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## Introduction

Since its independence in 1943, Lebanese leaders have faced unique challenges reflecting factors that have shaped the country's social and cultural structure. Among these factors are religious factions: Maronite and Orthodox Christians, Shiite and Sunni Muslims, Druze, and Alawites. National leaders adopted power sharing in the democratic confessional political system to pacify the historical tensions among the religious sects. Unfortunately, Lebanon achieved limited success in this endeavor. The confessional system is based on the 24th article of the Lebanese Constitution and relies on equal representation between Christians and Muslims and proportional representation among geographic regions (Lebanese Presidency Web 2012).

Throughout its modern history, Lebanon witnessed several conflicts and disagreements between different religious communities. There is the risk that any internal conflict will escalate into sectarian clashes because Lebanon is a multi-sectarian nation based on a confessional system. Since the 1960s, as the number of Palestinian refugees has increased, inter-sectarian tensions appeared in the social fabric of the country. The presence of Sunni Palestinian refugees awakened the fear of other religious groups of toppling the confessional system. In 1975, this fear turned into violent confrontation between Palestinian and the Lebanese Phalange movement.<sup>1</sup> This violence later escalated into a civil war that involved all sectarian rivalries and neighboring countries like Syria and Israeli enemy (Chuter 2015, 2). In 1989, the Taif Agreement<sup>2</sup> between all Lebanese factions ended the civil war in 1990. This agreement recalibrated the power sharing

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<sup>1</sup> In 1936, Pierre Jumayyil founded The Phalange party as a Maronite Catholic paramilitary youth organization ("Political Party in Lebanon" 2017).

<sup>2</sup> For further information on the Taif agreement you can visit the New World Encyclopedia at: [http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Taif\\_Agreement](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Taif_Agreement)

confessional system that constitutes the cornerstone of the sectarian balance. The current flow of more than one and a half million Syrian refugees is like the Palestinian refugee flow, and even far bigger. The socio-economic downturn coupled with the Covid 19 pandemic and Beirut port blast have contributed to nine out of ten Syrian refugee living in extreme poverty (UNHCR LEBANON 2022, 1). The new refugee crisis has increased sectarian tensions and threatens the fragile internal balance between different factions since all refugees are Sunni Muslims.

Despite the numerous vulnerabilities Lebanon possesses, the government has maintained internal stability. Nevertheless, the rise of violent radical extremism and activity on the part of the Islamic State along the 375-km border with Syria, till 2017, when the Lebanese Army launched an assault to drive out ISIS militants who had established a presence in the border region between Lebanon and Syria. The battle lasted for several days, with intense fighting taking place in the rugged terrain of the border region. Eventually, the militants were driven out, and the Lebanese Army declared victory. The Battle of Fajr al-Jouroud was seen as a significant victory in the fight against terrorism in Lebanon and the wider region. It demonstrated the effectiveness of the Lebanese Army to defend the country against the threat posed by ISIS.

The present situation of the Islamic State (ISIS) is one of decline and territorial loss. At its peak in 2014, ISIS controlled a sizable portion of territory in Iraq and Syria and was a major global threat. However, in the years since then, the group has suffered a significant loss of territory and resources as a result of military offensives by local and international forces.

In Iraq, the group's territorial control has been largely dismantled, with its presence limited to a few pockets of rural areas. In Syria, the group has lost control of its major cities and towns, and its territorial presence has been reduced to small pockets of territory in remote areas.

Despite these losses, ISIS remains a significant threat. The group has shifted its focus from territorial control to guerrilla-style attacks and has continued to conduct deadly attacks in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. It has also maintained a strong presence in the virtual world, with its propaganda and recruitment efforts continuing to pose a significant threat, and an increased number of terrorist sleeper cells that threatens the stability.

As the Islamic State lost most of its territory in Iraq and Syria, it may respond with terrorist attacks outside these countries, as we see today in Afghanistan, to keep its status as the pre-eminent Jihadist organization in the world. The same scenario happened in November 2015 when the insurgency lost control of some areas in Iraq and Syria—it conducted attacks in Paris and Beirut.

The future of the Islamic State remains uncertain, and the group will likely continue to pose a significant security threat for the foreseeable future. The group has demonstrated a significant ability to adapt to changing circumstances, and its continued resilience and ability to carry out attacks suggests that it will remain a significant security challenge in the region and beyond. This fact brings out the necessity of a counter-terrorism public policy to face the threat of ISIS and other violent extremist's terrorist groups and keep the stability and security of the country.

The Lebanese Army has proved its combat effectiveness, executing the fierce battle against ISIS which took place in Aarsal on the eastern borders in August 2017. But

still, important challenges facing the army were security concerns and the protection of the borders, to prevent the risk of the infiltration of armed militants into Lebanon. The Lebanese Army focuses its efforts on the protection of internal security, by chasing terrorist networks and uncovering dormant cells in successful preemptive operations (Shah and Dalton 2020).

### **Thesis Statement and Research Questions**

Lebanon is facing severe economic crises with no near solution, added to a fragile social cohesion that is tested every day. Since 2019 the country witnessed riots against the government in addition to the covid-19 pandemic that made the economic crisis worse. Lebanon witnessed in the last months the return of few radical and extremist activities especially in the northern part of the country. These radical groups may turn into a near danger that must be faced under the spread of poverty and the lack of social aids to the Lebanese people. This thesis examines the Islamic State as an existential threat to the security and stability of Lebanon. Huge numbers of Syrian and Palestinian refugees and the vulnerability of the population in Lebanon to radicalization pose direct threats to Lebanon's internal security and threaten to further destabilize the entire region. The Lebanese government must enact actions and measures to reduce the effects of the refugees and radicalized groups on Lebanese security and the society.

There are critical research questions that require investigation to pursue this thesis. What were the roots of the Islamic State and how it developed into such a serious threat to the security and stability of Lebanon? What should the government response be to counter similar phenomenon in the future and to enhance the security and stability of Lebanon? In what ways have the huge numbers of Syrian and Palestinian refugees and



the radicalization of the population in Lebanon poses direct threats to the security of Lebanon?

### **Research Methodology**

To answer the central question and evaluate the hypotheses presented, this thesis will adopt a research design based on a counterterrorism (CT) plan to address the destabilizing effect of the Islamic State, combined with a policy evaluation to analyze the effects of increased radicalization and refugee inflows on the security of Lebanon. The overall goal is to help Lebanon build a national approach to terrorism and extremism. As the battle against the Islamic State continues in the region, the Lebanese government should adopt additional strategies to increase national resilience and prevent the spread of violence, sectarianism, and radicalization. This thesis will provide recommendations for a state response including the use of all possible instruments of national power to achieve security and stability in Lebanon.

### **Organization of the Thesis**

The thesis consists of three chapters. Following this introduction providing the geostrategic context, thesis statement, relevance of the problem, and research methodology, is Chapter I, a selected literature review of secondary sources and a Theoretical Framework. Chapter II provides an analysis of the problem using the College of International Security Affairs' (CISA) Template for Analysis and Action. Chapter III continues to use the CISA Template for Analysis and Action and provides national level recommendations for Lebanon. Finally, a conclusion to include summary of main ideas and key arguments.

# **Chapter I**

## **Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

### **Introduction**

The IHS (Information Handling Services) annual country report on Lebanon, released in September 2016, stated “there is a high risk of refugee militancy and escalation of communal violence into civil war in the coming three years” (Lebanon Country Monitor, 2016). The Islamic State claims responsibility for ruling the whole Muslim world under its proclaimed “Caliphate.” The insurgency in Iraq and Syria had been a critical international issue and a threat not only to the stability of the Middle East, but also to the people of Lebanon. The position of Lebanon in the middle of the Levant Region makes it vulnerable to the territorial expansion project and terrorist attacks of the Islamic State and other radicalized groups. Indeed, these terrorist organizations sought to control Lebanese territories to spread its ideology, establish sleeper cells, and recruit supporters.

To execute its nation-building plan, the Islamic State seeks to exploit vulnerabilities in targeted states. Understanding one’s own vulnerabilities is crucial. “If you know the enemy and know yourself, your victory will not stand in doubt” (Sun Tzu 2014, 93). Understanding the threat and how it emerged is critical to success. Examining the refugee crisis in Lebanon is also important to determine if it represents a critical vulnerability that the Islamic State or other Jihadi groups can exploit. Finally, it is important to analyze the increase in the radicalization of parts of the Lebanese Sunni communities that provide fertile ground for the Islamic State or other Jihadi groups to infiltrate the social fabric of the country. Also, it's so important to know what is the

current public policy of the Lebanese government to counter-terrorism, and what is the theoretical framework to build an effective strategy to face it. Thus, these themes—Emergence of the terrorist groups, the Refugee Crisis in Lebanon, the Increase in Radicalization, the Public Policy of the Lebanese Government to face terrorist groups and the Theoretical Framework for Analysis—constitute the organization of this literature review.

### **Lebanon and Terrorism**

The LAF reacted to the threat of terrorism before other armies of the world and before terrorism became a global danger. In early 2000, the LAF fought a harsh battle against a terrorist group that was holed up around *Jroud al-Doniyeh* (Doniyeh outskirts) in northern Lebanon. They were equipped with heavy and medium weapons and planned to establish an extremist emirate in northern Lebanon. The LAF successfully accomplished the mission and captured many terrorists.

In 2007, the LAF again fought a long battle, this time against *Fatah al-Islam* in Nahr el Bared camp, in northern Lebanon; the terrorist organization was planning a takeover of the north for use as a base to spread terrorism over other parts of the country. This battle ended with the elimination of a large number of terrorists.

In 2013, a terrorist group led by Ahmad al-Assir in the Saida region, in the south of Lebanon, attacked military posts in the area. The LAF fought back and managed to eliminate the threat quickly.

After these events the Syrian Civil War erupted in 2011, it created an environment that is easy for extremists to manipulate for radicalization purposes. This war has had significant implications for Lebanon and will continue to do so. From the influx of

refugees, to the rise of Salafi Jihadism in the country, the negative consequences of the conflict have proven difficult for the Lebanese government to address.

Dangerous terrorist organizations participating in the Syrian events, the most prominent of which were ISIS and *Jabhat al-Nusra*, used the northern and the northeastern borders of Lebanon with Syria and began dispatching booby traps, carrying out rocket attacks and launching rockets into Lebanon. These attacks included an incursion in 2014 into the town of Arsal on the eastern border, and attacks on troops deployed in the region, with the aim of seizing the area extending from the eastern mountains to the sea, in the northern city of Tripoli. The LAF was on guard for such a move. It carried out a large-scale attack in which it managed to expel the terrorists from Arsal and its surroundings.

The LAF's capabilities were tested yet again in *Fajr al-Jouroud*, the 2017 operation against ISIS on the northeastern border. The LAF launched a series of aerial attacks and ground maneuvers. Operation *Fajr al- Jouroud* cornered the surviving fighters into a valley adjacent to the Syrian border, driving them out of the Lebanese territories.

The LAF was the first among all armies of the region to achieve, alone, victory over ISIS. However, despite this great victory, the danger of terrorism remains in Lebanon, an assumption the LAF acts on by monitoring terrorist cells along with pre-emptive military security operations and eliminating them directly in their infancy.

Violence and bloodshed in Lebanon's neighboring Syria have increased pre-existing sectarian tensions between Sunni and Shi'a members of Lebanese society. The

Islamic State and other radicalized groups exploit these tensions to threaten the stability of the country.

During January 2023, five people were detained by Lebanese General Security for establishing a terrorist cell connected to the Islamic State (ISIS). One of the detainees acknowledged to planning to carry out a terrorist assault on a church in the northern city of Tripoli on Christmas Eve, according to preliminary findings. The group also intended to use an explosive drone to target a “Rasoul Al A’azam” hospital in Beirut. According to the investigations, the detainees, who are all Lebanese citizens, come from families that have a long history of cooperating with terrorist organizations. Several of them have fought in Syria and have spent years in prison in Lebanon for their involvement with terrorist organizations (Tasnim 2023).

These facts bring out the necessity of building a national counter terrorism public policy to face all these threats and to deal with the roots of the problem not its symptoms.

### **Emergence of the Islamic State**

Scholars, journalists, policy makers, and others have set forth works of varying scholarship and efficacy since the Islamic State first emerged to describe how a confluence of geopolitical factors and deep seated sectarian violence led to the emergence of the Islamic State. Recent scholarship has offered detailed examinations of the root causes in Iraq and Syria that led to the Islamic state upheaval. In *ISIS: A History*, Fawaz Gerges focuses on four factors that led to the rebirth of this insurgency. First, Gerges considered the Islamic State as an extension to Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), which itself emerged as a result of the U.S. led coalition invasion of Iraq and its aftermath. Unfortunately, the invasion contributed to the destruction of Iraqi institutions and

strengthened ethnic and religious divisions. Ultimately, this created the environment where AQI and later the Islamic State, flourished.

Gerges also argues the shattering of the post-Saddam Hussein political establishment and the incapacity of implementing policies that empower a nation's national identity fed the intercommunal distrust, and deepened the Sunni-Shia division. This division provided the Islamic State with a social base among aggrieved Sunnis, and later the insurgency exploited this sectarianism to expand and gain more power. Gerges also argues the Syrian Civil War and the breakdown of the state were important factors in the emergence of the Islamic State.

Like Gerges, Charles R. Lister, in *The Syrian Jihad*, emphasizes the state collapse and political instability that nourished the recovery and then the expansion of the insurgent groups in Iraq and Syria that contributed to the emergence of the Islamic State. Lister argues the organization would not have succeeded if the government of Nouri Al-Maliki was more receptive, inclusive, and concerned in addressing the grievances of the Sunni population. Additionally, the international community failed to deal more definitively with Bashar Al-Assad's regime earlier in the revolution, and as a consequence, a favorable environment developed for the Islamic State to revitalize and emerge (Lister 2015, 278).

Michael Van Dusen expands on Gerges and Lister's arguments, in his article "ISIS is About the Arab Past, Not the Future," where he contends the Islamic State is "The latest and most frightening manifestation of the quest for meaningful statehood by Arabs who have repeatedly been disappointed, degraded, and humiliated by their governments and by the policies of foreign powers." Van Dusen argued that three local

and international factors shaped the collapse of the Arab societies in the current spate of violence. The first factor is the continued foreign military intervention in the region. Second is the unresolved historical Israeli-Arab conflict in the Middle East. The third and the most important is the brutal nature of the local Arab governance and domestic rule. For those who join the Islamic State, the new Caliphate represents a better economic, social, and political entity than states in the existing contemporary Arab world (Van Dusen 2015).

Other scholars explain the success of the Islamic State in different and practical ways. In the *Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate*, Abdel Bari Atwan argues that without digital technology, it is very unlikely the Islamic State have been able to survive and expand or even exist in the first place. Indeed, the very title of his book argues the Islamic State is the Digital Caliphate, using the Internet and digital communications for recruitment and propaganda, to direct synchronized military actions at vast distances, and to consolidate allegiances with similar ideological organizations. According to Atwan, Islamic States operators and leaders are skillful and inventive (Atwan 2015, 9).

### **The Refugee Crisis in Lebanon**

Lebanon's geographic position in the Middle East makes it particularly vulnerable to refugee flows from regional conflicts. The UNHCR says that "Lebanon hosts the highest number of refugees per capita worldwide." It refers to the "Government estimates 1.5 million Syrian refugees and 13,715 refugees of other nationalities, and adds that "90% of Syrian refugees are living in extreme poverty" (UNHCR 2023).

This section of the literature review examines scholarship on the refugee crisis in Lebanon, especially the massive inflow of Syrian refugees the Islamic State hopes to take

advantage of to threaten the safety and stability of Lebanon. In their *International Interactions* article, “Radicalism of the Hopeless: Refugee Flows and Transnational Terrorism,” Daniel Milton, Megan Spencer, and Michael Findley examine whether the movement of refugees across a country’s borders raises the possibility of terrorist attacks in the host state. Milton et al study the relationship between refugee flows and the number of terrorist attacks that refugees commit in host countries, conducting empirical tests using data on global international refugee flows and transnational terrorism. The authors model the consequences of refugee movements on transnational terrorist aggression within a “directed dyad framework” to account for characteristics of origin and host states (Milton, Spencer, and Findley 2013, 621-645)

Milton et al found that refugee movements considerably heighten the probability and number of transnational terrorist attacks that occur in host countries. Indeed, the authors argue because host nations treat refugees poorly, refugees often find themselves in terrible living situations that contribute to their resentment of the host government, making them vulnerable to radicalization and involvement in terrorist activities against host communities. This does not mean that all refugees will turn into terrorists, but the intention of the individuals to participate in terrorist attacks increases proportionally with the size of the refugee flow. The magnitude of the flow will also affect how host states see refugee threats. Milton et al concluded that population movements are an important mechanism by which conflict spreads across regions. The authors emphasized that the existence of displaced people and refugees can also heighten the likelihood of future conflict in both host and origin countries (Milton, Spencer, and Findley 2013, 621-645).

Other scholars find that the presence of refugees does not contribute to more



conflict. In “Questioning Refugee Camps as Sources of Conflict,” Andrew Shaver and Yang-Yang Zhou contradict the conclusions of Milton et al, arguing that refugee flow does not increase the likelihood of conflict in either the host or the country of origin. Indeed, Shaver and Zhou contend regions which host refugees tend to have more stability over time, because these areas receive massive amounts of humanitarian aids from special organizations like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and that may enhance the stability and security. Shaver and Zhou also refute Milton et al’s argument that because refugee flows often include combatants, arms, and ideologies, this may cause a direct conflict with the host government. Alternatively, Shaver and Zhou found that most refugees are civilians who did not participate in conflicts in their country of origin due to their incapability or refusal and thus, often refrain from engaging in a new civil conflict. Furthermore, Shaver and Zhou argue that local police, humanitarian organizations, and often military units secure refugee camps, which make the task of interdicting any violent actions much easier (Shaver and Zhou 2015).

What Shaver and Zhou do not cover in detail is what Milton et al contend is the importance of the magnitude of the flow of refugees. In Lebanon, one third of the country’s population are Syrian and Palestinian refugees. In the Palestinian refugee camps, the government is struggling to establish security in the surrounding areas. The other 1.1 million Syrian refugees are scattered all over the country, which presents significant security and logistical challenges. Indeed, while Shaver and Zhou contend that all of these refugees are civilians, the authors do not account for universal conscription in Syria. Each adult male over eighteen years old has a mandatory two-year term in the

army. Thus, the men in the 1.1 million registered refugees will most likely have had some military training.

Understanding the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon requires an assessment of the present political and security situation in the country. Cathrine Thorleifsson, in her *Third World Quarterly* journal article, “The Limits of Hospitality: Coping Strategies Among Displaced Syrians in Lebanon,” examines the dynamics and consequences of Syrian refugee presence in the Northern Lebanese village of Bebnine. Thorleifsson carried out in-depth interviews with thirty-seven Syrian and Lebanese men and women in 2013. She supplemented the information in this pool with statistics from a national opinion poll the Fafo Institute for Applied International Studies conducted. Thorleifsson argues that Syrian refugees are victims of a humanitarian crisis and their role is passive and they are at times overwhelmed in trying to deal with challenges of displacement. Indeed, Thorleifsson discovered that both Syrians and Lebanese have great fear of spillover from the Syrian Civil War to Lebanon and the increased chance for a sectarian conflict in the country. She concludes that refugee status alone provides no direct connection to acts of violence, but the Lebanese community does experience the continued presence of Syrian refugees as a burden and threat. Most of the Lebanese population believes that refugees are taking job opportunities and lowering wages, increasing competition over jobs and causing communal tensions (Thorleifsson, 2016, 1071-1082).

Seung-Whan Choi and Idean Salehyan, in their *Conflict Management and Peace Science* journal article, “No Good Deed Goes Unpunished: Refugees, Humanitarian Aid, and Terrorism,” elaborate on these sectarian tensions, focusing on the issue that there is a high risk of sporadic attacks against aid workers and refugees from militants in the host

community, which would have devastating effects on the security and stability of the country. Choi and Salehyan argue that low opportunity costs coupled with seeking a sense of purpose may urge some refugees to walk away from camps and join armed groups. The authors also contend that just the presence of refugees and foreigners might push some right-wing radicals to launch attacks against immigrants (Choi and Salehyan 2013).

According to the UNHCR, there are three solutions to a country's refugee problem: resettlement to a third country, voluntary repatriation, or local integration (Solutions 2017). Unfortunately, there are several issues with these solutions. First, for many refugees, resettlement is unlikely, especially with the current anti-immigrant's atmosphere in the Western world (Sengupta 2015). Second, even if a portion of refugees are able to return to their country, new refugees will continue to emerge if the armed conflict in the home country continues. Finally, Lebanon faces issues with local integration for a variety of reasons.

