

## **Militancy Governance under State Failure: Models of Legitimacy Contestation in Ungoverned Spaces**

Devlet Otoritesi Boşluğu Durumlarında Milis İdaresi:  
Yönetilemeyen Alanlarda Meşruiyet Rekabeti Modelleri

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### **Abstract**

*This article makes an empirical exposition of militancy governance under state failure by focusing on ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria), YPG (People's Protection Units), Luhansk People's Republic and Donetsk People's Republic. Specifically, the article discusses how these groups mobilize different types of grievances and frame their propaganda to exert control over areas where states are weakened. Furthermore, how these groups engage in early modes of pre- and post-territorial control, form governance practices and prioritize particular areas for better administration are also elaborated in detail. Ultimately, the paper argues that Violent Non-State Actors (VNSAs) perform better in areas of low loyalty and high resource-generation and if its territorial ambitions are maximalist (expansionist). Through these variables, we are better able to judge how sustainable these groups will be in their respective territories and how should states approach local governance once these groups are defeated.*

**Keywords:** Civil War, Non-State Actors, Governance, Syria-Iraq, Ukraine.

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An earlier version of this study was presented at the 5th International Conference on Conflict, Terrorism and Society, 12-13 April 2016, Kadir Has University and an improved version was presented at the 2017 Istanbul Security Conference, 1-3 November 2017.

Geliş Tarihi / Received : 13.07.2016  
Kabul Tarihi / Accepted : 12.09.2017

## Öz

*Bu makale, Irak-Şam İslam Devleti (İŞİD/DAEŞ), Halkçı Koruma Birlikleri (YPG), Luhans Halk Cumhuriyeti ve Donbas Halk Cumhuriyeti örgütlerine odaklanarak, devlet zaafiyeti alanlarında milis idaresi konusunu irdelemektedir. Bu örgütlerin uzun vadeli yerel sorunları ne şekilde seferber ettikleri ve çerçeveselendirdikleri, ve bu sorunlar üzerinden devlet otoritesine nasıl meydan okudukları da metodik bir şekilde tartışılmaktadır. Bunu yaparken makale, bu örgütlerin çatışma bölgelerine yayılmaları öncesinde ve sonrasında uyguladıkları idari pratikler, yönetim modelleri ve neden belli bölgeleri önceliklendirdiklerini de açıklamaya çalışmaktadır. Neticesinde bu makale, silahlı devlet-dışı örgütlerin kendilerine bağlılığın düşük olduğu ve kaynak üretiminin yüksek olduğu alanlarda ve örgütün hükümranlık kurmaya çalıştığı alan geniş bir coğrafya ise idare ve yönetişimde daha başarılı olmaya çalıştığını öne sürmektedir. Bu değişkenler üzerinden, bu dört örgütün alan hâkimiyetinin ne kadar sürdürülebilir olacağını, bu örgütler askerî yollarla yenilgiye uğratılır veya anlaşma yoluyla silahsızlandırılırsa arta kalan bölgelerin geri kazanımı konusuna nasıl yaklaşılacağı tartışılmaktadır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İç Savaş, Devlet-Dışı Aktörler, Yönetim, Suriye-Irak, Ukrayna.

## 1. Introduction: Geography, Territory and Legitimacy

Armed Non-State Actors (ANSAs, or Violent Non-State Actors, VNSAs<sup>1</sup> –often simply NSAs) are perhaps as old as the history of war and took many theoretical and operational definitions in the form of rebels, pirates, terrorists or mafia organizations. Their common denominator is to challenge the legitimacy, power or borders of a formal and structured organization in the form of states. Our recent understanding of non-state actors builds upon post-Cold War international relations theory, whereby the collapse of the bipolar world order has led to the emergence of multiple regional and transnational networks of violence.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This article uses the term ‘Violent Non-State Actors’ (VNSAs) throughout this article for the sake of uniformity and clarity, in addition to the fact that this is the most prevalent and widest-used designation in the literature.

<sup>2</sup> Daphne Josselin and William Wallace, 2001. *Non-State Actors in World Politics*,

These new networks were essentially non-state formations of organized violence that challenged both meso-level actors (states, alliances), as well as macro-level variables (ideology, norms, law) of world politics.<sup>3</sup> Grievance models of civil war assert that the threat of nuclear war had primarily suppressed lower-level grievance factors (ethnic, sectarian, religious); once the Cold War was over, these layers of grievance emerged in their respective geographies, leading to the emergence of VNSAs as one of the main transnational sources of threat.<sup>4</sup>

All VNSAs control a particular territory. Large or small, fertile or barren, these VNSAs form a symbiotic relationship with their respective territories. These territories essentially belong to one or multiple states and either sit at the borders of their territories (terrorist organizations, militant groups), or occupy poor and neglected parts of urban areas (mafia or vigilante groups). Regardless of the exact location of their territories, VNSAs occupy peripheral areas that become ‘gray zones’ that are either fully inaccessible to formal security structures of states (military, intelligence or police), or host competing claims, such as between VNSAs and the state, or within VNSAs themselves.<sup>5</sup> Eventually, all VNSAs establish self-defense, control, taxation, and administration zones, that feed their armed movement and from where they can launch offensives against their adversaries.<sup>6</sup>

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Springer; Thomas Risse-Kappen, (ed.) 1995. *Bringing Transnational Relations Back In: Non-State Actors, Domestic Structures and International Institutions* (Vol. 42). Cambridge University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Collier, and Anke Hoeffler, 2004, “Greed and Grievance in Civil War”, *Oxford Economic Papers*, 56 (4), pp. 563-595; James D. Fearon and David Laitin, 2003, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War”, *American Political Science Review*, 97 (1), pp. 75-90.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Collier and Nicholas Sambanis, 2002, “Understanding Civil War: a New Agenda”, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 46 (1), pp. 3-12; Michael L. Ross, 2004, “How Do Natural Resources Influence Civil War? Evidence from Thirteen Cases”, *International Organization*, 58 (1), pp. 35-67.

<sup>5</sup> Caroline Holmqvist, 2005, “Engaging Armed Non-State Actors in Post-Conflict Settings”, *Security Governance in Post-Conflict Peacebuilding*, Münster: LIT Verlag, pp. 45-68.

<sup>6</sup> Diane E. Davis, 2009, “Non-State Armed Actors, New Imagined Communities, and

Civil wars in Iraq, Syria, and Ukraine have significantly increased the relevance and popularity of the study on failed or weak states, along with the emergence of a wide array of VNSAs that emerge as a result of such weakening. Emergence of multiple VNSAs as a result of successive state weakening is in fact a significant problem to adjacent states too. Robert Rothberg successfully demonstrated how identity-based grievances that emerge as a result of state weakening travel well into adjacent territories too, resulting in a domino effect that states find very hard to contain.<sup>7</sup> Security theory identifies two types of competition that emerges as a result of this domino effect: vertical (state-VNSA competition within a single territorial entity) or horizontal security competition (between multiple VNSAs and states across adjacent territories).<sup>8</sup> These dual types of competition render identity-based grievances a threat to not only the state to which they are directed to, but also to the states share a border with the VNSA. Therefore, it is imperative to study not only how these grievances emerge, but also how they maintain themselves in territorial rivalries. Most VNSAs sustain narratives and perceptions on grievances through administrative practices (electricity-water provision, garbage collection, infrastructure maintenance, social aid distribution). If states cannot match VNSA administrative capacity and provision volume in contested territories, state legitimacy in these areas are substantially threatened.<sup>9</sup>

The purpose of this article is to provide a comparative analysis of how the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (or ISIS, or Daesh), Democratic Union Party (PYD) (Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat, along with its military wing, YPG–Yekîneyên Parastina Gel, or People’s Protection Units) and

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Shifting Patterns of Sovereignty and Insecurity in the Modern World”, *Contemporary Security Policy*, 30 (2), pp. 221-245.

<sup>7</sup> Robert I. Rothberg, 2003, “The Failure and Collapse of Nation-States” in Robert Rothberg (ed.) *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*, Princeton University Press.

<sup>8</sup> Anthony Vinci, 2008, “Anarchy, Failed States, and Armed Groups: Reconsidering Conventional Analysis”, *International Studies Quarterly*, 52 (2), pp. 295–314.

<sup>9</sup> Anna Holzscheiter, 2005, “Discourse as Capability: Non-State Actors’ Capital in Global Governance”, *Millennium*, 33 (3), pp. 723-746.

