The Impact of Rebel Group Structure on Foreign Fighter Civilian Victimization

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Abstract

The modern foreign fighter (FF) came into prominence following the onset of the wars in Iraq and Syria in the early 2010s. The fact that there was a movement of over 20,000 foreign fighters to Ukraine in 2022 shows that this is a phenomenon that is not going away or slowing down. What makes this phenomenon more serious is the negative impact that FFs have on civilians. FFs have been shown to conduct disproportionate violence against the civilian population in the locations that they inhabit. For that reason, it is vital to not only understand the impact of these individuals on civilians but also to understand the factors that can act to inhibit the actions taken by FFs against civilians. This dissertation seeks to answer the following question: What impact does rebel group structure have on the actions that FFs take toward the civilian population? Chapter 1 details a novel dataset that was created, The Rebel Foreign Fighter Dataset. This dataset provides an expansion of the information on the number of FFs that are involved in 65 conflicts around the world (1985-2022) as well as providing a Centralization and Governance variable for the groups they join. Chapter 2 provides an analysis of the rebel governing structures that al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen implemented and how those structures impacted the actions that FFs took toward civilians. The analysis supports the proposed hypothesis that inclusive rebel governing structures provides an avenue for FFs and civilians to become integrated and decrease the amount of disembeddedness that is experienced by the FFs which decreases the amount of civilian victimization that is linked to FFs. Chapter 3 includes a case study of the evolution of Ansar al-Islam in Iraq. As the group evolved within the conflict, there was a degradation of the centralized structure that was originally present within the rebel group. The centralized structure allowed rebel group leaders to have more oversight of soldiers' actions and hold them accountable. The results support the hypothesis that a more centralized structure can decrease the amount of civilian victimization that is linked to FFs.

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INTRODUCTION

Daan grew up in a rough neighborhood but lived a very average life with his mother and brother. He was known as a "silent goody-goody" and spent most of his time inside reading and studying leading him to do quite well in school. Because of this, Daan was not close with many of his classmates who were busy outside playing or taking part in sports; things that did not interest Daan. At the age of sixteen, Daan's father became seriously ill and eventually died which took a large toll on the young man. Searching for meaning and direction in life, Daan was drawn to Islam after he befriended two Iraqi brothers who lived in his neighborhood. In order to cope with his loss and bring meaning to his life, Daan soon converted to Islam, and his family noticed immediate changes in his behavior such as calling many things in daily life *haram* and would not eat with his family during dinner because the food was not *halal*. Because of the tensions that rose with his ever-increasing radical behavior, Daan ran away from his home. His mother would come to find out that he had become of member of a radical Muslim group that had been ostracized from several of the local mosques because of their radical beliefs and condemnation of moderate Muslims. She discovered that he, along with other members of the group, had made the decision to travel to Syria to take up arms to defend Islam (Weggemans, Bakker, Grol 2014). This desire to fight for Islam is echoed by many fighters leaving to travel to Syria:

> *"We are motivated by our religion, by our Qur'an and Sunnah and we are not ashamed of that. We left the convenient world to establish Khilafah on the path of Prophethood…We are not motivated by politics, wealth, the love of this world. We are willing to die as shuhada in the path of Allah and that is to establish shariah in the land of the Khilafah." (Dawson 2017).*

Over the last several decades, hundreds of thousands of other individuals of varying ideologies and motivations have left the comfort of their homes to take part in a conflict that is not their

own. While the actions of these individuals likely fall on a spectrum, there is a strong consensus that foreign fighters tend to victimize the civilian population at a higher rate than local fighters. A majority of ~~the~~ foreigners lack an understanding of the local traditions, culture, language, and can even have differing, more radical motivations than the local fighters. For that reason, a stark in-group/out-group mentality is formed which leads to the "othering" of the local population, which, in turn, has been shown to increase the violence that is perpetrated against them. For example, the foreign fighters that joined Ansar al-Sunnah in Iraq had a massive impact on the local population. These foreigners brought with them previous tactical knowledge on how to implement suicide bombings to more effectively damage the target as well as implementing tactics such as beheading civilians and videotaping executions to disseminate. One such video documented the brutal beheading of one man followed by the subsequent execution of 11 other individuals. The members of the group had previously not been willing to conduct such extreme levels of violence against the civilian population, but with the addition of the foreign fighters, they now had the influence and the tactics to do so. The foreign fighter that joined al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen had the same effect on the rebel group. They were focused on conducting high-profile attacks which would garner international attention, a tactic which varied from the local fighters of AQAP, and resulted in massive civilian casualties. While there are a multitude of instances in which foreign fighters negatively influence the rebel group by targeting the civilian population, there are also instances in which the foreigners have no negative effect on the civilian population. For example, an estimated 800 foreign fighters traveled to join the Kurdish Protection Units and the Kurdish Women's Protection Units (YPG/YPJ) in northeast Syria (Schwartz 2023). While these groups contained a large number of foreign fighters within their ranks, little civilian violence was attributed to them (Corradi 2022). The literature assumes

that the mere presence of foreign fighters leads to an increase in civilian victimization and fails to explain why there is any variation in the amount of civilian victimization that is perpetrated. This variation in levels of violence stemming from foreign fighters and the lack of understanding of the factors that can influence their behavior is what is driving this dissertation. The question that this research is seeking to answer is: What impact does rebel group structure have on the actions that foreign fighters take toward the civilian population?

Foreign Fighters have been a reality in the world for many centuries, but what constitutes a foreign fighter is disagreed upon and various definitions are included within the literature. Cerwyn Moore and Paul Tumelty (2008) describe foreign fighters as "non-indigenous, non-territorialized combatants who, motivated by religion, kinship, and/or ideology rather than pecuniary reward, enter a conflict zone to participate in hostilities". Robert Pape and James K. Feldman (2010) describe FF as individuals who are traveling to partake in a conflict to support "kindred communities" in a country that is not their own. Hegghammer (2010) outlines a quite restrictive definition of foreign fighters as individuals who take part in an insurgency, lack citizenship in the state in which he or she is fighting, lack affiliation to an official military organization, and are not paid. Because of the impact that David Malet's Foreign Fighter Project has had on the field, this research implements the definition that is put forth by David Malet (2007) who describes foreign fighters as "non-citizens of conflict states who join insurgencies during civil conflicts". This definition is echoed by Ian Bryan (2010), "not agents of foreign governments, but they leave home typically to fight for a transnational cause or identity," as well as, Kristin Bakke (2010) who describes foreign fighters as "transnational insurgents in intrastate conflicts [to] refer to armed non-state actors who, for either ideational or material reasons, choose to fight in an intrastate conflict outside their own home country". Therefore, an individual

from a country other than the one in conflict who travels to take part in the conflict. This includes individuals who are ethnically, religiously, or ideologically tied to the group for which they are traveling to fight for. In saying that, the term "foreign fighter" is used to describe an individual that is traveling across borders to take part in a conflict in a country that is not their own. Regarding the age-old saying, "One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter" (one man's), this research is not meant to differentiate between the aspirations of these fighters or the moral standing that they have to take part in these conflicts. The term "foreign fighter" is used as a broad term to describe anyone who decides to make the journey to fight and no moral judgment is passed in classifying who is considered a foreign fighter.

While the number of foreign fighters can seem quite small compared to the size of some conventional militaries, increases in technological innovation and material ability (Silber 2007; Combs 2017; Torok 2010), dissemination of information and propaganda (Denning 2011; Mahmood 2013; Mueller 2018; Hughbank 2012; Vacca 2019), and ease of travel (Hegghammer 2013; Conway 2006) lead many to believe that these numbers will continue to increase (Hegghammer 2010). Despite foreign fighters appearing to be a small proportion of the total fighting force in some conflicts, there have been an estimated 600,000 foreign fighters that traveled to take part in around 65 different conflicts since 1985. With the massive global mobilization of over 20,000 foreign fighters traveling to Ukraine to fight in 2022, it is clear that this is far from a small occurrence.

There are several reasons why a rebel group may seek the recruitment of foreign fighters, but, put simply, foreign fighters can provide a boost to the material capabilities of the rebel group. While there are many reports of foreigners entering into the fray with little to no experience resulting in a negative impact on the group (Doctor 2020; Mendelsohn 2011), rebel

groups, in general, are more likely to be successful if there is the presence of foreign fighters (Malet 2010; Chu and Braithwaite 2017). For this reason, there are hundreds of documented rebel groups that have accepted foreign fighters into their ranks over the years. To these individuals, traveling to fight was not a question; it was an obligation. Ami Lokman Mohamed, a foreign fighter fighting in Iraq, stated "My life counts for nothing; my fate is that of Islam…Because we are God's soldiers" (Ansar al-Islam Member). But the foreign fighter phenomenon included various drivers and motivators, not just religion. Take Western foreigners fighting in Syria under the Bob Crow Brigade. This group included anarchists, socialists, and feminists whose main goal was to fight back against the fascist Islamic State. They included "assembly line workers, railway track-workers, farm laborers, classroom assistants, bike couriers, and the unemployed" who all felt the calling to fight against, what they viewed as, a noble cause. (Meet the Young). Another example is individuals traveling from Chad, Mali, and Sudan who joined the ranks of the Islamic State in the Second Libya War. These individuals were traveling not for a cause but because IS was offering up to $1000 payment to anyone who joined. In countries where individuals make around $1 a day, the opportunity to earn $1000 was well worth the risk of war.

Foreign fighters have become quite ubiquitous in modern-day conflict so it is no surprise that scholars have sought to understand the effect that these individuals can have on the conflicts that they join. One such effect that has gained a large amount of focus is the effect that foreign fighters have on the civilian population. Civilians, a population that already bears the brunt of much of the violence and destruction that comes in a conflict zone, have been shown to largely be the target of foreigners' violence. Whether this violence is stemming from the fact that more radical individuals are the ones deciding to travel to partake in a foreign conflict or the in-

group/out-group mentality is being seen to the fullest extent, the violence against civilians is great and solutions need to be sought after. To work towards ameliorating this pressing problem, scholars need to understand factors that can work to decrease the amount of civilian victimization that foreign fighters conduct.

This dissertation is seeking to understand what factors impact foreign fighter action, specifically foreign fighter action towards the civilian population. Prior to this research, there was consensus within the foreign fighter literature that there was a significant relationship between foreign fighters and civilian victimization. Following the inclusion of the data from the Rebel Foreign Fighter Dataset and the re-analysis of the work of Doctor (2021), it is clear that this relationship is not so black and white and there is likely nuance that needs to be explored. Because Chapter 1 shows that the main assumption of the foreign fighter literature needs further refinement, I sought to understand what factors could impact whether or not foreign fighters are going to victimize the civilian population and what is leading to the variation in victimization experienced. In order to accomplish this, the cases studies in Chapter 2 and 3 explore a nuanced relationship between rebel group structure and foreign fighter civilian victimization. I sought to use these two cases to showcase the logic behind my argument while also providing potential cases studies that can be implemented in a broader analysis in the future. My deep dive into these cases provides the historical and cultural depth to better understand the decisions and behaviors of foreign fighters which will help to develop a more complete theoretical model explaining foreign fighter behavior under different and unique rebel group contexts.

I argue that two aspects of rebel group structure, governance and centralization, can play a major role in dampening the effect that foreign fighters have on the civilian population. I argue that these structures cannot only place a check on the actions of the more radical foreign fighter

that seeks to commit violence on the civilian population but also can work to integrate the foreigner with the local population to reduce violence. Inclusive rebel governing structures decreases the amount of disembeddedness that foreign fighters experience by integrating the foreigners and the locals through state-building mechanisms, social service provisions, the adoption of local grievances into the rebel group agenda, and power-sharing mechanisms. Additionally, a centralized command structure provides the leadership with a clear chain of command and a judicial system for accountability as well as oversight of soldiers' actions and recruitment. These factors allow leaders to hold their soldiers more accountable and ensure that the foreign fighters are not conducting needless violence on the civilian population.

This work makes several contributions to the existing literature. First, to address the lack of data available on foreign fighters and rebel group structure, this dissertation presents the novel Rebel Foreign Fighter Dataset. This dataset expands the information available on foreign fighters, and where they reside, as well as provides a new ordinal coding mechanism. These aspects will have a great impact on not only the ability of scholars to study foreign fighters but also may challenge previous conclusions that were made about foreign fighters. Additionally, the dataset includes an expansion of the data available on both centralization and rebel governance. If future scholars hope to draw conclusions about the relationship between foreign fighters and rebel group structure, these new data are vital. Secondly, Chapter 2 explores the relationship between rebel governance and foreign fighter action toward the civilian population, a relationship that has not been previously analyzed. Not only does this provide a novel finding to the literature, but it also illuminates a valuable case study to lay the groundwork for future studies looking at this relationship. Lastly, Chapter 3 analyzes the relationship between centralization and foreign fighter action. While Doctor (2022) has attempted to explain this

relationship, this chapter's conclusion runs contrary to his findings. This in-depth case study calls into question the conclusions that have been drawn about the relationship and opens the door for future research looking into this.

Foreign Fighters and Civilian Victimization

Much of the research in the field has been focused on the foreign fighters themselves (Fritz 2020, Hegghammer 2011, Malet 2010), the recruitment tactics of the terrorist organizations (Klausen 2015, Nelson 2017, Holman 2016, Clifford 2018, Depuydt 2017), motivation for foreign fighter involvement (Dawson 2016, Muro 2016, Lindekilde 2016, Sarah Lyons-Padilla 2015, Van San 2015), and various studies on the effects of foreign fighters once they return home after participating in the conflict (Mendelsohn 2011, Reiff 2020, Malet 2020). But one of the most important questions that is being asked is: **what effect do they have in the conflict?** While civil conflicts that include foreign fighters tend to escalate to a higher level of violence, their addition has been shown to lead to a higher likelihood of success for the rebel group (Malet 2010; Chu and Braithwaite 2017). This can stem from the direct material support that they can provide or because of the new skills that they bring along with resources (Malet 2010, Bakke 2014). For these reasons, adopting a tactic that includes foreign fighters is seen as a realistic path forward for rebel groups to continue their fight against their enemy.

In contrast, studies have found that foreign fighters can have an impact on the level of group cohesion that is experienced within the conflict. When foreign fighters become embedded in a rebel group, their views will likely differ to some extent from the members. For that reason, Seymour, Bakke, and Cunningham (2015) found that the presence of foreign fighters led to a higher propensity for rebel fractionalization. This finding was echoed in Rich and Conduit's

(2018) analysis of the foreign fighters that resided within the Chechen and Syrian conflicts. They find that foreign fighters can boost the ranks of the rebel group and provide material support, but they also become a liability to the group. After the arrival of foreign fighters, divisions within the Chechen resistance became apparent. This fracturing led to internal turmoil, which eventually led to Chechen-on-Chechen violence within the insurgency (Bakke 2014). Additionally, foreign fighters have been shown to influence rebel groups that may have not been religiously driven toward a more religious framing of the conflict (Rich 2018). This was experienced in the Bosnian war when the rebels were largely seeing the focus of the war through a secular lens, but the inclusion of Islamist foreign fighters led to the radicalization of some of the rebels. In addition, the intense fervor that the foreign fighters can bring to the battlefield and the tactics that they implement have been shown to affect the public perception of them. In civil conflicts such as the Bosnian Civil War, foreign fighters were responsible for the killing of UN aid workers that were in the country to help, which resulted in aid being cut off from the country (Beelman 1994). This provides a strategic advantage to the government because the government can begin to paint a negative narrative about the rebels being terrorists, allowing for negotiations to be denied, legitimacy to be lost, and political power to be stripped from the rebels (Wilhelmsen 2005).

Not only can the foreign fighters be detrimental to the rebel group and the movement, but they can also have a disproportionate impact on the civilian population. As discussed above, rebel groups that are less dependent on the population are going to be more likely to victimize civilians. Therefore, if a rebel group's ranks are boosted by foreign fighters, civilian victimization is going to be seen as less costly (Conrad et. al. 2019). If the rebel group does not depend on the citizens for material support or resources, then they are not going to be focused on the civilians' safety to the extent that they previously would have (Conrad et. al. 2019; Doctor

and Willingham 2020). It has also been shown that if a rebel group is not dependent on the locals, then the leadership of the rebel group is going to be less likely to reprimand soldiers who commit violence against the civilian population (Humphreys and Weinstein 2006; Fortna and Rubin 2018). Rebel groups that share ethnicity and religion with the civilian population are less likely to commit violence against the citizens[20], but "foreign combatants may upset the balance of ethnic overlap between rebel groups and their civilian constituency" which could lead to higher levels of victimization (Moore 2019; Fjelde and Hultman 2014). In most situations, the foreigners who are arriving in the conflict zone have no prior knowledge of the language, values, culture, history, or traditions that are embedded within the society. This can lead to increases in violence stemming from the foreigners because "absence of cognitive access to local customs can provide incentives for brutal and indiscriminate behavior" (Schutte 2015). Civilian victimization can also be used as a tactic by the rebel group to increase internal cohesion. The lack of knowledge that foreign fighters have about the environment that they are now living in and, in many situations, a language barrier leads to internal tensions within the rebel group. In these situations, there have been accounts of rebel group leaders forcing soldiers to take part in sexual-related civilian victimization to increase group cohesion. This can be seen with Joseph Kony and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone. Both groups implemented a system of forced marriages and wartime sexual violence "designed to strengthen organizational cohesion" (Marks 2014).