In addition to the socio-economic problems that Syrian refugees have contributed to, their presence has also created a political debate. In the *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies* article "In the Wake of the Islamic State Threat: Repercussions on Sunni-Shi'i Competition in Lebanon," Aurélie Daher examines the Islamic State's reasons for involving itself in Lebanon. Daher conducted a historical, chronological analysis of military confrontation between Lebanese armed forces and Islamic militants to determine the actual range of possibilities that exist for the Islamic State in Lebanon. Since most refugees are Sunnis, and because of previous bad experiences with Palestinian refugees, Lebanese Christians often fear that Syrian refugees will not return to Syria and will

jeopardize the balance of power in the confessional Lebanese political system.<sup>3</sup> Daher concludes that “the threat of an annexationist radical Islam is very real to Lebanon,” due to both a large number of Syrian refugees and the sympathy that some Islamic jihadists have a non-negligible portion of the Sunni population in the Lebanese community” (Daher 2015, 209-235).

Other scholars support Daher’s view that the Syrian refugee crisis is a viable threat to the stability of the Lebanese confessional system. In the *Security Studies* journal article “Refugee Flows, Ethnic Power Relations, and the Spread of Conflict,” Daniel Krcmaric seeks to answer why refugee flows created violent conflict in one host nation state, but not in others. Krcmaric argues that when the number of refugees changes the ethnic balance in the host nation, it will be difficult to resolve bargaining problems between ethnic groups without violence. As evidence, he compared a case study of the flow of Kosovar Albanian refugees into Macedonia and Albania. Krcmaric concluded these refugees caused violent conflict with host nation citizens in Macedonia because they altered the ethnic balance of power, whereas on the other side in Albania that alteration did not occur (Krcmaric 2014).

In addition, the Syrian refugees in Lebanon face significant challenges with regards to their legal status and protection. The Lebanese government has not officially recognized the majority of Syrian refugees as refugees, and many lack the necessary documentation to access services and protection. This has left them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, and has made it difficult for them to access the support and protection they need.

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<sup>3</sup> This system of government in Lebanon proportionally allocates political power among the country’s religious communities – Christians, Sunnis, and Shi’as – according to their percentage of the population.

The situation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon is made even more challenging by the ongoing economic crisis in the country. The crisis has resulted in a significant devaluation of the Lebanese currency, high inflation, and a shortage of basic goods, making it even more difficult for refugees to meet their basic needs.

### **The Increase in Radicalization**

Another theme within the literature for consideration in this thesis is the increase in radicalization among local Lebanese Islamic radical groups. As Aurelie Daher contends, the sympathy the Islamic State Jihadists have among the Lebanese population is from a significant part of the Sunni population (Daher 2015). This has encouraged the group to seek actual status as a Lebanese Sunni Islamist group. In the Middle East Institute article “The Current Status of Lebanon’s Sunni Islamists,” Rola El-Husseini contends the different Islamist groups in Lebanon exist in three categories. The first category consists of old organizations that are close to party structures and existing institutions, like aid agencies, charities, and schools. The adherents of groups in this category reject violence and accept the actual confessional political system. The second type consists of apolitical groups whose first interest is in religious proselytizing. These constituents long refused any political participation, but since the assassination of Lebanon’s former Sunni Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, their discourse has become more radical. The last category consists of Salafi-Jihadists who believe in strict Sharia rule and have affiliated themselves with Al-Qaida and the Islamic State. El-Husseini concludes that there is no evidence of an actual Islamic infrastructure in Lebanon, but there is considerable sympathy for its agenda. Thus, if the alienated feeling of the Sunni

population persists, this sympathy could become more broadly dangerous for Lebanese society, and terrorist organizations could easily exploit it (El-Husseini 2014).

Bernard Rougier, in his book *The Sunni Tragedy in The Middle East: Northern Lebanon From Al-Qaeda to ISIS*, argues that the convoluted politics of the Sunni-dominated northern part of the country and its capital city, Tripoli, serve as a paradigm for the plight of Sunnis throughout the Levant. Rougier conducted interviews with many Islamists and with Lebanese and foreign security services personnel tracking them. Rougier concluded that radical Salafi sheiks are taking advantage of the absence of strong Sunni leadership to fill the void and spread their influence among Tripoli's population. He further contends the Islamic State is sending jihadists to recruit among the region's youth, as they are easily attracted to fight against the Syrian regime and its allies because of the grievances of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Northern Lebanon also represents a vital strategic arena for the protagonists in the Syrian Civil War (Rougier 2015).

Besides the Syrian Civil War and its implications, what made Northern Lebanon a fertile ground for recruiting? Ana Maria Luca, in her thesis for Lebanese American University, "Sectarian Conflict and Sunni Islamic Radicalization in Tripoli, Lebanon," examines the Syrian Civil War as one of the triggers for the radicalization of parts of the Lebanese Sunni community, and the much deeper root causes that existed before 2011 related to the security situation and the current political system. Luca identified social marginalization, political disenfranchisement, poverty and unemployment, and politicians battling over leadership using sectarian speeches to reach their goals as root causes for alienation and marginalization among the affected community. The most important cause for radicalization, however, was related to the Lebanese confessional system that

encourages and feeds the sectarian divisions. In her new approach that differs from the old historical perspective and the economics that link radicalism to poverty and unemployment, Luca highlighted the linkage between Islamic Radicalism and the sectarian identity of the Sunni community in Lebanon. These causes pushed some of the Sunni community groups to join Salafi movements and Jihadi organization, like the Islamic State and Al Nusra Front, in order to assert its Sunni identity (Luca 2015).

This literature review indicates that the substantial flow of Syrian refugees into the Lebanese homeland, accompanied by an increased level of Islamic radicalism in the general population will facilitate the mission of the Islamic State and other terrorist organizations in threatening the security and stability of Lebanon, and the effectiveness of the Lebanese state. Even though there is no evidence of the involvement of large numbers of refugees engaging in direct violence (Shaver and Zhou 2015), their huge number and continuous inflow facilitates the transnational spread of weapons, fighters, and ideologies that could lead to future conflict. Refugees alter the balance among different socio-religious groups in the Lebanese population and aggravate economic competition (Daher 2015, El-Husseini, 2014, Krcmaric 2014, Milton et.al 2013, Rougier 2015, Thorleifsson 2016). Local integration is an impractical solution (Daher 2015). Sunni extremists view Syrian refugees as an open field for recruitment, and a more lucrative target than Palestinians in long-existing refugee camps. The Lebanese government must take measures and address ways to limit the radicalized groups' recruitment opportunities especially when there is no national counter-terrorism strategy. Added to the government's inability and the unwillingness of Lebanese society to assimilate the enormous number of Syrian refugees, this recruiting phenomenon could

provide the Islamic State and violent extremists groups with a critical tool to destabilize Lebanon.

### **Counter-Terrorism Public Policy**

Counter-terrorism public policy refers to the measures taken by governments to prevent, detect and respond to acts of terrorism. Effective counter-terrorism policies must balance the need to protect citizens from the threat of terrorism while respecting individual rights and freedoms.

Prevention is a key aspect of counter-terrorism public policy and involves identifying and addressing the root causes of terrorism. This may include addressing socio-economic grievances, improving border security, and disrupting the flow of funds and weapons to terrorist organizations. Preventive measures also include counter-radicalization and de-radicalization programs aimed at dissuading individuals from joining terrorist groups and reintegrating former members back into society.

Detection is another critical aspect of counter-terrorism public policy, which involves the use of intelligence gathering and analysis to identify potential threats. This can include the use of technology such as facial recognition and biometrics, as well as human intelligence and analysis of open-source information. Effective information sharing between intelligence agencies, both domestically and internationally is also crucial for detecting and preventing acts of terrorism.

Response is the final component of counter-terrorism public policy and involves the measures taken to respond to a terrorist attack and minimize its impact. This may include the deployment of emergency response teams, the implementation of lockdown procedures, and the provision of medical and psychological support to those affected. The



response should also include investigations to bring the perpetrators to justice and prevent future attacks (Renard 2021).

However, the implementation of counter-terrorism public policy is not without challenges. Balancing the need for security with the protection of individual rights and freedoms is a delicate task. There have been concerns over the use of surveillance and data collection methods, which may infringe on privacy rights. Additionally, some counter-terrorism measures have been criticized for disproportionately affecting marginalized communities and for having a negative impact on civil liberties.

A comprehensive and effective counter-terrorism public policy is crucial in ensuring the safety and security of a nation and its citizens. It is a comprehensive approach to addressing the threat of terrorism, outlining the government's strategy for preventing and responding to acts of terrorism (Mansour-Ille 2021):

*1. Clarity of Purpose*: A counter-terrorism public policy provides clarity on the government's approach to countering terrorism, outlining the goals and objectives of the policy and the roles and responsibilities of the various agencies involved in implementing it. This clarity of purpose helps to ensure that all relevant agencies are working towards the same goal, reducing the risk of confusion and conflicting priorities.

*2. Improved Coordination*: A well-structured counter-terrorism public policy provides a basis for interagency cooperation and coordination, improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the government's efforts to prevent and respond to terrorism. This improved coordination helps to avoid duplication of effort and ensures that all agencies are working together to achieve the best possible outcome.

3. Better Resource Allocation: A counter-terrorism public policy can also help to ensure that resources are allocated effectively to where they are needed most. This can help to improve the overall effectiveness of the government's efforts to prevent and respond to terrorism, as resources are targeted to areas of greatest need.

4. Increased Public Trust and Confidence: A counter-terrorism public policy demonstrates the government's commitment to countering terrorism and can help to build public trust and confidence in the government's ability to protect citizens from acts of terrorism. This increased public trust and confidence can also help to maintain social stability and support for the government's efforts to prevent and respond to terrorism.

5. International Cooperation: A well-structured counter-terrorism public policy can also provide a basis for international cooperation and participation in international counter-terrorism efforts. This international cooperation can help to improve the overall effectiveness of the global fight against terrorism, as nations work together to share information and resources.

6. Legal Framework: A counter-terrorism public policy can also provide a legal framework for the government's efforts to prevent and respond to terrorism, outlining the powers and responsibilities of relevant agencies and providing a basis for the development of counter-terrorism legislation.

7. Public Awareness: A counter-terrorism public policy can also play a crucial role in raising public awareness of the threat of terrorism and the steps that can be taken to prevent and respond to acts of terrorism. This increased public awareness can help to enhance public vigilance and reduce the risk of terrorism by promoting the reporting of suspicious activity.

## **Maoist and focoist models of insurgency**

The Maoist and focoist schools of revolutionary thought provide a useful framework for understanding radicalized violent extremists groups' differing strategies. As an example, Al-Qaeda exhibits a revolutionary strategy that is both implicitly and explicitly based on the works of Mao Zedong, while the Islamic State's approach is more consonant with the focoist writings of Ernesto "Che" Guevara and Régis Debray (Gartenstein-Ross et al 2016).

The Maoist insurgency paradigm is based on the theories and strategies of Mao Zedong, the former leader of the Chinese Communist Party. The supremacy of politics over warfare is the foundation of Mao's idea of revolution. Mao believed that in order for guerrilla forces to establish bases for logistics and operations and gradually gain strength and momentum for the ultimate conventional stage of battle, they needed a strong political foundation. Consequently, in Mao's view, guerrilla forces must first concentrate on "arousing and organizing the masses" and "reaching internal unification politically" before they can engage in military action. This step is seamlessly followed by a stage of gradual expansion, then a third and final stage of decision, the annihilation of the enemy (Bonnin 2021).

It is a guerrilla-based warfare strategy that emphasizes the importance of rural support and the involvement of the masses in the revolution. The Maoist model of insurgency is characterized by the following key elements (Cheng and Sanchit 2021):

- 1. People's War*: Mao Zedong believed that the key to winning a revolution was the support of the masses. He argued that the success of the revolution depended on the mobilization of the rural population and their participation in the struggle. In the Maoist

model, the countryside is seen as the primary base for the revolution, and the urban areas are seen as secondary targets.

2. Protracted War: Mao Zedong believed that the revolution would be a long-term process and that it would take many years to win. He argued that the revolution could not be won through a single decisive battle, but rather through a series of small victories and setbacks that would gradually wear down the enemy.

3. Guerrilla Warfare: Mao Zedong believed that guerrilla warfare was the most effective way to fight a counterinsurgency. Guerrilla warfare involves small, mobile units that operate in the countryside and use hit-and-run tactics to harass and disrupt enemy forces. The goal is to wear down the enemy and create the conditions for a larger uprising.

4. Mass Mobilization: Mao Zedong believed that the key to winning a revolution was the mobilization of the masses. He argued that the revolution had to be led by the people, and that the masses had to be involved in every aspect of the struggle. This included the development of political organizations, the building of a guerrilla army, and the establishment of rural-based support networks.

5. Political Ideology: Mao Zedong believed that the revolution had to be based on a strong political ideology. He argued that the revolution had to be driven by a clear set of ideas and values that would guide the struggle and provide a vision for the future.

The Maoist model of insurgency has been applied in various countries, with varying degrees of success. In some cases, the model has been adapted to fit local conditions and to address specific challenges. Consistent with Maoist theory, al-Qaeda and its affiliates have focused on maintaining and expanding the group's political support. Even in areas

where al-Qaeda has engaged in open warfare, it has been somewhat restrained in its approach to civilian populations (Young 2021).

On the other hand the Focoist model of insurgency is a guerrilla warfare theory that originated in Latin America and was named after the Cuban Revolution led by Fidel Castro. It suggests that a successful revolution can only be achieved through the actions of a small, dedicated group of militants who focus on establishing a base of operations and building up their strength. The central idea behind the Focoist model is that a small group of dedicated militants can create a focal point or "foco" around which a broader resistance movement can be built. The focal point serves as the hub of the insurgency, with the militants carrying out raids and operations to draw attention to their cause and to disrupt the existing government's control. Over time, as the insurgency gains strength and spreads its influence, more people are likely to become involved, eventually leading to a critical mass that can overthrow the existing government.

The Focoist model of insurgency is highly centralized, with a strong emphasis on discipline and coordination among the militants. This allows the insurgency to carry out effective military operations, even in the absence of widespread popular support. The Focoist model also places great importance on propaganda and psychological operations, as it is seen as crucial to winning over the population and building a broad base of support.

One of the key advantages of the Focoist model is its flexibility and adaptability. It is designed to be able to operate in a variety of different environments and circumstances, and can be adapted to the unique conditions of each individual insurgency. The model is also highly mobile, with the ability to move quickly from one

area to another as the situation demands. This allows the insurgency to evade government forces and maintain the initiative.

However, the Focoist model of insurgency also has its disadvantages. The highly centralized structure of the model can make it vulnerable to infiltration and sabotage, as the enemy can focus their efforts on destroying the central hub of the insurgency. The model also requires a high degree of commitment and discipline from the militants, which can be difficult to maintain in the face of adversity. Furthermore, the model can be slow to build up a broad base of support, as it requires time and effort to win over the population (Young and Leszczynski 2021).

Che Guevara was a prominent Argentine Marxist revolutionary and guerrilla leader whose implementation of the Focoist model in Cuba played a significant role in the success of the Cuban Revolution. He and Fidel Castro formed a small, dedicated guerrilla force that was able to carry out effective military operations and gradually gain control of the country. Over time, their success drew more people to their cause, building a broad base of popular support and eventually leading to the overthrow of the existing government.

The Islamic State has largely adopted the focoist model and believes that violence can shape the political views of the majority of Muslims. Al Qaeda's methodical approach is viewed by the Islamic State as being too slow. It seems content to win today and lose tomorrow as long as today's victory generates a sizable enough propaganda target (Gartenstein-Ross, Barr, and Moreng 2016).

*Similarities and Differences between the two models:*

The Focoist and Maoist models of insurgency are two distinct approaches to guerrilla warfare and revolution. While both models share some similarities, they also have several key differences.

***Similarities:***

1. *Guerrilla Warfare:* Both models emphasize the use of guerrilla warfare as a key element of the insurgency. Both see guerrilla warfare as a means to disrupt and harass the enemy, create conditions for a larger uprising, and wear down the enemy over time.
2. *Mass Mobilization:* Both models place a strong emphasis on the involvement of the masses in the struggle. Both believe that the success of the revolution depends on the mobilization of the people and their active participation in the struggle.
3. *Political Ideology:* Both models see political ideology as a key factor in the success of the revolution. Both believe that a clear set of ideas and values is necessary to guide the struggle and provide a vision for the future.

***Differences:***

1. *Leadership:* The Focoist model emphasizes the importance of a vanguard, or a small group of dedicated revolutionaries who lead the struggle. In contrast, the Maoist model places greater emphasis on the involvement of the masses and the development of a broad-based political movement.
2. *Timeline:* The Focoist model emphasizes the importance of quick, decisive actions, with the goal of quickly overthrowing the existing government. In contrast, the Maoist model sees the revolution as a long-term process that will take many years to achieve.

3. *Geography*: The Focoist model is focused on urban areas and the establishment of a centralized command structure in the cities. In contrast, the Maoist model places greater emphasis on the countryside and the development of rural-based support networks.

4. *Tactics*: The Focoist model emphasizes the importance of direct action and the use of terrorism as a means of destabilizing the enemy. In contrast, the Maoist model places greater emphasis on the use of guerrilla warfare and the development of rural-based support networks.

### **The Framework of Analysis and Action**

There is no framework available to security professionals that can clarify the nature and logic of the threat, place it meaningfully within its environment, and ascertain its overall strategy and operational art. Without such examination, there is little chance of developing a strong reaction. Since its founding in 2002, the College of International Security Affairs (CISA), a senior-Service college housed within the National Defense University in Washington, DC, has focused on irregular warfare. The curriculum was developed and is based on an analytical framework of assessment and action in order to fulfill the purpose of developing strategists who can handle irregular problems. This framework has developed over time through repeated testing and application in educational settings and elsewhere to assess irregular problems and come up with a workable solution (Ucko and Marks 2020).

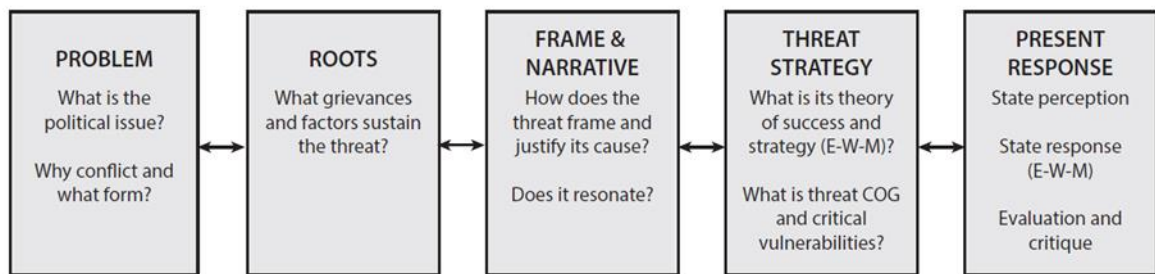
The goal has been to convey the perplexing characteristics of irregular warfare—its ambiguity, unconventionality, and intangibility—throughout. The framework tries to pinpoint the crucial, map the issue, and create an appropriate framework for formulating strategy by drawing on the caseload of pertinent precedents and a synthesis of useful



scholarly viewpoints. It provides an analytical tool for the current strategic concerns by outlining the methodology for assessment and strategy-making.

The analytical framework is divided into two parts: analysis and action. Analysis produces a strategic appraisal of the situation, which is used to create a course of action (COA) to direct the appropriate response (Ucko and Marks 2020).

### **The Estimate: An Analytical Framework to Diagnose Irregular Threats**



*Figure 1: Graphical Representation of the Strategic Estimate Framework (Ucko and Marks 2020).*

The problem statement, the roots of the problem, the frame and narrative, the threat strategy, and the critique of the current government response are the five primary parts of the strategic estimate, as shown in figure 1.

#### *The Problem Statement*

Its goal is to succinctly and precisely describe the heart of the issue at hand, including the political issue driving the conflict, the type of actor and strategy to be dealt with, and the key reasons why it has been so challenging to address.

#### *Roots of the Conflict*

This analytical part focuses on the contextual factors that force support for disruptive, even violent systemic change and support the irregular challenger. To put it another way, the roots section outlines the social, economic, and political inconsistencies that the threat takes use of to either strengthen or weaken its legitimacy. In either case,

redress is necessary as part of a holistic response. Issues of identity, inequality, corruption, or state predation may be motivating voters to support a challenger promising reform or they may undermine the legitimacy of the state. In order to guide such action, the roots section requests that the analyst identify the threat's drivers, the elimination of which would assist undo previous damage and strengthen resistance to future rupture.

Instead of offering an either/or answer to this query, the approach put forth here emphasizes the necessity of analytical integration. Such integration makes use of the social movement theory's three lenses of analysis—the macro level (the structure or context), the micro level (the agent or individual), and the meso level—to evaluate collective dispute (the group or collective actor as an intermediary between the self and the system). Analysis must consider how context (macro) influences people (micro) to support or join movements (meso) as a tool for change, especially when these movements advocate violence as a part of the solution.

