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SAKARYA ÜNİVERSİTESİ
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THE RISE AND FALL OF NON-STATE ARMED GROUPS (NSAGs) IN LIBYA: WHAT DETERMINES THEIR FATE?

DOKTORA TEZİ

Bilgehan ÖZTÜRK

Enstitü Anabilim Dalı: Ortadoğu Çalışmaları

Tez Danışmanı: Prof. Dr. Murat YEŞİLTAŞ

AĞUSTOS – 2023

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THESIS APPROVAL

This work headed “The Rise and Fall of Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) in Libya: What Determines Their Fate?” which has been prepared by Bilgehan Öztürk, is approved as a Ph.D. thesis by our jury in majority vote.

Date of Acceptance: 06/08/2023

(Title, Name-Surname of Jury Member)	Opinion
Professor Tuncay Kardaş	SUCCESSFUL
Professor Murat Yeşiltaş	SUCCESSFUL
Professor Ali Balcı	SUCCESSFUL
Associate Professor İsmail Numan Telci	SUCCESSFUL
Associate Professor Mustafa Yetim	SUCCESSFUL

Approval

I approve that the opinions above belong to the aforenamed teaching fellows.

…/…/….

Prof. Dr. Tuncay KARDAŞ
Institute Director

BEYAN

Bu tezin yazılmasında bilimsel ahlak kurallarına uyulduğunu, başkalarının eserlerinden yararlanılması durumunda bilimsel normlara uygun olarak atıfta bulunulduğunu, kullanılan verilerde herhangi bir tahrifat yapılmadığını, tezin herhangi bir kısmının bu üniversite veya başka bir üniversitedeki başka bir tez çalışması olarak sunulmadığını beyan ederim.

Bilgehan ÖZTÜRK
06.08.2023

TEŞEKKÜR

Bu tezin başlangıcından son halinin ortaya çıkmasına kadar geçen uzun sürede pek çok kıymetli hocamın katkısı oldu. Bu meyanda öncelikle danışmanım Sayın Prof. Dr. Murat Yeşiltaş'a rehberliği ve desteği; Tez İzleme Komitesi üyesi hocalarım Sayın Prof. Dr. Tuncay Kardaş ve Sayın Prof. Dr. Ali Balcı'ya tezimi akademik ve bilimsel açıdan daha güçlü hale getirmeye matuf geri dönüşleri; tez savunma jürimde bulunan Sayın Doç. Dr. İsmail Numan Telci ve Sayın Doç. Dr. Mustafa Yetim'e yapıcı eleştirileri ve katkıları için teşekkürü bir borç bilirim.

ÖZET

Sakarya Üniversitesi, Ortadoğu Enstitüsü **Doktora Tez Özeti**

Tezin Başlığı: Libya'da Devlet Dışı Silahlı Grupların (DDSG) Yükselişi ve Düşüşü: Kaderlerini Ne Belirliyor?

Tezin Yazarı: Bilgehan ÖZTÜRK **Danışman:** Prof. Dr. Murat YEŞİLTAŞ

Kabul Tarihi: 06.08.2023 **Sayfa Sayısı:** 8 (ön kısım) + 151 (tez)

Anabilim Dalı: Ortadoğu Çalışmaları

DDSG'lar, başarı oranları, ömürleri, kimlikleri, doğaları, uyguladıkları şiddet seviyeleri, mahiyetleri ve benzeri pek çok açıdan büyük farklılıklar göstermektedirler. Tüm bu DDSG nitelikleri arasında, belirli bir bölge üzerinde kontrol ve otorite kurma yeteneklerini destekleyen ve aynı zamanda yenilgi, dağılma, çökme ve sonunun gelmesini öngören faktörler özellikle önemlidir. Bu çalışma, belirli DDSG'ların neden başarılı bir şekilde büyüdüğünü ve yayıldığını diğerlerinin ise aynı zaman dilimlerini ve mekânları paylaşmalarına rağmen neden küçüldüğünü ve yok olduğunu açıklamak için bir çerçeve sunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Bu çalışma, Libya'daki orijinal vaka çalışmalarına dayalı olarak araştırma sorusuna özgün bir yaklaşım sunmaya çalışmaktadır. Libya, bu tür bir araştırma için uygunluğundan dolayı bu çalışmanın sahnesi ve ana vaka çalışması olarak seçilmiştir; çünkü 2011 yılında eski lider Albay Muammar Kaddafi'nin devrilmesinden bu yana iç savaş, devlet yapısının çöküşü, parçalı veya kısmi devlet otoritesi, şiddet içeren aşırıcılık, çok sayıda farklı silahlı grupların aynı anda varlık göstermesi ve hatta hibrit ve yarı-devlet oluşumları gibi olgular ülke içinde mevcuttur. Libya, Orta Doğu'nun daha geniş kapsamında dahi benzer ve büyük ölçüde farklı DDSG'ların aynı anda bulunduğu nadir vakalardan birini sunmaktadır. Bir bakıma, Libya hem benzer hem de farklı DDSG'lar için uygun bir ortam ve bu nedenle aynı anda bir 'laboratuvar' olmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: DDSG, Libya, hayatta kalma, yükseliş, dağılma

ABSTRACT

Sakarya University, Middle East Institute Abstract of PhD Thesis

Title of the Thesis: The Rise and Fall of NSAGs in Libya: What Determines Their Fate?	
Author: Bilgehan ÖZTÜRK	**Supervisor:** Prof. Dr. Murat YEŞİLTAŞ
Acceptance Date: 06.08.2023	**Nu. of pages:** 8 (pre text) + 151(thesis)
Department: Middle Eastern Studies	

NSAGs vary greatly in terms of their success rate, lifespan, identity, nature, level of violence, enjoyed legitimacy and so on. Among all qualities of NSAGs, the factors that enable them to prosper, flourish, expand, and establish control and authority over a certain territory; as well as the factors that pave the way and foreshadow their defeat, dissolution, dismantlement, and demise are especially important to know and understand. This study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on NSAGs by offering a framework for explaining why certain NSAGs thrive and expand while others shrink and dissolve despite sharing temporal and spatial commonalities.

This study attempts to provide a peculiar approach to the question building on an original set of case studies from Libya. Libya was chosen as the theatre and the main case study of this work due to its suitability for this kind of inquiry since phenomena such as civil war, state collapse, fragmented or partial state authority, violent extremism, an abundance of all sorts of armed groups and even hybrid and semi-state formations are all present in the country since the toppling of the former ruler Colonel Muammar Gadhafi in 2011. Libya provides one of the few cases even in the wider Middle East where a sustained and protracted authority vacuum is partly filled by numerous competitive armed formations. In a way, Libya has been a ‘heaven’ and hence, a ‘laboratory’ for both similar and starkly different NSAGs at the same time.

Keywords: NSAGs, Libya, survival, ascension, demise

CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

ABBREVIATIONS

ASL **:** Ansar al-Sharia in Libya

BRSC **:** Benghazi Revolutionaries' Shura Council

DAESH **:** The Islamic State of Iraq and Sham/The Islamic State of Iraq and Levant

GNA **:** Government of National Accord

LAAF **:** Libyan Arab Armed Forces

LNA **:** Libyan National Army

MS **:** Madkhali-Salafis

MSCDS **:** Mujahideen Shura Council in Derna and its Suburbs

NSAGs : Non-State Armed Groups

INTRODUCTION

Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) have long been a reality in conflict environments, civil wars, insurgencies, proxy wars and all sorts of crisis-laden issues and areas, sometimes transcending the national boundaries of the crises. Yet, NSAGs vary greatly in terms of their success rate, lifespan, identity, nature, level of violence, enjoyed legitimacy and so on. Among all qualities of NSAGs, the factors that enable them to prosper, flourish, expand, and establish control and authority over a certain territory; as well as the factors that pave the way and foreshadow their defeat, dissolution, dismantlement, and demise are especially important to know and understand not only for practical policy purposes to deal with NSAGs but also for deepening the insight on NSAGs in general as a phenomenon as part of academic inquiry.

This study aims at contributing to the existing body of knowledge on NSAGs by offering a framework for explaining why certain NSAGs thrive and expand while others shrink and dissolve despite sharing temporal and spatial commonalities with each other. In other words, what determines the fate of NSAGs?

There are already a considerable number of studies dealing with similar or associated questions on NSAGs, the details of which are provided in the literature review section in Chapter 1. Yet, this study attempts to provide a peculiar approach to the question building on an original set of case studies, not to disagree with the existing studies but to complement and enrich them.

Libya was chosen as the theatre and the main case study of this thesis due to its suitability for this kind of inquiry since phenomena such as civil war, state collapse, fragmented or partial state authority, violent extremism, an abundance of all sorts of armed groups and even hybrid and semi-state formations are all present in the country since the toppling of the former ruler Colonel Muammar Gadhafi in 2011. Libya provides one of the few cases even in the wider Middle East where a sustained and protracted authority vacuum is partly filled by numerous competitive armed formations. In a way, Libya has been a ‘heaven’ and hence, a ‘laboratory’ for both similar and starkly different NSAGs at the same time.

Drawing on the evidence provided by the case studies the following hypotheses are developed in this thesis:

- The strategic environment in which NSAGs operate and their behavior towards other actors in the same environment significantly influence their trajectories and strategic outcomes (ascension, survival, and demise).
- The presence of a prolonged authority vacuum, state collapse, and the existence of multiple competing armed formations in a conflict-ridden region contribute to the thriving and expansion of certain NSAGs.
- NSAGs that adapt their strategies and tactics to changing circumstances and exploit weaknesses in the strategic environment are more likely to survive and thrive.

Despite the development of an original analytical framework as well as making use of original case studies, the study has certain limitations that must be acknowledged. First of all, the study focuses on three specific NSAGs in Libya (Ansar al-Sharia, DAESH, and Madkhali-Salafis). While these case studies can offer valuable insights, the findings may not be easily generalizable to NSAGs in other regions or contexts. The uniqueness of the Libyan situation and the selected NSAGs may limit the broader applicability of the conclusions.

The availability of data on the Madkhali-Salafis (MS) is limited compared to well-known organizations like Ansar al-Sharia and DAESH. Relying on primary resources from interviews and fieldwork introduces potential biases and limitations in the depth and breadth of data for the MS case study.

The choice of ASL, DAESH, and MS as the case studies could introduce bias in the analysis. There might be other NSAGs that could have provided valuable insights but were not included due to the research design.

The study concentrates solely on Libya as the case study country. While Libya provides a rich context for exploring NSAGs, its specificity might limit the transferability of findings to other regions with different historical, social, and political contexts.

While the study aims to offer a framework to explain the success and failure of NSAGs, the extent to which the framework can cover all aspects and intricacies of such a complex phenomenon might be limited.

Selection Criteria

Among all sorts of armed formations in Libya, from the best equipped to the negligible ones, from the large and formidable to the local gangs, three armed groups were chosen to be subjected to the analytical framework of this thesis: Ansar al-Sharia in Libya (ASL), DAESH alternatively known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS), the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) or the Islamic State (IS); and the Madkhali-Salafis (MS). The commonalities of these three organisations came into sight during a separate research project undertaken by the author whereby the respondents of the anthropological research unanimously pointed to MS as a violent extremist organisation (VEO) along with ASL and DAESH without any inducement or prior knowledge of the researchers whatsoever. The respondents' choice of these three organisations was a result of a generic definition of violent extremism provided to them, which was "either practising or condoning the use of violence to achieve a widescale societal transformation". Thus, the obscure and much less known MS came to the fore along with ASL and DAESH which were well and widely-known organisations both domestically and internationally. The quality of violent extremism is one of the factors that made the three organisations comparable to each other. However, the violent extremist trait is hardly the only denominator that makes ASL, DAESH and MS comparable to each other.

First, ASL, DAESH and MS are comparable organisations because of their temporal commonality. These organisations were picked not because they were the only VEOs in the history of Libya, but because they were the VEOs of the same period, which is simply the post-2011 revolution period. Although there have been other organisations that fit the violent extremism definition provided above throughout Libya's history such as the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), also known as 'Muqaatileen', it was not included among the case studies of this thesis due to two reasons: first, violent extremism is not the main and only criterion to select the case studies; second, while ASL, DAESH and MS all operated and existed after the revolution in 2011, LIFG had operated for years while Gadhafi was in power and it dissolved itself once Gadhafi was gone. Since Gadhafi's rule or its absence are equally big enough game-changers for any Libyan phenomenon, it would not be analytically quite right to compare LIFG to ASL, DAESH, and MS by ignoring the 'Gadhafi effect' and the time difference between

them. LIFG and the other three existed and operated under starkly different circumstances.

Second, there have been dozens of various armed formations of varying strengths, manpower, political affiliation etc. since the 2011 revolution in Libya, however, ASL, DAESH and MS were chosen because of a highly discernible ideological component in them. It is not that the rest of the armed groups in the country are totally free of ideology, but ideology is not the main defining component for the former to the extent that it is for ASL, DAESH, and MS. Many of the armed groups across the country were formed during the 2011 revolution so they all share more or less a revolutionary, anti-Gadhafi and -some of them- Islamist credentials. Those that were formed after 2014, especially in Barqa/Cyrenaica, in the eastern part of the country usually harbour anti-Islamist and Arab nationalist credentials. Nevertheless, these credentials and attitudes do not amount to ideology and do not determine the potential recruits' decision to join them. Since these credentials and attitudes are shared by dozens of armed groups, the past and potential recruits' choice to join any of them has been a matter of convenience rather than a strong conviction for a specific ideology. Ideology has been a mere facilitator for mobilisation for these armed groups and it came after convenience in terms of priorities. On the other hand, ASL, DAESH, and MS all have a distinct sense of identity and ideology has always been the main driver for their members and recruits. Their distinct identity and ideology have been the organisation's organising nucleus, and their recruits had been aware of their ideology all the way. In short, ASL, DAESH and MS differed greatly from the 106th battalion of the Libyan National Army (LNA) or the 166th brigade of Misrata.

Third, the different trajectories of ASL, DAESH, and MS until today provide explanatory and analytical possibilities as the trajectories feature both divergence and convergence between the organisations. While ASL and DAESH converge on their respective trajectories which featured first 'rise' and then 'fall', MS diverge from both of them by not going through a 'fall' period at all. This allows us to draw certain causal relations between certain conditions and certain outcomes such as survival, rise or demise for the said organisations.

Methodology

In both the research and analysis phases of this thesis, various methods were utilised. To begin with, the literature review was the starting point of this research endeavour to have a clearer idea of the existing scholarly works on the field of NSAGs per se, but also on the related fields such as civil war, insurgency, the political economy of conflicts, rebel governance and so on, which would also enrich and deepen our understanding and insight into NSAGs. In doing so the aim was to learn about the answers given by other scholars and researchers to the question "what determines the fate of NSAGs?" or again, related questions. The arguments and analytical frameworks of other scholars were reviewed and compared with the preliminary and tentative answers in mind to the research question of this thesis.

Before the thorough examination of the case studies of this thesis, the initial tendency was to join and support a specific approach among the scholars reviewed in the literature review to provide 'the most appropriate' or the strongest answer to the research question at hand. However, that tendency gave way later on to another approach as a result of a closer examination of the case studies. In a way, the case studies, the respective armed organisations, and the wider Libyan context dictated their own 'reality' and explanation. Hence, instead of only joining and supporting an existing framework in the literature with the case studies of this thesis, a different framework is offered building on the experience of the three NSAGs and their Libyan context.

Establishing the empirical base of the case studies, i.e., the information and knowledge on the experience and trajectory of ASL, DAESH, and MS as well as the wider context of the Libyan issue was the second step of the research effort for the thesis. The information and knowledge on ASL, DAESH and MS, and more importantly the relevant aspects of that information and knowledge to the analytical framework of the thesis were presented for the purpose of creating a reference point for the discussion and analysis within the framework of the thesis. While presenting the information and knowledge on the three NSAGs of concern for this thesis, both secondary and primary resources were utilised. As ASL and DAESH are much more well-known organisations, the sheer volume of written and other resources is far greater than those resources on MS. Only a handful of works and resources are available on MS, and thus, the information and knowledge on MS were to a great extent provided based on the author

interviews and fieldwork observations that had been conducted by the author for a separate research project prior to the submission of the thesis. As part of the fieldwork, three Libyan cities Tripoli, Misrata and Zliten in the northwest of the country were visited as places that were available for visit by Turkish citizens at the time of the fieldwork since these cities were under the rule of the internationally recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli. On the other hand, the interviewees were selected among people who were knowledgeable about the three organisations. Some of them were former members of the organisations; some had first-hand experience with them; some were exposed to the activities and practices of the organisations in question. In terms of age, profession, political orientation and worldview, and hometown, the group of interviewees were quite diverse including religious scholars, academics, civil society members, journalists, former combatants, revolutionaries, students, researchers and so on. Primary resources were also used in presenting the information and knowledge on ASL and DAESH, too, but not to the extent of MS.

After establishing the empirical base for the case studies and the inquiry in general, a discussion of the facts and empirical base with the conceptual and analytical framework of the thesis was the last step of this endeavour. At this stage, secondary resources were extensively utilised in addition to primary resources in shedding light on the various phases of the respective organisations in terms of the fluctuations in their trajectories. First, the various strategic outcomes were identified for the organisations such as ascension, survival, and demise. Under each strategic outcome, the organisations that fit the relevant outcome were analysed. The organisations were analysed under the relevant strategic outcomes based on two variables: 1) the nature of the respective strategic environments in which they existed and operated, and 2) the behaviour of the organisations toward other actors in the same strategic environment. The interaction between the strategic environment and the behaviour of the individual organisations created certain outcomes for the latter. Based on the patterns of convergence and divergence between the disparate phases and experiences of the NSAGs at hand, causal conclusions were drawn, and this constituted the answer of this thesis to the main research question.

The thesis was organised into five chapters in total. The first, introduction chapter is followed by Chapter 1 in which the literature review was made, and the conceptual framework of the thesis was presented. Chapter 2 was devoted to the presentation of the empirical elements of the three NSAGs in question within the framework of this thesis based on both primary and secondary resources. Chapter 3 is where the extensive discussion was undertaken through the application of the analytical framework of the thesis to respective case studies and the wider context of the Libyan issue. Finally, the last chapter aka the Conclusion features the main findings of the discussion in Chapter 3 and the main answer to the research question of the thesis.

1. CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. Literature Review

Nearly everywhere there are numerous armed organizations of all ideological persuasions and organizational capacities. In addition to their wide range of abilities, each organisation's longevity, success, sophistication, instiutionalisation etc. are all very different. This leads to the primary issue: what factors contribute to the prolonged existence of certain armed groups while others disintegrate early on? What conditions make some groups resilient and capable of surviving existential threats whilst making others susceptible to dissolution?

Research focused on understanding the lifespans of armed organizations has traditionally taken an individual-centred perspective. These studies have used statistical models based on mortality rates, mainly considering factors like the organization's age and size. However, they have often overlooked crucial elements such as environmental influences, leadership dynamics, and inter-organizational relations. Later on, in response to specific historical circumstances, scholars explored the relationship between the ideological orientation of armed groups and their longevity. The prevailing notion was that nationalist organizations tended to endure much longer. Following waves of social revolutionary and left-wing movements in the 1960s, and the emergence of religious organizations from the mid to late 1970s, studies found that religious and nationalist groups exhibited higher durability than leftist and rightist groups (Asal & Rethemeyer, 2008) (Berman E. , 2010) (Blomberg, Engel, & Sawyer, 2009) (Cronin, 2010) (Hou, Gaibulloev, & Sandler, 2020) (Jones & Libicki, 2008) (Piazza & Piazza, 2017).

Based on an analysis utilizing open-source data, various studies have highlighted several factors that influence the dynamics of armed groups. These factors include:

Target choices: Some studies (Abrahms & Mroszczyk, 2021) have emphasized the importance of the targets chosen by armed groups, which can significantly impact their operations and longevity.

Recruitment, financial support, and safe havens: (Beehner, 2018), (Kubota, 2013), and (Stewart, 2018) have explored how recruitment methods, financial backing, and secure locations play crucial roles in sustaining armed organizations.

Location: (Blomberg, Gaibulloev, & Sandler, 2011) have studied the significance of geographical locations in influencing armed group behavior.

Leadership and organizational structure: Scholars like (Hofmann, 2015) and (Mahoney, 2020) have delved into the impact of leadership qualities and organizational structures on the durability of armed groups.

County-level independent variables: (Malthaner & Waldmann, 2014) have examined the influence of county-level independent variables on armed organizations.

In addition to the above, other analyses have explored various factors, including regime type (Daxecker & Hess, 2013), poverty and economic inequality (Suleiman & Karim, 2015), failed states (Ünver, 2013), and globalization. These studies collectively contribute to a broader understanding of the complexities surrounding armed group resilience and longevity.

There have also been theoretical approaches to NSAGs in the Middle East such as Hezbollah. Yetim analysed Hezbollah through the assumptions of neo-Weberian approach. According to the social-historical structuration concept of neo-Weberian approach, structural tendencies in global, regional and state-society relations impact the emergence, embraced discourse and actions of both state and non-state actors. Yetim analyses the case of Hezbollah in Lebanon based on the concept of social-historical structuration. Yetim investigates Hezbollah's role, which is affected by the certain ideational and socio-political factors, on social-historical relations (Yetim, 2016).

Yetim's main discussion is undertaken within the framework of the interaction between Hezbollah as a violent non-state actor and three significant –"stratified" in Roy Bhaskar's words- social structures. While doing this, Yetim attaches importance to the ontological equality based on neo-Weberian assumptions (Yetim, 2016).

In the Middle East region, Yetim argues that violent non-state actors have an impact as agents of social developments (Yetim, 2016: 116). He criticises the existing works on Hezbollah for their two main deficiencies. The first significant deficiency in

assessments concerning Hezbollah is the insufficient analysis of structural conditions (Yetim, 2016: 117). Another important deficiency in studies related to Hezbollah is the emphasis on structural conditions while neglecting to give sufficient attention to agency. Only focusing on structural factors limits our understanding of the actor's impact on social developments and its transformation over time (Yetim, 2016: 117-118). In line with its agency, as an armed non-state actor, Hezbollah plays a reproducing and transformative role in state-society relations and regional developments, particularly in stratified social structures (Yetim, 2016: 160). Also, Hezbollah largely reproduces regional and local structural relations through its actions and discourses directed towards the Middle East region (Yetim, 2016: 184).

Despite being a highly original contribution to the literature on Hezbollah in particular and NSAGs in the Middle East in general, especially the ontological equality defended by Yetim based on neo-Weberian approach does not suit the nature of the three cases in question in this study. In this study, structure's ontological superiority in its determinative power to agency is embraced in analysing the different trajectories of respective cases.

Another theoretical approach to a different but again a Middle Eastnern NSAG, PKK was provided by Balcı in which he sets about from the possibility of discussing "foreign policies" of ethnic dissident movements, especially considering that they lack the typical attributes of modern sovereign states, such as territory, borders, and recognition. In addition to the possibility of studying foreign policy, the way of going about studying their policies towards and perceptions of the outside world is a side inquiry of his work. Balcı endeavors to explore a theoretical framework for examining how dissident ethnic movements perceive world politics, with a particular emphasis on the PKK as a case study and he draws upon poststructural, feminist, and postcolonial theories as the theoretical foundation of his study (Balci, 2017).

Rather than viewing the armed PKK movement solely as an act of resistance, Balcı offers an alternative approach by portraying contemporary Kurdish nationalism led by the PKK as a counter-hegemonic narrative. This narrative gives rise to a new form of identity and belonging, empowering the PKK to exert its influence (Balci, 2017).

Balcı put the question of how the domestic realm of post-1980 Kurdish political subjects, who may willingly comply with the laws and violence of Kurdish political institutions, is structured, defined, and distinguished from the Turkish state in the centre of his inquiry. This domestic domain is considered the unproblematic foundation upon which all legitimization discourses are based. He concluded that in PKK texts, the narratives of world politics positioned the PKK as a responsible and authoritative "sovereign" for the post-1980 Kurdish political subjects in a specific manner (Balci, 2017).

Apart from this finding, he argued that the PKK's discourse on world politics played a crucial role in shaping a distinct Kurdish political identity, where the Kurdish political subject primarily recognizes the legitimacy of Kurdish nationalist institutions as a sovereign presence, rather than the Turkish state. Furthermore, by engaging in world politics, specific meanings were generated and normalized, and these meanings became associated with different subjects, positioning the PKK as the rightful interpreter and arbiter of Kurdish identity. And lastly, the conclusion of the Cold War brought about profound changes in the PKK's discourse on world politics, leading to a significant reconfiguration of the post-1980 Kurdish national identity (Balci, 2017).

The relationship between NSAGs and the concept of sovereignty was also analysed in the literature. Yeşiltaş, Kardaş and Jacoby argued that NSAGs impact sovereignty in three ways. Firstly, non-state armed actors (NSAAs) challenge the exclusive and uniform nature of state sovereignty by seeking strategic or territorial autonomy within state borders. Secondly, competition for a particular territory compels local populations to strengthen their identification with sub-state identities and organizational structures. The conflict between DAESH and the PYD in Syria and Iraq serves as a clear illustration of how conflicts across different regions can reshape sub-national groups along diverse military, social, and political dimensions. Thirdly, domestic internal conflicts between state and non-state actors can become internationalized when external actors and institutions become involved (Yeşiltaş, Kardaş, & Jacoby, 2023).

By examining the relations both inside and outside the state, they argue, it is possible to explore the limitations of a certain type of sovereignty. Within the state, horizontally, the presence of diverse social and organizational structures creates distinct conflict

dynamics among local actors. Vertically, there is a clash over sovereign rule, with the state striving to prevent non-state armed actors from expanding their territorial control and societal influence. Outside the state, the international system also exerts various forms of influence. In some instances, there is an emphasis on established norms of state sovereignty and existing border structures. However, in other cases, armed actors may be utilized as proxy agents to contain adversaries or support allies (Yeşiltaş, Kardaş, & Jacoby, 2023).

In Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, armed actors not only seek dominance and control over land but also aim to provide public services. By doing so, they assert an autonomous role and establish an alternative territorial order either alongside or, in some cases, in lieu of state sovereignty. This challenges the state's acknowledged right to govern, thereby limiting its legitimacy and ability to effectively rule over the internationally recognized territory. Acquiring land becomes more than a mere military objective. It serves the additional purpose of consolidating the armed actor's authority within the local population and ensuring civilian loyalty. As a result, armed actors engage in competition with the government, and in some instances, they may entirely replace the government as the principal sovereign entity within that particular territory (Yeşiltaş, Kardaş, & Jacoby, 2023).

Indeed, another aspect of non-state sovereignty is the tendency of armed actors to create alternative political subjectivities either under or alongside established concepts of citizenship. These armed actors often formulate their own definitions of identity to legitimize their territorial control and governance practices. However, it is essential to note that their definition of identity may not necessarily be in direct opposition to centralized authority. Instead, they may seek to coexist, challenge, or negotiate with central governments, establishing complex and multifaceted relationships within the existing political landscape (Yeşiltaş, Kardaş, & Jacoby, 2023).

Political subjectivity and the quest for legitimacy are closely linked for non-state armed actors (NSAAs). This legitimacy-seeking process can take place both internally and externally. Some NSAAs place a higher emphasis on seeking international support than others. Given the absence of fully sovereign allies in the region, the PYD (Democratic Union Party) has been particularly active in engaging with external powers to bolster

their position and ultimately gain international recognition and legitimacy. By establishing alliances and partnerships with external actors, the PYD seeks to enhance its standing and demonstrate its legitimacy on the global stage (Yeşiltaş, Kardaş, & Jacoby, 2023).

Another crucial aspect of non-state sovereignty is the creation of new economic spaces. Armed actors establish intricate networks to acquire resources, both domestically and internationally. These networks go beyond traditional state-controlled channels and involve informal economies, illicit trade, and transnational connections. By establishing such resource acquisition mechanisms, armed actors can strengthen their position, achieve financial independence, and sustain their activities without relying on state support. As a result, these economic interactions play a pivotal role in shaping the dynamics of non-state sovereignty (Yeşiltaş, Kardaş, & Jacoby, 2023).

Non-state armed actors (NSAAs) also demonstrate varying degrees of social mobilization, which can be either at the national or regional level. Achieving and sustaining social mobilization has traditionally been the most challenging aspect of sovereignty for NSAAs. Nonetheless, their ability to mobilize and organize their constituencies reflects a form of foreign policy engagement (Yeşiltaş, Kardaş, & Jacoby, 2023).

Moreover, Yeşiltaş and Kardaş analyses the case of PYD specifically to elucidate how a faction of Kurdish nationalists in Syria emulates and replaces the Westphalian notion of sovereign statehood within Syria's context. They posit that the Partiya Yekîtiya Democrat (PYD), an offshoot of the PKK in Syria, establishes its authority by adopting and substituting contemporary state-building mechanisms. The study identifies a three-pronged political-military strategy employed at the local, regional, and international levels. They reveal that in the face of existential challenges posed by local non-state competitors and regional predatory states, the PYD's primary approach involves mimicking aspects of the modern state whenever feasible while compensating for the lack of legitimate rule and sovereignty through a network of political and global support. Furthermore, the research demonstrates how the PYD's strategy of mimicking modern state practices is contingent on support, particularly from major powers like the USA, and responses from regional powers such as Turkey. Ultimately, the study

examines how the fluctuations in the PYD's approach stem from its adoption and substitution of modern state practices, including survival strategies, foreign policy practices, and identity politics, which intersect with traditional concepts of state, sovereignty, geopolitics, and territoriality (Yeşiltaş & Kardaş, 2023).

The PYD's approach to sovereignty is perceived as a form of camouflage rather than an outright alternative to the Westphalian conception. Yeşiltaş and Kardaş identify three underlying logics that contribute to the PYD's exercise of sovereign rule. Firstly, the logic of territory and territorialization is utilized to strengthen and support sovereign authority. Secondly, the logic of institutionalized governance serves as the primary form of political order, enforced through disciplinary violence to maintain organizational structure and control. Thirdly, the logic of politics, both at the local and international levels, aids in consolidating the PYD's internal and external networks of power. Rather than treating sovereignty in the context of the PYD as a norm, they interpret it as a ruling practice. This entails a diverse array of practices in the field, underpinned by disciplinary armed forces. The research explores how the PYD seeks to govern both people and space by adopting the three classical tenets of the modern state: territory, security, and identity (Yeşiltaş & Kardaş, 2023).

Indeed, the PYD's exercise of sovereign rule often involves imitating conventional state practices, while at the same time, it implements ambiguous-alternative sovereign practices (Yeşiltaş & Kardaş, 2023).

In addition, the reception by global actors played a crucial role in securing empathetic recognition and creating political space for the PYD in an initially hostile strategic environment. By first establishing civilian and military relationships with over 60 countries within the vast anti-ISIS coalition, the YPG (People's Protection Units) managed to navigate geopolitical challenges and expand its political and military influence whenever opportunities arose (Yeşiltaş & Kardaş, 2023).

Overall, Yeşiltaş and Kardaş argue that the PYD's prevalence is a result of its survival strategies and the support it receives from global networks. These strategies and networks intricately intersect and transcend the boundaries of traditional state conduct, sovereignty, geopolitics, and territoriality (Yeşiltaş & Kardaş, 2023).

The framework of the logic of sovereignty does not provide a useful tool to explain the causes of divergence between three Libyan cases and to detect the main determinative factors for a number of reasons. The way PYD cultivated its international relations and the way it secured international support is very different from Libyan NSAGs. There is no resemblance whatsoever to ASL and DAESH as the latter was not in a position to secure an international support similar to PYD, but even the only organisation that secured international support, MS did it very differently than PYD. The nature of relationship between MS and its foreign patron and the one between PYD and its international backers is also very different. MS was created in the first place as a proxy actor but whether PYD was 'created' as a proxy is up to discussion. Furthermore, sovereignty, either as a claim or as an emulated practice does not come to the fore in MS' trajectory. PYD and MS' respective relations with territory are also very different both in terms of acquiring and subsequently governing it. PYD acquired territory in the first place as a 'gift' from the Assad regime as a result of the latter's 'strategic withdrawal' from northern Syria. MS, on the other hand, was granted power, authority, space etc. by both Tripoli and Benghazi based authorities, and however, it was not granted an exclusive territory by either of them. As a result, MS have never been a primarily territorial actor.

