The Territorial Penetration, Control, and Governance Nexus: Cases of Radical Religious Violent Non-State Actors

O Nexo entre Penetração Territorial, Controle e Governança: Casos de Atores Não-Estatais Radicais Religiosos Violentos

El Nexo entre Penetración Territorial, Control y Gobernanza: Casos de Actores No Estatales Violentos Religiosos Radicales

Zdeněk Ludvík

1. Assistant professor at the Department of International Relations and Political Science at Ambis University in Prague.

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Abstract: This paper explores the relationship between territorial penetration, control, and governance of violent non-state actors (VNSAs). The three concepts have been previously studied in isolation. However, this paper aims to fill a gap in the literature by linking them into a common framework. The article establishes a causal link between three concepts using the process tracing method within three instrumental case studies of radical religious VNSAs: Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the Islamic State (Daesh), and Hezbollah. Within a given research framework, the analysis also identifies specific intervening phenomena and contextual factors that may have a causal influence on the nexus under study. The main source of primary data comprises open expert interviews conducted by the author. The article presents evidence that advanced non-state governance requires a sequence of sufficient material actor power (penetration, control), inclusive ideational power (ideology), and positive contextual influence. Only such a sequence of establishing VNSAs in the territory fulfils a necessary and sufficient condition for positively impacting their power and status.

Key words: Violent Non-State Actors; Territorial penetration; Territorial Control; Territorial Governance; Ideology.

Resumo: Este artigo explora a relação entre penetração territorial, controle e governança de agentes não estatais violentos. Os três conceitos foram estudados anteriormente de forma isolada. No entanto, este artigo tem o objetivo de preencher uma lacuna na literatura, associando-os em uma estrutura comum. O artigo estabelece um vínculo causal entre os três conceitos usando o método de rastreamento de processos em três estudos de caso instrumentais de grupos religiosos radicais: Al-Qaeda no Magreb Islâmico, Estado Islâmico e Hezbollah. Dentro de uma determinada es-

trutura de pesquisa, a análise também identifica fenômenos intervenientes específicos e fatores contextuais que podem ter uma influência causal sobre o nexo em estudo. A principal fonte de dados primários inclui entrevistas abertas com especialistas realizadas pelo autor. O artigo apresenta evidências de que a governança não estatal avançada exige uma sequência de poder material suficiente do ator (penetração, controle), poder ideacional inclusivo (ideologia) e influência contextual positiva. Somente essa sequência de estabelecimento de agentes não estatais violentos no território preenche uma condição necessária e suficiente para impactar positivamente seu poder e status.

Palavras-chave: Atores não estatais violentos; penetração territorial; controle territorial; governança territorial; ideologia.

Resumen: Este artículo explora la relación entre la penetración territorial, el control y la gobernanza de los actores no estatales violentos. Los tres conceptos se han estudiado anteriormente de forma aislada. Sin embargo, este artículo pretende llenar un vacío en la literatura vinculándolos en un marco común. El artículo establece un vínculo causal entre los tres conceptos utilizando el método de seguimiento de procesos dentro de tres estudios de casos instrumentales de actores religiosos radicales: Al-Qaeda en el Magreb Islámico, el Estado Islámico y Hezbolá. Dentro de un marco de investigación determinado, el análisis también identifica fenómenos intervinientes específicos y factores contextuales que pueden tener una influencia causal en el nexo objeto de estudio. La principal fuente de datos primarios son las entrevistas abiertas a expertos realizadas por el autor. El artículo presenta pruebas de que la gobernanza no estatal avanzada requiere una secuencia de suficiente poder material de los actores (penetración, control), poder ideacional inclusivo (ideología) e influencia contextual positiva. Sólo dicha secuencia de establecimiento de los actores no estatales violentos en el territorio cumple una condición necesaria y suficiente para influir positivamente en su poder y estatus.

Palabras clave: Actores no estatales violentos; Penetración territorial; Control territorial; Gobernanza territorial; Ideología.

Introduction

This paper considers the territorial behaviour of religious violent non-state actors (VNSAs) by examining the relationship between the phenomena of territorial penetration, territorial control, and territorial governance. Previous studies have analysed each phenomenon separately, but this paper addresses a gap in the literature through a comprehensive framework. While territorial behaviour is deemed essential for state actors, it is uncertain whether it equally applies to VNSAs. Although not all non-state groups are affected, a number of them now possess unprecedented political influence. Their approach is to establish territorial presence, build repressive and distributive apparatuses, and govern territorially (Cronin, 2015).

However, the extent to which and the mechanism by which the possession of territory positively impacts VNSAs has not yet been explicitly addressed. Using case studies of Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Daesh and Hezbollah, this paper shows how territorial aspects of power have shaped the political agendas outlined by these non-state actors.

The paper proceeds as follows: initially, the relationship between religion and behaviour in international politics is outlined from the literature. Next, the significance of territory for actors' power is substantiated and the literature examining territory in relation to VNSAs is reviewed. This is

followed by an explanation of the theoretical and methodological research background, including an introduction to pertinent concepts related to territory possession, methods for tracing causal relationships, and data collection procedures for the open-ended expert interview method used. The subsequent section presents case studies and finally the conclusion addresses the research questions and discusses the implications of the research findings.

1. Getting religion involved in politics

Religion, the Dimension of the Sacred (Smart, 1996), in which the belief system and practices associated with that sacredness are interrelated (Durkheim, [1912] 1979, 65), loses political influence with the end of the Thirty Years' War and the emergence of the Westphalian system of states (Bagge; Wæver, 2000, 706). In the following centuries of a state-centred, secularised international system, religious issues remained strictly separated from political issues, and actors in international relations did not pursue religious agendas (Haynes, 2021, 8). In other words, religious issues were not foreign policy issues.

This situation did not change until the collapse of semi-hegemonic patronage systems after the end of the Cold War and the consequent increase in the influence of VNSAs in international politics (Mandel, 2013, 67). As Snyder puts it, "[s]ince September 11, 2001, religion has become a central topic in discussions about international politics" (Snyder, 2011, 1), as non-state actors with transnational revolutionary agendas began to establish themselves on the international stage. Their motivations were and are based on a fundamental interpretation of Islamic religious doctrine (Martin, 2021, 120) and, in Haynes's words, "can cross state borders and become internationally significant" (Haynes, 2021, 21). In short, the secular ideological and nationalist drivers of political violence and conflict have declined in favour of an increase in ideological-religious motives (Martin, 2021, 126). One of the Westphalian pillars defining the parameters of the international political order has thus been weakened. This is all the more so because there is also a religious agenda, both Islamic and non-Islamic, that is promoted in international relations by the Westphalian states. It is worth mentioning that this has been the case with Iran even before the end of the Cold War, and more recently we have seen an instrumental use of religious arguments in the politics of a number of Eastern European states. Religion has also long played a role in (domestic) political discourse in the United States.