When there are no realistic chances for change through nonviolent political participation, violent alternatives will often receive more support. This organizational pattern relates to the perceived political opportunity structure. The attraction for illegal actions or violent solutions emerges as a crucial intervening element that influences state response (or responsiveness) to bottom-up pressure for change. The group's ideology is a second relevant meso-level element because it influences both the group's repertoire and chances of gaining a large following.

### *Frame and Narrative*

It will become simpler to create anger, organize mass protests, and create doubt about what is actually happening as technology develops to include artificial intelligence-

produced simulations in both photo and video form. The value of messaging is well acknowledged: it has the capacity to increase or decrease credibility, limit the alternatives available to the government, and fundamentally alter the balance of strategic power.

By focusing on framing, which two top academics define as the act of giving events meaning, social movement theory offers a strategy. Also, it suggests the diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational essential frames. Each is essential to the development of the message and the modification of perception and, ultimately, behavior. We can understand how they relate cause and effect and how they rationalize the worst of violations by dissecting adversarial tales within these three frameworks. The component or components that seem to "sell" the most to contested audiences can then be evaluated. Each frame needs to be explained. The diagnostic framework offers an analysis of the current circumstance. It describes what is wrong and—more importantly—who is at fault from the threat actor's perspective. The diagnostic framework also serves to prepare the listener for the subsequent proposed solution. The prognosis frame offers the solution and a route out of the situation, but the acts are not simply justified and righteous; they are also urgently required at this time. The difficulty is to connect the litany of problems from the diagnostic frame to the suggested remedy from the prognosis frame in order to explain the grim present and present the only way to redemption.

In the face of a collective struggle, it is easy to lend moral support and nod in agreement but to remain disengaged. As such “free-riding” cripples movements, a narrative is necessary to justify personal sacrifice for the sake of the collective and in spite of the risk. This is the purpose of the motivational frame. A common approach is to emphasize solidarity with a constructed “in group,” creating a cause that is bigger than

oneself. A related effort lies in tying the struggle to the past, representing injury and sacrifice, and projecting it into the future, representing redemption and hope.

### Threat Strategy

The situation at hand serves as the basis for the following five inquiries about any irregular warfare challenge:

◆What political activity does the threat have?

◆How is it taking advantage of domestic partnerships to further its goals?

How is violence employed to advance its political agenda?

◆How is nonviolence used?

◆What is the function of internationalization in the strategy?

These inquiries include a breakdown of the how of strategy, the whole and integration of methods, or the link between means and goals. Answers to these queries can be illustrated as five lines of effort, each with a distinct strategic interim aim that specifies its goal and direction, as seen in figure 2. One can create a strategy blueprint in this way. The content of each line of effort, or the responses to the five questions, must be further organized and evaluated for its strategic intent for this blueprint to be meaningful. In order to do this, the primary campaigns in each LOE, or its constituent bundles of tactical action, must be identified. For instance, the peaceful LOE might contain "information warfare" and "protest" campaigns, just as the violent LOE might include "terrorism" or "guerrilla warfare" operations. A bird's eye view of operational art as it

manifests in violent politics is produced by the identification of these campaigns within their various LOEs.

### *Present Government Response*

After analyzing the nature of the issue—its foundations, frameworks, and strategy, as well as its hub and key weaknesses—we now focus on the current reaction, or what is being done to address this problem. What is the existing strategy of reaction, what measures are now underway, are they functioning, and why is change needed? Is the subject of the final analytical "box" of the estimate framework since it is a crucial prerequisite for formulating policy recommendations and solutions?

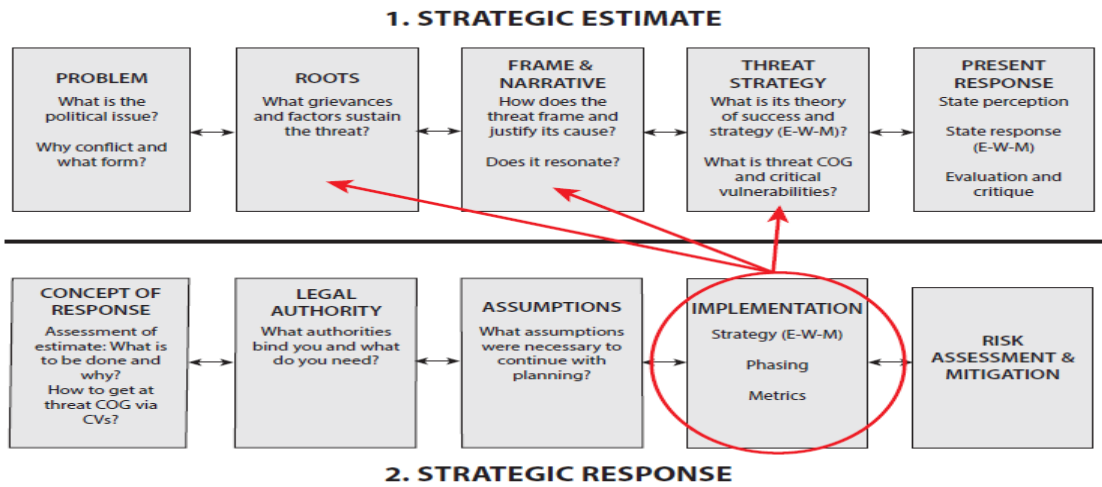
Three steps are included in a systematic analysis of state response. We must first identify the state's perspective on the issue and its responsibility or motivation for taking action. Second, what is the current government approach in light of this threat understanding? Finding the existing "theory of success" or the premise supporting our efforts—even if it is unstated—is crucial in this situation. More specifically, how has success been defined and how is success expected to be attained? This background aids in our explanation of the strategy as an approach and logic meant to address the threat, however perceived, and furthers policy goals rather than a list of initiatives and activities.

A critique of the current government reaction constitutes the third step, which presents the greatest analytical challenge. Since the goal of the estimate is to enhance the response, reviewing what is currently being tried out is a crucial transition from analysis to prescription. This evaluation can start with a fundamental framing question: Is the state's perspective of the issue accurate? Is it aware of the issue? Is the strategic risk being

underestimated (or exaggerated)? Is it misdiagnosing the threat and the current policy, or is it assuming its own legitimacy among contested populations? Since the critique of the current government response serves as the pivot from the estimate portion of the framework to the proposed path of action, these problems must be thoroughly and impartially addressed.

**The COA Framework: How to Respond to Irregular Challenges?**

The framework offers direction and a foundation around which to develop content, guaranteeing that the essential elements of strategy-making are covered and brought up in the right way. The course of action framework includes five boxes to serve as a guide and do sequence analysis, similar to how it does for the estimate (see figure 2).



*Figure 2: The COA Framework*

Concept of Response

The concept of response, like the estimate's problem statement, offers a succinct summary of the entire proposed course of action. The new strategy's theory of success, or the explanation for why the suggested course of action will result in the intended result, is crucial to explaining and justifying it. It is nevertheless crucial to explain how and why

the suggested modification to the current government response will change the environment and achieve the desired position (Ucko and Marks 2020).

### Legal Authorities

The legal basis for the suggested course of action should also be taken into consideration while developing the plan of action. Because the rule of law confers legitimacy on actions in the eyes of both domestic and international audiences, it is crucial to uphold it. The requirement for legal clarity is even more crucial in light of irregular actors' propensity to straddle the line between right and wrong, use ambiguity as a weapon, and engage in lawfare, or "the use of law as a weapon of war." In order to demonstrate continuous respect to the rule of law, it is frequently required to establish and effectively communicate a strong legal argument while defending against an adversary who willfully abuses the same set of restrictions. The legal basis for the suggested course of action is another important enabler that should guide its development. Acting in accordance with the law is crucial because, in order for the best course of action to be taken, the state's legislative body may need to pass additional laws in addition to the ones that already exist.

### Assumptions

Since the analyst must accurately foresee the implications of actions made on present conditions, developing a strategy is inherently a forecasting effort. Planning sometimes seems like a fool's errand because we cannot foretell the type of environment in which prescribed actions will take place in the future. And yet, it is essential. Assumptions can be utilized to fill in the gaps in our knowledge that are unavoidable,

allowing us to move forward with our planning while remaining aware of and certain of the specific futures where our plans make sense. So, it is crucial to recognize our assumptions and explain them to people who carry out our plans. Nevertheless, this process can be quite difficult.

### Implementation

If the concept of response is the strategy's executive summary and the legal precedents and presumptions describe the context in which it takes place, the implementation box gives a detailed breakdown of the strategy's constituent parts. These elements include the goals to be attained, the strategy chosen, the operational design and campaign architecture used, the necessary resources, the primary planning phases, the metrics required to gauge success, and the relevant transition points.

In terms of content, the implementation box elaborates on the idea of response and handles the theoretical issues brought up by the estimate, whether they are related to the threat strategy, the roots of the conflict, the used frames, or a mix of all of these. Designing, connecting, and sequencing the appropriate actions that are likely to respond to these targets is the challenging aspect of the course of action. This criterion necessitates a thorough understanding of the context, statecraft across the spectrum of instruments of power, and pertinent precedents, or the lessons and best practices that may, appropriately, serve as an inspiration for the strategy. The theory of success, or justification for why the chosen course of action is likely to result in the intended results, encompasses these activities, their sequence, and their population.

### Risk and Mitigation



Understanding the risks involved with implementing the suggested strategy and coming up with acceptable solutions to reduce such dangers are two more challenging aspects of strategic planning. Risk assessments typically fail to identify the strategy's weak areas and, as a result, fail to discover an appropriate course of action, while receiving significant institutional attention.

The next step is to come up with potential actions that might still lessen the residual hazards' potential harm once they have been discovered. Plans for risk mitigation may be elaborate branch plans with their own logic, sequencing, and prioritization, or they may be much simpler, pointing to potential actions that could lessen the possibility that hazards would materialize or that their repercussions will be less severe if they do. Actions to reduce residual risks are often not included in the strategy itself and may not even be desired; however, they should be recognized as emergency measures in case the strategy fails or succeeds but harms other interests (Ucko and Marks 2020).

## **Chapter II**

### **Strategic Estimate of the Situation**

#### **Introduction**

In 2003, a US-led international coalition invaded Iraq and toppled the Saddam Hussein regime. Jordanian citizen Abu Mussab Al-Zarqawi<sup>4</sup> founded a terrorist organization in the chaos following the invasion, naming it Al Qaeda in Iraq to attack US troops and Shi'a civilians, inflame sectarian conflict, and establish a Caliphate. After his death in 2006, the group changed its name under the leadership of Abu Omar Al-Baghdadi to the Islamic State in Iraq. The death of Abu Omar in 2010 brought Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi to the leadership of the group. With Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi, the organization took the name of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. In 2014, after gaining vast territory in northern Iraq and eastern Syria<sup>5</sup> (see Figure 3), Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi announced the establishment of an Islamic State—the Caliphate. Built on an extreme radical Islamic ideology, and flourishing on sectarian conflict, this organization became one of the most powerful insurgent groups in history (Byman 2016).

In 2022, regional and international security remained at risk from ISIS and its regional branches. Since the COVID-19 epidemic started in 2019, they have strategically sought to benefit from current trends around the world. First, organizations connected to ISIS celebrated the Taliban's coup in 2021 as a jihadist success. They saw it as a blueprint for achieving their objectives in the conflict with the west. Second, the invasion of

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<sup>4</sup> The Jordanian Abu Mussab Al-Zarqawi, born Ahmad Fadhil Nazzal al Kalaylah in the city of Zarqa in Jordan, joined Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan in 1989. After the US invasion in 2001, he fled to Iraq where he founded the organization of Al-Tawhid wal Jihad known later as Al-Qaeda in Iraq. He came to global prominence when President Bush administration considered him the link between Al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein (Stern and Berger 2015).

<sup>5</sup> The National Counterterrorism Center estimates the territory occupied by the Islamic State at 81,000 square miles almost equal to the United Kingdom (Noack 2014).

Ukraine by Russia has altered global priorities, making Western backing for Ukraine a top priority. ISIS-affiliated groups now have more opportunity to conduct secure operations in jihadist zones as a result of the overemphasis on Ukraine. Third, security voids have developed as a result of the withdrawal of western soldiers from regions where jihadist organizations have operated. Due to the shortcomings of the municipal governments at the time, these organizations have been successful. Fourth, the prison breakouts gave ISIS fighters possibilities in 2022. ISIS, for instance, attacked the al-Sina jail in Syria's al-Hasakah province. About three-quarters of the 500 fatalities during the eight-day combat were ISIS fighters. Although ISIS's effort to break out of a prison was unsuccessful and cost the organization numerous fighters, it demonstrated the group's ability to engage in multiday combat (Cengiz 2023). Till now, ISIS threat is still imminent. On 17 February 2023, an ISIS terrorist assault in the southeast of the city of Al-Sokhna, in the eastern countryside of Homs, claimed the lives of 53 Syrian civilians who were gathering truffles.

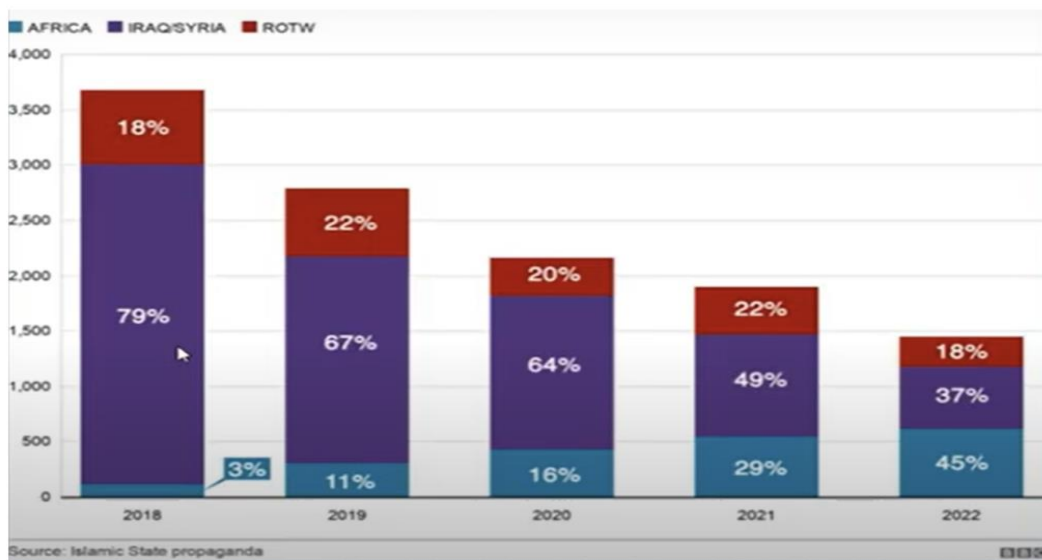


Figure 3: ISIS-Claimed Attacks between January 2018 and October 2022 (Cengiz 2023)

Lebanon’s geographic location in the Middle East makes it part of the Islamic State’s territorial and political expansion project as the insurgency has proclaimed itself the sole representative and ruler of the Muslim nation. Lebanon’s multi-factional society with its Sunni, Shi’a, and Christian constituents is similar in population mix to Iraq and Syria, where the Islamic State exploited sectarian tensions to gain influence. From the beginning of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, Lebanon has faced significant challenges related to spillover conflict across its northern and eastern borders. Radical Islamic militants (the Islamic State, Jabhat El-Nusra) infiltrated, along with the influx of Syrian refugees (Luca 2015). The Islamic State represents a security threat to Lebanon because of the increase in activity of local Salafi Jihadist groups and the huge number of Syrian and Palestinian refugees.<sup>6</sup>



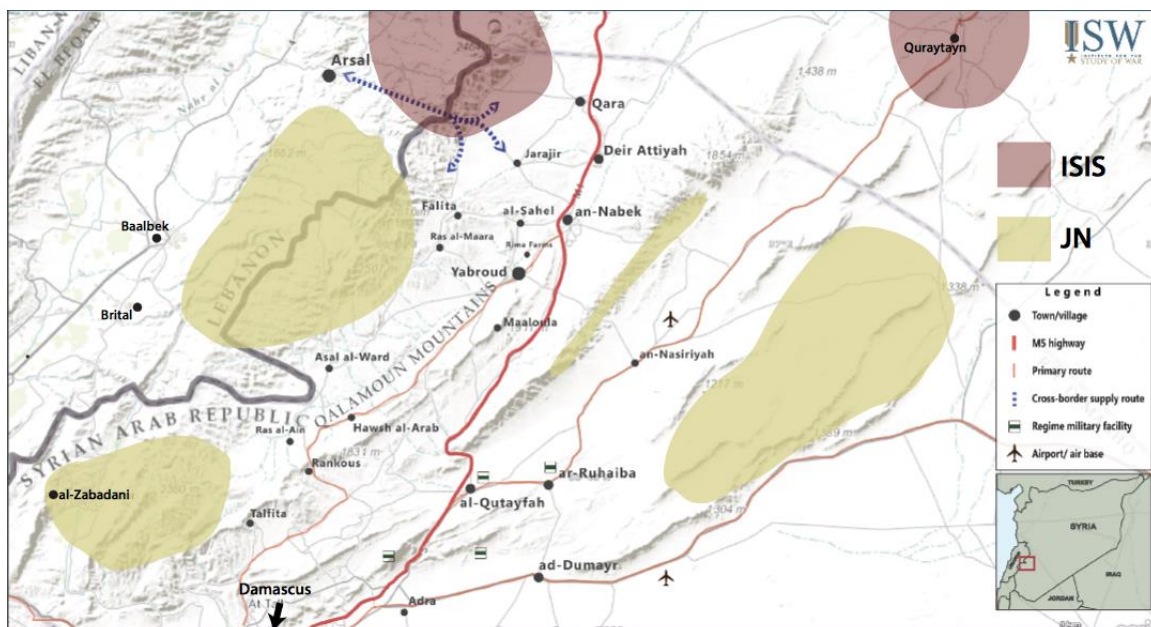
*Figure 4: The Islamic State controlled territory in 2014 (The Economist 2014).*

<sup>6</sup> In September 2016 the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) declared that Lebanon is hosting 1,017,433 registered Syrian refugees (“Syria Regional Refugee Response” 2016).

## The Problem Statement

The Islamic State is a radical Sunni-Islamic organization that claims exclusive political and theological authority over the world’s Muslim population. The group uses the Maoist model for insurgency, with terrorism as a method. It controlled territory along the Lebanese-Syrian northern and eastern borders and has made itself prominent in Lebanon when it joined with other extremist groups to launch an attack against the Lebanese Armed Forces at the border town of Eرسال in 2014 (See Figure 5).

The Islamic State continues to be a threat to Lebanon through its sleeper cells and lone wolves. One of its purpose is to establish a “Wilayah”<sup>7</sup> in the northern part of the country (Mortada 2015).



*Figure 5: ISIS Control of Terrain in Syria (ISW 2015).*

<sup>7</sup> According to Bernard Lewis “Wilayah” in the language of political Islam means a province (Lewis 1988, 123)

The Islamic State and other radical groups are difficult to counter because of sectarian tensions, regional instability, and a vast array of other situational dynamics that prevent effective intervention (for example, the Iranian-Saudi Arabian fight over influence and the position of the Syrian regime).

### **The Roots of the Problem: Scope to Lebanon**

#### **The Macro Contextual Factors**

For the first time since the end of the Lebanese Civil War in 1990, Lebanon found itself embroiled in a regional turmoil that is affecting its internal cohesion. The Sunni population from Iraq to Lebanon, believes that in the last eighteen years, three separate events have weakened its status and strengthened Shi'a influence in the region. The first power shift occurred with the invasion of Iraq in 2003 that resulted in the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. The assassination of the Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri followed two years later.<sup>8</sup> Finally, the Syrian insurgency in 2011, led by Sunnis, which Western countries failed to support (Chulov and Shaheen 2015).

Lebanon's location on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea sits at the crossroads of two continents and has played a role in forming its ethnic, religious, and political diversity. Its two neighboring states, Syria and the Israeli enemy, have had a long history of pursuing domination over the region.

Lebanon, a battlefield for proxies, has suffered because of geostrategic tensions, translated on the ground into sectarian tensions between the Sunni and Shi'a communities. In 2005, an opportunity arose for regional rivals hoping to emphasize

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<sup>8</sup> Rafik Hariri was born in Sidon from a Sunni family. After working as King Fahed personal contractor, he returned to Lebanon in 1992 and was appointed Prime Minister. He was instrumental in placing Lebanon on the international financial map. He served five terms until 2004, and was assassinated February 14, 2005, by a car bomb in down town Beirut.

