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CIVIL WAR INCENTIVES, IDENTITIES, AND GROUP ALLEGIANCES IN SYRIA'S
CONTESTED PROVINCES:
A CASE STUDY ON CIVIL WAR

by

HILARY WEITZE

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Center Faculty in Political Science in partial fulfillment of the degree requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2015

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Abstract

CIVIL WAR INCENTIVES, IDENTITIES, AND GROUP ALLEGIANCES IN SYRIA'S CONTESTED PROVINCES: A CASE STUDY ON CIVIL WAR

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HILARY WEITZE

Adviser: Susan L. Woodward

This project seeks to answer the following questions: Why did the 2011 Syrian Revolution transition into a civil war? What contributed to the popularity of rebel efforts in the countryside? This case study on the Syrian Civil War begins by characterizing key events in the current civil war setting in order to characterize the nature of participation on the insurgent side of the conflict. Further, this project sets out to identify key events and actors in their respective geographic and demographic frameworks in order to identify the nature of participants and their respective characteristics. I will ultimately draw a connecting line between the nature and degree of insurgent participation by speculating on grievances. The latter process is identified as originating in the re-arrangement of the domestic economy. In other words, I argue that the local origins of the insurgency are a product of the breakdown in the dynamics between group actors and their respective economic institutions. The last discussion will allow the author to offer insight into the relationship between macro-level determinants of civil war and the micro-foundations of identification with and/or participation among insurgent efforts. The nature and origins of political grievances will be discussed at the end of this project.

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Overview

This project focuses on the nature and composition of political grievances to the extent that they can shed light on the particular patterns of violent conflict in the case of Syria. The central thesis of this project is that a breakdown in the structure of specific sectors in the national economy cultivated an anti-regime fervor among local actors in the remote areas. The monopoly over power afforded to the regime in Syria was atrophied by the transition to the liberal model of development. Through structural adjustments to the national economy, the regime's centrality among particular demographics in the total population were retracted and replaced by non-state actors. This, it follows, ultimately tipped the events toward a sustained insurgency. This is owed to the nature and ideology of economic liberalization.¹²³

This project begins by finding the antecedent⁴ conditions and structural components that, the author speculates, are the springboard for the current war period in the case of Syria. The design of this project is qualitative and in a case study format. The methodology utilized to connect causal linkages is known as process tracing.⁵ This project sets out to trace the processes of institutional breakdown at the state level in Syria and to ultimately, link the causal mechanisms⁶ which connect antecedent variables to the politics of the present civil war context. As process tracing requires backtracking through events, the assessment begins in the most

¹ Sambanis, N., (2010) "What Is Civil War? Conceptual and Empirical Complexities of an Operational Definition," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48, no. 6 pp. 814-858.

² Woodward, S., (1995), *Balkan Tragedy, Chaos and Dissolution after the Cold War*, Washington, D.C., the Brookings Institution.

³ Wood, E.J., (2003) *Insurgent Collective Action in El Salvador*.

⁴ Van Evera, S., (2006) "Guide to Methods in Political Science," chapter 3.

⁵ (Checkel 2006) "Tracing Causal Mechanisms," *International Studies Review* 8, no. 2, pp. 1.

⁶ Checkel, J. T., (2006) "Tracing Causal Mechanisms," *International Studies Review* 8, no. 2, pp. 362-364.

recent context and ends with a discussion about changes to the nature of the domestic economy.

A discussion about the nature of civil war violence will take place in the context of the Provinces of Homs, Damascus, and Idlib Provinces. These contested areas are given special attention because they allow for a more careful discussion about the nature of allegiance patterns among rural non-combatants. Further, these geographic areas are isolated because they contain elements of multiple variables affecting civil war onset as the abovementioned geographic areas contain elements of urban as well as rural warfare as well as insurgent and incumbent allegiance among specific groups. In order to understand the present situation in Syria in a manner that is relevant to extant comparative scholarship, (one that allows for speculation into the possible outcomes to the war) this project begins with a delineation of significant war events wherein the tool of social scientific research is process tracing. After a discussion on key events in the war, a discussion about the nature of participation will ensue. Finally, this project will derive the structural components that, it is argued, contributed to the breakdown of Syrian state capacity and led ultimately to a lasting insurgency in the rural areas and among local actors.

Homs Province

Homs' initiation into hostilities began early in the war. In Homs, the Free Syrian Army began as defectors from the regular military. This embryonic insurgency consisted of low ranking members of the enlisted national forces who were exclusively trained in regular-style combat. Hence, these fighters relied heavily on tanks as well as campaigns against the regime that required constant reinforcements of human and material power. The early FSA failed due to these combined factors as well as the dependence on regime weapons for liberating territory. This is especially true in land-locked and suburban areas. In tactical terms, the insurgent war of position was doomed: FSA did not have nearly a fraction of the military capacity afforded to the regime making the ultimate goal of annexing territory particularly hard.

The insurgency in Syria began with large-scale military defections from regular forces in the national army. The Free Syrian Army were first mobilized in Homs Province in the neighborhood of Bab Amr. Experimental in nature and reliant on weapons from regime depots, Bab Amr's modernist approach to warfare proved costly. The FSA in Homs' suburbs suffered under the imposition of sanctions imposed on regular forces, resulting in a shortage of supplies and in the FSA's ultimate entrenchment into the black market. This stymieing of the FSA's tactical capabilities also resulted in a limitation of movement for the long term. This stagnation in securing military supplies made Homs the example not to follow for future participants in efforts to dismantle the regime of Bashar al-Assad.

Following this first stage of defections were the following events: a ground bombardment by regime forces, an FSA counter-offensive and the loss of annexed territory. In

the first phase, tanks were introduced into Homs' urban and suburban centers early on with a stated intention of driving out insurgent efforts. In the case of Homs, the option of staying alive outweighed the requisite ideological and political commitments of the revolutionary movement. Secondly, where rebel efforts were choked off by the regime's ground forces and in cases such as the neighborhoods of Bab Amr, indiscriminate regime shelling of civilian infrastructure cleared space for Islamic Front topographical gains. Rebel efforts took the form of an attrition campaign, whereby geographic as well as political sovereignty were prizes in the coordinated effort. As the conflict escalated, either side began to splinter into smaller brigades. The competition for territory among itinerant factions ultimately complicated efforts to remain faithful to the original goals of the uprising.

The regime bombardment of Homs' suburban infrastructure incentivized the use of selective violence⁷ by regime forces in many forms. Ground offenses were supplemented by air bombardments in which military aircraft targeted non-combatant infrastructure including, hospitals, schools, housing, and bread queues. This undercuts the theory of an ontology⁸ of civil war within the "old war" context, broadly.⁹ Political relevancy became less important (as many Syrian nationals were now refugees in neighboring Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and the like), limiting the degrees of allegiance in the countryside as well as between the communication networks of the Syrian National Coalition (Turkish based) SNC/SNCHR/FSA operatives stationed in remote areas, and civilian enclaves, many of whom chose to evacuate

⁷ Kalyvas, S., (2003), "What is Political Violence? On the Ontology of Civil War," *Perspectives on Politics*, 1:3, p. 477.

⁸ Collier, P., & Hoeffler, A., (2004) *Greed and Grievance in Civil War*, pp. 566-567

⁹ Kaldor, M., (2006), *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*, pp. 1-32.

as asylum seekers.¹⁰ This created a vacuum of leadership among combatants, coordinating committees, and local and regional ex-patriated groups. In the context of indigenous bodies of interested parties—combatant and non— the opportunity structure shifted in such a manner that rather than having to please local coordinates with acquisitions that made strategic sense for the long term political goals of the LCCs, the incentive became characterized by opportunism.¹¹

This stagnation of FSA mobility thus owed in part to a failure to remain mobile and annex territory without incurring heavy civilian and insurgent casualties, particularly in the case of Homs.¹² The nature of the siege and blockade of Homs by regular regime forces a “fight or flight” scenario for civilians. The two sides of decision making in the Homs experience involved either waiting out the escalated regime bombardment or opt to become an asylum seeker.

When war began and foreign factions and FSA groups became active combatants in the countryside, LCCs were crucial in documenting and delineating the events as they unfolded, archiving incentives and group dynamics, deductively. The LCCs were central to coordinated efforts in tandem with community members and were horizontally organized in the early stage of the conflict. LCCs elected representative bodies and projected the political sentiment of civilian allies onto the organization of rebel forces.¹³

¹⁰ BBC News (2014), “Syria crisis: Concern for Homs refugees” retrieved, February 12, 2014.

¹¹ Fearon, J.D., Laitin, D., (2003) “Ethnicity Insurgency and Civil War,” p.101.

¹² BBC News, “Syria crisis: Concern for Homs refugees” (2014) *ibid*.

¹³ al-Kafri, M. A., (2002), “Climate and Incentives of Investment in Syria,” *ibid*.