Ukrainian militant groups (Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republic) conduct administration, services provision and build permanent economic models of production as a way of legitimacy contestation in unadministered or semi-administered territories.

## 2. Legitimacy, Power, and Territorial Control: A Theoretical Overview

Conflict and crisis rests at the heart of international relations –both in practice and theory. Within conflict and crisis-research, VNSAs occupy an especially central position due to their unpredictability, difficulty in gathering data and their secretive practices. There have been scholars that dismissed the importance of non-state actors in conflict research<sup>10</sup>, but the author disagrees with this view. Peace Research Institute of Oslo and Uppsala Conflict Data Program's "Armed Conflict Database" indicates that intrastate conflicts have substantially increased after 1970s, forming the most dominant form of war and conflict in international relations.<sup>11</sup> As of 2015, 64% of all conflicts are intra-state, whereas inter-state wars are merely a small minority at 0.9%. This demonstrates the centrality of armed non-state actors in war, conflict, and terrorism research.

One of the main reasons why VNSAs are hard to eliminate and defeat is that successful groups mimic and replicate the capabilities and behavior of the state actors they fight against. VNSA armed practices – such as training doctrine, deployment tactics or recruitment propaganda– in addition to administrative practices –such as law enforcement, taxation or services provision– are almost always copied from state actors. This paradoxically requires a successful copying of methods, modes, and principles of a successful armed resistance from the very

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<sup>10</sup> See for example: Michael Brecher and Jonathan Wilkenfeld, 2000, *A Study of Crisis*, Michigan University Press.

<sup>11</sup> Nils Petter Gleditsch, Peter Wallensteen, Mikael Eriksson, Margareta Sollenberg, and Havard Strand, 2002, "Armed Conflict 1946-2001: A New Dataset", *Journal of Peace Research*, 39 (5), pp. 615-637.

same state institutions that VNSAs seek to defeat.<sup>12</sup> There are further paradoxes in questions such as “how much force is enough”, or “how much resources must be allocated to fight with VNSAs?”. The paradox comes from the theory that VNSAs emerge not as a result of states’ lack of military power, but from the strength of social or political grievance structures.<sup>13</sup> The theory follows that as long as grievance mechanisms are there, military strength of states will simply improve the strength of VNSAs as well, copying much of the knowledge, capacity, and skillsets of state militaries. Therefore, the argument goes, prolonged civil wars are not necessarily a result of weak armed forces, but simply the power parity between the state forces and VNSA(s) is comparable and underlying grievance mechanisms are too strong to resolve.<sup>14</sup> Mobilization procedures, the use of flags, sometimes language, use of currency, rallying rhetoric, and discourses of animosity are then transmitted across state to non-state capabilities. Often the last component of this mirror image is the establishment of security provision and daily administration is somewhat defined borders, creating a state within a state.<sup>15</sup> In this last phase, VNSAs not only challenge state militaries through the use of force, but they also challenge the governments and local municipalities through performing non-armed tasks such as construction, maintenance, law provision and financial redistribution. The resultant case is one of vertical security competition between states, in which VNSA challenges the legitimacy and borders of a state in that given territorial confine.

A state’s loss of territorial control usually happens gradually, although there are cases of unexpected and rapid state collapse. Usually,

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<sup>12</sup> Klaus Schlichte, 2009, *In the Shadow of Violence: The Politics of Armed Groups*, University of Chicago Press.

<sup>13</sup> Benedikt Korf, 2005, “Rethinking the Greed–Grievance Nexus: Property Rights and the Political Economy of War in Sri Lanka”, *Journal of Peace Research*, 42 (2), pp. 201-217.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p. 146-154.

<sup>15</sup> Sukanya Podder, 2013, “Non-State Armed Groups and Stability: Reconsidering Legitimacy and Inclusion”. *Contemporary Security Policy*, 34 (1), pp. 16-39.

an unadministered territory emerges when the state consistently fails in providing services for a long period of time. Poor transportation, lack or restriction of electricity/water, garbage collection, security provision, and schooling/education are some of the services that fail in the first phase of administrative competition.<sup>16</sup> In this phase, VNSAs often use armed activities like sabotage, harassment or intimidation to prevent the state or local authorities to fulfil these tasks. In the second phase, VNSAs challenge the state's security provision and territorial control by expanding attacks into wider areas or often directly targeting state security services (outposts, headquarters) to challenge state legitimacy and confine the operational area of its military/police force. In the third phase, VNSA successfully uproots the state's security and services provision actors and start taking over some of these tasks. For example, a successful VNSA will first take over security provision task, simultaneously starting taxation and legal enforcement duties, later expanding over into utilities provision or running schools. An acute contested geography is the one where state and VNSA shares the provision of certain services; for example, a VNSA may control security and law provision in a certain district, while the state can still run water/electricity network and conduct garbage collection. The resultant picture yields important discussion points on Weberian-Westphalian notion of legitimacy and sovereignty, whereby the de facto user of organized force isn't the sovereign and the social contract that should ideally be hypothesized between states and subjects is negotiated between VNSAs and local populace.<sup>17</sup> To that end, a contested territory becomes legally contested as well, as actors other than the state starts performing essential tasks of security, law and services provision.<sup>18</sup> Once a geography is contested, it transmits grievances

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<sup>16</sup> Robert Bunker, 2014, "Global Security Upheaval: Armed Nonstate Groups Usurping State Stability Functions". *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 25 (5-6), pp. 1065-1067.

<sup>17</sup> Max Weber, 1921, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, p. 29.

<sup>18</sup> Andreas Osiander, 2001, "Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Westphalian Myth", *International Organization*, 55 (02), pp. 251-287.

across adjacent borders and destabilizes neighboring states as well. This, in turn, brings in difficult and profound questions over state stability theory: namely, states may not automatically be the sole source of stability in international relations. For example, a maladministrating state, presiding over unresolved and exacerbated layers of grievance can, and will, export instability to its immediate region. This is specifically the case with the civil wars in Syria, Iraq, and Ukraine, with different groups emerging to take over tasks that usually lie within the domain of the state, transmitting instability across their borders, destabilizing neighboring countries.

Multi-layered competition for control and the role of administrative practices is best outlined in David Kilcullen's "competitive control theory",<sup>19</sup> which conceptualizes the interactions between states, VNSAs, and the populations under their control in unadministered territories. Kilcullen posits that the winner of territorial contestation between states and VNSAs is the side which establishes a normative system that is predictable by the population of the unadministered zone.<sup>20</sup> This predictable set of behaviors can range between security-provision to utilities maintenance to distribution of foodstuffs during emergencies and armed clashes. Disruption, irregularity or erratic behavior in any of these will result in the transfer of loyalties of the local populace to the side which is comparatively better in terms of reliability and predictability. To illustrate, the side which is able to produce and distribute five units of bread every day is more likely to win the favors of the local people than the side that distributes 45 units in random and uneven intervals. This theory applies to rural/frontier VNSAs like militia groups or secessionist organizations, as well as urban VNSAs such as mafia and vigilante groups. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that service provision competition between actors is a positive game, which emphasizes welfare, social order or

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<sup>19</sup> David Kilcullen, 2015, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla*, Oxford University Press, pp. 116-169.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p. 132.



stability. In a conflict setting, sides emphasize administration and redistribution as a security-oriented zero-sum game, whereby one side's gain implies loss for the other side. This creates a special warrior class Kilcullen defines as "conflict entrepreneurs",<sup>21</sup> who benefit from weakening the territorial control abilities of the other side. Such "conflict entrepreneurs" survey, detect, and stratify the range of disenfranchisements and grievances that are embedded among the population hostile to the other side and generate varying levels of mobilization and collective action among them. The resultant group is usually made up of the most hopeless layers of a population that see conflict as the only way of survival and seek to engage in perpetual armed conflict in a way that prevents the other side from establishing regular administrative practice in that area.

Current research on life cycles of terrorist organizations tell us that the overwhelming majority of them are eliminated within a year.<sup>22</sup> Very few terrorist organizations survive for more than 18 months. But those that survive past the 18-month threshold tend to sustain themselves for at least five years. This means that once armed non-state mobilization becomes successful, it generates long-term structures of territorial control rivalries.<sup>23</sup> Depending on the power balance between state and non-state actors, some territories can have "compartmental competition": a type of strategic rivalry for control, where both state and non-state actors take on administrative responsibilities in the same territory. For example, a non-state group can provide local security, food, and garbage disposal, whereas a state can still be providing electricity, water, and banking services. This equilibrium between state and non-state administration can range from ghetto-ization where non-state groups

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p. 66.

