrain of Islam rather than the geographic presence of Muslim communities.[102]

Some of the essential principles that enable the demarcation of an Islamic territory involve the institutions of the court and the public monitoring of rights and duties known as "hisba."[103] Other instruments of governance, such as defense, public services, and foreign relations, were not specifically defining markers for the Abode of Islam. In other words, the terrain's physical demarcation is of a lesser consequence than the principles ruling it. ISIS's main slogan that the Islamic State is lasting and expanding is emblematic of that principle. But as we have seen, the religious authorities arbitrating among the armed groups insisted on retaining the functions of the

courts and the oversight of the public good. Those were the only two aspects of the territorial governance that were not relinquished to civilian LACs for fear of losing power and losing the legitimizing role of those instruments within the jihadist discourse.

Ironically, in that respect, some the programs aimed at curbing the influence of extremism fell right into the trap of reinforcing the symbolism of the jihadist territorial demarcation. A large part of the USAID programs went to support law and order and reinforced policing as a distinct function of local governance with the purpose of "preserving moderate space and deterring extremist influence." "Assistance," the agency reports, "helps moderate actors remain relevant and maintain moderate space, to resist extremists' efforts to expand their influence by reaping the reputational benefits of service delivery."[104] In an attempt to help stabilize governance in opposition-held areas, the USAID provided substantial resources during the past two years to local police forces. Policing is seen in traditional Muslim discourses as part of the hisba or maintenance of public oversight. The US funding focused on the policing as such and did not look at its links to the religious authorities and the symbolic meaning these links allow the authorities to attach to it. The early attempts to set up independent judiciary functions by defected judges and opposition lawyers were immediately met with harsh repression by the more radical groups.[105]

The strategy of most radical groups inside Syria was to maintain the symbolic elements of the Islamic state even though they do not profess to impose such a state. This point applies to the terrorist designated Al-Nusra front as well as to many of the other groups not classified as terrorists but who profess similar radical inclinations. They were able to compromise on the outlook of their turf by developing mechanisms for arbitrating their military powers and setting up the minimal symbolic structures of statehood without claiming the territory and thus attracting attention to their endeavors. They delegated services to civilian governance structures as long as these did not infringe on the symbolic order of dar al-Islam (the Abode of Islam), as they espouse it to be. ISIS, in contrast, decided to break the patterns and to move overtly to establish the full-fledged markers of an Islamic state. This move should impose questions that have hitherto not been answered or even asked.

The first of these questions is: What made ISIS break with the well-established norm in jihadist circles of working to create the Abode of Islam from the bottom up? What made it take the tremendous risk of surfacing and exposing itself to the whole world, knowing full well that the international world order will not tolerate its territorial ambitions? The second of these questions is: To what extent is ISIS truly invested in defending the territory? It was clear in its military tactics that it was flexible about relinquishing certain terrain (even recently its most sacred terrain around the town of Dabeq, where it believes that the battle for the end of the world will take place) while it is still invested in conquering other terrain. Clearly this is not about turf as much as about battle tactics. And the third question is: What sort of control does ISIS exercise on a moral ground beyond its turf? This last question will determine how ISIS will metamorphose if and when it is defeated militarily.

These questions will help determine how ISIS will eventually be confronted. To answer them one must look at how ISIS defines its turf organizationally and, more important, morally and ideologically. ISIS maintains two parallel and slightly contradictory territorial trends. On one hand, it has fostered an image of a centralized power with strong local institutions working in tandem with the directives of the central khilafat; on the other hand, it has fostered local forms of patronage and diversified the models of alliance to the state, enabling it to exercise asymmetrical forms of control despite its professed centrality.

The centrality of ISIS as a state was constructed administratively through a form of provincial governance similar to that of the Baath in which local governors are appointed and are accountable to the center, and their actions and performance are closely monitored through a network of informants.[106] But on the symbolic level, the state was constructed by obliterating territorial demarcations through the abolition of the Sykes–Picot era borders, the erasure of the provincial boundaries, the destruction of local cultural markers and artifacts, the changing of toponyms, and the implementation of absurd regulations whose sole purpose is to assert control.[107] Even their taxes were imposed, as we have seen, with an eye to establishing a certain social contract with merchants and traders to abolish trade barriers.