Damascus Province

The political landscape of Damascus is such that the most powerful political actors and state institutional power are located in the center of the city in the Mezzeh District with tangential networks of regime sanctioned economic, military and soft power- sharing function in the slightly off-centered geographic areas such as Mezzeh, which is west of the central regime's institutional functionaries. The political leadership of the Ba'ath Party, the regime itself, and the Autonomous Ba'athists in the Military are among the Presidential Guard, and located in government buildings in the precise center of Damascus, proper. In other words, the regime's heart and mind are located in the Old City (central), its lungs are directly west of the Old Gate, and its nourishment (intelligence gathering subsidiaries) is diffuse in the Province's outlying areas yet the hand that feeds such actors is operational in a multitude of positions, formal and in the shadows, in the remainder of the contested Governates.

Political power is concentrated along the eastern corridor of the innermost gates of the old city, in Damascus. This area is densely populated according to the most recent pre-war data on populations in the Province. The UNHCR reports in 2006 relatively low (in the tens of thousands) numbers of Syrian nationals seeking asylum or refugee status outside of Syria.¹⁴ Likewise, in Damascus, regime/rebel hostilities have been the heaviest, the most deaths as a result of war have been documented in the Damascus countryside. In order to best contextualize the tactical arrangements and the broad trajectory of war related violence,

¹⁴ UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency, "2014 UNHCR Country Operations Profile Syrian Arab Republic," accessed May 2, 2014, from www.unhcr.org.

we must start with the first province to which such claims to insurgency can be made. Dera'a's remoteness as well as the nature of horizontal organization in the Bedouin southeast made it difficult to reconcile the need to express outrage over regime repression (traditionally through a public funeral procession) wherein regime forces fired randomly into crowds of funeral-goers. Such sequence of events called upon defection by violent means among civilian organizations and local actors. The intersection of interests by local actors, demonstrators and insurgents is derived from this event.

Damascus demonstrations began a bit later than in the other provinces. It's unique archaeology, demography, architecture, and institutional compositions create a pretext for involvement in such efforts complicated. Participation in demonstrations as such would likely compliment dire political/material grievances or an accessible opportunity structure associated with participation in mobilized efforts. Let us thus begin by laying out the above mentioned requisite structural components in the form of economic policy Damascus is the oldest capital city in the world, boasts of rich human and religious heritage and is home to a copious anthropological history, the likes of which are represented in the form of architecture and designated according to their origins by their precise location in the city. In the modern Syrian city, wealth is concentrated in the inner city.¹⁵ This is relevant in the case and nature in of the cities and surrounding suburbs of Aleppo and Damascus, however, recent trends in internal migration and the young, unemployed demographic have produced an oversaturation of skilled labor at the suburban intersection of rural and explicitly urban life. The 'breakdown' of neighboring Palestine and Lebanon produced a high surplus

¹⁵ UNHCR, "2014 Syria Regional Response Plan," accessed, May 2, 2014, from: www.unhcr.org.

workforce, and the annexation by Israel of new borders has changed the nature of incentives for local shadow economic actors. Rural areas, especially the southern and eastern outskirts of Governates, have been the Fertile Crescent for rebel units and shadow-irregular forces, on any and either side of the conflict, strategic use of violence against civilian populations in order to deter cooperation with rebel military efforts and to stop annexation of political and topographical physical discursive and conceptual space. Major instances of these events were documented in Houla, Daraya, Banyas, and other cases.

Also ongoing as a trend among incumbent patrons is the use of foreign mercenaries, and openly such as the case of Hama province and Hezbollah mercenaries or, speaking to the former, in the eastern and southern provinces of Dera'a and Deir El Zour, incumbent forces have entangled local rebel efforts in a complex network of partisanship along the lines of ethnic and/or religious identity. The regime employs in the major urban areas regular forces including armored tanks and aerial bombardments. Degrees of regime investment in particular geographical areas vary widely across a broad spectrum. The major productive organs of regime capacity include taxation, foreign investment and trade, exports in agriculture, finance employment and various service-based and industry-led employment in the second-inner-most ring of the cities as they appear on maps. Regime violence and natural resources, actors, trends, and typology of incumbent operations in oil-rich Deir Ezzour, fertile "crescent" al-Hassakeh, and questions of accessibility to trade routes for the transitory securement of exports in raw agriculture and oil to the port cities and to the Turkish border. Such begs the question of what the dynamics of the regime's political clout coupled with centralized monopolies over the state's structural capacity for production as well as workers'

interests, moreover. These institutions share various and different types of entitlements, wherein the central Ministry (in a given sector/service activity) maintained a centralized cooperative-monopoly over the instruments of state power, including the ability to impose sanctions (through embargoes, retraction of central subsidies, and the like).

The Damascus countryside, in terms of events, is the most equipped to shed light on the connectivity between structural change and the micro-foundations of insurgent mobilization. Present in Damascus are regional complexes¹⁶ affecting many sides to the conflict in terms of currency, medical aid, weapons supplies, and political clout in NGOs as well as IGOs. Damascus is a fruitful framework for assessing the impacts of preceding conflicts in the region. Internally as well as regionally displaced cohorts of people are present in Damascus Province including Palestinian refugees living in camps, Iraqi refugees living in subsidized housing and in encampments, and internal migrants from the younger generational cohort seeking specialization in career training, educational opportunities, and employment. Damascus has been affected in the last decade by macro-level changes—in the form of shifts in the overall employment structure in the province—as well as by localized outcomes to the unique subset within the broader case because the war effort, on all sides of the conflict and at many times in a multitude of locations, contains many case study models in the topical framework of political violence. The trajectory of participation in Damascus began with a domestic effort in mobilization before transitioning into a complex web of

¹⁶ Peter Wallensteen and M. Sollenberg, (1998) “Armed Conflict and Regional Conflict Complexes, 1989-97,” *Journal of Peace Research* 35:5, p. 631.

various migrant groups—some newly arrived, others displaced since the Lebanese Civil War and the 1967 June War with Israel—wherein Iraqi and Palestinian ex-patriots, refugees, and mujahidin became intertwined in violent efforts to defeat government troops in Damascus and the surrounding countryside. Participation in Damascus is one of the most difficult to diagnose and interpret along the lines of identity. This allows room for understanding the variation in allegiances among a given participating cohort, beginning in a peacetime setting and transitioning into a conflict setting. The latter (conflict) period is not devoid of massive ambiguities, as it stands in the present period of continued and protracted efforts.

Participation patterns often follow counter-intuitive outcomes. Many declared—and implied—allegiances to either side of the broad conflict, as well as between Syrian-born revolutionaries and the regime of Bashar al- Assad. The dynamics of political associations are very complex in the case of Damascus; they are, in the post-2012 context. In the civil-war context, socio-political characterized by many combined social factors and inter-woven with a socio-economic/ethno-religious space that is at once, personalized and cosmopolitan: the former referring to the individual identity of the Muslim personage in contemporary Damascus.

In the current context, the particulars of the collective action problem have, it goes without saying, completely changed for insurgent and regime components, alike. Overall, rebel efforts in Damascus carry simple incentive structure: the short and long-term goals are the same among FSA legions and their civilian allies: the best case scenario and generalized goal is to topple the regime and seize the state. (Note, such is not the long-term goal in the case of Homs).

Rebel territorial victory is incomplete so long as Damascus stays intact. A successful campaign, one in which rebels declare victory, requires sacking of government officials, state institutions and regime controlled economic enterprises. In the short term, the tactics of attrition and guerrilla warfare make a great deal of sense in a framework where an essential factor affecting armed efforts by FSA in Damascus is the brandishing of improvised explosive devices which lead to high numbers of collateral-civilian death at the hands of the rebels. Access to the national military's equipment/supplies is an indication that rebel forces have already weakened 4th Division and Air Force Generals. This is true because of the infrastructural elements of Damascus as it functions at war: the regime understands the high stakes associated with any losses to territory in the center of the province. The regime will maintain a partition over the entire Province for as long as it can weaken rebel guerrillas. In the present period, regime forces have yet to lose the upper hand whereby the generals in the national air force stay alive—and—so long as the instruments of a sustained air bombardment remain at any degree, at some form of functional capacity. Thus, insurgent military victory means dismantling air bases and military airports as these are the instruments of power affecting collective action, most apparently. So, it is presumed that among insurgents—and in terms of incentives in the war context—that the ultimate political and military prize is, respectively, a two-sided sequence of events: dismantling incumbent airpower, killing Air Force Generals, and seizure of the instruments of violence in the form of jets, helicopters, and bombers.