The developments in practical politics discussed above have had their echoes in theoretical reflection on international relations. Nevertheless, classical theories pay minimal attention to religion. The positivist approaches of realism and liberalism, which argue in a purely rationalist logic of fixed state interests, neglect religion as a variable and regard it as causally insignificant (Snyder, 2011, 1–2). This has changed with the emergence of the theoretical schools of constructivism and poststructuralism. These already take into account the influence of ideologies, identities and discourses on how actors, embedded in logics of appropriateness or habits and routines, are motivated to interact. They thus see religion as an important concept that can be helpful in understanding the behaviour of state and non-state actors in the international system. Hence, it is only through postpositivist approaches that religion

has gained a firm place in the scholarly interpretation of international politics (Bagge; Wæver, 2000, 725ff.). A detailed insight into the relationship between religion and various theories of international relations is provided by Sandal and Fox's very informative 2013 monograph entitled *Religion in International Relations Theory: Interactions and Possibilities*. Important publications that contribute to the scholarly debate and discuss religion in the much broader academic context of the discipline include the two edited monographs: Snyder's canonical 2011 *Religion and International Relations Theory*, in which the contributors conclude that the increasing demand for political participation by the masses is behind the resurgence of religion in politics; and the second, the more recent Haynes' 2021 *Handbook on Religion and International Relations*, in which the contributors conclude that the factors behind the renewed penetration of religion into politics are successively decolonisation, the Cold War and globalisation, as these have fundamentally and in many ways changed people's attitudes towards the organisation and functioning of social, cultural and political models, both nationally and internationally.

As far as the function of religion is concerned, according to Durkheim it has a very social character (Durkheim, [1912] 1979, 13). Not only does it represent an interconnected system of beliefs (orthodoxy) and practices (orthopraxy), but it also functions as an instigator of the group identity of a given community and each of its members. These identities are shaped both precisely through the reiteration of learned and experienced social practices (Hopkins, 2011, 532), and through an institutionalised religious structure that acts as a facilitator of social mobilisation (Sandal; Fox, 2013, 19). As a result, a social dichotomy is created between those who belong to the community and those who do not. This can even lead to the creation of a sense of community superiority over others and the emergence of hostility towards those who are different, i.e. unlike or lukewarm believers, etc. (Ysseldyk; Matheson; Anisman, 2010, 60–64). These others may come to perceive such a dominant religious group as a security threat, as their secured interests come into conflict with the interests of that group (Bagge; Wæver, 2000, 720).

This is also the case, albeit to varying degrees, with the Islamic groups discussed in this text. Radical Sunni Salafi Islam, i.e. Islam free of all influences introduced after the death of Muhammad, is based on the concept of *Tawhid*, i.e. the principle of the divine uniqueness of Allah, which stands in stark contrast to *Shirk*, idolatry and polytheism. In the logic of *Takfiri*, therefore, all heretical Muslims who deviate from the only correct exegesis of the Quran and Hadith must be excommunicated (Philips, 2005, 17–58; Barrett, 2014, 18). In political practice, then, this religious perspective is translated into an ideological conglomerate of so-called offensive jihad, within which radical Salafis seek to establish a territorialised and religiously homogenised caliphate with an exclusive Sharia legal system (Ali; Sikandar, 2020).

In contrast, Shia Islam rests on three differently defined pillars: the legitimate succession of the Prophet in the line of Muhammad's son-in-law Ali (the doctrine of the *Imamate*), the existence of a political system based on the rule of experts rather than an absent infallible Imam (the doctrine of *Wilayat al-Faqih*), and the efforts of members of the Muslim community to implement the faith correctly (the doctrine of *Jihad*) (Alagha, 2006, 112). Thus, compared to Salafism, Shia Islam is not such an uncompromisingly radical conception.

That is to say, if for Salafis the establishment of the Caliphate is a matter of the present (i.e. before the coming of the Messiah), for Shiites the fully functioning Ummah is a matter of the future, i.e. after the coming of the Mahdi, who will be the only one who will be infallible and therefore the only one authorised to undertake this task. There is an important socio-political aspect to this: if radical Sunnis absolutely refuse to compromise with people who have a different worldview, then Shiites are not so exclusive and can find space to communicate with such divergent groups (García-Arenal, 2000).

Islamist VNSAs, which derive their legitimacy from religious beliefs and associated ideologies, are heavily involved in setting norms for the regulation and organisation of social relations. They create a model of political and social organisation with a strong presence of the element of politicisation and organised violence in everyday life, paralysing existing social rules and defining new ones that often contradict the identity of some groups. In this way, VNSAs destroy the foundations of natural social ties and make it impossible for people to participate and engage in a pluralistic political process. However, radical Islamic religious ideology also has an external dimension. It regards the current Westphalian states as apostates because they do not share the same system of values. Therefore, the governments of these states are to be overthrown and norms in line with the desired ideology are to be imposed. Thus, there is to be a global expansion and rise in power of the Islamic religion, part of which will be the elimination of all polytheistic religions in favour of the spread of monotheistic Islam (Siebert; Von Winterfeldt; John, 2015, 17; Napoleoni, 2015, 18). The aim is to establish a new world order in which secular political power is transformed into a form of absolutist theocracy with exclusive control over the entire spectrum of social life.

2. Impact of Territory on an Actor's Power

Territory can be employed to wield political, economic, and social power, thereby enabling an actor to secure a dominant power position (Storey, 2001, 172–173; Vollaard, 2009, 692) and reduce the effort needed to attain its objectives (Sack, 1986, 22).