Another theoretical approach to NSAGs was provided by Polat in which he investigates the confrontations and rivalries among armed factions within failed states. Polat uncovers the underlying reasons behind these competitions among armed groups and to analyze the overall strategic behavior of these actors. In doing so he addresses two key questions: first, the motivations driving armed groups to pursue power, and second, the strategies they employ to achieve their objectives. To answer these inquiries, his study adopts the principles of offensive realism, originally conceived to explain conflicts and competitions between major powers in the global system, and applies it to the context of armed groups operating within failed states. According to this perspective, the absence of a central authority in these states compels armed groups to engage in power struggles and adopt offensive tactics. To support its argument, the research formulates four distinct hypotheses related to the central thesis and evaluates them using the example of Libya. Through this analysis, the study presents a broad and transferable perspective on the conduct of armed groups and the root causes of civil wars (Polat, 2022).

One of the most recent studies was undertaken by Karakuş who investigates the causal connection between armed groups and their territorial, political, organizational, and operational elements, which are likely to influence their longevity. His study stands out for its comprehensive analysis of a number of groups' policies during intrastate wars against rival forces, as previous analyses have mostly been individualistic and lacked the integration and evaluation of variables. By examining armed groups from various regions around the world, his study aims to establish a framework that illustrates the resilience and durability of non-state armed groups (NSAGs) despite time, military, and organizational pressures (Karakuş, 2022).

The rest of the knowledge base on NSAGs in the existing literature is roughly categorised into three dimensions below, namely organisational, operational and functional, and political dimensions.

1.1.1. Organisational Dimension

Certain works in the literature focused on exclusively the ‘inner’ dimension of NSAGs as isolated and closed units and in doing so analysed and explained the internal workings and dynamics of NSAGs. For them, armed groups are smaller social settings, organizations and less organized collectives, and groups of interdependent people who are individuals. Asymmetric power balances bind these people, as they trade favours or goods, as they maintain emotional links, and even as they fight. Many factors may therefore be sources of influence in these balanced relationships. But these precarious balances do not constitute equilibrium. Because of the continual action of actors and because of actions of conflict and acts of agreement, they continually alter and are almost never fully balanced (Elias, 1991) (Mennell, 1998).

Nobody rules alone, and without rank-and-file, only very basic forms of political dominance can do so. Among the only figures in which skilled staff are not needed are gerontocracy and primary patriarchal types, as the rulers themselves suffice to implement and execute their decisions. But any political system in which social interactions transcend immediate and face-to-face contact requires some kind of support staff, that is, individuals who acquiesce consistently to general procedures and follow political leaders' orders. Usually, this workforce is supplemented by supporters and lower ranks. The differentiation between leaders, workers, and followers makes it

possible to establish rough initial ideas as figurations about the foundations and growth of these internal ties within armed groups. The forms in which armed groups are formed show a great deal, both within their chain of command and in the eyes of outsiders, about their future chance of gaining legitimacy (Schlichte, 2009: 32). Legitimacy is a trait that is not enjoyed evenly by all NSAGs; the extent of legitimacy in the eyes of both members of NSAGs and everyone else in the most general terms varies greatly between NSAGs. At first glance, it seems logical to expect longer lifespan and greater level of resilience and durability at the ones enjoying higher level of legitimacy. However, legitimacy is not something to be measured easily.

The central aspect of Weber's dominance theory calls for the stabilization of relations between leaders and rank-and-file, and that is the principle of legitimacy. Insurgencies need to resolve the costs of aggression, both within figuration and in its external relations, which consist primarily of its de-legitimizing consequences. Not only is the point here that all rulers ought to rouse and groom confidence in their rule's validity. For a secure law, it is important that rank-and-file at least believe in the authority of the respective order. Political types can best be differentiated by the type of legitimacy. For armed groups, this still remains true. The position and consistency of legitimisation within the figuration can best be understood and clarified by their internal functioning, their internal dynamics, and also their external actions. In these figurations, all three ideal forms of legitimacy, charismatic, conventional, and legal-rational, can be found in varied blends. It has also been said that it is incredibly hard to determine legitimacy empirically. Hypocrisy can also be found in hierarchical relationships empirically, and may be mistakenly taken for validity. Personal interest, vulnerability, or helplessness often prompt individuals to obey a given order. Indeed, in figurations such as those of armed gangs, all these motifs are empirically measurable. But without a certain degree of legitimacy, at least in the eyes of his rank-and-file, no political figuration will last for a long time. In addition, such poor motives as indifference or helplessness are not likely to justify membership in an armed group in its early, most dangerous stages. It can also be seen that many militant groups that have been able to fight for long periods in civil wars have actually had solid forms of internal legitimacy. It is also implausible to believe that, without such internal ties, a community will maintain its organization intact through long periods of combat associated with misery, deprivation, and immense

costs in so many respects (Schlichte, 2009: 33-34). Although the (positive) impact of legitimacy on the durability of a NSAG is not fully verified, it is clear that some level of legitimacy is a must at least at the earlier stages of a NSAG and also for maintaining the NSAG for a while, if not for eternity.

The formation of an armed group is the mechanism by which figurative kernels are created. Within a setting, this formation often takes place. There are often rules, links, and definitions that the initiators of the formation should rely on. This does not necessarily mean that the formation is going to be successful. There were an uncounted number of militant groups that never exceeded their early stages. However, the pre-existence of these relations implies that there is a framework on which first attempts at legitimization can be established. For the internal hierarchies of armed groups, this inner legitimacy provides necessary cohesiveness. Losing credibility leads to the utter collapse of an organisation (Schlichte, 2009: 34). Although legitimacy does not guarantee longer lifespan by itself, the lack or loss of credibility, which is the bare minimum for legitimacy, is a recipe for demise of the organisation.

1.1.1.1. Different Paths of Formation

Some scholars argued that the formative phases of respective armed groups and the foundations on which those formative phases were built, impact the trajectory and longevity of armed organisations. Two different paths of formation have discernibly divergent impacts on the durability of armed organisations.

1.1.1.2. The Path of Repression

The path of repression in the formation of an armed organisation arguably prolongs the lifespan of that organisation. The fact that state violence is always indiscriminate relieves the radicalisation of existing parties. This is always the case when information on opponents is scarce, as Stathis Kalyvas has shown convincingly (Kalyvas, 2006). Usually, this happens when government forces are deployed in areas that they are not familiar with and thus cannot control tightly. Civilians turn their support for them as rebellious forces give at least partial security. This has been the case in Mindanao, Philippines as McKenna reveals the stories of why they joined opposition forces with a number of people (McKenna, 1999: 176). At face value, high level of local support especially in the form of joining an armed organisation would point to better prospects

for the organisation as solidarity with locals and not experiencing shortage of manpower during the fight are very positive and highly needed assets.

Like the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in Philippines, armed groups established through the process of repression do not always split. Many are effective in preserving their organizational limits and creating strong bonds of inner legitimacy. A case in point is the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka. The LTTE did not falter after being founded in much the same way as the MNLF, but became one of the largest and best organized armed groups with complex internal structure and powerful transcontinental branches (Radtke, 2009). Additionally, this process has influenced most leftist guerrilla groups in Latin America. More often than not, with strong militarist traditions, they were produced under oligarchic rule. Similarly, with violence against what was considered "liberation movements" at the time, colonial rule also responded. In this respect, the "Frente de Libertaçao de Moçambique" (FRELIMO), the beginning in Algeria of the anti-French "Front de Libération Nationale" (FLN) and the creation of the "Viet Minh" during the Japanese occupation of French Indochina are similar (George, 1994) (Prunier, 2005) (Ramirez, 2004) (Young, 1997) (McClintok, 1998).

However, NSAGs that were formed through the path of repression and their being much more resilient compared to other paths of formation does not provide a useful explanatory framework for the cases of concern in this study. Among three NSAGs analysed in this study, namely Ansar al-Sharia in Libya (ASL), DAESH and Madkhali-Salafis (MS), only ASL qualifies as a product of regime repression and even this qualification is questionable. Although future pioneers or members of ASL were prisoners and were subjected to certain types of repression by Qaddafi, ASL was founded after the individuals escaped from the prison during the 2011 revolution and when they founded the organisation the Qaddafi regime did not exist anymore. Hence, the closest case among the three organisations in this study diverges significanlty from the above mentioned examples.

1.1.1.3. The Ad Hoc Path

In an extreme way, the establishment of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) exposes the crucial issue of the armed groups established by the ad hoc process. They

usually consist of members of the political class who have been driven from power by post-colonial regimes during serious crises. Without depending on existing social or political institutions, ad hoc groups are formed solely for the purpose of taking power by force. They might try to borrow credibility from older practices and use satellite telephones and press officers to impress foreign observers, but such techniques will not conceal their chronic instability (Schlichte, 2009: 44).

Ad hoc groups are "voluntary associations based on self-interest" in Weberian terms, which is their internal logic, the common belief of its members that military success is required to capture the spoils of power (Weber, 1978: 41). The fragile bond binding the initial group together is this mutual interest. A viable source of credibility that could resolve this fatal flaw would only be the leader's charisma. These groups' mechanisms are chronically threatened because any improvement in the situation could give members incentives to abandon the fragile coalition. This is the key explanation why ad hoc groups fragment as much as they do. Any modification of choices is closely observed by all participants who behave with strategic opinions. As soon as they have enough followers to prepare an opportunity to get a bigger share by behaving individually, they leave. The lack of internal regulation, leading to uncontrolled violence with its de-legitimizing impact on the community as a whole, is another issue for ad hoc groups. It is possible to summarize the ad hoc process as follows: when neo-patrimonial regimes, or other political structures under which clientelist networks organize political life, come under extreme strain, political class members would be selectively barred from the spoils of power. Those excluded prefer to mobilize organized violence when they find favourable circumstances, such as sanctuaries provided by neighbouring regimes that are willing to provide protection. If central leaders are able to extend the competence of their party by incorporating military experience, the possibility that exclusion from the rule of clientelism would inevitably lead to a rise in armed resistance (Schlichte, 2009: 44-45).

The ad hoc path of formation and its relative fragility implications for a NSAG cannot provide the explanatory framework for the three Libyan NSAGs discussed in this study as it does not fit any of their respective journeys. There have been anecdotal and other types of evidences pointing to the link between certain figures of Qaddafi regime or its supporters and DAESH in Libya, however, they have been far from constituting the

whole story about DAESH. Even if certain former regime supporters and members conspired with DAESH, this conspiracy is not the main reason and constitutive power that created DAESH. At best, former regime members constituted a fraction of DAESH for the purpose of seeking revenge from revolutionaries and even this does not fit into the path of ad hoc formation to regain power.

The prominent role of intellectuals in ad hoc groups, but also in armed groups arising from the repression process, has much to do with the near relationship that universities maintain with the world's political arena. A state-class of bureaucrats and technocrats is not only replicated by universities. They are also hotbeds of political opposition, especially in times of political crises and increasing social contradictions. What counts, as Derluguian pointed out, are not just academic abilities, such as the ability to devise political initiatives, to address a foreign-language Western public, or to set up an organisation (Derluguian, 2005: 61). The relations, the social capital in Bourdieu's words, accrued during the long years in the cultural environments that are part of the resources of the person, are of equal importance. For active leaders of armed groups, expertise, cultural capital, connections and social capital are important requirements (Schlichte, 2009: 47).

Likewise, universities and intellectual cadres did not feature in any of the three case studies in Libya. The ad hoc path does not fit fully to any of the organisations in question, but even the closest case, i.e., DAESH in Libya did not present any figure or cadre who were known to be either intellectuals or affiliated with universities. No university within Libya functioned as a venue for DAESH mobilisation, either.

1.1.2. Operational and Functional Dimension

It is possible to classify another group of existing works in literature based on their focus on the operational and functional elements of NSAGs. Violence is almost the biggest common denominator of NSAGs, in a way; violence is their language, their way of operating. Of course it has dual effects both positive and negative. Apart from the use of violence and the associated implications on the prospects of legitimacy of NSAGs, service provision to population in the most general terms and operating as a proxy or a surrogate force for a foreign patron are other functions of NSAGs that have divergent implications.

1.1.2.1. Violence and Legitimacy

Armed groups vary little from other social organizations. However, their primary consistency stems from the physical aggression they employ. Owing to the limited period it brings and its psycho-physical consequences, aggression casts a shadow on social relationships. Violence shortens, interrupts, induces irritation, and has lasting consequences. This "shadow of violence" falls on each of the armed groups' individual organizational aspects. What's more, violence is influence. Insurgents need to transform this influence into partnerships that are more secure and eventually into dominance. Armed groups' politics oscillate between mere authority and its institutionalized form, dominance. In order to turn the impact of violence into legal law, armed groups need to obtain legitimacy. Nevertheless, the influence of violence appears ambivalent: political acts and actors are almost both legitimized and de-legitimized. Only those groups that attain a minimum of credibility within their ranks, their societies and the international community will create and retain political supremacy. Of course, there are innumerable explanations why armed groups struggle. Most are connected to the failure to satisfy basic organizational criteria that occur in the organization of military violence and territorial power. The fact that physical action is an inherent element of their way of action separates armed groups from other organisations. And because violence often has both legitimizing and de-legitimizing consequences, armed groups find it especially difficult to succeed. On the road to conquest, being de-legitimized by aggression is the biggest threat. This "shadow of violence" is cast on all relationships maintained or desired by armed groups (Schlichte, 2009: 19-20).

The ‘shadow of violence’ was cast on all relationships between ordinary people and all of the three Libyan NSAGs, turning the former against the latter. Even when violence was not inflicted on ordinary people themselves but on a specific target such as the US ambassador by ASL, the act drew the ire of ordinary people for its destabilising and disturbing effect. It must be mentioned that depending on the way violence is used, whether well-placed or indiscriminate and extreme, its effect on population varies. If violence is used in the way a state authority uses such as prosecution, imprisonment, cracking down on crime and law enforcement it is received well by the population. The instances of this were witnessed albeit limitedly in the acts of all three Libyan NSAGs. However, when violence was used extremely and arbitrarily, the perpetrator of the

violence lost its legitimacy in the eyes of the population, which we could observe in the instances of popular backlash against ASL and DAESH. Nevertheless, loss of legitimacy was not enough to spell the end of either of these organisations. DAESH responded to popular backlash with extreme suppression and its end was not brought about by a popular mobilisation. ASL, on the other hand, resorted to service provision to people in an attempt to weather popular backlash against itself.

1.1.2.2. Service Provision (Domestic)

The provision of services targeting civilians appears to take the form of social, charitable, or public services. Many non-state military actors, like governments, are complex structures that involve social support networks that can include services such as childcare, medical care, education, and even maintenance of infrastructure. Many of these programs have the added advantage of supplying fighters or their family members with "day jobs." (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2008). Some tend to provide services exclusively to members of their own societies, while others, for a variety of reasons, which provide them more widely (Cammett, 2014). These programs may also hold a non-material appeal: the sense of being treated with dignity and accepted as worthy of services at all can be very effective for people who feel neglected or discarded by their government and could well outlast the schools and clinics themselves (Szekely, 2017: 17).

The provision of services by armed groups holds much of the same possible advantages and disadvantages as the provision of state services. As with the provision of public goods by governments, when it helps to show the movement's overall competence and ability to rule, service provision is most effective for insurgent groups (Szekely, 2015). Mampilly argued, convincingly, that greater credibility and public consent are gained by "rebel rulers" who can provide protection, a conflict resolution system, and other goods, such as education and health care, making it easier to maintain territory (Mampilly, 2011) (Cammett & Issar, 2010). The administration of charities and social services often helps to provide additional information for those who are trying to determine whether the existing government is better off or those who are trying to replace it. If every civilian has ever seen a militia fight, there might be little reason for them to assume that it would do a better job of governing than the current regime. The

competent supply of services could serve as useful proof to the contrary (Szekely, 2017: 17).

On the other hand, if the provision of these services comes to act as a form of patronage, those services can prove to be ineffective or even detrimental to those delivering them. In this, the same possible pitfalls as the regimes they aim to challenge are faced by insurgent groups. The Rentier Economics Scholarship argues (broadly speaking) that the production of rents from oil sales, foreign assistance or remittances makes the Authoritarian State autonomous from the public, which becomes the beneficiary of patronage rather than paying taxes. The granting of this patronage makes it possible for the state to buy off opposition and forestall demands for reform, while at the same time establishing a structure in which access to public resources is a matter of personal ties rather than a privilege to which all people are entitled. Corruption is not a by-product of poor governance, but rather, in its own right, an institutionalized system of governance (Anderson L. , 1987) (Beblawi, 1987) (Bellin, 2004) (Lujala, Gleditsch, & Gilmore, 2005) (Migdal, 1988) (Ross M. L., 2012). Money or other advantages can be provided in return for electoral support in the most transactional form of this relationship (Albertus, 2013) (Brusco, Nazareno, & Stokes, 2004) (Vicente, 2014).

The exact contrary is the case in Libyan NSAGs. Although all three NSAGs provided different sorts of services at different times to certain segments of population, MS is the one that provided services on the basis of patronage to a much greater extent than both ASL and DAESH. However, in terms of the type of service provision and its expected benefits for the providing NSAG, Libyan case presents a different experience. At least, the expected benefits from unconditional and widespread service provision did not translate into a longer lifespan to ASL and DAESH, or patronage-based service provision worked much better for MS in terms of longevity.

The first-pattern provision of services (i.e., the broad, unconditional provision of services as a means of demonstrating authority to govern) is much more productive than the latter (i.e., the limited dispensation of services in an explicit exchange for support). Even the first solution has its dangers, however. For one thing, if the organization does not deliberately refuse services to those it does not consider its constituents, certain individuals are likely to use the services for their own sake without necessarily changing

their opinion of the political project supported by the organization offering them; even outstanding services do not always transcend strong disdain for a specific ideology (Clark, 2004) (Berrebi, 2007).

In addition, rather than content, the type of support created by the provision of social service is most likely to be political or ideological. This is for practical purposes. A civilian population that is sufficiently poor to require items like free medical care or education may not be able to offer much material help beyond food, housing, or small sums of money that may not necessarily be needed by a campaign that is well supported enough to create hospitals. Conversely, the tanks, artillery, and rocket launchers that the movement needs are possibly not available to a population poor enough to require such hospitals. True, wealthier individuals may donate out of appreciation for the charitable services of the movement (donations that may represent an important source of funding for those institutions), but in general, the individuals served by the charitable institutions of a militant group are probably not the same individuals who finance their military operations (Kilcullen, 2006). The fact that insurgents still strive to win over the civilian population even though they receive nothing from them in terms of material contributions shows that they need forms of help beyond material resources from them (Szekely, 2017: 19).

1.1.2.3. Serving as Surrogate (Transnational)

The second way of acquiring resources for non-state actors is by trading for them. This takes the form of service as a military proxy in the case of possible state sponsors. Broadly speaking, states are finding military proxies as a way of achieving their agendas without incurring direct military intervention costs on their own (Salehyan, 2008). Such aims can range from basic political control in the target state to the fostering of internal resistance and political instability (i.e., anarchy for its own sake) to the actual overthrow of an enemy government (Byman, Chalk, Hoffman, Rosenau, & Brannan, 2001). Of course, sponsors also have a choice between potential non-state customers, and a potential proxy could be more desirable if it shows at least a minimum degree of competence (such as a record of successful attacks), but sponsors may also provide training to compensate for any deficiencies in this field (Szekely, 2017: 27).

A partnership based on an exchange of sponsoring military services offers access to a broader spectrum of resources. In particular, states funding a military proxy are likely to provide military assistance in the form of finance, weapons, equipment and training, but not necessarily as a refuge within their territory. Non-material support such as public political lobbying and propaganda can also be given occasionally, but not often, but this is clearly less true of sponsors that have gained a military proxy because of a need for plausible deniability. There can, however, be major disadvantages to this approach, even more serious than those suffered by supplying civilians with social services. This first problem is one of durability; in the long term, proxy relationships will prove unreliable because help is not so much purchased as leased. While these relationships can seem similar to those based on mutual ideology from the outside, a relationship based solely on a very utilitarian sharing of service support is somewhat different from a relationship based on sincere solidarity for the aims of the movement. Help that is based on the need for a proxy by the state may be removed if the need for a proxy is decreased. In addition, military proxies are inherently fungible, like weapons and money, without a distinctive ideological commonality -one non-state actor can sometimes set off bombs in an enemy capital just as well as another, and if a more productive or less costly client appears, the patron can abandon his original client in favour of the new one (Szekely, 2017: 27-28).

The second issue is much more serious, and that is the unintended effects issue. Proxyhood also forces a non-state military player to give up a portion of his freedom. However often the interests of the sponsor state can overlap with the interests of its proxy, some distinction will almost certainly be made between them. The state would most likely put its own interests first and challenge its proxy to do so if it is forced to choose between pursuing its own interests or those of its clients. This gives the representatives of the company a choice between concentrating on their own priorities or those of the sponsor whose support might be needed to achieve them. They will alienate a valuable patron if they choose the former, but if they choose the latter, they risk harming mission creeps, loss of reputation in the eyes of civilian constituents, and loss of status and mainstream support for their peer organizations (Byman, Chalk, Hoffman, Rosenau, & Brannan, 2001).

This leads to this form of state funding being a third possible pitfall. Conflict between the sponsor's interests and the militant movement's aims will cause dangerous rifts within the group, as some groups support greater autonomy while others remain loyal to their patron. If the non-state actor is funded by more than one state, the danger of factionalisation is exacerbated, in which case it may find itself pulled in many directions at once. For movements with bases and training camps in multiple states, this can be a particular issue, the commanders of which can become especially dependent on or truly loyal to their hosts. Of course, the danger of schism is less serious if the different sponsors of the movement are allied with each other or at least have similar foreign policy priorities. But if the sponsor states are rivals (or allies who have a fall out), their rivalry may lead to conflict within the client entity, to its detriment, between the individuals or groups most loyal to each state. Sponsorship has the very real ability to warp, divide, and fracture the same insurgent group it is supposed to profit from in this way (Szekely, 2016).

None of the above risks has ever been an issue with MS with regards to its relationship with its foreign patron and MS is the only organisation among the three that would fall into the category of a proxy. Clearly neither ASL nor DAESH was a proxy for a foreign state actor. However, the surrogate or proxy force depicted in previous works do not correspond to the nature of MS. Proxy forces usually have their own sense of identity, organisation, maybe even agency in the first place and they offer their services to a foreign patron. In the case of MS, from the very formation phase of the organisation, it seems to have been designed, formatted, directed by the foreign patron and the former does not enjoy the agency to negotiate certain terms with its patron. Although MS has the flexibility to customise its orientation based on the local environment in Libya, this flexibility does not amount to being able negotiate or divergre from the will of the patron. Acquisition of resources also not subject to the ‘performance’ or ‘skills’ of MS, the resources were and still are provided by the patron to extend the latter’s influence in Libya through the former’s versatile nature going beyond military function.

1.1.3. Political Dimension

NSAGs engage in politics or they have political aspects. Acquiring the much needed both tangible and non-tangible resources, managing those resources, the way of acquiring them from both domestic and international actors all constitute the political

dimension of NSAGs. According to certain scholars, depending on the way each political behaviour is undertaken, the implications are various.

1.1.3.1. Assets

Each non-state military actor (like any other organization) needs a variety of resources in order to survive, or indeed to operate at all (Bell, 1971) (Metz & Millen, 2004) (Byman, Chalk, Hoffman, Rosenau, & Brannan, 2001) (Kalyvas, 2006) (Weinstein, 2006) (Army, 2007) (Mao, 1961) (Guevara, 1961) (Lawrence, 1935). Some are self-evident; weapons, as well as funding, are obviously significant. Materiel and provisions, as well as a base of operations, are also clearly needed. But non-state actors often need a variety of non-material services that are equally crucial. Although it is difficult to wage a guerrilla campaign without weapons or resources, without access to intelligence, political cover, basic training or local knowledge, it is also difficult to do so. Given the nature of guerrilla warfare, this is especially true; since non-state military actors seldom have superior weapons power, they appear to rely heavily on stealth, better local knowledge, and the possession of greater resolve than their traditional military opponents. It is also possible to think of these non-material assets as capital (Szekely, 2017: 11).

Insurgency and counterinsurgency analysts and practitioners have long seen both non-financial and material resources as important. In their respective classic works on the subject, Che Guevara and Mao Tze Tung emphasize the importance of non-material resources such as knowledge of land and local details, as well as material resources such as food, transportation, ammunition, and durable shoes. Similarly, the Counterinsurgency Field Manual of the US Army and Marine Corps lists safe havens, medical care, funding, logistics and training assistance, provisions, recognition of legitimacy, intelligence, transportation, active involvement in 'insurgency actions' and non-cooperation with counterinsurgency forces as essential assets (Army, 2007: 104-105). Insurgency scholars list similar resources; Metz and Millen argue that insurgencies need manpower, finance, equipment, sanctuary, and intelligence to operate (Metz & Millen, 2004), while Bell cites public support, guerrilla tactics training, space to manoeuvre, and a secure base as necessary (Bell, 1971), Byman et al. list safe heaven, safe travel, financial support, political assistance, training, weapons, warriors, intelligence, organizational skills, and ideological inspiration (Byman, Chalk, Hoffman,

Rosenau, & Brannan, 2001). Finally, Bob adds transnational activist networks' access and compassion to the list (Bob, 2005).

Resources from local civilians and sponsoring states are collected. Much of the theoretical work echoes the role of the local community in helping rebel groups (Kalyvas, 2006) (Weinstein, 2006) (Chaliand, 1982) (Johnson, 1962) (Salehyan & Gleditsch, 2006).

Similarly, the value of international state support for non-state actors is also addressed in a great deal of work by both academics and practitioners of insurgency and counterinsurgency. Byman et al. found that state support had a substantial effect on 44 of 74 insurgencies waged during the 1990s (Byman, Chalk, Hoffman, Rosenau, & Brannan, 2001: 9), and Harbom and Wallensteen found that it was a factor in 80 out of 111 civil wars fought between the end of the Cold War and 2004 (Harbom & Wallensteen, 2005) (Byman, 2005) (Salehyan, 2008).

State support in the form of a highly covert one is the most discernible trait of MS among the three Libyan NSAGs analysed comparatively in this study. ASL and DAESH are not known to have been supported by any state actor. It is possible that like many organisations studied in the literature, MS also benefitted greatly from the line of both tangible and non-tangible support from its foreign patron. However, it is not certain whether the flow of foreign support ensured MS' longer lifespan than those of ASL and DAESH as the abundance of resources does not guarantee longevity of an armed organisation by itself, but rather constitutes one of probably many necessary conditions.

It is possible, of course, that certain insurgent groups might have access to types of (primarily financial) support which do not rely on either foreign or domestic relations. In areas with ready access to highly lucrative and easily lootable natural resources, some fortunate militant groups come into being, i.e., those that do not need initial investment in the form of industrial infrastructure to acquire (Lujala, Gleditsch, & Gilmore, 2005). This most generally means alluvial diamonds, which need little extractive ability and are quickly extracted from riverbeds. After the militia in question has captured the territory comprising them, other groups may manage to gain speculative financing from large companies eager to invest in what are often called 'booty futures' or the promise of access to natural resources (Ross M. , 2004).

In the case of three Libyan NSAGs, apart from occasional exploitation of oil resources in Libya through deals with smugglers or direct engagement in oil smuggling, exclusively relying on oil resources to fund and sustain the organisation has not come up in the examination of any of the three organisations. Thus the latest category of NSAGs discussed in the literature, the ones that do not need either domestic or foreign support due to the availability of natural resources does not provide a similar context with Libyan NSAGs.

1.1.3.2. Compulsion Inwards

Civilians' coercion can take various forms. It may include the expropriation of land, houses, farms, companies, natural resources, or vehicles; theft of food, clothing, or other equipment; or the collection of "taxes" on enterprises or individuals. It can include kidnapping civilians for ransom in its more severe ways, or torturing, killing, and raping certain people to instil fear in others (Kalyvas, 2006). It may also include the kidnapping of children and the use of them as child soldiers or forced labour. Using the threat of violence (including sexual assault) to compel villagers to allow a militant group to hide weapons in their basements, for example, sometimes intimidation may simply be about inducing obedience in the civilian population as a way of retaining power over territory (Szekely, 2017: 16).

Yes, looting, theft, and rape are often ends in and of themselves, rather than the means to finance more large criminal objectives (Keen, 1998) (Collier, Rebellion as a Quasi-Criminal Activity, 2000) (Ross M. , 2004). However, there is proof that this is not always the case; since the end of the Cold War, coercive extraction has become more prevalent, as superpower funding has become less available, suggesting that coercion is being used to replace other sources of funding (Duffield, 2001). In addition, even though looting is an end in and of itself for individual combatants, if that constitutes their salary, then it is an essential source of funding for the leadership of the militia, which might otherwise have to find other means of paying its soldiers (Szekely, 2017: 16).

Coercion can be a useful short-term tactic in that, if local citizens are unarmed, it takes little time for planning and sometimes little effort. But since the long-term chances of obtaining non-material resources are likely to harm a group, it is essentially

counterproductive (Army, 2007) (Johnson, 1962: 652). Although intelligence can maybe be acquired by coercion, reliable intelligence can be much harder to acquire that way. Coercion, as Che Guevara and others have warned, is also not terribly useful for obtaining legitimacy, votes, or political access to political capital (Guevara, 1961: 78). And it may backfire; intimidation may inspire people to join enemies of the group or to support counterinsurgency state operations (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2008). In addition, this type of access to resources can become unsustainable in a strictly material context. There will be no more crops to steal and no more peasants to steal from if the militant group goes past simple predatory warlordism and into more drastic measures (massacring villages or even just driving people off their land). In sum, while coercion can be useful for civilians to gain certain forms of material support, this is only true in the short term (Szekely, 2017: 17).

DAESH in Libya resorted this way of procuring some of its resources, or even did so for the sake of committing violence in itself to instill fear and obedience among others; it likely harmed its legitimacy in the eyes of the population. However, a link between this likely loss of legitimacy in the eyes of people and DAESH's demise in Libya cannot be established based on the available evidence.

1.1.3.3. Marketing Inwards

For non-state actors trying to obtain resources domestically, another policy choice is to persuade the local community to provide them because they support the aims of the entity, not because of what it promises (or threatens) to do for them. That is, to the public, the company will sell itself (Murphy & White, 2007) (Bob, 2005) (Ford, 2005) (Hoffman, 2007) (Wood, 2003) (Johnson, 1962) (Army, 2007).

Both commercial marketing and propaganda owe much to the form of marketing discussed here. There are definitely parallels between them: both attempt to alter perceptions in some way; both rely in part on eliciting an emotional reaction to do so; both rely on a variety of media to carry the intended message (O'Shaughnessy, 2004) (McGarry, 1958). However, while propaganda attempts to disseminate knowledge about the cause of the "seller," and commercial marketing seeks to react to or establish a customer need, marketing as defined here refers to an effort to shift not only preferences, but also personalities and narratives. The way future supporters see

themselves in relation to the organisation and the organisation in relation to themselves and to the larger political environment is influenced by successful marketing. Not only does it build on existing affinities between organizations and potential voters, but it may also produce such affinities where none previously existed. This happens through the mechanism referred to as "frame alignment" by social movement theorists. Polletta and Jasper describe frames as "the interpretive packages developed by activists to mobilize potential adherents and constituents." (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). Frame alignment refers to attempts by the leadership of a movement to build the identity of the movement in such a way that it resonates with the identities of future constituents or patrons themselves. Both depend on and are a means of building group identity, that is, a means of "distinguishing 'us' from 'them.'" (Goffman, 1974) (Snow, Zurcher, & Ekland-Olson, 1980) (Benford & Snow, 2000).

Not all ads will be equally successful. Each ecosystem of dispute is characterized by a dominant ideological or ethno-political cleavage that cuts across the entire ecosystem (and sometimes more than one). This implies that the process also has an oppositional or competitive dimension in that any militant group attempting to advance itself and its project must place itself in opposition to its own key opponent, in opposition to opposing narratives and in opposition to other groups pursuing the same narrative. Efficient local marketing presents the mission of the militant group in a way that resonates with the way people see themselves in relation to certain cleavages, while the most effective marketing adjusts the message itself to reflect the aims of the organization itself. In comparison, it is difficult to succeed in marketing efforts that do not align with the way people see themselves in relation to such distinctions, either characterizing them in a manner that seems insignificant to the consumer in question or failing to mention the cleavage at all. Admittedly, without drifting into tautology, measuring whether marketing has been effective is challenging, yet both the presence of marketing strategies and their effect are measurable and observable. Although in some countries, widespread public opinion polling is easier than in others, improvements in attitudes can be convincingly demonstrated by behavioural changes. With that in mind, when there is a normative public acceptance in the target population of the company that a) its adversary of choice is indeed an adversary, and ideally the primary adversary, marketing can be said to have been successful; b) that its perception of the conflict is

right rather than that provided by its rivals; and c) that it is the rightful representative of the conflict (Szekely, 2017: 21).