The general consensus of the literature is that there is a significant positive relationship between foreign fighters and civilian victimization, but it fails to account for why there is variation in the amount of civilian victimization that is perpetrated. For example, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen has a constant number of foreign fighters that resided within the

group during the course of the conflict (2009-2016). From the conclusions that are drawn from the literature about foreign fighters, we would expect the amount of civilian victimization to remain relatively constant during this time, but this is not what is recorded. As AQAP evolved, the amount of civilian victimization connected to foreign fighters decreased. In addition to AQAP in Yemen, when analyzing Ansar al-Islam in Iraq, the same variation is present. Ansar al-Islam has a constant number of foreign fighters, but in the beginning, the civilian casualties attributed to the group were minimal. But as the conflict continued, the foreign fighters began directly targeting the civilian population and implementing extremely brutal tactics against them that had not been previously utilized. The literature, which assumes that the meer presence of foreign fighters is related to increases in civilian victimization, cannot explain why there is a decrease in the amount of civilian victimization stemming from AQAP in Yemen and an increase in CV stemming from Ansar al-Islam in Iraq even though the number of foreign fighters remained constant. While the literature has placed a significant emphasis on understanding the impact that foreign fighters have, the major problem that is experienced when attempting to understand the many aspects of foreign fighters is a lack of understanding of how the rebel group structure can influence the actions that foreign fighters take. More specifically, how varying structures can lead to differing amounts of civilian victimization from the foreign fighters that inhabit these rebel groups. I argue that the structure of the rebel group can play a major role in influencing the actions of foreign fighters and impacting how they interact with the civilian population.

Impact of Rebel Group Structure

The purpose of this dissertation is to understand the rebel group structural factors that lead to foreign fighters being able to commit violence against the civilian population. With the

literature's emphasis on the relationship between individual characteristics of foreign fighters and their actions, scholars have largely failed to address the impact that the rebel group characteristics can have on the actions of the foreign fighter. More specifically, the literature fails to provide an adequate explanation of how the structure of a rebel group can impact the actions that foreign fighters take toward the civilian population. To fill this gap in the literature, I will approach two aspects of rebel group structure, rebel governance, and centralization, to explain the relationship that exists between structure and FF action toward civilians.

Rebel Governance

The literature on rebel governance and its effect on civilian victimization is sparse and does not include many analyses that move to understand this relationship. The literature thus far has placed a focus on the types of rebel governing structures and the reason that rebel groups choose to implement such structures but lacks an understanding of the effect that rebel governance has on civilian victimization (Huang 2016, Cunningham 2021, Carnegie 2022). More specifically, the literature does not discuss the impact on civilian victimization that specific methods of rebel governance such as the establishment of courts, law and order, and power sharing, among others can have. These structures are important because they can increase the number of societal interactions that foreign fighters have with the local population. This research seeks to fill the gap in the literature, which fails to address the impact that rebel governance has on the actions of foreign fighters regarding the civilian population.

Moore (2019) was able to show that foreign fighters tend to commit higher levels of violence on the civilian population when they are less culturally and structurally embedded in the community. This disembeddedness can lead to an in-group/out-group mentality where the "mere awareness of the presence of an out-group is sufficient to provoke competitive or discriminatory

responses" (Chapman and Ademan 2011; Tafjel 1986). Based on the idea of embeddedness, I argue that inclusive governing structures can increase the amount of cultural and structural embeddedness that foreign fighters experience which will lead to a decrease in the amount of civilian violence. When these governing structures are implemented by the rebel group, foreign fighters, and the local population share power and interact within the organization which reduces the potential animosity that could be felt between the two groups. Not only has the previous literature on rebel governance not addressed the impact of governing structures on civilian victimization, but it additionally does not address the impact that rebel governance can have on the actions of foreign fighters.

Centralization

Within the literature, there is an agreement that the increased centralization of a rebel group leads to a decrease in civilian victimization because of the training and disciplines that are invoked by centralized rebel groups. This relationship exists because a centralized rebel group structure provides leaders oversight of operations and actions of members, which leads to an increase in accountability. For this reason, scholars argue that centralization leads to more disciplined rebel groups (Abdulkader 2008; Jones 2017). Heger, Jung, and Wong (2012) show that a more hierarchical structure provides "clear lines of command and control that coordinate the efforts of various parts of an organization". They argue that as centralization increases, accountability will also increase and form a tighter principal-agent relationship within the organization. For this reason, when leaders take a strong stance against civilian violence, members within a centralized rebel group are likely to follow command. In contrast, a rebel group that is more decentralized provides members an increased ability to work outside of the supervision of the leadership. When there is a less clear structure, "the opportunity for agents to slack, or less faithfully follow

through a leaders' directives, increase. There is, after all, no clear centralized punishment mechanism. This opens the door for more deviation" (Heger, Jung, Wong 2012). This impact of centralization is largely supported by scholars such as Macartan Humphreys & Jeremy Weinstein (2006) and Amelia Hoover Green (2018). An increase in fighters, in itself, provides more work to be done by the rebel leadership because they require training and supervision. When these fighters come from a different country which brings with it a different culture, language, beliefs, etc, this organizational stress is heightened which leads to an increase in the incentives to engage in civilian victimization.

Civilian victimization can be used for various reasons such as for bargaining, the acquisition of land, and shaping the behaviors of the population (Kalyvas 2006, Kydd and Walter 2006, Merom 2003, Vinci 2005, Henkriksen 1983). While this is the case, it is unclear whether the rebel groups 'want' to victimize the civilians. The rebel groups seem to take part in civilian victimization only when they see it as being able to produce positive returns (Arendt 1970). The rebel group will limit civilian victimization in situations in which this action does not provide a benefit (Siverson and Starr 1990). A high level of centralization in a rebel group can provide a rebel leader the power to dictate what actions the members of the group are taking against the civilian population because there is a tighter principal-agent relationship. I argue that rebel group centralization provides rebel leaders the ability to rein in the violent tendencies of foreign fighters against civilians when it is deemed detrimental to the group by increasing the ability of rebel groups to assimilate and adapt these fighters. This process is facilitated by centralization and will lead to a suppression of the expected civilian victimization stemming from foreign fighters. This process plays out with the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan in Syria, a group that was able to include and utilize many foreign fighters without devolving into mass civilian casualties.

Doctor (2020), the only scholar thus far to approach the relationship between foreign fighters and rebel organizational structure, deviates from the predominant understanding of centralization in his finding that foreign fighters have an impact on civilian targeting when they reside within a centralized command structure. He argues that because foreign fighters are likely to be over-zealous, opportunistic, and because they "may believe they are less likely to be held accountable for the violence", they are more likely to act outside of the command structure (Doctor 2020). Additionally, he argues that his result arises because foreign fighters are "reshaping rebel leaders' strategic assessment of the costs and benefits of employment abusive tactics" (Doctor 2020). Because foreign fighters lead to the rebel group being less dependent on the population, rebel leaders can utilize foreign fighters to strategically implement civilian victimization to "coerce their informational or material support, consolidate control of territory, punish communities that support competing armed parties, or to offset the costs of recent material or battlefield losses" (Doctor 2020).

Not only has the previous literature on rebel governance not addressed the impact of governing structures on civilian victimization, but it additionally does not address the impact that rebel governance can have on the actions of foreign fighters. The literature thus far assumes that the presence of foreign fighters leads to an increase in civilian victimization, but when I look at AQAP in Yemen, this explanation does not explain the variation in civilian victimization that is present. AQAP had a steady level of foreign fighters, but the amount of civilian victimization varied over the group's evolution. The analysis conducted in Chapter 2 seeks to answer this question by providing a unique insight into the relationship between rebel governing structures and foreign fighter action to fill this gap in the literature. Besides Doctor's conclusion on rebel group centralization that runs contrary to the current literature, there has been no further attempt

to understand the impact that centralization can have on the actions of foreign fighters. The purpose of Chapter 3 is to bridge the gap between rebel group centralization and foreign fighter literatures and work to fill this gap in understanding. Doctor conducts a large-N study, so I can't outright reject his argument but when I look at Ansar al-Islam and Ansar al-Sunnah in Iraq, I do not arrive at the conclusion that he does. I argue that this shows that the answer is likely more complex than what Doctor is showing in his study. In other words, the relationship between foreign fighters and civilian violence may be different depending on the structure of the organization.

This dissertation seeks to understand how rebel group structure can impact the actions that foreign fighters take toward the civilian population. This dissertation not only gives a detailed and nuanced look at the impact of rebel group centralization and rebel governance on foreign fighter action but also vastly increases the amount of data available on foreign fighters and the group structures that house them. First, this dissertation provides a novel dataset that includes information on foreign fighter numbers, location, and the presence of centralization and governance. This dataset is then paired with two unique in-depth case studies that exemplify the relationship between two aspects of rebel group structure, centralization, and governance. I conduct a qualitative case study on the evolution of Ansar al-Islam in Iraq and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen to provide a picture of the impact that structure can have. I have come to realize that rebel group structure plays an important role in moderating foreign fighter action towards civilians. In fact, we can't completely explain FF behavior without knowledge of the rebel group structure.

Methodology

In Chapter 1, I provide The Rebel Foreign Fighter Dataset which includes foreign fighter numbers for 65 different conflicts between the years 1985 and 2022. In contrast to previous data on foreign fighters, I place a focus on the "State vs. Group" level of analysis instead of "State vs. Opposition". For this reason, I can greatly increase the number of data points that can be analyzed, over a 500% increase from previous work. I gather data from academic, governmental, and news sources to provide the low, high, and best estimates of foreign fighters for the conflicts listed. I additionally implement a 0-8 ordinal code for the number of foreign fighters which had previously not been seen. Because the literature has had to lean on a dichotomous coding mechanism to simply mark the presence of foreign fighters, the ordinal code is not only useful but vital to truly understand the impact that foreign fighters have. The increased information about foreign fighters leads to more accurate coding of the foreign fighters which will then lead to more accurate conclusions to be drawn about the effect that foreign fighters have on civilian victimization. The ordinal code utilized by the dataset is then used to re-run Doctor (2021)'s study on the link between foreign fighters and civilian sexual victimization to showcase the dataset's usefulness. The dataset is vital to answering the question of why there is variation in civilian victimization from groups that are coded in the same way. If the literature is simply using a dichotomous coding mechanism where a rebel group with 10,000 foreign fighters is coded in the same way as a group with 10 foreign fighters, then it is no surprise that there are discrepancies. This updated ordinal code was used to select the case studies with similar amounts of foreign fighters in Chapters 1 and 2. Additionally, a "Centralization" and "Rebel Governance" variable is going to be implemented in the dataset. While K.E. Albert's Rebel Governance dataset does exist, it fails to include many of the rebel groups that include foreign fighters within

their ranks, and the RFFD increases the centralization coding for rebel groups that include foreign fighters by 2450%. This “centralization” categorization will be used and implemented in Chapter 1. The Rebel Quasi-State Institution Dataset includes 25 different variables describing types of rebel governance but, similarly, does not reference many of the rebel groups that include foreign fighters. Regarding these groups, the RFFD increases the data available by 700%. A more detailed understanding of foreign fighters' numbers via the novel ordinal code and coding for rebel group centralization and rebel governance will allow for more accurate conclusions to be drawn about the actual effects of foreign fighters.

In Chapter 2, I conduct a process tracing model on the evolution of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula through the War in Yemen. The key independent variable that is tested is the level of rebel governance that is created by AQAP from 2009-2016. Arjona, Kasfir, and Mampilly (2015), scholars at the forefront of this topic, defined rebel governance as “the organization of civilians within the rebel-held territory for a public purpose. These purposes include rebel encouragement of civilian participation, provision of civilian administration, or organization of civilians for significant material gain”. Important aspects that will be analyzed include State-building mechanisms, social service provisions, the inclusion of local grievances, and power-sharing/intermarriage. Because no research has been conducted on the effect of rebel governance on foreign fighter action, the definition implemented by Doctor (2020) in his analysis of the effect of centralization on foreign fighter action, “any event in which civilians are deliberately and directly targeted by non-state groups”, is used as a base, but this research will focus on instances of civilian casualties. This count will be gathered from academic and government sources and secondary sources from the NEXIS database. I plan to control for

various confounding variables such as time, political environment, territory, 3rd party intervention, 3rd party support, ideology, and leadership.

In Chapter 3, I conduct a process tracing model on the evolution of the rebel group Ansar al-Islam during the Iraqi War. As the conflict progressed, Ansar al-Islam transitioned into Ansar al-Sunna which resulted in a change to the organization of the rebel group. The key independent variable that I am focusing on is the level of centralization that the rebel group holds and the result that has on the likelihood that foreign fighters can influence the level of civilian victimization present. Centralization can be defined as "the extent to which a group's system of command is characterized by a clear hierarchical structure…decision-making is concentrated to the high echelons of the organization and positions of authority are strictly determined by placement in the chain of command" (Doctor 2020). The dependent variable that will be analyzed is civilian casualties. The methods that are implemented against civilians are also analyzed to conclude whether there is a change in tactics. I control for various confounding variables such as time, political environment, territory, 3rd party intervention, 3rd party support, and leadership. Because of Ansar al-Islam's unique transition, variables that otherwise would have been impossible to control such as ideology, leadership, and goals can now be controlled. This allows for more accurate targeting of the independent variable, rebel group centralization, and its impact on the relationship between foreign fighters and civilian victimization.

CHAPTER 1

THE REBEL FOREIGN FIGHTER DATASET

Abstract

This chapter introduces the Rebel Foreign Fighter Database (RFFD) which can be used to expand research on civil war and foreign fighters. First, it expands the previously reported data on the number of foreign fighters that have been and continue to be involved in conflicts across the globe. Second, this database disaggregates foreign fighters into the various rebel groups they belong to as opposed to simply categorizing them as residing within a rebel movement. Third, low, high, and best estimates of foreign fighters within rebel groups have been provided as well as providing a novel foreign fighter ordinal coding mechanism. Lastly, the RFFD provides centralization and rebel governance codings for the group in which foreign fighters reside. These additions allow for more accurate conclusions to be drawn on the effects of foreign fighters on specific groups as well as on the conflict in which they reside. Using the Rebel Foreign Fighter Database, the link between foreign fighter inclusion and civilian sexual violence discussed in Doctor's (2021) study will be re-examined. The new findings show that foreign fighter numbers below 1000 do not have a significant impact on moderate levels of civilian victimization perpetrated by a rebel group, and foreign fighter numbers below 100 do not have a significant impact on high levels of civilian victimization.

Introduction

Research into foreign fighters has increased drastically in the last decade following the tens of thousands of individuals that traveled to Syria and Iraq to take part in the conflicts. Studies have explored who is choosing to travel, why they radicalize, and the effects that they have when they arrive and when they return home. Researchers in this area have spent much time and effect to gain insight into the effects that foreign fighters have on their surroundings (Moore and Tumelty, 2008; Moore, 2019; Doctor, 2020). Nevertheless, the data for the inclusion of foreign fighters (FF) lacks detail and depth. Many studies have emphasized the importance of understanding the results of FF inclusion (Bakker, 2013; Lindekilde, 2016; Chu and Braithwaite, 2017), but little has been done to fill the gap in knowledge that comes with describing the number of FF in various conflicts. While some studies such as Hegghammer (2010) have provided data on the number of Islamic FFs in civil conflicts, the Foreign Fighter Project (FFP), created by David

Malet, has been at the forefront of FF research. While being the primary resource for many studies in the field, an expansion of the data on the number of FFs as well as information on the groups in which they reside would provide a vital addition to the literature.

The subject of the Rebel Foreign Fighter Dataset (RFFD) addresses many of the current limitations in the data concerning FFs. The RFFD identifies conflicts and the rebel group involved that includes FFs within its ranks between 1985 - 2022. The RFFD provides over a 500% increase in dyads that include FFs. This not only provides an enormous increase in information that can be used to understand the presence and prominence of FFs, but it also allows for the effects of FFs on the rebel group and conflict to be more accurately analyzed. Additionally, the RFFD provides novel information on the rebel groups that host these foreign fighters including the presence of centralization and rebel governance. These variables can help to understand the relationship that exists between rebel group structure and foreign fighters. The new information will provide scholars that seek to understand civil war, civilian victimization, and rebel group violence the ability to arrive at more accurate conclusions on the effect of FFs. In the following sections, the RFFD will be described and compared to the FFP, highlighting the expansion of the data available, details provided, and variables offered along with the previous limitations. Lastly, the RFFD will be used to re-examine Doctor's (2021) study on the impact that FFs have on sexual violence. Doctor (2021) found that the mere presence of FFs has a significant effect on sexual victimization. Using the RFFD, the results vary from Doctor (2021) in that they show that there is a threshold that FFs have to pass in order for their effects to be significant. The rebel group must exceed 1,000 FFs before there is a significant effect on "some" level of sexual violence and 100 FFs for there to be a significant effect on "high" levels of sexual violence.