There are four key components of territorial power. Firstly, the territory serves as a security element. Geographical formations and military infrastructure enhance military capacity and help to mitigate external threats (Hensel, 2012, 12; Wiegand, 2011, 24). Secondly, the territory plays an important economic role by providing access to natural resources, agricultural land, drinking water, sea and land transport routes, as well as urban and industrial centres. Tax revenues from local populations are of great importance (Goertz; Diehl, 2002, 14–16; Hensel, 2012, 9–10; Wiegand, 2011, 23). Furthermore, the territory embodies a manifestation of a community's shared historical and cultural understanding (Hensel, 2012, 9–10; Storey, 2001, 172). Thus, territorial possession serves as a "psychosomatic phenomenon of the community" (Gottmann, 1973, 15) that is necessary for the social integration of individuals into a polity with a sense of identitarian belonging (Soja, 1971, 33). Additionally, the ownership of land demonstrates reputation and prestige, resulting in significant differences in how actors are perceived in comparison to those who are unable to seize territory. Territorially anchored

actors have a higher status (Hensel, 2012, 11). Thus, the territory matters, and the territorially rooted actors are relevant to international politics.

3. Territory and VNSAs in the Literature

Existing literature lacks explicit theorising on how territory affects the effectiveness of VNSAs. Only two texts discuss the concept and significance of territory from a non-state perspective in any depth.

The first of these is Stathis Kalyvas's monograph The Logic of Violence in Civil War (2006). Kalyvas defines two basic categories which determine possible ways of holding territory. The first category includes the process of segmentation where power is monopolised by one actor; the second category includes the process of fragmentation where power is oligopolised by a group of actors. The different levels of territorial power are categorized on a scale ranging from 1 to 5. In zones 1 and 5, power is segmented and monopolized by either the state (zone 1) or a VNSA (zone 5). In contrast, zone 3 exhibits fragmentation due to the overlapping powers of the state and VNSA. Zone 2 is chiefly dominated by state power, while VNSA power is minimal, and zone 4 sees the opposite: VNSA power is dominant, while state power is minimal.

The second of these is Stig Hansen's monograph Horn, Sahel and Rift: Fault-lines of the African Jihad (2019). Hansen introduces a four-tiered categorisation. The first category is called clandestine network, where VNSAs do not use the territory as such to achieve their objectives. The second category, accepted presence, is a situation where a weak state allows a VNSA to coexist on its territory in order to use it for its own purposes. The third category is semi-territorial presence, where a relatively strong VNSA operates in the territory at the expense of a state actor. The final category is territorial control wherein an exceedingly powerful VNSA reaps the full benefits of the territory.

While the research conducted by the above-mentioned authors offers the most inclusive comprehension of the importance of territory for VNSAs to date, it is simply a conceptualisation of the various forms of territorial presence. However, the authors did not consider how these territorial forms might impact the political power status of VNSAs.

4. Concepts, Methods and Research Design

Territorial penetration refers to the physical presence of an actor in a given territory, based on the simple premise that "a human being has to be in space" (Thirlway, 2017, 145). The extent of such presence varies according to the size of the space occupied, the number of fighters present, and the density of their deployment. There are VNSAs who solely penetrate a territory without any intention or ability to take further action. This may happen if a) the state has no power over the territory (e.g. safe havens); b) the state holds power, but VNSAs are unable to seize it (e.g. terrorists); or c) the VNSAs have no interest in posing a threat to the state (e.g. criminal groups). Therefore, penetrating territory does not automatically mean gaining power (and thus establishing their own policies).

Territorial control refers to an actor's ability to move around freely and prevent an adversary from entering a controlled area (Rubin, 2020,

463; Kasfir, 2015, 26). An actor controls a territory when it: a) has sole authority to use force; b) has the ability to manage cross-border movements; c) can exclude other entities from its decision-making process; d) or alternatively, enjoys recognition/acceptance from other significant (state) entities (Krasner, 1999, 9). VNSAs may a) control and occupy territory that is not or only weakly protected by the state (e.g. clan militias, weak insurgents); b) seize territory in a politico-military way (e.g. warlords); c) displace the state by force (e.g. strong insurgent groups). So, controlling territory can mean gaining power (and thus establishing their own policies, albeit quantitatively and qualitatively limited).

Territorial governance refers to an actor's capacity to create institutions that restrict the interactions between it and the civilian population. Through these institutions, the actor has the ability to implement formal or informal regulations and allocate public goods (Arjona; Kasfir; Mampilly, 2015b, 15). Specifically, governance encompasses measures aimed at addressing both internal and external threats, as well as the provision of social, health and educational services. Additionally, it involves creating a conducive environment for economic activity, systematic mobilisation and extraction of resources from both the territory (mining, agricultural production) and society (taxation). Finally, identitarian compliance between the actor and the civilian population is key in empowering and legitimising the actor in question (Schneckener, 2006, 31). While governance can take various forms, ranging from basic social interventions (e.g. strong insurgents, tribal militias) to very sophisticated forms of social regulation that can even be directly described as state-building (e.g. proto-states) (Arjona, 2014, 1375; Metelits, 2010, 7), it can involve the maximisation of power (and thus the imposition of one's own policies without major quantitative and qualitative constraints).

Neoclassical realists argue that material power is a prerequisite for ideational power, and that only the sum of the two constitutes the total power available to the actor to implement its preferred form of policy. Additionally, only when society aligns with the actor's intentions can a positive effect of both material and ideological bases on the actor's overall power be anticipated (Taliaferro; Lobell; Ripsman, 2009; Schweller, 2003; 2009). Thus, it could be claimed that the degree of penetration of the territory by VNSAs has the potential to significantly influence the degree of control, and both of these categories can significantly influence governance and applied policies. The interrelation between these three phenomena is nested, as a subsequent phenomenon depends on the previous one.

The research framework, consisting of three within-case instrumental studies, is embedded in a qualitative explanatory methodology of causal process-tracing. The main method used to collect data is the expert interview.

"[C]ausal-process tracing is a crucial technique for drawing causal inferences" (Blatter; Haverland, 2012, 82) and "for capturing causal mechanisms in action" (Bennet; Checkel, 2015, 9). Causal inference is an investigative belief about the nature of the relationship between cause and effect; process-tracing helps to determine it by observing the causal process, thereby allowing the fully specific mechanism responsible for

the relationship to be identified (Collier; Brady; Seawright, 2010, 201–202; Mahoney, 2010, 124). Thus, in process-tracing research, independent and intervening/conditional factors that influence the dependent factors are empirically revealed as elements of a sequential chain of causality (George; Bennett, 2005, 18). Process-tracing can therefore be described as an evaluation tool that analytically transforms the mere observation of this world into an evidence-based assessment (Beach; Pedersen, 2013, 120). In this research, process-tracing is not based on the analysis of an extensive historiographical narrative, but is conducted in the form of a loose but thoughtful storyline, focusing on those events and facts that are crucial with regard to the concepts that are to be traced. The storyline must therefore include all the main points of development of each case under investigation, taking into account the temporal sequence, intensity and depth of key events (Blatter; Haverland, 2012, 143).