<sup>22</sup> Brock Blomberg, Rozlyn C. Engel, and Reid Sawyer, 2010, "On the Duration and Sustainability of Transnational Terrorist Organizations", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 54 (2), pp. 303-330.

<sup>23</sup> David B. Carter, 2012, "A Blessing or a Curse? State Support for Terrorist Groups", *International Organization*, 66 (1), pp. 129-151.

maintain security in small districts and streets to full state collapse where non-state actors provide all components of administration including infrastructure, municipality, and financial services. One of the best examples to this was the case of Mosul where civil servants continued to receive salaries from Baghdad long after the capture of the city by ISIS.<sup>24</sup> In other words, the extent to which non-state actors assume state-like roles depend entirely on the relative balance of power between those actors and standing armies of states.

Civil wars in Syria, Iraq, and Ukraine exhibit similar characteristics in terms of security competition between states and VNSAs and offer differing models of legitimacy contestation in their respective areas. This contestation usually builds upon an economic and a social model, which is defined by groups' ideologies, worldviews, and culture of the population they seek to rule. Once VNSAs uproot all or most of state functions from their territories, they start engaging in different types of administrative control to recruit, tax, and mobilize these areas. In successfully challenging state authority and legitimacy, VNSAs take on more responsibilities and have to develop multiple organizational identities, such as an armed/terrorist wing, a municipality wing and an administrative/political wing. The interplay between ideology, administration, and service provision is a particularly under-researched and substantially important topic which gives valuable insight to the question: "what happens when VNSAs are defeated?". This is an important question as the military defeat of a VNSA has to be followed up by a state's successful transfer of its administrative tasks back into formal government structures. If states cannot take over these tasks successfully, the resultant administrative vacuum will inevitably generate a new VNSA to replace the old one.

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<sup>24</sup> Isabel Coles, 2015, "Despair, Hardship as Iraq Cuts off Wages in Islamic State Cities", *Reuters*, [<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-salaries-idUSKCN0RW0V620151002>] (Access Date: 19 June 2016).

### 3. Pre-Territorial Control: Ideological Communication in the Civil Wars of Syria, Iraq, and Ukraine

Legitimacy contestation in ungoverned spaces begin with a battle of ideas –what is popularized in the modern policy discourse as “hearts and minds”.<sup>25</sup> Strategic use of images, words, and behavior form an important portion of war efforts by states and VNSAs. Framing is at the essence of such efforts; they communicate grievances and set the main agenda in a conflict. Through the use of posters, speeches, videos, and, more recently, digital media outlets, sides in a conflict try to win the support of civilians and prevent the other side from mobilizing successfully.<sup>26</sup> Although propaganda research is a vast field with significant contributions from linguistics, psychology, and political science, the specifics of how frames are distributed during civil wars require further research. Civil wars in Syria, Iraq, and Ukraine are ideal case studies for this kind of research, as they have been “digital media conflicts”, where the role of social media, digital communication, and the Internet have played a substantial role in recruitment, mobilization, and propaganda.<sup>27</sup> In addition, the well-documented nature of these conflicts in digital space allows researchers to find and process data in order to compare them in meaningful ways. Although their objectives are identical (recruitment, morale, intimidation), the specifics of ISIS, YPG, Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR) and Luhansk People’s Republic (LPR) pre-territorial practices are quite different.

In selecting an area to challenge, ISIS relies on information provided by “sleeper cells”; followers that infiltrate an area by embedding in other VNSAs, get information about local grievances

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<sup>25</sup> Stathis N. Kalyvas, 2006, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, Cambridge University Press; Fransisco Gutierrez Sanin and Elisabeth Jean Wood, 2014, “Ideology in Civil War: Instrumental Adoption and Beyond”, *Journal of Peace Research*, 51 (2), pp. 213-226.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Alan Gurval, 1998, *Actium and Augustus: the Politics and Emotions of Civil War*, University of Michigan Press.

<sup>27</sup> Brigitte Nacos, 2016, *Mass-Mediated Terrorism: Mainstream and Digital Media in Terrorism and Counterterrorism*, Rowman & Littlefield.

and power relations and buy out the loyalties of smaller clans and tribes. Based on the level of competition emerging from other VNSAs and state security forces, ISIS either strengthens these sleeper cells, or move onto the next phase of “*dawa*” (missionary activities). In “*dawa*”, ISIS sets up more explicit and visible forms of “soft presence”, such as outreach/information offices, organizing sports competitions, games or large collective meal arrangements that host leaders of prominent clans. The main idea behind “*dawa*” is to penetrate more complex dimensions of social power in new territories and immediately demonstrate the group’s provision capacity.<sup>28</sup> For example, if the Syrian or Iraqi government was unable to bring certain tribes together, ISIS demonstrates its capacity to unite these tribes through specific functions or celebrations. If, on the other hand, both states were unable to provide jobs to local young men, ISIS coordinates local businesses to provide short-term employment to these people as a show off its administrative capacity. In the second phase of “*dawa*”, ISIS engages in more complex form of administration, such as holding local Sharia courts to resolve long-standing disputes or to engage in garbage collection or social aid distribution. Based on grievance information collected at the first phase of “*dawa*”, ISIS invests in administrative work that corresponds best to the neglected or underperformed aspects of state rule. During both phases of “*dawa*”, taxation is minimal or, in certain cases, non-existent, in order to fully attract the loyalties of the local populace. Both in Syria and Iraq, over-taxation and inefficient management of taxes are chronic sources of local grievance.

In roughly the same contested geographies of northern Iraq and northern Syria, YPG also benefit substantially from state weakening. The resultant horizontal competition with ISIS also forces these groups to craft pre-territorial practices of messaging and communication, allowing them to recruit and mobilize. However, the main difference

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<sup>28</sup> Aaron Y. Zelin, 2016, “The Islamic State’s Territorial Methodology”, *Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, Research Note No. 29 [<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/ResearchNote29-Zelin.pdf>] (Access Date: 19 June 2016).

between ISIS and YPG in this regard is that they have different understandings of natural habitus; while ISIS sees itself as the legitimate force in Sunni-dominant parts of Iraq and Syria,<sup>29</sup> YPG has a more ethno-nationalist understanding.<sup>30</sup> To that end, the group focuses on the control of predominantly Kurdish-majority areas of Iraq and Syria, which leads to a more consolidation-oriented approach in grievance framing and resource mobilization –as opposed to ISIS, which follows a more expansion-oriented strategy.<sup>31</sup> Yet, this difference in strategy and aimed areas of control also create a big difference in two groups' reliance on pre-territorial control practices. In contrast to ISIS, YPG relies less on elaborate practices of intelligence gathering, infiltration or soft administration.

In addition, both groups have a distinct foreign propaganda strategy geared towards recruiting foreign fighters. While most of the foreign fighters of YPG came from European countries; ISIS recruits came from a much wider geographical extent, going as far to Tanzania and Australia.<sup>32</sup> Although both ISIL and YPG propaganda demonstrated how their struggle was a civilizational conflict, they displayed profoundly different worldviews and civilizational discourses through digital content.<sup>33</sup> For both, this fight was one of self-autonomy and freedom. Freedom, however, was understood in different terms; for YPG, it

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<sup>29</sup> James P. Farwell, 2014, "The Media Strategy of ISIS", *Survival*, 56 (6), pp. 49-55.

<sup>30</sup> Hamid Akin Ünver, 2016, "Schrödinger's Kurds: Transnational Kurdish Geopolitics in the Age of Shifting Borders", *Journal of International Affairs*, 69 (2); Fred H. Lawson, 2014, "Syria's Mutating Civil War and its Impact on Turkey, Iraq and Iran", *International Affairs*, 90 (6), pp. 1351-1365.

<sup>31</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz, 1998, "A Preamble to the Kurdish Question: The Politics of Kurdish identity", *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 18 (1), pp. 9-18.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas Hegghammer, 2011, "The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters: Islam and the Globalization of Jihad", *International Security*, 35 (3), pp. 53-94; Thomas Hegghammer, 2013, "Should I Stay or Should I Go? Explaining Variation in Western Jihadists' Choice between Domestic and Foreign Fighting", *American Political Science Review*, 107 (1), pp. 1-15.