Defining Foreign Fighters and Rebel Group Structure

The RFFD compiles data concerning FFs in civil conflicts during the period of 1985 – 2022 because an emphasis was placed on civil conflicts that occurred post-Cold War. While some of the conflicts included did start prior to the end of the Cold War, they continued after the fall of the Soviet Union, and FFs were reported to have joined these conflicts after 1991. For that reason, they are included in the dataset. This period includes 65 civil conflicts with 282 groups documented as having FFs. While a vast majority of the conflicts that are documented in the dataset are categorized as civil wars, there are instances of uprisings and civil unrest where FFs were active. For example, the Slovak National Uprising in 2000, the Equatorial Guinea Coup in 2018, and unrest in Kazakhstan in 2022 all recorded the presence of FFs. These cases are included within the dataset because these data are an attempt to document all instances of FFs, not simply FFs in official civil wars. This dataset does not include FFs involved in interstate war. The term "Foreign Fighter" is a debated term, and many scholars disagree on what constitutes a FF with Malet saying that many scholars have an "I know it when I see it" mentality (Malet 2010). Cerwyn Moore and Paul Tumelty (2008) describe FFs as "non-indigenous, non-territorialized combatants who, motivated by religion, kinship, and/or ideology rather than pecuniary reward, enter a conflict zone to participate in hostilities". Robert Paper and James K. Feldman (2010) describe FFs as individuals who are traveling to partake in a conflict to support "kindred communities" in a country that is not their own. Hegghammer (2010) outlines a restrictive definition of FFs as individuals who take part in an insurgency, lack citizenship in the state in which he or she is fighting, lack affiliation to an official military organization, and is not paid.

Because of David Malet's work on the FFP, the RFFD implements the definition that is put forth by David Malet (2015) which describes FFs as "non-citizens of conflict states who join insurgencies during civil conflicts." This definition is echoed by Ian Bryan (2010), "not agents of foreign governments, but they leave home typically to fight for a transnational cause or identity", as well as Kristin Bakke (2010) who describes FFs as "transnational insurgents in intrastate conflicts [to] refer to armed non-state actors who, for either ideational or material reasons, choose to fight in an intrastate conflict outside their own home country". This includes individuals who are ethnically, religiously, or ideologically tied to the group for which they are traveling to fight for such as Islamist individuals who traveled to Iraq to join Al-Qaeda all the way to individuals traveling to join the Trotskyist Leon Desov Brigade in Syria to fight for their anarchist, anti-fascist ideology. From this definition, individuals who are motivated by material gains are similarly categorized as FFs. While this does include organizations such as the Russian Wagner Group, it also includes many ideological groups that motivate foreigners with a stipend. Utilizing Hegghammer (2010), individuals who are part of an organized, intervening, third-party country, are not considered FFs. For example, France deployed French troops to Cote D'Ivoire to help settle the violence that was occurring. These individuals would not be considered FFs under the definition utilized by the RFFD.

For an individual to be listed as taking part in the conflict, they had to have been active within the conflict zone as opposed to simply providing monetary support from abroad or actively supporting the cause via social media. Additionally, the RFFD includes FFs that did not adopt a specific name but were traveling and interacting together within the conflict. This can include groups such as Darfur Rebels, Somali Fighters, and Russian Cossacks, among several others. These unofficial groups were included because 1.) they took part in the conflict that was

occurring and, more importantly, 2.) they adopted FFs into their ranks. Additionally, there is no minimum or maximum member number necessary to be included as a group within the dataset if FFs resided within the ranks. This is an important note when it comes to groups such as the Revolutionary Union for International Solidarity in Syria which included, at most, only a couple dozen members and around five FFs.

Regarding rebel group structure, two variables are analyzed: centralization and rebel governance. Rebel group centralization is defined as "the extent to which a group's system of command is characterized by a clear hierarchical structure…decision-making is concentrated to the high echelons of the organization and positions of authority are strictly determined by placement in the chain of command" (Doctor 2020). Centralization could include various aspects such as a clear chain of command, the presence of a judicial system for accountability, oversight of soldiers' actions, and oversight in the recruitment process. These were the aspects that were used to determine whether a group was deemed centralized or not. A centralized rebel group is coded as "1" and a non-centralized group is coded as "0". Additionally, a group was coded as having no centralized command if they were simply identified broadly as insurgents such as "Kasmiri Insurgents" or "Afghan Mujahideen" (Gleditsch, Cunningham, and Salehyan 2013). Rebel governance is defined as "the organization of civilians within the rebel-held territory for a public purpose. These purposes include rebel encouragement of civilian participation, provision of civilian administration, or organization of civilians for significant material gain" (Arjona, Kasfir, and Mampilly 2015). When coding rebel groups, variables such as state-building mechanisms, power-sharing, social service provision, and adoption of local grievances were focused on. A rebel group that had the presence of a rebel governance system is coded as "1" and a group without such governance is coded as "0"

Existing Data on Foreign Fighters and Rebel Group Structure

Thus far, there are two main sources of FF data: Hegghammer (2010) and David Malet's (2010) FFP. Hegghammer (2010) lists 18 conflicts that resulted in the mass mobilization of Islamic FFs (1967 - 2007). This data includes conflict variables such as entry date, number of FFs, and confirmed nationalities. While Hegghammer does include ranges of FFs present, there are two major limitations. First and foremost, the dataset is centered on Islamic FFs only. While this brand of fighter tends to gain more notoriety, there are many instances of non-religious or non-Islamic FFs. Secondly, the sample size is extremely small. Because the dataset only focuses on one brand of FF, it includes only 8 conflicts following the Cold War. For both reasons listed above, the Hegghammer Foreign Fighter Data can be expanded to include more conflicts that include FFs that don't identify as Muslim.

The FFP focuses on FFs in 93 civil conflicts, their location, and various details about them such as their type and their location relative to the conflict conflicts between the years 1821 – 2014. While the dataset does include a variable for the number of FFs present in the conflict, only 30 of the conflicts included details on the number of FFs involved. Furthermore, the numbers can be vague such as "several" or "100s" of FFs involved. In the conflicts following the end of the Cold War, only 23% of the conflicts include the number of FFs involved. When compared to the FFP, the RFFD (1985-2022) increases the number of conflicts included in David Malet's dataset by 44% and increase the number of dyads analyzed by 526.7%. Additionally, instead of analyzing the conflict from the perspective of "state vs. opposition," the RFFD analyzes the "state vs. Group" relationship. Lastly, the RFFD provides both the low/high/best estimates for the number of FFs with a group as well as providing an updated ordinal coding mechanism.

The Non-State Actor Dataset is the only current dataset that includes data on many aspects of rebel groups including the presence of centralization (Gleditsch, Cunningham, and Salehyan 2013). The dataset looks at armed conflicts during the years 1945-2011 and includes 271 rebel groups from around the globe. While this list is quite extensive and provides invaluable insight into various aspects of rebel groups within civil wars, it fails to include a centralization coding for most of the rebel groups that included foreign fighters. The NSA Dataset only includes centralization data for 2.87% of the groups that are included in the RFFD. The Rebel Quasi-State Institutions Dataset includes a plethora of information on the various state-like governing institutions that rebel groups implemented from 1945 to 2012 (Albert 2022). The dataset looks at 235 different rebel groups with 25 different institutions, such as establishing a currency, a constitution, a tax system, a judicial system, etc. While the Rebel Quasi-State Institutions Dataset provides some more information than the NSA Dataset in regard to groups that include foreign fighters, it still only includes rebel governance information on 8.96% of the groups that are included in the RFFD.

The Rebel Foreign Fighter Dataset

The RFFD details the prevalence of FFs following the Cold War, a time that has shown a steady increase in FFs involved in conflicts around the world (Figure III). Throughout the decades, technological advancements have led to an increase in the dissemination of information and terrorist propaganda (Denning, 2011; Hughbank, 2012; Mahmood, 2013; Mueller, 2018; Vacca, 2019), ease of travel to participate (Hegghammer 2013; Conway 2006), and material ability to conduct attacks (Silber, 2007; Torok, 2010; Combs, 2017). Because of this, FFs have become a

more vital element in many recent conflicts such as Syria, Afghanistan, and Ukraine. This trend is apparent when seeing the notable rise in FFs starting in 2011 and moving forward.

To analyze FFs, the RFFD provides an increase in the number of conflicts that are analyzed following the Cold War, as detailed in Table 1. The RFFD increases the conflicts within the dates used for the FFP such as the Croat-Bosniac War (1992), the Civil Conflict in the Philippines (2000), and the 2014 Gaza War. Additionally, it increases the time frame from 2014 to 2022 and includes conflicts such as Philippine Government v. Communist (2019), the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (2020), and Mozambique v. Ansar al-Sunna wa Jumma (2021), among several others. Because FFs have only recently come into the academic sphere, the more conflicts that researchers must analyze their effects, the better. Additionally, the RFFD expands the amount of information provided on the number of FFs that travel to their conflict areas. Of the 45 conflict dyads outlined following the cold war, Malet (2016) includes FF numbers for 10 of them (23%). The RFFD includes 65 conflicts following the cold war and reports FF numbers for 59 of them (91%). Not only has the data available on the FFs involved in each conflict increased but as discussed above, the number of conflicts listed that included FFs.

Second, the RFFD provides a more nuanced view of what groups the FFs join. Previously, the FFP approached the inclusion of FFs from the dyadic point of view of the state versus rebels. This can be sufficient in instances in which the state is fighting a singular rebel group, but it tends to be the case that a multitude of rebel groups are interacting within a civil war. By attributing FFs to the broad rebel movement, Malet's assigned values hide useful information on all these rebel groups. In the "Syria vs. Rebels" dyad, Malet attributes 35,000 FFs to the rebel movement but does include information about the distribution of foreigners. In some

of the conflicts, the FFP does provide a list of rebel groups that the FFs have been recorded to have joined, but it does not provide detail about how many reside in each. In such conflict, a multitude of rebel groups takes on varying numbers of FFs among their ranks. Under the previous description, scholars are unable to understand how the inclusion of FFs affects the individual rebel groups within the civil war. Following the disaggregation of the rebel movement into individual rebel groups, this data set includes 282 "Government" vs. "Group" dyads. That represents a 526.7% increase in the dyads available to analyze. Instead of "Syria vs. Rebels" having 35,000 FFs, "Syria vs. Jabhat al-Nusra" has 1,500 FFs, "Syria vs. Jaysh al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar" has 1,000 FFs, and so on. Table II provides an example of the differing reporting from Hegghammer, Malet, and the RFFD for the conflict in Iraq (2003-). Hegghammer estimates the number of FFs in Iraq (2003 -) to have been between 200-400 and Malet estimates the number of FFs, labeled "Islamists", to be around 5000. In contrast, RFFD provides 10 different groups that include FFs while also providing a more nuanced view of where the FFs reside and to what extent.

Third, the coding mechanism utilized by the RFFD expands on the FFP. Not only are the number of FFs collected for a vast majority of the conflicts listed, but the low, high, and best estimates are also documented for the foreign insurgents. For example, instead of the FFP conflict "Somalia" which included 1500 FF, the RFFD conflict "Somalia v. Al-Shabaab" includes Low Estimate: 300, High Estimate: 2000, and Best Estimate: 1500 and "Somalia v. Al-Qaeda" with Low Estimate: 20, High Estimate: 300, and Best Estimate: 160. Secondly, regarding coding, an 8-point ordinal code was implemented into the dataset seen in Table III. Because of several instances of very low levels of FFs (diaspora Armenians in Azerbaijan 1991, Americans in Libya 2011, and Leon Desov Brigade in Syria 2011), the ordinal coding will begin from 1-10.

Table 1: Foreign Fighter Dataset Comparison

	Malet (2007)	Hegghammer (2010)	RFFD
Time Period	1821-2014	1967-2007	1985-2022
Conflicts Included	45	18	**65 (+44%)**
Unit of Analysis	State v. Opposition	State v. Opposition	State v. Group
Dyads Provided	45	18	**259 (+526.7%)**
FF # Coding	No	No	**Yes**
FF Details	Focus on Islamic Foreign Fighters	Limited Information on Foreign Fighter Numbers	Extensive Information on Foreign Fighter Numbers **(Low/High/Best Estimate)**
Centralization Variable	No	No	**Yes**
Governance Variable	No	No	**Yes**

Table 2: Foreign Fighter Datasets: Iraq Comparison

	Malet	Hegghammer	RFFD
FF Number	Iraq (2003 -	Iraq (2003 -	Iraq (2003 -
	Islamists - 5000	200-400	Al-Qaeda - 700
			Lebanese Baath Party - 250
			Ansar al-Islam - 150
			Islamic Jihad -
			Iraq (2014 -
			Kata'ib al-Imam Ali - 8000
			Kata'ib Sayid al-Shuhada - 7500
			Kata'ib Jund al-Imam - 5000
			Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada - 3000
			Saraya Talia al-Khurasani - 3000
			Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba - 1500

While the FFP did not implement a coding mechanism, the scholars that have implemented the data from the FFP have been forced to implement a dichotomous code to mark the presence or absence of FFs (Moore 2019; Doctor 2020, 2021; Raagart 2021). Malet (2015) does provide additional FF number ranges for several conflicts following the Cold War but does not provide a coding method for this data. Using the previous dichotomous variable, a rebel group with thousands of FFs is going to be coded the same as a rebel group with fifty FFs. A detailed comparison of the RFFD, FFP, and Hegghammer Dataset is included in the appendix.

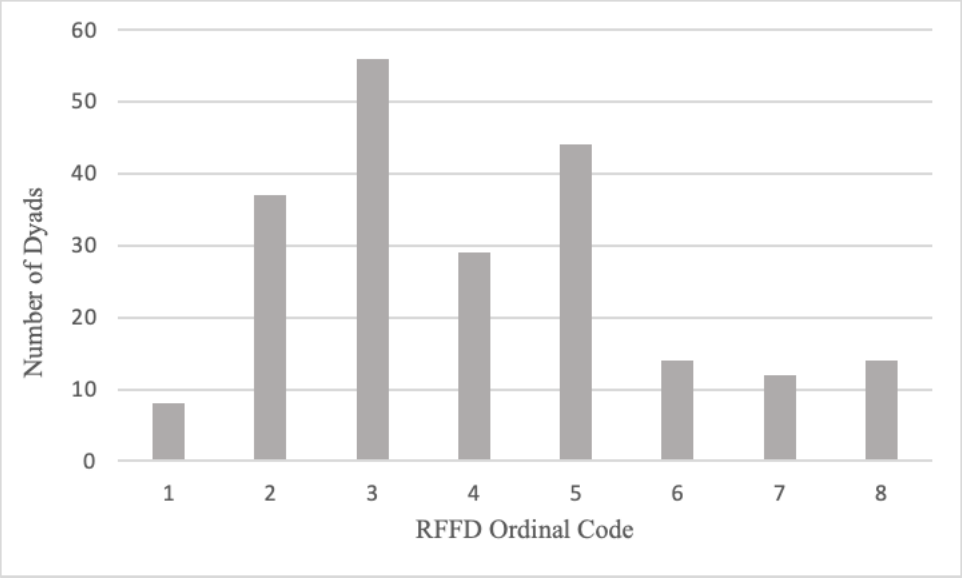
Lastly, the dataset makes additions to the data that have been collected on rebel group structure, specifically regarding the centralization and presence of rebel governance in rebel groups that include foreign fighters. For rebel groups that include foreign fighters, the RFFD provides a 2450% increase in the amount of data available for the centralization of rebel groups and a 700% increase available for the presence of rebel governance. The NSA describes many of the largest rebel groups that play a role in the conflict and forgo an analysis of some of the smaller groups or unaffiliated fighters. The Quasi-State Institution Dataset additionally falls into this category of placing an emphasis on the largest or most influential rebel groups in the conflict. This issue in both datasets results in the fact that they relied on the UCDP dataset which provides immense information on rebel groups but does not address smaller less well-known groups. In contrast, the RFFD acquired the list of rebel groups after determining which groups had the presence of foreign fighters not by size, influence, or prominence. Because of this, the RFFD includes many groups that are not included in either dataset.

For the period from 1989 - 2022, the RFFD describes 65 conflicts across 44 countries. There is not a single year since the start that does not include a civil conflict in at least one country. The most FF activity occurred in Africa (38.5% of cases, n= 25 observations), followed

Table 3: Rebel Foreign Fighter Dataset Ordinal Coding

ORDINAL VARIABLE	FOREIGN FIGHTER NUMBER
0	0
1	1-10
2	11-100
3	101-500
4	501 – 1,000
5	1,001 – 3,000
6	3,001 – 5,000
7	5,001 – 10,000
8	10,000+

Figure 1: RFFD Ordinal Coding to Number of Dyads



by Asia (26.2%, n = 17), Europe (16.9%, n = 11), the Middle East (15.4%, n = 10), and South / Central America (3.1%, n = 2). This distribution can be seen in Figure II which includes the total sum of the "best estimate" of FFs in each region. Within the RFFD, 4.1% of the groups included 1-10, 17.95% included 11-100 FFs, 28.72% included 101-500, 14.36% included 501-1000, 20.51% included 1001-3000, 5.12% included 3001-5000, and 4.62% included 5,001-10,000 and 10,000+.