The first of these tasks is by far the easiest; it is not a hard stance to take to state that one opposes a widely reviled adversary. However, the second and third are more demanding. Intra-group rivalry that leads to "ethnic outbidding," a race to the bottom between elites, disputes about which entity is the "legitimate" representative of the community can touch off as to who can more strictly adhere to ethno-communal legitimacy or cultural purity requirements (Brass, 2005) (Keen, 1998) (Gagnon, 1994) (Saideman & Zahar, 2008). But the ability to set the terms of the debate itself, which is arguably both the most difficult and most important, is the middle part (Gould, 1995). Although it is possible to fail at all of these tasks, ineffective marketing strategies are often those that either fully neglect or cannot fix this aspect (Szekely, 2017: 22).

The particular mechanics of launching a marketing campaign vary from location to location. Marketing at the most fundamental level demands that the public first hear, then understand, and eventually agree with the arguments of the company. The method of ensuring that the public listens and recognizes the narrative of the terrorist group is heavily influenced by accessible communication technologies. These can vary from face-to-face contact to the use of the internet and related technology, to print and broadcast media. Historically, the importance of access to printing presses, radio, and face-to-face communication was stressed both by Che Guevara and Mao Tze Tung. The emergence of digital media, such as the internet and satellite TV, has helped non-state military actors spread their message well beyond their local spheres of control since the late 1990s (Hoffman, 2007) (Kilcullen, 2006) (Payne, 2005) (Lynch, 2006) (Lockyer, 2003). Some militant groups have their own satellite television stations, Al-Aqsa and Al-Manar, like Hamas and Hezbollah, while others have used online media outlets such as Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook extensively to distribute images, writing, videos, and other materials.

Yet more conventional approaches are still beneficial. Graffiti is still an efficient way of signalling its existence in a given territory to insurgent organizations, particularly though forced to operate underground. Street protests are often a very strong vehicle for a militant group to communicate its message, both to the state (often the group's

adversary) and to potential civilian backers, because of their symbolic weight (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007). The ability to rally large numbers of demonstrators is also a way by which a militant group within the society it seeks to serve will argue for its own dominance and legitimacy. This is valid irrespective of the potential for the demonstrations to potentially diminish the state's strength. They do not expect the tanks to be destroyed or the force behind them to surrender when Palestinian young people throw rocks at tanks; rather, they expect other people to pick up rocks, too (Szekely, 2017: 22).

Marketing tactics can be broken into three groups with respect to content: racial appeals, ideological appeals, and performance-based appeals. An often-cited source of civilian sympathy and support for non-state actors is ethno-communal affinity (Horowitz, 1985) (Weinstein, 2006). Organizations that are able to frame themselves as members of a specific identity-based group will gain access to networks that make them much faster than they would otherwise be able to create trust and reputation, making these links extremely valuable (Polletta & Jasper, 2001: 286) (Anderson B. , 1983). But the value of these identities and their boundaries are also far from set. Ethnic identities will involve several different components and not all at all times would be prioritized by all individuals equally. Therefore, ethno-communal marketing is an effort to change the foundation on which ethno-communal identity is established in such a way as to give the organization access to the largest possible constituency. If ethnic boundaries in the region can be changed in such a way that the former rather than the latter becomes the most significant feature in deciding community identity, an organization that shares a common language but not a common religion with a majority of the local population can benefit (Posner, 2005). For example, Hezbollah had to work to persuade non-Shiite Lebanese that its Lebanese-ness and its Arab-ness trumped its Shiite-ness. Other organizations may benefit from pushing for a transnational ethno-linguistic (Arab) or religious (Sunni) identity to be prioritized rather than a local national identity (Lebanese vs. Palestinian) (Szekely, 2017: 23).

Militant groups may also seek help on the basis of what they believe, not who they are. That is, they can argue that, rather than because of mutual ascriptive identity, individuals should endorse them based on ideological commitment (Wood, 2003). In its potential audience, ideological marketing is less limited and may rely on large domestic

political objectives that are shared by those who may be less sympathetic to other aspects of the agenda of the group or even hostile to its claimed ethnic identity; Bayat points out that even if they differ on other issues, movement members may have "partly shared interests." (Bayat, 2005).

Finally, non-state actors can, on the basis of their expertise in key areas, attempt to market themselves. One version of this focuses on the military success of the party and claims about its ultimate victory's inevitability. This may include the suggestion that resisting the movement will be a bad long-term bet, as they are likely to win eventually. Another version of this may concentrate on the integrity of the party as governors or administrators, often with regard to their greater honesty or superior moral character compared to their competitors. However, in any case, a distinction should be made between real military success or administrative competence and the capacity of the company to mobilize support by integrating these features into its messaging. A terrorist group that is militarily very successful but does not convey this badly to the public would not have the same advantages as a group that is skilled at positively publicizing its achievements and "spinning" operations, even though its actual record is less than stellar (Hoffman, 2007: 312).

Marketing can be an exceptionally powerful way of mobilising support if done well. Effective marketing creates a high level of support within the civilian community, making it difficult for a person to openly denounce the organization that considers it a part of its constituency. The genuine sympathy it creates gives permanent access to non-material resources to militias, such as intelligence and local information, credibility and political support, as well as whatever material resources are available to the civilian population. As such, in the long run, it can prove more competitive and contribute to greater overall performance. Of course, for all non-state military actors, not all marketing techniques are similarly practical; although all terrorist organizations have at least some of these strategies at their disposal, there are particular frameworks that would be hard for those specific groups to follow credibly. While no partnership is permanent, effective marketing has the ability to create more stable and resilient relationships than those based on other strategies. But, of course, it can be difficult to measure whether marketing has actually been effective or not. The militant group needs to determine both where it stands and where the society sees itself in relation to the

prevailing cleavage characterizing the ecosystem of conflict in order for marketing to succeed. It must then not only express its opposition to the main opponent, but also persuade the public that its approach is the right one and that it is the rightful guardian of its interests and the bearer of its concerns (Szekely, 2017: 24).

Whether this phase has taken place is not always easy to determine. It is difficult to measure attitudes and political norms, particularly in contexts such as ongoing civil wars where public opinion polling is impractical or risky. There may be recorded instances of civilians specifically referring to the publicity initiative of the militant group when describing their organizational support, but such information is not always available. Here, the solution proposed by Stathis Kalyvas is taken to solve this dilemma, which is to concentrate on actions rather than behaviours, since the former is far more easily observable (Kalyvas, 2006) (Valentino, Huth, & Balch-Lindsay, 2004). Therefore, marketing can be considered to have been effective when the goals of that marketing modify their actions to behave in ways that are in line with the articulated goals of the militant party (Szekely, 2017: 24).

Marketing inwards was -and still is in the case of MS- was performed by all three Libyan NSAGs in question in this study. Both in terms presenting the organisation as the truthful bearer of principles and values of the population and framing the cleavage between the organisation and its adversaries as a binary depiction between “us” and “them”, three Libyan NSAGs engaged in marketing efforts. Of course, each of them applied the marketing tactics in their own ways and their respective success rates in applying them are understandably divergent. Still, rather than functioning as a distinctive variable that would signify the differences among the organisation, marketing efforts constitute a rather common denominator among them.

1.1.3.4. Compulsion Outwards

Though "state sponsors of terrorism" are given a great deal of political and media coverage, not all state assistance to non-state actors is voluntary (Byman, 2005) (Salehyan, 2008).

As with civilian coercion, coercion of states can take various forms. It can involve stealing of money or supplies of assistance or the use of abuse, like murder or the threat of it. It may also take the less clear form of threats to harm the domestic credibility or

regional prestige of the government. In pressuring states to provide funding or weapons, the latter can be especially useful. However, the bulk of "involuntary support" appears to come in the form of a refuge, when a poor state is unable to deter a terrorist group from using its territory as an operational base (Byman, 2005) (Kalyvas, 2004). This form of intimidation can take various forms. Maybe one day, the militant group simply arrives on the territory of the state and refuses to leave; maybe it takes over a refugee camp and creates a "state within a state"; maybe it makes a side deal with local political leaders, circumventing the central government's authority; or maybe it persuades its regional allies to pressure the state to allow the militant group to join. For the conduct of a successful insurgency, a "safe heaven" is crucial, particularly at the early stage when the group is most vulnerable (Salehyan, 2009) (Brynen, 1990) (Salehyan, 2008). In several ways, sanctuary makes it possible to gain these other forms of support (Byman, 2005); it promotes fundraising (Salehyan, 2008), offers space for weapons training and storage, and can even make counterinsurgency forces think twice before chasing insurgents across foreign borders.

Part of this strategy's appeal is that it can be applied relatively rapidly, making it an enticing option for a sudden or escalating danger faced by a non-state actor. But militant groups can also resort to coercion if they find that a particular state needs a particular asset and the state in question refuses to provide it. This is more likely to be true of the sanctuary than of other services. Money and guns are practically fungible, since money from one source is as good as money from another, and no matter where they are purchased, two similar guns work just as well. But this is not the case with territory. Due to the proximity to the border with its opponent state (Salehyan, 2009), or because there is a community of refugees who it considers to be constituents living in the region (Brynen, 1990), or because it is geographically conducive to training, or simply because it is difficult to reach and easily defensible by guerrilla tactics (Fearon & Laitin, 2003), a militant group might have a strong preference for a particular piece of territory. This can make coercive methods remarkably attractive if the state government in which this territory is situated refuses access. But there are essential disadvantages to coercing a state. For one thing, it has limited usefulness -while a territorial base can be gained by force, it could be more difficult, if not impossible, to gain other material resources (such as weapons and financial support) in this way, and almost impossible to acquire non-

material resources. If the organization receives all its required funding from other sources and requires only a conveniently placed safe heaven, intimidation can be useful, but this will extract a heavy price down the road when the insurgent group needs non-material support (Szekely, 2017: 27).

As the bulk of coercing a state actor entails using a state's territory for sanctuary or as a springboard for an armed organisation to organise its attack from that territory, this policy option by a NSAG and its implications are not relavant for three Libyan NSAGs. ASL, DAESH, and MS all existed and operated exclusively within the limits of the boundaries of Libya.

1.1.3.5. Marketing Outwards

Just as organisations can market themselves to potential civilian constituents, they can market themselves to potential sponsor states as well. In several cases, the elements of effective marketing to sponsor states are equivalent to those of marketing targeted at a domestic audience. The militant group must persuade the possible sponsor of three things: that the opponent of the militant group is genuinely worthy of hostility; that the organization's understanding of why it merits hostility is the right one; and that the organization is a more valid symbol of the grievances it articulates than any of its rivals. It is tough to do all of this effectively. States can be more difficult to persuade than citizens that another state should be openly viewed as an enemy, which is what sometimes amounts to giving open support to its non-state opponent, partially because the stakes are rather higher for publicly adhering to this view. However, if the prospective patron is already hostile to the adversary of the militant party, that can considerably smooth the operation. As with domestic marketing, it could be the second of these three elements, the need to persuade the sponsor state that the reading of the essence of the ethnic cleavage by the militant group is right, which may be the most difficult. It would be more difficult for a radical group whose political project depends on a nationalist narrative to persuade a patron state that sees things in pan-religious terms to give its support, unless it can frame the problem in a way that resonates on both sides (Szekely, 2017: 29-30).

The marketing mechanics for sponsoring states are a little different from those for the general public. Many insurgent groups seeking state support can and do use public

outlets, such as the media, to improve their regional profile (particularly given the advent of transnational forms of media like the internet and satellite TV). Marketing to sponsor states in this way is similar to the effectiveness of marketing to civilian constituents. There is, however, still a great deal of private lobbying that takes place behind closed doors, if necessary (Seale, 1990) (Shlaim, 2007).

Marketing tactics aimed at sponsoring states appear to use three closely linked (and sometimes overlapping) techniques, as with attempts by insurgent groups to market themselves to the civilian community: appeals to ethno-communal relations, appeals to traditional political orientation, and appeals focused on the legitimacy that can be conferred by support for the party. There is evidence that the first of these methods can work very well; Saideman has argued that foreign policy can be influenced by ethnic links in solid, if often unexpected, ways, while Gleditsch discovers that transnational ethnic ties increase the possibility of external insurgency support (Gleditsch, 2007) (Saideman, 2001) (Saideman, 1997). Such sympathy, in its more severe form, irredentism, can lead to militia support as a proxy for the state's own ethno-political territorial ambitions (Moore & Davis, 1998) (Saideman & Ayres, 2008) (Byman, Chalk, Hoffman, Rosenau, & Brannan, 2001). Appeals to ethno-communal sympathy, however, are likely to be most effective if the non-state actor can frame itself as the sponsor state's ethno-communal kin. While ethnicity is seen here as a category that is built rather than set, this construction is based on a menu of characteristics (such as language, religion, or geography) that, while sizeable, are not infinite (Laitin, 1998) (Saideman, Dougherty, & Jenne, 2005) (Posner, 2005).

Ideological appeals, on the other hand, are far more flexible since a larger spectrum of organizations have access to ideological structures. For the most part, they appear in literature in the sense of the Cold War, when it was often enough to yield lucrative superpower funding to be (or pretend to be) communist or anti-communist. Many of these groups rebranded after the end of the Cold War in an attempt to pursue other sources of support and ideological legitimacy (Kalyvas, 2001) (Metz, 2007).

A third and particularly efficient strategy is to appeal to the desire for ethnic and ideological legitimacy and prestige of a state. This kind of marketing is rooted in the group's desire to define itself as being able to confer a certain kind of ideological

credibility in the eyes of both representatives of other states in the region and their citizenship. That is to say, in order for this form of marketing to be successful, the group must create a generally agreed standard by which support for the group in question constitutes an ideological litmus test for regimes in the area and for the cause it claims to serve. Marketing techniques targeted at governments can, in this sense, be seen as related to those aimed at civilians; this credibility is primarily derived from perceived public support. A common client's sponsorship enables the state to shore up its ideological credentials while justifying the suppression of opposition at home at the same time. Similarly, by appealing to a state's desire for increased regional legitimacy, militant groups might be able to attract support, especially if their rivals already have client militias fighting in the same conflict (Byman, Chalk, Hoffman, Rosenau, & Brannan, 2001).

This policy choice also is not relevant for the three Libyan NSAGs as marketing outwards to seek a state actor's sponsorship was not an option with ASL and DAESH throughout their existence. The one who relied considerably on a foreign state's sponsorship has been MS but as mentioned before, the way it procured that sponsorship did not necessitate its active efforts to convince its patron or MS did not have to compete with any other potential competitor for the same state's sponsorship as depicted in previous works.

1.2. Conceptual and Analytical Framework

There is no theory of or for NSAGs in the sense of an all-encompassing explanatory one in the existing literature. There are approaches, perspectives and even works applying existing social theories to various aspects of NSAGs such as violence, legitimacy, sovereignty, quasi-state properties, survival strategies and so on.

The nature of the case studies of this thesis, namely ASL, DAESH and MS; their varying trajectories over time and the peculiar context of the protracted Libyan crisis in which the NSAGs in question existed and operated, provide a valuable opportunity for the development of a different analytical and explanatory framework than the existing frameworks in the literature. All the existing frameworks are extremely helpful in offering an analytical and explanatory tool for the trajectories and prospects of a given NSAG based on several approaches presented and reviewed above. The reasons why the

existing frameworks and approaches are not applied to the case studies here explained above citing several significant differences between them and the current study. However, the distinct opportunity provided by the specific case studies here in terms of contributing to the analysis and explanation of the NSAGs phenomenon is worth investing in an enriching and complementary framework since it would be useful in other or similar contexts and regions featuring other or similar NSAGs.

Most of the works and frameworks in the literature tends to focus on the certain methods, strategies, behaviours etc. displayed by the NSAGs at various levels and their impact on the prospects, success, failure, survival etc. of those NSAGs as determinative factors, underscoring the significance of the 'agency' of the NSAGs. The legitimising and de-legitimising effects of the use of violence by a NSAG; how or through which path a NSAG is formed in the first place; instrumentalization of service provision to achieve popular consent and legitimacy; performing governance; the way the essential resources (material and non-material) are procured for the maintenance of the NSAGs; the way the external relations and relations with foreign patrons are managed etc. are some examples of the existing aspects that have been paid attention by scholars and researchers. Furthermore, the organisational aspect and dimension entailing the inner workings and nature of an NSAG; the operational and functional aspect and dimension entailing for what purpose the NSAG was formed and used as well as the ways it acts; the political aspect and dimension entailing how an NSAG regulates and manages its relations with both domestic population and external actors; the territorial aspect and dimension entailing the implications of a specific piece of land ruled or controlled by an NSAG for their prospects and lifespan are some of the main categories under which the existing approaches are organised in the literature. However, in most approaches and frameworks, the emphasis on the 'agency' of the relevant NSAGs in determining their own fate is quite discernible.

Moreover, major differences between the context and nature of the case studies in this thesis and ones in the literature merits the development and application of an original or a tailor-made framework to better analyse the patterns in the empirical phenomenon in question. To name a few, in Karakuş's work, which is one of the most recent ones, as well as in many other studies in the literature, the state of civil war or intrastate war is an incessant condition in which the NSAGs in question exist and operate. In other

words, NSAGs in most studies spend the entirety of their existence in a state of civil war or intrastate war. Although the state of civil war existed in Libya after the 2011 revolution at intervals, three NSAGs discussed here did not spend the entirety of their existence in a state of civil or instrastate war. There were simply times of calm and even when there was conflict between parties, some NSAGs enjoyed the luxury of staying out of it for a while, which is a considerable advantage to either insulate that NSAG from the damages of conflict or even to exploit the preoccupation and mutual consumption of its rivals.

Likewise, there is a clear difference between the nature of the conflict environment in the bulk of the literature and the one discussed in this thesis. One of the most common contexts in the literature is a rebellion or an insurgency against a monolithic albeit imperfect state structure. In the case of post-revolutionary Libya, nothing of this sort was ever witnessed. It was rather an atomised landscape divided into multiplicity of armed groups, quasi-state authorities that could not impose their authority beyond certain regions and even cities and the intersection of armed groups and quasi-state legitimacy. The dynamics between a conflict between a bi-vectoral conflict divide and a multi-vectoral one would naturally be different.

Furthermore, there are futher discrepancies between the findings or propositions of many works in the literature and the case studies in this thesis. For instance, controlling territory brings about certain advantages to a NSAG such as a greater scale of recruitment among others. However, despite not controlling territory MS outlived both ASL and DAESH who controlled territory to varying degrees. Another example is there is usually a sequence between territorial control and service provision by a NSAG, in the sense that service provision follows territorial control. Although this sequence was witnessed in the case of both ASL and DAESH, MS did not fit into the conventional sequence as it has not controlled territory. Moreover, governance usually implies a more sophisticated capacity by a NSAG, which is usually affiliated with a better performance by that NSAG compared to peers and a longer lifespan. Nevertheless, MS again does not fit into this conventional conviction as it never governed exclusively a territory, at best; it assumed certain roles within an existing governance structure. ASL and DAESH on the other hand engaged in governance in varying degrees but ended up short-lived compared to MS. Another discrepancy stands out in the impact of territorical control on

the behaviour or conduct of a NSAG. Certain works see a positive correlation between territorial control and a higher level of flexibility in the behaviour of a NSAG. DAESH in Libya does not fit into this presumption as controlling territory did not render it more flexible either in its treatment of population or in its creed. Again, as opposed to many case studies in the literature, for none of the three Libyan NSAGs, territory had a symbolic significance, value, and meaning. The ones who controlled territory behaved very pragmatically and controlled wherever they could and they did not engage in developing a narrative to transform the territory they controlled into something bigger. Lastly, another proposition in the existing literature is that the distance between a NSAG and the wider population it is in contact with in terms of political ideology impacts the former's overall performance and longevity. Thus, if the distance is big, this has a negative impact on a NSAG's durability and longevity. In Libyan case, the distance in terms of political ideology has been huge between all NSAGs and the wider population, yet only one of them, MS proved to be long-lived.

In addition to the emphasis on the 'agency' of NSAGs during their lifespan, it would be enriching to pay due attention to the 'structure', more specifically, the nature of the strategic environment or landscape in which NSAGs exist and operate; in other words, perform their 'agency'. Taking into account the 'structure' in analysing the prospects of the NSAGs is highly significant as the 'structure' inevitably determines the limits and possibilities of the 'agent', or it deprives the latter from a full liberty of action, which makes it a crucial component in analysing the performance and trajectory of the 'agent'. No matter which agency it is, it does not exist and operate in an absolute vacuum.

Figure 1: How the Analytical Framework Works

Having emphasised the significance of the 'structure' in determining the prospects of the NSAGs, the 'agency' still matters. The strategic outcome for the NSAGs is rather determined by the interaction between the 'structure' and the 'agent'. But it must be emphasised that as a result of the interaction, the structure, which is the nature of the strategic environment and landscape surrounding each of the NSAGs proved to be more decisive on the fate of each organisation. The 'agent' displays various behaviours such as assertion, accommodation, and belligerence toward a set of different actors in its environment, 'friends', 'foes', or neutral actors throughout its lifespan. As a result of these various behaviours displayed by the NSAGs as 'agents' strategic outcomes for the NSAGs also vary in the forms of ascension, survival, and demise. However, various behaviours are not solely capable of generating the outcomes for the NSAGs. For instance, assertion does not guarantee ascension; accommodation does not guarantee survival; and belligerence does not necessitate demise automatically for the NSAGs in their dealings with other actors sharing the same strategic environment.

Figure 2: Assertion

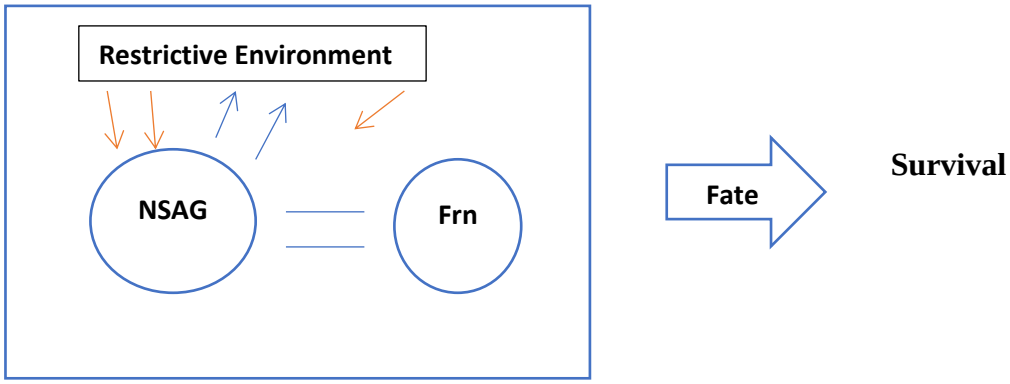


Figure 3: Accommodation

What makes these various behaviours count and generate meaningful results is the congruity of the 'structure', the strategic environment, with the behaviours of the 'agents'. Assertive behaviour by the 'agent' brings about ascension only if the strategic environment is 'permissive' in the sense that it grants an extensive and comfortable area of manoeuvre to the NSAGs without checks on their power and expansion. When the strategic environment is not 'permissive', but instead 'restrictive/repressive' the assertive behaviour by the 'agent' ensures nothing but trouble and weakening for the latter. Likewise, when the strategic environment is 'restrictive/repressive' in the sense that it puts heavy pressure on the 'agent', the outcome of mere survival occurs as long as and only if the 'agents' accommodate one another and maintain solidarity as allies in the face of the pressure and challenge posed by the environment. Here, the behaviour of the 'agents' matters in weathering the challenge and remaining afloat, but, only for a very temporary and short period of time. It is true that accommodation is what ensures the survival of the 'agent' instead of its demise, but at the end of the day the pressure put by the environment gradually wears out the resolve of the allies and eventually breaks them. Moreover, the outcome of demise is hardly experienced in a 'permissive' strategic environment. Unless bolstered by a solid solidarity with a group of likeminded 'agents', the bellicose behaviour almost certainly ensures the outcome of demise under a 'restrictive/repressive' strategic environment. Nevertheless, if the strategic environment is 'permissive', bellicose behaviour toward other actors might not harm the 'agent' at all, reiterating the validity and determinative power of the strategic environment over the fate of the NSAGs as 'agents'.

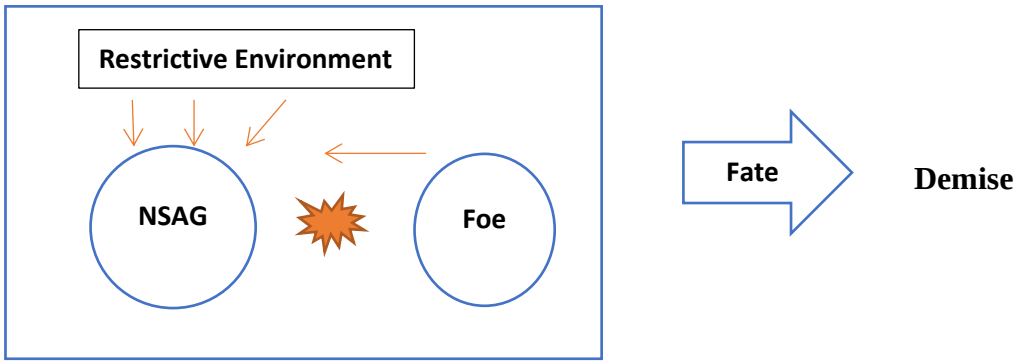


Figure 4: Belligerence A

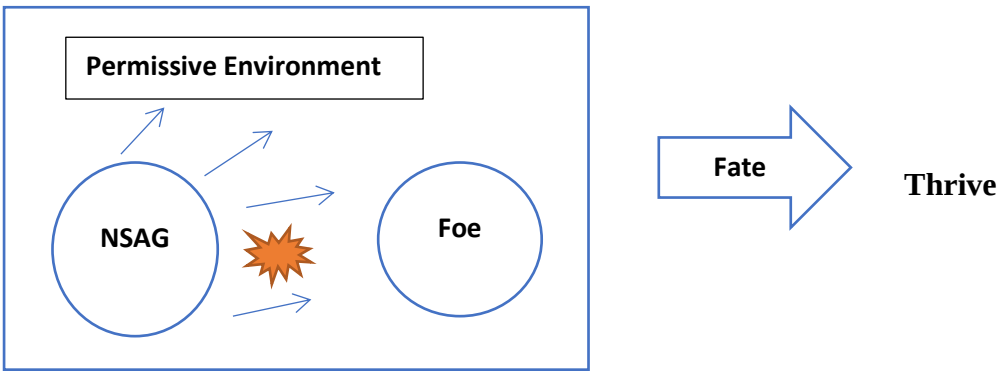


Figure 5: Belligerence B

Therefore, despite having a 'stopgap', 'band-aid', or mitigating impact on the negative effects of the environment on the trajectory of the NSAGs, it is safe to argue that the behaviours or other elements deployed by the 'agents' have a secondary impact on the trajectory and fate of NSAGs. It is the nature of the strategic environment that primarily impacts and determines the trajectory and fate of the NSAGs as 'agents'. Thus, due attention must be paid to the nature of strategic environment -the 'structure'- not less than the performance, discretion and choices of the NSAGs -the 'agents'-, which exist and operate within the contours of the former, in analysing and explaining the disparate trajectories and fates of the NSAGs.

2. CHAPTER TWO: EMPIRICAL BASE: WHO ARE ASL, DAESH AND MS?

In this section, the respective evolutionary paths of ASL, DAESH, and MS as well as the respective strategic environments in which they existed and operated and how the changes in the nature of their strategic environments over time impacted their reaction, behaviour, conduct, and ultimately their fate are presented to establish the empirical base and reference point for the discussion of these three organisations' respective trajectories.

2.1. Ansar al-Sharia in Libya (ASL)

It is important to understand the environment into which ASL was born after the 2011 revolution in Libya. In Libya, where tribal affiliations hold significant influence and centralization is feeble, long-standing conflicts have profoundly disrupted social cohesion. Following the assassination of Muammar Qaddafi in 2011, violence escalated in Libya. Geopolitical, conjunctural, and ideological developments have collectively contributed to creating an environment that fosters the escalation of conflict in Libya (Telci, 2020).

Qaddafi's legacy did not help; on the contrary, exacerbated the ongoing crisis. During the Qaddafi era, Libya's institutions were deliberately destabilized, leading to the establishment of a fragmented and non-hierarchical structure. This de-centralization of authority aimed to prevent those institutions from posing a threat to Qaddafi's rule (Telci, 2020). The deliberate undermining of institutions and institutionalisation by Qaddafi paved the way for the subsequent inability to build state and maintain authority.

The tumultuous political environment after the February 17 revolution in Libya yielded the surfacing of the ASL and had been the essential condition of the organisation's capacity to freely function in the country. The ousting of Muammar al-Qaddafi in 2011 produced an authority void, which enabled provincial armed groups to constitute spheres of influence mostly beyond the authority of Libya's interim government in Tripoli. No ruling power succeeded in taking hold of the country since and constituting a monopoly of violence. Rather, competing armed groups with usually clashing missions consolidated their status as the capable powerbrokers. This brought about a deadlock where a continuous conflict among a plethora of actors such as jihadis,

Islamists, nationalists, revolutionaries, counterrevolutionaries and ethnic minorities for control over the country's future held the Libyan politics hostage (Eriksson, 2016) (Mattes, 2016) (Barr, Dignity and Dawn: Libya's Escalating Civil War, 2015).

It is obvious that the peculiar post-revolutionary environment consisting of state collapse, authority vacuum, fragmentation -both political and military- and more specificallly, an atomised scene filled by countless armed formations and their infighting and rivalry provided very favourable environment for ASL to emerge, operate, carve out a space and impose its will on that space for a while.

ASL emerged as a result of collaboration between two factions, Ansar al-Sharia in Benghazi (ASB) and Ansar al-Sharia in Derna (ASD). The more outstanding of the two factions, ASB was founded by Muhammad al-Zahawi in Benghazi in February 2012, while ASD was established by Abu Sufian bin Qumu, who was a former Guantanamo prisoner, in Derna (Zelin, Know Your Ansar Al-Sharia, 2012). *Katibat Ansar Al-Sharia* was the first organisation, when new jihadi organisations started to appear, in Benghazi, which initially proclaimed itself in February 2012. Its leader Muhammad al-Zahawi was known to have been a prisoner in Qadhafi's notorious Abu Salim prison in the past (Fitzgerald, 2012). The group later altered its brand to Ansar Al-Sharia in Libya (ASL) to attempt and indicate that it was a national actor. Notwithstanding that initially most of its operations were limited to Benghazi, in a short while they spread out, which underscores that the organisation managed to draw some interest in Libyan public (Zelin, Libya's Jihadists Beyond Benghazi, 2013).

ASL had affiliations with other *katiba*s, such as Katibat Abu Ubaydah bin Jarrah and Saraya Raf Allah al-Sahati. Many of these battalions were among those that took part in ASL's first "annual forum" on June 6, 2012. As seen in the public records of the forum around a thousand people turned up. However, ASL was thought to have had merely a few hundred fighters then (Zelin, Know Your Ansar Al-Sharia, 2012). Later the organisation enlarged, some two thousand individuals attended the second annual forum in June 2013 (Zelin, Libya Beyond Benghazi, 2013).

ASL flourished in terms of its reputation principally thanks to its concentration on *da'wa* endeavours. Whereas jihadism is widely seen through the lens of violence, this tendency overlooks the impact that non-aligned jihadi scholars have on the direction of

jihadi practice. Since the immoderation of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and Al-Qaeda in Iraq, *Minbar al-Tawhid wal-Jihad*, a library of jihadi firsthand reference resources established by Sheikh Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, who was once incarcerated in Jordan, tried to guide the jihadi community to a rather "genuine" kind of sacred war. For this, Maqdisi constituted a *sharia* commission consisted of scholars of the same opinion in 2009, which issued fatwas replying to inquiries on an assortment of subject matters from the political to the quotidian (Wagemakers, 2011).