<sup>33</sup> Jytte Klausen, 2015, "Tweeting the Jihad: Social Media Networks of Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 38 (1), pp. 1-22.

meant the purge of radical interpretations of Islam -and especially political Islamism- from the governance and society.<sup>34</sup> In return, they propagandized a less hierarchical system in terms of gender, race, and ethnicity. For ISIL, freedom implied liberty from “western yoke” and from long-term imperial legacy established by the western countries.<sup>35</sup> To do this, ISIL fought to force foreign troops to leave Syria and Iraq, as well as local forces supported by the West. On ISIL’s end, liberty implied living Islam to the full, without any political correctness or necessity to dilute it into a form accepted by anyone other than the local Muslims. That’s why ISIL’s framing and their overall social media efforts emphasized the branding of an undiluted, puritan understanding of Islam in a way that was practiced during the founding period of Islam. This would be jihad (struggle), strict adherence to religious practice (“*iman*”) and strict (and often punitive) justice (“*Shariah*”) as a way of attaining the perfect social order.<sup>36</sup> Strong emphasis was made on “*ganimah*” (spoils of war) which has been considered “*halal*” in wars under Islamic law. Yet, ISIL’s digital branding of “*ganimah*” as a religious concept, frequently got mixed up by contemporary capitalist consumerist framing.

YPG’s audience and what attracted them were substantially different. Their framing and messaging targeted the Kurds in Iraq, Syria, Iran, Turkey, and Europe that had a dual-structural grievance. First, most Kurds come from a collective history of oppression under the patriarchal-religious social hierarchies, that had suppressed an increasingly educated and urbanizing Kurdish youth sociology through much of the late 19th and early 20th century.<sup>37</sup> Second, grievances

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<sup>34</sup> Cengiz Güneş and Robert Lowe, 2015, *The Impact of the Syrian War on Kurdish Politics Across the Middle East*, Chatham House, p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> Alberto M. Fernandez, 2015, “Here to Stay and Growing: Combating ISIS Propaganda Networks”, *The Brookings Project on US Relations with the Islamic World Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings*.

<sup>36</sup> Brandon Colas, 2016, “What Does Dabiq Do? ISIS Hermeneutics and Organizational Fractures within Dabiq Magazine”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 40 (3), pp. 173.-190.

<sup>37</sup> Hayriye Özen, 2015, “Latent Dynamics of Movement Formation: The Kurdish Case

against unitary and centralized states defined Kurdish identity and culture since the early 17th century. Ottoman and Safavid empires, and surviving post-World War I nation-states reinforced and amplified strict social control mechanisms of local religious and patriarchal structures as a way to retain hold over provincial territories.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, freedom for the Kurds meant liberty from both Islamic patriarchy, as well as from nation-state rule.

Ukrainian Civil War, on the other hand, has both similarities and differences to the wars in Iraq and Syria. The way both DPR and LPR units handle conflict framing and propaganda can be likened more to YPG than ISIS. Both secessionist groups have a distinct ethno-nationalist grievance that has remained dormant since the Cold War and both groups mobilize these grievances through armed opposition.<sup>39</sup> The main difference, however, is that neither DPR nor LPR seek to expand their borders to the extent sought by ISIS or YPG.<sup>40</sup> Their territorial bid is minimalist, demanding either autonomy or separation for a limited and small portion of Ukraine. An estimated total of three million people live under DPR and LPR rule combined, forcing these groups to frame and mobilize grievances in a way that renders their struggle a permanent or successful one.<sup>41</sup> Another difference is that both groups took over control from the Ukrainian Armed Forces rapidly, within a matter of weeks, by overrunning government buildings in their respective city centers. Met with general support from pro-Russian local populace,

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in Turkey (1940s–1960s)”, *Current Sociology*, 63 (1), pp. 57-74.

<sup>38</sup> Zeki Sarigil. and Ömer Fazlıoğlu, 2014, “Exploring the Roots and Dynamics of Kurdish Ethno-Nationalism in Turkey”, *Nations and Nationalism*, 20 (3), pp. 436-458.

<sup>39</sup> Lars-Erik Cederman, Kristan Skerde Gleditsch, and Julian Wucherpfennig, 2017, “Predicting the Decline of Ethnic Civil War: Was Gurr Right and for the Right Reasons?” *Journal of Peace Research*, 54 (2), pp. 262-274.

<sup>40</sup> Luke Harding, 2014, “Inside the ‘Donetsk People’s Republic’: Balaclavas, Stalin Flags and Razorwire”, *The Guardian*, [https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/19/ukraine-donetsk-pro-russia-militants]

<sup>41</sup> Taras Kuzio, 2015, “Competing Nationalisms, Euromaidan, and the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict”, *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 15 (1), pp. 157-169.

these groups didn't have elaborate plans to win over people or expand their legitimacy to larger areas.<sup>42</sup> In addition, neither DPR nor LPR had a grievance that travelled well beyond their immediate borders. This meant that they couldn't recruit volunteer foreign fighters from abroad, allowing them to focus instead to post-territorial control practices. Both groups have exclusionary, minimalist, and consolidation-oriented political framing and propaganda which prioritizes loyalty and ethnic purity rather than an exclusionary bid for large territorial expansion.<sup>43</sup>

#### **4. Post-Territorial Control: Towards Sustainable War Economies**

Once VNSAs assert control over a particular territory, they shift their focus into governance and daily administration of the area and people that live under their control. This forces VNSAs to be more predictable, exposed and calculating, offsetting some of the strategic benefits of asymmetrical warfare such as the element of surprise, secrecy, and uncertainty.<sup>44</sup> Controlling territory brings about the dual necessity of taxation and security provision, in addition to gradually more state-like tasks of recruitment, training, law enforcement, and infrastructure maintenance. The extent to which VNSAs can successfully manage and rule a contested geography not only shifts the loyalties of the people that live there, but also generate additional income and manpower to extend this rule into adjacent territories.<sup>45</sup>

Among all four VNSAs analyzed in this paper, ISIS performs the most state-like tasks in areas under its rule. Once the loyalties of an

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<sup>42</sup> Marlene Laruelle, 2016, "The Three Colors of Novorossiia, or the Russian Nationalist Mythmaking of the Ukrainian Crisis", *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 32 (1), pp. 55-74.

<sup>43</sup> Oliver Boyd-Barrett, 2017, "Ukraine, Mainstream Media and Conflict Propaganda", *Journalism studies*, 18 (8), pp. 1016-1034.

<sup>44</sup> Timothy Raeymaekers, Ken Menkhaus, and Koen Vlassenroot, 2017, "State and Non-State Regulation in African Protracted Crises: Governance without Government?", *Afrika focus*, 21 (2).

<sup>45</sup> Annette Iris Idler and James J.F. Forest, 2015, "Behavioral Patterns Among (Violent) Non-State Actors: A Study of Complementary Governance", *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 4 (1).



ungoverned space are shifted in its favor, ISIS establishes formal structures of recruitment and taxation, security, and law provision, maintenance and expansion of basic services (road repairs, bakery expansions, water, and electricity provision), in addition to deploying state-like symbols such as flags, anthems, code of law, and a formal bureaucratic hierarchy.<sup>46</sup> In demonstrating its competence as a reliable source of administration, ISIS engages in substantial municipality work; from paving the roads to fixing electric and phone lines, to garbage collection and “beautification” projects, including new mosque, market and shop constructions.<sup>47</sup> As a form of communicating to the local populace that ISIS’ arrival effectively ends the conflict and provides safety (one of the most welcomed changes to a population under prolonged duress), the group also restarts industries (quarries, poultry farms, glass, brick, and wood workshops) that halted due to conflict. Mass-production of food—especially bread, rice, and potato—is especially emphasized in this phase. The focus then gradually shifts to manpower and fund maximization, along with order maintenance through strict application of cultural codes (dress, facial hair, social relations etc.). In these areas, ISIS employs an open warfare posture by deploying more men, vehicles, and ammunition, replacing the initial “soft administration” and propaganda tools. ISIS’ code of religious order maintenance, “*hisba*”, replaces “*dawa*”, as stricter punishment of crimes, punitive penalties to disruption of social order, and more radical interpretations of religious law are disseminated through “*Sharia*” courts.<sup>48</sup> Final phases of ISIS’ transition to full administration of an area usually witness new road signs, specific government building plates, distribution of new ID cards and even changing the name of the town under control.