Data Collection

In identifying the presence of FFs and the group structure, the RFFD relies on academic and governmental sources along with compiled secondary information from the NEXIS database. Key search words such as "foreign fighter", "foreign insurgent", and "foreign jihadists" were used to find the number and "structure", "leadership" and "governance" along with location and group name to narrow down sources available for use. Each source was analyzed for relevant information, and if beneficial to the database, recorded alongside the FF number documented from the source. Once the sources were collected, low, high, and best estimates of FFs were calculated for each rebel group. It is worth noting that there were rebel groups which only one source was able to be discovered. In those situations, the FF number was used as both the "high estimate" and the "best estimate".

Drawing solely from secondary news sources was not sufficient to document the "best" estimate of FF because of potential bias and misinformation. Newspapers can, at times, selectively edit and censor the information disseminated which can leave the information reported less than trustworthy. The RFFD sought to reduce bias by corroborating secondary sources with academic or governmental documents. These included many academic sources from scholars writing about specific conflicts such as *Child Soldiers in the East of the Democratic*

Republic of the Congo (Rakisits, 2008) to academics exploring the inner workings of a rebel group such as *Arming the Revolutionary United Front* (Berman 2001). These articles along with UN documents on specific rebel groups and information from research institutes such as the Center for Strategic and International Studies, The Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, Human Rights Watch, The Washington Institute, as well as the Mackinzie Institute were used.

While an emphasis on primary sources allowed for some of the information to be corroborated, the reliability of news sources can continue to be an issue. For that reason, when calculating the "Best Estimate" of FF, documents from academics, governments, or research institutes were placed at the forefront. Whenever possible, these sources were used to boost the reliability of the number being reported.For example, when documenting the number of FFs in the El Mujahed Unit within the Bosnian Army, a news source reported that there were 800 FFs within the group. Upon further research, two separate academic sources refuted this claim in that there were around 3000 FF within the group (Zosak, 2010; Mustapha, 2013). With that being said, there are several conflicts, such as Zaire and the Philippines, and rebel groups, Abu Sayyef or the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, that offered up little to no information about its members let alone if foreigners reside among the ranks. In situations such as this, secondary sources were accepted to be used to create the ordinal code.

To increase the transparency of the foreign fighter data provided, a reliability variable was inserted into the dataset. When calculating the best estimate of FF available, an estimate will receive a reliability score of 4 if the number is reported by an academic, government, or institutional report and is corroborated by a second document. An estimate will receive a score of 3 if the number is reported by an academic, government, or institutional report but does not have a secondary document corroborating it. If a "best average" is found by using the average of two

academic, government, or institutional reports, it will receive a 3. An estimate will receive a reliability score of 2 if the number is reported by a secondary news source and is corroborated by a secondary news source. Additionally, an estimate will receive a reliability score of 2 if the "best estimate" is gathered by averaging the high and low estimate that is provided by secondary sources. An estimate will receive a reliability score of 1 if the number is reported by a secondary news source but is not corroborated by a second news source. Because of the low reliability of some of the estimates that were supported by only one secondary source and included an extremely low number of FFs, a threshold for the ordinal code was implemented. For the groups that fall within the "1" range for both the ordinal and reliability coding, the estimate of FFs was documented, but no ordinal code was officially assigned to them.

Application of the Dataset

To demonstrate how the RFFD can be useful when analyzing FFs, this section will re-analyze a previous study with the new data provided. There are several studies utilizing Malet's data with Doctor (2021) being one of the most recent that utilized the FFP Dataset. Doctor's investigates whether FFs have an influence on the amount of sexual victimization that is perpetrated on the civilian population. In his work, Doctor uses a sample of 143 rebel groups that are active from 1989 - 2011 which is then followed by a case study of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant.

The literature surrounding the effects of FFs argues that not only do they typically lack preparedness for combat, language skills, or real conflict experience (Mendelsohn, 2011; Moore, 2019), but FFs can also become problematic to the rebel group that they join such as creating division amongst the group (Watts, 2016), increasing dissatisfaction from the native

Figure 2: Foreign Fighter Per Region

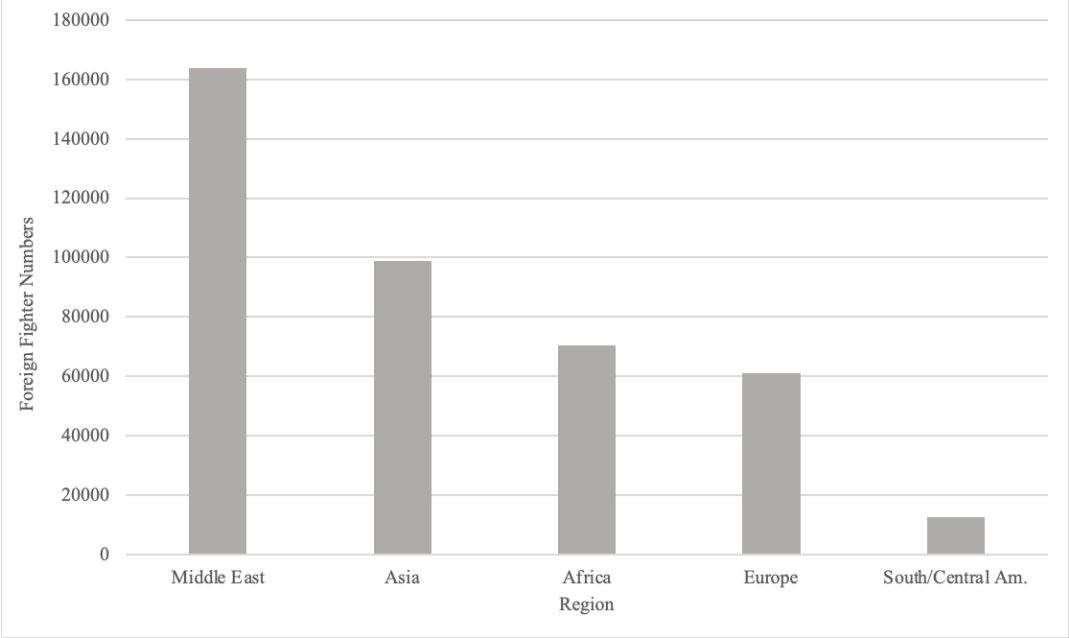
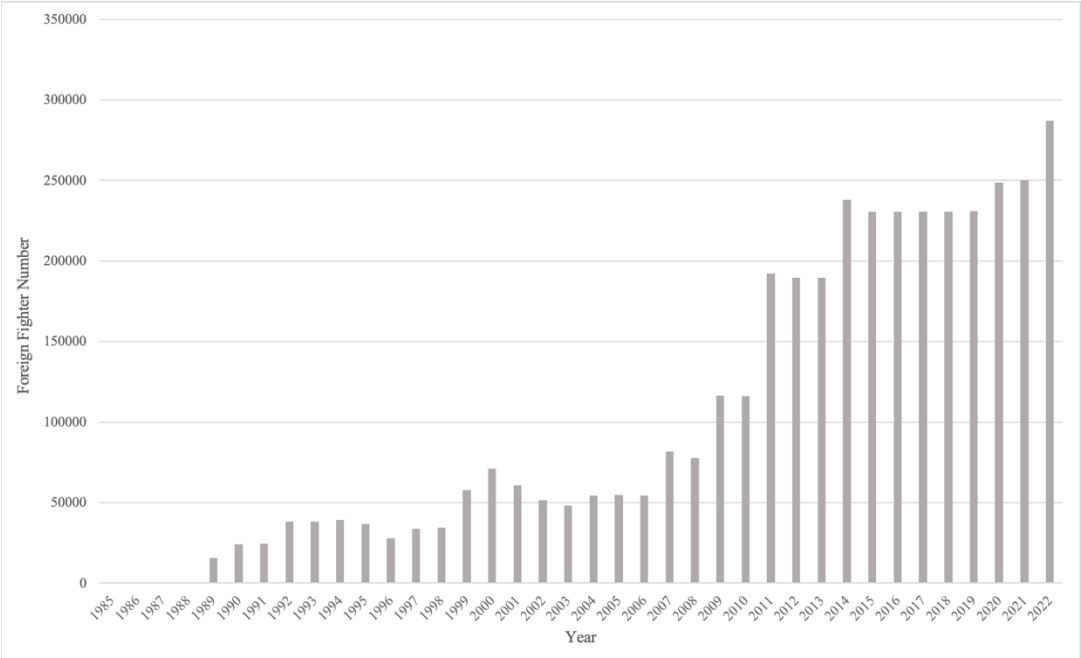


Figure 3: Foreign Fighter Number (1985-2022)



population (Bakke, 2014), and lead to increases in counterterrorism measures (Bacon and Muibu, 2019). For that reason, Doctor argues that the implementation of sexual violence "offers a means by which rebel commanders can limit the divisive challenges that FFs pose to the internal cohesion of their organization" (Doctor, 2021). Doctor also explains that it may be that rebel leaders are more willing to accept the violence against civilians because of the material support that the FFs provide to the group. Doctor utilized the FFP in his quantitative analysis of FFs and, because of the limitations of the previous data, is forced to implement a dichotomous variable to represent the presence of FFs. As discussed previously, the inherent issue is that a dichotomous coding of FFs fails to capture the wide variance in the number that is present among those groups that include FFs. For example, Ansar al-Islam and Croatian Irregulars are both coded as a 1 in Doctor's analysis, but Ansar al-Islam included only 150 FFs while the Croatian Irregulars were home to around 4000.

To recalculate Doctor's models, his exact method is duplicated while inserting a new "FFOrdinal" independent variable. The findings differ significantly from the results that were produced by Doctor's analysis using Malet's data. Doctor finds that the inclusion of FFs within the ranks of the rebel group has a significant impact on the rebel group conducting "some" (95% confidence) and "high" (99% confidence) levels of sexual victimization. "Some" sexual violence is defined as ranging from some sexual violence reported to widespread sexual violence reports. "High" sexual violence is defined as "massive/systematic" sexual violence. These categorizations were gathered from the Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict (SVAC) Dataset (Cohen and Nordås, 2014).

Utilizing the ordinal code put forth by the RFFD, I find that the inclusion of 11-100 FFs in a rebel group (ordinal code 2) has no significant relation to the amount of sexual violence that

a group perpetrates. I find that when there are 101-500 FFs (ordinal code 3) among the ranks of a rebel group, the rebel group has a .07 increased probability of committing “high” levels of sexual violence. But FFs at this level provide no significant impact on the rebel group committing “some” levels of sexual violence. Similarly, I find that when there are 501-1000 FFs (ordinal code 4) among the ranks of a rebel group, the rebel group has a .05 increased probability of coming “high” levels of sexual violence. Again, FFs at this level provide no significant impact on the rebel group committing “some” levels of sexual violence. Lastly, I find that when there are 1001-3000 FFs (ordinal code 5) among the ranks of a rebel group, the rebel group has a .27 increased probability of committing “some” sexual violence and a .32 increased probability of coming “high” levels of sexual violence. In order to ensure that the same analysis that was conducted previously, the rebel groups that were analyzed in Doctor (2021) were used which did not include any groups that were coded as a 7 and 8. Additionally, because of a lack of availability of information that was available for some of the variables that Doctor included, the groups that were coded 6 were not able to be used in the statistical analysis. These results can be seen in Table IV. To test whether my results are sensitive to changing ordinal coding sets, I re-ran the analysis while including 13 ordinal categories as opposed to 8. The results showed that, even with more coding sets, the effects of FFs on civilian sexual victimization did not begin to become significant until the FF number reached 500-1000 which mirrors the results of the original ordinal coding set.

Conclusion

This article introduced the Rebel Foreign Fighter Dataset (RFFD), its purpose, and the data that it provides. Following the description of the RFFD, Doctor's analysis of FFs and sexual violence (2021) was conducted to demonstrate the contribution of the new data. The results exemplify the

Table 4: RFFD Application of Data

DOCTOR (2021) PREDICTED PROBABILITY

	Dy/dx	Std. Err.	z	P>|z|	95% Conf.	Interval
0.FOREIGN_F	Base Outcome					
1.FOREIGN_F _PREDICT						
1	-.0865444	.03245	-2.67	0.008	-.1501452	-.0229435
2	.0410965	.0191289	2.15	0.032	.0036046	.0785884
3	.0454479	.016372	2.78	0.006	.0133593	.0775364

RFFD PREDICTED PROBABILITY

	Dy/dx	Std. Err.	z	P>|z|	95% Conf.	Interval
0.FOREIGN_F	Base Outcome					
2. FOREIGN_F _PREDICT						
1	.00309329	.0604145	0.51	0.609	-.0874773	.1493432
2	-.018955	.0406914	-0.47	0.641	-.0987087	.0607988
3	-.0119779	.0202414	-0.59	0.554	-.0516504	.0276945
3. FOREIGN_F _PREDICT						
1	-.1373699	.0554744	-2.48	0.013	-.2460978	-.0286419
2	.0641736	.0345467	1.86	0.063	-.0035367	.1318838
3	.0731963	.024603	2.98	0.003	.0249753	.1214173
4. FOREIGN_F _PREDICT						
1	-.0973465	.0499692	-1.95	0.05	-.1952843	.0005914
2	.0457062	.0293581	1.56	0.12	-.0118346	.103247
3	.0516403	.0234995	2.20	0.028	.0055821	.0976984
5. FOREIGN_F _PREDICT						
1	-.5942217	.1118301	-5.31	0.000	-.8134046	-.3750388
2	.2720095	.0561773	4.84	0.000	.161904	.382115
3	.3222122	.1249559	2.58	0.01	.077303	.5671213

contribution that the dataset has to the field of FFs as well as providing several paths to move forward.

First, the data increases the amount of information available regarding FFs in several ways. It increases the number of conflicts included and the number of conflicts that include information on FFs. It provides a 44.44% increase in the number of civil conflicts (45 to 65) and a 68% increase in the conflicts that include information on the number of FFs involved. Additionally, because of the disaggregation of FFs into specific rebel groups, the dataset provides a 526.7% increase in specific dyads that include FFs that can be analyzed. Lastly, it provides updated coding mechanisms for FFs. The RFFD includes a "high", "low", and "best" estimate for the number of FFs include along with an ordinal coding mechanism for the "best" estimate. The data allows for the updating of several findings regarding FFs and their effects. Although FFs undoubtedly do have some effect on the conflicts they inhabit, the results show that the relationship is not quite so clear. These results lend themselves to the conclusion that there is a threshold that FFs must reach before they will have a significant impact on the amount of sexual violence perpetrated. For that reason, having a more accurate count of where and to what extent FFs reside is vital to predicting and alleviating where civilian victimization occurs.

Secondly, the data allows for the research on FFs to be expanded and refined. Other scholars researching FFs and their effects have implemented David Malet's FFP (Peeters, 2014; Raagart, 2021). As was seen with the revision of Doctor (2021), the RFFD has the potential to have an impact on many of the conclusions that were drawn using the previous data. While the RFFD provides new results to the field, it also provides several questions around FFs. Why do some conflicts include extremely high levels of FFs but extremely low levels of sexual violence?

Vice versa, why do some conflicts include extremely low levels of FFs but extremely high levels of sexual violence? Does the ideology of the specific FF matter as opposed to that of the group? How does international law deal with the fact that FFs may have little to no effect on individuals outside of those fighting in some circumstances?

Thirdly, the RFFD provides an increase in data which can be beneficial to further understand the relationship between foreign fighters and rebel group structure. The previous data that was available regarding centralization and rebel governance, while extensive, did not include information on a vast majority of the groups that included foreign fighters among their ranks. For that reason, it was difficult to understand the relationship between these variables. Because the RFFD not only provides clarification on the number of foreign fighters but also more detail on the structural environment, new avenues of research can be approached.

Lastly, while the RFFD increased the amount of information that is available on FFs in civil conflicts, it does have its limitations. First, while the FF data was expanded, there are still major gaps in the information that is available. Conflicts such as Sudan, Ethiopia, and Tajikistan had little to no information to be found on the individuals that were members of the rebel groups present. While it is possible that some information has not been found regarding these fighters, it is equally as likely that there is no information available or recorded. For that reason, the scholarly literature on FFs might have to accept some gaps in the numbers available. Secondly, while reliable sources were always sought after, secondary sources were utilized at times to calculate the ordinal code. For that reason, some coding fails to exemplify the reliability that is hoped for. For that reason, the ordinal coding is subject to updates and changes as more information arises.