Complementing ISIS's efforts to foster the image of a centralized power are its efforts to foster local patronage with tribal leaders and local elders. ISIS developed several forms of allegiance so that tribal and other nonstate entities can bargain collectively on their form of adherence to the khilafat through direct citizenship, protection and positive neutrality, and noninterference and passive neutrality. A fourth form involves distant nominal allegiance to the state by nonadjoining entities in other countries (some overt and some covert). With the ability to draw from a wide arsenal of treaties derived from early Islamic models of political pacts signed by the prophet Mohamed and the tribal leaders in Arabia, ISIS also had a much decentralized hold on its immediate and its projected future terrains. ISIS was initially established as a series of aterritorial networks.[108] It continues to operate internally along that model despite its overt centralized outlook. The geographical boundaries of the Islamic State as defined by ISIS are of little consequence; they can expand and shrink and they can be exchanged and recaptured. In that regard many of the attempts to defeat ISIS on a purely territorial level are missing the point about ISIS's symbolic markers of legitimacy.

This observation raises a further question: Why did ISIS choose to publicize the overt image of the state when it could have operated as it did in Iraq for some time and as other groups operated and are still operating in Syria without attracting much international attention to their radical agendas in the quagmire of civil wars? One possible answer to that question (and there may be many more) can be found in the theological debate over the foundation of a khilafat. Whereas a terrain can be considered part of Abode of Islam on the simple condition that the courts are run according to Islamic Sharia and the public order is maintained through the hisba institution, the requirement for a formal khilafat has additional conditions, one of which pertains to having a terrain for such a state to exist on. ISIS's ability to establish the title of the khilafat and to endow its leadership with a symbolic positioning that could give it a clear competitive edge over other radical groups competing for allegiance and financial contributions from nonstate actors and individuals around the world depended on its building up a terrain. Today, even after the allied forces have destroyed much of ISIS's capacity to produce oil, the revenue streams, diminished though they may be, are still flowing and the basic financial infrastructure of ISIS has not been destroyed. ISIS taps into important financial resources because it has created the moral competitive edge with regard to other radical groups. It will likely continue to maintain that edge even when the territory is eventually taken militarily by the formidable international alliance that has been amassed despite all political differences on Syria. ISIS's origin as an aterritorial network and the funding infrastructure (established during its short-lived experiment with territoriality) are likely to sustain its transformation and metamorphosis into the fifth generation of jihadists.

Into the Future

The territorial transformation of the Syrian state, as we have seen, belies the simple colored map of territorial control often portrayed in the international media. The fragmentation of the terrain has manifested itself at different levels beyond the divided control zones of the principal belligerents. We have seen also the internal fragmentation of the terrain controlled by each side and, more important, the breakdown of economic flows and social capital across the terrain and the rise of the militarized and radicalized actors as the only parties able to assert territorial contiguity. International aid and the logistical concerns of humanitarianism have established negative externality on the fragmentation of the terrain by being unable to mitigate the economic and symbolic instruments of territorial control usurped by the armed and increasingly radicalized actors.

While international stakeholders to the conflict have grappled with the question of who is to blame and who is more radical and more moderate among the belligerents, they have turned a blind eye to how the geography of the conflict was erasing social, economic, and symbolic layers of the territorial order of Syria. While nothing is to be taken for granted with regard to this artificial order developed over the century since the end of World War I, no viable alternatives were set to replace it. With every act of erasure permitted by the war, the relative positioning of radicalized actors improved. The uprising in Syria did not get stolen by the radical forces; the radical forces simply managed the terrain more adeptly to usurp the very programs that were meant to undermine their power.

This article does not propose a solution to the political conflict in Syria, nor does it attempt to propose better models of demarcating the country's territorial lines than those proposed by some recent policy papers.[109] Instead it proposes certain guidelines for the political solution to be taken into consideration beyond the considerations of setting up a transitional governing body as mandated by SC Res. 2254. That resolution seems to have become more and more elusive in the light of recent developments in Syria. These guidelines are needed for the long haul and should be incorporated into the political negotiations over the future of Syria and in the designation of funds for stabilization and recovery. They include the following:

1. International stakeholders should put financial and political emphasis on bridging the territorial divides imposed by the radical armed actors on all sides and helping the civilian entities to establish their territorial networks to encourage economic flows, complementary value chains, and positive social capital accumulation. At a fundamental level the battle against radicalization cannot be won military; it has to be won by tilting the micro balance of power away from the radical actors and encouraging them to blend into the emerging territoriality rather than try to impede it.
2. Supporting the aggregation of local governance to provide stability and counteract the influence of the radical actors cannot take place from the top down. It will have to take place from the bottom up. Local governance should create a political space for democracy to emerge. Top-down models will only foster the traditional political economy based on the convenient relationship between the central power and the local elite. This model has surfaced in Baathist territory and in ISIS areas, and when tried in opposition areas it had the same outcome.
3. International donors should study not only the humanitarian and stability needs of local communities but the negative externalities their funds may create when delivered in socio-symbolic environments that are prone to radicalization. Beyond due diligence

and standard do-no-harm reporting, donors should make a careful assessment of the political economy of the receiving communities.