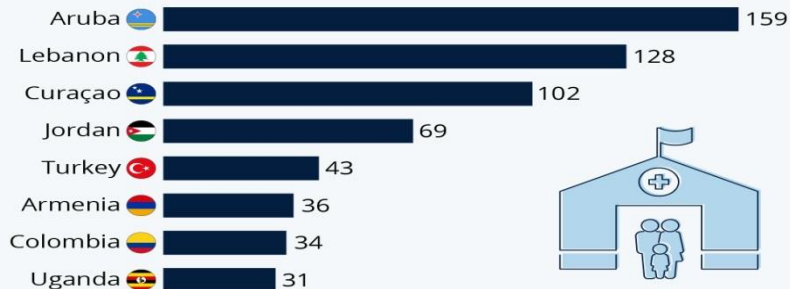
power over Lebanon after the withdrawal of the Syrian Army and the end of its hegemony. The withdrawal of the Syrian Army also affected the political balance between Lebanon's Shiite and the Sunni communities. The Sunnis saw power increasing among the Shi'a because of regional support from Iran for Hezbollah. This caused alienation and marginalization among Sunnis (Luca 2015).

On May 7, 2008, violent clashes occurred in the Beirut suburbs between the Sunni Future Movement supporters and the Shi'a Hezbollah and Amal. The defeat of Hariri's followers deepened the sentiments of fear among some Sunni populations, who resented the prospect of being controlled by Shi'as as in surrounding countries. The clashes left them with grievances that needed to be redressed, especially against the backdrop of Islamist groups calling for weapons and offering themselves as rescuers for the whole Sunni faction (Hamdan 2013, 53).

The Palestinian camps in Lebanon suffers from socio-economic problems that have grown worse over the last ten years because of the growing number of Syrian and Palestinian refugees fleeing the Syrian Civil War. Indeed, the harsh living conditions for residents of the camp have made recruiting new militants for radical groups an easy task (Matar 2015). In general, Lebanese society has difficult experiences with the Palestinian camps, which contain large numbers of Islamic extremists. More than one million and a half Syrian refugees scattered throughout the country have only exacerbated the problem and the fear of spread of radicalism is growing (see Figure 6).

## The Countries Hosting The Most Displaced People Per Capita

Number of people displaced across borders hosted per 1,000 inhabitants at the end of 2020\*



\* Countries hosting at least 10,000 displaced people.  
Excludes Palestine refugees under UNRWA's mandate  
Source: UNHCR



statista

*Figure 6: The countries with the most refugees per capita (UNHCR 2021)*

There is also Lebanese resentment against refugees due to the socioeconomic problems that they are causing. Lebanese citizens believe refugees are taking their jobs and lowering the wages of the laborers. Most refugees are Sunnis and if they remain in Lebanon, they risk upsetting the ethnic balance that holds the Lebanese confessional political system in place. Another issue is that they constitute fertile ground for terrorist radicalization and recruitment, especially by the Islamic State, which seeks to infiltrate and plant terror cell networks around the country (Sude, Stebbins, and Weiland 2015).

The contagious sectarian disease so prevalent in Iraq and Syria may further spillover into Lebanon if the two principal Islamic communities, the Sunnis and the Shi'as, decide to bear arms against each other to settle their disputes over the Syrian conflict. "The higher incidences of war in the geographical neighborhood of a country increase the incidence of war in that country. Also, the risk of contagion across the borders is real and hence that localized conflicts, if not quickly pacified, can have a vast diffusion and eventually expand to the entire region" (Carmignani and Kler 2016, 10).



The troubled economic situation in Lebanon poses burdens for most of the population. Tripoli and Akkar, in the north, suffer from a higher level of poverty and unemployment in comparison to the rest of the country.

These regions have the highest unemployment rates in the country, with 65 percent unemployment in Minniyeh-Dennieh and nearly 60 percent in Akkar. Public institutions including schools and health centers also need more national level support ("Vulnerability Assessment Of Syrian Refugees In Lebanon 2022" 2022). There is a feeling of inequality with respect to accessing the infrastructure and the educational system between Lebanon's main urban areas and the poorer northern region. This sense of inequality has amplified the Sunni perception of discrimination at the hands of the Lebanese government. Poverty and lack of education attract radical Islamic organizations like the Islamic State and foreign states intervention (Turkey, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates), who will fill the void and exploit the youth dissatisfaction by encouraging commitment of terrorist actions.

### **The Political Opportunity Structure**

The Lebanese economic, social, and political structure is closed to Palestinian and Syrian refugees because they are not assimilated into host communities. Even those who have been in Lebanon since 1948 and their descendants are not permitted to have passports or identity papers, nor can they own private property,<sup>9</sup> or have access to higher education. Palestinians in Lebanon depend on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and Syrians in Lebanon depend on the United Nations High

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<sup>9</sup> According to the Lebanese first amendment: "No real right of any kind may be acquired by a person who does not carry citizenship issued by a recognized state or by any person, if such acquisition contradicts the provisions of the Constitution relating to the prohibition of permanent settlement (Tawteen) ("Palestinian Refugees' Right To Inherit" 2016)."

Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for basic necessities of life (Monahan 2015).

Islamic Salafists are also unable to access the political system. According to the Salafist Zakari al-Masri, a professor of theology, Salafists focus on spreading the call and prohibiting the participation of people in the existing Lebanese political system because, doctrinally, Salafists reject “the legitimacy of post-Caliphate secular states” (Elali 2012).

The disfranchised parts of the Lebanese Sunni population who have long been unhappy with their actual status have no agency to redress their grievances. If they do not belong to a Salafist organization, they may find themselves without options for high-level support or some entity to back them up if they were in trouble. Moreover, joining these radical groups' offers marginalized youth a sense of solidarity and belonging to a larger faction of disenfranchised individuals who are also struggling for their personal rights. Furthermore, the extremist religious ideology has only added a sectarian component to political tensions and fused the two (Meier 2013).

The assassination of the Sunni Prime Minister Rafik Hariri on February 14, 2005 was a turning point in Lebanon’s recent political history. Subsequently, the Syrian Army withdrew from the country, and the nation entered a new era after thirty years of Syrian presence on Lebanese soil. The Sunni population lost a leader the community needed to prove itself on the local and regional political scene, and after the 2022 parliamentary elections there was no bloc of Sunni deputies headed by one leader like other factions do.

A portion of the Sunni population led by the Salafist and Islamic radicals feels marginalized compared to other elements of Lebanese society that have more influence and benefits than Sunnis do. The legal status of the Palestinian and Syrian refugees does not allow them to find redress for their grievances. Consequently, the Political

Opportunity Structure is closed for the large refugee population living in Lebanon. Thus, insurgencies including the Islamic State easily target these factions for radicalization and recruitment.

### **The Intervening Variables**

State Response. Lebanon encountered security breakdowns because of the presence of radical Islamist groups in two major Sunni areas dating from the late 1990s. The first was in the town of Douniyeh, where a confrontation between the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and a Sunni Islamist group occurred. A second episode of violent confrontation occurred in the northern Palestinian refugee camp of Nahr El Bared, where the Fatah Al-Islam terrorist organization attacked the LAF. This clash lasted three months and ended with 167 soldiers killed and the destruction of a significant part of the camp. The Lebanese Armed Forces killed 250 militants in the fighting and captured 240 others. Unfortunately, Shaker Al-Absi, the leader of the organization, was able to escape (Biedermann 2007). Since the majority of these fighters are from foreign nationalities, the repercussions for the Sunni populations in other camps were minor and Lebanon was able to contain them inside the borders of other Palestinian refugee camps (Daher 2015).

In 2012, after the eruption of the Syrian Revolution and the violent civil war, a Lebanese Salafi radical cleric named Ahmad Al-Assir in Sidon tried to take advantage of the fighting across the border. With a group of Lebanese and Palestinian supporters, he launched a mobilization discourse focused on hatred against the government, the LAF, and the Shi'a population represented by Hezbollah. After leading an attack on a Lebanese Army post in the region of Sidon, the LAF destroyed this terrorist group after a two-day battle resulting in Assir's capture (Daher 2015). This confrontation killed eighteen LAF

soldiers, around forty of Assir's followers. Islamic militants accused Hezbollah of participating in this battle. Even if the Ministry of Defense denied the accusation, it added a reason for additional grievances on the part of the Sunni population against the government (Blanford 2015b).

Lebanese law enforcement units arrested and investigated a few Syrian Sunnis who sought shelter in Sunni villages and tried to raise support for the Syrian revolution. The Lebanese government also placed Syrian refugees under strict surveillance and subjected them to spot checks because of security concerns. These actions made the refugees feel abused and engendered hatred against law enforcement units and even against local Lebanese villagers. The raids also deepened the sense of frustration and prosecution among the Salafi society. As a result, the Islamic State and other radical organizations has gained an opportunity to put itself forward as taking responsibility for protection and provision of social services for the refugee population (Yahya 2015).

The Role of Violence. In August 2014, a group comprised of the Islamic State and Jabhat El-Nusra fighters launched an attack on Lebanese Army posts in the village of Ersal along the northeastern border. These groups justified their actions as a response to the arrest of Islamic State regional leader, Imad Jomaa. The LAF repulsed the attack, but the Islamic State and Nusra Front took twenty-five soldiers as hostages. Such a direct attack was the first of its kind on Lebanese territory by these groups. Jomaa confessed that this attack was planned and that his organization intended to establish an Islamic political entity in the border region (Daher 2015).

Nevertheless, this was not the first-time Lebanon had suffered from terrorist attacks. In 2013, suicide bombers targeted the Hezbollah Shiite neighborhoods in Beirut

and Hermel. Many people believed that the Islamic State was responsible of the attacks, even though the group did not claim it officially. The first attack the Islamic State claimed was in January 2014, when bombs erupted in the southern suburbs of Beirut where Hezbollah has a dominating presence. More suicide attacks continued to target the same region until late 2015, all with one goal of inflaming sectarian clashes when the Shi'as ask for revenge from the Sunni population (Anderson 2015b).

Ideology. The Islamic State represents itself as the only entity that practices authentic Islam as it was in the seventh century during the time of the Prophet Muhammad. The extremist ideology of the Islamic State comes from a hybridization of Salafism and other Islamic schools of thought. One of these, Political Islam, originated with Hassan Al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood. He called for the restoration of a Caliphate to govern the Muslim nation. The discourse of the Islamic State scholars derives from this ideology.

Salafi ideology extends to the thirteenth century; its founder Ibn Taymiyya. Salafism was mainly concerned with purifying the Islamic faith from idolatry and confirming God's Oneness. Salafists reject anyone who does not practice Islam as they do and many Salafi thinkers have come from the Wahhabi movement or Wahhabism, founded on the Arabian Peninsula by Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab in 1792. This school of thought has long waged Jihad against the enemies of Islam (Bunzel 2015). "The group's ideological lineage of Salafi-Jihadism forms part of the ideological impetus; the other part of its nature is a hyper-Sunni identity driven by an intrinsic and even genocidal anti-Shi'a ideology" (Gerges 2016, 24).

One of the Islamic State's core beliefs is the final battle that will happen in the village of Dabiq in Syria. A prophecy from Prophet Mohammad states that all Muslim believers will fight against the Christians in this border village with Turkey. After the defeat of the non-believers, Judgement Day will come. This has proven a powerful motivator for Muslim youths, including those in countries like Lebanon where sectarian tensions exist, for radicalization and recruitment to groups like the Islamic State (Davidge 2015).

### **The Frame and Narrative**

On June 29, 2014, Abu Bakr-Al-Baghdadi announced the establishment of the Caliphate and proclaimed himself as Caliph Ibrahim. With this announcement, the threat group framed itself as the guardian of the Caliphate, a State established based on Islam. This proclamation decreed that all Muslims in the world should join with their families and participate in the battle against the enemies because the Ummah is at war (Byman 2015, 171).



*Figure 7: The Islamic State Flag (Independent 2015).*

The Islamic State stipulates that the Caliphate will take care of the believers with love and patience. Prosperity and Islam's Golden Age will return to the Muslim nation. Under Sharia law, all Muslims will live a life without humiliation, full of security and peace (Stern and Berger 2015, 75-76). One of the images the Islamic State uses to illustrate this frame is its flag (see Figure 7). The flag is black with the Islamic profession of faith or the Shahadah, written on it in white Arabic calligraphy. Translated in English, it means "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger." This is an attempt to recreate the Prophet Mohammad's flag (Byman 2015, 171).

In different messages, Abu Bakr-Al Baghdadi summarized the causes that led the Islamic State into what he termed a legitimate and violent struggle, and this narrative includes justification for the Islamic State's actions. These are summarized in the following. After the fall of the Ottoman Empire and its Caliphate in 1917, all the world's Muslims felt defeated and humiliated. Nonbelievers dominated them in every region and facet of the world. The West is responsible for all the atrocities against the Muslim nation. The West stole Muslim wealth, resources, and rights. The West attacked and occupied Muslim lands and appointed treacherous rulers with deceptive slogans like democracy and secularism. Imperialistic nations of the West are killing Muslims all around the world, from Myanmar, the Central African Republic, and Philippines to Kashmir. These "Kafara" are expelling Muslims from their lands and slaughtering their children. They are repressing Muslims in banning the Hijab in France and destroying their houses in Palestine (Burke 2015, 91-92).

Abu Bakr-Al Baghdadi contends that for all Muslims in the world, the only solution is the establishment of a Caliphate. This rightful state will be a military, political,

and cultural rival to the West, currently led by the United States. With Allah's grace, Baghdadi believes the state will restore the dignity, pride, and rights of the Islamic people. It is the divine duty of all Muslims to listen to and obey the Caliph. It is also a divine duty to wage Jihad, defend the Caliphate and expand it. Baghdadi justified terrorism as an act of worship to Allah to reject humiliation and allow believers to live as honorable Muslims with rights and freedom (Burke 2015, 92).

To justify its extremism, the group relies on three Jihadi Salafist manifestos: *The Management of Savagery* by Abu Bakr Al-Naji, *The Jurisprudence of Jihad* by Abu Abdallah Al-Muhajjer, and *The Essentials of Making Ready for Jihad* by Sayyid Imam Al-Sharif. The most important of these is *The Management of Savagery* that provides a new roadmap of how to establish an Islamic State that differs from older Salafi-Jihadist strategies. Sayyed Qutb influenced Al-Naji in his manifesto as an extremist member of the Muslim Brotherhood who called for offensive Jihad (Gerges 2016, 24).

## **The Islamic State Strategy**

### **Strategic Approach**

The Islamic State measures its success on the battlefield rather than in operations from remote bases in Afghanistan like Al-Qaeda. Although the Islamic State focuses on fighting local regimes, it also fights other rival Islamic Jihadists. Baghdadi says he is continuing what Zarqawi started in 2003, in attacking Shi'a and other minorities to purify the Islamic community and implement Sharia in a correct way, and to topple the existing secular regimes. Attacking the "near enemy" is his priority, in contrast to Al-Qaeda's "far enemy." Al-Baghdadi believes his group must be responsible for all Jihadist operations in Syria, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon (Byman 2015, 169).



The Islamic State complemented its resolve in Syria with a strategy of targeting Hezbollah in Lebanon, because the latter is fighting alongside the Assad Regime. The insurgency's main goal in attacking Hezbollah was to force the organization to return its focus on Lebanon, thus causing the Syrian Regime to lose essential support on the battlefield. This course of action made the Islamic State a genuine threat to Lebanon (Cafarella 2015).

The Islamic State wanted to consolidate its control over the Sunni territories in Iraq and Syria and expand from there. Its motto is "baqqia wa tatamaddad" which means "lasting and expanding." To reach its goal, the group undertook operations in Lebanon, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, where it has started recruiting fighters and launching attacks to destabilize the countries (Byman 2015, 170). It also seeks to eliminate the borders that European colonial powers established<sup>1</sup> in the Levant at the end of World War I (Gerges 2016, 7).

To operationalize the Islamic State's strategic approach, the organization has adhered largely to the Maoist model for insurgency, using terrorism as a method, and four of the five lines of effort. The group uses its means of manpower, money, and materiel to support various campaigns within four lines of effort (LOEs): Political, Violent, Non-Violent, and International, ultimately to establish and expand an Islamic Caliphate based on strict interpretation of Sharia Law.

### **The Political Line of Effort**

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<sup>1</sup> On May 19, 1916, Great Britain<sup>0</sup> and France represented by Mark Sykes and Francois Georges Picot secretly made an accord, known later as the Sykes-Picot Agreement. This agreement divided the Arab lands, which were ruled by the Ottoman empire, between their spheres of influence at the end of the first World War (Christianson 2015).

The Political LOE consists of a Governance Campaign and a Mobilization Campaign. The purpose of the Political LOE with its campaigns is to man, equip, fund, and govern the counter-state, which directly contributes and nests with the Islamic State's overall ends. The Islamic State consolidated through monopolization of violence, brutality, and proselytization (Byman 2015). It also methodically developed institutional structures, which this thesis discusses in a later section, and provided state-like services: policing, identity cards, birth certificates, consumer protection, bakeries, garbage collection, and hospitals (Gerges 2016, 265).

Islamic State fighters consist of Sunnis from Iraq and Syria, and foreign fighters. To recruit its Jihadists, the group uses an online strategy and a local or physical strategy. J. M. Berger explains the group's "distinct online recruitment strategy, which follows targets from their introduction to the organization's message, through a careful pruning of their social networks, before culminating in a call to action" (Berger 2015, 19). Recruiters working in social media make the first contact with potential foreign supporters. Then a micro-community is created to maintain constant contact and encourage the target to insulate himself against outside influences; next is a shift to private communications. At the end of this stage, the recruiters identify the best task the recruits can execute as a social media activists, lone wolf terrorists, fighters on the battlefield, or other role for the Islamic State (Berger 2015, 20-22).

For its local or physical recruitment strategy, the Islamic State seeks territorial control and subsequent expansion. Recruiters appeal to supporters and especially youth, directing sectarianism and apocalyptic ideology at them in the aim of convincing, and coercing them into violent action. On April 10, 2016, the Lebanese General Security

forces arrested an Islamic State recruiting network led by Umar Al-Satem who was living in the city of Al-Raqqah in Syria. This network used a school in Akkar District to recruit and train youths and teenagers from Tripoli in order to transform them in actual fighters for the Islamic State (Al-Masdar News 2016).

After gaining control over broad swaths of territory in Iraq and Syria, the Islamic State has become one of the world’s richer terrorist groups. Its fiscal reserves have reached hundreds of millions of dollars, or even a billion, with some estimation claiming that it earned one to three million dollars a day. Most Islamic State revenues are generated from internal sources: taxes on local citizens, looting, sales of antiquities, ransom of Western hostages, and most importantly, oil smuggling (See Figure 8) (Stern and Berger 2015, 46).

In 2014, the Islamic State’s oil operations produced around 50,000 to 60,000 barrels daily, what provided the organization with \$2.5 million a day. Thus, a combination of coalition airstrikes and lost territories caused a dramatic reduction in oil production and sales (Di Giovanni, Mcgrath Goodman, and Sharkov 2014).

The Islamic State militants have captured advanced, modern military equipment

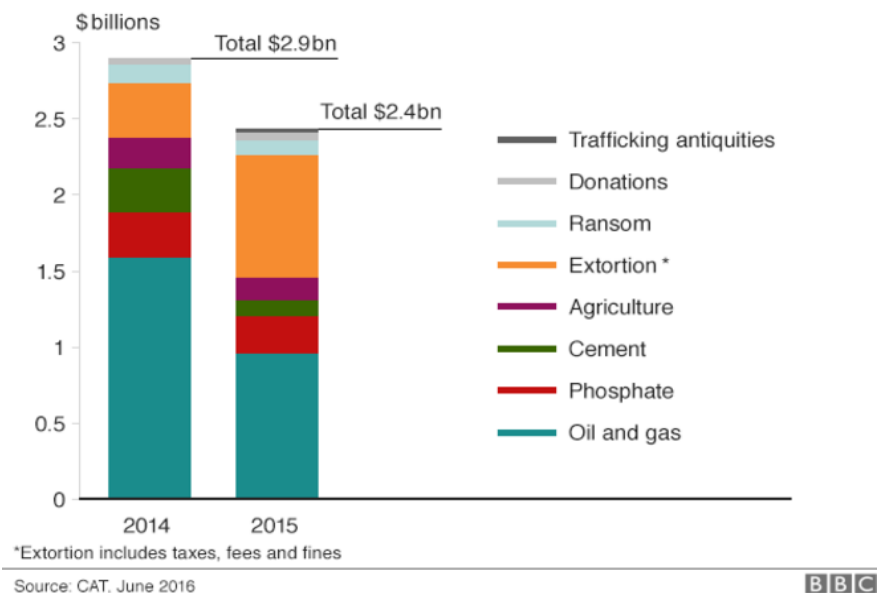


Figure 8: Islamic State Revenue (BBC 2016).

from Syria's government and the Iraqi military. This access to heavy weaponry occurred just months after the group gained control over new territory when the Iraqi military abandoned its mostly US-made weapons and fled as units heard Islamic State fighters were advancing on Iraq's second largest city Mosul in June 2014 (Kaplan 2015). The organization arsenal consisted of a large variety of small arms and light weapons, field artillery, rocket launchers, ammunition and ordnance, armored fighting vehicles, tanks, anti-tank rockets, and air defense missiles.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Violent Line of Effort**

As mentioned in the problem statement, the Islamic State uses the Maoist model of insurgency. For Mao, when territory is vast like China, the government is weak, and the occupying enemy a powerful state like Imperial Japan, guerrilla warfare is the right strategy (Ryan 2015, 29). Similarly, the Islamic State views Muslim nations as vast, weak, and occupied by foreign troops or by their allied apostates. The Islamic State used a three-stage strategy of guerrilla warfare described in Abu Bakr Naji's book, *The Administration of Savagery*. In the first stage, the Jihadist must damage and exhaust the enemy. The second stage is "the administration of savagery" in the liberated areas (Ryan 2015, 19). Here the "mujahedeen" dismiss anything that stands in their way. "The benighted people who are unfortunate enough to live in the savage chaos will yearn for someone to manage this savagery" (Atwan 2015, 160). And then the final stage, with the establishment of the Islamic State in liberated areas. Islamic State guerrillas rely on this strategy to attack weak enemy targets and avoid strong ones. The group also uses suicide bombers as the first salvo, followed by guerrilla units (Ryan 2015, 20).