Participation on the incumbent side is complex as well, containing elements of foreign, national armies acting as irregular forces in the form of mercenaries, Iranian Revolutionary

Guard being the most obvious example. Many variables which shed light on questions of escalation, duration, and containment in a civil war conflict are at contained in the case of Damascus. These will be extracted from timelines of events, below. At this case study juncture, it is noteworthy to mention which exogenous factors, or, antecedent conditions have already been enunciated: internal/ trans-national migration, employment, and literacy/education.

May 10, 2012: Suicide bomb attacks kill more than fifty people near a police base in Damascus.

July 18, 2012: An explosion at the National Security Building in Damascus kills three top regime officials: Deputy Defense Minister Assef Shawkat (1950-2012), Bashar Al-Assad's brother-in-law and a former intelligence chief; Defense Minister Daoud Rajha (1947-2012); and General Hassan Turkmani (1935-2012), a former defense minister; Free Syrian Army and the Islamic Brigade group issue separate claims of responsibility.

25August 26, 2012: Security forces reportedly kill some 400 people in the Damascus suburb of Daraya.

February 21, 2013: A car bombing near the ruling Baath Party headquarters in Damascus kills more than fifty people.

March 25, 2013: Rebels fire mortars into central Damascus. May 5, 2013: Israel says its military aircraft bombed a shipment of advanced surface- to-surface missiles in Damascus possibly intended for Hezbollah.

August 21, 2013: Starting at 2:30 a.m., thousands of social media messages report a chemical attack on Damascus suburbs; Western media publish images of bodies of purported victims; opposition accuses Al-Assad regime of toxic gas

attack; Syrian Information Minister Omran Al-Zoubi says allegations are “untrue and completely fabricated.”

August 30, 2013: White House accuses Syrian government of launching a chemical attack that killed 1,429 people in the Damascus suburbs on August 21; U.S. assessment says motive was to rid suburbs of opposition forces using area to stage attacks on the capital; Doctors Without Borders later reports that three hospitals near Damascus treated 3,600 patients displaying neurotoxic symptoms, and that 355 of the patients were subsequently pronounced dead.¹⁷

Rebels launched an extravagant offensive in Eastern Ghouta in December 2013. In the aftermath of their incursion they claimed to kill approximately 800 regime soldiers. The *Battle of Eastern Ghouta*¹⁸ involved regime regular and irregular forces and united factions brandished under the title: The Islamic Front. This event was a turning point in the war, overall, because it represented the beginning of the factionalization of insurgent and incumbent forces. Eastern Ghouta was a loss for FSA. The sophisticated communications systems, material support, and tactical maneuvering coordinated carefully by a central command in the Ghouta neighborhood. When regime airpower wiped out the communications centers in Ghouta, the transition from irregular violence to guerrilla violence among insurgents became commonplace in the broader Damascus Province.

The trajectory of events which represent tipping points¹⁹ in the total war thus far, are: repression by regime instruments of violence, defection from within regular forces, the

¹⁷ Plofchan, T., (2014), "TIMELINE: SYRIAN CIVIL WAR." *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs, The American University in Cairo.*

¹⁸ El-Sodar News (Arabic language), *The Battle of Eastern Ghouta*, www.almasdarnews.com/maps/syria, (September 2014), accessed, October 31, 2014.

¹⁹ Collier, P., Sambanis N., chapter 5: “Understanding Civil War” *Sporadic Ethnic Violence: Why has Kenya not Experienced a Full Blown Civil War?* pp. 125-129.

brandishing of rebel forces under the enigmatic taxonomy: FSA (Free Syrian Army), rebel territorial gains in Homs' suburbs, Eastern Aleppo, Eastern Damascus, and various remote areas, massive insurgent losses by Assad's air campaign in suburban Aleppo, Hama and Homs, the rise of factions, stalemate, and lastly, partitioning of Aleppo and Damascus Provinces. Unique to the most durable of civil war conflicts is continued efforts by incumbents whose tactical blue-book now follows the pedigree of attrition war, actualized through guerrilla campaigns. This is true among FSA loyalists and commanders as well as among foreign mercenaries who are loosely interwoven under the informal-institutional banner: The Islamic Front.

Factions among rebel forces coincided with the rise of factions among regime forces, as well.²⁰ Opportunistic rebels²¹ are those brigades which seek to conquer the region (ISIL) and have been brandished with the power to create new institutions, namely through piracy and in the form of cartels, sustained through illegal oil trade and the instrumentalization²² of coercive violence and the strategy of using civilians and journalists as bargaining chips. This is underscored by specific patterns of ISIL/foreign fighting elements whose relevant politics which justify their efforts are limited to a mutual hatred of the Assad regime and most importantly, those Ba'athist principles of socialist governance which, as far as they understand, were responsible for the dismantling of Iraq since the late 1980s and ending with an internally broken structural amalgam. Many Islamists from Iraq who fought American

²⁰ Staniland, P., "Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Insurgent Fratricide, Ethnic Defection, and the Rise of Pro-State Paramilitaries," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 56: (1): pp. 16-40.

²¹ Benetech Reports, *ibid.* Index 2.1

²² Gutierrez, Sanin, F., (2014), "Ideology and Civil War: Instrumental Adoption and Beyond," *Journal of Peace Research, IEPRI-Universidad Nacional de Colombia* vol. 51, (2) 213-226.

combatants in Iraq and who the American military's shock and awe strategy rendered Iraq hopeless in terms of reconcilability in the post-Iraq War period. Many former rank and file troops from Saddam Hussein's military were put in jail by American joint operatives following the spectacular trial and hanging of Saddam Hussein. Since being released, many have joined the ranks of Islamist rebel groups, seeking revenge against Iranian mercenaries. These ambiguous participants are present on all sides of the conflict, and are represented by mercenaries from all over the region and among Iraqi diaspora in the case of Islamist insurgents. Among incumbent loyalists, these include the Iranian Revolutionary Guardsmen and Hizballah mercenaries.²³ Insurgent forces allegiant to ISIL/ISIS goals and strategic appropriations are as complex and ambiguous as perhaps, FARC guerrillas in Columbia whereby their allegiance is dependent upon intimately derived incentives: revenge, jihad, and the seizure of power in Syria and ultimately, the total region. In terms of instrumental violence, these peripheral components in the insurgency can be identified by the kidnapping of UN Peace-keepers, the extra-judicial killing of American and French journalists, and the targeting of civilian populations in Eastern Ghouta and Jobar, Damascus.

The Ghouta Joint operation room of Ahrah Al-Sham, Nusra, Habib Mostapha, Shabab AlHoda, Katibat Issa ibn Mariam. The room was created back in June. The guy making the battle video announcement appears in a Youtube video announcing the creation of this room, Jaysh al Islam (Army of Islam). The Islamic Union of Sham Soldiers. Announced Nov 30, the coalition included Shabab al Hoda, Habibi Mostapha, Amjad al Islam, AlSahaba, Dirii al Asima.

²³ Al-Monitor, (June 2, 2013) "Why Hizballah is Fighting in Syria," accessed, January 14, 2014, from: www.almonitor.com.

This was part of the broader “Rif Dimashq Offensive” begun in November, 2012 and was when the Eastern front of rebel fighters attempting to liberate the city from the countryside penetrated checkpoints and controlled supply routes.²⁴

By December of 2013, rebel positions in Eastern Ghouta were defeated by regime air power. The loss of the Tawhid Brigade Commander in Idlib²⁵, near the countryside was equally devastating for joint operations in various remote areas. The regime defected wholesale in not knowing what the foreign elements of insurgents meant in terms of violent capacity, hence the regime erred on the side of terror, as well. Perhaps the most famous of such high stakes defection by asymmetrically informed regime operatives is the wielding of chemical weapons in the southern Damascus countryside. This gesture was centrally derived by regime officials and designed in such a way that it would beckon international military and/or diplomatic intervention, in the capital of Damascus. Naturally, these outcomes were animated by a fearful and weakened Assad regime and with the belief that a successful guerrilla campaign could be imminent.²⁶ A report by UN weapons inspectors found “clear and compelling evidence that surface-to-surface missiles containing the nerve agent sarin were launched from regime-controlled positions on Ein Tarma, Moadamiyah, and Zamalka in the Ghouta neighborhood of Damascus.²⁷ Officials from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) arrived in Damascus to monitor the dismantling of Syria’s chemical weapons arsenal soon after the second alleged incidence of regular forces’ use of

²⁴ Landis, J., (2013) Blog Entry, accessed June 2, 2013, from: www.joshualandis.com, “Syria Comment.”

²⁵ Landis, J., (2013) *ibid.*

²⁶ The Guardian, “Timeline of Major Events” *Syria, War Reports*, accessed February 8, 2013.