Lastly, because of the lack of data for many of the groups and conflicts included in the RFFD, these data are gathered on solely a cross-sectional basis. Reliable information to detail annual observations for the hundreds of rebel groups were not able to be obtained. In saying that, this same method was utilized by both Malet and Hegghammer's FF dataset. The sparse reporting on FFs forces scholars to rely on the span of years that the FFs were active in the conflict rather than year-by-year data.

CHAPTER 2

THE IMPACT OF AQAP'S GOVERNING STRUCTURE ON FOREIGN FIGHTER CIVILIAN VICTIMIZATION

Abstract

What role does rebel governance play on the level of civilian casualties stemming from foreign fighters? I focus on the connection between rebel group governance and the amount of civilian victimization that foreign fighters conduct. I argue that inclusive governing structures can decrease the amount of disembeddedness that foreign fighter experience, which decreases their propensity for violence against civilians. To make my argument, I use a process tracing model to analyze the evolution of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula's governing structure in Yemen and what impact that has on the violence that is experienced by civilians. I use primary literature and sources along with secondary literature gathered from the NEXIS database to detail the two phases of AQAP: (2008-2011) and (2012-2016). The analysis is largely supportive of the argument that rebel governance can have a positive impact on foreign fighter civilian victimization.

Introduction

Why is there variation in the amount of civilian victimization that is perpetrated by the same rebel group over time? Understanding why there are varying amounts of civilian victimization perpetrated by rebel groups has been a question many scholars have sought to answer (Moore 2019). More specifically, some scholars have sought to explain how rebel group structure can impact the level of civilian victimization (Heger, Jung, and Wong 2012; Humphreys and Weinstein 2006; Hoover Green 2018). I build on these significant contributions to the literature to address the relationship between rebel governance and the level of civilian victimization perpetrated by foreign fighters. Because increases in technology and access have led to conflict zones being more accessible, foreign fighters are going to continue to be an issue that deserves attention. In order to adequately address the problems of civilian victimization and form tangible solutions, it is vital to understand what role rebel group structure plays in this violence. Understanding the relationship between rebel group structure and civilian victimization will allow action to be targeted at those groups that are deemed most likely to seek out violence against civilians.

To make my argument, I focus on the link between the amount of rebel governance implemented by a rebel group and the likelihood that the foreign fighters within can impact the level of violence that is perpetrated against civilians. Foreign fighters are less likely culturally and socially embedded in the local population (Moore 2019) and there is also the potential that the individuals that are choosing to travel to fight are vastly more radicalized than the average fighter. For this reason, foreign fighters have been shown to impact violence inflicted in a conflict but also more specifically violence inflicted against civilians. As opposed to focusing on the number of foreign fighters as previous studies have, I will focus on the impact that changing levels of rebel governance will have on the actions of a foreign fighter population that remains constant.

I argue that foreign fighters that reside within a rebel group that implements rebel governing structures are going to be less likely to have an impact on the level of civilian victimization than those residing within a rebel group that has less rebel governance. Foreign fighters have been shown to conduct more violence on the civilian population because they lack knowledge of the language, culture, and norms of the local population and therefore form an in-group/out-group view of the relationship. Additionally, there may be a self-selection process where only the most radical individuals are traveling outside of their country to fight in conflicts. In saying that, rebel governance provides a system that forces the inclusion of the local population within the rebel group. Rebel governance is defined as "the organization of civilians within the rebel-held territory for a public purpose. These purposes include rebel encouragement of civilian participation, provision of civilian administration, or organization of civilians for significant material gain" (Arjona, Kasfir, and Mampilly 2015) and have been shown to play a substantial role. Instead of viewing the civilians as the "other", inclusive rebel governing

structures intermesh the two communities which decrease the incentive for violence and provide a structure in which violence against civilians is punished. This general trend can be seen in groups such as The Ivorian Popular Movement of the Great West (MPIGO) and The Patriotic Movement of the Ivory Coast (MPCI) in Cote D'Ivoire. The MPIGO had around 1,000 foreign fighters within its ranks and the MPCI had around 500. Along with the presence of a high level of foreign fighters, both of these groups implemented rebel governance which resulted in low levels of civilian victimization with MPIGO having 70 deaths and MPCI causing 156 civilian deaths. The MPIGO created local governing structures, a system of law and order, and collect tax revenue from the civilians that lived under its control (United Nations Operation in Cote 2003, International Crisis 2003, Amnesty International 2003). The MPCI created local governing bodies, tax collection mechanisms, a judiciary system, along with police and administrative bodies (United Nations 2004, Human Rights Watch 2005). While a more detailed analysis would need to be conducted to confirm, these groups appear to fit the findings discovered regarding AQAP. In this research, a process-tracing method is conducted using primary academic and governmental sources as well as secondary sources gathered from NEXIS database to gather information on the two phases of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula: (2008-2011) and (2012-2016). The research finds that as rebel governance becomes more institutionalized there is a decrease in the amount of civilian victimization that is perpetrated.

This work highlights the benefit that rebel governance can bring when it comes to civilian victimization. This work makes two contributions to the literature's understanding of foreign fighters and rebel groups. Within the foreign fighter literature, there is no discussion about how rebel governance can impact the level of civilian victimization. This work provides the first case study in a much broader project of portraying the relationship between rebel governance and

civilian victimization. Secondly, the research emphasizes a more nuanced view of rebel groups. The internal processes within a rebel group are quite dynamic, and rebel groups not only have the ability but are likely to vary over time. This research stresses that to understand the actions of a rebel group, scholars need to understand the evolutionary path of that rebel group.

The Effect of Foreign Fighters

The effect that foreign fighters have within civil conflict has been a growing area of literature. Starting from as far back as the Spanish Civil War, these individuals have had an impact on the rebel group in which they inhabit and the actions that are taken within the conflict. For several proposed reasons such as a lack of cultural and structural embeddedness, groups that choose to allow foreigners into their ranks have been shown to victimize civilians at a higher rate (Moore 2019). Because the task of leaving your home to fight in a foreign conflict is inherently going to select more committed individuals, the violence that is experienced within civil conflicts that include foreign fighters is seen to increase (Hegghammer 2010). Many of the rebel groups that these individuals are joining are at a large power disadvantage against their adversaries, so the inclusion of foreign fighters does provide material benefits to the group. In saying that, the FFs do not have extensive knowledge of the language, environment, and culture and largely lack military experience (Beslin and Ignjatijevic 2017). For that reason, the FFs can end up being a detriment to the rebel group that they join because the leadership ends up having to pay extra attention to the actions that are being taken by the foreigners and allocate additional resources to their training (Doctor 2021). Not only can these foreign fighters create internal issues within the rebel group, but they can also increase the negative perception of the group (Bakke 2014; Beelman 1994; Rich and Conduit 2015; Doctor 2021; Bacon 2019). The violence and

radicalization that tends to follow these individuals can lead to both domestic and international actors denouncing the rebel group movement as a whole and withholding aid or military support.

The domestic population largely disapproves of foreigners not only because of the negative perceptions that they bring but also because FFs have been shown to have a largely negative impact on the civilian population. When foreigners join to bolster the ranks of rebel groups, the group is inherently going to be less dependent on civilians for support and resources. Because the civilian population is now seen as expendable, less emphasis is placed on ensuring their safety from arbitrary acts of violence. For that reason, groups that are less dependent on the local population are positively correlated with high levels of civilian victimization (Weinstein 2006). Because the foreigners can act outside of the rank and file of the general fighters of the rebel group, the leader may be less likely to punish these individuals for their actions would additionally explain the escalation of violence (Schutte 2015; Humphreys and Weinstein 2006; Page, Lotito, and Rubin 2018). Some literature casts doubt on this generalized statement showing that foreign fighters that share the same ethnicity as the population will be less likely to conduct violence against them (Stanton 2015; Moore 2019; Fjelde and Hultman 2014). Additionally, it is possible that only certain cells of the rebel group are committing violence against civilians, and it should not be generalized to the rebel group as a whole (Schwartz 2023).

The Impact of Rebel Governance on Civilian Victimization

The literature comes to the consensus that foreign fighters lead to an increase in civilian victimization, however, it does not explain why a rebel group with a constant number of foreign fighters would conduct varying amounts of civilian victimization over time. Some scholars have

sought to explain foreign fighter action from the angle of rebel group centralization, but the literature has yet to explore the relationship between rebel governance and foreign fighter action.

Rebel group inclusive governing structures "create a check on rebel power and make it more difficult for the rebel leadership to change course in a direction contrary to the interests of the civilian population." (Weinstein 2006). Additionally, including the civilians in the governing process ensures that civilians have a stake in the system, which fosters cooperation between the rebel group and the civilian population (Weinstein 2006). This is exemplified by the National Resistance Army in Uganda and how the group depended on the local population, so it was more willing to continue its cooperative relationship with the citizens. When the local population can participate in the governing structure, it "creates opportunities for large numbers of civilians to express their preferences and to challenge the choices made by their own leadership and by that of the rebels" (Weinstein 2006). The literature is clear that rebel governance has an impact on the amount of civilian victimization that is present. But because "foreign fighters may be especially capable of breaking from an insurgency's chain of command to pursue their own individual interests" (Doctor 2022), it remains unclear how rebel governance affects foreign fighter action and through what mechanisms.

Rebel groups can gain approval and legitimacy from the local population when they can embody the values and norms that are embodied by the local community (Kasfir 2015, Forster 2015). The more local societal values that the rebel group can implement and the more embedded the rebels become in the local population, the more strength their authority is going to carry in the eyes of the population (Hoffmann 2015). Rebel group embeddedness "eases access to critical information and blurs the distinction between rebel and civilian" (Moore 2019). Additionally, having knowledge of the local customs and values can help strengthen negotiations

and bargains between the rebel group and the citizens (Weinstein 2006, Mampilly 2011, Kasfir 2015). Sharing a common ethnicity with the local population allows for rebels to become more embedded within the population and leads to a decrease in civilian victimization (Fjelde and Hultman 2014, Stanton 2015). When looking at rebel groups' co-ethnic civilian population in Africa from 1989-2009, Wieselgren (2020) finds support for this argument, and rebels that hold more ethnic ties with the local population are going to be less likely to victimize the civilian population. In general, foreign fighters are going to be less embedded in the local population because they are traveling across borders. Likely, these individuals do not have access to knowledge about the local traditions, culture, values, or language. Because there is this disconnect between the foreigners and the local population and they share no substantial ties with one another, foreign fighters are more likely to victimize these individuals (Moore 2019). While the amount of embeddedness does vary, for example, FFs that are fluent in the local language, are of the same ethnicity, or are traveling from a neighboring country are going to be more embedded, there is still going to be a tendency for foreign fighters to be more disembedded than the native fighter. Because of this disconnect with the local population, foreign fighters are linked with higher levels of civilian victimization.

I argue that inclusive governing structures can act as a method to reduce the disembededness that is experienced by foreign fighters, which could result in a decrease in violence against the civilian population. During the conflict in Yemen, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula evolves to adopt inclusive rebel governing structures such as power sharing, local provisions, and addressing grievances and customs. The group remains identical from the first phase to the second, including the number of foreign fighters that are present. The literature largely agrees that the presence of foreign fighters leads to an increase in civilian victimization,

but it fails to explain why the amount of civilian victimization perpetrated by AQAP varies over time even though the number of foreign fighters remains the same. In the first phase (2009-2011), AQAP conducted attacks that held little regard for civilian life. The attacks perpetrated by AQAP took place in very public locations and result in the deaths of hundreds of civilians. In the second phase (2012-2016), AQAP implemented extensive inclusive governing measures which were able to intermesh the foreign fighters and the local population. For this reason, the number of attacks that result in the deaths of civilians drastically decreased. The fighters who once felt disconnected from the civilian population and conducted brutal attacks against them were now forced to interact and govern alongside them which decreased the disembeddedness that Moore 2019 showed leads to violence.

Hypothesis: As a rebel group implements inclusive governing structures, foreign fighter disembeddedness decreases leading to less violence directed against civilians.

Research Design

An analysis of the effect that the level of rebel governance has on the ability of foreign fighters to commit violence against civilians in intrastate wars is conducted. To evaluate the relationship between rebel governance and civilian victimization by foreign fighters, a process-tracing method is implemented. For this analysis, al-Qaeda in the Arabia Peninsula (AQAP) in Yemen has been analyzed in two phases: the first phase (2008-2011) and the second phase (2012-2016) to understand the impact that rebel governance has on foreign fighter action. These two phases included similar numbers of foreign fighters within the rebel groups' ranks but varying amounts of civilian victimization. This allows for a more accurate analysis of how rebel governance can impact the level of civilian victimization that occurs. The two phases of al-Qaeda in the Arabian

Peninsula share the same amount of territorial control, beliefs and goals, conflict time, capacity, and level of 3rd party support. For this reason, a process-tracing model allows for the specific variable, rebel governance, to be tracked through the evolution of the group to measure its effects.

Anti-Civilian violence is the dependent variable in this study. The UCDP One-Sided Violence Dataset defines anti-civilian violence as "the use of armed force by the government of a state or by a formally organized group against civilians which results in at least 25 deaths" (Sundberg 2012). Because little research has been conducted on the effect of rebel governance on foreign fighter action, the definition implemented by Doctor (2020) in his analysis of the effect of rebel group centralization on foreign fighter action will be used "any event in which non-state groups deliberately and directly target civilians" with a focus on instances of civilian casualties. This data is collected from various sources including academic manuscripts, governmental reports, NGO reports, and secondary media sources gathered from the NEXIS database.

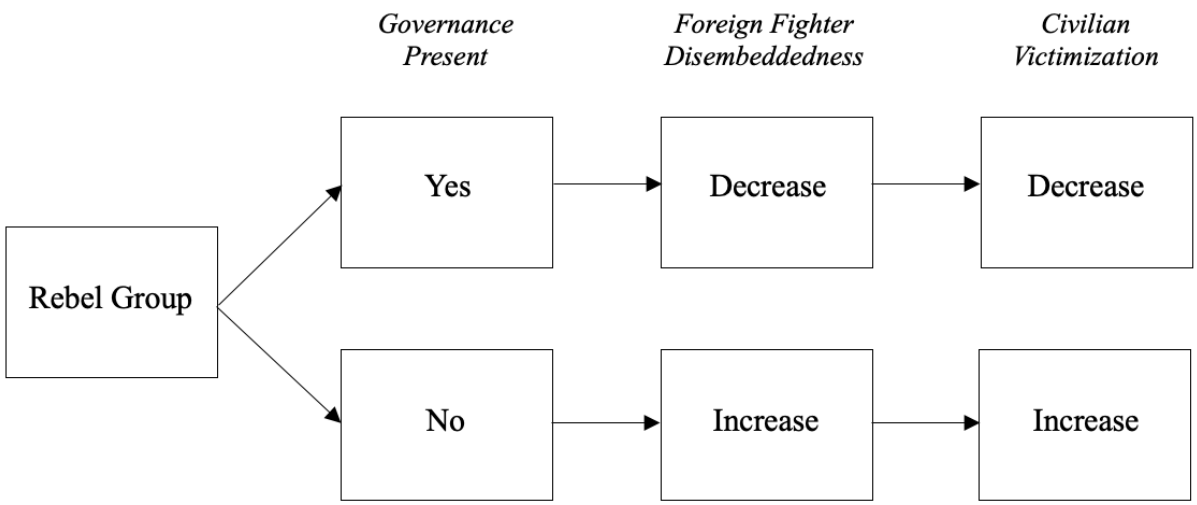
The independent variable in this research is the amount of rebel governance that is present within the rebel group. Arjona, Kasfir, and Mampilly (2015), scholars at the forefront of this topic, defined rebel governance as "the organization of civilians within the rebel-held territory for a public purpose. These purposes include rebel encouragement of civilian participation, provision of civilian administration, or organization of civilians for significant material gain". Utilizing this definition, this study looks at various aspects of rebel governance which includes state-building mechanisms, power-sharing, social service provisions, and the inclusion of local grievances. State-building mechanisms refer to various implementations that form some semblance of a quasi-state such as providing laws and a system to upload these laws.

Power-sharing refers to actions that are undertaken by AQAP that delegate some of the power to the local tribal communities such as empowering the local sheiks, creation of local protection councils, and intermarriage. Social services are necessary services that are provided to the local population that were not provided by the Yemeni government. These services can include the provision of water, wells, electricity, sewage infrastructure, roads, schools, hospitals, etc. Lastly, being able to adopt and address grievances from the locals shows that AQAP seeks to not just supplement but place itself in a position to replace the ruling government. These grievances were mainly focused on the growing conflict that the tribes held with the Houthis. to This data is additionally collected from academic and governmental sources and secondary media sources. Because of the highly nuanced nature of this variable, several sources were required to corroborate the legitimate presence of the various aspects of rebel governance. Within this study, the various confounding variables that are addressed are time period, territory, number of foreign fighters, the ideology of foreign fighters, rebel group leadership, goals, ability, ideology, and 3rd party support.