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<sup>1</sup> A detailed report of the Islamic State weaponry is on the Amnesty International website: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde14/2812/2015/en/>.

In its Terrorism Campaign, the Islamic State uses terrorism as one method among many others. It has used suicide bombings, beheadings, and assassinations to express authority and to intimidate potential enemies (Stern and Berger 2015, 276). The consistency of the attacks keeps the enemy occupied and demoralizes its forces. Also, the Islamic State is careful in choosing the right time and place for attacks to foment sectarian violence, intimidate rivals, and harasses occupation forces. The group uses terrorism in its occupied areas to intimidate a disobedient population and to eliminate potential threats such as the Iraqi Awakening Councils. It uses terrorism against Western states to deter foreign enemies from intervening in Islamic State internal affairs and halt support to its rivals and apostate regimes. This warfare helps the group in its recruitment and funding operations. The purpose here is to provoke Western nations to overstretch security measures against the Muslim community in a way that facilitates radicalization by the insurgency (Habeck et al 2015). A clear example is the Paris coordinated terrorist attacks that took place on the evening of November 13, 2015. At least 130 people were killed and more than 350 were injured.

As for Lebanon, the Islamic State has used the strategy described above to reach its goals. Between February 2013 and the end of June 2014, Islamic militants conducted a series of attacks against Shia areas in Lebanon. Multiple rocket launches, vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs), and suicide VBIEDs, left behind 100 people killed and nearly 900 others wounded (Blanford 2015b).

The Islamic State executed operations that involved full-scale sieges and assaults on major military facilities and well-defended municipalities. On December 11, 2016, the insurgency conducted a massive attack with 4,000 militants and recaptured the Syrian

city of Palmyra, forcing the Syrian Army to retreat before being destroyed (Hale 2016). The Islamic State deployed militants like a light infantry force, along with organized lines, backed by artillery and tanks in the rear (Lister 2015). According to Byman, the Islamic State displayed some conventional capabilities in conducting mixed operations of traditional tactics and suicide bombings to frighten and defeat enemy forces (Byman 2015a).

In its War of Position Campaign on June 9, 2015, the Islamic State fighters launched a massive attack on four Hezbollah positions on the outskirts of Ras Baalbek along Lebanon's northeastern border, attempting to gain control of the hills between Eرسال and Al-Qaa. The taking of these hills would have given the Islamic State control by fire over the northern Bekaa Valley (Anderson 2015a).

Returning to the ideology of jihad, the two types of jihad that exist in the jihadi world are jihad al-tamkin, or the jihad of empowerment, and jihad al-nikaya, or the jihad of vexation and exhaustion, and they are based on the circumstances on the ground as well as the capabilities of the jihadi groups. In the first, the group wants to impose its brand of Islam and rule over a particular area. Under the latter, the goal is to disrupt the enemy's interests while avoiding detection by employing hit-and-run tactics that are suitable for its limited resource base (territory and people). Al-nikaya consists of ambushes, suicide bombings, forced entry into jails, and the murder of important enemy individuals and allies (Ajjoub 2022).

In 2014, when ISIS declared the foundation of its so-called caliphate, which included eastern Syria and western Iraq, it changed from jihad al-nikaya to jihad al-tamkin. However, as a result of its loss of resources and territories, which started in 2016,

the organization has deliberately and gradually switched back to jihad al-nikaya. ISIS has been employing al-nikaya combat, a well-known military tactic in the Islamic Salafi strategic playbook, in Syria and Iraq since late 2016 in an effort to restock its depleted troops and prove its continued significance (Ajjoub 2022).

In the northern Lebanese village of Kaftoun on August 21/2020, terrorists under the command of terrorist Khaled al-Talawi, who is associated with ISIS, murdered two police officers and one civilian. Later, on September 13/2020, near Tripoli, the LAF captured and killed al-Talawi; four LAF soldiers were killed in that operation. In the Wadi Khaled area of northern Lebanon on September 26/2020, LAF and ISF units confronted militants with ties to al-Talawi, killing 14 and detaining 15 others (“Country Reports on Terrorism” 2020).

Although the group's safe haven in Syria and Iraq was destroyed, and the possibility of the group reestablishing its "caliphate" is relatively remote, it still has lone wolves and sleeper cells that can disrupt order and demonstrate its relevance.

### **The Non-Violent Line of Effort**

The scale of the Islamic State's Infowarfare Campaign and operations on propaganda has surpassed other Jihadist groups as represented in Figure 9. In a report for the International Center for Counter-Terrorism, Daveed Gartenstein-Ross et al identified major themes that the group uses from a strategic point of view in this propaganda. The report's authors concluded that the insurgency employed the Internet to attract mass media and worldwide audiences, to justify its frame and narrative, to increase the effectiveness of its recruitment campaign and radicalization of followers, to deter their rivals, and raise funds (Gartenstein-Ross, Barr, and Moreng 2016).

The group uses all social media apps, to include Twitter, hashtags and links, Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Skype, and Viber. Twitter, however, is the most important of all its social media use. In this sophisticated campaign, the Islamic State used films to promote the achievements of its fighters, and live updates of its current operations. It is a four-level campaign. The top-level component is the main group Twitter account and other platforms where the group centrally uploads Hollywood style videos and messages. The second level consists of regional accounts that post local live operations and images. The third level aims to appeal to potential recruiters through updated posts of adventures and emotions by individual fighters. Finally, the fourth level consists of supporters who re-tweet or re-post Islamic State messages (Page 2015).

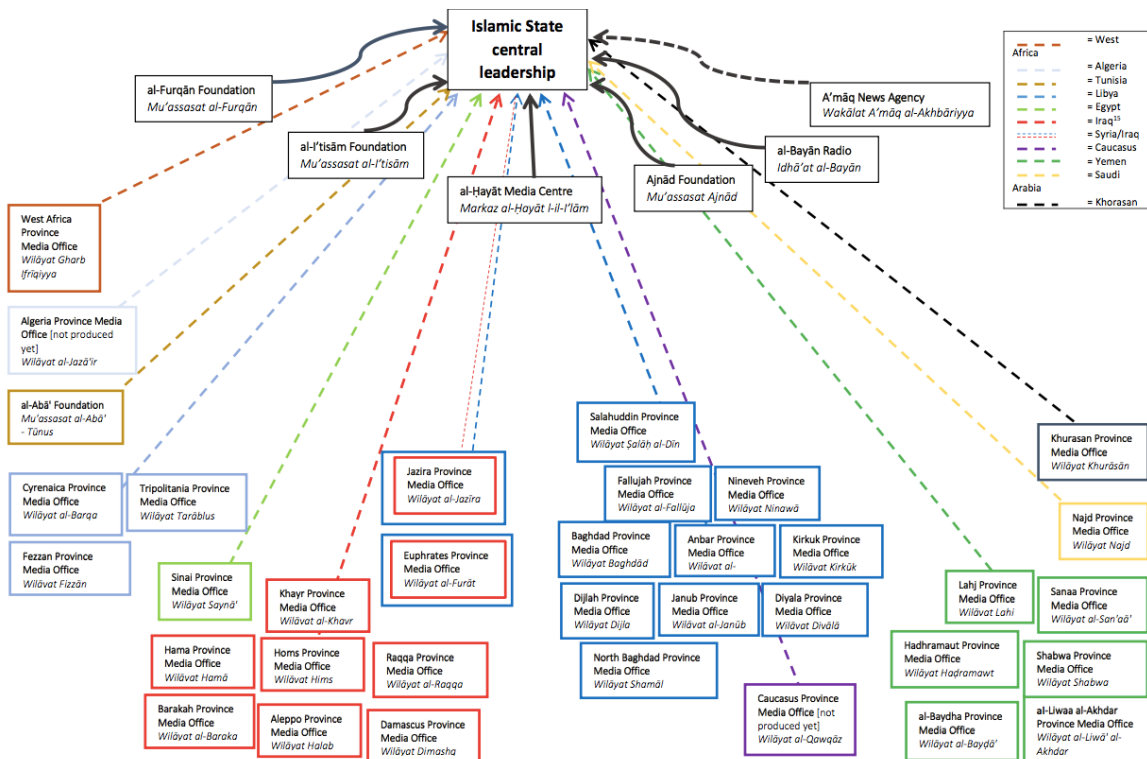


Figure 9: The Islamic State Media Organization (Quilliam 2015).



In its Lawfare Campaign, ideology is related to legitimacy, and the Islamic State claims it is implementing Islamic Law to justify its actions. William McCants of the Brookings Institute argues that the Islamic State has religious scholars that can convince an Islamic audience of the group's greater faithfulness to scripture than other Muslims. Also, the organization uses Islamic texts and examples from the Prophet Mohammad to justify its atrocities (McCants 2015).

### **The International Line of Effort**

Over fifty organizations worldwide have pledged allegiance or support to the Islamic State. These affiliates, when accepted by the Caliph, transform their local terrorist or insurgent actions into a global irregular warfare threat. This pledge of allegiance turns formerly domestic terror or insurgent organizations with limited aims into global actors, seeking to expand the footprint of the Islamic State far beyond its current borders. Affiliates in Egypt, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan and Libya have grown and changed their goals for an internal regime change to international goals (Day 2016).

The actual affiliates and allies of the Islamic State (ISIS) in the world are not well-defined and can vary over time. The group has attracted a diverse range of supporters, from individuals who have joined the group's cause to other extremist organizations that have pledged allegiance to the group. However, some of the most prominent affiliates and allies of ISIS include (Leigh et al. 2022):

- **Boko Haram in West Africa:** Boko Haram pledged allegiance to ISIS in 2015 and has since carried out a number of attacks in Nigeria and neighboring countries under the ISIS banner.

- **Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP):** This splinter group from Boko Haram has maintained its allegiance to ISIS and continues to carry out attacks in the region.

- **Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS):** This group has carried out a number of attacks in the Sahel region of West Africa and has pledged allegiance to ISIS.

- **Islamic State in Somalia:** A small group of militants in Somalia have pledged allegiance to ISIS and have carried out a number of attacks in the country.

- **Islamic State in Afghanistan:** Concentrated in the eastern Afghan province of Nangarhar, Khorasan Province is formed of several thousand fighters according to the Afghan government and made up primarily of disgruntled Pakistani Taliban members as well as former combatants from the Afghan Taliban, the Islamic Movement of

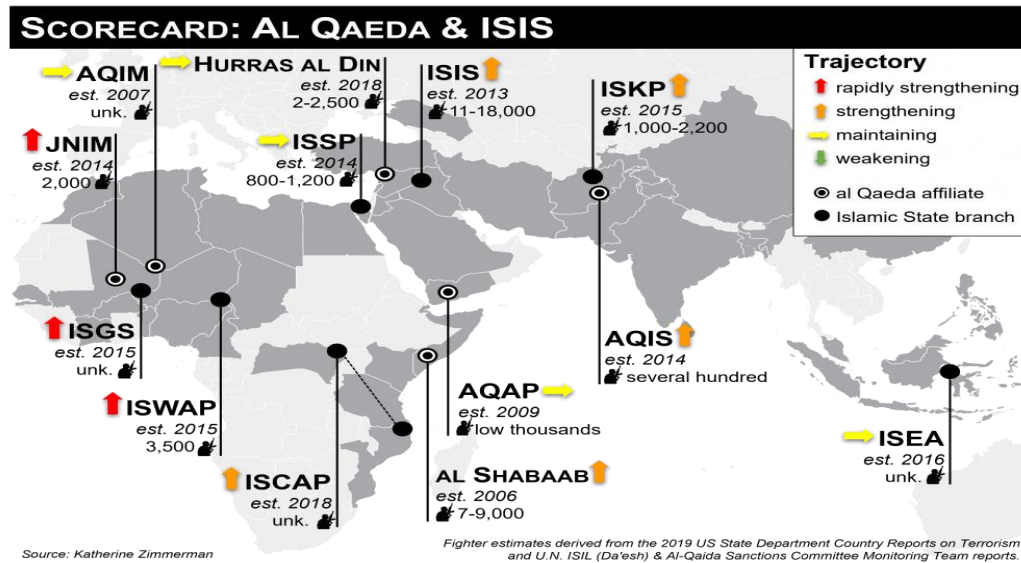


Figure 10: IS and Al-Qaeda: Affiliates and nb of fighters in the world (Zimmerman 2021)

Uzbekistan and other militant Islamist groups. It is named after a historical province that included portions of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

AQAP: al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula	ISGS: Islamic State in the Greater Sahara
AQIS: al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent	ISKP: Islamic State Khorasan Province
AQIM: al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb	ISSP: Islamic State Sinai Province
ISCAP: Islamic State Central Africa	ISWAP: Islamic State West Africa
ISEA: Islamic State East Asia	JNIM: Jamaat Nasr al Islam wa al Muslimin

- **Islamic State in Sinai Province-Egypt:** In November 2014, formerly known as Ansar Beit al-Maqdis, Egypt's most potent autonomous militant organization, swore allegiance to the Islamic State.

It is important to note that the above list is not exhaustive and that the actual affiliates and allies of ISIS can change over time. The group's network is constantly evolving, and it is difficult to keep track of all its affiliates and allies. While the actual affiliates and allies of ISIS are not well-defined, the group has been able to attract a diverse range of supporters, including other extremist organizations and individuals who have pledged allegiance to the group.

Lebanon witnessed the emergence of local resistance groups, such as the Free Sunnis of Baalbek and Jund Al Sham in the Ain El-Hilwe Palestinian Refugee Camp, with potential relations to the Islamic State. These domestic resistance groups may provide a tool for the insurgency to establish an outpost in Lebanon, then work through it to seize terrain and prepare for the future Wilayat in the country. This is applicable as a long-term objective rather than an immediate one. Nevertheless, in the short term, the Islamic State seeks to amplify resentment toward the Lebanese government and inflame sectarian tensions to exploit a broader collapse of state control (Cafarella 2015).

## Means

The Islamic State governed thousands of square kilometers of territory in northern Iraq and Eastern Syria. At least eight million Iraqis and Syrians lived in this area where hundreds of thousands have sworn allegiance to the group. It operated as a government with a bureaucratic hierarchy and state-like structures in several territories (see Figure 11). At the top, is the Caliphate Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, the commander in chief, who has two deputies: Abu Ali Al-Anbari responsible for Syria, and Abu Muslim Al-Turkmani responsible for Iraq. Both were former generals under Saddam Hussein. The three top leaders are referred to collectively as Al-Imara. This emirate level is responsible for the key strategic and policy decisions of the Islamic State (Bellini and Makhoul 2014).

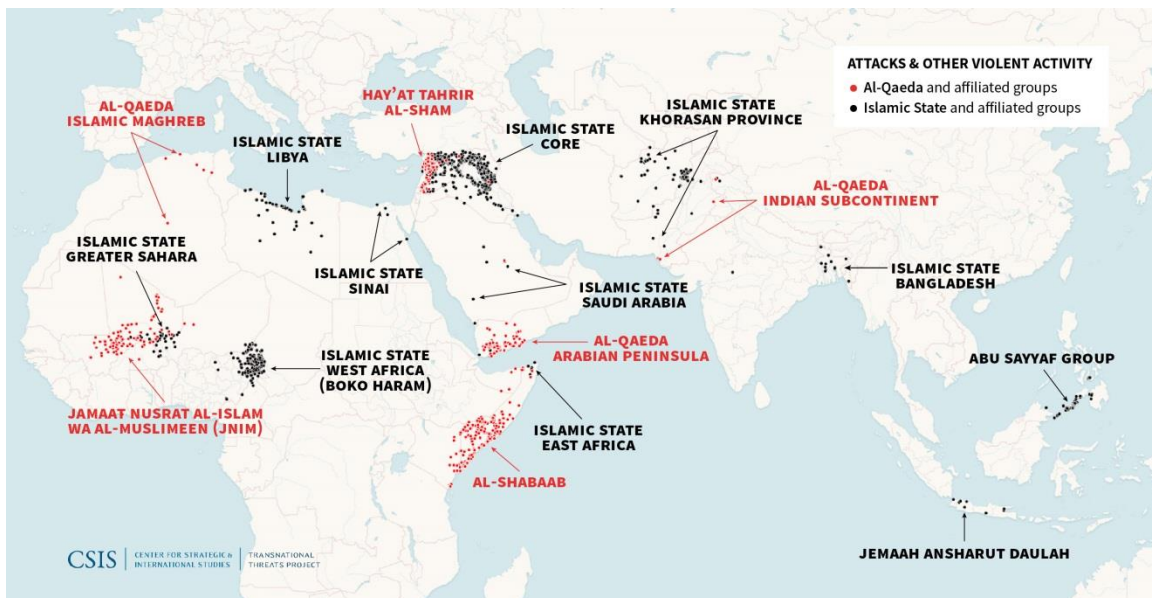
Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who was named Caliph of the organization in 2014, was killed in October 2019, during a US military raid in Syria. Two weeks after the group's most significant attack on the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)-run al-Sina'a prison in al-Hasakah province, US Special Forces killed new ISIS leader Abu Ibrahim al-Qurashi in Idlib province in northern Syria on February 3rd 2022. In an effort to maintain unity and prevent disintegration, the group chose Abu Hassan al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi as its new leader on March 10 of that year.



*Figure 3: The Islamic State: How Its Leadership Is Organized (WSJ Online 2014).*

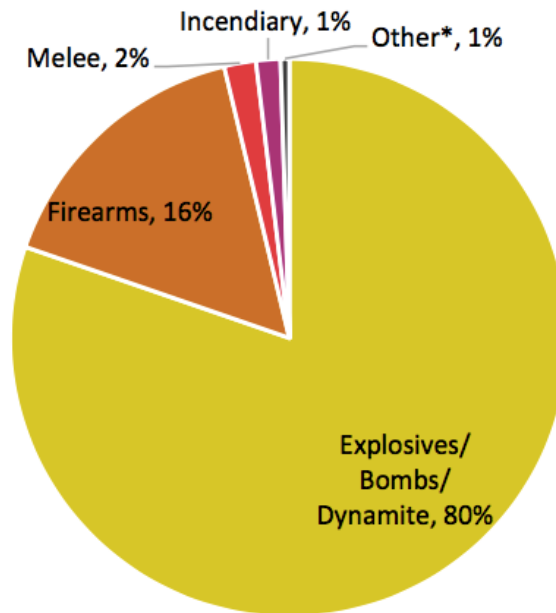
Few months later, the terrorist organization announced a successor to lead its remaining sleeper cells after announcing that its leader Abu Hasan al-Hashimi al-Qurashi had been slain in combat. Hashimi, an Iraqi, was murdered "in conflict with enemies of God," according to an IS group official, who made no more mention of the occasion or details of his passing. Hashimi was reportedly murdered in a mid-October assault by the Free Syrian Army fighters in the southern Syrian province of Daraa, according to the US military's Central Command (CENTCOM). As "another blow" to the jihadists, it praised his death. On November 30, 2022, in an audio transmission, the IS group's spokesman announced Abu al-Hussein al-Husseini al-Qurashi as the new leader (Seldin 2022).