One of the chief criticisms Maqdisi posed and aspired to produce a course correction within the jihadi action was his distinction between the concepts of *qital al-nikayya* (battling to harm or ruin the foe) and *qital al-tamkin* (battling to solidify one's capacity). Maqdisi elaborated on this in his 2004 work in which he asserted that *qital al-nikayya* offers solely short-range tactical successes, while *qital al-tamkin* offers a model for solidifying an Islamic state. In this manner, Maqdisi underscores the significance of designing, organisation, upbringing and *da'wa* endeavours (Zelin, Libya Beyond Benghazi, 2013).

The establishment of ASL was probably a reasonable result of the execution of Maqdisi's notions. Surely, one of ASL's most effective ways of moving forward its agenda was via the organisation's social services programme. This aided it to raise adherents and a wider attraction than its fellow jihadi groups, paving the way for a prospective Islamic state (Zelin, Libya Beyond Benghazi, 2013).

One of the most fruitful activities that ASL assumed responsibility for was a robust anti-drug struggle fulfilled in collaboration with the Rehab Clinic at the Psychiatric Hospital of Benghazi, the Ahli Football Club, Libya Telecom and Technology Company and the Technical Company. This hints that there was support for ASL's notions at a town level. Furthermore, it underscores the bona fides and favourable function some perceived in ASL for Libyan society. In addition, ASL engaged in cleaning streets, religious instructions, contests for minors, security patrols, and initiating medical clinics and religious schools (Zelin, Libya Beyond Benghazi, 2013).

Yet whereas *da'wa* was the group's primary concentration, ASL also turned into a virtuous arbitrator of Libyan society, participating in *hisba* (ordering right and prohibiting wrong, generally implies vigilante actions) and *jihad*. Al-Zahawi confessed

that his organisation engaged in the destruction of Sufi mausoleums and sanctuaries (Maher, 2012). Besides, ASL raided the European School in Benghazi and seized publications on anatomy, which in ASL's perspective was obscene and antagonistic to religion. There was also a footage where ASL men in Sirte were administering chastisement by lashing (Zelin, Libya Beyond Benghazi, 2013).

The most notable performance of jihad for ASL was its alleged engagement in the assault against the US Consulate in Benghazi on September 11, 2012. Although there was no official claim of responsibility, the parlance employed in the first declaration from ASL's spokesman Hani al-Mansouri implies that certain militants in the organisation contributed to the assault. Furthermore, the ideological parlance employed and circulation of themes incompatible with Libya on ASL's authorised Facebook page hints closeness with Al-Qaeda's wider ethos (Zelin, Libya Beyond Benghazi, 2013).

As ASL flourished it became capable of extending its sphere beyond Benghazi. With the advent of spring 2013, indications of the organisation evolving into a nationwide one surfaced. ASL's leaders assembled with the Ubari tribe on March 19, 2013. Soon after, ASL organised its first activity outside of Benghazi in Tripoli as a component of its anti-drug struggle instruction series. Later, ASL proclaimed the formation of a new subdivision in Sirte on June 28, 2013, and another one in Ajdabiya on August 6, 2013. All indicated the reality that the organisation enlarged in both capability and impact (Zelin, Libya Beyond Benghazi, 2013).

The rampage against the US consulate in Benghazi in September 2012 became a critical watershed moment for both ASB and ASD. Neither of the factions claimed responsibility of the attack; however since a commander of ASB Ahmed Abu Khattala was claimed to have organised it, both factions were assumed to be culpable for the attack (Exclusive: Libyan Islamist Says He Was at U.S. Consulate during Attack, 2012) (Kirkpatrick, Ahmed Abu Khattala Capture May Shed Light on Benghazi Attack, 2014) (Pentagon Releases Official Timeline of Benghazi Attack, 2013). This incident made both ASB and ASD the focus of international attention for the first time, and also it was decisive in the designation of the organisations as terrorist organisations by both the UN and the US State Department in 2014 (Terrorist Designations of Three Ansar Al-Shari'a Organizations and Leaders, 2014) (Joscelyn, UN Recognizes Ties between Ansar Al

Sharia in Libya, Al Qaeda, 2014). The consulate attack also took an immense toll on the image of both organisations within the country and triggered a wave of rage against them. Widescale demonstrations flared up against ASB and ASD after the consulate attack, compelling them to recede from their headquarters in Benghazi and Derna (Militia Groups in Eastern Libyan City "to Disband", 2012) (All Benghazi Militia to be Put Under National Army Control, Others to be Disbanded: Official, 2012).

Although neither of the factions of the ASL, ASB and ASD, claimed responsibility for the consulate attack, ASL has been the widely believed perpetrator until this day. And even if a marginal faction of ASL undertook the attack without the chain of command, it gives an idea about the way ASL perceived itself, its power and its surrounding environment, which made the former believe that it could assert itself, impose its will, and conquer it as it liked to the extent of killing the US ambassador without fearing the consequences. On the other hand, the popular reaction against ASB and ASD did not constitute a change in the nature of ASL's strategic environment as it was not an attempt to pick up on ASL militarily that would decisively force it to dissolution. It was rather a setback for ASL that pushed it to adapt to the reaction of its environment.

After these incidents ASB's Commander Muhammad al-Zahawi launched a campaign to rebrand that hoped to redeem Ansar al-Sharia's image in the society. The organisation started to concentrate more on philanthropy function to change the impression of the public towards itself. ASB also rebranded itself as Ansar al-Sharia in Libya (ASL), omitted 'brigade' from the name to send the message that it was not primarily a military organisation. At the same time it attempted to present itself a nationwide group (Zelin, Libya's Jihadists Beyond Benghazi, 2013), despite having a footing solely in Benghazi and maybe in Derna then (Eljarh, 2013).

Map 1: Actual Presence and Control by ASL

Adding a civilian dimension to the armed organisation by engaging the civilian population in the form of philanthropic activities was a modest and relatively primitive attempt by ASL to render itself more lasting through attempting to gain greater acceptance by wider public or even building popular consent. It was arguably a survival strategy by ASL in the words of Polat, Yesiltas, and Kardas (Polat, 2022) (Yeşiltaş & Kardaş, 2023). Better and more successful versions of this attempt to be more resilient and lasting were displayed by Jabhat al-Nusra in its transformation to Jabhat Fath al-Sham and later to Hayat Tahrir al-Sham in Syria and PYD displayed the most successful and sophisticated version by managing to mimic the Westphalian state sovereignty in many respects (Yeşiltaş & Kardaş, 2023). In the same vein, ASL's rebranding by substituting "Benghazi" and "Derna" localities with "Libya" in its name seems to be another and complementary move to communicate its "Libyanness", and emphasising its common denominator with wider Libyan public, especially given the simultaneity of this move with ASL's nationwide claim whilst its actual existence was limited to Benghazi and Derna. Nevertheless, all these attempts still took place and became possible in a permissive strategic environment, which enabled ASL to expand. Taking advantage of the disorderly security and political environment in the country, ASL succeeded in ramping up its power, especially in Benghazi and later it moved on to set up offshoots in other cities such as Ajdabiya and Sirte (Zelin, Libya's Jihadists Beyond Benghazi, 2013) (Engel, Libya's Civil War, 2015). Furthermore, ASL is known

to have run cells in other cities in the country such as Tripoli, Sabratha and Al-Bayda (Ajilat under Sabratha Control; IS Supporters Seen, 2015) (Zelin, The Rise and Decline of Ansar Al-Sharia in Libya, 2015).

Map 2: Offshoots and Cells of ASL in Libya

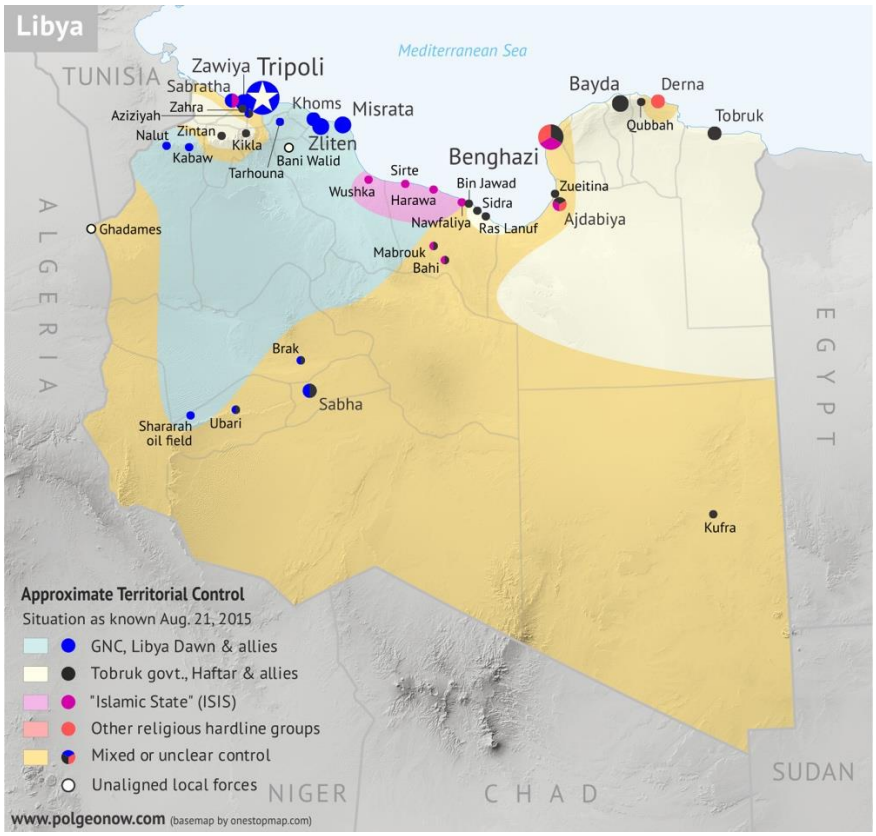
Since 2014, Libya's political disputes have escalated into a deadly civil war, with growing involvement from regional and international actors. From 2014 onwards, illegitimate forces led by former General Khalifa Haftar gained influence in the Eastern region of Libya. These forces actively sought support from local and regional allies, as well as from international actors (Telci, 2020).

In May 2014, armed groups attached to Haftar embarked on an armed operation unchartered by transition government called “Operation Dignity” to dislodge Islamist armed organisations from Barqa. Haftar took advantage of largely agreed suspicions that some Islamist armed organisations were culpable of the assassination of security officers and were collaborating with non-Libyan jihadis such as Al-Qaeda and its regional offshoots as well as Syrian armed organisations. More polemically, Haftar extended his bluster and targets to contain promises to purge the country from Islamists, involving the backers of the Muslim Brotherhood (Blanchard, 2016: 23).

Haftar’s armed adversaries and his comparatively more temperate political antagonists reacted strongly to his provocations. Through the end of 2014, the Operation Dignity armed operation endured various blows on the battleground at the mercy of Ansar Al-

Sharia, which was identified as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation by the US, and the organisation's partners in a developing alliance known as the Benghazi Revolutionaries' Shura Council (BRSC). Haftar's military groups fought back, trying to thrust into Benghazi, yet falling short of defeating resolute recalcitrance until breaking through in the beginning of 2016. Extensive districts of Benghazi became ruined in combat and UNSMIL documented aggregate displacement among the inhabitants of Benghazi (Blanchard, 2016: 24).

Although in the formative phases of Operation Dignity, ASL with the support of BRSC could withstand the attacks by Haftar, the indiscriminate nature of the Operation, which turned more than half of Benghazi into a ghost city and the superior firepower especially in the latter phases were consequential in crushing ASL and BRSC eventually.



Map 3: Control Map as of August 2015 during Operation Dignity

Source: "War in Libya: Map of Control in August 2015", **Political Geography Now**, August 22, 2015.

When Khalifa Haftar embarked on the Operation Dignity in May 2014, ASL was obliged to concentrate the majority of its energy on military undertaking, and it was hence rendered incapable of maintaining the *da'wa* operations to the same extent. As a matter of fact, it is very questionable that ASL had the capability to perform *da'wa* in any consequential manner by the end of 2016. Whereas starting from mid-2014, ASL's publicity activities mirrored the shifts in the field in Libya in terms of its concentration on the fighting against Haftar, persistence in the organisation's communication strategy was also visible. It went on promoting the line that ASL is a benign current in society through presenting Haftar as the adversary of the February 17 Revolution and a war criminal attacking innocent people, whilst depicting ASL as the protector of the revolution and civilians (Zelin, The Rise and Decline of Ansar Al-Sharia in Libya, 2015).

ASL's ability to engage in non-military activities such as its contact with people through *da'wa* activities prior to the Operation Dignity falls into the category and phase of ASL's ascension as an NSAG. Prior to Operation Dignity, ASL felt comfortable enough to consolidate itself as an organisation, asserted itself as a forceful actor to the extent of assassinating US ambassador, modified itself with the introduction of non-military qualities such as service provision and *da'wa* when faced with popular backlash among others. ASL's trajectory prior to Operation Dignity points to a trend towards greater expansion via adaptation and introduction of more non-military qualities. It is likely that had it not been for the disruption by Operation Dignity, ASL would further entrench, consolidate and expand its will in the permissive environment it used to exist.

Another shift in ASL's course of action following the Operation Dignity was its participation in alliances, dubbed as "Shura Councils" with other jihadi and Islamist organisations in its important hubs of impact such as Ajdabiya, Derna and Benghazi among others. As stated earlier, Haftar's crusade attacked against Islamists from all persuasions, without separating rather temperate Islamists from rigid jihadi organisations. The common intimidation felt from Haftar seem to have consolidated the organisations in question and initially they accomplished substantial achievements on the battleground, motivating ASL's then commander al-Zahawi to proclaim Benghazi an Islamic emirate in 30 July 2014 (McGregor, 2014). Nevertheless, both ASL and its

allies endured weighty blows after that point. Earlier, ASL had substantial existence in a handful of cities; later its existence became largely limited to Derna and Benghazi, where Haftar stamped down the whole city with the exception of Ganfuda area and the Sabri and Souq al-Hout neighbourhoods in the heart of Benghazi (Other Jihadi Actors, 2016).

ASL was member of the Benghazi Revolutionaries' Shura Council (BRSC), which consisted of the majority of the main Islamist armed groups such as the Raf Allah Al-Sahati Brigade, the February 17th Martyrs Brigade, Libya Shield along with certain lesser organisations (Engel, Libya's Civil War, 2015: 7). Even though there is not adequate data on the mechanism through which the BRSC was formed, various elements hint that ASL was the leading organisation in the alliance. ASL was repeatedly cited in this manner in the Libyan press and al-Zahawi's being the first leader of BRSC hinting at the same direction (Ghariani Tells Libyans to Join Fight against Haftar in Benghazi, 2016) (BRSC Statement Suggests Benghazi Ansar Leader May Be Dead, 2016). ASL's comparative military capability vis-à-vis the other organisations in Benghazi was also exposed by the reality that they seem to have embraced some aspects of ASL's more radical doctrinal stances, and that BRSC's political platform mirrored ASL's doctrine (Engel, Libya's Civil War, 2015: 6). A textbook example is the 19th dispatch, which is plainly more in line with ASL's doctrine than, say, with the organisations related to Muslim Brotherhood in the alliance. It follows that BRSC did not accept democracy or political parties, no matter what they are, i.e., Islamic or secular. On the other hand, in Derna, ASL seemed to have figured rather modestly in the provincial Shura Council, the Mujahideen Shura Council in Derna and Its Suburbs (MSCDS), in which an Al-Qaeda affiliated organisation Abu Salim Martyrs' Brigade was identified as the leading organisation. Even though ASL's first commander in Derna, Abu Sufian bin Qumu was previously a military leader in MSCDS, ASL generally appeared to have functioned autonomously from the Council since June 2015 (Zelin, The Rise and Decline of Ansar Al-Sharia in Libya, 2015). Then clashes erupted between Daesh and MSCDS and ASL chose to stay impartial in this fight (Eljarh, 2016).

While ASL preserved its distinct individuality in Derna, it got more and more inseparable from BRSC in Benghazi. The organisation seems to have made a deliberate

choice to formulate most of its operations via BRSC. One rationale for this might be that BRSC, to a lesser degree than ASL, had its name sullied by link to terrorism. In contrast to ASL, BRSC was not denominated as a terrorist group by the UN, and the other organisations in the alliance presumably permitted BRSC to seem less radical than ASL proper. As mentioned earlier, if ASL aspired to exhibit a more agreeable façade of Salafi-Jihadism to the society, the organisation's judgement to promote itself via BRSC would seem like a reasonable amplification of the same frame of mind (Skretting, 2017).

Whereas ASL's participation in Shura Councils permitted it to construct closer links with more temperate organisations, it also rendered the organisation more exposed to the doctrinal confrontation with Daesh. A textbook example was the 11th issue of Dabiq magazine in which DAESH's then emir in Libya Abu Al-Mughira Al-Qahtani reviled ASL's jihadi underpinnings by denouncing the organisation for coalescing with revolutionary groups connected to the "apostate government in Tripoli", pointing to the GNC administration in Tripoli as well as Libya Dawn. Whereas ASL swiftly issued a riposte to this assertion, another declaration uttered by BRSC after a while demonstrates that BRSC and ASL truly collaborated with Libya Dawn. Combined with the powerful doctrinal appeal of DAESH after its proclamation of the "Caliphate" in June 2014, ASL's links to more temperate Islamists caused the organisation the loss of scores of militants to DAESH, not to mention its whole offshoot in Sirte in 2015 (Zelin, The Islamic State's Burgeoning Capital in Sirte, Libya, 2015). Nevertheless, ASL seems not to have endured additional substantial desertions to DAESH after that point. As a matter of fact, it is very likely that DAESH's appeal to Libyan jihadis diminished as its riches plummeted in Iraq, Syria and Libya. To illustrate, above three hundred DAESH militants were claimed to have defected to ASL in Derna after MSCDS succeeded in routing out DAESH from the city (Eljarh, 2016: 9).

ASL was also a considerable fighting force, which did not yield to Haftar-led coalition easily. The earliest incursion that could be imputed to ASL was the attack against the US Consulate in Benghazi in 11 September 2012. Following this game-changer attack, there was a respite in ASL's operations for 13 months during which ostensibly no attack was ascribed to the organisation (Eljarh, 2013). Starting from October 2013, ASL once more embarked on executing intermittent assaults against both military and non-military

targets. The earliest leap in assaults and fatalities happened in May 2014 when the Operation Dignity started whereby 90 individuals died due to the attacks of ASL. The second chief attack by the Operation Dignity against Benghazi between October-December 2014 was the most fatal time period by a long shot due to nearly 600 recounted deceased as a result of ASL/BRSC assaults, which corresponded to nearly 40 % of casualties in the whole period. The quantity of casualties per month since January 2015 stayed quite steady as around 33 individuals died monthly. A remarkable leap was witnessed in April 2016 with 65 casualties; whereas August and September 2015 recorded 10 casualties each; and lastly December 2015 and January 2016 recorded 4 casualties each, because of relatively less lethal assaults in the latter two periods (Skretting, 2017).

The bulk of the assaults (86%) were aimed at targets that had military quality, and these assaults corresponded to the huge preponderance of casualties (92%). Most of these fatalities stemmed from "ordinary encounters". It seems that most of these assaults was executed by assorted sorts of light weaponry, frequently reinforced by rocket launchers and sniper rifles. The quantity of Operation Dignity forces deceased increased in 2016 because of IED detonations and landmines. BRSC was claimed to have used tanks in an assault for the first time on 1 January 2015, however, this was not followed by another example or report that either ASL or BRSC used tanks. Hence it seems like a rather one-off occasion. ASL was claimed to have shot down three fighter aircraft of the Operation Dignity forces in January and February 2016, which hints that the organisation had procured advanced ground-to-air arms such as MANPADS (Ansar Al-Sharia in Libya Displays MANPADS, 2014). Ten "sacrifice operations" were ascribed to ASL or BRSC between 2013 and 2016; however they claimed responsibility for only three of them. All sacrifice operations aimed at the Operation Dignity forces, yet some of them cost the lives of civilian passer-bys. All of these assaults were executed with explosive-laden vehicles that were crashed into the installations and control points of the Operation Dignity forces. There were no cases of sacrifice operations executed with explosive vests or equivalent apparatuses (Skretting, 2017).

When it comes to assaults against non-combatants, the obvious bulk aimed at persons that ASL views as its political competitors such as other Salafis and followers of Haftar. The better part of these assaults (61%) against non-combatants was carried out by

rockets (LNA Planes Bomb Militants' Supply Vessels off Benghazi, 2015), and these ones also corresponded to the biggest proportion of total non-combatant casualties (around 70%). The majority of these attacks by rockets appeared to have been reciprocating strikes against the quarters that backed Haftar in Benghazi and most of them were executed when ASL was suffering weighty squeezing by Haftar's troops (Ansar Al-Sharia Appears to be Firing Missile Indiscriminately, 2014). There are five documented instances of assassinations against non-combatant targets, yet the actual figure is probably to be greater. Since organisations in Libya rarely claim responsibility for assassinations, it is hard to verify whether ASL or another organisation perpetrated them. There were also countless additional assassinations that were executed within the same time span (Seven Killed in Benghazi as Wave of Assassinations Continues, 2014). It should also be mentioned that there are no instances of ASL claiming responsibility for assaults directed against non-combatants. The fact that ASL assaulted chiefly active combatants and ostensibly attempted to evade being affiliated with assaults targeting non-combatants indicates that the organisation tried to pose as a guardian of ordinary civilians (Skretting, 2017).

All of the attacks by ASL were executed in Libya, and the vast majority of them were directed against Libyan citizens during the time span in prospect. On the other hand, attacks aimed at non-Libyan individuals and diplomatic missions occurred conspicuously between September 2012 and May 2014. Even though the total rate of assaults within this time span is quite marginal relative to the ensuing intervals, it is remarkable that four out of twelve assaults by ASL documented until May 2014 were aimed at non-Libyan citizens and that three of these four assaults aimed at Western nationals. This rate does not definitely give the whole context, since there were a number of assaults on diplomatic missions in Benghazi preceding the one against the US Consulate on 11 September (Libya Unrest: UK Envoy's Convoy Attacked in Benghazi, 2012).

ASL was an organisation that could operate only on local and regional, rather than global capacity. The organisation did not execute attacks beyond Libya, nor did it or any of its allies issued any authorised publicity products where it unambiguously threatened to follow through. As for the menace ASL constitutes on a provincial level, the organisation plainly showed its purpose to hinder any political course that could

bear an amicable settlement of the crisis in the country. The organisation fiercely disapproved democracy as a valid structure of authority and unequivocally declared many times that it would not abandon its arms unless an “authentic Islamic state” was founded in Libya. ASL did not possess as many fighters as Haftar. The fact that Haftar’s quantitatively ascendant army could not succeed in capturing whole Benghazi for a very long time, despite having declared that the conquest was close at hand many times since 2014, suggests that ASL and its coalition partners certainly exerted consequential warring capacity (Libya's Haftar Vows "near" Victory as Benghazi Clashes Kill 20, 2015).

ASL’s chief objective was to set up a long-lasting existence in the country through cultivating local people. Since its origination in 2012, the organisation tried to market itself as a benign current in society by underscoring its function as a guardian of the ordinary civilians and by understating its function as a violent group and its links to Al-Qaeda. The organisation’s aspiration of earning grassroots sympathy was to a great extent illustrated in its actions that involved violence: ASL chiefly attacked combatants and abstained from executing widescale assaults against non-combatants to shun estrangement of the local people. Nevertheless, ASL opted for random assaults on non-combatants residing in districts ruled by Haftar’s forces when under weighty coercion. The organisation also did not avoid politically induced assassinations of non-combatants (Skretting, 2017).

Since the beginning of 2014, ASL did not execute any attacks against foreign nationals and diplomatic missions in Libya (Scaravilli Back in Italy, Libyan Kidnapping Still A Mystery, 2015). What brought about this outcome were mainly the shifts on the ground in Libya and likely boiled down to these causes: most foreign diplomats were withdrawn from Libya after 2014 because of the deterioration of the security environment in the country (Foreign Ambassadors Return to Libya under New Government, 2016). Moreover and probably above all, the battle with Haftar’s Operation Dignity took primacy and kept ASL preoccupied with it in the following period. Lastly, the fact that earlier assaults against Western diplomats such as the one against the US Consulate in 2012 provoked a popular reaction to ASL could be another reason why the organisation did not execute more attacks of this sort (Eljarh, 2013). The organisation was importantly debilitated after it proclaimed an Islamic emirate in

Benghazi in mid-2014 (Blackman, 2016) (Joscelyn, Libya's Terroist Descent: Causes and Solutions, 2016).

2.2. DAESH

The emergence of DAESH in Libya as a phenomenon seems to be interconnected with the Syrian civil war. There were certain assessments that Syrian war pulled scores of Libyan youths since 2012, and some analysts attributed the ascent of DAESH-associated organisations in the country to the homecoming of some of those Libyan combatants from Syria in 2014 (Wehrey & Alrababa'h, Rising Out of Chaos: The Islamic State in Libya, 2015). US military officials assessed the organisation's power at nearly 3,500 militants in the end of 2015, yet in the beginning of 2016, high-level US officials assessed that number had increased to as many as 6,000. On February 9, 2016, CIA Director John Brennan stated for the Select Senate Committee on Intelligence that they viewed Libya as the most significant field of operations for DAESH apart from Iraq and Syria fields, that DAESH possessed a few thousand militants by 2016, it assimilated certain organisations within the country such as ASL, which was quite potent before DAESH's ascent. This kind of terrorism and extremism flourished throughout the years in the country. As DAESH's boundaries of the Iraq and Syria field were being constrained around 2016, certain amounts of foreign fighters were understood to have redirected into Libya. Thus, Libya turned into a place of attraction for people not only within the country but also for the ones from abroad and the African continent. In short, Libya was viewed by the CIA as highly significant for DAESH's operations (Blanchard, 2016: 10).

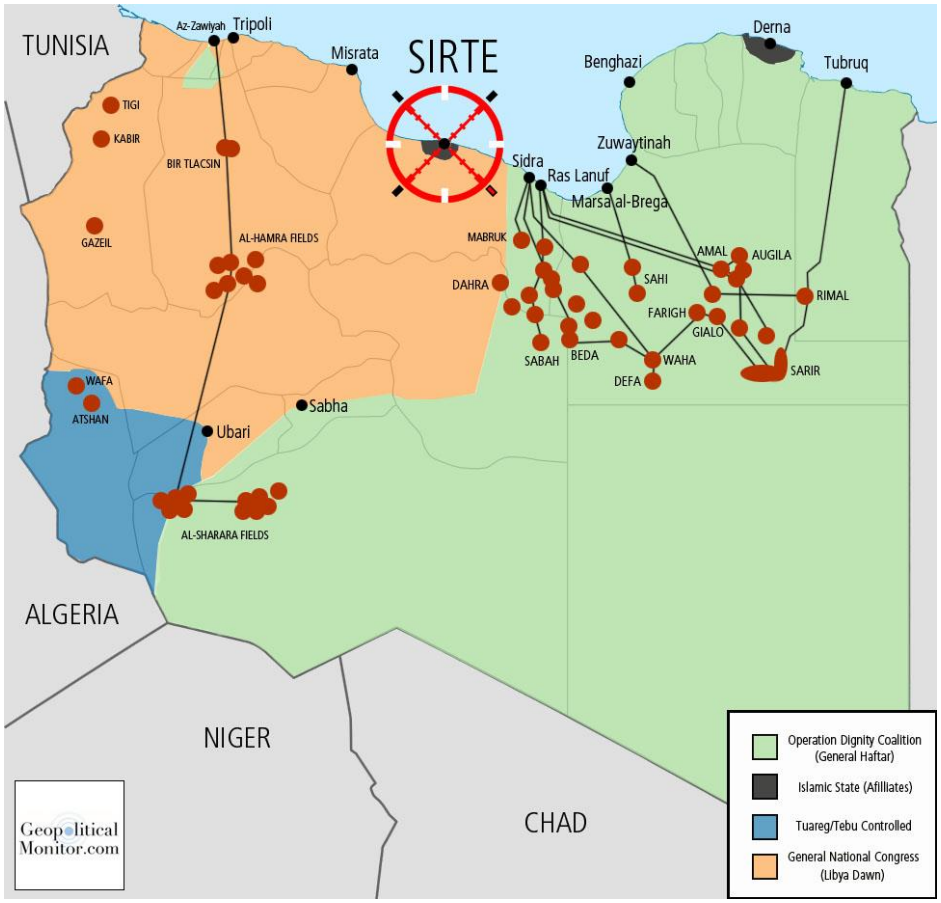
Since the end of 2014, DAESH followers took charge of Sirte and struggled with both eastern and western Libyan forces as part of an endeavour to enlarge its lands. Fighting against the eastern Libyan forces ruined critical national petroleum infrastructure and afterwards DAESH carried on pushing for ownership of the national petroleum resources in the region. DAESH militants in Sirte also embarked on offensives towards the west against the Misratan forces and in May 2016, DAESH militants took hold of an important local intersection at Abugrein, south of Misrata (Blanchard, 2016: 10).

As witnessed in other contexts, DAESH followers in Libya fought against local armed organisations involving Islamists, which did not embrace its faith or acknowledge the

jurisdiction of DAESH leader and self-professed caliph Baghdadi. DAESH supporters tried to enforce their authority on the town of Derna but were driven out from the city by an alliance of Islamist actors. In Benghazi, DAESH followers were beleaguered and vanquished in certain districts of the city by several LNA-associated groups (Blanchard, 2016: 10).

DAESH backers kept encountering a reaction from antagonistic tribal factions, local armed groups and Islamists. In April 2016, then US Africa Command Commander General David Rodriguez stated during a Pentagon press statement that Libyan armed organisations confronted DAESH rendered it a lot harder for it to manoeuvre in Derna, Benghazi and Sabratha. These organisations countered the expansion of DAESH in various regions across the country (Rodriguez, 2016).

In January 2016, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) General Dunford stated that US was considering making a resolute military move against DAESH in line with the political process in the country and President Obama elucidated that the US military had the authorisation to expedite military power. President Obama expressed his opinion that the 2001 Authorization for the Use of Military Force was suitable for the case of DAESH. A US air attack purportedly eliminated a high-level DAESH commander in eastern Libya in November 2015 and another US air attack against DAESH militants in the western Libya city of Sabratha purportedly eliminated dozens of suspected militants in February 2016. Many of those that were eliminated in the latter air attack were purportedly Tunisian nationals. In the beginning of 2016, US Defence Department officials said that there were several US troops in Libya attempting to found communication with forces on the ground with an aim to assess the developments (Cook P. , 2016). The media coverage in May 2016 referred to anonymous US officials as saying that units of US troops served in and around Benghazi and Misrata as part of these endeavours (Ryan M. , 2016). Furthermore, by May 2016, the US and other third parties carried on overseeing the security conditions and sporadically hitting terrorist elements in numerous regions, involving targets linked to DAESH's extensive presence in Libya (Blanchard, 2016: 1).



Map 4: DAESH presence in Libya as of June 2015

Source: "Map: Islamic State Makes Gains in Libya", **Geopolitical Monitor**, June 10, 2015.

Libyan experience of DAESH in Sirte was somewhat ephemeral since it set out in 2015 and terminated in December 2016 when the organisation was vanquished in military terms by Libyan military forces backed by international airstrikes (Wintour, 2016). DAESH's leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi approved the DAESH provinces, (*wilayat*) in Libya as *Tarabulus* (Tripoli), Barqa and Fezzan in November 2014 (Estelle & Zimmermann, 2016). Sirte turned into the home base of the Tarabulus *wilayat* and throughout 2015 ascended to be DAESH's most powerful *wilayat* after Syria and Iraq (Zelin, The Islamic State's Burgeoning Capital in Sirte, Libya, 2015).

The ascendance of DAESH as the reigning power in Sirte evolved in parity with the Libyan civil war delineated by a military split simply based on Eastern and Western regions (Wehrey & Badi, 2018) and with the leading armed forces of West and East more concentrated on battling each other, DAESH succeeded in taking advantage of the

subsequent power void. In addition, other regional rivals, most distinctively ASL fighters in Sirte began to be afraid of the intrusion of Operation Dignity forces and thus tried to line up with more powerful forces. DAESH in Libya, which had the obvious endorsement of DAESH Central, appeared to be appealing, as it drove an unequivocal understanding of ruling. In the end, DAESH outsmarted ASL in Sirte (Lister, 2016) and numerous fighters owed obedience (*bay'ah*) to the self-professed Caliph al-Baghdadi (Cook, Haid, & Trauthig, 2020).