4. Syrians need to reimagine their state afresh. Their narratives of agony cannot be swept under the rug to expedite the peace process. They will need to develop a new narrative of living together and that narrative can be forged only if all agonies are recognized. International stakeholders who supported one side of the conflict or the other need to come to terms with the fact that they contributed directly to the fragmentation of the country. Peace in Syria cannot be achieved without reconciliation and this requires that a new moral territory be forged in the process.

Notes

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[64] See, for instance, Barak Barfii, "In Aleppo, I Saw Why Assad Is Winning," *Politico*, December 2, 2016, http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/12/aleppo-syria-assad-214494.

[65] Strategic Steering Group and humanitarian partners working under the Whole of Syria Framework, *2017 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic* (New York: UNOCHA, 2016).

[66] The author oversaw a process of collecting more than seven hundred maps made for Syria and published in international media outlets over a three-year period. The overwhelming majority of these maps depicted different terrains of control. Some depicted sectarian divides, few depicted the severity of the humanitarian needs, yet none of the maps that were found involved geographic information about social, economic, or demographic distribution.

[67] "Mo'tamar Sahafi li'Ilan nata'ej intikhababt majales al'idarah al-mahaliyah," YouTube video, 1:00:44, December 22, 2011, posted by manqol2, December 22, 2011, https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=fElcPahb_fM.

[68] See, for instance, Natasha Bertrand, "Syria 'Is Being Swallowed Whole by Its Clients': Assad May Be Losing Control over His Own Militias," *Business Insider UK*, August 18, 2016, http://uk.businessinsider.com/syrian-regime-militias-becoming-warlords-2016-8?r=US&IR=T.

[69] Many informants have told the author about the direct interference of the checkpoints and the local security branches in the day-to-day of their neighborhood, and the restrictions on social mobility these measures have caused.

[70] Rim Turkmani, with Ali A. K. Ali, Mary Kaldor, and Vesna Bojicic-Dzelilovic, *Countering the Logic of the War Economy in Syria: Evidence from Three Local Areas* (London: London School of Economics, 2015); Hallaj et al., *Decentralization in the Mashrek Region*; Ivan Briscoe, Floor Janssen, and Rosan Smits, eds., *Stability and Economic Recovery after Assad: Key Steps for Syria's Post-Conflict Transition* (The Hague: CRU-Clingendael, 2012); Hammoud Al-Mahmoud, *The War Economy in the Syrian Conflict: The Government's Hands-Off Tactics* (Washington, D C: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2015); Charbel Nahas, "Economies des guerre civiles: La Syrie et le Liban transformés," *Confluence Méditerranée,* no. 9 (2015); Mark Taylor, *Law, Guns, and Money: Regulating War Economies in Syria and Beyond,* NOREF report (Oslo: Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Center, 2015).

[71] Michele Acuto, ed., *Negotiating Relief: The Politics of Humanitarian Space* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2014); Gilles Carbonnier, *Humanitarian Economics: War Disaster and the Global Aid Market* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2015).

[72] D. Khamissy, "ECHO Fact Sheet—Syria," Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection, UNHCR, http://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/middle-east-north-africa/syria_en, accessed December 30, 2016.

[73] Strategic Steering Group et al., *2017 Humanitarian Needs Overview*.

[74] Conversations with a wide range of staff working with UN and other international donor organizations in Syria in the period from November 2015 to December 2016.

[75] This issue is finally being addressed in the Humanitarian Response Plan for 2017.

[76] "Syrian Arab Republic," OCHA, http://www.unocha.org/syria, accessed December 30, 2016.

[77] See, for instance, "UN Pays Tens of Millions to Assad Regime under Syria Aid Programme, *Guardian*, August 29, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/29/un-pays-tens-of-millions-to-assad-regime-syria-aid-programme-contracts.

[78] Many industrialists complained in private to the author about their inability to access UN procurement procedures and the net impact the aid has made on demand for their products. Anecdotal evidence goes to even smaller services; for instance, the only local pharmacy in an area near Damascus closed down because medications were distributed for free in the local clinics.

[79] Interview with aid worker in Turkey, November 17, 2016.

[80] Sahar Taghdisi Rad, "Political Economy of Aid in Conflict: An Analysis of Pre- and Post-Intifada Donor Behavior in the Occupied Palestinian Territories," *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 4, no. 1 (2015).

[81] Gérard Fellous, *Daech-État Islamiqu: Cancer d'un monde Arabo-musulman en recomposition, un conflit international long et incertain* (Paris : L'Harmattan, 2015).