The effect results not only from the causal mechanism itself, but also from the context in which the causal process occurs (Pawson; Tilley, 2000, 77). Therefore, this analysis extends and refines the explanation by identifying specific intervening phenomena and contextual factors captured in the process tracing that causally contribute to the increase/decrease in the influence of territorial possession. Thus, the complexity of social reality is acknowledged by recognising the interconnectedness of processes between established concepts and other contextual factors (Dany, 2013, 91). These factors are responsible for the constellation of conditions that significantly influence the course and output of the causal mechanism (Pawson; Tilley, 2000, 76; George; Bennett, 2005, 107).

The research presented in this text focuses on areas of the world where violent conflict has been ongoing for a long time and where there is no end in sight. Increased tensions make safe access to these places very difficult. As Arjona, Kasfir and Mampilly say (from their own experience), it is very difficult and can be dangerous to obtain valid empirical evidence in these areas (Arjona; Kasfir; Mampilly, 2015a, 296). It is therefore virtually impossible to conduct individual fieldwork without the guidance and support of local authorities. For this reason, a procedure in the form of expert interviews was chosen, and data that would otherwise have been collected at the conflict sites was obtained in an alternative way: through personal (physical) and mediated (computer) communication with people who possess the required information in aggregate, i.e. with experts who are professionally engaged with the localities in question and who repeatedly stay there, communicate with local actors, and are able to convey their knowledge and insights in the perspective of the research context (cf. Lohmann, 2013, 6). (To a lesser extent, communication also took place with eyewitnesses of the event who already live outside the conflict areas.)

In general, interviews are one of the main methods used in research practice to obtain the empirical data needed to conduct process-tracing (Trampusch; Palier, 2016, 442; Vennesson, 2008, 234), as they allow the researcher "to delve deep into agency, relations between agents, and individual and collective processes of meaning and decisionmaking" (Gonzalez-Ocantos; Masullo, 2024). The expert interview method is

based on the personal accounts of experts and practitioners during an open-ended, unstructured interview. It is particularly suitable for the researcher when these people, who have expertise and/or insider knowledge, are willing to share their insights. At such a moment, the expert interview represents an effective means of becoming familiar with the otherwise hard-to-find facts needed in process-tracing to reconstruct the events under study (Pouliot, 2015, 246), and to extract from them information about the sequence of causal and intervening phenomena in the traced mechanism (Beach; Pedersen, 2013, 134).

The interviews took place between March and August 2017 on the territory of Belgium, France, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States. In total, 26 people were interviewed, including army security analysts (2), diplomats (1), eyewitnesses (2), INGO workers (4), scholars and researchers (9), and think-tank analysts (8). Given that a number of respondents agreed to be interviewed solely on the basis of established mutual trust and only on the condition that their anonymity would be preserved, they are not identified in the text and are referred to in the bibliography using a code. As documented in the literature, this practice is consistent with the ethics of academic research in the social sciences (see Yow, 2005, 129–148). (The most frequently cited reason for maintaining anonymity by the interviewees was the need to protect their own organisation, i.e. themselves and other staff working in the localities in question for research, humanitarian aid, etc., whether from the perspective of the safety of persons directly present in the field, or from de facto diplomatic and political considerations, with the need to maintain neutrality in the context of uneasy and precarious relations with actors in conflict areas [cf. Autesserre, 2010, 33].)

Academic literature (monographs, journal articles), policy papers and reputable daily newspapers were used as secondary data sources.

5. Case Studies

AQIM

AQIM started to penetrate northern Mali (Azawad) at the beginning of 2008 (Larémont, 2011, 245). Until 2011, the group penetrated the territory very poorly, had no territorial control and did not exercise any territorial governance (Interviewees A; B; C). Formally, the Malian secular legal system was still in force and tribal law was applied (Lecocq, 2010, 138).

In 2012, the situation changed. AQIM increased the number of its fighters to between one and two thousand, penetrated the territory and deployed its units unevenly throughout. AQIM's fighters were not restricted to individual human settlements, rather, they were in a state of constant oscillation throughout the territory (Guidère, 2011, 61; Interviewees A; C). AQIM subsequently captured energy and communication infrastructure, along with twelve to fifteen human settlements which consisted of the cities of Gao, Kidal, Mopti, and Timbuktu, in addition to transport

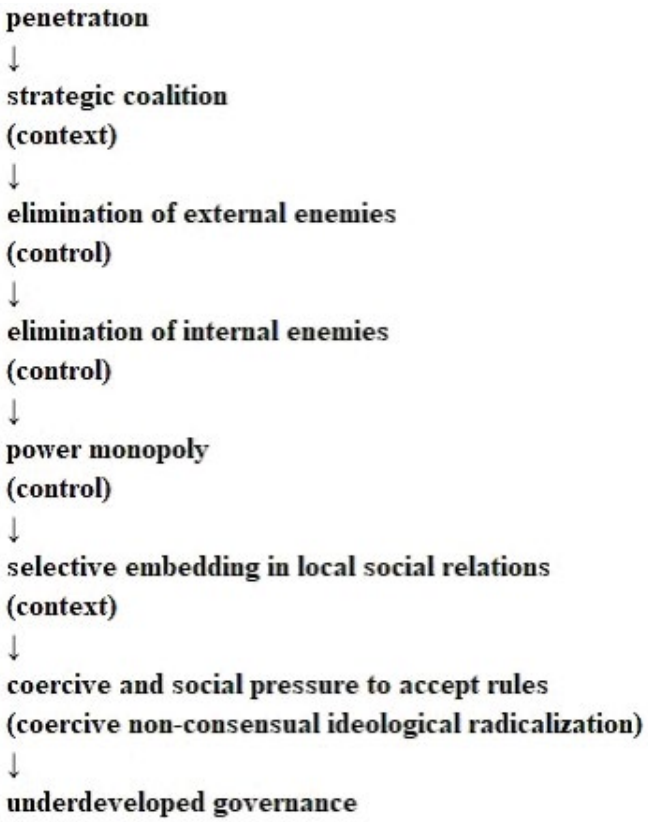
routes connecting them (Interviewee A).