Lastly, Sirte had its peculiar significance. Since it was the hometown of Muammar Qaddafi, numerous provincial tribes sided with his regime and in the period after the February 17 Revolution the city was perceived as the symbol of the loathed former regime (Wehrey & Badi, 2018). After 2011, vindictive and riotous armed forces were strenuous and new form of administration could not be founded. Unlawful actions and high-handed personal punishments increased and in the absence of an operational law enforcement, Sirte became ripe to have authority enforced (Wehrey, When the Islamic State Came to Libya, 2018). Plus, the choice of brutal authority of Daesh also equipped the provincial forces with vengeance instruments for what they reckoned as unjust dealing following the revolution in 2011 (Cook, Haid, & Trauthig, 2020).

This experience is marked by two chief dynamics. First, DAESH in Sirte was an offshoot, which had discernible links with DAESH Central in Syria and Iraq, but also cultivated existent provincial jihadi organisations. Second, DAESH in Sirte instituted itself in a city where real regional grudges were exacerbated by recent past and a tangible authority vacuum. DAESH in Sirte rested on local establishments preceding the February 17 Revolution in 2011 as well as jihadi administration forms that were already created (Estelle & Zimmermann, 2016) (Engel, The Islamic State's Expansion in Libya, 2015) (Stevenson, 2016). They also conspicuously redesigned regional establishments such as the Ouagadougou Conference Centre, which was employed during Qadhafi time to host international events and turned it into their camp, where they organised sittings of Islamic teaching and sharia law (Cook, Haid, & Trauthig, 2020).

The crew that was working in implementation of DAESH's type of law and order in Sirte was a blend of three sets of actors. First, local jihadis that had defected from ASL to DAESH. Second, local stakeholders such as tribes connected to the Qadhafi regime

recognised in DAESH either a defence against more revenge, or at a minimum a stopgap alternative that let them to recuperate their sway. Third, foreign fighters that were already DAESH militants dispatched from Syria and Iraq, or the ones that arrived in Libya from generally bordering countries to sign up with DAESH (Zelin, 2018).

Nevertheless, DAESH envisaged ruling Libya from the beginning, i.e., DAESH was attracted by over-representing its existence and making the population believe that it was DAESH that oversaw holding law-breaking rates down. This was not the case for Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria, which initially laboured to form local bonds, behaved less savagely, and acted more susceptible to local conditions. Congruent with the customary model of founding jihadi rule, DAESH in Sirte also initially concentrated on Islamic teaching, sermon and later on shifted to security provision and judicial affairs (March & Revkin, 2015) (Zelin, 2016). Considering the defined circumstances in Libya in general, and in Sirte in particular, in 2015, the law-and-order element was especially crucial for DAESH obtain local esteem and somewhat backing (Cook, Haid, & Trauthig, 2020).

DAESH's *hisba* organisation in Sirte was a more powerful, more extremist variant of the already present ASL *hisba* organisation, prior to which, there had been the absence of a law enforcement that recalled by the locals dramatically. DAESH depended on former associates in the security organisations who displayed penitence and then owing obedience to the Caliph. Following this procedure, existing associates of the security organisations were incorporated into DAESH's system. The command, on the other hand, was generally non-Libyan. The chief of the local *hisba* was an Egyptian national called as Abu Abdu Misri (Cook, Haid, & Trauthig, 2020).

In the initial stage of governance in Sirte, which was in Spring 2015, DAESH began advertising its security machinery and the way it stamped down unlawful acts and thwarted other menaces to residents. The depiction of an operational and dependable law enforcement body persisted to be the centre of gravity of DAESH's order in Sirte. To illustrate, in December 2015, DAESH circulated a film from its Tarabulus *wilayat* that featured fragments of its *hisba* body in Sirte and their everyday actions. In the film, inhabitants of Sirte lauded DAESH implementing *sharia* and providing security for the city. In February 2016, in another film circulated by DAESH displayed vehicles with *al-hisba* signs on them, presenting an extensive conversation with a *hisba* operative from

Sirte who explicated why he desired to live by and implement *sharia*. Furthermore, the film displayed that DAESH dominated social and individual life entirely, stopping by shops and butcheries examining things whether they were *halal*, and seizing and burning the things that were *haram*, which happened to be books most of the time. The extensive permeation of public domain by DAESH was also articulated by a number of interviewees who dwelled under DAESH, explicating that although DAESH did not purge former staff from their positions, DAESH militants continued to examine to guarantee that instructors implemented gender segregation in school where these examiners were frequently mentioned as being foreigners (We Feel We Are Cursed: Life under ISIS in Sirte, Libya, 2016).

The judicial structure enforced by DAESH in Sirte was separated into tribunals for public and private affairs. The designation of judges was managed in a strict hierarchical way meaning that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi chose or outright dispatched local leaders to Libya who were responsible for ordaining new judges as well as determining which judges to retain (Ayyub, 2016) (Zelin, 2016).

Reportedly, plenty of the existing judges kept their positions in Sirte. This was possible for two reasons: first, DAESH rendered it somewhat comfortable for individuals to choose joining their ranks whereas concurrently applying bitter penalties for the ones who rebelled against it (We Feel We Are Cursed: Life under ISIS in Sirte, Libya, 2016). Likewise, the fortunate co-optation of ASL in Sirte was critical, for instance, the desertion of high-ranking ASL jurist, Sheikh Abu Abdullah al-Libi, to DAESH in March 2015, conveyed a powerful stimulus to other ASL fighters as well as carrying a qualified *sharia* judge into the organisation (Wehrey, When the Islamic State Came to Libya, 2018). Second, the actors that were integral part of the existing judicial structure were overpoweringly connected to the Qadhafi regime, who would benefit from collaborating with DAESH. One especially prominent case occurred in February 2015 when forty-two personnel at the Ministry of Interior repented and owed obedience to Baghdadi (Zelin, 2016). Lastly, DAESH also enlisted new staff facilitated by DAESH militants openly inviting people in Libya and abroad to team up with the organisation. To illustrate, Abu Hamza al-Misri reached out to jurists specially to team up with the organisation and enforce *sharia* (Zelin, The Islamic State's Burgeoning Capital in Sirte, Libya, 2015). This element of keeping accomplished judges in their positions that

possessed local relations aided DAESH in Libya when it was introducing its governance structure in Sirte as it supplied the organisation effectiveness and legitimacy in the eyes of the local residents thanks to many of the judges' legacies (Cook, Haid, & Trauthig, 2020).

Once the fledgling judicial structure installed, DAESH in Sirte began not only commanding societal institutions owing to *hisba*, but also started to chastise populace with capital punishments if they behaved against DAESH's understanding of sharia. Owing to two judicial structures and *hisba* in concert, DAESH succeeding in paving the way for ruling a previously solely primitively ruled and in some measures disregarded and assailed territory since it dealt with personal and public affairs. Residents and IDPs that ran away from DAESH's authority in Sirte underscored the cruelty of the practice, but also stated that it was not erratic and did not appear to be motivated by partisanship and felony was fundamentally absent during DAESH's governance. In the end, regardless, DAESH's judicial structure was characterised as "not Libyan" since it was excessively cruel, yet for a while any collective reaction towards DAESH's authority was surpassed by the ongoing civil war in the country (Lister, 2016) and taking into account the state of affairs in Sirte, elementary lawfulness already supplied least dignity to local people, which at any rate for a while was capable of producing a fair amount of legitimacy for DAESH's authority (Cook, Haid, & Trauthig, 2020).

DAESH's judicial system developed within a certain environment. In Libya, the environment was a combination of the absence of a functional local law and order system following the descent of an authoritarian, across-the-board structure during Qadhafi era, alongside existent grudges, and search for vengeance. In practice, the identification, judicial proceeding and capital punishment of assumed undercover agents and wizards especially was prevalent during the authority of DAESH in Sirte. DAESH in Libya concentrated on individual matters, betrayal, espionage and witchcraft. DAESH in Libya, like its counterparts in Syria and Yemen, seem to have assumed the existing local judicial organisations: courts and police stations. In terms of methodology, swearing allegiance to Baghdadi was a precondition to join either the court mechanism or *hisba*. Still, the organisation depended on local associates too and encouraged collective integration with the organisation. The public opinion for DAESH as a capable law and order machinery was critical and during its authority in Sirte, it

succeeded overpoweringly in providing safety and founding a mechanism that while being cruel, was viewed as evenly cruel to everyone. In the case of DAESH, capital punishments in public were frequently recorded and extensively advertised. The capital punishments were also utilised to sermonize the people on DAESH's doctrine and communicate admonition (Cook, Haid, & Trauthig, 2020).

Daesh in Libya proved that it had both an international aspect with foundations in wider global structure and a local aspect, which necessitated answering to local players, structures, and elements in socio-political context it was functioning in. The function that was served by the governance for the aspirations of DAESH was notable. The case of DAESH in Libya underscores the significant function that jurisprudence served in its endeavour to acquire legitimacy and aid these goals to keep or govern territory and enforce *sharia*. Thus, it was obliged to balance between acquiring legitimacy at the local level by sufficiently heeding the local considerations and goals through its execution of governance and *sharia*, and wider strategic objectives, which might comprise international aspirations and targets. This kind of balance is not always smooth and the example of DAESH also underscores the strain between transnational and local aspirations and elements (Cook, Haid, & Trauthig, 2020).

2.3. MADKHALI SALAFIS (MS)

Madkhali Salafis are a new generation of violent extremist organization (VEO), and a NSAG which has been operating across Libya with a purely religious movement façade. This religious movement façade often obscures its actual quality for many observers; thus, it is not treated in the same way with other much more conventional VEOs such as DAESH, ASL or Al-Qaeda. More importantly and unlike other NSAGs, Madkhali Salafis (MS) occupy and aims to dominate all aspects of life ranging from security sector, media, and religion to education, which makes its modus operandi very different than those of conventional VEOs.

The emergence or ascendance of Madkhali Salafis also coincides with several dynamics at national and regional levels. Temporally, their ascendance, more or less, coincides with the emergence of Khalifa Haftar in Libya, and they became much more prevalent once ASL and DAESH were eliminated Libya. Also, the rise of Madkhali Salafis became much more salient with the counter-revolutionary movement epitomized and

kick-started in the coup against late Egyptian President Muhammad Morsi in 2013. Although Madkhali Salafis were dormant before the February 17 Revolution, they took action after the revolution by penetrating armed groups and spreading their ideological narratives. Here is how the process works:

> "The most important and effective thing they did was blacklisting the people in the security sector. They shifted from idea to practice after the revolution. They tried to infiltrate all armed groups, and they were the ones who convinced Haftar to take action" (Köse & Öztürk, 2020, s. 99).

As Libya is a country awash with countless militias formed after the revolution, any actor with an agenda must have a militia of its own or must cooperate with them. Hence, as an organization with ambitions to dominate the country, Madkhali Salafis did not spare militia groups as a target. They formed their own militias, infiltrated the ones that they did not form, and they also infiltrated the quasi-state institutions in the security sector such as intelligence and police. This web of armed formations constitutes the armed and violent wings of the organization (Köse & Öztürk, 2020, s. 99-100).

Assassinations against certain figures in society are a further example of the Madkhali Salafis' aggressive nature as a group. These murders are committed with deliberate intent and a clear strategic plan to advance the objectives of the organization and its foreign backers. A fatwa supposedly issued by Rabi al-Madkhali, the group's spiritual leader who resides in Saudi Arabia, is what is indicated by a "foreign fatwa" above. People think that the group is controlled by Saudi intelligence through its religious head Rabi al-Madkhali based on the group's moves and their consistency with purported Saudi national goals.

The ability of Madkhali Salafis in Libya to activate their social network within society is one of their significant influences over public space. The respondents think they have two strategic focuses. The first is a private-public setting where private schools, in particular, use their curricula to spread their message:

> "Their [Madkhali Salafis] pecuniary resources come from a Saudi Arabia. They generate their income from pilgrimage (Hajj and Umrah) and selling Saudi goods in Libya. Recently, they started to open private schools.

> Misrata's population is 500,000, and they have 20 schools in Misrata only. Last year, they used a building to open a university strictly for Salafis" (Köse & Öztürk, 2020, s. 100).

The second tactic is to strengthen their message throughout both mainstream and alternative social media platforms. Through books, leaflets, brochures, cassettes, and more recently YouTube channels, they spread their message. One of the answers, a political figure from the February 17th revolution, mentioned such:

> "Madkhalis run a lot of radio channels, they have weapons, and they have their militia forces. Those who might balance them in society do not have any such power. The authority of 'fatwa' [Dar al-Ifta] struggles to inform people correctly though; it is not enough in the face of Madkhalis' powerful message".
>
> "Their books, magazines, TV, and radio programs are a dime a dozen."
>
> "Radio Furqan in Libya belongs to them [Madkhali Salafis]. They broadcast sermons and preaches of foreign [mostly Saudi] scholars. They have around 40 radio channels in Libya".
>
> "They [Madkhali Salafis] are organized in tribes, mosques, and cities. They have powerful propaganda mechanisms and also resources to maintain the propaganda" (Köse & Öztürk, 2020, s. 100-101).

They don't only take advantage of technical and media opportunities to increase their power, though. They take advantage of everything Libya has to offer, from uncontrolled borders to resentment among some socioeconomic and tribal groups. Madkhali Salafis did not hesitate to work with pro-Qadhafi actors and tribes since they are seeking retribution against revolutionaries in Libya:

> "Technological means are an advantage for them [Madkhali Salafis]. Another advantage for them is the fact that Sudanese, Egyptian, and Tunisian borders of Libya are out of control. Plus, some Qadhafi regime remnants supported them to take revenge from revolutionaries" (Köse & Öztürk, 2020, s. 101).

No one thinks that the Madkhali Salafis could achieve this without ongoing assistance from outside sources, given their material and social capacity to exert significant influence in both the private education and media sectors:

> "The reason for this much power Madkhali Salafis are enjoying is the solid support they receive. One of the ways for them to spread their ideas is opening private schools. Due to the weakness of the [central] government, they can implement their own curriculum. The second way to spread their ideas is the media, especially the radio. They have effective radio stations in almost all provinces. We think that this had become possible thanks to the financial support they receive" (Köse & Öztürk, 2020, s. 101).

> "Madkhali Salafis cannot survive without their external support. Saudi Arabia provides overt support to them [Madkhali Salafis], support in every respect" (Köse & Öztürk, 2020, s. 101).

People's conviction that this organisation is supported by outside parties is not malicious. They assess specific Madkhali Salafi behaviors at specific times and relate them to their political and tactical outcomes. They notice certain similarities between the intentions of several regional nations and the behavior of Madkhali Salafis:

> "It is obvious that Saudi Arabia is behind this [Madkhali Salafis]. Therefore, it is an instrument of Saudi policies' becoming influential in all Muslim countries. They produce books, leaflets, YouTube videos, etc. thanks to enormous financial support. Madkhali Salafis in Libya do nothing without asking their patrons abroad. When the revolution kicked off, for example, they were instructed, and they decided not to join the revolution. They did not participate in elections, declaring the latter 'haram' and thus, Mahmoud Jibril's party came to the forefront" (Köse & Öztürk, 2020, s. 102).

It was widely assumed that actor Mahmoud Jibril had close ties to the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Since the Arab revolutions, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have been the primary financiers of the counter-revolutionary wave that has swept the region. Therefore, Madkhali Salafis are thought to be Saudi Arabia's primary proxy in Libya

based on their actions, movements, and decisions at pivotal moments, which matched Saudi Arabia's preferences and strategic objectives at those times.

> “Madkhali Salafis aims to transform society in line with their religious conviction. There are 3-4 influential scholars abroad. These scholars are, on the other hand, directed by political figures. They set a story and tell it to people. These 3-4 people are at the center of this social change, and they became successful. They are directed by Saudi intelligence”.
>
> “Rabi al-Madkhali is directed by Saudi intelligence. He has tens of thousands of followers, and they are uneducated. They are mobilized by fatwas coming from Saudi Arabia. There was a strict order not to participate in the revolution. They are really powerful at the moment. Certain countries in the region support them to a considerable extent” (Köse & Öztürk, 2020, s. 102).

The Libyan people view Madkhali Salafis as foreign organizations to Libya's social, cultural, and religious fabric, much as DAESH and Ansar al-Sharia:

> “The ideologies of both Ansar al-Sharia and Madkhali Salafis are outside of Libya. The majority of Ansar al-Sharia’s ideologues, especially Maqdisi, do not live in Libya. The ideologues of Madkhali Salafis live in Saudi Arabia”.
>
> “There is the shrine of one of the companions of Prophet Mohammed in Bayda. Madkhali Salafis attempted to bomb that shrine. The people protested the attempt”.
>
> “Haftar is allied with certain countries in the region, and naturally with Madkhali Salafis. This annoys Libyans greatly. People call them “a foreign diaspora.” (Köse & Öztürk, 2020, s. 103)

More significantly, the mosques serve as the primary hubs of activity for Madkhali Salafis in Libya. Respondents emphasized that by their lectures, speech, and activities they destroy the moderate line there. They stock mosque libraries with their sheiks' books. Many participants claim that while Madkhali Salafis dominate over 80% of the mosques in the country's west, they control about 100% of mosques in the country's

east:

> “There is a prime minister and an Awqaf Ministry in the region [Cyrenaica/Barqa] ruled by Haftar. All mosques are in the hands of Madkhali Salafis there [Cyrenaica/Barqa/Eastern Libya]”.
>
> “Madkhali Salafis have a 100 % control over mosques in Sabratha. Although jamaah of the mosques are not sympathetic to Madkhali Salafis, they are under pressure. The percentage [of the mosques controlled by Madkhali Salafis] in the west [western Libya] is approximately 80%” (Köse & Öztürk, 2020, s. 103).

Their endeavor to control the religious domain is ensured through physical force, repression, and intimidation rather than on the basis of "fair competition." This competition for control over mosques and the Awqaf Ministry:

“When Madkhali Salafis and Deterrence Forces attained power, they started to intervene in the Awqaf Ministry. 95 % of the mosques in Tripoli are under their control” (Köse & Öztürk, 2020, s. 104).

By leading prayers, delivering sermons, packing mosques with their supporters, stocking mosque libraries with their own publications and the works of their religious leaders, and other means, Madkhali Salafis typically rule mosques. They typically threaten and, in some cases, carry out assassinations when other Libyans respond, if at all. It is difficult to see and identify the armed branch of the Madkhali Salafis as DAESH or ASL. People are unable to predict where the threat or danger posed by Madkhali Salafis would come from.

“They [Madkhali Salafis] blew up a bomb vehicle in front of the Awqaf building in Misrata to threaten Awqaf officials.” (Köse & Öztürk, 2020, s. 104)

Above is a prime illustration of how Madkhali Salafis conduct themselves. They detonated a car bomb in front of the building to persuade the Awqaf officials to turn over control of Awqaf to Madkhali Salafis. Due to the fact that there is frequently a price associated with resistance, these behaviors make it very difficult for common people to rebuff the demands of Madkhali Salafis.

Interviewees stated that one of the motivating grounds for joining the Madkhali Salafis is that they take advantage of the general public's reverence for religion, particularly the Prophet Mohammed. Because the Madkhali Salafis' true motivations are hidden from the general public, they are judged by their outward appearance, including how they dress, behave, and seem:

“Being like Prophet Mohammed, living like him. Trying to observe his ‘sunnah’ in everything.” (Köse & Öztürk, 2020, s. 104).

With their 'purely religious' appearance, Madkhali Salafis can have a small but significant impact on Libyan culture. They take great care to conceal their self-centered nature and the above-mentioned goal that is driven by other countries while doing this.

The government did not adequately address the issue or take the necessary steps, despite some poor but honest attempts to counteract their detrimental message. Additionally, Madkhali Salafis took use of this flaw:

> “The first disciple of Madkhali Salafism in Libya was Sheikh Mahmoud. He was drawing attention to the dangers of Madkhali Salafism on TV. However, he backed off after receiving serious threats” (Köse & Öztürk, 2020, s. 104).
>
> “Initially, the society was not aware, until they [Madkhali Salafis] showed up with their radio channels. Dar al-Iftâ published a notice targeting those [Madkhali Salafis]. Then people became aware, and a reaction arose in general” (Köse & Öztürk, 2020, s. 105).

The fact that Madkhali Salafis are entangled with official and semi-official entities in Libya may be the biggest issue with them. They exert power through their militias, which are integrated into the quasi-state institutions, in many ways by taking advantage of the legitimacy of the state:

> “Madkhali Salafis influenced GNA and became parts of security units. On the other hand, they are fully integrated with both security and military structures in Haftar’s region. There are rumors that they control the Tripoli Airport, sometimes private jets land the airport, and some Madkhali Salafi

leaders came for secretive meetings. Also, their regional backers help them become official figures in Libya. For example, Law Number 25 gave them powers above the law".

"They [Madkhali Salafis] are under the legitimacy of the state. For instance, Deterrence Forces are under the state authority; they are affiliated with the Ministry of Interior. They act as if the state is their own. If things continue to happen like this, they will get even more important positions in the state".

"This group is a major threat to Libya. They are an intelligence organization rather than an armed organization. They have a presence in all security agencies. Fight against crime, counter-terrorism, illegal immigration units are all under the control of them. There is an agency of fight against crime in Misrata. This agency assumed the powers of the counter- terrorism unit as well. They built a huge prison there. They opened training centers in Misrata and other places under the name of "guesthouse." Sometimes they also use houses as headquarters and training centers".

"Madkhali Salafis occupy official positions in Libya. For instance, local Awqaf offices in the west are controlled by Madkhalis. They represent 30 % of the population in Tripoli. There is a Madkhali Salafi imam in the central mosque in Tripoli. The ministry asked me to write a report on Madkhali Salafis. However, I rejected to conduct fieldwork for that report; for fear that Madkhalis would learn about it" (Köse & Öztürk, 2020, s. 105-106).

Some of Tripoli's most powerful militias, which also have semi-official status, are allied with Madkhali Salafis:

"Deterrence Forces, Nawasi Forces, etc. are deployed in Tripoli to protect Sarraj. Deterrence Forces also have a presence in Sabratha and Zawiyah. The main request of the people is the withdrawal of Deterrence Forces from the region".

"There are two main Madkhali Salafi groups in Tripoli: Nawasi and Deterrence Forces. Another one is Tajouri Group. Although it is not Madkhali, it acts in unison with them for its self-interest. Nawasi Battalion

> also contains extremists within itself, but they are not very criminal. They cooperate with Deterrence Forces out of regionalism" (Köse & Öztürk, 2020, s. 106).

Their relationship with Haftar contributes significantly to their influence and power:

> "It is more difficult to struggle with this group [Madkhali Salafis] than DAESH because they are in alliance with Haftar in the east."
>
> "The public prosecutor in Libya, for example, cannot arrest those [Madkhali Salafis]."
>
> "When Ansar al-Sharia and DAESH were liquidated in places like Derna, Sabratha, and Sirte, the ground became available for Madkhali Salafis. For instance, Tawhid Group is a Madkhali Salafi group that supports Haftar. After Benghazi Operation was over, this group was abrogated and incorporated into the Battalion 102, Battalion 204 and Saiqa Battalion with Haftar's pressure. Now they are a part of armed militias, and they have a presence in the fight against crime unit within the police department. They have a presence in both army and security agency" (Köse & Öztürk, 2020, s. 106).

All of the interviewees referred to the Madkhali Salafis' excessive use of force and violence against anyone they view as a rival or simply as people who have different opinions. Numerous accounts have provided detailed documentation of their misbehavior:

> "There is Madkhali Salafi control in western Zawiyah and Sabratha. They tend to invade homes by using excessive force for even simple disagreements".
>
> "Their acts include kidnapping, torture, and so on. Their charge for the kidnapped is 'terrorism.' There have been deaths under torture. Mohammed Bakr from Benghazi revolutionaries was one of those who were killed under torture. There are a lot of people who were kidnapped by this group [Madkhali Salafis] and their fate is now unknown".

“A Madkhali Salafi so-called commander Mahmoud Werfalli in the east has footages of mass executions, in which they made people wear orange jumpsuits as DAESH does in its videos.”

“Nader al-Umrani was liquidated for being up against Madkhali Salafis on a live broadcast. Why are certain figures in Türkiye? A person’s son was kidnapped, and he was released only on the condition of his father leaving Libya. Sufi leader, Mohammed Mushaali’s home, was invaded; his son was kidnapped and killed in Misrata. He was a person training hafizs. Although he did not have any connection to political Islam, he was arrested. You cannot criticize Madkhali Salafis. I cannot criticize Madkhalis openly for example. If I did, I would not be able to go back to Tripoli. Local actors might inculcate youth for not joining Ansar al- Sharia or DAESH, but the same cannot be done for Madkhalis”.

“They [Madkhali Salafis] hit back their critics mercilessly. For example, the chief editor of a Tripoli-based TV told me that they had 70 people in Tripoli working for their channel. However, if he said anything against Madkhali Salafis, all those people would stop working for the channel. There are 11 TV channels in Libya at the moment, and apart from ‘Tanasub,’ none of them talks about Madkhali Salafis. It broadcasts from Istanbul. All figures who criticize Madkhali Salafis had to move to Istanbul”.

“When Haftar forces captured Benghazi, Madkhali Salafis captured scores of scholars and hafizs and killed them and even burned them. We have footages of these acts. Madkhalis firstly created competition and small conflicts among tribes. Later Madkhalis presented their opponents or all groups who were against them as unbelievers; hence called for their murder. After this, violence became widespread. They declared everyone unbeliever as they pleased and attempted to kill or put them under pressure in this way”.

“They [Madkhali Salafis] force the scholars who do not agree with them to leave the country, threaten them, or kill them (Nader Umrani). They killed

> some scholars and imprisoned many people. People like me had to flee the country. They became an iron fist against us, revolutionaries and scholars".
>
> "Madkhali Salafis are much more dangerous than DAESH and Al-Qaeda in terms of extremism."
>
> "80 % of the 1,800 prisoners in Deterrence Forces' prison are the members of Islamist groups who rejected to join Madkhali Salafis. Deterrence Forces commit as much violence as Ansar al-Sharia and DAESH. They committed violence based on hadith texts" (Köse & Öztürk, 2020, s. 107-108).

The Madkhali Salafis employ a variety of strategies to broaden their socioeconomic base and increase the number of their adherents in Libya. Although some people join the Madkhali Salafis in order to receive specific material rewards, this does not seem to be the group's main draw. The Madkhali Salafis' doctrine and storyline appear to be what most appeals to those with a soft heart for religion. Typically, Madkhali Salafis seek young people who are already devoted, consistently attend mosque prayers, and strive to be a "better Muslim." The Madkhali Salafis do not target young people who are not religious. Additionally, tiny social groups are used to influence young people into becoming Madkhali Salafis:

> "They [Madkhali Salafis] do not promise material or political benefits [to their potential recruits]. Their appeal is mainly ideological. For example, they pick a youngster who regularly prays at a mosque, and talk to him. They try to convince him [to join]. They also use social circles to reach out the youth" (Köse & Öztürk, 2020, s. 126).

The recruitment procedure is one that is gradual. Young people are approached gently and with care, and they are drawn in by their regard for and sensitivity to piety and religion. Since these young people value authenticity, Madkhali Salafis place a strong emphasis on their own claim to be "the real Muslims":

> "They [Madkhali Salafis] do not target non-religious youth, but they mostly target devout youth. They approach the youth in a smart way. They involve the youth gradually in their group. Then they start to indoctrinate them [the youth]: 'This is the way you should grow your beard; this is what actually

> the Prophet said' etc. They go to the people [average devout people] and tell them: 'We are the ones who perform the actual Islam; we are the actual Muslims'" (Köse & Öztürk, 2020, s. 126).

There are specific reasons why some people find Madkhali Salafis intriguing and why other people decide to join them. All of the people who have already joined them seem to share a low level of education and ignorance. Additionally, religion and piety are highly respected in Libyan society. People regard someone as respectable when they have a religious appearance. Additionally, once a young person joins the Madkhali Salafis, he gains importance in society, is treated like an imam, and enjoys all the advantages that come with being an imam:

> "The youth that join them [Madkhali Salafis] are unschooled. They have either a primary school education or have less. Intellectually speaking, they are ignorant. Also, there is a cultural dimension: when people grow a beard and dress in a certain way, this image becomes appealing to the youth. This image elevates them to an institutional level. Suddenly, those youth with that image acquire the status of an imam. This is appealing to the youth due to the ignorance of the society" (Köse & Öztürk, 2020, s. 127).

An interviewee furthered the following comments regarding ignorance, a lack of critical thinking abilities, and the possibility of a social status as recruitment drivers:

> "There are many factors [making recruitment possible] and many sorts of people [among recruits]. First of all, there are the ones who did bad things and sinned in the past, wanting to repent and seem to be devout youth in the eyes of people. They have a high motivation but their religious knowledge is poor. Secondly, there are the ones who are illiterate, they learn only through what they hear. These are unschooled and ignorant in terms of religion. Madkhali Salafis tell them: 'You don't have to think. We give you all knowledge you need'. Lastly, there are the ones who have no idea about what is going on in the world. They are without higher education and they don't have a sense of the 'outer world'. [By joining Madkhali Salafis] those without a social status, gain one after joining" (Köse & Öztürk, 2020, s. 127).

Another element of youth vulnerability to Madkhali Salafi recruiting is the sense of ineptitude they experience, whether they are religious or not. Youth turn to joining the Madkhali Salafi movement as a way to make up for their perceived or actual inadequacies. If individuals believe they are lacking in religious understanding, they can quickly catch up with the group because there aren't many complex concepts taught in Madkhali Salafi schools. The strength of Madkhali Salafis is their simplicity. Additionally, once more as a result of ignorance, the majority of people, particularly some young people, accept Saudi Arabian Islam as the original form of Islam. Many individuals are impressed by the Madkhali Salafis' authenticity claim and pretense:

> "The common characteristic of them [the ones who join Madkhali Salafis] is the feeling of incompetence. All feel somehow in competent. Also, there is another issue. The origin of Salafism and Madkhali Salafis is Saudi Arabia. They think: 'The true Islam must be in the place where the Prophet was from. The certain version of Islam and the scholars from Saudi Arabia are the right ones'" (Köse & Öztürk, 2020, s. 128).

Undoubtedly, the most effective way for Madkhali Salafis to communicate their message and story is through their extensive network of radio stations. Through these radio networks, prominent Madkhali Salafi figures and professors deliver sermons and spread their philosophy constantly. Especially women listen to radio programs in their homes and personal vehicles.

This exposes a large number of people to the Madkhali Salafi message, and they either join the group or develop sympathies for it. If not, at least they are unaware of their negative aspects and just see them as a religious movement:

"They [Madkhali Salafis] broadcast via radio. They run a lot of radio channels" (Köse & Öztürk, 2020, s. 128).

A former prominent member of the Madkhali Salafis described how they used Hajj and Umrah visits by individuals from all over the world to contact a lot of people, especially the young, which allowed them to recruit the young:

> "In the beginning, they [Madkhali Salafis] were active only in Saudi Arabia. They were expanding their influence only through the youth who were

> visiting Saudi Arabia for Umrah. Youth were coming from Libya [as were from other countries] and we were talking to those youth. We were inviting them to these thoughts, to our cause [Madkhali Salafism].” (Köse & Öztürk, 2020, s. 129).

Culturally, the great regard that the Libyan people have for piety, religion, and therefore religious academics has made them vulnerable to groups, particularly the Madkhali Salafis, who have taken advantage of and manipulated the former's respect and sensitivity for their own cause:

“The youth, which came from Libya [to Saudi Arabia], had great respect to us [Madkhali Salafi scholars]” (Köse & Öztürk, 2020, s. 129).

The Madkhali Salafis employed various published materials in addition to the radio stations to propagate their message, increase their impact, and ultimately increase recruitment. Additionally, since the group's founding, Madkhali Salafis have never experienced financial hardship, which kept the recruiting cycle going:

“There was an unlimited support [to Madkhali Salafis] in terms of financial resources [from Saudi Arabia], which were used to publish books, booklets and other materials in order to spread the message” (Köse & Öztürk, 2020, s. 129).