The Islamic State used its budget to pay its fighters, sometimes giving them bonuses when they get married or have children. Also, when the Islamic State recruits new followers, it pays the expenses for their travel to the Caliphate (Byman 2015a). To ensure its sustainability, it must buy tribal loyalties especially in its peripheral areas of operation, and fund its continued military and other operations. The state-like entity has



*Figure 4: The Islamic State and Al-Qaeda Violent Activity, 2016-2018 (Jones 2018)*

to fund its activities related to localized governance across territory under its control (Lister 2015). Between 2013 and 2015, the Islamic State disproportionately used



*Figure 5: Weapons used in IS attacks, 2013-2015 (START 2016).*

explosives in its terrorist attacks rather than incendiaries and firearms (see Figure 13).

Shared by the United States and U.N. member states, IS has decreased in size from possibly commanding upwards of 20,000 fighters in the months following the fall of the final outpost of its self-declared caliphate in Syria to perhaps as few as 6,000 fighters spread across Syria and Iraq (Seldin 2022).

In a report from the northern city of Tripoli, France 24 announced that since December 2021, eight men have reportedly been slain in Iraq as suspected Islamist militants. They all come from poor areas of the city, and according to a security official who spoke on the condition of anonymity because the matter is so delicate, dozens more people from the same Mediterranean port city are thought to have lately joined IS ranks after being recruited by a Tripoli jihadist who resides outside of Lebanon. He also added

that Tripoli's youth are primarily entering the ranks of IS due to money consideration.

The group is attracting new members with the promise of "salaries ranging up to \$5,000 a month." Qassem al-Araji, the national security adviser for Iraq, announced that Baghdad and Beirut had begun discussing the threat posed by IS. He noted that the interior minister of Lebanon is likely to travel to Baghdad to talk about issues (France 24 2022).

### **Lebanon's State Response**

Lebanon does not have a published strategy for countering terrorism. While this Estimate of the Situation assesses the Islamic State as an insurgency, the Lebanese government, like many other nations, perceives the Islamic State as a jihadist terrorist organization. Lebanon assesses the aims of the Islamic State as the overthrow of the Lebanese government and control the territory of the nation to form a "Wilayah" in Lebanon. Currently, the group does not threaten Lebanon as an insurgency, but there are insurgent sleeper cells scattered between Ain El-Hilwe, Tripoli, and some Syrian refugee camps. These cells do not have enough materiel, manpower, or public support to attack and control territory in Lebanon. Nevertheless, the Islamic State may use these cells to conduct violent aggressions, spread chaos, and create distractions achieve specific tactical goals (Matar 2015).

Securing and stabilizing the Lebanese confessional political system from any sectarian tensions that the insurgent organization seeks to inflame is the priority of the government. The LAF is building up the right structures to strengthen the weak borders in order to deter and deny infiltration and support (Leigh and Deeply 2014). Using available information and personal experience, the Lebanese government appears to be

employing four lines of effort: Security LOE, Information LOE, Governance LOE, and International Partnership LOE.

### **The Security Line of Effort**

The purpose of this LOE is to ensure the security and stability of Lebanon from internal and external threats. The LOE consists of three campaigns: Counter-Terrorism Campaign, Border Management Campaign, and Law Enforcement Campaign.

The Counter-terrorism Campaign aims to defend the Lebanese territory from any potential Islamic State attacks and dismantle all Islamic State sleeper cells in Lebanon. It is also intended to cut Islamic State resources and funding by developing a system for monitoring potential terrorist behavior. As well, to monitor any importation of potentially dangerous materiel and weapons trafficking between the Palestinian camps that should be under strict surveillance. Indeed, Lebanese security forces keep dismantling sleeper terrorist cells. In 2013, the Internal Security Forces arrested seventeen suspected members of the Islamic State in a raid on a hotel in Beirut (Khodr and Issa 2016).

On November 25, 2016, a LAF special unit captured eleven members of the Islamic State on the eastern border with Syria near the village of Ersal. One of these members, Ahmad Youssef Amoun, was the leader of the group in the area. This operation followed a similar one executed in the Ain EL-Hilweh Palestinian Refugee Camp where the Lebanese Army captured Islamic State leader Imad Yassin (Lebanon Army 2016).

On 21 August 2020, three municipal police officers were shot and killed in Kaftoun, Koura in the north of the country. Subsequently, a series of counter-terrorism operations were conducted in the North of Lebanon by the Lebanese security forces. After one month, Lebanese police intelligence units raided a house in the northern region



of Wadi Khaled where "suspects linked to the IS" jihadist group who executed the Kaftoun attack had been holed up, "killing nine terrorists inside" (France 24 2020).

The Border Management Campaign goal is to strengthen the security measures on the borders with Syria, especially in the northeast and deny any weapon smuggling and fighters crossing between the two countries.

The Law Enforcement Campaign goal is to promote security to the Lebanese population by insisting on the Rule of Law. The atmosphere of mutual trust between the security forces and the population is necessary to locate sleeper cells and threat group actions with the help of local citizens.

The means used in the Security LOE are all the security forces with full coordination between the Ministries of Defense, Interior and Municipalities, Treasury, Justice, and Foreign Affairs.

### **The Information Line of Effort**

This LOE provides all other LOEs with the right information to execute courses of actions. The Internal Information Gathering Campaign aims to collect data from all the working intelligence agencies in the government. This data contains information about all terrorist activities: weapons trafficking, recruitment, supporters, and funding. This data is exploited by the appropriate security unit to deal with the potential threat.

The External Information Gathering Campaign aims to share the database of suspected terrorist activities with international intelligence agencies. The cooperation with other countries that are threatened by terrorism is important to defeat the Islamic State global threat. The combination of these two campaigns helps to identify, locate, and destroy any threat, whether internal or external.

The means used in this LOE are the different intelligence services in the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Interior, with the cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

**The Governance Line of Effort**

The purpose of this LOE is to implement political, economic, and social reforms that redress the grievances of the targeted population by the terrorist group. These reforms open the Political Opportunity Structure, so all individuals have a chance to participate effectively in the political and socioeconomic system of the nation. This LOE consists of a Political Reform Campaign, an Economic Reform Campaign, and a Social Reform Campaign.

The Political Reform Campaign aims to reduce sectarian division and tribalism, reinforce the rule of law, and ensure transparency and accountability. The Lebanese electoral system based on a proportional representation needs few adjustments to make the voice of the minorities more and well represented, and to avoid disenfranchisement.

The Social Reform Campaign aims to assure the protection of individual rights and establish a culture of respect and freedom of expression. Also, the government is creating social protection schemes to ensure that the most vulnerable segments of society—the poor, elderly and disenfranchised—are protected through well designed and targeted programs of assistance. Also, access to decent healthcare and quality education is a priority. For the Palestinian and Syrian refugees, the government is giving close support to the international organizations in implementing laws that facilitate their mission in helping this marginalized portion of the society (“Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2015-16” 2014).

The Economic Reform Campaign aims to eliminate inequalities in providing economic opportunities and initiating reforms in governance. Public sector reform is essential to future economic development with a plan to decentralize public services. With these reforms, the government will encourage foreign companies to invest in creating new job opportunities, especially for young people.

### **The International Partnership Line of Effort**

Lebanon is unable to face the threat of the Islamic State and other terrorist groups without assistance from regional and international partners. Thus, the Lebanese government is cooperating with the international community to face this threat. To implement the strategy in protecting Lebanon's borders and conducting military operations to counter illegal arms and human trafficking, the LAF is receiving military aid to include weapons, equipment, and special training. This LOE contains a Cooperation Campaign and a Military Assistance Campaign.

There is full cooperation with the international community in the fight against violent extremism. In 2006, the Lebanese government participated in the US Antiterrorism Assistance Program (ATA). This Department of State program focuses on border security and capacity building in cooperation with the LAF and the ISF. The government is also taking strict measures to prevent money laundering and financing terrorism through the Bank of Lebanon with the cooperation of the United States. The Lebanese Special Investigation Commission primary task is to investigate and stop any illegal banking activities (Khodr and Issa 2016).

Due to the weak economy, the Lebanese budget does not allow for an armament strategy to provide the LAF with weapons needed in its fight against terrorism. Thus, the

Military Assistance Campaign aims to supply the LAF with weapons it needs from international partners like the United States, UK, France and other allies to enhance its capabilities. This campaign is also intended to provide LAF troops with the necessary training to use the equipment and the best combat skills (Kanaan and McDowall 2016).

### **Critique**

The year 2018 saw the release of Lebanon's national strategy for combating violent extremism (PVE). For the purpose of gathering ideas for a PVE national action plan (NAP) for the strategy's implementation, the National PVE Coordination Unit hosted a number of workshops in 2019. The COVID-19 and delays in the government formation in 2020 prevented the Cabinet from yet endorsing the NAP.

To counter the terrorist organizations threat to the security and stability of Lebanon, the Lebanese government is not conducting serious reforms to the Political Opportunity Structure to address the roots of the problem and not its symptoms. While the LAF is to be commended on its efforts to fight radical militants, military efforts alone will not effectively address local sectarian grievances. Lebanese authorities need to implement a national counter-terrorism public policy. Lebanon depends on the LAF to plan and execute this war on the operational level. Although the LAF is conducting all the necessary tasks to counter the terrorism threat, there is a lack of support in materiel and manpower to raise the effectiveness of the fighting forces.

## **Chapter III Strategic Response**

### **Introduction**

Unmediated grievances that date back over years of disenfranchisement have fueled the success of the Islamic State insurgency in the Levant region. These grievances are historical, geographic, political, social, and economic in nature, and coupled with a longstanding tolerance for extremist religious observance, formed the recruitment base for the Islamic State. Since 2014, the insurgency has implemented a formal expansion strategy through direct attacks inside Lebanon, threatening national security and stability.

On March 1, 2017, General Security Chief Major General Abbas Ibrahim declared in an interview to the *Daily Star* newspaper that the most active terrorist group in the Lebanese arena is the Islamic State. Abbas added that he expected that the group would conduct terrorist attacks through its sleeper cell to shift the attention of its losses in Iraq and Syria. He concluded that members of this organization had incited the latest violent incidents in the Ain El-Hilwe Palestinian refugee camp (Obeid 2017).

The Islamic State's primary strategic goal is to delegitimize the Lebanese government to create fear among the Lebanese population, and to inflame sectarian clashes between the Sunni and the Shi'a communities. Thus, the group will continue to take advantage of the regional instability to create active and sleeper cells, to conduct suicide bombings inside the country, and deliberate attacks on the Lebanese Armed Forces to destabilize the security environment and create chaos.

## **The Concept of Response**

### **Political Opportunity Structure (POS)**

Combating the threat must consider the sectarian divisions and the larger political environment in the country. Border security management from and into Syria will determine the success of any LAF operations. The pockets most vulnerable to the Islamic State or other violent extremist groups, or other violent extremist groups, infiltration are those with the most Sunni grievances in places such as Tripoli and Sidon, also among the Syrian and Palestinian refugees. Lebanese political class must make the interest of the nation a priority and ahead of each party's narrow benefits.

The Lebanese government must adopt a holistic approach to eliminate all its sleeper cells, undercut its popular appeal, and offer the alternative of good governance to people specifically in the vulnerable areas. To adequately tackle current problems, the government of Lebanon must adopt broad reforms in public and private sectors. It should also focus on a more human-security centered approach to fighting terrorism. Essentially, the government should conduct a "whole of nation" counter-insurgency operation aimed to keep Islamic State militants outside the borders, dismantle its sleeper cells, reduce sectarian tensions, and the adverse effects of the refugee crisis to ensure a stable and secure Lebanon.

The recommended response is a hybrid approach involving limited military operations and patrols to protect the Lebanese-Syrian borders and robust law enforcement capabilities to defeat the insurgency and its sleeper cells scattered throughout the country. A rebuilding process for affected regions and restoration of healthy, productive economic activity must accompany all measures. The response will also involve the use of all

instruments of national power: ministries and agencies (see Table 2), NGOs, civil society organizations, and religious leaders. All elements of Lebanese society will have a role to play in establishing security and stability, enhancing social cohesion and unity in the whole country, communication outreach, and addressing refugee grievances.

The new recommended strategic response involves five lines of effort with associated campaigns: governance, development, communication, security, and diplomatic. To restore state legitimacy and establish democracy through good governance, Lebanese authorities must also strengthen control over the Lebanese-Syrian northeastern borders and around 12 Palestinian refugee camps. This process will require military, and law enforcement capabilities enhanced with a parallel communication effort to ensure balance in the response and to deny the legitimacy of the insurgency's narrative.

### **Center of Gravity and Critical Vulnerability Analysis**

The Islamic State's moral center of gravity is its perceived legitimacy among the poverty-stricken Muslim Sunni population, the Palestinian refugee camps, and the Syrian refugees. The government must attack the insurgent group's legitimacy by targeting its critical vulnerability in the brutal and indiscriminate acts of violence on innocent people. In addition the terrorist organization narrative is another center of gravity. It's based on multiple messages: The West is responsible for all the atrocities against the Muslim nation, stole Muslim wealth, resources, and rights. Also, the West attacked and occupied Muslim lands and appointed treacherous rulers with deceptive slogans like democracy and secularism and these imperialistic nations are killing Muslims all around the world. That's the reason why the Islamic state is fighting the "Kafara" to bring back the Muslim

nation to its prosperous era under one Caliphate. For the critical vulnerabilities, it's the contradiction in this narrative and how they are killing more Muslims than they do for other religions. Regarding the physical center of gravity it's the sleeper cells and lone wolves scattered all around the country and in Syrian refugee camps and Lebanon's 12 Palestinian refugee camps that remained largely outside the control of Lebanese security forces and posed a security threat owing to the potential for militant recruitment and terrorist infiltration ("Country Reports on Terrorism" 2020). As for its critical vulnerability is its logistical support that it receives from the Syrian and Palestinian refugees' camps and remote villages in different part of Lebanon.

Lebanon's moral center of gravity is its government legitimacy among the whole population. Thus, the government must eliminate its vulnerabilities, which include the prevention of the overwhelming use of force, denying the Islamic State the opportunity to continue portraying itself to the Sunni population as the defender against the brutality of the oppressing government. The Lebanese Armed Forces represent the physical center of gravity for Lebanon. Approximately 80 percent of the Lebanese population trusts the Lebanese Army, making it the most trusted public institution in the country. That confidence helped the Army to overpass the sectarian divisions that the Islamic State is tried to exploit (Monk et al. 2016, 19). The critical vulnerability for the Lebanese armed forces is its lack of resources and the economic crisis that is putting more pressure on its soldiers. The government must provide necessary resources in equipment and training to its military forces to undermine this vulnerability and to raise the salaries of the soldiers in a way to help them overcome this economic crisis that is making it so hard to feed their families and live a normal life.



### **Legal Considerations**

The Lebanese government cannot successfully implement an effective response without certain legal reforms and considerations. The government should plan its strategy within a legal framework of domestic and international laws. The legal basis of response for this strategy is an approach combining elements of both International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and Human Rights Law (HRL). Lebanon must also consider passing a counter-terrorism law, since at present, the legal framework for prosecuting terrorist acts relies on several articles of the 1943 Lebanese criminal code (“Country Reports on Terrorism” 2020).

Lebanon’s security institutions must increase security measures at border crossings and airports via United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701 and 2178 to better exert its sovereign authority and to prevent the flow of Islamic State and Al-Nusra fighters to Iraq and Syria. The Land Border Security Project, which was supported by the US, the UK, and Canada, gave the LAF better control over the land border between Lebanon and Syria. This project led to increased border monitoring and the detention of ISIS fighters trying to enter Lebanon from Syria. On November 13, 2015, the Lebanese Parliament endorsed laws number 42 (Transportation of Cash), 43 (Exchange of Tax Information), and 44 (Confiscation of Assets) intended to strengthen Lebanon’s Anti-Money Laundering (AML) and Countering Financing of Terrorism (CFT) (“Country Reports on Terrorism” 2020).

The Lebanese government must adopt political, social, and economic reforms to open the political opportunity structure in an equal manner to the whole population and to some extent to the refugees. Necessary changes include a few necessary amendments to

the proportional based electoral system that ensures the representation of all minorities and makes it more fair and transparent. Laws to promote decentralization in the local and regional administration that will take the responsibility of development are also required. In Lebanon, there are areas with weak local and state institutions that are unable to provide communities with essential services, degrading popular support for the government, and undermining its credibility as a viable authority. Under these circumstances, alternative service providers that include political party charities, Islamic and Christian charities, and other nongovernmental organizations are taking the role of the central government—this affects the state’s legitimacy with the people. The state must also consider new legal frameworks that will allow passage of laws to confirm funding for the new response. Lebanon must also enhance and empower an independent judiciary responsible for monitoring the executive and legislative powers of the state (Salem 2014). The government must face the country’s corruption issues by passing laws to empower the pre-existing anti-corruption institutions to address the problem more effectively.

Lebanon has suffered from the Palestinian refugee crisis since 1948 and the recent Syrian refugee flow has further exacerbated the problem. Indeed, Lebanon could not sign the 1951 Convention related to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol was inadequate. Lebanon has always confirmed that Lebanon is not a final destination for refugees, an asylum nation, or a resettlement land. Thus, Lebanese authorities are treating all individuals who fled from Syria to Lebanon after March 2011 as “displaced” (Cherri, Delgado, and González 2016). According to Lebanon’s president General Michel Aoun, the Syrian refugees should return to safe zones inside Syria after coordination between

the international community and the Syrian government (*U.S. News* 2017).

### **Assumptions**

Achieving the desired goals of the strategic response described above requires making assumptions based on expected norms and existing trends. Some of these assumptions are related to local factors and others to regional and international factors. Domestically, it is necessary to assume that the Lebanese government will have the support of the public, primarily Sunni Muslim leaders and clerics, to execute the planned response. Muslim community support is of great importance in implementing the law enforcement process specifically in regions where the Sunni population is mixed with a large number of Syrian refugees. In these regions, the LAF and the Internal Security Forces (ISF) will conduct their operations in respect of civil liberties and human rights laws. The government will also find adequate resources to fund this response. Because Lebanon's economy is largely based on the service industry,<sup>1</sup> it is assumed area will not be affected and will keep working in a stable manner.

Some local actors like Salafist groups and national charities that benefit from the refugee situation, will view this strategy as a threat to their political and economic status, and therefore will try to spoil it. Thus, this strategy assumes the government will be able to deal and reduce the adverse effects on the security of the Lebanese returnees who are involved in the Syrian Civil War. It is also assumed these Sunni and Shi'a returnees who are divided between supporting the opposition and the Syrian Regime will refrain from violent armed clashes. Thus, the sectarian tensions will not escalate into inter-religious clashes due to unexpected deterioration in the current Syrian Civil War.

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<sup>1</sup> Lebanon's economy is service-oriented (69.5 percent of GDP), and primary sectors include banking and financial services as well as tourism (Humud 2017, 15).

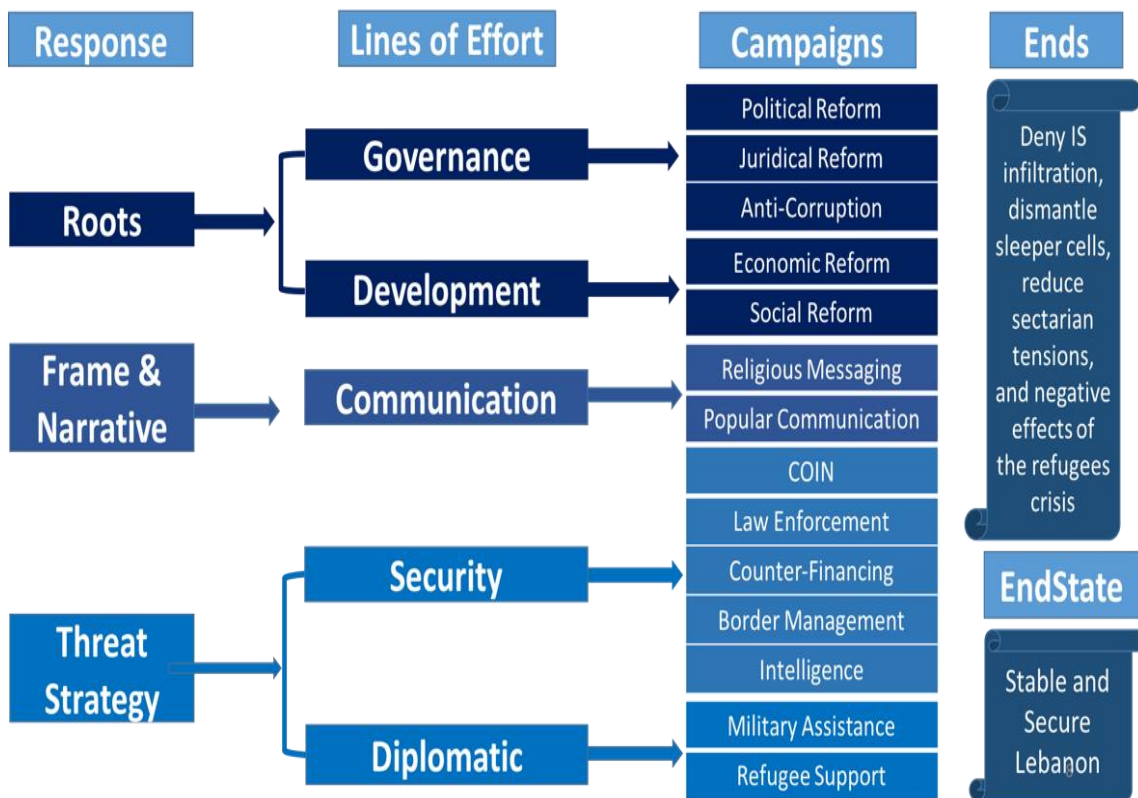
Regionally and internationally, partners and allied states will continue supporting the Lebanese government as it undertakes this new response and will provide appropriate and necessary resources to equip and train the Lebanese Armed Forces, in addition to providing the humanitarian aid and financial resources required to solve the Syrian refugee crisis.