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<sup>46</sup> Clark McCauley, 2016, “What Comes after ISIS? A Peace Proposal”, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 10 (4).

<sup>47</sup> Aymenn Al-Tamimi, 2015, “The Evolution in Islamic State Administration: The Documentary Evidence”, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 9 (4).

<sup>48</sup> Aaron Y. Zelin, 2015, “The Rise and Decline of Ansar al-Sharia in Libya”, *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, 18, p. 104.

Much of ISIS' post-territorial control practices are mirrored by YPG. The first level starts by municipality and infrastructure work,<sup>49</sup> designed to prove the case that the group has more to offer to people than fighting. These public works projects are of primary importance as one of the grievances of Syrian Kurds towards Damascus is that the region has been deliberately left neglected by successive Syrian governments and a new administration is needed at the local level in order to improve and modernize these areas. Most Kurds in Syria define their relationship to the Syrian state as one of colonialism<sup>50</sup> and local administrations, along with autonomy, are highly prized to break this unequal link. Therefore, although YPG rules mainly in areas that have a loyal Kurdish support, they nonetheless have to emphasize administration and construction in order to prove the case that they are a legitimate force in ungoverned spaces of northern Syria.

YPG doesn't enjoy the kind of territory and population controlled by ISIS. To that end, YPG has fewer road connections and rule over a mostly underdeveloped strategic hinterland. Key battles such as the Battle of Kobani (Ayn al-Arab) mobilized the majority of northern Syrian populace into active combat, leaving few behind to run and manage an active economy. This brings out the need for "social economy", which is a network of cooperatives that handle different economic sectors that produce essential wartime supplies, such as grain, ammunition, construction material, and fuel.<sup>51</sup> The basic social economy model is based on production of rations of food, provided at the center of a network cluster, feeding adjacent areas and, in return, is

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<sup>49</sup> Tom Perry, 2015, "Syrian Kurds' spending plans reflect rising ambition", *Reuters*, [http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-kurds-idUSKCN0Q21BK20150728] (Access Date: 19 June 2016).

<sup>50</sup> Erika Solomon, 2014, "Amid Syria's violence, Kurds carve out autonomy", *Reuters*, [http://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-kurdistan-specialreport-idUSBREA0L17320140122] (Access Date: 19 June 2016).

<sup>51</sup> Ahmed Yousef, 2015, "The Social Economy in Rojava". *Kurdishquestion.com*. [http://kurdishquestion.com/oldsite/index.php/kurdistan/west-kurdistan/the-social-economy-in-rojava/917-the-social-economy-in-rojava.html] (Access Date: 19 June 2016).

defended by the same adjacent territories. This idea of networked economic production units isn't new and goes back to early 20th century rural developmental models in the form of Soviet "kolkhoz" (колхоз)<sup>52</sup> and the Israeli "kibbutz" (קיבוץ / קבוצה).<sup>53</sup> These social economy models have become relevant to YPG strategy as a nation-building infrastructure<sup>54</sup> as it relies on totally indigenous resources, with minimal or no resource generation from external territories. Regardless of the outcome of the Syrian Civil War, YPG's farming collective network will continue to be important driver of development in predominantly Kurdish provinces of Syria, allowing these regions to be financially self-sufficient, driving bids for autonomy over the long-term. By building local relations of interdependence (food production in exchange for security), the need to be connected to the nation's capital is minimized, leading to substantial shifts in loyalties and land allocation in northern Syria.

Another way YPG's social economy model resembles "kibbutz" and "kolkhoz" examples is the elimination (or, at least, minimization) of currency in financial transactions. Through an exchange of essential goods and supplies, reliance on banking, monetary exchange, and more complex capital relations are avoided. According to the model, these complex financial relations and interactions strengthen state centralization, which is against the parameters of YPG's bid for autonomy.<sup>55</sup> A pilot region in this collective social economy has been Derik within the Jazira canton under YPG control. A basic administrative problem –how to

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<sup>52</sup> Tommaso Trevisani, 2007, "After the Kolkhoz: Rural Elites in Competition", *Central Asian Survey*, 26 (1), 85-104.

<sup>53</sup> Yonina Talmon, 1972, *Family and Community in the Kibbutz*, Harvard University Press.

<sup>54</sup> On Rojava's economy, one of the best accounts is ANF's interview with Ahmet Yusuf, who was President of the Committee On Economy and Trade of the Afrin Autonomous Canton. See: Seyit Evran, 2014, "Dr. Yusuf: Rojava's Economic Model is a Communal Model", *Firat News Agency (ANF)*, Available at: [<https://rojavarreport.wordpress.com/2014/04/14/dr-yusuf-rojavas-economic-model-is-a-communal-model/>] (Access: 19 June 2016).

<sup>55</sup> Janet Biehl, 2015, "Rojava's Threefold Economy", *KurdishQuestion.Com*, [<http://kurdishquestion.com/oldsite/index.php/kurdistan/west-kurdistan/rojava-s-threefold-economy.html>] (Access Date: 19 June 2016).

pay workers and civil servants living under VNSA rule– is solved through a socialist mode of redistribution where need, rather than performance, is emphasized. Municipality salaries were thus given based on the requirements of its workers (number of dependents, sick or old family members), rather than the position or performance of workers.<sup>56</sup> In the last year, towns that were taken under pilot administrative model increased, although reliance on currency still continues in large portions of towns under YPG rule. This brings in questions on sustainability and what happens when the war is over. Sustaining war economy models, such as social economy, can be easier during wartime, when the constituents of an ungoverned space is mobilized for conflict. Following the end of active hostilities, however, people usually want to return back to normal life and go about their businesses as usual, decreasing the level of mobilization considerably.<sup>57</sup> Once people are demobilized, crucial questions will remain on the sustainability of farming collectives and continued absence of currency in financial relations.

Perhaps due to the unexpectedly rapid collapse of authority in Donbass, neither LPR or DPR were prepared to employ elaborate models of administration. These groups have been hastily mobilized in order to fight, rather than administer, and they have found it difficult to shift between these dual tasks of fighting and managing.<sup>58</sup> Like northern Syria, eastern Ukraine harbors a long-standing grievance of being neglected on purpose by the central authority. Corruption, mismanagement and ideological differences have created two Ukraines, where the western half is developed and modernized, whereas the eastern part –especially border provinces– are under-developed. Yet, these grievances didn't force LPR or DPR to adopt a model of reconstruction or economic model to help improve infrastructure and economic

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Evran, 2014.

<sup>58</sup> Bruno de Cordier, 2017, "Ukraine's Vendée War? A Look at the 'Resistance Identity' of the Donbass Insurgency", *Russian Analytical Digest*, (198), pp. 2-6.

management in Donbass region.<sup>59</sup> Both groups have also been too weak to address internally displaced people, set up shelter and food distribution, and mobilize them in fighting or production tasks. The essence of this lack of mobilization is the existing divisions between pro-Ukraine and pro-Russian portions of Donbass and its adjacent territories, along with a significant, undecided population that sits in-between these groups. Social cohesion is thus weaker compared to territories controlled by YPG or ISIS, preventing LPR/DPR to form a consensus among the population under their control either for war or for peace. As a contested territory, Donbass has a significant identity crisis which impairs VNSAs performance in conflict and reconstruction alike.<sup>60</sup> The extent of this identity crisis is best exemplified by the fact that Donbass has historically been a strong mining, chemicals, and transportation hub of the Soviet Union and retains much of the infrastructure and know-how transmitted through the Cold War. To that end, Donbass is in fact more advantageous compared to both YPG and ISIS-controlled parts of Iraq and Syria; yet social divisions are too deep to benefit from such human and infrastructure capital.

Typical VNSA's tasks of administration, such as infrastructure maintenance, services provision, and taxation suffer in Donbass case, as these tasks were traditionally handled by the population center of the oblast, which is no longer under state control. The departure of the bureaucracy, which traditionally handled such tasks and the absence of prepared and capable VNSA know-how to take over these tasks have effectively eliminated LPR/DPR ability to learn and replicate these tasks.<sup>61</sup> Remaining road connections both to Russia and the rest of Ukraine are restricted or transportation infrastructure destroyed. The

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<sup>59</sup> Kimitaka Matsuzato, 2017, "The Donbass War: Outbreak and Deadlock", *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, 25 (2), pp. 175-201.