Following this, a loose coalition was formed with the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) and Ansar Dine groups in which the Malian state's power and the secular Tuareg National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) were completely displaced (Whitehouse; Strazzari, 2015, 221). AQIM was successful in controlling political processes, the ability to control the border lines was quite strong (Interviewees A; B). Without the approval of AQIM, it was impossible for anyone to stay within the territory while access to urban zones remained under the group's strict supervision (Interviewee C). Even if AQIM did not have exclusive decision-making authority, it was not constrained by others. Consequently, AQIM had considerable ability to exclude other actors from its decision-making process (Cocodia, 2017, 50; Notin, 2014, 148; Lacher, 2012, 15; Interviewee D). However, AQIM was deemed by the worldwide community as an entity of unacceptable terrorist nature that deserved to be eliminated without compromise (U.S. Department of State, 2017; United Nations Security Council, 2013; Interviewees A; B; C). Nonetheless, the region remained under the tight control of AQIM and there was no real entity capable of disrupting its dominance. AQIM effectively monopolised power.

In the subsequent step, AQIM used a marriage policy. Fighters affiliated with AQIM wedded individuals from impoverished households in order to disrupt the entrenched tribal hierarchy. Additionally, AQIM showed preference towards the local tribal nobility and Muslim clergy. AQIM facilitated the movement of their livestock by providing a free zone, essential for the survival of their animals, which had frequently been thwarted by the Bamako administration. It also allowed these elites to engage in illegal trade (Interviewee E). In other words, AQIM corrupted religious leaders with material incentives. The established connections facilitated AQIM's coercion of the population, and the support of the tribal elite led to the adoption of new rules of behaviour (Bøås; Torheim, 2013, 420; Interviewees A; D). AQIM's conduct towards the population was solely coercive, without delivering security to civilians. On the contrary, AQIM posed a threat by itself (Solomon, 2013, 17). The failure to distribute public goods to the entire population led to scarcity of electricity, fuel, and food, resulting in the shutdown of schools, hospitals, shops, and markets (English, 2014). The funding sources remained unsystematic, and a notable proportion of AQIM's revenue was derived from criminal activities (Interviewee A). AQIM hindered civic participation at the political level. Conflicts in the sphere of identity persisted, with radical Islam at odds with the beliefs held by the majority of the population (Solomon, 2015, 21–22,28). In summary, AQIM failed to translate its territorial power, acquired through penetration and control, into an institutional structure capable of managing territorial governance.

After 2013, AQIM lost its territorial gains in Mali due to the French military mission Operation Serval and consequently was no longer able to control the territory in any way (Rémy, 2013; Sallon, 2013; Interviewees A; C).

Figure 1 AQIM: Sequence of territorial behaviour



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Daesh

After 2006, Daesh (formerly known as the Islamic State in Iraq) started to penetrate gradually into the peripheral areas of Iraq (Napoleoni, 2015, 39; Interviewee F). Nevertheless, it was unsuccessful in maintaining systematic control over the territory and was unable to establish governance. (McCants; Zelin, 2016; Interviewees B; F; G).

The period from 2014 to 2015 marked a significant turning point, driven by an upsurge of foreign militants, certain Sunni tribal factions, Ba'athist elite members, and indigenous jihadists, leading to the ballooning of Daesh fighters to several tens of thousands (Salama, 2016, 59; Sallon, 2015). Through an unparalleled military campaign, Daesh took control of approximately one-third of Syrian and Iraqi territory, specifically targeting areas surrounding Syrian Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor, as well as the region encompassing Iraqi Mosul and the central sections of Iraq to the north and west of Baghdad (Gerges, 2016, 2–3).

This was followed by the elimination of external and internal adversaries: Daesh had a numerical advantage over its rivals within its territory and had no military adversary; from the outside, the forces were balanced on a one-to-one basis (Interviewee H). External rivals were defeated militarily or divided internally, whereas the internal enemies were either killed, expelled or disarmed (Weiss; Hassan, 2016, 207). Daesh had the capability to permanently deploy in urban and industrial areas, as well as in populated

rural areas (Ahram, 2017, 356). It took control of over 130 strategic locations and significant settlements, such as cities, military or industrial facilities (including oil infrastructure), or transport and energy infrastructure lines, in a gradual manner (Almukhtar et al., 2017; Lewis, 2014).

Daesh, became the dominant actor and gained a strong monopoly of power (Zelin, 2016; Interviewees B; F; G; H). No other actors were able to influence its decisions in a relevant way (Interviewees B; C; G; H). Penetration by an external actor into Daesh territory would have required breaking through the front lines. However, Daesh tightly controlled these lines (Rosiny, 2015, 101). Simultaneously, Daesh had the capability to control cross-border traffic (e.g. oil transport by tankers) (Hawramy; Harding, 2014). Moreover, the border lines were impenetrable to the general population (Sullivan, 2015). Internationally, Daesh was perceived as entirely unacceptable and deserving complete destruction (U.S. Department of State, 2017; Interviewees B; F; G). It is evident that Daesh exhibited very strong territorial control.

Daesh's power was closely tied to the indoctrination of radical Salafism (Lister, 2014), which forbade any political ideas conflicting with Sharia law or referencing Western concepts like democracy (Revkin, 2016b). This created a self-contained subculture that was accepted by only a small portion of the population (Dincer; Topal, 2014, 29). As a result, society as a whole never identified with Daesh nor did it voluntarily embrace its ideology (Gerges, 2016, 168).

Therefore, the majority of society was compelled to accept the situation and seek to benefit from it, resulting in a unique social contract. This contract facilitated effective recruitment, the potential for non-confrontational extraction, and the absence of internal challengers or power seekers. The social contract solely pertained to individuals of Sunni faith who adhered to the radical Salafi ideology. Those who did not fit this description, including Shiites, Christians, and Yazidis, faced persecution and were forced to flee, convert, or were enslaved or killed (Barrett, 2014, 42; Luizard, 2015, 80).