War in Yemen and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula

The Yemen War officially started in 2014, but violence was present within the state at least a decade before. The Houthi rebels, otherwise known as Ansar Allah, are Zaydi Muslims in Yemen. They attempted to take violent actions against the Yemeni government in 2004 after Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi was killed. This low-level conflict continued for several years with an escalation in violence in 2009 which resulted in a ceasefire. As the Arab Spring swept across

Figure 4: Rebel Governance Theory



the Middle East, the Yemeni Revolution of 2011 began to spread throughout the state in hopes that the dire situation would be improved. The Houthi Leader, Abdul-Malik al-Houthi placed his support behind the anti-government protestors that were seeking the end of President Ali Abdullah Saleh's 20-year reign. Following the escalation of protests and the oversight of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Saleh agreed to negotiations to step down from office and Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, Saleh's vice president, ran unopposed for the position. Instead of pushing for change, many felt that the influence of the GCC, the most influential member being Saudi Arabia, installed the same corrupt institutions and governing individuals within Yemen, which would perpetuate the struggle that the country had experienced over the previous decades. In 2014, the Houthi rebels took control of the capital city of Sanaa which resulted in Hadi fleeing the country and taking refuge in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia, along with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar, among several other countries, formed a US-supported coalition with the goal of putting Hadi back into power. Since the Saudi-led coalition intervened in the conflict, there have been continuous reports and accusations that the bombing campaigns that they implemented have resulted in large-scale civilian death. This conflict has resulted in, what the United Nations calls, the worst humanitarian crisis on the planet.

Within this disastrous, war-torn environment, al-Qaeda, a group infamous for its deadly actions in Iraq, began to gain a foothold. al-Qaeda has had a presence in Yemen going back several decades splintering from the Islamic Jihad Movement and eventually swearing allegiance to Osama bin Laden. The group conducted its first regional attack directed at a hotel in Aden in 1992, but it wasn't until 2000 that al-Qaeda gained international attention when it claimed responsibility for the attack on the U.S.S. Cole off Yemen's coast. Following a broad military crackdown on the organization in the early 2000s, al-Qaeda was largely viewed as a minor threat

and was seen as a defeated organization. Following a vital prison break in 2006, al-Qaeda was able to free 23 fighters which includes Qasim al-Raymi and Nasir al-Wahayshi, Osama bin Laden's former secretary (Daley 2018). Because of the leadership capacity, al-Qaeda was able to make a resurgence and begin to launch attacks that targeted Westerners and their sympathizers. al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula was officially formed in January 2009 when the AQ of Yemen merged with the AQ in Saudi Arabia. Following its inception, "US officials have described AQAP as the most active AQ operational franchise beyond Afghanistan and Pakistan" (Analysis). In 2011, AQAP formed an internal organization taking the name Ansar al-Sharia (AAS). AQAP was acutely aware of the negative perception that was tied to the name "al-Qaeda" and attempted to utilize AAS to become more accepted by the civilian population.

Foreign Fighters and Their Impact

"We will help our brothers in Yemen. We will cross the sea between us and fight alongside with you against the enemy of Allah" (Jan 1)

The migration of foreign fighters traveling to Yemen was small when compared to the number of FFs that were seen to travel to other conflicts in the region, but "AQAP in Yemen likely provides the most appealing option for joining an official affiliate of the al-Qaeda movement" (Watts 2012). It is possible that the geographic location of Yemen left it inaccessible to a lot of individuals that would potentially seek to fight, which resulted in around 37% of AQAP's membership being Saudi nationals and 7% were foreigners from locations such as Pakistan, Egypt, Somalia, Nigeria, Chechnya, Uzbekistan, Algeria, Dagestan, Tunisia, and North America (Boucek 2010, June 28, July 29, Taneski 2019, Cook 2019). The exact number of foreign fighters that resided in AQAP from its inception is difficult to calculate but estimates range from,

at a minimum, around 76 foreign fighters from al-Shabaab and another 100-200 other foreigners among its ranks (June 28, Swift 2012). This number remained relatively constant during the duration of the conflict from the first to the second phase of AQAP.

Not only were the foreigners crossing the regional countries of Saudi Arabia and Somalia, but also following the call from prominent American AQAP members such as Anwar al-Awlaqi and Samir Khan, they "raised the profile of the group among English-speaking audiences as well" (Koehler-Derrick 2011). Anwar al-Awlaki grew in prominence after he created online sermons to recruit foreigners from the West, but also included individuals who steamed across the border into Yemen from conflicts in Iraq and Somalia (June 28, Boucek 2009, Window 2011). Some of the most notorious foreign fighters include Ibrahim Hassan Asiri, a Saudi National who was one of AQAP's most talented bomb makers, a Nigerian who attempted to detonate a bomb while onboard a flight to Detroit, the French-Algerian brothers who attacked the Charlie Hebdo magazine in Paris, and a Danish fighter named Morten Storm (Window 2011, Kendall 2019). Nayif bin Muhammad al-Qahtani, a Saudi national, was asked why he chose to travel to Yemen to wage jihad and that he was motivated to "fight the unbelievers who are near to you and let them find harshness in you" and "expel the polytheists from the Arabian Peninsula" (Koehler-Derrick 2011). Along with al-Qahtani, other Saudi nationals such as Sa'id Ali Jabir al-Kathim al-Shihri and Muhammad 'Atiq 'Awayd al-'Awfi, former Guantanamo Bay inmates, held senior positions within the growing organization (Koehler-Derrick 2011). Additionally, 'Uthman al-'Amira al-Ghamda, holding a senior military position, and Ibrahim al-Rabaysh and Muhammad bin Abd al-Rahman al-Rashid, holding senior religious positions, were able to bring years of experience and knowledge to the battlefield of Yemen following their release from Guantanamo Bay (Koehler-Derrick 2011).

Just as has been seen in other conflicts that included foreign fighters, the foreigners that traveled to fight with AQAP brought with them expertise, which undoubtedly increased the level of violence that was seen. In the past, AQAP implemented vehicles to deliver a bomb to strike the enemy, but the foreign fighters were able to aid in implementing the tactic of using suicide bombers (AQAP a rising). This was seen from the alleged actions of Somali terrorist, Ahmed Abdulkadir Warsame, which was accused of levying his history and experience with al-Shabaab in Somali to "teach and demonstrate the making of explosives" to AQAP in Yemen (Lister 2011). Furthermore, "there are indications that brainwashed young men from overseas are more willing to blow themselves up than locals" which had a large impact on the local population (Daily star). Mirroring the radical actions of foreign fighters in previous conflicts, reports show that the foreigners favored "high profile" attacks and "provocation operations" to increase their reach to a worldwide audience (Swift 2012). This varied from the local fighters of AQAP that saw community relations and territorial consolidation as the main goal of the organization. While the foreign fighters were able to act as a force multiplier in the conflict, the "growing cadre of non-Yemenis within AQAP has undercut efforts to maintain an authentic local voice" which leads to increased tension with the strict tribal hierarchy of Yemen which inevitably leads to conflict (Koehler-Derrick 2011). Furthermore, reports indicate that many of the foreign fighters arriving from Somalia did not view the conflict in the same light as AQAP. They were more focused on the global jihad and "these jihadists see themselves as part of a global vanguard" which resulted in little emphasis on strengthening ties with the local population (Swift 2012). The presence of these foreign fighters among the ranks of AQAP led to "further exacerbating local tensions and are an important factor in upsetting the peace process to solve the civil strife" (Hubbard 2014).

AQAP Rebel Governance (2008-2011)

As al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula began to come to fruition and shape itself within Yemeni society, there were clues that the group one day hoped to establish a governing structure within the state. AQAP was "seeking to destroy the existing political system and establish its own", but it had not gathered the organizational capacity to implement such a system (Boucek 2010). AQAP was able to transcend the tribal affiliations that increased tensions in the region by appealing to the overall hatred of the government of Yemen. AQAP soon found that its best method to gain influence in the state is to stoke the animosity that was held by the tribal groups, "but it has not demonstrated it can translate this rapport into a palatable political program" (Boucek 2010). In the first few years of its existence, AQAP was able to begin to "insinuate themselves into the tribal system through marriage and through recruitment", but had not yet been successful in fully integrating itself or implementing solidified structures to govern (Noonan 2011). There is no documentation to suggest that AQAP in Yemen implemented any state-building mechanisms during its first phase to attempt to establish its own governing system. While AQAP had aspired to replace the failing Yemeni government, no tangible mechanisms were present. Additionally, AQAP was not reported to have provided any social service provisions to the locals or attempted to solve any of the local grievances that were held. While some reports state that AQAP embedded themselves with the tribal system through intermarriage, a characteristic of power-sharing, the success was quite low and AQAP remained a separate entity that was isolated from the clans.

AQAP Civilian Victimization (2008-2011)

"Do not consult anyone in killing Americans. Killing the devil does not need any fatwa"

Anwar al-Awlaki

The leadership of AQAP held a radical and indiscriminate view of foreigners acting within the borders of Yemen with no differentiation between military personnel and civilians that were simply working within the state. This is made clear by an AQAP statement:

> *"We call upon every Muslim who cares about his religion and doctrine to assist in expelling the apostasies from the Arabian Peninsula, by killing every crusader who works at their embassies or other places, declare it an all-out war against every crusader on Mohammad's peninsula on land, air, and sea"* (January 2).

Several attacks stemming from al-Qaeda were conducted in 2008, the first of which was an attack in Hadramaut which resulted in the deaths of two Belgium tourists and two local Yemenis (Boucek 2010). Additionally, there were several attacks on the embassies that were attempting to remain operational in the warzone. These attacks included a grenade attack on the U.S. Embassy in March, a successful car explosion attack in September that resulted in the death of 17 workers, and a barrage of mortars fired at the Italian embassy (Boucek 2010, December 31). There were also reports that AQAP directly targeted a foreign housing compound in the capital city of Sanaa in April (Boucek 2010). In March 2009, an AQAP suicide bomber targeted four South Korean tourists in Yemen and the local tour guide that was with them (Boucek 2010). After the arrival of the victim's families and Korean investigators, al-Qaeda attempted to conduct a second suicide attack on the group but failed to inflict damage on the foreigners (Boucek 2010). The foreign suicide bomber was said to have received training and indoctrination from across the sea in Somalia. While unsuccessful, one attempted attack by AQAP that could have led to devastating

results was conducted on December 25, 2009. Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, a Nigerian student dedicated to fighting for the AQAP cause, attempted to detonate a bomb in his underwear while aboard a plane headed for Detroit (Boucek 2010). There were additional attempts by foreign nations fighting for AQAP to bring down airplanes. In 2010, a bomb disguised as a printer cartridge was intercepted before it could be detonated aboard a Chicago-bound flight (CFR Staff). This attempted plot, along with the attempted attack on Christmas of 2009, would have resulted in the deaths of hundreds of innocent civilians. It was clear that AQAP was attempting to grow the territory and power that they held within the semi-failed state which resulted in over 50 AQAP attacks within the borders of Yemen (March 2). One such attack was the attempted assassination of the British Ambassador to Yemen after a suicide bomber assaulted the security convoy (Hugh). With 10 attacks conducted within the first two months of 2011, AQAP has sought to target "energy infrastructure, foreigners, and domestic security," which has resulted in the death of residents in the area (March 2, Jamjoom 2011). The suicide attacks not only affected the local civilian population but also extended to the non-combatants that reside within the Saudi royal family. In the early years of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, there were several failed attempts at the life of Prince Mohammed bin Nayef. While these did not result in substantial harm to the family members, AQAP's military commander Qasim al-Raymi vowed to utilize his newly acquired suicide battalion to overwhelm the royal family with attacks stating "We will come to your offices…to your bedrooms, I advise you to check your bedrooms before going to sleep that there's not one of our suicide bombers or bomb in your bedrooms" (October 5).

AQAP Rebel Governance (2012-2016)

As al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula matured as an organization it was clear that the lack of attention paid to the civilian population was coming at a detriment to the goals of the organization. As AQAP evolved, it transitions to a tactic of building "its movement from the ground up rather than the top down" (Swift 2012). The focus was placed on providing a solid structure and a governing system to a population that had not experienced such structure in many years. If a-Qaeda was able to win the hearts and minds of the population, they believe that they were in a better position to accomplish their overarching Islamist goals.

Law and Order

First and foremost, AQAP was able to provide a service that was vital to many of the citizens residing in the war-torn country - law, order, and security. Because AQAP was able to protect many of the civilians, they were clearly "winning the support of local tribes who were largely concerned with protecting their homeland" (Carboni 2020). While the system of laws that al-Qaeda put forth for the territories that it held was harsh, the organization was able to prosecute criminals and protect the property rights of many civilians, and "the use of violence was used sparingly and intended to serve as an example to other locals" (Swift 2012, Daley 2018). Because AQAP was inhabiting an environment that leaned heavily on tribal rule of law, it faced a large backlash in its first phase after attempting to implement Sharia law. As the group moved into its second phase, it was able to tone down the emphasis on Sharia to better placate the citizens. This is seen in that only 3% of the tweets put out by AQAP in 2016 addressed any sort of implementation of Sharia Law or hudud punishments (Kendall 2018). When spreading its views on the rule of law to the local population, "AQAP softened its approach to governance and placed a greater emphasis on gradualism and working with tribal and local leaders" (Daley

2018). These structures were not just put into place to hold the citizens accountable but were also implemented to keep the members of AQAP in line with the goals and objectives of the organization. Harith al-'Izzi and Human al-San'ani were tried by the Shura courts of AQAP and found guilty of blowing of a Sufi shrine which resulted in the deaths of Yemeni civilians (Kendall 2018). AQAP issued a formal statement denouncing the attack and expelled the two individuals from the ranks of the group.

Power Sharing

al-Qaeda in Yemen in its second state was keener to integrate the local governing structure into its own and implemented a system of powersharing. AQAP would identify and empower the local sheiks within the communities to implement their governing capabilities allowing AQAP to "operate through certain tribal structures without resorting to overt coercion" (Swift 2012). Furthermore, instead of AQAP forcing a leading member into the governing structure of the local territories which would likely disrupt the tribal ruling structure, AQAP emphasized the importance of allowing the local sheikh to continue preceding the town (al-Arami 2021). It is worth noting that AQAP wanted assurances that the Sheikh aligned with the organization, but nonetheless, this provides a substantial powersharing method that was implemented by AQAP. al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula has shown a unique ability to not control the tribal structure within Yemen but to "make common cause with some tribes" and work within the historical structure that was already present (Kendall 2018). This was seen by the creation of the Hadramawt National Council which included the AQAP leadership included alongside "a local ruling council that oversaw day-to-day governance and a militia force that protected schools, banks, and local government buildings" (Daley 2018). To further intermesh the AQAP structure with the Yemeni tribal structure, AQAP members commonly took part in intermarriage. This

allowed AQAP to strengthen its coalition within the state as well as emphasize its "desire to overcome political, generational, and other differences" (Swift 2012). This process was not directed only at the Yemeni fighters among the ranks of AQAP. The foreign constituents of the organization were incentivized to integrate into the tribal structure of Yemen by marrying the daughters of influential societal leaders (Swift 2012).

Social Provisions

The ruling government of Yemen has failed the citizens of the country and has not been able to provide many of the basic necessities needed for survival. AQAP was able to step up to fill that gap in the market and supply the civilian population not only with much-needed and invaluable resources but also with various social provisions. Outside of the capital, AQAP was able to win "significant support not just by providing villagers with water, but also by helping them to dig wells and install other vital water infrastructure" (January 26). The resource provision does not stop at water. AQAP was able to provide the communities they inhabited with "electricity, water and sewage infrastructure, building roads, renovating schools, and stocking hospitals" (Kendall 2018). In addition to these basic societal necessities, AQAP was able to provide teachers for the schools and basic healthcare to the citizens, and provisions that are vital in a war-torn country (Daley 2018). As opposed to some organizations that only provide provisions to the members or fervent supporters of the group, the AQAP social services were "provided promptly, for free, and in the case of electricity, for the first time in decades" (Daley 2018). al-Qaeda's emphasis on social provisions was even apparent in the Twitter feed with 56% of the tweets stemming from the organization in 2016 addressing various developmental projects around the region (Kendall 2018). While much of the country was suffering from the continuous war being waged within its

borders, the civilians that were living within the al-Qaeda-held territory were witnessing a period of stability,

In Yemen, al-Qaeda was also intently focused on building the next generation of the organization. To accomplish this, they implemented various community-building activities that were directed toward the youth population. For example, in March 2016, AQAP threw the "Festival of Martyrs of the American Bombing" in the city of Hadramawt and Mukalla (Kendall 2018). This festival includes various games and activities such as "eating ice cream blindfolded, Qur'an recitation competitions with weapons and motorbikes as prizes" for young boys that were littered with anti-US and anti-drone propaganda (Kendall 2018). AQAP used this entertaining community event not only to bring the community together and further mold their place in the Yemeni society but also to recruit from the youth. In cities such as Taiz, AQAP drove around trucks that supplied "CDs, films, nashids, lectures, books, and Qur'ans" along with writing competitions where the winner would receive "a Kalashnikov as first prize, followers by a motorbike, laptop, revolver, or money" (Kendall 2018).