3. CHAPTER THREE: DISCUSSING THE ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK WITH CASE STUDIES

Table 1

Analytical Framework

Outcome	**Strategic Environment**	**Behaviour**
Ascension (TYPE I)	Permissive	Assertion (ASL, DAESH, MS)
		Accommodation (DAESH, MS)
		Belligerence (MS)
Survival (TYPE II)	Restrictive/Repressive	Accommodation (ASL)
		Belligerence (ASL)
Demise (TYPE III)	Restrictive/Repressive	Belligerence (ASL, DAESH)

Source: Created by author.

3.1. TYPE I - ASCENSION

3.1.1. ASL 1 – Permissive Environment - Assertive Behaviour

It is important to remember the environment in which ASL could create and assert itself as an armed organisation, which also achieved territorial control and some sort of local authority throughout its trajectory. ASL launched itself and later assumed control over certain territories thanks to the extremely permissive environment where the state mechanism had just collapsed due to the toppling of Gadhafi through a NATO-led military operation. ASL asserted itself as an organisation and authority even before the formation of two rival power centres in the east and west, namely Dignity vs. Dawn. ASL emerged in a near-total vacuum, where there was no state authority, nor were there even quasi-state authorities. Even if there were some quasi-state entities, they were not designated and committed enemies of ASL. Thus, ASL did not immediately confront any discernible and consolidated adversary or obstacle, which granted it an immensely amicable environment to prosper and assert itself.

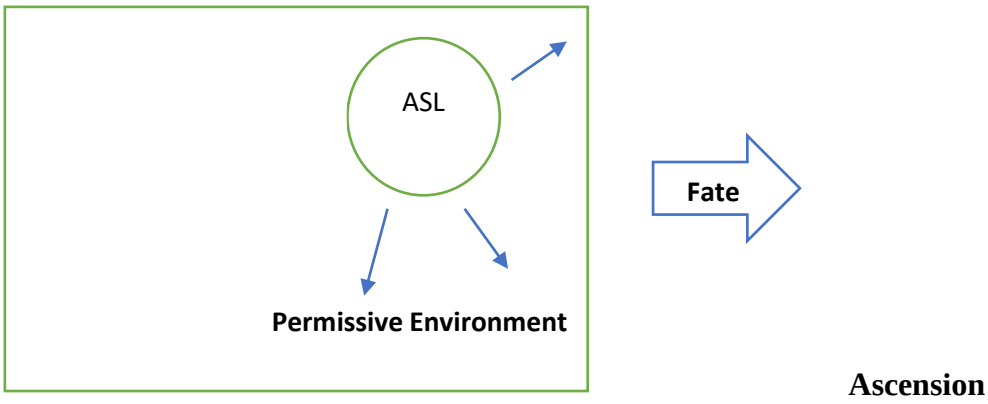


Figure 6: Assertion (ASL 1)

The fact that Gadhafi and his regime was taken out of the picture provided the amplest ground for ASL's free manoeuvring. The enabling environment was so void of a state authority that it became an environment of conflict of interests among the intervening powers who arrived to topple the Gadhafi regime. Competing objectives even rived the NATO-led alliance patrolling the sky. Tensions were notably obvious among countries with boots on the ground, including as intelligence and special operations officers who organized arms supplies, provided training in some cases, and coordinated airstrikes on behalf of local Libyan armed factions. The armed groups effectively became local proxies for foreign powers, most notably the Emirates (joined by France) and Qatar, who waged war through competing "operations rooms" through which information, weapon requests, and intelligence cooperation flowed (Wehrey, NATO's Intervention, 2015).

The anarchy and the authority vacuum created by the international coalition's intervention were especially consequential in certain areas more than others. After the revolution, the anarchy in Benghazi, Sirte, and Derna allowed militants to take root, turning these cities into 'jihadist' hotbeds (Bergen & Sims, 2018). Not surprisingly, Benghazi, Sirte and Derna all became areas where not only ASL, but also DAESH settled themselves and turned them into their centres of gravity later.

One of the most permissive traits of the strategic landscape in which ASL operated was the immense vacuum because of the non-existence of state, institutions, and basic services, after the 2011 revolution. ASL first asserted and then consolidated itself by filling the vacuum of security, authority, and services, substituting some sort of a state

or local authority within a limited territory. ASL was not only a terrorist organization; it also appeared to be gaining support from locals through "*dawa*," or charitable activities, and territorial control in place of the state, the welfare state, and Libyan institutions (Varvelli, 2014).

Territorial control enjoyed by BRSC and ASL in Barqa/Cyrenaica up until it was engaged head-on by the Operation Dignity in 2014, was also a product of the permissive environment after the revolution. BRSC or even ASL on its own controlled much of Benghazi's eastern half well into 2014 (Varvelli, 2014).

The division of the revolutionary camp quickly after the revolution was also arguably a boon for ASL's, albeit short-lived, prospects. Due to the preoccupation and distraction of both sides of the revolutionary camp with each other, ASL could exist and operate freely until it was targeted by a grand coalition. The competition began in Benghazi and eastern Libya (Barqa/Cyrenaica) just weeks after the revolution began and quickly extended to other parts of the country. However, it was not preset, and it was not built along secular and Islamist lines; among the revolutionary armed organizations, tensions between Islamists and anti-Islamists steadily intensified and crystallized, thanks in part to Emirati and Qatari influence. They also intersected with a complex network of town and region-based networks and elites inside Libya, as well as Libyan intermediaries headquartered in Abu Dhabi or Doha, who often moulded the tastes of foreign backers and influenced where the weaponry went (Fitzgerald, 2015).

3.1.2. DAESH 1 – Permissive Environment – Assertive & Accommodative Behaviours

DAESH's establishment or re-spawn in Sirte occurred on a very fertile ground for the emergence and consolidation of the organisation. The omnipresent authority vacuum, state collapse, and fragmented environment across Libya were arguably much direr in Sirte as it was situated at equidistance from the two post-revolutionary power centres in both east and west, Tripoli and Benghazi. Both power centres could not expand their authority or influence on Sirte to the full extent as it was remote from each camp's respective centres of gravity. Sirte's being Gadhafi's hometown and stronghold also exacerbated the city and its residents' neglect in the post-2011 era in Libya. These all added up to the emergence of a very permissive environment for DAESH's rule in Sirte. The only serious obstacle before DAESH's expansion and consolidation would be

Misrata, but it did not have the luxury of diverting its attention and resources to picking up a fight with DAESH, while it was locked in an existential war against Haftar and Dignity camp, at least for a certain period. That limited period provided the window of opportunity to DAESH to prosper and consolidate its power in Sirte.

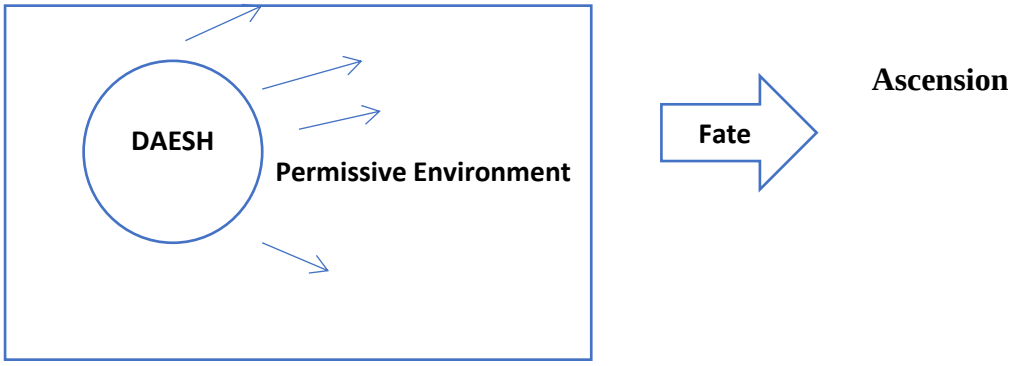


Figure 7: Assertion (DAESH 1)

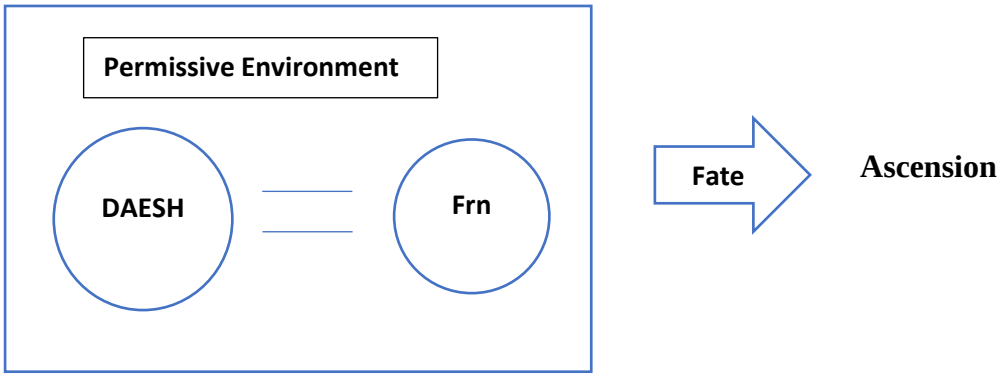


Figure 8: Accommodation (DAESH 1)

DAESH embraced an assertive behaviour in such an amicable environment for its taking roots. Since DAESH did not confront any serious adversary especially in the initial phases of its presence in Sirte, it could easily claim its authority over the city and proclaimed the city as the capital of the "Caliphate" in Libya.

Another response of DAESH to the surrounding permissive environment was the customary practice of DAESH elsewhere: solicitation of foreign fighters to boost its ranks. In addition to accommodating and incorporating the existing jihadist elements in the city –including remnants of ASL Sirte-, DAESH also accommodated its prospective members from within and beyond Libya alike.

In 2013 and 2014, DAESH gradually established itself in Sirte by utilizing pre-existing jihadist networks, political schisms, and societal conflicts. Foreign fighters also contributed significantly to the organization's rank-and-file and leadership cadres (Zelin, 2018). But, more importantly, the terrorist group exploited the fact that Sirte was located on a fault line between Haftar's Dignity camp in the east and the opposition Dawn party in the west, which is based in Tripoli (Wehrey & Alrababa'h, Splitting the Islamists: The Islamic State's Creeping Advance in Libya, 2015). The city of Misrata and its militias were particularly well-positioned in the latter camp to assault DAESH and halt its expansion. However, Misratan notables and leaders of armed groups believed that committing resources to the terrorist group would divert attention away from Misrata's more existential war with Haftar (Wehrey, 2020: 22).

Another peculiarity of Sirte as a fertile ground for the advent of DAESH lied with the city's extremely neglected and discriminated nature. State collapse and authority vacuum was felt probably nowhere in Libya more than Sirte. The post-revolutionary conduct against Sirte as a Qadhafi loyalist city deprived the city of the necessary tools to resist the forthcoming DAESH invasion. However, even if Sirte had the necessary tools to resist DAESH, it is not certain that it would use them against DAESH, since the sense of revanchism, which was not unsubstantiated, was running deep among the residents due to the post-revolutionary practices. For some, in Qadhafi-loyalist constituencies, DAESH was a "hope of revenge" against the revolutionaries (Interview source).

Unlike Derna, Sirte, as the dictator's hometown, enjoyed a special status among Libyan cities throughout the Qaddafi regime. However, it joined Derna as one of a handful of cities and towns that were not fully absorbed into new governance institutions following the 2011 protests. Sirte was one of the last pro-Qaddafi strongholds in 2011, and it was badly devastated during the final battles (Dobbs, 2012). The town was also subjected to a very peculiar situation in post-Qaddafi Libya: its residents were disarmed, and the town's critical choke points were captured by fighters from the victorious (mostly Misratan) militias. Tribes from Sirte, such as the Qadhadhfa, Warfalla, and Furjan—all tied to Qaddafi's rule—were discriminated against by post-Qaddafi authorities, who failed to invest in or administrate the city, allowing it to fester as a battleground for opposing militias (Nayed, 2017). It was extremely difficult for foreigners to go to Sirte

by road or air. Foreign embassy employees rarely travelled beyond Tripoli as the security situation worsened, with the exception of the revolutionary cities of Benghazi and Misrata; their absence from the defeated cities of Bani Walid and Sirte reinforced the sense of isolation in these areas (Pack, Smith, & Mezran, 2017: 25).

Unfortunately, the existence of DAESH in Libya did not prompt a coordinated military or political reaction from Libya's many factions and militias at first. Instead, the war between Haftar's anti-Islamist Operation Dignity and the pro-Islamist Libya Dawn camp remained the top priority from the advent of DAESH in Sirte in May 2015 to the commencement of the Misratan-led al-Bunyan al-Marsous (BM) onslaught on Sirte in May 2016. This internecine fighting not only stymied progress toward resolving Libya's political legitimacy crisis, which had been plaguing the country since at least late 2013, but it also allowed DAESH to thrive, sending out sleeper cells to communities with a high proportion of returnee jihadists from the Levant, such as Sabratha and Benghazi (Pack, Smith, & Mezran, 2017: 28).

In the same way that many local militias struggled to bury the hatchet in order to combat DAESH, the media and civil society organizations were similarly splintered. Local media in Libya engaged in activities that inflamed conflicting interest groups and hampered a coordinated response to DAESH's domestic, regional, and global danger. Rival interest groups in Libya were using gaining influence over the narratives propagated by media outlets to gain an upper hand in the current conflict, according to Freedom House. Television and radio stations have been forced off the air, journalists have been replaced with those more sympathetic to Islamist or anti-Islamist perspectives, and others have been threatened and even murdered for their beliefs, resulting in widespread censorship and aggressive speech (House, 2015). The media and civil society sectors, on the other hand, have not been able to band together and establish a coherent strategy to oppose DAESH propaganda, at least not publicly (Pack, Smith, & Mezran, 2017: 28).

There was no national or municipal authority in Sirte that could stand up to DAESH’s assaults. The fact that DAESH was able to carry out more high-profile attacks in the Sirte area, such as the murder of Coptic Christians and attacks on oil fields in the Sirte Basin in early 2015, is obvious evidence of the group's relative ease of movement there

compared to further east. DAESH in Sirte gradually took control more and more key civic locations in this environment. The Ouagadougou Centre (the location of several DAESH propaganda movies), the Ibn Sina hospital, and the port were among them. During this time, Sirte's wealthiest families departed. Their belongings were taken, and their profitable industry and farmland were harmed (Roslington & Pack, 2016).

DAESH's confiscation of the wealth of the Sirte residents that fled the city as well as the city's agricultural and industrial capital also naturally became an additional lifeline to the organisation, bolstering its capacity to rule and operate for a longer period. The group was further bolstered by their victory over Misrata's formidable 166th Brigade in mid-2015. Between March and May 2015, the Misratan 166th Brigade engaged DAESH in the Sirte area, but eventually fled, preferring to focus their efforts on fighting Haftar's forces in the east. The 166th Brigade also expressed dissatisfaction with the then incumbent GNC administration in Tripoli, claiming that it did not provide them with sufficient resources to confront DAESH (Pack, Smith, & Mezran, 2017: 26). This individual example of DAESH's almost only recorded victory over a Misrata force is another confirmation that DAESH found quite a smooth environment to prosper and expand without any serious challenge to its power. Compared to the Bunyan al-Marsous operation wiping out DAESH, a single militia's own fight against DAESH without the necessary support from a greater coalition and authority was not sufficient to deal with DAESH militarily, which did not yield any result.

The last component of the overly permissive environment for DAESH's rule in Sirte was the de-populated quality of the city. Sirte became a very easy prey for DAESH without a considerable population who would supposedly either resist or would make it hard for DAESH to rule by at least asking for certain concessions from DAESH in return for its rule.

Sirte, where over 90,000 individuals, or nearly 85 percent of the population, fled during DAESH's occupation, was one of the most devastating illustrations of the futility of local resistance to DAESH during its peak of prominence (Libya, 2016). Residents accused of being spies for the Misratan 166th Brigade were often targeted by DAESH and subjected to horrible public executions. Resistance to the savagery was suppressed, even when the group was confronted with problems posed by the complicated tribal

landscape. Locals, especially from the Furjan tribe, attempted to band together in mid-August 2015 to thwart DAESH's attempts to consolidate authority over Sirte (El-Ghobashy & Morajea, 2015). The assassination of local anti-DAESH Salafi preacher Sheikh Khalid bin Rajeb al-Furjani, who was killed during an attempted DAESH kidnapping, sparked the uprising. (Pack, Smith, & Mezran, 2017: 27). DAESH fighters, including members of the Furjan tribe, massacred approximately forty Furjan leaders and followers, including members of the Warfalla tribe, in response to the insurrection. Local rebels were also targeted by bombarding their homes, particularly in Sirte's third district. To convey a graphic message to the rest of the town, they killed twelve others and publicly crucified four more (Colville, 2015). As a result, the uprising was put down in three days, thus putting an end to any further public challenge to their control among the local population (Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Support Mission in Libya, 2016).

The ruthless suppression of Furjan rebels in Sirte sent a message to the neighbouring villages that fighting DAESH was pointless. DAESH had set up extra checkpoints throughout Sirte by late September 2015, and had begun requiring stores to close during prayer times and women to appear in public only with a chaperone. DAESH designated local leadership to run activities in Nufaliya, a small town east of Sirte that the group had conquered in February 2015 before attacking Sirte. DAESH used the absence of resistance in satellite towns near Sirte like Nufaliya and Hawara, especially after August 2015, as a buffer to protect its increasing headquarters (Pack, Smith, & Mezran, 2017: 28).

Sirte was already quite a weak constituency to rule as it was toothless, armless and few, due to the mass emigration from the city with DAESH’s entrance. When a rare revolt was crushed brutally by DAESH, the message was convincing and strong enough to preclude any future such revolt. DAESH continued its rule over the city even more easily after that point free of any challenges to its authority, which naturally prolonged its lifespan in Sirte.

3.1.3. MADKHALI SALAFIS (MS) 1 – Permissive Environment – Assertive (Vacuum), Accommodative (Friend) & Bellicose (Easy Targets) Behaviours

What makes Madkhali Salafis (MS) unique and different from both ASL and DAESH is obviously the fact that MS is very well alive and powerful today as opposed to the demise of both ASL and DAESH in Libya. MS is a very successful case of survival and ascendance among all three organisations in the post-conflict and civil war environment of Libya.

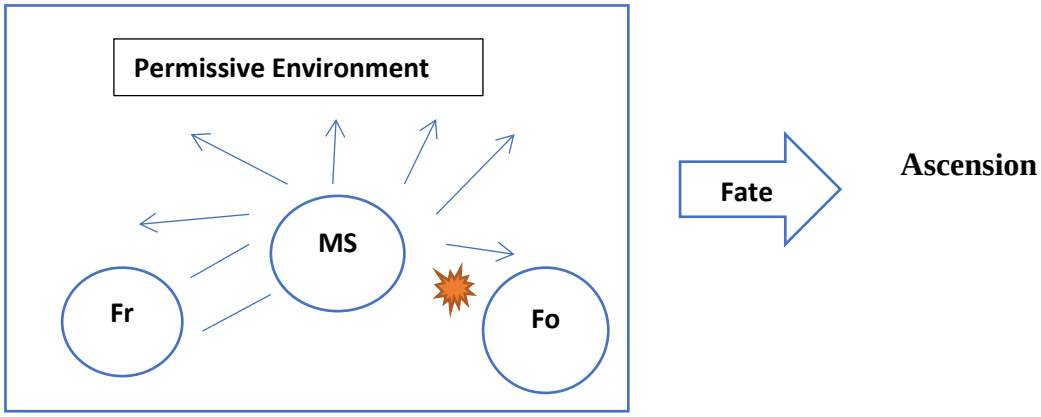


Figure 9: Assertion, Accommodation and Belligerence (MS 1)

The most determinative factor ensuring the success and longevity of MS is rooted in its 'invisibility', in the sense that it is not recognised or seen as an independent, self-serving and even extremist armed organisation sharing many elements with ASL or DAESH. MS has never been treated like ASL and DAESH; it has never been viewed as a source of threat by either a considerable coalition of Libyans or foreign actors. Since it has not been viewed as a threat, it did not provoke a coalition-building like Dignity and Bunyan al-Marsous. The general permissive environment in which all three organisations could emerge, prosper and consolidate has been disproportionately more permissive to MS. While ASL and DAESH had to deal with huge and formidable coalitions, which consisted of both Libyan and non-Libyan elements eventually spelling the end of both ASL and DAESH, MS never had to endure such a heavy pressure. MS only continued its expansion uninterrupted.

MS' accommodation of powerful actors and coalitions instead of picking up a fight with them also has been immensely determinative on its success and longevity. Most

notably, MS not only accommodated but also allied with Haftar almost everywhere it is active in Libya. By benefiting greatly from Haftar's authority where he ruled, it gained important positions, strength and attacked the adversaries of Haftar from a point of strength. However, MS has not only gained important positions only in the areas under Haftar's control; MS also has a serious level of presence and activity in the areas nominally under Tripoli. By not consuming itself with destructive fights against much greater and powerful actors, MS allied with them instead, displayed its cruelty and power against the weak enemies of those coalitions and received the blessing of those powerful actors in return.

Some Salafi factions in and around the capital, known as "Madkhalis" because of their reverence for an influential Saudi-based cleric named Rabi bin Hadi al-Madkhali, backed Haftar's advance on Tripoli, owing to self-serving calculations as well as previous pro-Operation Dignity statements from al-Madkhali (Wehrey, 2020: 24) (Wehrey, 2019).

MS' ability to operate not only in the areas under Haftar's control but also the ones nominally under Tripoli's authority was showcased during Haftar's attack against Tripoli in April 2019. Due to the long-standing alliance between them, Haftar had hoped to enlist the help of friendly Salafists (MS) in the western towns of Sabratah and Surman in his assault on Tripoli (Wehrey, 2020: 50). Again, MS in western towns that would attack Tripoli to serve Haftar's campaign was not a primary military actor that would wage a frontal attack against Tripoli, rather it was a peripheral force to attack Tripoli's Achilles heel while the capital was pre-occupied with Haftar's frontal attack. MS' pattern of free-riding in a much more powerful coalition and scoring points by attacking easy targets held here, too.

Haftar's attitude against all Islamists is well-known. In fact, it is even not an attitude; he undertook Operation Dignity to annihilate all Islamists indiscriminately. In 2014, he informed an observer, "We don't need Sharia [Islamic law] here." "Sharia has already found its way into our hearts." Despite this, devotees of Salafism (MS), a strict, literalist interpretation of Islam, are his most ardent military supporters. Although Sabratha is more than a thousand kilometres away from Haftar's headquarters Benghazi, MS had a considerable presence there. A militia commander, Musa al-Najem, is an example

(Wehrey, 2019). He reportedly fought DAESH in Sabratha and now leads the Wadi, or Valley Brigade, a Salafist (MS) group that claims to ensure security in the town (Wehrey, 2019).

MS in both Barqa/Cyrenaica (east) and Tripolitania (west) alike offered their support militarily among other areas to Haftar and often benefited from this interaction in return. MS' support to Haftar was their accommodative act towards him and this accommodative act paid off in the form of his goodwill, support and approval of their activities and expansion especially in Barqa/Cyrenaica, where Haftar's rule is more direct. On the other hand, in remote areas like Sabratha in the country's northwest where there is no Haftar's rule, other dynamics paved the way for MS' presence and power. Since Sabratha has been beyond the reach and authority of weak Tripoli governments, MS thrived on the vacuum that prevailed there. Due to the lack of Tripoli's capacity to expand its authority to Sabratha, Tripoli could not make Sabratha a priority, on the contrary, it even delegated the security and governance of the city to MS since the latter enjoyed material and organisational capacity thanks to support from both Haftar and their external patrons chiefly Saudi Arabia. MS adapted to the vacuum and even incentivising factors and duly asserted its rule in the area. This capacity was also used against DAESH remnants and cells to derive a local legitimacy and credibility as a security-provider force.

When an MS commander inquired if he and his fellow Salafists supported Haftar, they declined, citing a Salafi doctrinal tenet about respecting the local political authority in one's geographic area, which appeared to be Haftar then. It's a philosophy that underpins a Salafi trend known as "quietism," which has been cultivated with Saudi petrodollars in order to avoid overt political activism. However, in Libya, these Salafists are far from apolitical: they are a growing influence in schools and mosques, as well as in law enforcement, where they patrol for illicit drugs and alcohol, as well as activities they consider un-Islamic, such as art shows. They have also fought DAESH militants and opposing rival political Islamists like as the Muslim Brotherhood (Wehrey, 2019).

Whether in the areas directly under Haftar's rule or in the areas closer to Tripoli, MS' assaults against adversaries such as Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamists were always conducted from a position of strength, so these assaults and fights were not

consuming for MS. This position of strength also applies to their non-combatant activities in both eastern (Barqa/Cyrenaica) and western (Tripolitania) parts of the country, ruled by Haftar and Tripoli respectively. MS have been able to carve out an exclusive public space that encompassed education, religion, law enforcement etc. for itself but for different reasons in Barqa/Cyrenaica and Tripoli. In Barqa/Cyrenaica, MS benefited from the security umbrella and unquestioned authority of Haftar, who granted a huge area of manoeuvre to them. In Tripolitania, MS again found an extremely suitable ground to carve out its own space thanks to first Tripoli's apathy and weakness, then the latter's delegation of certain services such as security provision to the former.

To be sure, through monitoring and raids, this force has dismantled DAESH cells. According to human rights organizations, it also administers its own prison, where suspected terrorists and criminals are subjected to Salafi religious teaching and torture (Wehrey, A Minister, a General, & the Militias: Libya's Shifting Balance of Power, 2019). It is important to note that what is claimed to be MS' fight against DAESH is actually the former's assaults against sporadic and small DAESH cells, which were not even in DAESH's strongholds like Sirte but in very remote areas. MS basically dealt with remnants and cells of DAESH rather than fighting it on a battleground.

MS is an integral part of Haftar's political and military structure. When Haftar started Operation Karama (Dignity) and Sheikh Rabi al-Madkhali issued a fatwa on the need for Salafists to join Haftar as Libya's lawful guardian and fight with him against the Muslim Brotherhood, the Madkhalists' involvement in the battle became clear. In this context, Haftar disbanded the Tawhid Brigade, a MS brigade, and merged it into his army, dispersing it over several brigades and military divisions like as the 210th Infantry Regiment and the 302nd Sa'iqa Special Forces. Madkhalism was able to spread farther and take control of military installations in Benghazi, Ajdabiya, and Jabal al-Akhdar as a result of this (Ali, 2017).

MS accommodated Haftar by beefing him up militarily at a time when he embarked on a largescale war against all Islamists in especially Barqa/Cyrenaica. MS' accommodation of Haftar also met his enabling conduct toward MS by providing them necessary channels to expand their organisation, influence and strength. Instead of

problematizing or stumbling on the dismantling of their own brigade into multiple military units, MS adapted to new circumstances and duly exploited them in its favour.

The impact of MS in Haftar's camp does not end there. On March 28, 2017, MS-controlled internal security forces in Benghazi ordered the Tawhid Brigade, also known as General Haftar's 210th Infantry Regiment, to arrest three young men planning an Earth Day celebration in the city. One of the Tawhid Brigade's leaders, Abdel Fattah bin Galboun, saw it as a type of un-Islamic Freemasonry, calling it immoral, disgusting, and demeaning to those who had perished fighting. In the same vein, Galboun applauded General Haftar for rejecting such wickedness, noting that the Muslim Brotherhood and DAESH pose the greatest threat to Libya. Furthermore, the Benghazi Security Directorate decided to hand up the planners to the military for prosecution, but then reversed its decision and released the detainees as news of the incident spread on social media and a public outcry (Ali, 2017).

The overly permissive environment provided by Haftar’s favour toward MS, the latter expanded their clout not only in military field but also the law enforcement and societal fields, too, to the extent that they even tend to function as a ‘morality police’ in the areas ruled by Haftar. In a publicly contentious incident, MS’ praising of Haftar is a micro example of MS’ accommodation of Haftar. On the other hand, MS’ expansionism to the extent of some ‘morality police’ functions is an extension of their assertive practice within the conducive environment they are provided with.

Those associated with MS have perpetrated a number of crimes in order to gain control of religious space, including the destruction of Sufi shrines and the restriction of Sufi religious practice in eastern Libya (Ali, 2017). Dominating and subjugating the religious sector is one of the main channels through which MS are reproducing themselves, their ideology and organisation. Haftar's relationship with MS is not just military, but also involves control of the official religious discourse through the group's control over Tobruk's government's General Authority of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs. Since October 2014, MS have effectively controlled the official discourse through fatwas and the effective control of mosques in the east (Ali, 2017).

MS do not only have a military, but also a societal control function/value for Haftar. And for the societal control purposes, religion has a distinct weight as its reach among

wider Libyan public is vast. By both enabling MS to physically take control of the mosques and also the governing institution of mosques, Awqaf, Haftar basically clear the way for MS' hegemony in religious field. As a considerable portion of revolutionary figures that are staunchly anti-Haftar in Libya also happened to be religious and pious figures, a new religious ethos at the hands of MS largely functions as a political weapon. Hence MS assert themselves in religious sphere thanks to the permissive environment provided by Haftar.

The extremely permissive environment created by Haftar for MS is not the only dimension of their alliance. Haftar's alliance with MS works two way. Haftar and the MS consider their partnership as mutually beneficial. MS hope to gain more control over Libya's public domain by forming an alliance with Haftar. MS gained followers through controlling religious discourse and luring unemployed young to MS battalions, where they receive military benefits and decent pay due to the brigades' foreign funding. Because of its dominance over official religious discourse and its relatively strong military power on the ground, the situation has been and still is ideal for MS to gain even more members. In response, Haftar wants to utilize the MS to take control of the public discourse and use them to attack his opponents, whom he refers to as "jihadists". Because he lacked the required number of troops, Haftar required the MS (Ali, 2017).

In a society where meaningful economic activities and a proper labour market are almost non-existent, enjoying abundant resources is the greatest advantage of MS, the extent of which was not enjoyed by either of ASL and DAESH. This particular advantage of MS enables them to recruit widely, which works handsomely for them to consolidate and sustain their organisation and hence, spread and deepen their influence socially, economically and militarily.

The external support MS have been enjoying chiefly from Saudi Arabia and to a lesser extent from the UAE has been a crucial element boosting its strength and influence. Although there are signs indicating MS' relative autonomy from Riyadh, there are also other signs suggesting MS' nature as a proper 'proxy' of Riyadh in Libya. The Saudi government favours MS. Since 2014, Haftar's dedication to opposing the Muslim Brotherhood and other forms of Islamism has been shared by MS in eastern Libya. MS forbids political affiliation and demands seeming submission to an established authority

(Collombier & Barsoum, 2019). These tenets made MS a very common denominator for Haftar, Riyadh, and Abu Dhabi from whom it enjoyed enormous support and blessing.

A closer look at a local branch of MS provides a perspective on how MS as a military actor operates. Subul al-Salam, a Kufra-based armed group, is led by Abdel Rahman Hasham al-Kilani, a MS. Subul al-Salam originally appeared as part of Haftar's coalition in late 2015, when it spearheaded offensives in southern Libya against several Darfuri rebel factions affiliated with ethnic Tubu militias. Subul al-Salam also fought Islamist militias alongside LNA Zway tribal soldiers in the city of Ajdabiya, further north (Harchaoui & Lazib, 2019: 8). In a very local and isolated setting like Kufra, MS' local branch reflects MS' general behaviours such as taking part in Haftar's grand coalition and fighting against Haftar's enemies. Like other branches of MS, Subul al-Salam also enjoyed Haftar's support and represented his authority in a very remote region in southeast Libya. Strategically permissive environment for MS gained a geographically permissive nature, too, in Kufra. MS' branch in Kufra operated in a mainly desert area where national borders are almost non-existent between Libya, Egypt, Sudan, and Chad and all sorts of illicit activities are abundant.

About 300 people make up Subul al-Salam. In south-eastern Libya, it is the main LNA-affiliated force. It is nearly exclusively manned by civilian recruits. The militia, unlike other groups in the area, is tribally and ethnically diverse; however the Zway tribe makes up the majority of its members. Subul al-Salam reached out to other MS organizations, such as Radaa in Tripoli, who gave Subul al-Salam three ambulances in 2017. Even when connected with different authority, relationships and mutual aid occur amongst ideological brethren, as this overt expression of support demonstrates (Harchaoui & Lazib, 2019: 8).