²⁷ *ibid.* www.theguardian.com (2013).

sarin gas in the context of escalated efforts by insurgents in Eastern Damascus, Idlib, and Aleppo, at once.²⁸ Annexed rebel territory and insurgent positions were at the peak of their territorial gains when they reached as far eastern as Qataiba and included the neighborhoods of Harran al Awamid, Qaysa, Abadeh, Jarba, and Douma (in the northwest of Damascene countryside) as ‘liberated’ territory. Still held by the regime by November 2012 were the military airport, Adra, the Damascus international Airport (used by commercial jets until late in 2012 when Damascus was experiencing fierce clashes) and the Sahya Mountains Military Base. The neighborhoods of Harasta, Irbin and Ghouta, held by insurgents and allies, were strategic gold mines, their geography created a de-facto buffer between regime forces and rebel infrastructural depots in the form of telecommunications and equipment for an attrition war. Also uniquely privileged among rebels was the ability to surprise regime checkpoints from a distance and through building trenches and spectacularly attacking regime checkpoints without a second’s notice.

By January of 2014, a partition of the city remained intact, splitting the Northeast and Southeastern boundaries of Damascus through the Yarmouk refugee camp, located directly north of Sayyidah Daynab and the military road connecting the center of Damascus to the Damascus international airport. North of Yarmouk are the regime’s military strongholds in the neighborhoods of Midan and Jaramana. East of Jaramana is Ghouta, the front of the preceding rebel assault on regime bases. Yarmouk refugees were choked off from supply routes to the west (regime) and the east (rebel territory) and food, medical supplies, and potable water could not penetrate either rebel or regime lines of partition. Now that the key events and

²⁸ OPCW, Statement on Syria Investigation (2013), all.

their relevant frameworks have been identified according to their origins, stated and implicit military and political (long-term) goals.

At this point, we have derived the research variable/independent variable: violence. This independent variable must be disaggregated as regime violence versus insurgent violence, in such form it will then be possible to derive a relationship between certain types of civil war violence and a multitude of nominal-causal (independent) variables. From here, the final task of re-aggregating these same variables in order to determine a) whether there exist any covariant relationship between civil war violence (any given type) and state capacity b) to what extent such covariance exists.

Prior to the internet age, it was difficult to even gain access to—let alone understand along pseudo-scientific boundaries—the identities of displaced peoples and or refugees in Damascus and across the region, naturally. Given, however, the rise of social media and the—albeit relative—degree of anonymity afforded by such mediums of communication, such social phenomena like twitter and Facebook have become the lenses through which the intersection of individual and group attitudes toward a given phenomenon in the social world, interact safely and in a manner that travels faster than all other forms of communication. More importantly, those persons who are documented as refugees/temporarily displaced asylum seekers, and the like but are stateless, are identifiable as a result of social media and networking in digital space, broadly. Moreover the interaction of a given in-group in the context of radical experiments in social media and disclosure, coupled with the nature of regime weak points as we understand them in the Syrian context, are the pretexts within which media communication via the internet translates into physical mobilization with political demands and goals in mind.

One could say that the Province of Aleppo is the epicenter of antique and pre-antiquity

religious heritage. Moreover, Aleppo is the host and hub of all economic activity, operating as the epicenter of oscillation between market forces, individuals, and monetary exchange. This can be said for both domestic actors, and between compatriots, and foreign actors, in the form of international investment, agreement and contract negotiations between developers and/or trading legions, and domestic producers and merchants in the intermediary position, succinctly. If such is true about Aleppo, in as few words as possible, then, Damascus Province is the capital of Arab cultural heritage and material power in the form of respectively, heritage sites, preserved architecture, national monuments, and those institutions which contain the instruments of the preservation of such national monuments, alike.

Idlib Province

The Province of Idlib has been involved in war related engagements throughout a lengthy period since onset of hostilities. Clashes between regime officials and insurgent groups in the province can be characterized as mobile. Idlib lies in the northwestern quadrant of the country, sharing a border with Turkey to the north and the Province of Homs to the south and lies adjacent to the northwestern border of Aleppo. By the month of February, the Syrian Martyrs Database recorded 10,156 war related deaths in the province, including both civilian and military deaths, as well as deaths of prisoners. Idlib maintained a single Coordinating Committee beginning in the pre-war period in April of 2011. Local Coordinating Committees eventually take on an important intermediary role—connecting guerilla efforts with the short and long-term goals of non-combatants.

In Idlib, the Local Coordinating Committee has used its banner to collect information on individual deaths document them with detail. The Idlib LCC indicates a dissipation in

coordinated efforts by the group, however the extent of the group's activity after the months of December and January, 2012, is difficult to further diagnose according to extent and/or degree, given the selective appropriations of electricity in rebel territories by regime officials wherein powerful agents of the state's private sector used electricity and subsequent broadband and cell phone monopolies (Syriatel) as an instrument of war whereby authorities seeking to diffuse any accessible (by foreign journalists and humanitarian NGOs, alike) centralized coordination along revolutionary lines. By simply blacking out the electrical grid, state agents were able to erase many narratives available to Internet users, exclusively, affording the regime an upper hand in tactical organization in limited timeframes, as well.

The Idlib Martyrs Brigade: Formerly called the Syrian Liberation Army, were never a unit of larger defectors and are at odds with the Free Syrian Army (FSA), less equipped in terms of weaponry but better supported by local actors. Spokesman of the Brigade is Haitham Qutheimati, was outspoken in refusal to participate in Kofi Annan's cease-fire operation and subsequent negotiation sessions, claiming that any SLA compliance with a cease fire meant that the brigadiers only temporarily ran out of weapons. On November 5, 2012, brigade commander Bassil Ayeesa and rebels were killed in an airstrike. Also, the Idlib Military Council was the umbrella group under which guerilla fighters planned operations and retrieved material support from supply routes to the north.

By February 2014, another coalition of rebel forces in Idlib coalesced under the name Jaysh al- Sham (Army of the Levant) which also included the Syrian Martyrs Brigade (badly weakened by air bombardments). Idlib is overwhelmingly rural, it shares a border with Turkey to the North/north- west, remote areas are in the eastern part of the province. The province is made mostly of fertile low-lying land conducive to large scale industrial agriculture. Major sources of

GDP from agriculture are native to Idlib. Cash crops such as olives, wheat and cotton originate within Idlib's large agricultural plots and are a source of domestic GDP from raw goods. Industry- textiles are the primary industrial project in Idlib beginning in the Mandate period. Citrus and olive plantations line the outskirts of the province and are a major source of domestic revenue. The urban/suburban city "center" of the Governate is called Ashrifiyeh,²⁹ low skilled laborers who work in soap manufacturing and textiles. Wheat and cotton are the most important crops in Idlib, food prices in Syria are largely determined by Idlib's crop yields from wheat. Idlib rests at the southwestern border of Turkey and is mostly populated by Arabs in the form of communities of subsistent farmers. The native population in Idlib are agrarian³⁰ and relatively poor.³¹ Large majority of peoples are Sunni Arabs, with small pockets of Christian Arabs in the northwestern, mountainous region as well as in the main quarter of the city. Large-scale farming and textile manufacturing are the primary sources of income for Idlib and employment largely falls into these spheres of activity or at least to some derivative of them. The north and northwestern terrain of Idlib is hilly and more densely wooded, the climate becomes more desert-like the further east in the province.

The Province of Idlib was the first to be lost from the regime and declared a liberated Governate by the local Coordinating Committee. Local fighters banded together as brigades often as members of the same family or extended families sharing a tactical upper hand by knowledge of the territory as well as a pre-war attitude of local inter-subjective loyalty and tribal autonomy which, by the war's onset, translated into a formal doctrine of preservation. Second,

²⁹ Syrian Observatory of Human Rights, "Background Idlib, Salah elDin Neighborhood," accessed May 2, 2014, from: www.syriahr.org.

³⁰ www.citypopulation.de, "City Population Data," *ibid*.

³¹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, (2004) www.fao.org, *ibid*.

non-combatant/civilian allegiance required little coercion from insurgents. Largely agricultural, the residents of Idlib shared the incentives of rebel fighters, many of whom were native to the Province of Idlib. These factors in tandem contributed to Idlib's resilient insurgency.

The regime's structural withdrawal from the remote areas via restructuring left a vacuum in the actor-institution arrangement that had characterized the preceding period. Hence, prior to following the rubric of liberalization and decentralization, the regime was privileged with many enforcement mechanisms that preserved central authority and the regime's monopoly over strategic violence. The particular conditions which were at work during the pre-war phase to onset are derived below in the form of a Truth Table.

The presence of a state-appointed subsidiary in each sect of the economy entrusted more responsibility with diffuse regime components. This is unlike the structure of the military, whose operations begin and end with an elite authority in the Syrian Air Force. Most important to note is the linkage between agriculture as industry—the first public enterprise to fall out of the formal nexus of the state and into the liberal paradigm—represents the first participants in the rebellion, i.e., as members of the agrarian socio-economic in-group. In the Idlib Province foreign developers and their employees suspended operations early on in the war even prior to the escalation in Homs. This left an equilibrium of incentives that largely favored the insurgency as it meant access to public goods including localized political autonomy as well as protection for the local peoples and their lands. Moreover, the geography of Idlib was favorable to rebels, it's northwestern location meant easily accessible border crossing into Turkish territory for those seeking sanctuary, combatants and non-combatants alike.