Local Grievances and Customs

A key change that AQAP was able to implement within the organization is the adoption of local grievances into the organization's larger goals and objections. al-Qaeda largely supported the local and tribal grievances towards the Houthis and adopted this call to action within the organization to better assimilate and gain acceptance into the community (Carboni 2020). A more abstract change to the governing structure of AQAP is its emphasis on the tribal culture that they were cohabitating with. The organization was always quick to "invoke and praise the glorious history and courage of various tribes in statements, videos, poems, and nashids, or anthems" (Kendall 2018).

Ansar al-Sharia

In addition to the various governing structures that AQAP erected in the Yemeni territory, the organization also brought the newly created Ansar al-Sharia to the frontlines. Because of the severely negative connotation of the name al-Qaeda, the organization implemented a domestic wing named Ansar al-Sharia (AAS). One Senior al-Qaeda member, Abu Zubayr Adel al-Abab, stated that "the name Ansar al-Sharia is what we use to introduce ourselves in areas where we work" and allows for AQAP members to interact with the locals without branding themselves as al-Qaeda (Daley 2018). While there is the presence of two names, "there is no doubt that Ansar al-Sharia is one and the same as AQAP" (Kendall 2018). This internal group within AQAP "issues communique, operates media outlets and generates propaganda aimed at Yemen's Sunni tribesmen" (Swift 2012). To the average civilian, the name "al-Qaeda" could bring a revolting response because of the actions that have been taken under that same name across the globe. The leadership of AQAP was acutely aware of this perception and expertly utilized this shell organization, AAS, to conduct business more efficiently and interact with the local Yemeni population.

AQAP Civilian Victimization (2012-2016)

As the years passed, the AQAP leadership realized that continuing to conduct attacks against the tight-knit tribal populace would lead to continued failures at establishing power in the state. "Since armed groups in civil wars eventually realize that the incentives fostered by indiscriminate violence are against their interests", AQAP sought to implement internal structures that could limit indiscriminate attacks, which resulted in the deaths of civilians concentrating on "the assassination of unpopular security force targets rather than large suicide bombings, realizing these alienate local communities" (Rozic 2008, Boucek 2010). It is clear that

as AQAP transitioned from a rebel group implementing guerilla tactics to fight back against its perceived enemy into a legitimate quasi-state with “goals to limit the number of civilian deaths and not target women and children even if they belonged to one of its enemy’s sides” the foreign fighters that were among its ranks were unable to conduct the attacks that had previously been acceptable (Skladanova 2019). When compared to AQAP in its first phase, the number of attacks that resulted in civilian deaths was far fewer. In 2014, AQAP detonated a car bomb that was directed at the police station in Mukalla which resulted in the death of one civilian (May 13). AQAP claimed the 2015 attack on Charlie Hebdo magazine in Paris (CFR Staff). This attack resulted in twelve civilian deaths, but some experts dispute whether an al-Qaeda member carried out the attack or if the teachings of al-Qaeda inspired the attack (CFR Staff).

Just because there was the presence of rebel governance within the AQAP-controlled areas does not mean that there was an utter lack of violence directed at civilians. In 2013, AQAP conducted an attack on a military hospital in Sanaa, which resulted in the injury and death of several medics and patients (October 1). The AQAP leadership was swift in issuing an apology to the families of the dead and offering to pay blood money to provide reparations for their loss (October 1). This immediate response to wrongful deaths showed the immense evolution between AQAP and other Islamist groups in the region such as the Islamic State in Yemen which views any Muslim not following Sharia to be deserving of death. The second phase of AQAP backed up the organization's claim that “it wouldn’t attack mosques, markets, or crowds” as it moved forward in forging a legitimate governing structure (Skladanova 2019).

Confounding Variable

The confounding variable of *capability* stands to be one of the most important aspects to address. The literature is mixed on the effect of stability and capability in relation to civilian victimization. The literature on the relationship between rebel group capabilities and civilian victimization is mixed. Some argue that rebel groups that have low capabilities will commit more civilian violence because it provides an opportunity to expand the resource base (Wood 2010, Humphreys and Weinstein, 2008, Vinci, 2005, Wood 2014) while others argue that highly capable rebel groups are more likely to take such action because they are less dependent on the population (Beardsley 2009, Wood 2014, Salehyan, Siroky & Wood 2014, Salehyan, Siroky & Wood 2014, Toft & Zhukov 2015, Fortna, Lotito & Rubin 2018), have the capability to victimize larger groups of civilians (Asal and Rethemeyer 2008, Overgaard 1994), and are less worried about legitimacy costs (Fortna, Lotito & Rubin, 2018). Conversely, other scholars argue that low-capability rebel groups will commit less civilian victimization because weak groups fight conflicts on the periphery away from densely populated areas (Wood 2010, Buhuad 2010). In contrast, some scholars argue that rebel groups that have high capabilities will commit higher levels of civilian victimization (Cunningham, Huang, and Sawyer 2020, Loyle 2020). For that reason, no strong predictions can be made from the literature, but it can be observed that the military capabilities of AQAP remained at a high level from the first to the second phase of its insurgency. Even before the merger of 2008 that created AQAP occurred, al-Qaeda in Yemen (AQY) had a notable presence in the conflict. The group was able to detonate several hundred pounds of explosives when attacking the USS Cole, an attack that resulted in the deaths of 17 servicemen (CFR). Additionally, they conducted various attacks on hotels, embassies, and oil tankers (April 25). Even following an attempted crackdown on the organization by the Yemeni

government, AQY continued to hold substantial influence in the state (Carboni 2020). While Al-Qaeda did receive a boost in capability following the prison escape in 2006 that boosted their leadership capabilities, there was little change in the military capabilities of the rebel group from the first to the second stage. While the literature's explanation of the relationship between the level of capabilities and civilian victimization is blurry at best, the lack of change in the rebel group capability between the phases leads to the conclusion that capability has little influence on the level of civilian victimization.

An additional important confounding variable is *Governance,* which is an important aspect to discuss regarding the status of the federal government since the conflict in Yemen continues to be very dynamic. This variable is meant to measure the relationship that the leadership of the government held with AQAP. During the first phase of AQAP, President Saleh held power in Yemen. During the second phase, President Hadi ruled until 2015 before he sought asylum in Saudi Arabia. During the entirety of AQAP's presence in Yemen, they were adversarial to the Houthi rebel movement. While not technically allied with the government of Yemen, both entities were fighting against the growing Houthi expansion. During the first phase of AQAP (2008-2011), Saleh saw little threat from al-Qaeda with much of his focus placed on the Houthis with some speculating that he intentionally diverted funds that the U.S. provided to fight al-Qaeda to fight the more threatening enemy, the Houthis (Alterman 2010). Even more so, there is speculation that the Saleh government had closer ties with al-Qaeda than was reported. For instance, Saleh was reported to have facilitated several prison escapes that allowed prominent AQAP fellows to rejoin the ranks of the group (CFR Staff). Additionally, high-ranking officials within the Saleh government were shown to have worked with al-Qaeda which could have resulted in the 2008 attack on the U.S. embassy in Sanaa (Yemeni Official). While

there was no outward support from Saleh or his government for AQAP, there was little action taken to hinder the actions that the group was taking within the country. Following Hadi's rise to power following Saleh's resignation, the relationship between the Yemeni government and AQAP did not drastically change. Because of the continued fight against the Houthis, Hadi has "worked with local actors with suspected ties to al-Qaeda" (Brannen 2017). This is supported by the fact that three of Hadi's close associates have been designated "Specially Designated Global Terrorists" because of their substantial ties to AQAP. The first is Nayif al-Qaysi, an individual whom Hadi appointed as governor in al-Bayda, is a senior AQAP official and has utilized his position to expand AQAP in the region and provide funding and arms to the group (Brannen 2017). Additionally, Abdul Wahab al-Homayqani acted as an advisor to Hadi and a "member of his official delegation to a previous round of peace talks in Geneva" (Brannen 2017). He was an official member of AQAP and facilitated the transfer of foreign fighters from Saudi Arabia into Yemen. Lastly, al-Hasan Ali Abkhar has been accused of facilitating "money, weapons, and ammunition to AQAP forces" (Brannen 2017). This individual acts as a pro-Hadi government commander in the Jawf province. While there was never outright support by either government for AQAP, the actions that were taken and the relationships that were had led to the assumption that there was underlying support for the group by the Yemeni government. Both Saleh and Hadi were, at the very least, using AQAP as a way to fight against Houthis and, at the most extreme, supporting and funding the actions that AQAP was taking within Yemen. For this reason, it is unlikely that the government leadership had an impact on the amount of civilian victimization that was perpetrated. It is worth noting that the departure of Hadi in 2015 led to a power vacuum within Yemen. Because the actions of AQAP did not vary from 2015 to 2016, the end of the second phase, this environmental change was unlikely to have played any role.

Kalyvas (2006) found that the more territorial control that a rebel group holds the less selective and indiscriminate violence that is going to be perpetuated because the group is more stable. Based on this conclusion, it would be expected that as territorial control decreased, there would be an increase in civilian victimization but this is not the case with AQAP in Yemen. As the tensions within Yemen increased and anti-government fervor increased, the early years of AQAP brought a decrease in government power coming from Sana'a which provided fertile ground for al-Qaeda to expand. During this time, al-Qaeda was able to capitalize on the instability and control huge areas of land concentrated in the rural south of Yemen (Andrew 2009). While AQAP did not yet control the major cities within Yemen, they were expanding greatly outside of urban areas during the early years because of the dissatisfaction with the Yemeni government (Kasinof 2009; December 29). During the period of 2011-2016, there was a noticeable drop in the amount of civilian victimization that was perpetrated by AQAP, but, contrary to what is expected, the group steadily lost control of major cities. In 2011, AQAP held 9 major cities in Yemen including ZInjibar, Jaar, Shuqra, Lawdar, Mudiya, Hawta, Mahfad, Azzan, and al-Rawdah. This control began to decline substantially with six of these cities being held in 2012, only partial control of cities that were scattered through anti-Houthi territories such as al-Mukalla and Azzan, and control of only two cities, Azzan and Habban, in 2016. The literature expects that as territorial control is lost that there will be an increase in civilian victimization perpetrated, but the opposite relationship is experienced with AQAP in Yemen. For this reason, territorial control is unlikely to play a substantial role in the decrease in civilian victimization that was experienced under the second phase of AQAP in Yemen. (Political Geo).

Regarding the ideology of the rebel group, the motivation and goals of AQAP did not evolve as it moved from the first phase to the second phase. Following the establishment of al-

Qaeda in Yemen, it was quickly apparent that there was both an international goal as well as a more internal, domestic goal. Aligning with its affiliate organization in Iraq, AQAP placed a large emphasis on carrying out attacks against the West. Regarding their goal within the state of Yemen, al-Qaeda was clear in its focus on establishing the Islamic caliphate in the power vacuum (November 2019). This goal of establishing the Islamic state was held steady through the first and second phases of AQAPs presence in Yemen. There was no reported variance in this motivation as the conflict progressed.

Mixed conclusions are coming from the literature as to what effect leaders can have on the actions of a rebel group. While this is a factor that is worth addressing, it likely does not have a substantial effect on the actions of AQAP because the same leader, Nasser al-Wuhayshi, held power until 2015 when he was killed by a drone strike in Hadramout (University). al-Wuhayshi was a former private secretary to Osama bin Laden and orchestrated al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula's official creation in 2009. Following al-Wuhayshi's death, Qasim Raymi was granted authority over the organization. The analysis runs until 2016, which includes one year under the rule of Raymi, but there is no reason to believe that he had any effect on the level of civilian victimization that was perpetrated. AQAP had already been committing extremely low levels of civilian victimization since its implementation of rebel governing structures after 2011 and there was no deviation from this norm moving from 2015 to 2016. Even more so, Raymi was a devout follower of al-Wuhayshi, stood by al-Wuhayshi during the birth of the organization, and played an instrumental role in building AQAP in Yemen into the organization that is seen today (Qasim). The ideology and goals of both leaders aligned substantially with al-Wuhayshi emphasizing al-Qaeda's goal of fighting the Western "Crusaders" and Raymi emphasizing

following his rise to power that he “promised the fight against the United States would continue” (University, Qasim)

The literature says that if rebel groups have access to resources within the conflict zone or substantial 3rd party funding they are going to be more likely to victimize the civilian population because the group is less reliant on them (Weinstein 2007). AQAP did not have any large state backing during the years of 2009-2016. They were reported to have received funding from various Islamic charities as well as donations from other wealthy supporters (University). Additionally, there are reports of AQAP taking part in kidnappings and robberies to garner enough cash to conduct further attacks. AQAP did not receive any state-level support, nor did they have access to substantial amounts of resources outside of extorting money or stealing it. The only time in which al-Qaeda received a substantial increase in funding capabilities was in 2015-2016 when AQAP was able to seize Mukalla, a vital port city. Following the takeover, AQAP was able to “loot $60 million from the central bank and collect another $2 million per day from port taxes” (University). Based on the literature we would expect that there would be an increase in civilian victimization following the increased access to resources, but this is not what is observed. Because of the steady flow of low levels of cash from 2009-2014 and the lack of effect extra cash from 2015-2016, resource availability was deemed to not affect the actions perpetrated by AQAP.

Several entities are taking part in the conflict in Yemen. The first is the Saudi-led coalition. This coalition is headed up by Saudi Arabia and The United Arab Emirates and includes various other state supporters against the Houthi insurgency. The coalition did not become involved in the conflict until March 2015. This intervention, therefore, had little impact on the first phase of AQAP in Yemen, but it did come during the second phase of AQAP. The

literature tells us that “as a conflict actor weakens relative to its adversary, it employs increasingly violent tactics towards the civilian population as a means of reshaping the strategic landscape to its benefit” (Wood, Kathman, and Gent 2012). The Saudi-led coalition was fighting the Houthi rebels just as al-Qaeda was, but it was not a direct ally or supporter of al-Qaeda. In addition to the scholarly backing, the actions of AQAP did not vary from before 2015. The move away from civilian victimization started in 2012, several years before the Saudi coalition joined the conflict. Therefore, because the coalition was additionally fighting the Houthi rebels, just as AQAP is, then the civilian victimization would decrease from AQAP, but this decrease occurred prior to the intervention.

The second major intervening actor is the United States. The United States does not have boots on the ground taking part in the conflict, but it has largely implemented drone warfare to an extent that has not previously been seen. Some scholars have suggested that drone strikes may encourage rebel groups to conduct attacks on the civilian population (Cox 2021). If the drone strikes occurred solely in the first phase of AQAP, this intervention could explain the civilian victimization that was perpetrated, but the US continued its devastating drone campaign in both the first and second phases. There were various high-casualty drone strikes conducted by the United States starting in 2002 resulting in a constant variable throughout phases one and two of AQAP (Andrew 2009). Additionally using the search words “drone” and “in Yemen” in NEXIS database, there was an overall increase in the reports of drone strikes in Yemen with 188 in 2009 and 2,182 reports in 2016 with a peak in 2013 with 8,132 reports.

Analysis and Discussion

While many criticisms can be directed at al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, the social provisions and governance that they were able to provide in their governed territory provided a massive benefit to the local population. When AQAP was pushed out of much of the previously ruled territory in 2016, the living conditions of the Yemenis that had resided under its rule worsened substantially because "the central government remained completely incapable of providing security or services" and "AQAP and AAS provided far higher levels of governance and public goods than the central government" (Daley 2018). Additionally, the implementation of rebel governing structures by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula had a significant impact on the amount of violence that was perpetrated by the foreign fighters that traveled to Yemen. Foreign fighters are said to commit higher levels of violence against the local community because they lack cultural and structural embeddedness (Moore 2019). In other words, because the foreigners and citizens are not integrated, an in-group/out-group relationship is formed. When al-Qaeda implemented various rebel governing structures that welcomed the local population into the arms of the organization, the foreigners were provided the opportunity to increase the amount of integration that was experienced. Whether it was through powersharing mechanisms or intermarriage, the foreign fighters held a closer relationship with the local population because of the governing structures that were implemented. For that reason, it is quite clear that rebel governance has a dampening effect on the amount of civilian victimization that is perpetrated by foreign fighters, a group that typically has a highly detrimental effect on civilians.

This research provides both theoretical and policy-driven conclusions. In regard to the former, this research does substantial work in bridging the gap between the literature on rebel governance and the literature on foreign fighters. Providing this nuanced detail about rebel group

structure and providing a novel research question in regard to rebel governance is the first step in bringing together these two separate bodies of literature. These two areas of research can talk to each other and build on one another to present novel findings. While this analysis only details a singular case study, it provides the starting point for future research into understanding the impact that rebel structure can have on foreign fighter action. Regarding policy, this research can have a significant impact in attempting the alleviate the suffering and death that is experienced by many civilians that exist within a civil conflict. These findings support the idea that the implementation of governing structures, in the end, lowers the amount of civilian victimization that is perpetrated by foreign fighters. Leading from that, when allocating time, aid, resources, or military intervention, this analysis suggests that these aspects should be directed towards groups that have a lower number of governing structures implemented. While this does not suggest that influential leaders should completely disregard rebel groups that have governing structures, it does suggest that there can be a targeted approach that focuses on the most at-risk communities first.