### **Implementation**

Feelings of alienation and marginalization, inequality, experiences with state-sanctioned violence, ethnic and religious tensions are some of the numerous push factors for radicalization across the Middle East region. Thus, it is of great importance for the Lebanese government to strengthen the resilience of the most vulnerable communities and individuals to enable them to reject the appeal of radicalizers like the Islamic State recruiters. It must also promote tolerance and moderation, and improve social cohesion in the society (“Counter-Terrorism Cooperation with the Southern Neighborhood” 2020).

The new strategic response must ensure the opening of the POS so that reforms will occur in economic, social, and political sectors to address grievances through a whole of nation approach. These reforms will create new opportunities for the population, especially in the northern part of the country (Tripoli, Akkar, Dennyeh), and reestablish security and stability necessary to solve the problem of the Islamic State and other extremist violent groups. The Lebanese government must execute the proposed LOEs and associated campaigns (see Figure 14) to counter the roots, frame and narrative, and threat strategy of this insurgency. This counter-insurgency strategy will leverage the capabilities of all ministries, agencies, NGOs, clerics, social leaders, and public actors to address the range of issues that are affecting the well-being of the country.

To reach the end state where Lebanon will have peace, stability, and security, the nation's strategic objectives must focus on the defeat of all terrorist threats and the establishment of the rule of law. Also, it must concentrate on the enhancement of the national unity and cohesion through good governance and rebuilding of the most vulnerable and affected regions especially in the northern part of the country.



*Figure 6: Implementation of the Response.*

*Table 1: Table of Responsibilities.*

<b>LOE</b>	<b>Governance</b>	<b>Development</b>	<b>Communication</b>	<b>Security</b>	<b>Diplomatic</b>
<b>Ministries</b>					
Agriculture		+			+
Culture			+		
Defense			+	X	+
Education		+	+		+
Energy & Water		+			
Economy & Trade		X			
Environment		+			
Finance	+	+	+	+	+
Foreign Affairs			+		X
Displaced		+			+
Industry		+			
Information	+	+	X	+	+
Interior & Mun	X	+	+	+	+
Justice	+		+	+	+
Labor		+			
Public Health		+	+		+
State Minister for Combating Corruptions	+				
State Minister for Women Affairs		+			
State Minister for Refugees Affairs		+			+
State Minister for Human Rights Affairs		+			
State Minister for Parliamentary Affairs	+				
Telecommunications		+			+
Public Work & Trans		+			+
Tourism		+	+		+
Social Affairs		+	+		+
Works		+			
Sports & Youth		+	+		+

Level of commitment: High X

Medium +

### *Addressing the Roots of the Problem*

Since 2019, Lebanon has faced several remarkable events, and the government's response has been a matter of criticism and debate. Here are some of the major events and the government's response:

1. **Economic crisis:** The country has been facing a severe economic crisis since 2019, with high inflation, a devalued currency, and a rising poverty rate. The government's response has been criticized for being slow and inadequate. The government has implemented various measures to try to address the crisis, including a financial rescue plan and negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). However, progress has been slow, and many Lebanese people have lost faith in the government's ability to address the crisis.
2. **October 2019 protests:** In October 2019, massive protests erupted across Lebanon, calling for the government's resignation and for widespread reforms. The government's response was criticized for being heavy-handed, with security forces using tear gas, water cannons, and other measures to disperse the protesters. The government eventually resigned in the wake of the protests, but there has been little progress in implementing the reforms that the protesters demanded.
3. **Beirut port explosion:** In August 2020, a massive explosion at the port of Beirut killed over 200 people, injured thousands, and caused widespread damage to the city. The government's response was criticized for being slow and inadequate, with many Lebanese people feeling that the government failed to take responsibility for the disaster. The government eventually resigned in the wake of

the explosion, but there has been little progress in holding those responsible accountable.

4. COVID-19 pandemic: Lebanon, like many other countries, has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The government's response has been criticized for being inconsistent and ineffective, with measures such as lockdowns and curfews not being consistently enforced. The slow rollout of the vaccine has also been a point of criticism, with some accusing the government of mismanaging the vaccination campaign.

To counter the root causes of the terrorist organizations appeal, the Lebanese government must address the local population's long-standing grievances. The response described herein will propose reforms through a Governance LOE and a Development LOE, both of which will help the government re-establish security and stability in the country.

### **The Governance Line of Effort**

The Governance LOE focuses on improving Lebanon's political opportunity structure, making it equitable for all sectarian communities, and attempting to solve local problems that encourage individuals to find their solutions through radicalization and violence, to include joining groups like the Islamic State. The Governance LOE consists of three campaigns: Political Reform, Juridical Reform, and Anti-Corruption. This LOE necessitates the involvement of all state authorities where the President will have the lead in launching political reforms. The Ministry of Interior and Municipalities, with the collaboration of the Ministry of Justice, will take the lead in fighting corruption and strengthening the rule of law.



### **Political Reform Campaign**

The purpose of the Political Reform Campaign is to help the government build an inclusive political system where all ethnic and religious groups can share in the governance of the country. Lebanon is a parliamentary republic according to the 1926 constitution. Lebanese citizens elect the parliament for a four-year term. The elected parliament elects the president of the republic for a six year term who then chooses the prime minister after taking the opinion of all deputies. The laws reserve an equal representation between Christians and Muslims at sixty-four seats each, in addition to specific quotas for each religion sub-sects (Lebanese Presidency Web 2012).

The current electoral law is the newest that the cabinet endorsed in August 2017. This law provides a proportional representation system over the thirteen larger districts. The advantage of this proportional based electoral system is the extension of parties beyond sectarian or political monopolies and encourages more nationally oriented campaigns. But still it needs additional improvements, such as the distribution of electoral constituencies, blank ballots, the campaign spending limit, the women's quota, and the vote counting mechanism. And specifically the mega center must be created to allow citizens to vote where they live not where they have born. These amendments allow all components of society, specifically minorities, to feel well represented and that they participate in running the country. This process will address grievances at the roots of the problem that the Muslim population in the northern part of the country has felt deprived of its ability to elect its deputies in isolation of the traditional political leaders (LADE 2022).

Another issue the government must address is administration decentralization reform. This is significant because it gives more power to the local and regional elected authorities that can promote local development. The Ministry of Interior will have the responsibility of executing this campaign.

### **Juridical Reform Campaign**

The main objective of this campaign is to reinforce the popular confidence and trust in the legitimacy of the government and the Lebanese Juridical system. The focus is on improving the judiciary system so that it is efficient and bound to rule of law. It will also address the protection of citizens' rights as provided for in the national constitution and adoption of transparency and accountability as drivers for legitimate policies and practices. The major issues that the juridical system is suffering from are: lack of judges, limited resources, lengthy pre-trial detentions, and poor infrastructure (“Counter-Terrorism Cooperation with the Southern Neighborhood” 2020).

According to Aya Majzoub, deputy director of Amnesty International for the Middle East and North Africa, the Lebanese government has disregarded the law, brazenly ignoring a criminal investigation that was already underway, and retaliating against a judge who was merely carrying out his duties; it is crystal evident that the Lebanese government is aiming to thwart the administration of justice. They have repeatedly obstructed the domestic inquiry since the explosion, protecting themselves from responsibility at the expense of the victims' rights to the truth, justice, and reparation (Amnesty International 2023).

The Lebanese government, along with the parliament, must empower the judicial authorities as a genuinely independent branch of the government. Some of reforms can be

an independent and internal governance mechanisms, maintaining a separate budget, and the authority of defending and interpreting the Lebanese constitution (Salem 2014).

### **Prisons Reform Sub-campaign**

The purpose of this sub-campaign is to tackle the problem of prisons that plays a critical role in terrorist recruitment. In Lebanon, these prisons have a 185.8 percent of detention capacity, and 56 percent of inmates are awaiting trial. Furthermore, prisoners are not separated on the nature of the criminal charges (terrorists, Islamic radicals, offenders) or according to age. Lebanese authorities must make intense efforts to solve these problems by increasing the capacity of the justice system and improving the living conditions in prisons. (“Counter-Terrorism Cooperation with the Southern Neighborhood” 2020). The Ministry of Justice will take the lead in executing this campaign in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities.

### **Anti-Corruption Campaign**

Transparency International released its annual Corruption Perceptions Index, which revealed that Lebanon's corruption levels have declined. Lebanon ranked 154th out of 180 countries in the index with a score of 24 (with 100 being the best). According to Lebanon's regional and worldwide average performance rankings in the majority of governance domains, corruption is pervasive and affects all spheres of society. The most corrupted institutions in the nation are thought to be political parties, public administration, the Parliament, and the police. The nation has not put in place the essential integrity structures, in part because of political instability, and there are no signs that there is a strong political resolve to combat corruption. Confessional power-sharing

systems in Lebanon encourage clientelism and patronage networks, further undermining the nation's political structure (Wickberg 2022).

The purpose of the anti-corruption campaign is to eradicate corruption from the Lebanese social, economic, and political systems, and promote transparency and good governance to put the nation on the right path toward growth and progress. The Islamic State and other radical groups exploited widespread corruption as a justification for the need to establish Sharia Law as the lone cure in most Arab countries (Hansen 2015). Thus, strict and severe anti-corruption laws must be implemented, and Lebanon must indict and bring to justice everyone who violates them. The Ministry of Justice will lead the Anti-Corruption Campaign, in full collaboration with the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities.

### **The Development Line of Effort**

The purpose of this LOE is to fill the gap in prosperity and reduce differences by lowering poverty levels, decreasing unemployment, improving easy access to education, building necessary infrastructure, and improving living conditions. The Development LOE will include an Economic and a Social Campaign. The Ministry of Economy and Trade will have the leading role in executing this LOE with the support of the following ministries: Social Affairs, Finance, Education, Public Works and Transport, Agriculture, Economy and Trade, and Tourism.

### **Economic Reform Campaign**

Due to the ongoing impasse on urgently required economic reforms and the high level of uncertainty, the Lebanese economy remains badly depressed. Despite the pressing need for measures to address Lebanon's severe economic and social problems,

the reforms agreed to under the April SLA are still being implemented at a very poor pace. Delaying their execution can only result in higher costs for the nation and its people. The IMF Board must complete earlier tasks before it can evaluate Lebanon's request for a financing package (IMF 2022).

The government's fiscal policies, which relied heavily on debt financing and a fixed exchange rate, eventually led to a fiscal and balance of payment crisis. The government's inability to repay its debt led to a rapid depreciation of the currency and a shortage of US dollars, making it difficult for banks to meet the demands of depositors and businesses.

The Economic Reform Campaign will focus on economic growth, including local and foreign investments in agriculture, industry, and tourism, to create new job opportunities. The government will establish an appropriate environment for these investments by providing necessary services (water supply, sanitation, power) and infrastructure including bridges, roads, and commercial districts. The government will also provide combined financial and non-financial intermediation services to organizations of medium, small, and micro companies to support private sector development (“European Neighbourhood Policy And Enlargement Negotiations” 2020). This campaign will deprive the Islamic State of its recruiting base, especially youth, who will find new jobs, lessening their attraction to violence. The primary ministry for this campaign is the Ministry of Economy and Trade with the collaboration of Ministries of: Finance, Agriculture, Energy, Environment, Tourism, and Public Works.

### **Social Reform Campaign**

The economic crisis has had a devastating impact on the Lebanese people, with poverty and unemployment rates rising to record levels. The shortage of basic goods, including food and medical supplies, has made it difficult for many families to make ends meet. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on Lebanon's healthcare system, which was already facing challenges due to the country's economic crisis.

The main purpose of the Social Reform Campaign is the improvement of a viable health care system, expansion of educational access, establishment of social services, development of civil society, and promotion of social cohesion. The Lebanese government must reduce tensions around social inequality by ensuring investments in key infrastructure like public schools and hospitals. It must also serve the needs of marginalized and peripheral populations in the northern part of the country. Lebanese authorities must encourage and support individuals, NGOs, civil society associations, and political parties to engage in direct dialogue to solve the problems related to sectarian tensions. This will help build trust, share knowledge, and promote social cohesion that will lead to peace and stability (Picard and Ramsbotham 2019, 84).

Lebanon must provide education and health care access as for the refugee population, especially for the youth. This will deny the Islamic State and other radical groups a recruiting base by addressing local grievances. The government should also work on resolving tensions due to socio-economic causes, between refugees and the hosting community through mediation and dialogue to avoid violent clashes. The ministry of Interior and Municipalities will lead this campaign with the collaboration of ministries of Education, Public Health, and social affairs.

### **De-radicalization Sub-campaign**

The purpose of the De-radicalization Sub-campaign is to stop Islamists from participating in violence, liberate them from the influence of the radical group's ideology, and prepare them to assimilate into civil society. Using coercive measures against returnees or de-radicalization programs without accompaniment, such as social support, is ineffective and counterproductive. In fact, countries that have adopted repression and incarceration as the primary tool, such as Egypt and Algeria that do not allow reintegration, but rather have turned prisons into recruitment centers for jihadists (Ezzarqui 2010). All radical Islamic State and other Islamic Jihadist prisoners must follow a de-radicalization rehabilitation program before reintegration into civilian life.

This plan provides social accompaniment by affording employment, support to families, but also monitoring to prevent any recidivism. Giving the returning Jihadists a stable social situation in an environment where they can evolve, helps prevent the recidivism rate. De-radicalization programs are only effective if social and supervisory support elements complement it. Thus, it is more judicious to apply pro-active measures to counter radicalization by relying on the different motive categories but also on developing counter-narratives against the Islamic State's propaganda. Also, socio-economic conditions are drivers for individuals to join radical Islamic groups like the Islamic State. Improving the radicalized individual's well-being can draw them away from the insurgency (Duvall, Novy, and Knox 2012). The Ministry of Social Affairs will lead this sub-campaign with the collaboration of Ministries of Interior and Municipalities, Education, Public Health, Finance, and Work.

## **Countering the Islamic State's Frame and Narrative**

The Islamic State proclaims that it is involved in Jihad and is seeking to establish a Wilayah in Lebanon as a part from the proclaimed caliphate, where it will implement strict Sharia Law to solve the problems of the secular state. Its narrative also focuses on inflaming sectarian tensions between different Lebanese factions. The Communication LOE will counter the frame and narrative of the insurgency.

### **The Communication Line of Effort**

The objective of the communication LOE is to deprive the Islamic State and all violent extremists' groups of the legitimacy that they are trying to build among the Muslim community and at the same time restore the legitimacy of the government. Using this LOE, the government must demonstrate that they are corrupt and dangerous groups that are misinterpreting the Quran for their own benefit. Lebanese authorities must confront the insurgency's frame and narrative with a well-articulated message through the Communication LOE, giving the state an opportunity to win the hearts and minds of the whole population. The Ministry of Information will lead efforts in this LOE, which includes a Religious Unity Messaging Campaign and a Popular Communications Campaign.

### **Religious Unity Messaging Campaign**

The purpose of this campaign is to counter the terrorist's messaging, which relies on claims about the Islamic religion to justify violent action and gain legitimacy and support among the Muslim community. It will promulgate sermons and statements of Muslim clerics and leaders who condemn the brutal insurgency and expose their false ideology. These clerics will provide the public with a good translation of the real



meaning of the Quran and deliver sound messages to the Muslim population and promote unity between different religions and factions. This campaign will rely on developing a comprehensive counter-messaging program that amplifies and foster moderate voices, and uses televisions, radios, social media and SMS texts to counter the Islamic State and other terrorist group narratives. The Ministry of Information will lead this campaign with the support of Ministries of Education, Culture, and Dar El Fatwa.<sup>1</sup>

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### **Popular Communications Campaign**

This campaign will address the population with the aim of convincing it that the government is committed to solving its problems and that the new strategy will bring significant benefits to the country through planned economic, social, and political reforms. The Popular Communications Campaign will help regain lost trust in the government on the part of the Sunni population and different refugee populations and ensure their support for additional responses. This LOE will explain through different media means to the public the government's efforts and actions to build schools, hospitals, and various infrastructure. The Ministry of Information will lead these efforts with collaboration between Ministries of Interior and Municipalities, Education, Culture, and Justice, to ensure the effectiveness and highlights the government's performance.

### **Countering Islamic State's Threat Strategy**

#### **The Security Line of Effort**

Protecting Lebanon from internal and external threats is key to a secure and stable country. The purpose of the Security LOE is to ensure the safety of the Lebanese

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<sup>1</sup> In 1922, the Lebanese government established Dar al-Fatwa as government institution that is charged for publishing legal rulings related to the Sunni community, managing religious schools, and supervising mosques, as all Lebanese sects have their religious authorities to deal with their internal affairs in the Lebanese confessional system (Lefèvre 2015).

population, bring all terrorists to justice, restore stability across the country, and regain the trust of the whole community. To reach the objectives of this LOE, the Lebanese security forces must strengthen the borders to interdict the flow of militants and weapons, and conduct counter-terrorism operations targeting the Islamic State sleeper cells and supporters (See Figure 14) (Nerguizian 2014, 275) .

Five campaigns will comprise the Security LOE core focus: A Counter-Insurgency Campaign, a Law Enforcement Campaign, a Counter-Financing Campaign, a Border Management Campaign, and an Intelligence Campaign. This LOE will be a hybrid of Law Enforcement and Military campaigns to counter the threat group's strategy. The leading ministry will be Defense with the support of Interior and Municipalities and Finance.

#### **Counter-Insurgency Campaign**

The purpose of this campaign is to deprive ISIS and other terrorist groups of strongholds in the Lebanese territory, infiltrating the borders and deny their ability to attack soft targets. Through this campaign, the LAF will use all military assets to combat insurgents through transparent operations. Also, all efforts must focus on destroying Islamic State and terrorist groups awake and sleeper cells inside the Lebanese borders and in refugee camps and prevent any future attacks.

The Ministries of Defense will take the lead with the collaboration of ministries of Interior and Municipalities, and Justice to ensure the success of this part of the response.

#### **Law Enforcement Campaign**

The Law Enforcement Campaign will secure all vulnerable villages, cities, and infrastructure through building Lebanon's police capabilities and implementing the rule

of law. The LAF, ISF, Directorate of General Security (DGS), and Directorate of State Security (DGSS) are the primary agencies responsible for conducting law enforcement activities in support of counter-terrorism operations. These agencies will cooperate to defend the Lebanese territory from any potential Islamic State attacks and dismantle all its sleeper cells and Lone wolves in the country. Security services will also monitor any import of potentially dangerous material and weapons trafficking between the Palestinian camps. Intense efforts are necessary to train and professionalize some critical security units and leaders to improve planning and execution capabilities. The Ministry of Interior and Municipalities will lead the implementation of this campaign in collaboration with the Ministry of Defense and Justice.

### **Border Management Campaign**

The purpose of the Border Management Campaign is to secure the Lebanese borders against infiltration, attack, arms flows, drugs, and human trafficking. This campaign will strengthen the security measures on the borders with Syria, especially in the northeastern region where the insurgents are benefiting from cross-border logistics and manpower support. This campaign will also prevent the Islamic State from seeking refuge in local border villages and refugee camps. The Customs Agency and Directorate of General Security must effectively implement, all documentation and registration procedures for the daily border crossings between the two countries must be effectively implemented to address Syrian refugee movements.

The LAF will expand its presence on the Lebanese-Syrian northeastern borders with the deployment of four land border regiments. These defensive mission oriented units will focus on the LAF's ability to detect, deter, defend, and deny tasks.

Conventional and special operations forces will support the four border regiments in building and manning strong forward operating bases (Nerguizian 2014, 274). The Ministry of Defense with the collaboration of Interior and Municipalities and Justice will execute this campaign.