<sup>60</sup> Anna Matveeva, 2016, "No Moscow Stooges: Identity Polarization and Guerrilla Movements in Donbass" *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 16 (1), pp. 25-50.

<sup>61</sup> Renfrey Clarke, 2016, "The Donbass in 2014: Ultra-Right Threats, Working-Class Revolt, and Russian Policy Responses", *International Critical Thought*, 6 (4), pp. 534-555.

result is an indefinite state of emergency, which is enforced by under-prepared and under-skilled VNSAs that are unable to offer anything more than a frozen conflict. With essential infrastructure and public works projects being disrupted and damaged, LPR/DPR have so far failed in demonstrating administrative capacity to successfully challenge Ukrainian state legitimacy in the area. Given the strength of ethnic and identity-related grievances driving the conflict and subsequent inability of VNSAs to mobilize these grievances into a workable administrative model, the Donbass case is perhaps the weakest example out of all three cases of VNSA challenge to state authority.<sup>62</sup> Over the long-term, it is more likely for Donbass to remain a frozen conflict, or return back to Ukraine, but never successfully become a self-ruling and autonomous entity.

Three cases discussed above give us three main observations on the complexity of VNSA administration. First, VNSAs tend to perform better and more complex in management and maintenance tasks, if the loyalty of the area is lower. More elaborate sets of services and goods provision are deployed in order to prove administrative skills and awareness of the group. Over time however, as VNSA establish better entrenched control in the area, they focus on taxation and recruitment, spending less care on administrative tasks to sustain loyalties. Second, territorial ambitions of a VNSA determine how well they administer a contested area; if the VNSA has wider geographic ambitions of conquest, the impression they leave on their existing territories make a great difference on the receptivity of adjacent territories to VNSA control. In contrast, if the VNSA has minimalist ambitions and does not seek to expand its borders, it focuses less on elaborate tasks of administration. Finally, resource generation differences between existing territories matter substantially. In territories that yield more manpower,

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<sup>62</sup> Mikhail Mikhailovich Afanasiev, Olga Anatolievna Tkacheva, Irina Anatolievna Getmanova, Lyudmila Aleksandrovna Tsurak, Olga Andreevna Pavlenko, 2015, "Eastern Donbass Resources as Improvement Factor in the Fuel and Energy Competitiveness Sector of Russia", *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 6 (3 S6), p. 329.

tax, resources or rent, VNSAs tend to be better in administration, due to the strategic reasons for maintaining order and loyalty in the area. In less lucrative areas, however, administration is largely neglected and governance resources (funds, know-how, manpower) are allocated to more preferential areas.

### **5. What Makes Militancy Governance Sustainable? Macro Variables of VNSA Administrative Success**

Once VNSAs are defeated through military means, what happens then? Security studies literature doesn't really provide a satisfying answer to this question. National militaries and police forces establish checkpoints, reinforced outposts and repair damaged infrastructure. Formal hierarchies of state control in the form of governor, mayor, and district administrators return back to office and establish control over the territory. Yet, following several months of relative stability, old administrative problems pile up: power cuts get frequent, garbage collection lags, infrastructure maintenance is neglected, and economic growth stops. Large groups of young men lose their jobs, or have to work in significantly underpaying jobs. Many of them turn to mafia or vigilante groups that seek to fill in the vacuum left by state neglect; if the neglect is extreme and existing identity-related grievances are strong, these groups turn into militancy, seeking once again to uproot state security forces from the area. A vicious cycle emerges, where neither side plans for the aftermath of their victory, getting locked in a prolonged conflict that doesn't go beyond armed response. If these armed groups can successfully perform transition from armed roles to administrative service provision duties, then they establish a long-term presence in that territory, building deeply-entrenched relations with the social forces and society there. Through "theory of competitive control", we can theorize why some VNSAs are more successful than others and establish deeper and wider zones of control under state borders. Those VNSAs that can successfully emulate state functions in goods/services provision, law/order maintenance and establish a predictable normative set of rules become more successful than VNSAs that fail or lag in any of these tasks. But there are further variables at play. For example, not all VNSAs control the same amount of population, territory or resources.

This variance in responsibility also determines the extent to which such actors care to rule, along with the complexity of governance models the produce.

Out of all groups analyzed in this piece, ISIS is the most expansive and controls the most resources. At its peak in Syria and Iraq, it controlled close to 10 million population with more than 150,000 km-sq area.<sup>63</sup> When compared to YPG (4,6 million population and 65,000 km-sq area)<sup>64</sup> and DPR/LPR combined (slightly more than 2,4 million population and 42,000 km-sq controlled territory),<sup>65</sup> ISIS emerges out as the strongest VNSA. These fundamental resources of territory and manpower determine allocation of resources and the depth of provincial administration models. Based on existing evidence on ISIS finances, the group runs to levels of macroeconomic policy; one for its own members, and a second one for outsiders.<sup>66</sup> The “insider economy” is based on pricing that is half the amount asked from outsiders, allowing its combatants enjoy a special status in their respective society. Although the group engages in substantial public works and social aid, it follows a war economy model, which is occupied less with economic growth and focused more on rent generation through confiscation and re-appropriation of land, buildings and possessions.<sup>67</sup> Local economic model is run by a “*wali*” (governor), who sits above a “*Zakat*” Council, which coordinates tax collection. Taxation level is also micro-managed

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<sup>63</sup> Berger, J.M. and Jonathan Morgan, 2015. “The ISIS Twitter Census: Defining and Describing the Population of ISIS Supporters on Twitter”, *The Brookings Project on US Relations with the Islamic World*, 3 (20), pp. 4-1.

<sup>64</sup> Carl T. Dahlman, and Sanan Moradi, 2017, “Partition and National Fragmentation of Kurdistan”, *Scaling Identities: Nationalism and Territoriality*, p. 223.

<sup>65</sup> Renfrey Clarke, 2016. “The Donbass in 2014: Ultra-Right Threats, Working-Class Revolt, and Russian Policy Responses”, *International Critical Thought*, 6 (4), pp. 534-555.

<sup>66</sup> Sam Jones and Erika Solomon, 2015, “ISIS Inc: Jihadis Fund War Machine but Squeeze Citizens”, *Financial Times*, [http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/2/2ef519a6-a23d-11e5-bc70-7ff6d4fd203a.html#axzz4C2haXZPo] (Access Date: 19 June 2016).

<sup>67</sup> Erika Solomon and Sam Jones, 2015, “ISIS Inc: Loot and Taxes Keep Jihadi Economy Churning”, *Financial Times*, [http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/2/ae89a00-9ff1-11e5-beba-5e33e2b79e46.html#axzz4C2haXZPo] (Access Date: 19 June 2016).



at the district level, depending on a multitude of factors, including loyalty, profitability, and the level of contribution in non-material forms (i.e. manpower or strategic location) and can also imply non-monetary forms of tax, such as food supplies or infrastructure materials like timber, iron or steel.<sup>68</sup> ISIS local economies are built on the prediction that international sanctions will, at some point, be applied, leading to the emergence of a self-sufficient model.<sup>69</sup> The structure of local economy is built in a way that international sanctions will hurt civilians and local population, rather than ISIS' own ranks, creating a sanction-proof governance model. Fully embedded into the local population, the group uses the territory as a surrogate mother, from which it can launch attacks on adjacent settlements.<sup>70</sup>

In direct contrast with ISIS, YPG-run territories are less centralized and operate in a dual form of autonomy. In matters related to war and mobilization, the group is centrally coordinated, whereas in local non-militancy affairs, regional administrative bodies take over. These dual layers of centralization and de-centralization generates complications at the wider territorial level, for example in terms of resource provision to frontier towns or recruitment, but allow greater legitimacy to YPG's rule around predominantly Kurdish areas. A theoretical exposition of this dual autonomy model was made in "Rojava Constitution"<sup>71</sup>, which stipulates that their nation-building model is a highly-decentralized

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<sup>68</sup> Jose Pagliery, 2015, "Insider the \$2 Billion ISIS War Machine", *CNN Money*, [http://money.cnn.com/2015/12/06/news/isis-funding/index.html?category=home-international] (Access Date: 19 June 2016).

<sup>69</sup> Karoun Demirjian, 2015, "Congress Wants to Strengthen Financial Sanctions Against ISIS", *The Washington Post*, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/wp/2015/12/24/congress-wants-to-strengthen-financial-sanctions-against-isis/] (Access Date: 19 June 2016).