In order to diagnose the combined factors which contributed to onset and escalation of violent conflict all possible causal variables. These are considered in the Syrian case based on extant research in the field and through existing case studies.³² The durability of a given insurgency in a civil war depends on the nature of allegiances among non-combatants. Networks of civilian support and the extent of their allegiance can make or break insurgent capacity. To this extent, the table below measures the degree of anti-regime grievances.³³

Table 1 Truth Table, Onset (1=present, 0=absent)

| Province | Coordinating Committee | Refugees/diaspora groups | High internally displaced | Large rural population |
|-------------|------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Damascus | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Aleppo | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Homs | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Hama | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Deraa | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Deir ElZorr | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Idlib | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 |

Provinces that contain most of or all of the categories predicting favorability at the onset of the war, moreover, contain the most sophisticated insurgent efforts. Also unique is the question of ideology and coercive violence: regime held areas boast of air tight ideological monopolies by Assad, indicated by the regime’s use of low-level violence, designed in such a manner so as to maximally deter defections by civilian enclaves.

³² Ragin, C., (2014), *The Comparative Method*, “The Boolean Algebraic Method.”

³³ Collier, P., & Hoeffler, A., (2004) *Greed and Grievance in Civil War*, pp. 566-567.

The nature and composition of rebel units operating in the province of Homs was the first of its kind. The geography of regime and rebel campaigns is unique because fighting was centered mainly in the urban districts with the heaviest concentration of battle related deaths located in neighborhoods closest to the city's center. The second unique characteristic of Homs civil war efforts are the pedigree of rebel fighters in the province as originating within the national military, Homs internal conflict was almost exclusively, early on—between defectors from the regular army and the national army, itself. Third, the tactical arrangement of rebel efforts are unique as a product of the first two characteristics: rebel strategy—largely orthodox in nature—involved capturing and holding territory, opposite the war of maneuver that rebels in surrounding provinces were carrying out.

Rebel Incentives

After independence³⁴ Syria underwent a brief unification period with Gamal Abdel Nasser's Egypt whereby Syrian national institutional, military, and economic sovereignty was under the diffuse supervision of Egypt's Vice President. This ambitious pan-Arab project was formally disbanded in 1961 with a nationalist coup and subsequent transitional period of, once again, an autonomous platform of singular and autonomous central leadership. The withdrawal of Syria from the UAR ushered in a period of reforms to Syrian partisan power-sharing. The balance tipped in the favor of the Ba'ath Party, given Ba'athist reputability as the anti-UAR domestic party, rejecting the experiment of institutional and nationalist integration in favor of a strong domestic partnership and co-federation between the two countries. By the mid-1960s, Syria's most formidable political clout was concentrated in the hands of the Ba'ath Party leadership, bridging economic, military, and coercive power through the Absolutist governance of the Ba'ath.

This pre-requisite characteristic of Absolutism is paramount in the grievances among local coordinating committees across Syria. Early on in the mobilization of a non-violent resistance, the rhetoric associated with a constituency prepared to mobilize began during the Damascus Spring and bled into the demands of the LCCs. The signatures of the '99³⁵ was a document signed by Syrian nationals from elite institutions. The title of this civil convergence most often invoked is: The Damascus Spring. Briefly, the conference litigation and issuance of

³⁴ Seale, P., (2006), *The Struggle for Syria*, pp. 31-44.

³⁵ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, "Syria in Crisis," *The Damascus Spring*, retrieved April 3, 2014, from: www.carnegieendowment.org.

demands by these concerned elites were meant to reflect the goals of a peaceful organization across civil society. Signatories to the document thus ended up calling for the implementation of reforms to the political system.

The Damascus Spring was a forecasting of the adherent costs associated with this particular type of developing-state government and the economic liberalization associated with the broad paradigm of globalization. Damascus Spring patrons were confident in the new president's capacity to acknowledge the gaps in policy reform whereby Syria's political/legal/judicial nexus moved backward in time while the macro and micro-economic structures slipped into the future. The meeting called for a reconfiguration of and top-down reform to the system of governance, demanding free and fair elections, an end to repression, checks and balances, judicial oversight, an end to the Emergency Laws (in place for four decades), and the like. These phenomena served to supplement an already rigorous vacuum of political leadership in the form of central interior departments, organized in a top-down bureaucratic framework, wherein the absolutism of political representation was essentially bound to the minority status afforded such leadership: respectively, these categories are understood in political terms: in the form of the Ba'ath Party and as they operate in an in-group framework: as ethnic and religious Alawites with minority status in Syria's broader western region.³⁶

Due to the weakened status of post-war-for-liberation -Syria, central authority was diffuse and brokered by many parties and representative bodies, under the brief union between Egypt and Syria the monopoly over material instruments of power could not remain integral in the context of nationalist reputational capital among Communists and pan-regionalists, broadly.

³⁶ Lesch, D., *The New Lion of Damascus*, (2004) New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 12.

Those institutions which remained accessible in fortified, clandestine space and negotiating settings took place in the context of military structural power and between agents of a reformed Ba'ath party leadership, thus culminating in the famous marriage of the elite Fourth Military Division under Rifa'at al-Assad and Hafez al-Assad, in tandem and through a swift military coup. This nexus of concentrated power would evolve to include the now infamous Syrian Air Force and the Department of the Interior, two clandestine fortifications located in the western corridors of the Old City of Damascus. Ba'athists in Syria and their patrons in various domestic sectors capitalized skillfully on the rhetoric associated with a given absolutist regime. Highlighting the existential consequences of losing the status quo, in the form of complete monopolies, in either the 4th Division,³⁷ the Air Force, the Presidential Guard, the presidency itself or a combination, historians and commentators on Syria's conflict and time-line of events highlight the "blood" ties of the regime whereby a defeat over the monopoly by, it is often invoked, the ethno-religious "sect" known as Alawites who are, notably, of the minority Shia Muslim faction and whose minority status lends credence to the current declarative certainty among various outlets in the media and among historians, that the in-group, ethno-religious identity of a given partisan to the conflict, is the singular causal determinate which affects the behavior and governing dynamics of that same partisan, as an individual or in the context of in-group/out-group dualism.

At a glance, the complexity of ethnic defection³⁸ in any case is such that it demands

³⁷ Hinnenbusch, R., *Authoritarian Power and State Formation in Bathist Syria: Army, Party and Peasant* by Raymond A. Hinnebusch, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* Vol. 23, No. 4 (Nov., 1991), pp. 623-625.

³⁸ Stanliand, P., (2012) *ibid*, "Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Insurgent Fratricide, Ethnic Defection, and the Rise of Pro-State Paramilitaries," pp. i-iv.

careful attention to detail. In Syria's case, ethnic defections took the form of Alawites targeting one another through seizure of assets at checkpoints in the provinces of Latakia and Tartous, alike. It is yet to be the case that a given guerrilla unit target non-combatant Alawites in the mountainous areas based on their ethnic-kinship, alone. Those absolute sums which entail the losing side being slaughtered wholesale via a genocide or ethnic cleansing in the immediate aftermath of one side's victory, this is not a likely scenario in Syria's case. Such an over-determination of outcome is likewise an inaccurate over-aggregation of strategic military commitments, tactical arrangements, deterministic identity and political free will. In Syria's case, these contradictory associations are quite opposite: Syria is overwhelmingly an ethnic Arab state with the majority of the population tracing back to Bedouin origins with pockets of Turkmen, central-European, central-Asian, Alawite, Kurdish, Circassian, Sephardic, and Armenian communities who, say in the case of Kurds, have been in northern Syria since the rule by Ottoman Empire. Syria's status as a central trade hub for Byzantine, Ottoman and (most recently) Indo-European market activity has greatly complicated the anthropological history of its inhabitants.³⁹

Anti-regime mobilization—and the deaths which are related to it—are cited in the Syrian Martyrs Database⁴⁰ beginning in March, 2011 when the Days of Rage called upon Syrians to demand that the regime relinquish power. Exogenous factors are those which contributed to either the direct or indirect identification with the revolution as a civilian/non-combatant and/or supporter of mobilized resistance. The identification (along political lines related to goal-setting)

³⁹ Hadjar, Abdel, "Historical Monuments of Aleppo", (1996) Damascus: Engineering Guild Press.