So, the question of governance is not clear-cut. On the one hand, ex-Baath members possessed expertise in creating a contemporary state, which proved helpful to Daesh (Interviewees F; I; J). However, the provision of security and services was very selective. For privileged people, Daesh undertook activities that are common in strong states (Interviewees F; G; K). It provided security (protection from enemies), justice (settlement of disputes) and services (provision of human needs) (Revkin, 2016a; Zelin, 2016). Water and electricity supplies were restored, hospital and medical facilities were maintained, schooling was organized, municipal waste was collected, and postal services were provided (Lister, 2014; Alexander; Alexander, 2015, 152). However, the distribution of these public goods excluded the unprivileged.

Daesh established a robust hierarchical structure across three tiers: central, provincial, and local (Salama, 2016, 30; Interviewees C; G; K), enabling systematic and organized self-financing (Interviewees B; F; G). The revenue streams in the form of oil extraction and trading, as well as taxes, accumulated between $2 and $3 billion per year (Johnston et al., 2019, 43). The amount of funds was adequate for the operations of the caliphate as a territorial political unit (Interviewees C; G; H; K).

After 2016, due to an inability to provide public goods and the unacceptable progression of religious morality and Sharia behavioural demands

(Gartenstein-Ross; Magen, 2014) coupled with counterinsurgency operations, Daesh's territorial power structure was destroyed. The group transformed into the former guerrilla terrorist group, penetrating territories in the form of cells, but neither controlling nor governing them (Callimachi, 2019).

Figure 2 Daesh: Sequence of territorial behaviour

Search: Own elaborated.

Hezbollah

Hezbollah did not have control of any territory in Lebanon during the early 1980s (Szekely, 2012, 110). Instead, it penetrated only clusters of micro-territories under the influence of other actors (Verdeil; Faour; Velut, 2007). The extent of its territorial control was weak, and its governance was undeveloped (Interviewees B; H; L; M; N).

After the end of the civil war (1990), Hezbollah penetrated very strongly into areas of southwest Beirut, the northern region of the Beqaa Valley and part of southern Lebanon (Alagha, 2006, 155). The subsequent Iranian patronage created an unprecedented background for Hezbollah's activities (Interviewee C). It could not only self-style in the role of the sole protector of the interest of Shiites (this later created the conditions for social acceptance and the willingness to support it) but also, above all, Hezbollah was materially strengthened by that (Interviewees J; O).

Hezbollah, with its material superiority and social legitimacy, was empowered to deal with both internal (Amal, Falanga) and external (Israel) opponents. Initially consisting of 40,000 to 45,000 troops, the group later grew to more than 60,000 (Baud, 2014; Interviewees B; N). It gradually increased its units until they outnumbered its rivals by tenfold (Interviewees L; M). Hezbollah was evenly deployed throughout its territory (Interviewee L); it captured strategic points as bases with weapons arsenals in southern Lebanon, logistical facilities for training recruits in the Beqaa Valley and the political centre in Beirut and was also militarily present in civilian localities (Baud, 2014). Notably, Hezbollah's territory had high economic significance with thousands of economic units, including sizable companies. Agriculture was also highly developed with hundreds of farms. Numerous service companies were also in operation (Verdeil; Faour; Velut, 2007).

Hezbollah achieved an overwhelming monopoly of power and exerted complete control over the territory. The internal Lebanese rivals became nominal and did not disrupt Hezbollah's power (Interviewees C; H; M; N). Hezbollah effectively secured the border lines: it blocked access roads and mined southern Lebanon so that the Israeli army could not enter its territory (Szekely, 2012, 117; Matthews, 2008, 18). Hezbollah was able to control the movement of actors (Interviewees H; N): "It is difficult to imagine anyone crossing the border without some level of Hezbollah cooperation" (Norton, 2014, 117). Hezbollah's ability to exclude other actors from decision-making became virtually absolute (Interviewee N). The Iranian patronage had the consequence that the international community came to terms with Hezbollah's existence. Generally, Hezbollah is considered a legitimate resistance movement rather than a jihadist group (Baud, 2014; Azani, 2011, 201). This attitude of the outside world has had a decisive impact on Hezbollah – it has not been subjected to systematic and collective military operations by external enemies.

Subsequently, Hezbollah was very good at territorial governance. It was able to provide internal and external security throughout the area it controlled (Interviewees C; H; L; M; N). Over 86% of Shiites and over 73% of all Lebanese identified Hezbollah as a reliable protector against Israeli aggression (Daher, 2014, 459). The rate of redistribution of public goods provided by Hezbollah was very high (Interviewee C). These included a wide range of services: material support for the poor and orphans, housing and construction of buildings for public activities, management of schools and hospitals, including universities and top medical institutions, financing of business development projects, management of public media, and cultural and sports activities (Daher, 2014, 157–177).

Hezbollah was able to raise funds in an organised and systematic way, namely through taxation of the population and economic entities, and through regular financial transfers from Iran. Hezbollah's revenues exceeded $1 billion, and aid from Iran alone reached $800 million per year (Fanusie; Entz, 2017). Hezbollah was also able to create a hierarchical military and political structure consisting of the Office of the Secretary-General and the Shura Council, which includes the Executive Board, the Political Council, the Parliamentary Action Council, the Judicial Council, and the Military Council; the Regional Desk (with three subdivisions in Beirut, South Lebanon, and Beqaa); social services (further divided into charities, schools, and hospitals); political

organisations; and media outlets (Al-Nour radio, Al-Ahed news, and Al-Manar television) (Daher, 2014, 122,193–195). Hezbollah's structure imitated that of states (Interviewees C; H; N): it guaranteed the security of the population, ruled over the population and mobilised the population (Interviewee P).

This was followed by what could be described as a strategic turn. In terms of identity, Hezbollah understood that focusing on Muslim/Shiite groups could not bring more success in Lebanon's multi-confessional society. It abandoned traditionalist religious interpretations and began to adopt a tolerant approach to religious otherness and different ethnic groups (Saab, 2008, 96; Interviewees Q; R). The population was allowed to engage politically without the threat of discrimination. Lebanese society was liberalising: women were entering the public sphere, the language of the media was becoming less subservient, and Christians were beginning to work in Hezbollah institutions (Daher, 2014, 130–131). The conditions for civic participation could therefore be described as favourable (Interviewees B; C; H; L; N). The strategic turn has thus led to Lebanese society as a whole accepting Hezbollah as a legitimate actor and Hezbollah providing services to the Lebanese population as a whole. Thus, the relationship between Hezbollah and Lebanese society ultimately shifted to the constitutive relationship: internal acceptance led to inclusive governance, and inclusive governance led to internal acceptance.