[82] Samuel Laurent, *L'État Islamique: Organigramme, financement, filière* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2014).

[83] Benjamin Hall, *Inside ISIS: The Brutal Rise of a Terrorist Army* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2015).

[84] Turkmani et al., *Countering the Logic*.

[85] Hallaj, *Balance-Sheet of Conflict*; Taylor, *Law, Guns, and Money*.

[86] For examples of aid programs that went beyond the humanitarian level, see, for instance: "Governance Scorecard for Tamkeen Committees," Tamkeen, March 2016, http://www.project-tamkeen.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Tamkeen-Committee-Governance-Scorecard-cycle-IV.pdf; "Syria: Future Support to Strengthening Local and Provincial Governance Structures," ref. 7438, Public Bulletin Board, UK Department for International Development, https://supplierportal.dfid.gov.uk/selfservice/pages/public/supplier/publicbulletin/viewPublicNotice.cmd?bm90aWN lSWQ9NjUyNzA%3D, accessed December 30, 2016; "Syria," USAID, https://www.usaid.gov/political-transition-initiatives/syria, accessed December 30, 2016.

[87] LACU, *Indicator of Needs*; Gias Al-Junndi, Wael Sawah, Marwan Maalouf, and Radwan Ziadeh, *Local Governance inside Syria* (London: Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 2016).

[88] Such was the case for instance with the DIFID/EU funded project known as Tamkeen.

[89] Discussions with various persons involved in setting these projects, January and February 2016.

[90] The LACU has worked diligently to normalize the process and make it as transparent as possible. It issued a set of guidelines and is often called on by the local councils to resolve conflicts arising from the implementation of these guidelines. LACU, *Indicator of Needs*.

[91] More recently the United States started heavily funding police work to distance law-and-order operations from the more radical elements in the community. Ironically, in many instances they ended up supporting indirectly the authority of the very actors they were meant to undermine, as shall be seen later in the discussion.

[92] This was the latest direction adopted by Tamkeen in 2016. "Good Governance on a New Level: Tamkeen Establishes the Aleppo Provincial Coordination Group," Tamkeen, November 11, 2015, http://www.project-tamkeen.org/good-governance-on-a-new-level-tamkeen-established-the-aleppo-provincial-coordination-group/.

[93] Kileh, *Sowar al-jihad*; Haitham Mannah, *Al-nihayah wa al-bidaiyah* (Beirut: Beisan, 2016).

[94] Burgat and Paoli, *Pas de printemps.*

[95] Baczko et al., *Syrie.*

[96] Fabrice Balanche, *La Région alaouite et le pouvoir syrien* (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 2006).

[97] See, for instance, Bertrand, "Syria 'Is Being Swallowed Whole by Its Clients.'"

[98] Darweesh and Abi Samra, *Maasi halab*; Haji, *'Ila an qamat al-harb: nisa.'* Both were sited above

[99] Shiraz Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism: The History of an Idea* (London: C. Hurst and Co., 2016).

[100] Brannon M. Wheeler, "From Dar al-Hijra to Dar al-Islam: The Islamic Utopia," and Michael Lecker, "On the Burial of Martyrs in Islam," in *The Concept of Territory in Islamic Law and Thought*, ed. Yamahihashi Hiroyuki (New York: Routledge, 2000); Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*.

[101] Reza Pankhurst, *Hizb Ut-Tahrir: The Untold History of the Liberation Party* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2016); Salman Al-Odat, *As'ilat al-'onf* (Beirut: Dar Jousour, 2015).

[102] Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*.

[103] Ibid.; Al-Saidi, Sami Moustafa, Mouftah al-Mabrouk al-Zawadi, Mostafa al-Said Qounaifiz, Abdulhakim al-Khowailidi Balhaj, Abdelwahab Mohamad Qaid, and Khaled Mohammad al-Sharif, *Mouraja'at al-jama'ah al-islamiyah al-moqatilah fi labial: Dirasah tashihiyah fi mafahim al-jihad wa al-hisbah wa al-hikm ala al-nas* (Cairo: Madboul, 2010).

[104] "Syria," USAID.

[105] Adam Batzko and Gilles Dorronsoro, "Building the Syrian State in Wartime," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 16, 2013, http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/?fa=51658&lang=ar.

[106] Laurent, *L'État Islamique*.

[107] Hall, *Inside ISIS*.

[108] Hashem Al-Hashimi, *'Alam daesh mina al-nash'ah 'ila i'lan al-khilafah* (London: Dar Alhikma, 2015).

[109] James Dobbins, Philip Gordon, and Jeffrey Martini, *A Peace Plan for Syria II: Options for Future Governance* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2016).