⁴⁰ Staniland, P., (2012) "Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Insurgent Fratricide, Ethnic Defection, and the Rise of Pro-State Paramilitaries," pp. 17-21.

as a contributor to some degree to revolutionary efforts during the period of non-violent mobilization by civilian agents overlaps with the stated goals of coordinating committees. This remains true throughout the period of onset. The following factors contributed to the onset of hostilities in Syria's case:

1) *High unemployment* and/or joblessness among native Homs is, internal migrants and refugees/internationally displaced communities, alike. The combination of a highly skilled workforce along supply routes has contributed to the partition of the Governate along geographic lines: City and countryside (suburbs), wherein highly skilled labor was among elite factions of minority demographics in the center of the city and rebel campaigns continued to thrive in the eastern and western surrounding areas where rebel identification was lent credence by economic reform and the socio-economic outcomes of survival favored continued mobilization in the form of attrition campaigns.

2) *The presence of at least one permanently displaced minority* in the form of asylum seekers included Sunnis who left Hama during the 1982 massacre. These are politically relevant actors who benefit from the failure of the regime because it would entail the return of land and property, lost first under the Egyptian annexation then, by regime officials who either jailed or confiscated wealthy land-owning elites. These incentives and partisan complications contributed to a similar partition in the case of Damascus, where refugees in the Yarmouk Camp provided political and ethnic clout to the regime wherein the starvation of Palestinians created breathing room for Assad's regime, wherein asking questions about Syria's civil rights and humanitarian abuses tied the hands of international networks and non-governmental agencies who would first have to acknowledge Palestinian statelessness. The blockade and partition through Yarmouk

forced residents of the camp to pick a side, proverbially, which they failed to do, sealing their fate as neither enemies to the regime nor enemies to rebel FSA forces and as stateless persons from Pales- tine awaiting the Right of Return.

3) *Contraction of central subsidy allocations* for agriculture in the Homs countryside, in other words: austerity. Through shifts to state policy, the perceived capacity of the state by the broad agrarian community offset the cost associated with resistance. The regime's loss of social capital supplemented the regime's loss of material capacity which resulted from the policy changes mentioned above.

Many sources for descriptive statistics have been made available by a handful of NGOs, religious syndicates, non- profits, state representatives, and IGOs as well as native epistemic groups, alike. One such group is the Syrian Martyrs Database, which began operating in Syria and publishing their results abroad with professional diaspora in Turkey. They and other like-minded groups have provided the public with aggregate data on war related deaths. According to these data sets, the highest frequency of war- related deaths in Homs occurred during the calendar years of 2012 and 2013, specifically during the month of February of 2012. A spike⁴¹ in documented killings in Homs occurred in August of 2012 and continued to rise into the four-hundreds through November of 2012.⁴² In the month of February of 2013, Homs peaked in numbers of war- related deaths.

⁴¹ Price, M., Klinger J., Ball, P., (2013), United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights "Preliminary Statistical Analysis of Documentation of Killings in the Syrian Arab Republic,"

<http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/SY/PreliminaryStatAnalysisKillingsInSyria.pdf>

⁴² Balll, L., (2013) Benetech Reports, ibid (2013), Figures 1-3 (all).

Restructuring in Agriculture

The economic viability of many developing states can be determined by singular sectors in the national economy, in Syria's case, this is the agricultural sector. Furthermore, among post-colonial states whose governments rely disproportionately or perhaps, exclusively, on agricultural exports as the primary source of revenue, structural adjustments can make or break a given state's material capacity. Syria followed the China model for development, an ideological rubric for modernization wherein liberal economic policy would beget reforms to the political system. Policy changes in the formal economy in Syria began to mimic the basic tenants of liberalization in the 1980s decade, beginning with gradual reforms to the agricultural sector. By the mid-1990s, Syria's Cooperative Agricultural Bank had overseen and implemented a series of economic adjustments aimed at liberalizing Syrian agriculture.⁴³ In policy terms, this translated into an overhaul to the cooperative model in exchange for gradual privatization. Changes to agriculture began with the introduction of demand-side planning and the introduction of subsidized strategic crops.⁴⁴ These include chickpeas, tobacco, barley, lentil, wheat, and sugar beet.

The leasing and tenure of arable land had for at least fifteen years (under the Agricultural Relations Law⁴⁵ of 1958), been a domestic enterprise owned and operated by middle-class merchants from the cities of the Aleppo and Damascus Governates. A stable disincentive system barring access to domestic agrarian markets by manufacturer import ventures was achieved

⁴³ FIRDOS (2004), *ibid.*

⁴⁴ United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), "General Information," *Statistical Data, Syrian Arab Republic* (2004), first retrieved February 2013, from <http://www.fao.org/countryprofiles/index/en/?iso3=SYR>

⁴⁵ *ibid.* FAO, *Country Profiles, Syrian Arab Republic – "General Information" Statistical Data* (2011), retrieved, February 2013, from <http://www.fao.org/countryprofiles/index/en/?iso3=SYR>

through the imposition of an important source of revenue that adjusted according to inflation on an annual basis: tariffs, duties, and fees on foreign imports.

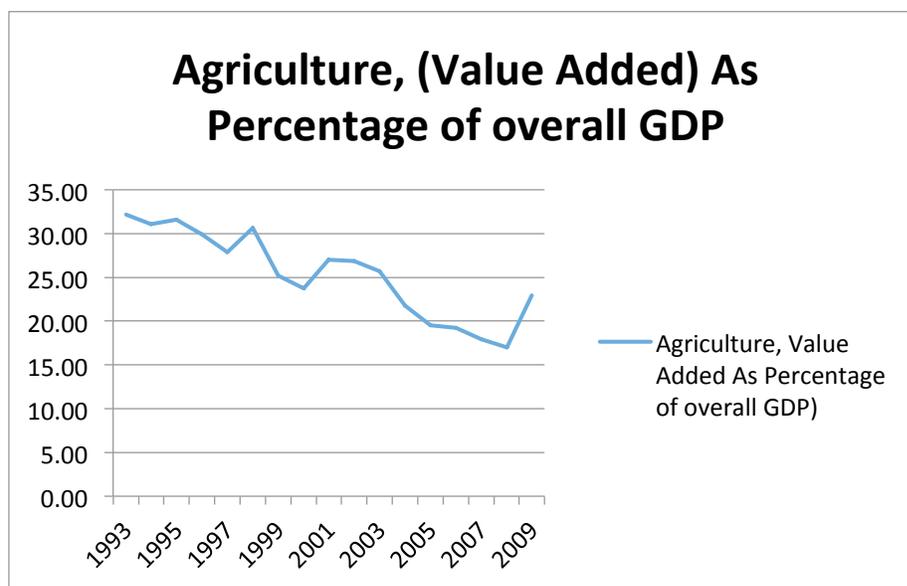
Through these supply-side subsidies, the costs of tenant, landlord, and oversight housing, services, and equipment were kept relatively safe. Also, as has been demonstrated above, the diffuse apparatus of state-run institutions for the distribution of domestic goods and foodstuffs related to agriculture were likewise—safe from externalities and exogenous changes. Finally, tenant laborers on agricultural plots were protected through a Federation and national Union. What suffered most during the 1970s was irrigation systems and maintenance of land as a result of local difficulties. The cooperative reform-within-the-reform assisted in guaranteeing that farmers received their full subsidies in the form of wages, maintenance, and diesel fuel for irrigation systems.

In 1987⁴⁶ the Cooperative Agricultural Bank of Syria began implementing a restructuring plan. This allowed the central, administrative functions of supply-side subsidization to be transitioned from state hands to that of the Agricultural Input Marketing Organization (AIMO), a private, foreign subsidiary firm who today, remains the only oversight to imports, exports, distribution, pricing, and subsidies in Syria's agricultural sector.⁴⁷ The details of the 1987 reform included a final overhaul to change the function and responsibility of the Agricultural Cooperative Bank from its previous function (central planning, distribution, price fixation, subsidization, etc.), now officially in private hands, to a complete opposite operational function:

⁴⁶ <http://www.syrianfinance.gov.sy/english/budget/banking-system/1814/1868.html>

⁴⁷ United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), "General Information," *Statistical Data, Syrian Arab Republic* (2004), first retrieved February 2013, from <http://www.fao.org/countryprofiles/index/en/?iso3=SYR>

as a trusteeship and financial advisory board whose singular responsibility became financial innature; that is, to oversee that accessibility was not barred by any of the central planning, protection, price fixing, and taxation by government administrators and institutions. This total reversal of roles between the Agricultural Cooperative Bank and the AIMO had serious consequences in Syria’s transition into the twenty-first century. The graphic below shows the evolution of agriculture from the year 1993 until 2009 as a percentage of overall GDP according to “value added” over time. This is the structural back-drop which makes clear, the social setting within agrarian communities in Syria prior to such structure-agent dynamics transitioned into an internal war.



(World Bank) Table 2

Agriculture (value added) as percentage of overall GDP

By the mid-1990s, Syria’s Cooperative Agricultural Bank had overseen and implemented a series of economic adjustments aimed at liberalizing Syrian agriculture.⁴⁸ In policy terms, this translated into an overhaul to the cooperative model in exchange for gradual privatization.