<sup>70</sup> Jonah Goldberg, 2015, "US Mandates ISIS Embed Deeper into Civilian Populations", *National Review*, [http://www.nationalreview.com/corner/420230/us-mandates-isis-embed-deeper-civilian-populations-jonah-goldberg] (Access Date: 19 June 2016).

<sup>71</sup> *Charter of the Social Contract in Rojava (Syria)*, available online: [http://www.kurdishinstitute.be/charter-of-the-social-contract/] (Access Date: 19 June 2016).

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Güvenlik  
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structure, but isn't specifically against states in adjacent territories. This emphasis serves to allay two sources of fear: one, from three adjacent states –Turkey, Syria, and Iraq, so that these states don't allocate extra resources to military end this project– and two, from Kurds that live in northern Syria, that are worried that Rojava will be just another centralized state formation. Contrasting with ISIS' understanding of ownership, Rojava pursues a pro-private property approach, somewhat contradicting the socialist foundations of its collective communalization system.<sup>72</sup> Rather than taxation or “*zakat*” however, Rojava focuses more on collective production–collective consumption and the eventual goal of minimizing the role of currency in economy.<sup>73</sup> Overall, however, the proximity of the main population centers to conflict and different practices of economic policy in Rojava cantons, a clear-cut, functioning economic policy is difficult to identify there, in contrast to ISIS' economic policy, which is more centrally administered.

VNSAs of the War in Donbass –LPR and DPR– have considerably less structural approach to administration and are still unable to form governance bodies that are able to handle at least the basic functions of militancy rule. The rapid severance of the connection between newly emerging VNSAs and the old central administration of Donbass led to the disappearance of know-how and skilled people. Although both groups are effectively pro-Russian, the exact influence of Moscow on these groups are quite difficult to identify and measure. Based on different sources, it is possible to identify around 17 battalions under DPR and slightly less organized and semi-organized fighting forces under LPR.<sup>74</sup> Both groups operate similar to ISIS, in that they are less

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<sup>72</sup> Colm Massey, 2016, “A New Co-Operative Economy: Democratic Confederalism in Rojava and Bakur”, *Institute for Solidarity Economics*, [http://solidarityeconomics.org/2016/06/07/a-new-co-operative-economy-democratic-confederalism-in-rojava-and-bakur/] (Access Date: 19 June 2016).

<sup>73</sup> Bkz. Seyit Evran, 2014.

<sup>74</sup> Paul Robinson, 2016, “Russia's Role in the War in Donbass, and the Threat to European Security”, *European Politics and Society*, 17 (4), pp. 506-521.

concerned about forming sustainable patterns of economic growth and development and, instead, pay more attention to the control of rent, such as smuggling, re-appropriation/confiscation of property, and extortion.<sup>75</sup> They have significantly less-developed models of legal and administrative structure, as LPR/DPR focus more on resolving the most violent of disputes through brute force and conduct basic redistribution through aid sent by Russia. Just like Iraqi civil servants that didn't flee ISIS territories and continued to perform essential technical work, such as operating pipelines, refineries, and power plants; a small group of Ukrainian public servants exist in Donbass that are tasked with similar duties. Pro-Russian police officers, judges, and civil service personnel have stayed behind and currently serve LPR/DPR in their elementary administrative tasks.<sup>76</sup> That said, a formal state-like hierarchy does not exist in Donbass and this chaos exists in LDR more, as a large number of foreign fighters from Chechen, Cossack, and pro-Russian dominion territories establish rival sources of militancy power. The combined lack of capacity in Donbass causes the region to significantly underperform economically. While most workshops and factories are destroyed, the remaining functional ones cannot be operated by DPR or LPR, given the lack of technically-proficient worker pool under their control. More problems emerge from both groups inability to stop shelling either from the Russian or Ukrainian sides, causing widespread damage to mining facilities, factories, and infrastructure. Many coal mines have descended into illegal operations ("kopanki"), as their output is sold both to Russia and Ukraine, through smuggling networks that work for the highest bidder.<sup>77</sup> The resultant unemployment and poverty has caused close to 50% of Donbass residents to live on infrequent income, forcing them to regular foraging

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<sup>75</sup> Iryna Serbinenko, 2016, "Presumptive Taxation in Ukraine Assessment of Previous and Current Systems from the Fiscal Perspective", *International Journal*, 4 (2), pp. 56-78.

<sup>76</sup> Jan Jakub Chromiec and Nicole Koenig, 2015, "Supporting Ukraine's Difficult Path Towards Reforms", *Jacques Delors Institut-Berlin, Policy Paper*, (143).

<sup>77</sup> Lawrence Freedman, 2014, "Ukraine and the Art of Limited War", *Survival*, 56 (6), pp. 7-38.

and scavenging.<sup>78</sup> Due to unavailability of essential goods like medicine, canned food, and sanitary items, their prices are at least double, compared to Ukraine-controlled areas. DPR/LPR haven't been able to set up either a structured form of redistribution mechanism like ISIS nor a social economy and collective sharing model like YPG. This arises from the fact that Donbass VNSAs are neither as dominant as ISIS nor enjoy high levels of legitimacy in their area of operation like YPG.

Overall, all four groups give us different insight on VNSA success in ungoverned spaces. It is clear to LPR and DPR are the least advantaged of all four cases, given competing loyalties in populations they control, lack of know-how or a structured plan to rule these territories. Even with Russian support, these groups are unable to control, administer, and mobilize their limited territorial area. Between ISIS and YPG, on the other hand, it is hard to identify a clear long-term winner. ISIS does control a larger territory and population base, however the group is also shrinking rapidly and it is hard to predict what kind of territory the group will rule over eventually. Even if ISIS is fully destroyed, in the absence of a sustainable economic model to take over its administrative and redistribution functions, areas under its current rule will continue to produce instability. As soon as the group is destroyed by the Syrian and Iraqi governments, remnants of ISIS will continue to perform what Kilcullen defines as "shadow governance"<sup>79</sup>, in parallel to the formal government structure. As a VNSA that relies on constant conquest for economic success, the group will also eventually be unable to perform many of its complex governance duties. Yet, if Syrian or Iraqi governments fail in providing goods and services after reclaiming territory back, loyalties of local populations will not shift back to these governments. The same cannot be claimed for YPG. Although the group controls a smaller territory and population, it has so far demonstrated

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<sup>78</sup> Lawrence Freedman, 2015, "Ukraine and the Art of Exhaustion", *Survival*, 57 (5), pp. 77-106.

<sup>79</sup> David Kilcullen, 2015, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla*, Oxford University Press, p. 151.

relatively better performance in economic administration without relying on territorial expansion. Although the group did pursue expansionist policy along northern Syria, its economic model worked even when expansion failed. It is crucial to underline, however, that a major variable that keeps YPG's administrative functions afloat is foreign aid. Once foreign aid ceases, it is unclear whether the group can continue to sustain its social economy model and keep its current extent of territories without internal opposition or revolt.

## 6. Conclusion

This article approached the question of how and why militant organizations succeed by analyzing four different cases of administrative and economic governance methods under contested territories. This question is getting more and more important in recent years as existing literature is trying to answer another question: what happens when VNSAs are militarily defeated? The main argument in this paper was that whichever entity –state or non-state– can perform consistent and predictable tasks of administration, enforcement, and governance, will win the loyalties of a contested geography. Once long-term state neglect and unpredictable/unexpected modes of coercion builds up significant grievances among the local populace; armed non-state actors emerge, filling in the vacuum left by states and enforce a more predictable pattern of enforcement. The article explored how ISIS, YPG, and LPR/DPR address these issues in their respective ungoverned spaces with different variables of territory, population, ideology, and ambitions.