The solidarity and cooperation between Subul al-Salam and Radaa is a very striking demonstrator of MS being an autonomous organisation with a distinct sense of identity transcending each of their respective loyalties to nominal authorities. Subul al-Salam functions nominally under Haftar's LNA and Tobruk-based HoR, however, Radaa has been under the authority of the successive Tripoli-based governments, first GNA and then GNU. Furthermore, the enormous geographical distance and lack of a sustained

physical contact between Subul al-Salam and Radaa, make their cooperation even more peculiar. There are thousands of kilometres between Subul al-Salam and Radaa.

From the Sudanese and Chadian borders in the south to the Tazerbu checkpoint on the Jalu-Kufra route in the north, Subul al-Salam's presence spans a broad geographical area. The brigade is also in charge of the airport and a prison centre in Kufra. The Sudanese authorities, who operate the Jabal al-Awaynat border station at the Egyptian-Libyan-Sudanese triangle, are in constant contact with Subul al-Salam. Even though Haftar does not consider Khartoum to be an ally, the militia values the relationship (Harchaoui & Lazib, 2019: 8).

The permissive environment especially in the ungoverned southeast Libya where Subul al-Salam has been thriving, not only has been a ‘passive’ permissive environment, but also an ‘active’ permissive environment in the sense that Subul al-Salam controlled two significant revenue generating strategic assets: the airport and the borders with Egypt, Sudan, and Chad. Radaa is similarly controlling the most important international asset of Libya, the only operational international airport in Tripoli. Controlling borders is obviously one of the most lucrative assets any non-state actor or armed group can ever have and there is no doubt that these strategic assets are exploited by these groups to sustain themselves.

Despite its Salafi rhetoric, which claims to be anti-crime, Subul al-Salam is involved in human smuggling, artifact trafficking, and other criminal operations (Letter dated 5 September 2018 from the Panel of Experts on Libya established pursuant to resolution 1973 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 2018: 15). Overall, Haftar's territorial authority in southern Libya is weaker than along the coast of Cyrenaica. The LNA's leadership does not attain full, direct territorial control in the Kufra area by relying on Subul al-Salam, but rather outsources protection of isolated areas to local militias (Harchaoui & Lazib, 2019: 8).

In Libya’s circumstances, control of Tripoli’s Mitiga airport would elevate any actor, be it a non-state or state actor, to a much more forceful position and that’s what happened to MS, too. Abdelraouf Kara, a native of Tripoli's Suq al-Jumaa area, built his headquarters in the neighbouring Mitiga base. Mitiga became Tripoli's sole operating

airport in August 2014. Control of such a crucial institution bolstered Kara's political, economic, and security clout (Harchaoui & Lazib, 2019: 13).

Despite Mitiga's rare and precious asset value for MS, they didn't settle for only Mitiga's control for boosting their resources and clout. Radaa concentrated on local security, confiscating alcohol, disrupting drug-trafficking networks, and maintaining an extrajudicial prison from 2013 to 2015. Radaa has grown in power since the UN-backed GNA took power in Tripoli in March 2016. Saudi Arabia is suspected of providing the group with financial, intellectual, and political backing. Radaa is officially funded by the GNA's Ministry of the Interior. Furthermore, beginning in 2017, it has increased its control over a significant portion of the illegal market for currency transactions (Harchaoui, Libya's Looming Contest for the Central Bank, 2019). It is a particularly well-funded militia due to the mix of these sources of income (Harchaoui & Lazib, 2019: 13). However, it is important to underline that Radaa's expansion to these extents is mainly because it prospered under the protectorate and legitimacy umbrella of the GNA as well as all sorts of support from Radaa's chief foreign patron, Saudi Arabia. Radaa prospered in an incubator-like permissive environment and duly asserted itself.

The permissive environment in Tripolitania, where there is no Haftar's authority, has its own peculiarities. The greatest advantage of MS has been the fact that no authority, armed group or a large coalition has ever treated MS as the most urgent threat and picked up a fight with it in both Haftar-dominated and Tripoli-dominated regions alike. MS' diffused and elusive nature made it hard for any rival to view it as a fully-fledged armed organisation such as ASL and DAESH. More importantly, through covert operations they managed to shape the conflict environment in their favour proactively, forging ahead of any actual or potential adversary armed group with its vision and slyness.

A string of assassinations targeting many midlevel Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade (TRB) -one of the prominent militia groups of the capital- leaders began in Tripoli before Haytham Tajuri's return from the UAE. Tajuri's return also coincided with Haftar's attack against Tripoli. The UAE may have lobbied for these executions through a subgroup of Radaa or other MS cells in Tripolitania, but this has yet to be established. All of the TRB commanders who were particularly antagonistic to Haftar were targeted.

During that time, the TRB's top brass held secret talks with the LNA about allowing Haftar to enter central Tripoli (Harchaoui & Lazib, 2019: 9). Here again, one cannot talk about a frontal attack by MS groups against TRB, which could have made MS an open target, instead MS groups picked up their fight with TRB through covert operations and assassinations.

Revolutionary actors have always assumed Kara would follow Riyadh's orders if and when unrest erupted in Tripoli. As a result, if Haftar decides to march on the capital, Radaa is likely to back him up. Radaa fighters explicitly acknowledged the prospect of allying with Haftar in September 2016 interviews (Harchaoui & Lazib, 2019: 13).

Despite this, Radaa leaders have been wary of the LNA during the latter's advance on Tripoli in 2019-2020. Individuals and subunits of the militia have joined the fight against Haftar's army, but the armed group has stayed on the sidelines, preferring to safeguard important assets (Harchaoui & Lazib, 2019: 13).

This particular attitude by Radaa in the face of Haftar’s attack on Tripoli does not contradict its longer term and more permanent traits. Firstly, Radaa or MS did not wage an all-out war against Haftar, it was rather individual and lower-level engagement by certain units. Furthermore, this attitude was very likely a result of a strategic calculation by MS. By not fighting an all-out war and instead allocating only a fraction of the group for the fight against Haftar was basically an act of hedging. As a Tripoli-based prominent militia, they did not risk being ostracised and targeted by the wider Tripolitanian public as well as by the political and armed coalition, which commonly treated Haftar’s attack as the most heinous act against their peace and existence, in case of Haftar’s defeat. This pragmatism and flexibility of Radaa and MS have arguably been one of their advantages in ensuring their survival especially in Tripoli. Secondly, one of the primary factors that created and propped up MS was Saudi Arabia’s unwavering support. MS have already been serving Saudi Arabia’s interests as things stand in Libya with the ongoing territorial and institutional division between Benghazi and Tripoli. Saudi Arabia did not and does not need Haftar taking over Tripoli to ensure the advancement of its interests in the country. Despite different modus operandi of respective factions of MS in Barqa/Cyrenaica and Tripolitania, MS in harmony with its foreign patron worked out the ways of safeguarding their interests. Thirdly, MS stuck to

its long-held practice of controlling valuable assets instead of consuming itself with fighting. Controlling the valuable assets was also the smartest move for the purpose of hedging: if Haftar won, MS would not have any difficulty to work with him; if he was defeated they would still be a formidable actor to be reckoned with in Tripoli due to its control of those assets.

3.2. TYPE II - SURVIVAL

3.2.1. ASL 2 – Restrictive/Repressive Environment – Accommodative (Friend) & Bellicose (Foe) Behaviours

It is a fact that ASL embraced bellicose behaviour when faced with the threat of Dignity, but the reasons why it did so are equally important. The bellicose behaviour of ASL in response to its adversaries is mainly because of the futility of other options. Since the rift even between different factions of the same camp, namely revolutionaries were very deep, and it was further deepened by their foreign sponsor's fierce competition, there was no way ASL could accommodate UAE and its Libyan proxies. ASL's adversaries were at the same time the staunch enemies of all colours of 'Islamism' and they had vowed to eradicate anything 'Islamist', heavily in line with the orders of Abu Dhabi.

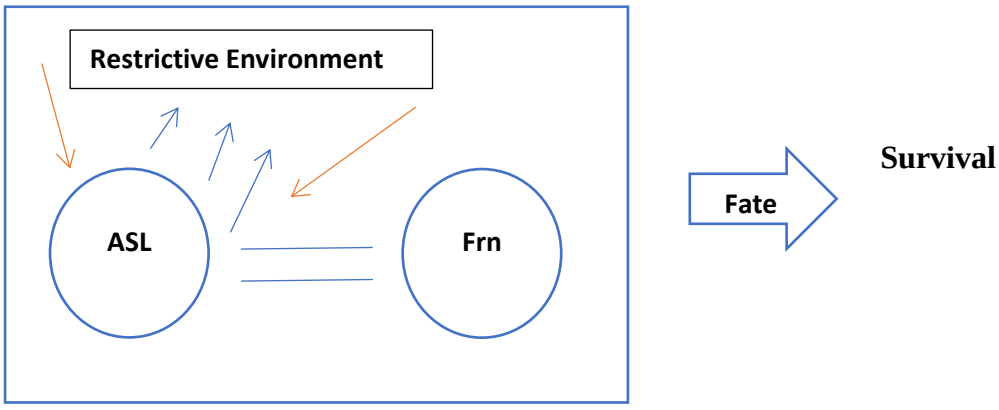


Figure 10: Accommodation and Belligerence (ASL 2)

In addition to contracting the area of manoeuvre for ASL, this vowed anti-Islamist moment both within and outside Libya triggered a counter-alignment between ASL and a lot of different Islamist groups. Haftar, for example, has made no distinction between Islamists, announcing his intention to "kill them all," which has aided the tactical convergence between extreme militias and diverse Islamist political forces (Varvelli,

2014). With anti-Islamist stance and moment crystallised both within and outside Libya, which was felt first and foremost in Barqa/Cyrenaica, in response, revolutionary and Islamist organisations banded together and formed the Benghazi Revolutionaries Shura Council (BRSC) in June 2014 (Harchaoui & Lazib, 2019: 5).

The alignment between ASL and Islamists materialised due to the strong push factor cornering both into the alignment, but also ASL's active efforts to accommodate Islamists and revolutionaries for the former's own survival played a role.

In later stages, ASL benefited from a relatively 'friendly' group of armed organisations, which were 'Islamist' and revolutionary in nature against the existential threat of Dignity or Haftar. During its fight against Haftar, albeit casually, ASL benefitted from material supplies from its circumstantial friends. Here, ASL's accommodative strategy towards Islamist and revolutionary armed organisations was a smart thing to do for his own sake, since it would make no sense to pick up a fight with them whilst another greater adversary, i.e., Dignity, had already vowed to destroy it. ASL's accommodative strategy towards Benghazi Revolutionaries' Shura Council (BRSC) and other Islamist organisations arguably prolonged its lifespan and saved it from an earlier demise.

Apart from the peer support ASL could garner within Libya, the indirect external support it secured was also crucial to sustain itself albeit the flow of external support was not always steady for ASL. Terrorist groups headquartered in Benghazi, like as ASL and later DAESH, fought with a broader constellation of local and Islamist militias battling Haftar, some of which were gathered as BRSC, which had its own foreign backers. Some of the same Libyan middlemen who had channelled supplies during the 2011 revolution oversaw those streams of materiel and weapons, which came mostly from Qatar, Turkey, and Sudan (UN Security Council Panel of Experts Report on Libya, 2017). Sudanese assistance was extremely important. Libyan Islamists had a lengthy connection to the east African country that they used in 2011, and they reactivated these networks in the aftermath of the 2014 civil war to transfer weapons overland into Benghazi or the western coastal city of Misrata (Wehrey, 2020: 19).

When faced with a serious adversary, which transformed the environment from being a permissive one to a less permissive one, accommodation of fellow fighters and armed actors by ASL mitigated the impact of a less amicable environment for its survival.

ASL's securing the support of BRSC and sporadically and indirectly of Misrata was significant in keeping ASL afloat. Misrata, a prominent port city in western Libya, has fought Haftar since 2014 and has backed radical Islamists [BRSC] operating in Barqa/Cyrenaica in some cases (Harchaoui & Lazib, 2019: 4-5). Although the Misrata militias and their political allies in the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) have often taken ambiguous positions and shown tactical alignment with radicals, this link was not ideological, but rather the result of events and the indiscriminate military campaign launched against "Islamists" (Varvelli, 2014).

ASL also embraced a strategy of accommodating Misrata, the most capable powerhouse in the post-revolution Libya due to a few reasons. First, Misrata was a formidable force due to its huge inventory of weapons and many powerful revolutionary armed groups. In addition, thanks to its own foreign relations, Misrata enjoyed a continuous flow of supplies and weapons, some of which it sometimes shared with others such as Islamist armed organisations in Barqa/Cyrenaica or anti-Dignity/Haftar and anti-UAE actors. Misrata was an actor to get along or even ally with against the nascent but enormous 'anti-Islamist' coalition in Barqa/Cyrenaica, rather than one to alienate. Second, Misrata did not pose a direct threat to ASL and BRSC and the likes of them in Barqa/Cyrenaica. Since Misrata was geographically remote from the area of operations of the said actors, there was no immediate clash of interest between them and Misrata. On the contrary, these disparate actors were pushed into the same 'camp of convenience' by the indiscriminate attack against them all by 'anti-Islamist' Libyan actors, who morphed into Dignity/Haftar subsequently.

3.3. TYPE III - DEMISE

3.3.1. ASL 3 – Restrictive/Repressive Environment – Bellicose Behaviour

ASL became a party to the Libyan civil war to some extent, which started to dominate and shape the strategic landscape/environment in Libya in 2014, by fighting against Haftar and his big military coalition. ASL was hardly a considerable actor in the civil war as the determinative axis was rather between "Dignity" and "Dawn". However, because of the bolstered nature of the Dignity, ASL had to fight against a much stronger adversary. The civil war turned militarized in 2014, first in Benghazi and then in Tripoli, with a considerable increase in foreign weapon shipments to two opposing

constellations of armed groups and political organizations. The first was the "Operation Dignity" camp in the east, which was directed by General Khalifa Haftar and backed by the UAE, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and France. The second was the anti-Haftar "Libya Dawn" coalition in Tripolitania, which was sponsored by Turkey, Qatar, and Sudan, and had militia supporters in Benghazi and Derna. Despite the fact that international forces intervened directly with bombings and limited incursions by special operations troops, the actual fighting was still carried out by Libyans (Wehrey, 2020: 5).

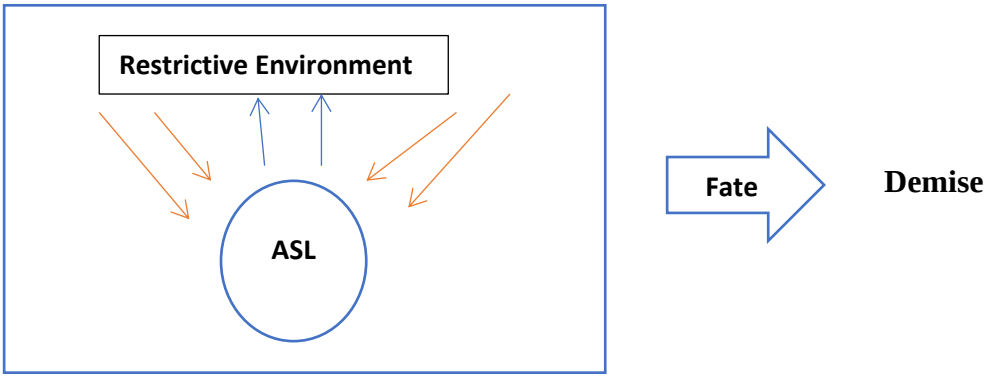


Figure 11: Belligerence (ASL 3)

Locally recruited Libyan forces drawn from Qadhafi-era military units, a meagre air wing of ageing MiG fighter-bombers, and, later that summer and fall, more defecting army units and neighbourhood paramilitaries known as "support forces"—all loosely constituted as the Libyan National Army—carried out Haftar's attack on Benghazi militia bases on May 16th (later designated the Libyan Arab Armed Forces or LAAF) (Wehrey, 2020: 17). With airstrikes and special operations raids in Benghazi and Derna, as well as the funnelling of supplies, weapons, and advisors to the LNA, his effort had drawn increasingly considerable foreign military support from Egypt and the United Arab Emirates by that summer (Kirkpatrick & Schmitt, 2014).

The authorities in Tobruk and Bayda, both in eastern Libya, have inclined to back Field Marshal Haftar. The self-declared Libyan National Army (LNA), based near Benghazi, was led by the commander. Despite its name, the LNA is not the Libyan armed forces, but it does have a core of regulars, many of whom were once part of the Qaddafi regime's military. In addition to the LNA, Haftar is supported by an informal coalition made up of several militias. Some are tribal in nature, while others are identified by

their hometown, while yet others practice Salafism. Haftar professes to be fighting all types of political Islam. His famous speech was aimed not only against violent groups like al-Qaeda but also at more moderate Muslim Brotherhood and non-Islamist groups. The UAE, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, France, Jordan, and Russia have all backed Haftar diplomatically, ideologically, financially, and militarily (Harchaoui & Lazib, 2019: 4).

Haftar began Operation Karama (Dignity) in May 2014, a nebulous campaign to purge Libya of all Islamists and revolutionaries. This was the official start of the LNA. The retired general and several hundred fighters moved out of their strongholds in al-Marj and al-Abyar to combat Islamist groups in Benghazi (Harchaoui & Lazib, 2019: 5). In the eastern city of Benghazi, Haftar led a coalition of disgruntled army units and local tribes in a military assault on Islamists and jihadists in May 2014. He won the east after years of hard combat and set his sights on the west (Wehrey, 2019). The LNA launched an offensive against Derna, a coastal city on the Egyptian border, in May 2018. The Islamist coalition there was almost entirely crushed after eight months of brutal urban combat (Harchaoui & Lazib, 2019: 7).

Thanks to external assistance, the LNA has steadily increased in size since 2014, notably after 2016. The nonviolent takeover of the oil ports between Sidra and Brega, dubbed the "Oil Crescent," in September 2016 enhanced the LNA's national and worldwide reputation. Haftar's territorial dominance grew significantly, culminating in the capture of Benghazi in 2017. Every Islamist or revolutionary group was labelled "terrorists" or "dawa'ish" (members of DAESH) in Haftar's "war on terror" narrative. Jihadists, moderate proponents of political Islam, and non-Islamist dissidents were all treated equally by the strongman. He has been able to gather a wide range of factions because of his indiscriminate rhetoric. Haftar has the support of several eastern tribes, affluent businesses, and old Qaddafi-era officers. Another key source of support in Cyrenaica is the Madkhali Salafi factions (Harchaoui & Lazib, 2019: 5).

ASL’s adversary, LNA and Haftar did not remain stagnant, on the contrary, he consolidated the coalition even further and turned it into a much more compact and efficient force, especially after 2016. Since its inception in 2014, Haftar's armed coalition has evolved. Initially, the Karama campaign was fought mostly by civilians from local and tribal groups, who were backed up by about 200 regulars. Haftar has

worked to strengthen the LNA and convert it into a more professionalized and efficient force since he suppressed Islamist insurgents in Benghazi in 2016. Simultaneously, he assures that the LNA is loyal to him personally. For example, the commander has made it a point to staff some of the LNA's top battalions with members of the Ferjani and Zway tribes, his father's and mother's kin, respectively. Foreign backing has been critical to Haftar's ability to transform the LNA. Haftar has effectively monopolized access to foreign sponsors. The UAE has been the LNA's most generous and decisive supporter. Egypt and Haftar have a tight working connection. Cairo has helped to shape the LNA into a more conventional and professional military by giving training and technological assistance. Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Russia, and France are all strong supporters (Harchaoui & Lazib, 2019: 7).

For instance, the 101st and 106th Battalions are part of a new generation of LNA troops that emerged in Cyrenaica following 2016. As a result, the LNA's leadership ensured that both battalions used properly trained recruits rather than individuals who joined fighting units during the 2011 revolution or the 2014 Karama war. In terms of manpower, equipment, and territory control, the 106th is the LNA's largest single unit. It has a total force of over 5,000 fighters. It can also rely on Salafi groups and eastern tribes for supplementary auxiliaries. In 2018, the 106th gained brigade status after absorbing ten battalions from Benghazi and Ajdabiya. Khaled Haftar, Khalifa Haftar's son, is unofficially in command of the 106th, after his brother Saddam. He reportedly trained in Egypt and Jordan (Harchaoui & Lazib, 2019: 7).

The 101st battalion is a regular military force made up primarily of Ajdabiya fighters. Captain Mohamed Absayat al-Zway, a young officer who received his training abroad, is in charge. Absayat's troop is well-trained, disciplined, and tribally diverse. During the opening stages of the Derna fight in May and June 2018, Haftar positioned both the 101st and the 106th near the front to boost their legitimacy and military significance. After then, the 101st became a component of the 106th Brigade (Harchaoui & Lazib, 2019: 7-8).

The decisive and suppressive nature of the Dignity coalition as the creator of the strangulating environment for ASL and others were reflected in their ruthless conduct, too. *The Independent* claimed in 2019 that LNA affiliates allegedly perpetrated war

crimes during the battle for Derna, citing "instances of torture, murder, and mutilation of bodies" as examples (Trew, 2019). Meanwhile, Haftar's efforts in Benghazi have succeeded in restoring some normalcy to the eastern city after three years of fighting, though it remained plagued by car bombs and killings. Extrajudicial executions of inmates have been carried out by Haftar-aligned militias (Bergen & Sims, 2018).

The enormous gap between ASL and its nemesis Dignity in terms of firepower was also consequential for the former and its allies' crippling defeat. This was basically a fight between two forces one of which lacked air power completely. From 2012 through February 5, 2020, 4,349 strikes were carried out, with the LNA alone carrying out 2,348 of them (Salyk-Virk, 2020: 43).

Foreigners intervened in Libyan military and political actors, many of whom were highly localized and acting through networks of foreign-based Libyan intermediaries, according to the traditional definition of a proxy or surrogate war: funnelling materiel, intelligence, training, and media support to Libyan military and political actors (Wehrey, Is Libya a Proxy War?, 2014). During this phase, the main motivation for outside intervention was ideological—a struggle over Islamists' place in Libya's political order, albeit it was also about control of economic resources and how much of the old Qadhafi-led order to save (Constantini, 2011) (Harchaoui & Lazib, 2019). At certain points, Abu Dhabi's policies have been particularly decisive, reflecting a history of Emirati military adventurism and economic development in the region, spurred in part by a "zero tolerance" policy to Islamists and political plurality in general (Ulrichsen, 2020) (Steinberg, 2020) (Rubin, 2014).

Anti-Islamists in Libya and abroad, for their part, were emboldened by the transition of power in Cairo; Qadhafists, in particular, found a welcoming sanctuary in Cairo and established their own media outlets (Lacher, Magnates, Media, and Mercenaries:How Libya's conflicts produce transnational networks straddling Africa and the Middle East, 2020). Some anti-Islamist Libyans in the east went so far as to proclaim, "We need a Sisi here" during this time (Wehrey, The Burning Shores: Inside the Battle for the New Libya, 2018: 166).

In Haftar's battlefield triumph, French assistance was also crucial and decisive. Personnel from the French Directorate-General for External Security (DGSE

paramilitary)'s arm, whose presence in eastern Libya was not formally confirmed by Paris until three DGSE officials were killed in the downing of a LAAF helicopter by an anti-Haftar militia in 2016 (Bensimon, Zerrouky, & Bobin, 2016). Hundreds of French DGSE officers joined LAAF forces on frontline missions, acting as forward spotters for mortars and artillery, according to UN security sources. Above all, they carried out covert surveillance for counter-sniper missions (Wehrey, 2020: 21). What is remarkable about this policy, which was being implemented by the president and the DGSE, was that it was taking place in the midst of professed French diplomatic support for the GNA, which Haftar opposed, and with the French fully aware that Haftar had national ambitions for power that extend far beyond the battle in Benghazi (Gillon, 2020).

Moreover, Africa Intelligence claimed that France had sent General Khalifa Haftar with a reconnaissance aircraft, according to the local news outlet Libya Observer (Assad, 2018); A Libyan National Army (LNA) camp was also discovered with French missiles sold to them by the US (Schmitt & Walsh, 2019). France's covert operations throughout the country demonstrated its fondness for the LNA. In 2018, France reportedly carried out seven strikes, most likely in collaboration with the LNA. Members of French intelligence were apprehended in April 2019 near the Libyan-Tunisian border, allegedly with communications devices linked to the LNA (Mikaïl, 2019).

Around the same time, Western diplomatic sources and local contacts reported a slew of foreign military and intelligence personnel stationed at the LAAF-controlled Banina Air Base in Benghazi, engaged in varying levels of surveillance, liaison, and direct support. Russian personnel were also among them (Wehrey, 2020: 21).

Even though it maintained channels open to other actors, Russia gained a new ally with the advent of Haftar in eastern Libya in early and mid-2014. By late 2014 and early 2015, Russia had teamed up with the UAE and Egypt to give Haftar weaponry, spare parts, and medical assistance, as well as technicians, logisticians, advisors, and intelligence officers (Becker & Schmitt, 2018). Moscow also minted dinars for Haftar's unrecognized Central Bank in eastern Libya, supporting the solvency of this parallel government (Becker & Schmitt, 2018).

With support of all sorts, including even printed money for its operations, Dignity/Haftar became an undisputed monopoly of power in Barqa/Cyrenaica, where

ASL and BRSC tried to put up a fight against the former. The permissive environment that paved the way for the emergence and existence of ASL in the first place ceased to exist as Haftar gradually and steadily increased his grip over the same territory.

The UAE and Egypt were not lesser supporters of Haftar and Dignity compared to France and Russia. If anything, they were much more at the forefront in their kinetic support. The UAE launched its first strikes in 2014, departing from an Egyptian air base (Kirkpatrick & Schmitt, 2014). The UAE is said to have carried out three solo airstrikes since June 2018, but as many as 67 in collaboration with the LNA. In certain circumstances, it's difficult to tell whether the UAE was acting independently. The UAE employed Chinese Wing Loong drones in its drone strikes. These 67 strikes have resulted in as many as 124 civilian deaths on the low end, and as many as 167 on the high end (Salyk-Virk, 2020: 24).

According to local and international sources, as of 2020, Egypt's 42 attacks have resulted in at least 13 and up to 14 civilian deaths. France's five attacks had killed at least four civilians and could have killed as many as eight. France could possibly be to blame for seven strikes in 2018, which were most likely coordinated by the LNA. Since its entry into the conflict in 2016, the UAE has carried out 131 attacks, killing at least 135 and possibly as many as 185 civilians (Salyk-Virk, 2020: 43).

In February 2015, Egypt's government admitted to conducting airstrikes in Libya for the first time. The initial strikes were in retaliation for the killing of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians by DAESH (Cunningham & Habib, 2015). Egypt's first involvement in the crisis, on the other hand, began in August 2014. The UAE used Egyptian military stations to fire armed planes into Libya (Kirkpatrick & Schmitt, 2014). Egyptian airstrikes hit the Bab Shiha neighbourhood and the headquarters of Jabal al-Akhdar Industrial Co. in east Derna on February 15, 2015. At least seven civilians, three or four of them were children, were killed in the strikes (Bergen & Sims, 2018). Although the pretext for Cairo to directly engage militarily in Libya was retaliation against DAESH’s execution of Egyptian citizens, given the prevalent environment at the time, it was not the focus of it. Cairo was already in a coalition with Haftar to carve out an authority for him.

Since the summer of 2018, the LNA's persistent airstrike assaults across the country have resulted in a massive territorial gain. The LNA refocused its attention on the southern oil crescent following the struggle for Derna, which began in 2018. According to data compiled by New America and Airwars based on public allegations of LNA strikes, the LNA carried out at least 60 strikes between June and December 2018, with eight to eleven civilians killed, as well as additional seven operations possibly coordinated with France (Salyk-Virk, 2020: 32). The correlation between airstrikes and territorial gain is positive and conclusive also for the cases of ASL and DAESH especially in Barqa/Cyrenaica. The more ASL and DAESH were suppressed by damning airstrikes, the more the former ceded territory and got close to obscurity.

Between 2012 and 2018, the majority of strikes took place in Benghazi, Sirte, and Derna, cities that were hotly fought during the Libyan uprising and 2011 intervention (Bergen & Sims, 2018). This concentration of air strikes and huge firepower on Benghazi, Sirte and Derna account for the demise of both ASL and DAESH militarily and territorially, since both organisations had set up, operated and prevailed in these cities.

While Dignity attracted a huge level of foreign support in terms of air force, special forces, weapons, funds, PR etc., the political and diplomatic support it received from not only regional powers such as UAE and Egypt but also the most powerful global power, the US was decisive in the harsh response against the ASL and BRSC since the latter was held responsible for the assassination of US' ambassador Christopher Stevens in 2012 in Benghazi. The presence of designated terrorist entities among Haftar's opponents in Benghazi, including individuals suspected of participating in the September 2012 attack on the US diplomatic mission in Benghazi, led to a more tolerant attitude toward Haftar's operation by some elements in Washington, as well as some tacit acceptance of Emirati and Egyptian support (Wehrey, The Burning Shores: Inside the Battle for the New Libya, 2018: 180).

US' both direct and indirect role in contracting the life space of ASL has also been consequential for ASL's lifespan. US military elements' direct engagement with ASL and the former's first support to and then leniency towards Haftar/Dignity provided the latter an ample ground to flourish. Until the focus shifted to DAESH in Sirte, US had

cooperated with Haftar, naturally boosting its military capacity. When Haftar wasn't interested in assault on Sirte, US did not do anything to harm him, either. Instead, his coalition remained intact and continued to prosper. Since Haftar was already being highly supported by a huge coalition, US' tacit approval of the continuation of this support was enough of an opportunity.

To illustrate the US' support to Dignity, which was not limited to a passive tolerant attitude, U.S. special operations forces and intelligence personnel landed in Haftar-controlled Benghazi in late 2015 reportedly to monitor and meet with the Libyan Arab Army Forces (LAAF). Apprehending and prosecuting Libyan extremists wanted in the 2012 terrorist attack on the US diplomatic station in Benghazi was also a priority for US law enforcement personnel working via his forces (Wehrey, The Burning Shores: Inside the Battle for the New Libya, 2018: 181) (Ryan, 2016). For instance, on August 11, 2013, several Libyans reported hearing explosions that they believed were triggered by US airstrikes in revenge for ASL on Twitter. The Twitter account "@news yemen" claimed (in Arabic) that ASL's headquarters in Al-Dahir, a district in Sirte, had been hit by an airstrike (Bergen & Sims, 2018). However, as previously stated, the Obama administration barred US military soldiers on the ground in eastern Libya from actively assisting Haftar unless he agreed to submit to a centrally-controlled, civilian-led government. The need for Haftar to join the national government became even more pressing when US officials attempted to persuade the LAAF to join a joint east-west Libyan attack on the DAESH's stronghold in Sirte, in the country's central coastal region. When it became evident that Haftar would not participate—mostly because of political considerations, but also because his supply lines would be stretched—US forces scaled back their engagement with him (Wehrey, 2020: 22). The US, for its part, has long regarded Haftar with suspicion and has formally backed the Tripoli government, however, it retained an intelligence and special operations presence among Haftar's forces in Benghazi (Wehrey, 2019).

There is no question about the military might of ASL's adversary. On the other hand, the fact that Dignity was not only a military but also a political organisation is one of the very things creating a very hostile environment for ASL. If Dignity was only a military actor, its fight against the ASL would remain limited to a 'turf war' at best in Barqa/Cyrenaica without the goal of annihilating the former. In that scenario, ASL

would hypothetically maintain its existence on a limited territory. However, Dignity's mandate entailed establishing a political authority under Haftar in entire Libya had it been successful in its fights against the Dawn. Ultimately Haftar had to settle for carving out a political authority in Barqa/Cyrenaica, but he made sure that his political authority was absolute: there was no place for any challenger, not to mention ASL and BRSC.

Another thing making Dignity a backbreaking adversary of ASL and BRSC was the fact that it was an organic fighting force in the sense that the infantry component of it was almost entirely consisted of Libyans. Of course the overwhelming firepower provided by foreign air assets and the sophistication of the foreign special forces were enough to cripple any non-state armed group militarily then, however, even these game-changer elements would not be enough to uproot ASL and BRSC entirely and socially as they were made up by the local residents of their area of operation. Hence, Dignity combined almost all necessary elements ranging from high-level combat skills and overwhelming firepower to greater and local manpower to effectively pressure ASL and BRSC.