⁴⁸ FIRDOS (2004) “Country Statistics, Syria,” www.firdos.org, *ibid.*

Changes to agriculture began with the introduction of demand-side planning and the introduction of subsidized “strategic crops.”⁴⁹ These included chickpeas, tobacco, barley, lentil, wheat, and sugar beet.

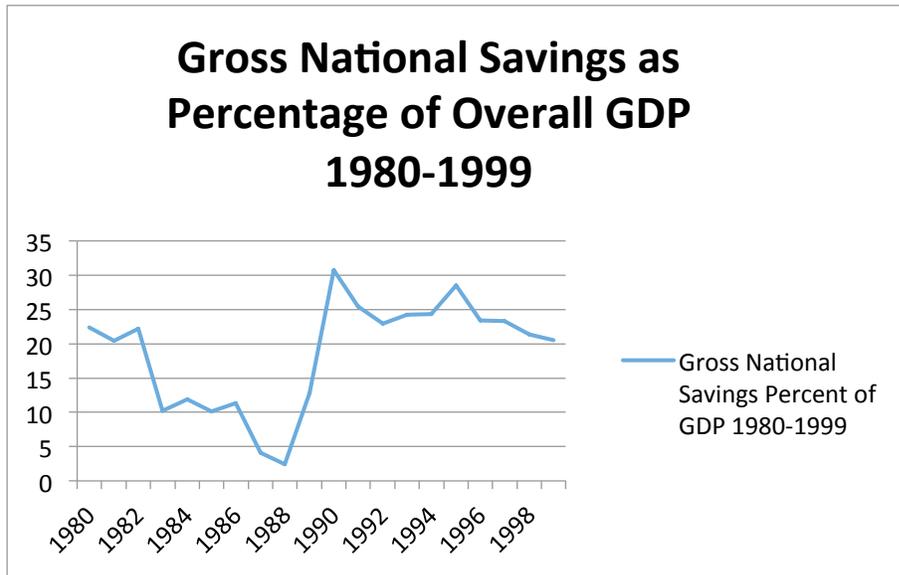


Table 3 Gross National Savings as Percentage of Overall GDP 1980-1999 (World Bank)

The remote, agrarian⁵⁰ regions that no longer fell under the “modern” doctrine of private competition, were ignored for at least twenty years, prior to which they were afforded subsidies, machinery, fertilizers, irrigation systems, and diesel, e.g., what was included in the first period of agriculture.⁵¹ Over the course of ten years, beginning in the early, to mid-1990s decade and ending in the early, to-mid-2000s, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) completed a series of projects in Syria’s rural communities, equipped with massive funding and earmarks for particular projects in particular areas. These were the areas that were, as has already

⁴⁹ United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), “General Information,” *Statistical Data, Syrian Arab Republic* (2004), first retrieved February 2013, from <http://www.fao.org/countryprofiles/index/en/?iso3=SYR>

⁵⁰ The World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2009*, retrieved March 2013, from <http://search.worldbank.org/all?qterm=syria%20agriculture&language=EN&format=html>

⁵¹ Jones, B.G., “The global political economy of social crisis: Towards a critique of the failed state ideology,” *Review of International Political Economy* 15:2, (May 2008): 180-205.

been explained in detail, encumbered by poverty as a result of decades-long structural adjustments to the agricultural sector. To recap, restructuring included the privatization of Syria's exports and adjustments to the socialist doctrine of central planning, whereby in less than twenty years, agriculture went from a system of planned resources for domestic consumption i.e., as a source of revenue, rural, and urban employment, the latter of which was achieved through state industry with the purpose of manufacturing and distributing agricultural machinery, equipment, accessories, supplies, and the like. These policy changes began in 1987 with an overhaul to the previous period's macro-economic structure, changing the composition of supply-side policy, thus retrofitting the nature of price fixation (according to yields) and costs (of machinery imported previously from the Soviet Union in a mutually beneficial trade agreement) completely. Factors such as worker productivity and arability of the land certainly co-varied with these rigid policy changes, including the presence of drought, explicitly.⁵²

In the year 2003, a rural development firm called the "Aga Khan Foundation⁵³" became the surrogate to economic activity in the rural areas. To this extent Aga Khan Foundation, through "recognizing the link between poverty and the lack of resource endowments,⁵⁴" adopted the practical enterprise of implementing reforms through training local actors by teaching local actors the nature of modern of agriculture. This was carried out through the disbursement of private loans, expensive classes, and hands-on tutorials with AKF experts. These loans were distributed by and subsidized through co-funding with another subsidiary groups of lenders called

⁵² 2008. *Annual Report Agha Khan Agency for Microfinance*. June 4. Accessed March 12, 2013. www.akdn.org.

⁵³ Ibid. 2008. *Annual Report Agha Khan Agency for Microfinance*. Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid. Foundation, Aga Khan, *ibid.*, *Spotlights: A Process Leading to Self Reliance*. Reportage, UAE: Telecentre Online Community (2011).

the “First Microfinance Institution” or FMI, a partner to the AGF in its Salamiyah project.⁵⁵ The Aga Khan Foundation also conducted reforms in the realm of finance. Through their subsidiary firm—called the Aga Khan Agency for Microfinance (AKAM)⁵⁶—their function job was to introduce the establishment of lending through the distribution of credit. AKAM had operations in the district of Al Haffeh in rural Idlib. AKAM also had business advisory boards in Masyaf, (Aleppo), Jobar (Damascus) and Suweyaydeh (Eastern Deraa). Their loan packages ranged from \$60 (US) to \$3,000 US dollars. AKAM established offices in these areas in the year 2005.

The Fund for Integrated Rural Development in Syria (FIRDOS) was established in 2001 under the “Syria Trust for Development”⁵⁷ is a non-profit organization whose stated mission is⁵⁸ “enhancing the bottom-up approach that aims to strengthen and enable the local community to become capable of taking the lead in the development process.”⁵⁹ They are of course, endogenous to the “development” paradigm and operate in Syria’s poorest villages in the countryside. FIRDOS is accredited by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). Aga Khan have projects in Marah (Damascus countryside) Ebla& Kafer Jales (Idleb) and villages across the Latakia and Aleppo Provinces.⁶⁰ FIRDOS also has a telecommunications branch among its inventory of development organizations called the Mobile Information Centre (MIF) whose oversight and planning fell under the auspice of the only national yet for-profit telecom company,

⁵⁵ Aga Khan Foundation (2008), “Annual Report Agha Khan Agency for Microfinance,” accessed March 12, 2013 from, www.akdn.org.

⁵⁶ Aga Khan Foundation, (2008), *ibid*.

⁵⁷ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. n.d. *Syrian Arab Republic Agriculture Sector AQUASTAT Country Fact Sheet*. General Information Data, FAO. Accessed January 2, 2015. <http://www.fao.org/contact-us/terms/en/>.

⁵⁸ FIRDOS: The Fund for Integrated Rural Development of Syria (2004), “Knowledge Access for Rural Inter-connected Areas Network” (2004), figure 21.

⁵⁹ FIRDOS (2004), www.firdos.org, *ibid*.

⁶⁰ FIRDOS: The Fund for Integrated Rural Development of Syria (2004), “Knowledge Access for Rural Inter-connected Areas Network” (2004), appendix.

Syriatel.

As mentioned in this section previously, Syrian agriculture has always occupied a significant portion of total GDP; any negative changes to this crucial economic sector will be felt in the form of discontent, much like the experience of Hama farmers beginning in the 1970s: the dissident cohort of disenfranchised Syrians whose experience of personal anomie gave way to the rise of Hama's Muslim Brotherhood, which grew in popularity as state capacity slowly but steadily retracted in certain industrial and agricultural productive forces.

The total cost of the International Fund for Agricultural Development's Syrian projects was the equivalent to \$58.1 million US and was co-financed by OPEC's Fund for International Development. The latter contributed US \$20.1 million.⁶¹ IFAD approved *private loans* to farmers in Syria that in total averaged to be approximately US \$20.1 million. IFAD's progress report on its Syrian projects, titled "Enabling Poor Rural People to Overcome Poverty in Syria" stated in their report that the main causes of poverty in rural Syria included "lack of access to credit and markets," as well as the "lack of a suitable microfinance system responding to the needs of rural people."⁶² The development fund/charity is the functional equivalent of the landlords who sought, to some extent to sabotage local productivity so as to hold onto their landed property and slow the process of expropriation and break-up to various monopolies on arable land. So it goes for the development organization as well; the farmers—instead of being sabotaged by local officials under the auspices of the landed elites—were now at the mercy of private investors whose identity is functionally akin to that of the landlord. The academic literature on civil wars

⁶¹ FIRDOS (2004) *ibid.*

⁶² Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, International Fund for Agrarian Development, accessed May 2, 2013 from www.fao.org.

includes the academic doctrine of “greed and grievance⁶³” whereby scholarly partisans of the “greed” cleavage reduce questions of rebel collective action to a rubric of behavioral calculability along the positivistic lines of econometric social theory.⁶⁴ This precedent has since been modified by scholars who have introduced the category of “opportunistic”⁶⁵ rebels or, to be presently specific, insurgent groups that gain support and participation according to the immediate bodily needs of civilian populations and according to the ideology of the amalgam known as the Islamic State.