ISIS occupies a different place in VNSA literature, due to the size of its territorial extent, population base, foreign fighter pool, and ambitions. The group's tactics, strategy, and administrative experiments date back to 2003 and subsequent lessons learned by Sunni armed groups resisting the US military intervention. Formulating a complex and elaborate interlinking of strategies, the group developed advanced intelligence gathering, sleeper cell implantation, network-building, influencing and propaganda tasks. The responsibilities of controlling more than 10 million people in a large span of territory, inevitably brought about the need to adopt state functions like taxation, recruitment, law-security provision, and infrastructure maintenance. In return, the group

was able to field larger resources and manpower to multiple fronts. YPG, on the other hand, benefited from state weakening in Syria considerably, expanding its territorial control across northern Syria quite rapidly. In contrast to ISIS, YPG focused mostly on ethno-nationalist control of predominantly Kurdish areas, although it tried to develop co-administration models (in the form of Syrian Democratic Forces, SDF) with local Arabs. That experiment has resulted in mixed results. Regardless, YPG was able to impose a sustainable rule in predominantly Kurdish territories in northern Syria, uprooting Syrian state functions entirely. Even if the Syrian Civil War ends in Damascus' favor, it is unlikely for YPG to lose its popularity and support in the northern part of the country. This inevitability largely owes to how social economy model fits into the wider grievance narrative of the Kurds, addressing a range of issues, including centralization-autonomy, role of religion in administration, and financial independence to any regional state power. That said, it is also unclear how this state-building project will shape once external financial aid is removed from the equation. The war in Donbass, on the other hand, including two VNSAs –LPR and DPR– are the least likely to have a long and sustainable future. The groups are struggling to establish an uncontested hold over their small territories and populations, even with direct Russian aid. Unable to form sustainable economic and administrative structures of governance, these groups will either be co-opted into a newly emerging VNSA that is capable of running these territories, or will vanish, losing the contest for territorial dominance to Ukraine. As Ukraine-controlled parts in the civil war do better financially and administratively, pro-Russian parts of the country will gradually shift their loyalties away from Moscow and rejoin with the rest of the country. The only case in which this inevitability will not happen is a direct military deployment of Russian forces in Donbass, bringing their own governance know-how and infrastructure, successfully annexing the area for long-term control.

The study of militancy behavior in ungoverned spaces is crucial to understand broad challenges of legitimacy and sovereignty faced by states in neglected and/or poor territories. In observing why certain

groups become more successful than the others, their administrative methods and economic practices are as important as studying how they fight and where they attack. Although states usually focus on defeating VNSAs, there is little policy discussion on what to do after the day of the victory or on how to reclaim these territories and reintegrate them back into the rest of the country. This article demonstrated the advantages and challenges faced by four VNSAs of different sizes and goals in running and administering contested areas and what makes them more or less successful than the others. Further research is needed on other VNSAs from different parts of the world and with different variables of population, finances, and strategies.

### Özet

İç savaşlar ve devlet otoritesinin zayıfladığı durumlarda ortaya çıkan silahlı gruplar, uluslararası çatışma literatürünün köşe taşını oluşturmaktadır. İç savaşların neden ortaya çıktığı, ne kadar sürdüğü ve can kayıplarının hangi durumlarda daha fazla olduğunu irdeleyen hatırı sayılır ölçüde geniş bu literatür, iç savaşlar bittikten sonra devlet idaresinin ve normal hayata dönüşün parametreleri konusunda geri kalmaktadır. Hâlbuki örgütlerin askerî olarak yenilmeleri veya siyasi süreçler yoluyla silahsızlandırılmaları sonucunda ortaya çıkan idare ve yönetim boşluklarının nasıl doldurulacağı, bu örgütlerin tekrar ortaya çıkmaması için sorulması gereken temel sorulardan biridir.

Bu makalede dört örgütün devlet zayıflaması durumlarında ne şekilde davrandıkları; bölgesel sorunları ne şekilde seferber ederek alan hâkimiyeti kurmaya çalıştıkları irdelenmektedir. Irak-Şam İslam Devleti (İŞİD-Daeş), Halkçı Koruma Birlikleri (YPG), Luhansk Halk Cumhuriyeti (LHC) ve Donyetsk Halk Cumhuriyeti (DHC), bu makalede irdelenen dört farklı örgüt olup, kontrol altına aldıkları coğrafi alan, nüfus ve kaynaklar bakımından literatüre farklı konularda vaka oluşturmaktadırlar.

Makalenin teorik altyapısını coğrafya, meşruiyet ve alan kontrolü oluşturmaktadır. Büyük ya da küçük fark etmeksizin, her silahlı örgüt belli bir alanı kontrol eder ve bu alan ile içinde yaşayan halk da dâhil

olmak üzere simbiyotik bir bağ kurar. Bu bağ, devlet otoritesinin zayıflığına bağlı olarak kırsal sınır bölgelerinde (terör örgütleri, militan gruplar) veya şehir içlerinde (mafya ve yasadışı organize suç örgütü) ortaya çıkar. Otoritenin uzun süre zayıf olduğu alanlarda bu bağ, örgütleri giderek “devlet-gibi” idari uygulamalar (altyapı hizmetleri, güvenlik tesisi, vergilendirme, eğitim-öğretim) üreten yapılar haline getirir. Netice itibariyle, mevzubahis bölge, hem siyaseten, hem de Weberyen hukuki meşruiyet açısından belirsiz hâle gelir. Silahlı örgütlerin buldukları bölgelere nasıl sızdıkları, buralarda nasıl alan hâkimiyeti ve yerel meşruiyet kazandıklarının bu sebeple çalışılması elzemdir.

İŞİD-Daeş kontrolündeki alan, nüfus ve altyapı olanakları açısından silahlı devlet-dışı aktörler literatüründe farklı bir yere sahiptir. Örgütün taktik, stratejik ve idari deneyleri 2003 senesine kadar geri giden ve ABD’nin askerî müdahalesine karşı çıkan Sünni grupların tecrübeleri üzerine kurulmuştur. Bu tecrübeler, zaman içinde çok detaylı istihbarat, hücre yapılanması ve propaganda faaliyet ve doktrinine evrilmiş; örgütün 10 milyonu aşkın bir nüfus üzerinde vergilendirme, devşirme, hukuk ve iktisadi fonksiyonlar kurmasını sağlamıştır. Öte yandan YPG, daha sınırlı bir bölgede hâkimiyet alanı kurmuş; “sosyal ekonomi” ve “katılımcı üretim” prensipleri üzerinden merkeze bağlı olmayan bir idari model geliştirmiştir. Kolektif üretim/tüketim ve ihtiyaca bağlı tedarik gibi sosyalist gelenekten gelen pratikler, Sovyet “*kolkoz*” ve İsrail’in “*kibbutz*” taşra geliştirme projeleri üzerinden tanımlanmıştır. Netice itibariyle, Suriye’deki iç savaşın sonucuna bağlı kalmaksızın, bölgede uzun süreli kendi kendine yeterlilik oluşturulmuş; devamlılığının altyapısı hazırlanmıştır. LHC/DHC örgütleri ise Donbass’ta çok daha temel ve aceleci bir idari yapı oluşturarak direkt Rus yardımına bağlı bir sistem kurmuştur. Bu örgütler idari ve yönetime dayalı bir sistem geliştiremeyerek sadece belli bölgelerin asgari korunmasına odaklanmış; bunun sonucunda da idare edilemeyen geniş alanlar yaratmıştır. Bu bölgelerde altyapı ve tamir/bakım hizmetlerinin sürdürülememesi, örgütün bu gibi iş kollarına ayıracak teknik yeterliliği olan insan kaynağı olmaması sebebiyle mafyalaşmaya yol açmış; bölge halkı üzerinde istikrarsız bir derebeylik-vari yönetimin ortaya çıkmasına sebep olmuştur. İŞİD-Daeş ve YPG ile karşılaştırıldığında, LHC/DHC



örgütlerinin uzun süreli alan hâkimiyeti kurması çok zor gözükmekte ve uzun vadede yerel halkın Ukrayna devletine dönük bir karşı-hareket geliştireceği tahminine yol açmaktadır.

İdari rekabete sahne olan bölgelerin daha derinlemesine çalışılması; asimetrik harp ve iç savaş gibi uluslararası ilişkiler literatürünün önemli konularının derinleştirilmesi konusunda büyük önem arz etmektedir. Neden bazı örgütlerin yönetime daha çok önem verdikleri, belli alanları geliştirerek diğer alanları gözden çıkardıkları gibi konular, bu bölgelerin askerî yollarla devlet kontrolüne geçtikten sonra nasıl geri kazanılacakları gibi sonraki sorulara da ışık tutmaktadır. Bu makale, dört farklı kuvvet, alan hâkimiyeti ve altyapıya sahip silahlı örgütün idari ve yönetim pratiklerini karşılaştırarak, bu literatüre katkı sağlamayı amaçlamıştır.

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