Figure 3 Hezbollah: Sequence of territorial behaviour

Search: Own elaborated.

6. Research Outcomes

The research findings show that, if penetration is to be sufficient for subsequent territorial control, then firstly the number of fighters in relation to the number of locations to be seized is key. Second, the ratio of the number of VNSA forces to the number of enemy forces is also key. This means that it is the density of the deployment and the ability to seize strategic points that is relevant, not the absolute size of the territory penetrated.

The case of AQIM shows that if a VNSA wants to successfully control territory in peripheral, backward and sparsely populated areas, it must penetrate the territory with a few thousand men. However, the VNSA must not face a stronger opponent – the VNSA's numbers must be significantly higher than the enemy's forces (AQIM showed a ratio of one hundred to one). In addition, the VNSA must be deployed (albeit unevenly) throughout the territory to seize key strategic points.

The case of Daesh shows that if a VNSA wants to successfully control territory in predominantly agricultural, sparsely urbanised and scarcely populated areas with limited infrastructure, it must penetrate the territory with tens of thousands of men. They must be evenly deployed throughout the territory and capture all strategic points. The VNSA units must outnumber the enemy forces (inside its territory, Daesh had no military opponents, and its power was absolute; outside its territory, Daesh had military opponents, and the powers were balanced one-to-one). In addition, the economic value of the territory (at least part of it) must be high. Only if the territory is penetrated in this way can the VNSA not only control it, but also lay the foundations for governance.

The case of Hezbollah shows that if a VNSA wants to successfully control territory in industrialised, urbanised and densely populated areas with developed infrastructure, it has to penetrate the territory with tens of thousands of fighters. They must be evenly deployed throughout the territory, capturing all human settlements, strategic points and infrastructure. They must achieve an optimal ratio to the opponent's units (Hezbollah showed a ratio of ten to one). A high economic value of the territory is also important. Only if the territory is penetrated in this way can the VNSA fully control and successfully govern it. For governance, the VNSA's self-identification with the population and mutual identity are absolutely essential (Arreguín-Toft, 2007, 144–145). The absence of counterinsurgency operations and strong external patronage (Kalyvas, 2018, 44) only frame this entire configuration.

But if territorial penetration was a prerequisite for sufficient strength to control, and control was a prerequisite for sufficient strength to govern, why did AQIM, Daesh and Hezbollah pursue different policies of territorial governance?

As far as AQIM is concerned, it should be emphasised that AQIM never originally planned to operate in the Malian territory (Interviewee C). The territorial penetration of Azawad was the result of the circumstances created by the Tuareg uprising. AQIM's real motives for being present in the area are to "maintain social confusion and triumph by creating chaos" (Interviewee S) and to profit from this chaos in the long term (Interviewee A). AQIM's primary aim was to disrupt state power rather than to transform its own power into the ability to govern and organise

social life (Interviewee O). Its territorial operations therefore represent a form of aliocracy in which the VNSA intervenes in social relations only to the extent that it maintains its monopoly of power (Arjona, 2014, 1375). The tactical mode of land use also corresponds to aliocracy – the control of AQIM territory served only as a utilitarian instrument to satisfy a partial religious and criminal interest. For AQIM, the territory therefore represents first and foremost a safe haven, control of smuggling routes and thus a source of money (Interviewees S; T). AQIM was not ready and willing to govern (Interviewee U).

From this perspective, it is possible to explain poor governance. AQIM did not create the necessary infrastructure or provide public goods. AQIM's mentality thus consisted primarily in the local expansion of strategic supporters, not in the development of state competencies and institutionalisation (Interviewees U; V). Although the weakness of the Malian state made it relatively easy for the VNSA to penetrate and control Azawad territory, the absence of a bureaucratic administration with the appropriate know-how and professional staff, and thus of any infrastructure, were shortcomings that acted as complications for the possible transformation of the VNSA. It is virtually impossible to move from a state of guerrilla warfare to a state of consolidated governance (Interviewees U; W). All this is exacerbated by the fact that AQIM had no real support from the states. It only had enemies. Al-Qaida Central only provided AQIM with ideological support and not enough material support (Interviewees C; U).

For Daesh, the use of force was to gain respect and increase the importance of its position in the domestic and international political arena (Gaub, 2016). Coercion was sufficient to displace Iraqi and Syrian troops and then build the seeds of the caliphate, marginalise / eliminate competing VNSAs and establish Sunnis as the dominant social class in the caliphate. At its peak, Daesh fulfilled the signs of rebelocracy (Arjona, 2014, 1375), but its use of territory remained only in the mode of a) linking local territorial control to a broader structural framework, and b) consolidating it into an institutional form of governance, without realising the long-term socio-political aspirations of the general population.

But there are circumstances that severely limit these successes. The fact that a) Daesh was not tolerated by the international community and was even directly considered an organisation to be destroyed; b) Daesh created absolutely no conditions for civilian participation in the organisation of society; c) Daesh's identity was incompatible with the identity of the local population, is the sum of the causes responsible for the selectivity of governance and its ultimate collapse. The common denominator of Daesh's problems was the ideology it represented. And radical Salafism was even detrimental to Daesh itself. Rigid ideology did not allow for concessions and compromises, which hindered Daesh in building governance, which requires non-coercive means of implementation (Interviewee X). Once Daesh "imposed his ideology on the population and the version of sharia […] was rejected by ordinary Muslims [who] resolutely turned against it and rejected his vision of the future of his country" (Habeck, 2014). And this is because

> "there is a strong identity heterogeneity between Daesh and the population which is due to an incompatible view of both the orthodoxy of religion and its ortho-practice. Ninety-seven percent of Muslims do not profess Salah Wahhabism which is considered eighteenth century heresy" (Interviewee B).

In other words, under the influence of its ideology, Daesh lost the legitimacy and long-term sustainability of its power dominance (Gartenstein-Ross; Magen, 2014). And without the loyalty of the population, it lost the superstructure element of its successful territorial penetration and control. With a fleeing population, it could no longer withstand external pressure. Indeed, war-making and state-building cannot be combined in parallel with success; these phases have their sequence, and international pressure forced Daesh to perform both components simultaneously. The result was obvious: Daesh failed to fight the external enemy and govern internally, and its power disintegrated (Interviewees X; Y). All in all, the radical Salafi ideology provoked Daesh's internal and external rejection and is thus responsible for its imperfect governance. Therefore, it can be said that "the internal and external contexts prevented Daesh from developing as it had originally envisioned" (Interviewee X).