⁶³ Collier, P., (2004) “Greed and Grievance in Civil War, Oxford University Press, pp. 563-565.

⁶⁴ Sambanis, N., (2010), *ibid*, pp. 849-850.

⁶⁵ Wood, E.J., (2003) *Insurgent Collective Action in El Salvador*, pp.123-133.

Restructuring in Manufacturing, Employment, and Finance

Changes were made to non-agricultural sectors of the national economy as well. Beginning in 1999, employment in jobs classified by the IMF as ‘finance and insurance’ increased by forty percentage points as the overall source of employment in Syria’s employment. Syria established an institution in 2001 called the Investment Office of the Supreme Investment Council which was designed to procure foreign investment in the financial sector. The International Finance Corporation (IFC), a lending subsidiary of the IMF, provided the distribution of. A new source of private wealth in Syria that was likewise a product of the privatization trend and a major change to employment in the financial sector was the introduction of the private consulting firm.

The IMF established a Price Stabilization Fund for Syria⁶⁶ in the year 2000, the likes of which was designed to restructure the government’s sources of revenue and expenditure through a series of private sector investments. In 2001 there was an 85% increase to natural gas extraction by private developers Syria’s natural gas fields are located in the Dierr Ezzor Province which is also the location of much of Syria’s proven oil reserves. In 2002, however, there was only a 54% increase; production came to a sudden halt until and—in 2004—Dierr Ezzor was abandoned when it was contracted to a Saudi Arabian developer who converted a project into a power plant.

According the IMF’s descriptive statistics, domestic consumption of natural gas decreased in the 2001-2002 timeframe; this is indicative of the fact that none of the output from gas extraction was used for domestic purposes.

⁶⁶ U.S. Energy Information Administration, (2013) *ibid*, www.useia.gov.

By 2003, public enterprises including manufacturing, housing, electricity, water, and gas had their subsidies at least halved over a period of three years. Let us then look more closely at how particular areas of Syria's urban economy, were monetarily reformatted according to the rubric of liberalization. That is, let us unpack the Price Stabilization Fund's activity in the areas of textiles, crude oil refinement, and construction/agricultural machinery and storage.⁶⁷

In the 1970s and 1980s, the city of Homs was among the most dependent on the regime for employment namely in the industry of petroleum-related work.⁶⁸ Construction⁶⁹ and manufacturing in chemical fertilizers⁷⁰ employed a majority of Homs' low-skilled and industrial workforce. Industrial workers had previously been incorporated under the General Federation of Workers' Unions from the beginning of the regime. Roughly three fourths of the male work force was employed in the petroleum industry in the 1970s decade.⁷¹ Homs has a large concentration of skilled laborers who were employed as industrial managers and engineers.⁷² Of these, a majority⁷³ worked in the Homs Refinery complex, foreclosed upon officially in the year 2003.

Employment in the Hama Province was based in three industries: petrochemicals, textiles, and steel⁷⁴ (all of which were also incorporated under the General Federation of Workers' Unions). Hamah's unemployment rate beginning in the 1980s reached upwards of 23%.

⁶⁷World Bank/CIA Factsheet, (2006).

⁶⁸ U.S. Energy Information Administration 2013, www.useia.org, accessed May 9, 2013.

⁶⁹ IMF, "Price Stabilization Fund Index" (2010).

⁷⁰ IMF (2010), "Price Stabilization Fund Index,"

⁷¹ IMF (2010) *ibid*.

⁷² IMF (2010) *ibid*.

⁷³ U.S. Energy Information Administration, (2013), accessed May 9, 2013 from, www.useia.org.

⁷⁴ World Bank/CIA Factsheet, *ibid*, (2006).

State controlled ginning operations in Hamah, all of which were incorporate under the General Organization for Textile Industries (UNITEX),⁷⁵ were officially shut down in 2003. Deirr Ezzor and al-Raqqa had employed much of their workforces in textiles as well, under the same Textile Industries Federation which to date is not operational. In Banyas, employment was steadily cut back beginning in the mid-1980s and was halved by 2003.⁷⁶ Banyas is adjacent to Tartous, the coastal city that experienced an “economic boom” (BBC Reports) in the year 2010. The refinery in Banyas that was foreclosed upon in 2003 employed some of the highest skilled industrial-chemical engineers in all of Syria.

⁷⁵IMF (2010),” Sources of Employment,” *ibid.*

⁷⁵ NHCR, *Iraqi Displacement as of April 2008*, retrieved April 9, 2013, from <http://www.unhcr.org/487ef7144.html>.

⁷⁶ IMF (2010), “Sources of Employment,” *ibid.*

Conclusion

The broad components of the Syrian domestic economy were already unstable when the American invasion of Iraq began.⁷⁷ This, of course, resulted in the Syrian absorption of one and a half million Iraqi refugees. This task—granting asylum to neighboring Iraqis⁷⁸—took place within an already precarious social, political, and economic context, and meant that Iraq’s internal crisis and the lack of reconcilable institution building at the outset of the Iraq War—was yet another tipping point. In 2006, housing in the suburbs of Damascus was already scarce and now was fully saturated resulting in high inflation in housing prices and a shortage of renters with national identification paperwork.⁷⁹ Further, Iraqis in Syria’s cities began competing for employment, cultivating exogenous social cleavages into sources of political grievance.⁸⁰

At this project’s conclusion, it is clear that the extent to which the regime was able to implement effective instruments of coercion was greatly atrophied by changes in the structure of the state’s economy. This is indicated by the failure of regime forces to effectively repress local dissent in the transitional period. The durability of rebel efforts in the countryside have to do with the nature of group-based grievances and the salience of revolutionary social identification. The nature of the employment structure in the remote areas was such that the incentive to protect fellow members of various agrarian populations was more salient among individuals in the countryside. These stakeholders were connected through subsistence living or through

⁷⁷NHCR, *Iraqi Displacement as of April 2008*, *ibid*, introduction & i-ii.

⁷⁸ Khawaja, M., *Internal Migration in Syria, Findings from a National Survey*.

⁷⁹ NHCR, *ibid*, *Iraqi Displacement as of April 2008*, pp. 11-15.

⁸⁰ Kalyvas, S., (2004) *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, pp.111-112.

lengthy familial lineages. The incentive to brandish protection for the community was characterized by horizontal organization. This rings particularly true in Dera'a Province where rebel factions mobilized early on and on the coattails of state repression. This was before the civil war, it is worthy to note, but it is the pretext within which future factions and support thereof, can be contextualized, that is, where exogenous structural components, in the form of a breakdown in state capacity, aligned coherently with the individual and group identities of rebel factions.

The pre-war phase of Syria's history followed a (loosely) similar formula to that of Egypt at the beginning of the Arab Spring. Both cases experienced the following trajectory of events: horizontal mobilization (which was countered by low-level violence from the government's regular forces), followed by expanded mobilization and selective regime violence, then, low-level regime violence, followed by expanded anti-regime mobilization. This is the intersection where the Egyptian and Syrian cases diverge and Syria's internal conflict transitions to civil war.

Experts on civil war emphasize conditions that can facilitate mobilization among potential insurgents, including the role of incentives (private benefits) from conflict and the role of state strength in increasing the costs of protests and deterring potential threats to a monopoly over state resources. Incumbent disincentives which could previously be counted on to deter mobilization—including the use of low-level selective violence—were not broadly effective, despite being applied similarly to previous periods of domestic instability. Regime efforts to flesh out effective deterrents (to organization in the name of political grievance) failed in the early stages of the conflict. The antidote of state repression was insufficient because the

particular structural characteristics typically afforded to the regime were no longer available, affecting state capacity negatively. This, coupled with the rewards structure associated with anti-regime mobilization, set into motion the necessary conditions required for a durable insurgency.

The two-sided competition for power at the onset of hostilities began between pro-regime and pro-revolutionary forces. The first phase of the war was characterized by less complicated allegiance structures. When the war began to garner international intervention in the form of economic and military sanctions by various actors, the patterns of allegiance became endogenously based. In the escalation period, the splintering of rebel groups became more muddled by the rise in factions participating in the competition for state resources. To this extent, UNSC sanctions and the freezing of regime officials' bank accounts resulted in an increased dependence on shadow economic actors.

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