Dignity was not only a military or political coalition and adversary, but at the same time it apparently acted in line with a holistic and concerted effort with its foreign patrons as part of a deliberate strategy. This strategy and concerted effort also had a 'public relations' component. This PR component was undertaken in the form of a 'psychological operation' with which not only ASL and BRSC but also all colours of 'Islamists' were targeted through a harsh smear/defamation campaign. Military defeat was not good enough: whatever social credit 'Islamists' were still enjoying then, had to be eradicated. This atmosphere made it much more difficult and unbearable for all who were somehow affiliated to 'Islamism' to stand as a social, political and military actor, including ASL and BRSC, since ordinary population were turned against them considerably.

Aside from the strikes, this stage of the civil war was marked by an increase of the outside powers' narrative war. Satellite television stations, which were funded and operated by foreign governments, played an important role. Libyan power brokers based overseas did as well. The Islamic scholar-businessman Aref al-Nayed, who served as Libyan ambassador to the UAE, and tycoon Hasan Tatanaki, who leveraged

longstanding ties in Egypt and the Emirates, but later turned on Haftar, were the most important in supporting the Dignity side with their own media platforms, financial aid, and personal diplomacy (Fitzgerald, 2014) (Wehrey, Is Libya a Proxy War?, 2014).

In the social media sphere, legions of Twitter trolls and "bots," many of whom were based in the Gulf, spread a witches' brew of fake news, slander, and hate speech—a tendency that would only become worse as the war progressed in 2019 (Wehrey, 2020: 18). This production was enhanced by partisan Libyan media channels, which were influenced or directed by foreign countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Russia (Analysis of April 2020 Twitter takedowns linked to Saudia Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, Honduras, Serbia, and Indonesia, 2020). Disinformation, such as recycled old images or bogus Western news, has become increasingly important in the struggle for public opinion (Lacher, Drones, Deniability, and Disinformation: Warfare in Libya and the New International Disorder, 2020).

Operation Dignity was described as a fight on terrorism in Egyptian and Emirati media. The narrative war mirrored the region's larger divide between the Emirates-led bloc and Qatar/Turkey, with the media offensive increasingly emphasizing themes of Barqa/Cyrenaican uniqueness and Arab authenticity. This showed itself in Libya as a nativist demonization of Haftar's Libyan opponents, who were represented as “ghuraba”, or outsiders, who came from western Libya and were of Turkish rather than Arab heritage. Both of these identities were, of course, fictitious, based on family ancestry that dated back centuries. Meanwhile, eastern tribes and federalists used an anti-Italian and anti-Turkish narrative to invoke the historical colonial influence of these countries in what is now Libya (Wehrey, 2020: 18). Expulsions and arrests followed in a tit-for-tat cycle that rippled far beyond Libya's borders. At least ten Libyan nationals living in the UAE were detained and tortured under the guise of supporting extremists inside Libya, i.e. claimed financial ties to anti-Haftar militias stationed in Benghazi (UAE: Reveal Whereabouts of ‘Disappeared’ Libyans, 2014).

After a certain point during the civil war, Dignity also drew foreign fighters into its ranks, which also arguably boosted its morale and manpower against its adversaries like ASL and BRSC. Specifically, Haftar's LAAF began recruiting Chadian and Darfur fighters for combat in Benghazi, the oil crescent, Kufra, and, most notably, the Fezzan,

where pro-Dignity Tabu factions fought Tuareg (aligned with Misrata and Libya Dawn) in the town of Ubari, strategically located next to the Sharara oil field (Wehrey, 2020: 19).

A series of developments disrupting ASL and BRSC's logistics and supplies appeared to have spelled the serious decrease in their capacity to maintain their organizational strength and fight against Dignity. The geographic disadvantage of ASL and BRSC was already obvious since they could not benefit from an adjacent territory for continuous supplies but they partly relied on feeble supplies from afar, which were not fully reliable for ASL and BRSC due to certain limitations.

Misrata, in particular, had emerged as a vital stopover for military and medical supplies to Benghazi-based forces, primarily via tiny fishing boat convoys (Wehrey, 2020: 19). However, as the number of DAESH militants sharing the Benghazi frontlines with the BRSC and other anti-Haftar forces grew, this distribution of aid became increasingly problematic among Misratan circles. Misratans who supported the arms supplies to Benghazi insisted that the help was only going to revolutionaries, not jihadist anti-Haftar groups like ASL and the DAESH (Wehrey, 2020: 20). Of course, after the weapons landed in Benghazi, there was little way to keep track of how they were being distributed throughout the front lines. However, the UN claimed in early 2016 that coordinated BRSC-DAESH efforts on the Benghazi front had come to an end (UN Security Council Panel of Experts Report on Libya, 2017: 110).

Blocking Misratan aid meant taking Mraysa, a vital port in southern Benghazi that the BRSC had renovated with a stone jetty to receive bigger shipments (Wehrey, 2020: 20). However, repeated attempts to do so were blocked by the BRSC's and other anti-Haftar forces' and Dignity forces' capacity gaps, particularly in mobility, artillery, and armour (Wehrey, 2020: 20) (Wehrey, Is Libya Headed for Another Qaddafi?, 2015). However, this altered in early and mid-2016 as a result of military assistance from the UAE and France (UN Security Council Panel of Experts Report on Libya, 2017: 24-35) (Harchaoui, La politique libyenne de la France et ses antécédents historiques, 2019).

The entry of the GNA in Tripoli was timed to coincide with a gradual but significant reduction in Qatari and Turkish backing for anti-Haftar forces (Wehrey, 2020: 20). However, in Haftar's eastern camp, Emirati, French, and Egyptian backing persisted,

allowing the LAAF to gain military ground in Benghazi, which Haftar then used to attack the GNA. The aid provided by the Emirates in particular was critical. Haftar's men were given armoured personnel carriers by the Emiratis, which gave them mobility and protection as they marched into Benghazi's dense urban neighbourhoods (Lewis, 2017). By 2017, Emirati close-air support in the form of air-tractor attack aircraft (Lewis, 2017)—converted AT-802 crop-dusters—as well as Chinese-made Wing Loong drones, had assisted Haftar's forces in defeating remaining militant pockets in seaside Benghazi neighbourhoods—an offensive marked by widespread human rights violations. (Libya: War Crimes as Benghazi Residents Flee, 2017). Aside from the battlefield, foreign and, in particular, Emirati assistance was vital to Haftar's political consolidation, particularly through his familial support network. Many of the foreign aid requests were made by his sons, causing resentment among senior LAAF officials concerning Haftar's favouritism (Wehrey, 2020: 21). The Emiratis continued their habit of providing weapons to a special LAAF unit, the 106th, which was informally led by one of Haftar's sons (Wehrey & Badi, 2019).

The last nail on ASL's coffin was arguably its overlap with DAESH in terms of ideology, audience, and potential recruits. The 'market competition' over 'jihadists', which was decisively won by DAESH, evaporated the remaining appeal and prospects of ASL in the 'market'. ASL and its affiliated militias appeared to revere the "caliphate" or DAESH, particularly among the younger 'mujahidin' generations. At a point, the Islamic Youth Shura Council confirmed their affiliation with DAESH (Varvelli, 2014).

The shift from ASL to DAESH started with 'innocent' sympathy of ASL members and continued with mass defections to DAESH later. Decrease in the number of potential or actual members of ASL was not the very thing paving the way for its meltdown, but DAESH's much 'brighter brand value' than ASL. As an ideology and a brand, DAESH offered what ASL is to offer to wannabe 'jihadists', but in a much better way. ASL's response to DAESH, on the other hand, was accommodative rather than bellicose since both were under attack and threat by the same and much stronger adversary. It is not clear whether ASL ever viewed DAESH as a threat, but even if it did, there was no point in wasting its energy on picking up a fight with DAESH since it was not a priority. Both tended to find themselves on the same side of the frontline against Haftar and his big coalition. Furthermore, given the scale of the defections from ASL to

DAESH -some put the estimate at rates close to 50 %-, a different attitude by ASL such as a bellicose one against DAESH would probably change nothing with regards to the lifetime of ASL.

3.3.2. DAESH 3 – Restrictive/Repressive Environment – Bellicose Behaviour

The most decisive blow to DAESH's existence in Libya was dealt at the hands of a grand military coalition consisted of the toughest revolutionary -mostly western- Libyan forces, which were supported by chiefly the US and UK in the forms of airstrikes, special forces, and intelligence assets. The uncompromising attack against DAESH in Libya by effective Libyan military actors, which were also materially supported by major global powers constituted the most compelling aspect of a restrictive strategic environment for DAESH.

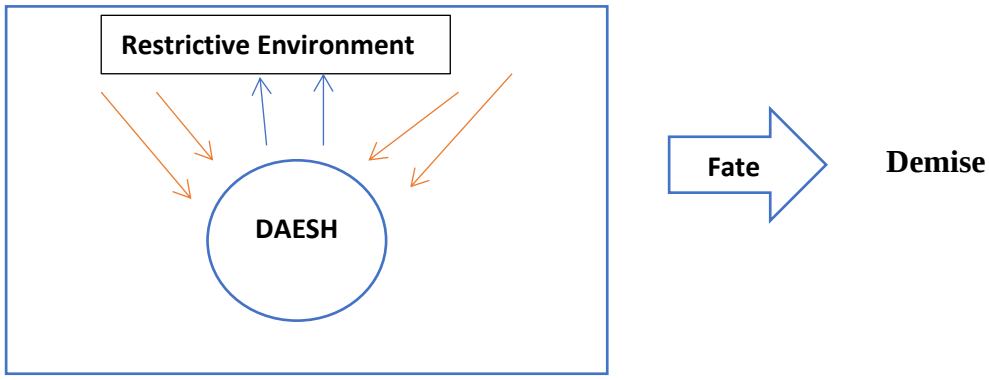


Figure 12: Belligerence (DAESH 3)

DAESH faced off a much greater organic Libyan military coalition led by Misrata, whose centre of gravity was very close to DAESH's capital Sirte. Apart from the military skills of Misratan forces, their geographic proximity to their target granted them serious logistical advantages from a military point of view. Moreover, unlike any other Libyan actor in post-revolution Libya, DAESH received the undivided attention of the US, which was extremely uninterested in anything related to Libya before and after the 2011 revolution. Defeating and ending the rule of DAESH became the only tenet of US' Libya 'policy'. This toughened the military force and commitment DAESH had to confront. Even the alleged perpetrator of the assassination of the US ambassador, ASL

did not provoke the same level of US commitment to defeat DAESH apart from a few on-target punitive special operations attacks by the US military elements.

In response to this highly restrictive environment, DAESH expectedly embraced a bellicose approach against its enemies for obvious reasons. Even if, in a parallel universe, DAESH was willing to accommodate the US and other international actors, the latter would not tolerate its existence because of its practices, ideology and attacks against any construct produced by the West, from sovereignty to citizenship. Since accommodation attempts by DAESH would change nothing and the fact that DAESH feeds on fighting, it naturally took the bellicose path against its foreign enemies. On the other hand, whether backed by an international coalition or not, DAESH's relations with local armed groups in every theatre it existed were not determined by the principle of equality, rather they were determined by a hierarchy whereby DAESH ensured the subordination of others. When other local armed groups or actors did not consent to this subordination, DAESH knew only one path: war. This existential and ideological incompatibility made it impossible for DAESH to develop a relationship model, other than fighting against either local or foreign enemies.

The nucleus and predecessors of the components of the anti-DAESH coalition were arguably forged during the toppling of Gadhafi in 2011. The networks and relations between foreign and Libyan components of the coalition against Gadhafi paved the way for future collaboration. For example, there were French and Emirati people participating, with British special operations units stationed in Misrata during the revolution in 2011. They were forming operational ties that would be rekindled five years later during the fight against DAESH, most notably with Misratan businessman and former GNA Minister of Interior Fathi Bashagha (Wehrey, 2020: 12).

By mid- and late-2015, US intelligence and special operations soldiers were engaging with Misrata-based political and militia figures in preparation for the assault, even while they were involved in combat with Haftar's LAAF (Naylor & Turse, 2019). By early 2016, Misrata's leaders were reportedly pushing the US and, to a lesser extent, the UK for more counter-terrorism assistance (Wehrey, 202: 22) (Jone, 2017). After the terrorist organization in Sirte encroached on a critical checkpoint outside Misrata, threatening to cut off Misrata's supply connections with southern Libya, they finally launched an

attack in May 2016. When it became clear that the fight against DAESH in Sirte would be led by Misratans, US special operations forces coordinating with Haftar in Benghazi reduced their presence, and the US threw its intelligence and airpower behind the Misrata-led operation, dubbed "Bunyan al- Marsus" or "The Solid Foundation" (Naylor & Turse, 2019). In 2016, Bashagha was in charge of coordinating American military assistance to the Misratan-led operation against the DAESH's bastion in Sirte, its capital (Wehrey, 2019).

During the months-long battle against DAESH in Sirte in 2016, American and British special operations personnel provided support to Misratan proxy militias while keeping in mind the broader political ramifications of their actions. The assistance, which largely consisted of intelligence, was task-specific, restricted in length, and lacked lethal capabilities that could be used against Haftar's forces afterwards. A Misratan militia leader, for example, who accompanied British special operations forces to the site of a recently bombed DAESH camp south of Sirte was handed night-vision goggles, which he swiftly returned once the mission was completed (Wehrey, 2020: 23).

The anti-DAESH campaign in Sirte, which ended successfully in December 2016, was hailed in Washington as a counterterrorism model that could be used elsewhere—special operations forces working with indigenous proxies loosely tethered to a recognized political authority, backed up by precision airstrikes (Wehrey, 2020: 23).

The suppressive and highly destructive firepower in the form of mostly the US' air campaign against the strongholds of DAESH was a significant force multiplier in the latter's defeat. For instance, on October 12, 2016, the US launched three airstrikes over Sirte, resulting in multiple reports of possible civilian casualties. In addition, five DAESH fighters are said to have perished (Bergen & Sims, 2018). In total, six hundred and seventy-two (672) attacks were carried out in Sirte, the majority of which were carried out as part of Operation Odyssey Lightning, the US military campaign against the terrorist organisation DAESH. 247 strikes have apparently been carried out in Derna, where DAESH first established itself before shifting its headquarters to Sirte (Bergen & Sims, 2018).

The highly destructive nature of the air campaign to wipe DAESH off expectedly caused extreme collateral damage, too. Salah Mohamed, a cab driver in Sirte, told the

Washington Post in a January 2018 report that "all they cared about was liberating Sirte," alluding to the 2016 battle against DAESH. "They were unconcerned about the consequences" (Raghavan, 2018).

Although Sirte was the capital of DAESH and accordingly the main focus of the operation against it, DAESH also had spin-off presence in less popular places like Sabratha. Very similar to Sirte's peculiarities, which made it the perfect choice for DAESH to set up its headquarters there, Sabratha also shared some of Sirte's peculiarities that paved the way for it becoming a spin-off DAESH presence. Thus, despite not to the extent of Sirte, Sabratha also became the target of the anti-DAESH coalition. Sabratha was the scene of a bloody struggle against DAESH terrorists who had set up a training camp in surrounding date palm plantations in early 2016. Local militias, bolstered by a US bombardment on the terrorist camp, drove the terrorist group out (Wehrey, 2019).

After the defeat of DAESH in Sirte, US continued more 'ad hoc-based', occasional targeting of small-scale targets such as the cells and individuals who had fled Sirte toward inner areas. Bani Walid was an example of such targeting. According to a press release from the US Africa Command (AFRICOM), four DAESH-Libya combatants died, and no civilians were hurt as a result of a US airstrike (Affairs, 2018). "#Libya_ now," Libya Alaan, a local television network, tweeted in Arabic: Six persons were killed in a nocturnal raid on #Bani Walid, including a key leader of DAESH # ISIS, 'Abd al-Ati Eshtiwi Abu Sita,' also known as 'Kiwi.'" (Salyk-Virk, 2020: 12).

By and after 2018, sporadic airstrikes by the US were in tandem with the phase of the dispersal of DAESH's remnants to Libya's south, Fezzan region. According to New America and Airwars research, the US has carried out 11 airstrikes in conjunction with the GNA since June 2018, killing at least 59 combatants. US AFRICOM stated that the US had carried out 10 airstrikes on DAESH-Libya and AQIM terrorist sites (six total airstrikes in Libya in 2018, and four in 2019). Many of the strikes took place in Murzuq's southern outskirts, where DAESH was based at the time (Salyk-Virk, 2020: 36-37). Then, in April 2019, a night-time air raid in southeast Libya killed between five and six DAESH fighters. According to later sources, four of the people murdered were civilians (Salyk-Virk, 2020: 41). In August 2018, DAESH stormed the Kaam Gate

checkpoint in southwest Libya. Their original plan to detonate a car bomb failed when it did not go off. DAESH used gunfire and grenades to try to reroute their attack, killing four people and injured three others. Shortly after the incident, an attack by AFRICOM killed an DAESH leader fleeing Sirte (Salyk-Virk, 2020: 41). According to official announcements from AFRICOM, the US targeted communities in southern Libya four times between September and early October 2019, killing 43 DAESH members (Secretary-General, 2020). This was the most active period for the United States in 2019. The United States' last strike in Libya was 10 months ago, with the exception of a strike recorded in Ubari in February 2019 that AFRICOM has not publicly confirmed (Salyk-Virk, 2020: 42).

Between 2012 and 2020, the US carried out 550 airstrikes in Libya (17 in 2017; 5 in 2018; 7 in 2019), killing between 11 and 21 people (Salyk-Virk, 2020: 39). Since DAESH had already lost its stronghold in Sirte in 2016, US airstrikes especially by and after 2017 were more than enough firepower to annihilate the remnants of DAESH in the forms of cells, individuals, and runaways.

By the end of 2020, the US had maintained that its airstrikes against DAESH in Libya were in direct support of and approved by the GNA (Trump, 2020) (Townsend, 2020). "Our ongoing focus on DAESH-Libya, in conjunction with our interagency and African partners and at low cost in Department of Defense resources, continues to disrupt DAESH freedom of action as a regional terrorist threat" according to the US AFRICOM 2020 posture statement (Salyk-Virk, 2020: 40).

By 2020, the threat posed by DAESH was severely downgraded by external observers. DAESH remained to be seen as a problem in Libya, but the DAESH of 2019 was a shadow of what it was before the U.S.-led Sirte battle in 2016, which drove DAESH out of the city in December. Those who remain have reportedly created "desert camps... [to hide] fighters and weaponry" in the Sahara or "sleeper cells" in Sirte (Salyk-Virk, 2020: 41). Others joined al-Qaeda affiliates in neighbouring countries or chose to help the organization (Raghavan, 2019).

To put the extent of DAESH’s demise into context, by 2019 according to reports from Sirte, US military officials believed there were only about 100 DAESH terrorists in Libya, down from the 5,000 that the country formerly had (Raghavan, 2019).

CONCLUSION

ASL, DAESH and MS and each of their different phases and experiences as armed organisations throughout their trajectories for the past decade in Libya were analysed in three main categories: Type I, Type II, and Type III.

Type I entails an experience and outcome of success for the relevant organisation(s) in question whereby the organisation(s) thrived, maintained its organisational structure, expanded its control either territorially or socially, or could operate and exist unabated in its environment.

Type II entails an experience and outcome of survival or something slightly more than the survival of the relevant organisation(s) in question whereby the organisation(s) could not thrive, could not expand its control either territorially or socially, could not operate and exist unabated in its environment; but could maintain its organisational structure to some extent and could struggle with its challenging environment or adversaries mainly thanks to its ability to secure a certain level of material and fighting support from fellow armed organisations against the same adversary, and as a result, could avoid the fate of dissolution for a while. This experience basically keeps the organisation(s) in a state of floating, instead of thriving or dissolving altogether.

Type III entails an experience and outcome of demise or dissolution for the organisation(s) in question as a result of their ultimate defeat and dismantling at the hands of a much greater and stronger military coalition or adversary, which is mobilised and formed especially for the specific purpose of defeating and dissolving the organisation(s) in question.

ASL, DAESH and MS all had their Type I moment in the past decade at mostly different times, through which they thrived; imposed their control in their environment; did not face an existential adversary to exhaust them; could dare further expand and capture valuable assets such as the ‘oil crescent’ and so on. All displayed or embraced various behaviours such as assertion, accommodation, and belligerence, sometimes simultaneously, sometimes asynchronously, depending on whom they dealt with. At times they displayed both accommodative and bellicose behaviour simultaneously as they dealt with both friends and foes at the same time. The accommodation was usually displayed against friendly forces and actors to benefit from their support and the

unnecessity to pick up a fight with them; and yet belligerence was displayed against adversarial forces and actors.

On the other hand, assertion has been the most widespread and common practice among all three organisations during their Type I period. The main reason and enabler of the assertive behaviour was the sheer vacuum in which they could emerge, exist, operate, and impose their power usually over communities sharing the same space with these organisations. ASL, DAESH and MS all emerged, existed, and operated in a vacuum created by the state collapse following the ouster of Colonel Gadhafi in 2011. Despite experiencing the vacuum at varying levels and in their peculiar ways, ASL, DAESH, and MS have all been exposed to the vacuum of the non-existence of a fully-fledged state authority that could subjugate all these organisations for a decade. The interim governments that were formed either in Tripoli or Benghazi in the post-2011 period, regardless of their level of legitimacy and recognition, cannot match the extent of the state authority under Gadhafi. None of the interim or transitional governments was capable enough to impose their authority in the entirety of Libya, they remained local and regional at best, in their capacity to impose their authority. This vacuum or statelessness has been a boon for the prospects of all three organisations and has been the main reason for their Type I moment in the first place.

Type II practice and outcome were only experienced by ASL whereby it did not enjoy the luxury of a vacuum and asserting itself since a grand coalition, namely, Operation Dignity was formed and launched against it along with ASL's fellow coalition BRSC. During this phase, ASL was under heavy pressure from a much bigger, more powerful, and merciless adversary, it deployed bellicose behaviour against Dignity. However, it accommodated its BRSC and the rather indirect and geographically remote ally Misrata to withstand the pressure from the Dignity. It did not dissolve right away in the face of Dignity thanks to the high morale provided by the synergy created by its alignment with BRSC; and more importantly, the material inflows which ASL continued to enjoy thanks to its ongoing alliance with the BRSC and at times Misrata. Mere survival defined this period as long as BRSC as a whole could maintain its unity and positions, but nothing more.

Type III was experienced by ASL and DAESH eventually, but not by MS. Today, ASL and DAESH are non-existent in the sense of fully-fledged operational and capable organisations anymore in Libya, but MS are as operational and capable as they were in the past; if anything, they are much more capable and formidable than they used to be. ASL and DAESH, after their respective experiences of power and limited rule over a specific territory, ended up with the fate of demise. They had to face much greater military coalitions, which were actively supported by external actors and also enjoyed a social and local dimension; and more importantly, formed and mobilised with the specific purpose of defeating and dismantling ASL and DAESH. Both ASL and DAESH deployed bellicose behaviour against their much greater adversaries and lost the fight, which also resulted in the loss of territory and organisational structure subsequently. The anti-ASL and anti-DAESH coalitions destroyed the permissive environment or relatively permissive environment for these organisations by strangulating them. Under these circumstances, the respective organisational traits of these organisations or their behaviours did not matter, at least for their lifespan.

MS merits specific attention among all three organisations as it has never undergone Type III or demise. ASL and DAESH shared much more commonalities than they did with MS, and hence their fate has been radically different from that of MS. The most significant difference between MS and ASL and DAESH has been the fact that MS has never been collectively perceived as an existential threat by a group or coalition in Libya. MS has never been a priority as an enemy or threat by any grand coalition that was mobilised for the specific purpose of dismantling them. Even if there have been individual actors and groups who viewed MS as an enemy or a threat, they could not act against MS due to their other preoccupations, priorities, and threat perceptions. Even if those actors and groups could make taking on MS as their priority, their capacity would not be sufficient since they were far from being a grand and encompassing coalition. Hence, MS has only experienced enabling, and protection from both external and domestic patrons, an extremely permissive environment, a lack of a formidable enemy or a grand coalition, and a fight against only weak and easy targets.

ASL, DAESH and MS shared many commonalities in addition to their differences. All existed or became meaningful actors in the post-2011 revolution period in Libya; all displayed various behaviours such as assertion, accommodation, and belligerence

throughout their trajectories; all enjoyed a certain level of external or peer support; all fought against some actors or groups; all were ideologically oriented organisations etc., yet, none of these has been determinant in their fate. Their ultimate fate was determined by the strategic environment they were surrounded by and they either persisted or dissolved to the extent that their strategic environment allowed them to do so.

While the frameworks found in existing literature provide valuable tools for analyzing and explaining the paths and future possibilities of a given NSAG through various approaches discussed and evaluated earlier, they are not without their shortcomings. Many existing works and frameworks in academic literature primarily focus on specific methods, strategies, behaviors, and their impact on NSAGs at various levels. These factors are often highlighted as significant in determining the success, failure, survival, or other outcomes of NSAGs, emphasizing the role of the NSAGs themselves. Scholars and researchers have examined various aspects, including the legitimization and delegitimization effects of violence used by NSAGs, the formation of NSAGs, the use of service provision for gaining legitimacy, governance, resource procurement, and managing relations with foreign patrons.

These approaches also categorize their analysis into different dimensions, such as the organizational dimension (exploring the inner workings of NSAGs), the operational dimension (examining the purpose and actions of NSAGs), the political dimension (assessing how NSAGs interact with domestic and external actors), and the territorial dimension (considering the implications of NSAG-controlled territories). However, in most of these approaches, there is a strong emphasis on the agency of NSAGs in determining their own fate.

Furthermore, the context and nature of the case studies in this thesis differ significantly from those in the existing literature. Many studies in the literature focus on NSAGs operating in a constant state of civil war or intrastate conflict. In contrast, the NSAGs discussed in this thesis, particularly in the case of post-revolutionary Libya, did not exist in a continuous state of conflict. There were periods of relative calm, and some NSAGs managed to stay out of conflicts, which offered them advantages in terms of insulation from damage or exploiting the conflicts between their rivals.

Additionally, there is a notable difference between the conflict environment described in the literature and the one examined in this thesis. The literature often deals with rebellions or insurgencies against a centralized but imperfect state structure, whereas in post-revolutionary Libya, the landscape was fragmented, with numerous armed groups, quasi-state authorities limited to specific regions or cities, and complex interactions between armed groups and quasi-state legitimacy. The dynamics between a conflict involving a two-sided conflict divide and a multi-sided one naturally vary.

Moreover, discrepancies emerge between the findings or propositions of many existing works and the case studies in this thesis. For example, conventional wisdom suggests that controlling territory provides advantages to NSAGs, such as increased recruitment opportunities. However, the NSAG known as MS outlived both ASL and DAESH, despite not controlling territory. Additionally, the sequence of territorial control preceding service provision, a common pattern in NSAGs, did not apply to MS, as it never held territorial control. Governance, typically associated with NSAGs' sophistication and longer lifespans, did not align with MS's case, as it never exclusively governed a territory. ASL and DAESH engaged in governance to varying degrees but had shorter lifespans than MS.

Furthermore, the impact of territorial control on NSAG behavior differs from what is often suggested. While some works propose a positive correlation between territorial control and NSAG flexibility, DAESH in Libya did not become more flexible in its treatment of the population or its ideology despite controlling territory. In contrast to many case studies, none of the three Libyan NSAGs attributed symbolic significance to the territories they controlled. They acted pragmatically and did not attempt to transform the territories into something more significant. Finally, the literature suggests that a significant ideological gap between an NSAG and the wider population negatively affects the NSAG's durability and longevity. In the Libyan case, there was a substantial ideological gap between all NSAGs and the population, but only MS proved to be long-lived.

This thesis contributes to the existing literature in a number of ways. The thesis introduces a unique categorization of NSAG experiences into three types: Type I (ascension), Type II (survival), and Type III (demise). This categorization provides a

comprehensive framework for understanding and analyzing the different trajectories and outcomes of NSAGs. By delineating these distinct types, this research offers a valuable reference point for future studies on NSAG dynamics.

Through the analysis of ASL, DAESH, and MS, this research identifies key factors that determine the ascension of NSAGs during their Type I moments. Notably, the presence of a vacuum or statelessness in the aftermath of the Libyan revolution emerges as a critical enabler for NSAGs to assert themselves, expand their control, and thrive. This finding deepens our understanding of how NSAGs can exploit specific contextual conditions to achieve success.

The examination of ASL's Type II experience sheds light on survival strategies adopted by NSAGs when facing a much larger and powerful adversary. By cooperating with fellow armed coalitions and securing material support, ASL managed to maintain its organizational structure and avoid immediate dissolution. This insight contributes to the literature on NSAG resilience and adaptability in challenging environments.

The study of Type III outcomes for ASL and DAESH emphasizes the pivotal role of grand military coalitions specifically mobilized to defeat and dismantle these NSAGs. The influence of external support and the mobilization of broader social dimensions in countering these groups provide important lessons for understanding the vulnerability of NSAGs in the face of concerted opposition.

The analysis of MS, which has not experienced demise and remains operationally capable, offers a compelling contrast to ASL and DAESH. The study highlights the significance of the absence of a collective perception of MS as an existential threat, enabling its continued existence and strength. This comparative analysis enriches our understanding of the factors that differentiate NSAGs in their trajectories.

By emphasizing the strategic environment as a critical determinant of NSAGs' fate, this research challenges the conventional emphasis on organizational traits and behaviors. This perspective encourages scholars to consider the broader contextual factors that shape NSAG outcomes.

In conclusion, this thesis significantly contributes to the literature on NSAGs by introducing a new categorization of NSAG experiences and providing insights into the

factors that determine their ascension, survival, or demise. The comparative analysis of ASL, DAESH, and MS offers valuable lessons on the role of strategic environments, adversary coalitions, and enabling factors in shaping NSAG trajectories. These findings deepen our understanding of the complexities of NSAG dynamics in conflict environments.

Despite these contributions to the existing literature, this study is not without limitations. This study focuses on three specific NSAGs in Libya (ASL, DAESH, and MS) during a particular period post-2011 revolution. As a result, the findings and conclusions may have limited generalizability to other NSAGs in different conflict contexts and timeframes.

The limited availability of data on MS compared to ASL and DAESH might affect the comprehensiveness of the analysis. Likely biases in data collection, particularly in the case of primary resources from interviews, may have influenced the research outcomes.

The study's focus on Libya as a single case study limits the scope of comparison and validation of findings. Conducting multiple case studies in different conflict environments could enhance the robustness of the analytical framework.

The study examines a decade-long period, post-2011 revolution. However, NSAG dynamics and factors influencing their trajectories may evolve over more extended periods. A longer temporal analysis could provide a more comprehensive understanding of NSAG behavior and outcomes.

While the framework considers the strategic environment as a determining factor, it may oversimplify the complexity of the dynamics between NSAGs and the broader context. Real-world strategic environments can be multifaceted and dynamic, and the framework's ability to capture all the nuances might be limited.

In light of the mentioned limitations of the thesis, future research might concentrate on more comparative case studies. Conducting further comparative case studies of NSAGs in different conflict contexts could provide a broader understanding of the factors influencing their trajectories. Exploring NSAGs from diverse regions and historical periods can help identify common patterns and unique dynamics that contribute to ascension, survival, or demise.

Extending the temporal scope of research by conducting longitudinal studies can offer insights into how NSAGs' trajectories evolve over time. Examining how NSAGs adapt their strategies and behavior in response to changing circumstances and environments may reveal additional factors that influence their outcomes.

Integrating qualitative and quantitative research methodologies can enhance the depth and breadth of understanding NSAG dynamics. Combining in-depth interviews, fieldwork observations, and archival research with statistical analysis can provide a comprehensive and rigorous approach to studying NSAGs.

Further exploring the role of ideology and identity in shaping NSAG behavior and outcomes can be a fruitful avenue of research. Investigating how ideological coherence impacts NSAG recruitment, cooperation, and resistance to external pressures could deepen our understanding of their organizational dynamics.

Investigating the role of external actors, including state and non-state actors, in influencing NSAG trajectories is crucial. Analyzing the type and extent of support provided to NSAGs and how it impacts their strategies and survivability can yield valuable insights.

Applying network analysis techniques to study the interactions between NSAGs and other armed groups, as well as their relationships with local communities and international actors, can shed light on the social and strategic dimensions of NSAG dynamics.

Investigating the role and impact of civilian populations on NSAGs, including support, cooperation, and resistance, can elucidate the complex relationships between NSAGs and the communities they operate in. By pursuing these further directions of research, scholars can deepen the insights into the complexities of NSAGs in conflict environments.

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