What plays an important role in the case of Hezbollah is the combination of a) Hezbollah's might (backed by external patronage), with which it displaced its enemies; b) international tolerance, which consolidated its position; c) identitarian intersection with the Lebanese population, which authorised it; and d) incorporation into the political status quo as part of the strategic turn, which legitimised it. Thus, Hezbollah's success lies in its rejection of violence against the population and its refusal to militarise society. If Hezbollah had (counterfactually) done so, i.e. used more violence and radicalised the population, the system within which it had built its strong governance would have collapsed.

Hezbollah understood that if it wanted to succeed in Lebanon's multi-confessional society, it had to shed its Muslim/Shiite profile. It understood that "Lebanon is not Yemen, Sharia is only for Muslims, it is not possible to impose it on Christians" (Interviewee B), while "Shiites are 35% and that is not enough to gain exclusive power in Lebanon" (Interviewee T). It therefore opened itself up to cooperation with other religious-ethnic groups in Lebanon (Interviewee Z). Having demonstrated that it could govern the Shiites and that it had gained a strong authority among them, it turned to the whole of Lebanese society: just as we can benefit our own Shia community, we can benefit the whole of Lebanon. In this way, Hezbollah became an actor in the process of redressing social injustices and a credible guarantor of peace in Lebanon (Interviewees B; Z). The strategic turn enabled Hezbollah to gain authority among the Lebanese, but at the same time it led to Hezbollah's moderation and self-limitation (Interviewee O). In short, the strategic turn created the conditions for Hezbollah to engage in inclusive governance.

As can be seen, Hezbollah was able to use the territory on a long-term strategic level. It had extensive control and authority there, provided a wide range of public goods and institutionalised its power. In doing so, it functionally moved closer to the state (proto state). The case of Hezbollah shows that successful governance therefore requires sophistication and complexity, requiring both coercive (penetration, control) and non-coercive (consensual political mobilisation) methods. In addition, it is extremely important to be

at least tolerated by significant state actors, to have a significant state patron, and to act in accordance with the identity and interests not only of one's own ethno-religious group but also of the wider political community.

The three cases above show that the two key condition variables that can explain the difference in the level of governance after the antecedent conditions of penetration and control have been met are a) know-how and b) ideology.

AQIM completely lacked the know-how to manage and look after society. It had no experience of governance, it lacked knowledge and competent personnel; it could not even take over an existing Malian state structure, because it lacked it in that area. And its cruel and trivial ideology left no room for self-reflection or concession. With its own simple vision of existence and its primitive interventions in society, AQIM remained in the dimension of a fanatical criminal network that had nothing to do with governance. AQIM did not learn to govern.

Daesh had relatively advanced know-how, largely thanks to home-grown former Ba'athist leaders. It also used the existing Iraqi state structure. Thanks to this know-how, it was able to build a kind of proto state with a developed provision of public goods. However, its ideology led Daesh to engage in selective governance, even without considering the scope for concessions. The privileged were protected, the marginalised persecuted. With the crossing of the red line in the form of increasing demands on the local population and the genocide of the Yazidis in August 2015, this ideological intransigence turned against Daesh itself, and the reactions of the international community led to the collapse of Daesh's selective governance. Daesh learned to govern only exclusively.

Hezbollah had the benefit of a long, uninterrupted time continuum in its internal development. It also used the already established Lebanese state structure. It used several decades to build up know-how and experience in how to take care of people. It was able to work with non-Shia groups in developing this know-how. This sharing, although pragmatic, led to an ideological tolerance far from the primitive practices of AQIM and Daesh. Through quality know-how and ideological openness, Hezbollah was able to build an advanced governance. Hezbollah learned to govern fully inclusively.

Conclusion

Although Kalyvas and Hansen touched on the issue of the use of territory by VNSAs, their attention was primarily focused on a different direction. Kalyvas examined the use of violence in civil wars with a focus on civilians; Hansen introduced an ideal typology of territorial presence and examined the transformation dynamics of actors on the African continent only. This paper qualitatively advances the research on the use of territory by VNSAs and explicitly shows how the mode of territorial penetration itself is reflected in two other strategically important phenomena: territorial control and territorial governance, and how it is further influenced by two condition variables: know-how and ideology.

As we have seen, a sufficiently penetrated territory is an essential condition for control and governance, but there is no direct causal relationship

between these three phenomena. Penetration alone does not lead to the establishment of effective governance (penetration as an insufficient condition), but without penetration there would be no control or governance (penetration as a necessary condition). Only when the territory is sufficiently penetrated can effective control, and consequently governance, be established. This means that if penetration is not extended to other relatively advanced capabilities, it is not very significant; and on the contrary, if it is really extended to such advanced capabilities, it is a really powerful tool for governance. Sophisticated governance can only be expected if penetration and control have been sufficiently achieved beforehand under the favourable influence of the condition variables.

Although all the VNSAs studied had a relatively high degree of penetration and control, their governance differed considerably. The material power of the actors was adequate for sufficiently strong penetration and control (depending on the type of territory penetrated and controlled). However, differences in ideational power led to differences in the nature of governance. First, the ability to acquire organisational know-how played a key role, as the art of governance is a form of strategic culture, the acquisition of which is a long-term process in which the actor has to learn the practical aspects of local governance (Lia, 2015, 37). Secondly, the willingness/calculation to adapt ideology so that it is not an obstacle to achieving goals, but rather an accelerator, was crucial. This is because "adopting a specific ideology is a strategic decision made by rebel leaders and not simply an extension of the underlying beliefs or grievances in a society" (Walter, 2017, 10). Finally, there were important contextual phenomena such as the tolerance of state actors, the absence of counter-insurgency operations and support through state patronage.

This paper has offered a theoretical concept of the relationship between territorial penetration, control and governance of VNSAs. Well, it turns out that holding territory can be a way of life for VNSAs in which they can be quite successful. But in order to do that, they have to not only eliminate internal and external enemies, they have to establish a functioning administration that allows the systematic acquisition and use of resources to strengthen their own power and to provide non-selective care for the population. This is crucial. If the VNSAs do not achieve a sufficient level of governance, even though they have heavily penetrated and controlled the territory, the whole chain of making them more effective will come to a standstill.

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