

Applying Napoleoni's 'Shell-State' Concept to Jihadist Organisations's Rise in Mali, Nigeria and Syria/Iraq, 2011-2015

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Abstract : The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant / Syria (ISIL/S), Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad, also known as 'Boko Haram' (BH), have fought successfully against Syria and Iraq, Mali, Nigeria's government, respectively. According to Napoleoni, the 'shell-state' concept can explain the economic dimension and the financing model of the ISIL insurgency. However, she argues that AQIM and BH did not properly plan their financial model. Consequently, her idea would not be suitable to these groups. Nevertheless, AQIM and BH's economic performances and their (short) territorialisation suggest that their financing models respond to a well-defined strategy, which they were able to adapt to new circumstances. Therefore, Napoleoni's idea of 'shell-state' can be applied to the three jihadist armed groups. In the last five years, together with other similar entities, ISIL/S, AQIM and BH have been fighting against governments with insurgent tactics and terrorism acts, conquering and ruling a quasi-state; a physical space they presented as legitimate territorial entity, thanks to a puritan version of the Islamic law. In these territories, they have exploited the traditional local economic networks. In addition, they have contributed to the development of legal and illegal transnational business activities. They have also established a justice system and created an administrative structure to supply services. Napoleoni's 'shell-state' can describe the evolution of ISIL/S, AQIM and BH, which has switched from an insurgency to a proto or a quasi-state entity, enjoying a significant share of power over territories and populations. Napoleoni first developed and applied the 'Shell-state' concept to describe the nature of groups such as the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), before using it to explain the expansion of ISIL. However, her original conceptualisation emphasises on the economic dimension of the rise of the insurgency, focusing on the 'business' model and the insurgents' financing management skills, which permits them to turn into an organisation. However, the idea of groups which use, coordinate and grab some territorial economic activities (at the same time, encouraging new criminal ones), can also be applied to administrative, social, infrastructural, legal and military levels of their insurgency, since they contribute to transform the insurgency to the same extent the economic dimension does. In addition, according to Napoleoni's view, the 'shell-state' prism is valid to understand the ISIL/S phenomenon, because the group has carefully planned their financial steps. Napoleoni affirmed that ISIL/S carries out activities in order to promote their conversion from a group relying on external sponsors to an entity that can penetrate and condition local economies. On the contrary, 'shell-state' could not be applied to AQIM or BH, which are acting more like smugglers. Nevertheless, despite its failure to control territories, as ISIL has been able to do, AQIM and BH have responded strategically to their economic circumstances and have defined specific dynamics to ensure a flow of stable funds. Therefore, Napoleoni's theory is applicable.

Keywords : shell-state, jihadist insurgency, proto or quasi-state entity economic planning, strategic financing

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