### **Counter-Financing Campaign**

The purpose of this campaign is to monitor, disrupt, and deny the financing of local terrorist groups like the Islamic State. Through this campaign, the government will be able to prevent the group from raising money from refugees and supporters, and then transferring and using these funds. In the overall strategy to fight terrorist groups, the Ministry of Finance with collaboration of Bank of Lebanon will primarily focus on the finance of terrorism through some of the Islamic charities and *hawalas*<sup>1</sup> or informal money-transfer (“Country Reports on Terrorism” 2020). With the collaboration of the international community, the Lebanese authorities will deny the Islamic State access to the local financial system. The Ministry of Finance will lead this campaign with the collaboration of the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior and Municipalities, and the Central Bank of Lebanon.

### **Intelligence Campaign**

The purpose of the Intelligence Campaign is to provide all other campaigns with accurate, timely and detailed information on the Islamic State and other terrorist groups’ leaders, militants, strongholds, supporters, and future planning. Essential information interchange and cooperation between different state agencies as preemptive measures against terrorist movements and supporters is critical to the success of this campaign.

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<sup>1</sup> The U.S. Department of Treasury defined the *hawala* money transfer system as:” Hawala provides a fast and cost-effective method for worldwide remittance of money or value, particularly for persons who may be outside the reach of the traditional financial sector.”

This cooperation must exist at the regional and international level, to share information and to assess the risk and threat of terrorist organizations. The intelligence cooperation with Lebanon's allies increased the LAF's ability to dismantle sleeper cells of groups like the Islamic State and Abdallah Azzam Brigades<sup>1</sup> and similar jihadi terrorist groups (Nerguizian 2014, 273). The Ministry of Defense will have the lead in executing this campaign, with the collaboration of Ministry of Interior and Municipalities.

### **The Diplomatic Line of Effort**

The purpose of this LOE is to build up the Lebanese security forces' ability and capacity to counter the threat of the Islamic State in the whole country and specifically in searching for sleeper cells. This LOE will also help the government reduce the adverse effects of the refugee crisis on the whole nation. This LOE will involve a Military Assistance Campaign and a Refugee Support Campaign. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will lead efforts in collaboration with other relevant ministries.

### **Military Assistance Campaign**

The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) has a crucial role to play in ensuring the stability and security of Lebanon. However, they have faced significant challenges in recent years due to political instability, economic crises, and the ongoing threat of terrorism. The international military assistance to the LAF is an important way to support the Lebanese government in its efforts to build a capable and effective security force that can maintain the country's security and stability. This assistance can take various forms, including training, equipment, and logistical support.

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<sup>1</sup> More information on the militant organization Abdallah Azzam Brigades (AAB) can be found on the website: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/aab.htm>.

One key area where international military assistance can be particularly helpful is in the area of counterterrorism. The LAF has been actively involved in countering extremist groups, including ISIS and Al-Qaeda, and has received support from international partners, including the United States, France, and the United Kingdom. This support has helped the LAF to develop its counterterrorism capabilities, including intelligence gathering, special operations, and border security.

The purpose of the Military Assistance Campaign is to cooperate with partners and allies to ensure the Lebanese security forces have adequate military aid to include weapons, equipment, and specialized training for success in countering the threat of the Terrorist organizations. Future attacks on the LAF's military bases on the Lebanese-Syrian northeastern borders will occur without support from partners and allies. The Lebanese government must cooperate with the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Saudi Arabia and other partners to provide the necessary military assistance.

This recommended response relies on the U.S. Department of State Anti-Terrorism Assistance program that Lebanon has participated in since 2006, to enhance its border security, and to build its law enforcement capabilities ("Country Reports on Terrorism" 2022). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will lead this campaign with the collaboration of Ministries of Defense and Interior.

### **Refugee Support Campaign**

The impact of this influx on the security and stability of Lebanon has been significant and multifaceted. One of the most significant effects of the Syrian refugee crisis has been the strain it has placed on Lebanon's infrastructure and resources. This has led to increased competition for jobs, housing, and public services, which has contributed

to tensions between Lebanese communities and Syrian refugees.

The presence of Syrian refugees has also created security challenges for Lebanon, as some refugees have been involved in criminal activities, including drug trafficking and human smuggling. In addition, some refugees have been radicalized and recruited by extremist groups, which has raised concerns about the potential for terrorism.

The purpose of the Refugee Support Campaign is to reduce the adverse effects of the refugee crisis in the country through assessing the necessary humanitarian and financial assistance from the international community and ameliorating the harsh living conditions of the refugees and the host community. By 2014, the third of the Lebanese resident population were refugees, making Lebanon with the highest per capita refugee population in the world (Humud 2017, 5). Hosting this large number of refugees costs the Lebanese budget over thirteen billion dollars (Brandt and McKenzie 2016). Through specific partnership programs, Lebanese authorities and NGOs will provide a safe environment for the Syrian refugees, at the same time providing a beneficial environment for the host population and vulnerable communities (“European Neighborhood Policy And Enlargement Negotiations” 2019). In addition to the significant financial and infrastructure burden of the refugees, the Lebanese government has faced a fear of potential terrorist recruiting among this vulnerable population (“Country Reports on Terrorism” 2022). The international community with the UNHCR, UNDP, USAID, and other NGOs should also support the host community in Lebanon with the Syrian refugees to ease this burden. These measures will decrease the tensions between the two populations due to the scarcity of economic resources. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the collaboration of Social Affairs, Interior and Municipalities, Public Health, and

Education will manage these partnership programs.

### **Metrics**

Metrics are essential tools to measure the success and the failure of the new strategy and to ensure that the response is heading to the fixed ends in the associated timeframe. Measuring the efficiency of each line of effort necessitate comprehensive metrics that will demonstrate the credibility of the implemented strategy.

The increase of military equipment, training, and assistance to the LAF and ISF is a reliable indicator that the objective of the Military Assistance campaign in the diplomatic LOE is achieved. Also, in the same LOE, an increase in humanitarian aid and financial support to the Syrian and Palestinian refugees through the Refugee Support campaign will indicate a similar result. Also, the decrease in number of people joining Daesh, and in number of sectarian incidents will indicate the amount of success of the religious unity campaign in the communication LOE. At the same time, the show of support by the local media and public opinion will measure the degree of acceptance of the population to the response through the Popular Support campaign. Having positive results with an increase in capabilities and support will launch the security phase of the new strategy.

The effectiveness of the security LOE which is the base of the second phase is measured through the decrease of the number of sleeper cells and Lone wolves related to the terrorist organizations in the Counter-Insurgency campaign. A decline in number of militant's intrusion through the borders, suicide attacks, will indicate the success of the Border Management and the Law Enforcement campaigns consecutively. Lastly, the



indicator of the success of the Intelligence campaign is an increase of the amount of information collected about Daesh and other radical groups operating in the country.

The Security LOE will still have a relative priority due to the rise of the Governance and Development LOEs. Therefore, the measurement of the effectiveness of the last two LOEs allocated campaigns is indispensable to forward to the final phase of the response. In the Governance LOE, the adoption of the local and regional decentralization in administration and necessary amendments to the proportional based electoral system is the right success indicator of the political reform campaign. Then, an increase in the capacity of the Lebanese justice system (Independent budget, the number of judges, the number of trials) and the improvement of the living conditions in prisons (Number of prisoners in each cell, food and water quality, rehabilitation programs) will indicate the effectiveness of the juridical campaign. Last, the widely used indicators like Transparency International's (TI) Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) and the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) could be of major help to determine the decrease in corruption. This indicator will show the success of the Anti-Corruption campaign ("A User's Guide to Measuring Corruption" 2008, 5).

A decrease in the unemployment and poverty rate and an increase in the number of tourists is a good indicator of the success of the Economic Reform campaign. Also, to measure the effectiveness of the Social Reform campaign, we must detect an increase in access, level of quality, the efficiency of health care and education. After insuring security, stability and good governance, the feelings of disfranchisement of the targeted population will decrease. In the end, the increase of essential infrastructure, public

services, and local and foreign investments in the most vulnerable areas in the country will indicate the achievement of the final goal of the strategy.

### **Risk Assessment and Mitigation**

In the process of formulating the strategic response to counter terrorism, some risks are considered inherent and capable of impeding the successful implementation of the response. There are risks of strategic failure (mismatch of ends-ways-means) and that of unintended consequences.

The inability to gain the support of all political elites and parties to this response, due to sectarian reasons, will pose a major risk to implement this response in the whole country. To mitigate this risk, the government has to gain the popular support through the Popular Messaging campaign, to pressure the political parties into accepting the response because they need the popular votes for the coming elections. At the same time, the government has also to develop an enduring resiliency to overcome the resistance that would arise in the course of implementing the strategy.

Another risk that may cause failure to the new strategic response is the lack of financial resources to fund it. This issue will have as direct consequence the shortage in equipping and training the military forces, and the necessary budget to finance different campaigns. Also, not receiving adequate and timely aid from partners will interrupt the support actions that the government must provide to the population in need. To mitigate this risk, the government through the diplomatic LOE must convince partners and allies that their assistance is vitally critical to Lebanon's success and the potential impacts on the security of the country in the lack of sufficient aid. Also, the government must

provide alternative ways of funding through changes to the budget in coordination with the parliament.

The risk of unintended consequences could impede the success of the strategy if the Lebanese military in the fight against Daesh, fail to conduct the operations in agreement with the Human Rights Law causing civilian casualties. This risk will decline the legitimacy of the LAF and the Lebanese government causing a lack of trust in the response. To mitigate this risk, the LAF will conduct the Security LOE carefully and with total transparency. Therefore, the operations can include media coverage with field journalist accompanying the troops.

A substantial risk that may topple the whole response is a sharp escalation of domestic sectarian tensions into violent clashes due to a sudden and unexpected deterioration of regional conflicts like the Syrian civil war. The Lebanese government will mitigate this risk by focusing on the communication LOE. It will urge all religious leaders to dialogue, and if needed deploy the LAF before the occurring of violence.

## **Conclusion**

Lebanon will continue to face dangerous spillover threats from the existing sectarian tensions and refugee problem and the most complicated issue of the Islamic State threat to its internal security and stability as long as the Syrian Civil War and instability in Iraq and the region persist. The international community, led by the United States, must assist the Lebanese government to minimize these spillover effects that will threaten the stability of the whole Levant region for years to come. Military assistance to the Lebanese security forces is of great importance to face the imminent threat of the Islamic State insurgency and other terrorist organizations. The LAF has a critical role in

securing the country, safeguarding the borders, and isolating Lebanon from regional instability.

The Lebanese government must also address the root causes of the current problem. Reducing inequality between parts of the country in development, poverty, unemployment, and poor governance must be a priority for all efforts. The grievances of the affected population, with the rise of radicalization and the huge number of Syrian and Palestinian refugees constitute fertile ground for radical groups to exploit. A new response based on a combination of kinetic and non-kinetic approaches addresses the root causes and will provide a lasting solution to the current threat of terrorism.

## **Conclusion**

The Sunni population in the Middle East Region has had historical grievances since the Sykes-Picot Agreement in 1916. These have continued with the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the U.S.-led coalition occupation of Iraq in 2003. These grievances created feelings of frustration and marginalization specifically to this population in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, due to lack of active participation in political power sharing. The growing influence of Iran in the region exacerbated these sentiments.

The Islamic State has capitalized on its ability to operate with little interference in fragile states to include Lebanon. Its strategy has relied on exploiting the social, political, and economic grievances of the Sunni population in Iraq and the Levant, and taking advantage of the sectarian conflict to establish its self-proclaimed Caliphate that it has lost but still have strongholds in Syria and Iraq and other parts of the world. The group targets the marginalized and disenfranchised segments of the Sunni population, especially the youth, for recruitment. It spreads its ideology of being the only example of authentic Islam and claims a divine role to redress Muslim grievances around the world. It seeks to reestablish the caliphate it has lost and expand it again. Using Islamic religious texts to justify its barbaric actions, it claims the authority over the Muslim world.

The thesis set out to explain that the insurgency in Iraq and Syria was and stills a serious international issue and a threat not only to the stability of the Middle East, but also to the people of Lebanon. The Islamic State terrorist organization is no longer the powerhouse it once was. However, the small number of survivors who weren't killed or imprisoned still attacks targets throughout the territories it once controlled and in neighboring countries like Lebanon. And earlier this year, information on the Lebanese

perpetrators of the attacks began to appear in reports. The geographic position of Lebanon, in the middle of the Levant region, makes it a part of the territorial expansion project of this insurgency. Although the Islamic State has lost its strongholds on the northeastern borders, its threat to Lebanon goes beyond the control of territories to spreading of its ideology, sleeper cells, and recruiting supporters.

The situation in Lebanon has been quite challenging since 2019, with a combination of economic, political, and social factors contributing to a general sense of instability. In October 2019, widespread protests erupted across the country in response to a proposed tax on WhatsApp calls. The protests quickly grew to encompass a range of grievances, including corruption, political dysfunction, and economic inequality. The government eventually resigned in the face of public pressure, but it took months of political wrangling to form a new government.

Since then, the country has been grappling with a severe economic crisis, with a rapidly devaluing currency, skyrocketing inflation, and widespread poverty. The crisis has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has put further strain on the already overburdened healthcare system.

The political situation remains tense, with ongoing power struggles between different political factions and continued accusations of corruption. In August 2020, a massive explosion at the Port of Beirut killed over 200 people and caused widespread damage, further exacerbating the sense of instability and anger among the population.

The presence of Syrian refugees has also had a significant impact on Lebanon's security situation. Some refugees have been involved in criminal activities, including drug trafficking and human smuggling, which has raised concerns about public safety. In

addition, some refugees have been radicalized and recruited by extremist groups, which has contributed to the threat of terrorism in the country. The influx of refugees has intensified sectarian tensions and has contributed to the polarization of Lebanese society. This has been further exacerbated by the involvement of various external actors in the Syrian conflict, which has led to increased political and military tensions in Lebanon.

### **Key Findings**

This thesis analyzed the current Islamic State and other terrorist organizations threat to the Lebanese security and stability. This analysis helped to explore the different aspects of this threat: the scattered armed sleeper cells and lone wolves, the increase in sectarian tensions, the growth in radicalization and the security threat that poses the huge number of Syrian and Palestinian refugees. There is the problem of marginalization of a part of the Sunni community due to the lack of political and socio-economic reforms, and the growing crisis of Syrian and Palestinian refugees. Thus, the thesis concludes a new response that the Lebanese government must adopt to counter this threat.

In 2014, the Islamic State began to implement a formal expansion strategy through direct attacks inside Lebanon, threatening national security and stability. The Islamic State will continue to take advantage of the situation to create active and sleeper cells, suicide bombings inside the country, and deliberate attacks on the Lebanese Armed Forces in order to destabilize the security environment and create chaos.

The group seeks to return to Lebanon by fomenting sectarian violence. In the short term, the Islamic State seeks to amplify resentment toward the Lebanese government and inflame sectarian tensions to exploit a broader collapse of state control.

The sectarian conflict that started in Iraq and spilled over into Syria is a

contagious disease. The current Syrian Civil War is intensifying sectarian tensions in Lebanon and the bloodshed in Syria has changed the inter-sectarian mobilization mechanism into an identity-based and religious approach. This wave of sectarianism is characterized by the belief that an existential struggle in the Levant is being waged. Both the Sunni and Shi'a components of the Lebanese community perceive themselves as defending their survival (Bahout 2013).

The state of poverty in the northern part of the country is accompanied by a rise in radicalization. This region is witnessing a growth of traditional Salafist and jihadist movements and an increase in recruiting efforts. However, some young men are joining IS for reasons other than poverty. Many Sunnis Muslims living in Tripoli and the neighboring areas are angry about what they perceive to be the neglect of the government in Beirut. In their anti-militancy campaigns, security authorities have targeted Sunni youth, and campaigners have claimed for years that thousands of them have been imprisoned without charge because of possible ties to militant groups. The movement to join IS in Iraq seems to be a recent one. Though the actual number is unknown, it is estimated that between 70 and 100 young men vanished from the Tripoli area in recent months. In an effort to enlist more young, disenfranchised Lebanese, IS recruiters are still circling.

Salafist organizations supported the Syrian opposition by sending militants and equipment to fight the Syrian regime backed by Hezbollah. The fact that these groups have the same faith and hatred towards Hezbollah has provided a refuge for some of the Syrian opposition combatants, including individuals who supported the Islamic state, Al-Nusrah Front, and Abdullah Azzam Brigades.



Regional sectarian tensions, an increase in radicalization and Hezbollah's intervention in the Syrian civil war supporting the Syrian regime have contributed to an increase in sectarian strife in Lebanon's domestic arena. The Islamic State and the other radical groups are exploiting sectarian tensions to increase division and inflame violent clashes between components of the Lebanese community. Their narrative relies on the duty of faithful Muslims to defend Sunnis from the tyranny of the Shiites and the Lebanese secular state, in a scenario similar to the one executed in Iraq and Syria. Also, the regional and local conditions constituted a breeding ground for armed terrorist groups, to mobilize some Syrian and Lebanese Sunni youths who suffered from disenfranchisement and marginalization.

The inability of local Sunni leaders to meet the aspirations of impoverished Sunni communities in the north has created a sense of their non-representation in Lebanese politics. These communities are considered the poorest among their Lebanese counterparts so that the poverty rate is double the national average in those areas. This region also suffer from weak government spending compared to other parts of Lebanon. Also, the Syrian refugee crisis has increased the complexity of the economic, social and living conditions of this Lebanese component.

Since the beginning of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, Lebanon witnessed a massive influx of Syrian refugees. This number, added to the already existing Palestinian refugee population, means that refugees make up one-third of the total Lebanese population. A substantial number of Salafi-Jihadists have arrived with refugee inflows and are hiding among legitimate refugees.

The substantial flow of Syrian refugees into Lebanon, accompanied by an

increased level of Islamic radicalism in society, has facilitated the goal of different terrorist organizations like the Islamic State in threatening the security and stability of Lebanon, and the effectiveness of the Lebanese state. Even though there is no evidence of a massive involvement of refugees in direct violence, their presence in huge numbers facilitates the transnational spread of weapons, fighters, and ideologies that could lead to future conflict, similar to what happened with the Palestinian refugees in the 1975 civil war.

There is a high risk that refugees will alter the balance among different socio-religious groups in the Lebanese population and aggravate economic competition. Sunni extremists view Syrian refugees as ripe for recruitment, more prominent than one presented by Palestinians in long-existing refugee camps. The government's inability and the unwillingness of Lebanese society to assimilate the enormous number of Syrian newcomers, provides the Islamic State with a critical tool to destabilize Lebanon.

Lebanon does not have a published national strategy for countering terrorism. Lebanon is facing a significant threat from terrorism, which has had a damaging impact on the country's stability, security, and economic development. A comprehensive counterterrorism public policy is necessary to address this issue effectively and to ensure the safety and security of its citizens.

The policy should prioritize measures to counter terrorism financing and money laundering, as well as address the root causes of extremism and radicalization. This can be achieved through improved governance and the implementation of social, economic, and educational programs aimed at promoting tolerance, inclusiveness, and respect for human rights.

Additionally, the policy should emphasize the importance of cooperation and coordination between the government and security forces, civil society organizations, and the international community. This includes information sharing, intelligence gathering, and training programs that support the capacity of security forces to effectively respond to terrorist threats.

The policy should also focus on the protection of critical infrastructure and ensuring the readiness of emergency response systems in the event of a terrorist attack. This includes enhancing physical and cyber security, as well as developing contingency plans to ensure that essential services, such as healthcare and communications, remain operational.

The Lebanese government perceives the Islamic State as a jihadist terrorist organization that aims to overthrow the government and control the territory to establish a Wilayah in the country. The current response relies on a kinetic approach led by the Lebanese Armed Forces to fight the insurgency and counter the terrorist attacks of the sleeper cells inside the country and on the borders. The LAF is building up the right structures to strengthen the weak borders to deter and deny infiltration and support internal sleeper terrorist cells.

The measures the Lebanese government takes to deal with the current crisis have contributed to a limited solution because these do not address the root causes of the problem. A military solution with no social, political and economic reforms will not lead to the desired end state of a secure and stable Lebanon. Indeed, it may worsen the current situation in the long run.

To adequately address the current problems, the government of Lebanon must

adopt broad reforms in public and private sectors imbedded in a counterterrorism public policy. It should also focus toward a more human-security centered approach to fighting terrorism. Essentially, the government should conduct a whole of nation counter-insurgency operation aimed to keep Islamic State militants outside the borders, dismantle its sleeper cells, reduce the sectarian tensions, and address the adverse effects of the refugee crisis to ensure a stable and secure Lebanon.

While this proposed response will not lead to the final elimination of the threat because its source is from outside the border, it will disengage its possible relations with some of Lebanon's social components. It will also address the current security problem of repeated terrorist attacks and the threat of sleeper terrorist cells inside the country. The Lebanese government must entail additional measures to strengthen social cohesion and prevent sectarian tensions escalation, which proved its ability to dismantle societies, as what happened in Iraq and Syria.

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