The limitation of this study is potential generalizability. While the conclusions that are found align with the conclusions coming from the rebel governance literature, the research focuses on a singular rebel group and the impact of the structures that it implements. While it is quite possible that these results can be translated to other groups, regions, and conflicts, more work needs to be completed before definitive, generalizable conclusions can be drawn. For this reason, there need to be more qualitative and quantitative studies conducted. Because of the large number of foreign fighters that have traveled to the Middle Eastern Region, a regional study on rebel governance and foreign fighters is a promising next step in furthering this research. Secondly, studies attempting to understand the impact of and differences between specific

aspects of rebel governance (ex. Power sharing, court system, law and order, etc) would be fruitful. This could provide an even stronger link between specific mechanisms in deterring violence against civilians.

CHAPTER 3

THE EFFECT OF REBEL GROUP CENTRALIZATION ON FOREIGN FIGHTER CIVILIAN VICTIMIZATION IN IRAQ

Abstract

What factors explain variation in civilian victimization by rebel groups? I focus on the connection between rebel group centralization and its relationship with foreign fighters' propensity for violence against civilians. I argue that rebel groups that are more centralized are better able to hold foreign fighters accountable which results in lower levels of civilian victimization. A process-tracing qualitative research design is implemented. Primary literature, interviews, and secondary news sources gathered from the NEXIS database are used to analyze the evolution of Ansar al-Islam into Ansar al-Sunnah during the War in Iraq (2003-2014). I find that as the governing structures weaken under Ansar al-Sunnah, the level of civilian victimization perpetrated by foreign fighters increases.

Introduction

Why is there variation in the amount of civilian victimization that is perpetrated by the same rebel group over time? Many scholars have sought to understand the effects that foreign fighters have on the conflict that they are involved in (Hegghammer 2010, Beslin 2017, Mendelsohn 2011, Rich 2015, Bakke 2014, Levitt 2009). Similarly, some have tried to understand the link between foreign fighters and civilian victimization (Whitaker, Walsh, and Conrad 2019; Doctor and Willingham 2020, Fjelde and Hultman 2014). From these significant contributions, we know that foreign fighters are likely to increase the level of civilian victimization perpetrated by the rebel group because they lack cultural and structural embeddedness. Further, the process of traveling to a conflict zone could be self-selecting for more radical individuals. Additionally, we know that rebel group structure and, more specifically, centralization can have an impact on the level of civilian victimization by increasing the accountability that is present within the rebel group (Haer, Jung, and Wong 2012). These two factors have been analyzed separately in the literature, but little has been done to investigate how these two factors have worked in tandem with one another. How do the actions of a rebel group with foreign fighters with centralized structures vary from the actions of rebel groups with foreign fighters without centralized command? How do these organizational factors condition the effects of foreign fighters entering

into conflict zones? This research seeks to explain how rebel group centralization can affect the level of civilian victimization that is perpetrated by foreign fighters as well as the tactics that are implemented. Understanding the effects of rebel group centralization on the actions of foreign fighters and the severity of civilian victimization is vital in understanding where and to what extent civilian victimization is more likely to occur. Additionally, considering the factor of the rebel group centralization can help explain why a large amount of civilian victimization is perpetrated by some foreign insurgents and not by others.

I focus on the connection between rebel group centralization and the propensity of foreign fighters (FF) to commit violence against civilians. Here, I focus on the conclusions of Haer, Jung, and Wong (2012) who found that rebel groups that have a more centralized structure are going to be less likely to commit civilian victimization. I place a focus on foreign fighters because the literature has claimed that they have a large impact on the rebel group leading to an increase in the amount of violence that is perpetrated against civilians as well as an increase in the number of indiscriminate killings. This research seeks to show how group centralization impacts foreign fighter action.

I argue that foreign fighters residing within a decentralized rebel group are going to be more likely to kill civilians at a higher rate as well as implement more brutal tactics such as suicide bombings, torture, and executions when compared to foreign fighters within a centralized rebel group. Because foreign fighters are more likely to not have adequate knowledge of many of the traditions, norms, and values of the culture as well as not knowing the language or sharing the same ethnicity, they have been shown to have a significant relationship with civilian victimization (Moore 2019, Stanton 2015, Fjelde and Hultman 2014, Schutte 2015). What is not explained by the literature is what impact rebel group centralization can have on the foreign

fighter's actions against civilians within the conflict. While there is a consensus that foreign fighters will take more violent action against civilians, the literature largely does not address why there is variation in the amount of violence that is perpetrated. This research puts forth the idea that the variation that is seen can be tied back to an organizational problem. Foreign fighters generally have a higher propensity for violence, however, following the analysis of the evolution of Ansar al-Islam into Ansar al-Sunnah, this empirical finding does not hold. Ansar al-Islam, a rebel group within Iraq that was home to foreign fighters, showed little direct aggression towards the civilian population which runs contrary to what the literature would have us believe about the effect of foreign fighters. To explain this deviation from the theory that the presence of foreign fighters leads to increases in civilian victimization, an emphasis is placed on the idea that strong/centralized rebel groups have the capacity, training, and oversight to manage this tendency to conduct violence against the civilian population and keep the actions of foreigners in check. A process tracing method is conducted using primary literature, interviews, and secondary sources compiled from the NEXIS database to analyze the evolution of Ansar al-Islam into Ansar al-Sunnah during the Iraq War (2003-2014). The analysis supports the argument that increased rebel group centralization leads to fewer instances of civilian victimization and less violent tactics overall being implemented. The ability of rebel group structure to dampen the impact that foreign fighters have on the civilian population finds support in al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen, a group that was able to decrease the civilian victimization that is perpetrated by its foreign fighters by implementing a more rigid organizational structure and accountability within the organization.

This work highlights the difference between foreign fighters within a centralized rebel group and foreign fighters within a decentralized rebel group and its effect on civilian

victimization, and this work makes two contributions to the literature. First, the literature thus far has lacked a clear understanding of the impact that rebel group structure can play on the actions of foreign fighters. This work details how one aspect of the rebel group, the level of centralization, can have an impact on foreign fighters' likelihood of violence against civilians. Secondly, this paper provides important policy implications. Resources from countries and international organizations are limited and, if the goal is to limit the amount of civilian death that takes place in the conflict, then understanding where violence is likely to occur and where resources can be allocated to provide the most benefit is vital. For example, this can be seen in the current war in Ukraine. Several thousand Arab Mujahideen have joined the Russian-Ukrainian war on the side of Russia, and these individuals exist within a largely decentralized command structure and "many reports suggest they participated in the mass murder of civilians during the occupation of Bucha and other towns around Kyiv" (November 25). Some of the Chechen Mujahideen have reported targeting civilians in the LGBTQ community as well as participating in "extrajudicial killings, kidnappings, and other crimes by human rights organizations, witnesses, and survivors" (August 19). The United States sent over $45 billion in total military aid to the Ukrainian forces. While this has largely boosted their fighting capacity, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights estimated that there were almost 19,000 civilian casualties in 2022. To attempt to decrease the number of civilians that are killed during the war, policymakers and decision-makers must understand which groups are committing the violence.

This is important because over the last century, civilians have accounted for 60% of all deaths stemming from warfare and because governments place less focus on legal action against targeting civilians, "the average war over the past three centuries has not been very 'just' as far

as the killing of unarmed civilians war concerned" (Eckhardt 1989, Downes 2006). Not only does this provide a security problem for the civilian population, but it can also have domestic and international governmental effects. Large-scale civilian victimization can lead to a plethora of results such as it can "destabilize conflict areas, send rural peasants streaming into urban areas and across international borders, contribute to deteriorating public health conditions, and degrade the productive capacity of the 'conflict state'" (Wood and Kathman). This can lead to increased intensity, length, and the likelihood of the conflict spreading. Lastly, this work provides an additional factor to analyze which allows for aid, resources, and support to be placed in areas that are most in need or have the largest potential for civilian violence[1].

The Role of Foreign Fighters in Civilian Victimization

The literature has sought to understand various aspects of foreign fighters, such as what levels of ability and knowledge they have (Mendelson 20122, Bakke 2013, 2014; Beslin 2017), what impact they have on the conflict and the rebel group (Rich and Conduit 2015; Levitt 2009; Bakke 2014) and the perception of these fighters from domestic and international actors (Rich and Conduit 2015; Bacon 2019). One such area that foreign fighters have been shown to have a significant impact is civilian victimization, and many scholars have sought to understand why this relationship exists. Some argue that because foreign fighters do provide material support to the rebel groups, the group is going to be less dependent on the population for various resources. For that reason, the rebel group is going to view civilian victimization as less costly and is, therefore, more likely to use violence against them (Conrad 2019). Even more so, if the rebel

[1] Rebel Group Centralization is generally defined as having the presence of 1.) Clear chain of command 2.) Judicial system for accountability 3.) Oversight of soldiers' actions and 4.) Oversight in recruitment. This will be detailed in the research design section.

group is not dependent on the civilian population for resources, then the leader is going to be much less likely to reprimand or curtail foreign fighter violence against those civilians because it does not bring a cost to the group (Humphreys and Weinstein 2006; Fortna, Lotito, Rubin 2018). Additionally, it has been shown that foreign fighters that share the ethnicity with the population are less likely to commit violence (Stanton 2015), but even then "foreign combatants may upset the balance of ethnic overlap between rebel groups and their civilian constituency" which leads to a potential increase in civilian victimization (Moore 2019; Fjelde and Hultman 2014). When individuals cross borders to take part in the conflict, likely, they are not well versed in the detailed value system, traditions, and culture of the country in which they are arriving. This lack of understanding of the population's worldview can lead to the potential for increases in violence against them (Schutte 2015). This lack of understanding can lead to internal strife within the rebel group between natives and foreigners. For this reason, foreign fighters have been shown to lead to a lack of internal cohesion (Rich 2015). The lack of uniformity and variation in characteristics among foreign fighters suggests that there is a less clear linear relationship between foreign fighters and civilian victimization than the previous literature would imply. Lastly, the proportion of foreign to native fighters within the rebel groups has been shown to impact how the foreigners interact with the civilian population and the level of violence that is experienced (Schwartz 2023).

The Effect of Rebel Group Centralization on Rebel Groups

The literature has largely agreed that the presence of foreign fighters leads to an increase in the amount of civilian victimization that is perpetrated. One such example is the sharp increase in civilian victimization following the inclusion of foreign fighters into the ranks of the

Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone (Human Rights Watch). While this may generally be true, this fails to explain why there are varying amounts of civilian victimization that are perpetrated by rebel groups that have similar amounts of foreign fighters. While some scholars have sought to explain why certain characteristics of foreign fighters lead them to commit more violence on civilians, the understanding of the relationship between the rebel group structure and the actions of the foreign fighter has largely been missed. The literature on rebel group centralization has shown that rebel groups across conflicts have varying levels of centralization and authoritative power over their fighters. This can be seen with, for example, the IRA which has internal mechanisms that "provided an incentive structure based on accountability that enabled IRA leadership to punish traitors and create more professionalized operatives" (Heger, Jung, and Wong 2012). The decentralized nature of the Islamic State stands in contrast with affiliates that reside in Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Yemen, the Gulf, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Eastern Europe, North Africa, and throughout Sub-Saharan Africa with very little large-scale coordination or accountability (From Syria). Some scholars have argued that centralization provides "clear lines of command and control that coordinate the efforts of various parts of an organization" which makes civilian victimization less likely (Haer, Jung, and Wong 2012). This lends itself to the idea that a solidified centralized hierarchy within a rebel group will lead to increased accountability of fighters within the group. For that reason, fighters are less able to commit random acts of violence against the civilian population for fear of punishment from their superiors. Within the foreign fighter literature, the relationship between rebel group structure and foreign fighter action has largely been overlooked. Doctor (2020) attempted to better understand this relationship and argues that contrary to the rebel group structure literature, foreign fighters within more centralized rebel groups are going to be more likely to commit

violence against the civilian population. He argues that more centralized rebel groups are better able to leverage the material capabilities of foreign fighters during civil conflict which can increase civilian victimization (Doctor 2020). Doctor assumes that rebel leaders are seeking to utilize the violent nature of foreign fighters to gain an upper strategic hand in the conflict. While this could potentially be the case, there is not only literature but also historical evidence that this is sometimes not the case. For example, when describing Arbi Barayev and the foreign fighters that traveled to fight in the Chechen War, a Chechen among the ranks of the resistance stated, "I viewed him and his followers as opportunistic thugs who exploited Islam for their own purpose and that purpose was power and wealth" (Bakke 2014). Furthermore, the leadership of al-Qaeda has long feared that the inclusion of foreign fighters could "forever blacken" the name of al-Qaeda, and their "atrocities or mistakes may tarnish the brand as a whole or even divert the movement" (Byman 2013). The fact that many senior leaders of rebel groups become concerned with the "self-inflicted damage caused by over-zealous fighters with insufficient understanding of the local conditions" casts doubt on Doctor's assertion that rebel groups will use a centralized organizational structure to capitalize on foreign fighters' violent tendencies (Mendelson 2011).

Throughout the War in Iraq, Ansar al-Islam evolves into Ansar al-Sunnah. The group retains many of the same characteristics through the years including the number of foreign fighters present. While the literature has concluded that an increase in foreign fighters leads to an increase in civilian victimization, it fails to explain why there is variation present in the amount of civilian victimization between groups that hold a constant number of foreign fighters. The attacks that stemmed from Ansar al-Islam were targeted solely at military personnel and infrastructure, largely avoiding the death of civilians. Ansar al-Sunnah, on the other hand, outwardly sought out civilians and brutally propagated videos of their slaughter. The answer is

that Ansar al-Islam had a hierarchical system of centralization that was implemented within the ranks of its fighters. This intricate system included a clear chain of command, a judicial system to assure that individual members were held accountable, oversight in recruitment process and the vetting of new members, and oversight of soldiers' actions. For example, when foreign fighters needed to travel throughout the region, the Ansar al-Islam leadership assigned senior commanders to escort them in order to assure that no actions were taken that did not align with the rebel group's mission and vision. This system was able to hold the foreign fighters, individuals who otherwise would be more likely to harm civilians, accountable for their actions and limit the amount of indiscriminate violence that would be counterproductive to their goals. Conversely, as Ansar al-Islam transitioned into Ansar al-Sunnah, the centralized structure that was previously present was dissolved. This new command structure was not able to contain the tendencies of the foreign fighters that were present which resulted in a higher level of civilian victimization.

The literature is clear that foreign fighters are linked with increases in civilian victimization. More specifically, Moore (2019) finds that foreign fighters that are less embedded within the population (culturally and structurally) are more likely to commit violence against the civilian population. This emphasizes the argument that individuals that are from outside of the conflict zone are engaging in violence against civilians for specific reasons. While the foreign fighters had a tendency towards violence against the civilian population, the centralized structure that Ansar al-Islam implemented was able to keep the foreigners in check and decrease the amount of civilian violence. For example, because the foreign fighters tended to be placed in their own training camps[2], the leadership of Ansar al-Islam implemented a strict system of

[2] Ansar al-Islam established a special unit for foreign fighters in 2002 named Katibat al-Ghuraba or The Battalion of Foreigners (Lia 2022).

oversight over these groups. Whenever foreigners were traveling between camps or through the region, Ansar al-Islam leadership accompanied them and assured they complied. Additionally, Ansar al-Islam utilized the internal Security Committee, which is "the internal security and covert communications management team within the organization" (Nance 2014). This organization was tasked with conducting detailed screening of newly recruited foreign fighters. While not a perfect system, this was implemented to weed out the foreigners that did not meet the standards of the rebel leadership. The leadership of Ansar al-Islam was able to utilize the centralized structure of the rebel group to place a check on the inherent tendency of foreign fighters to increase the violence on the civilian population. The centralized structure provides accountability and rewards for behaviors that are deemed positive and a system of oversight to quickly address actions that are seen as negative.

H1: Foreign Fighters will commit more civilian victimization in rebel groups that contain a decentralized governing structure.

H2: Fighter Fighters will use more brutal tactics against civilians in rebel groups that contain a decentralized governing structure.

Research Design

An analysis of the effect of rebel group governance and centralization on the likelihood that foreign fighters commit violence on civilians within intrastate wars is conducted. To analyze this hypothesis, a process-tracing method is implemented, which is "an analytical tool for drawing descriptive and causal inferences from diagnostic pieces of evidence - often understood as part of a temporal sequence of events of phenomena" (Collier 2011). This method is utilized to describe

the evolution of Ansar al-Islam into Ansar al-Sunnah in the Iraqi War (2003-2014). This transition provides a valuable case study to understand the effect that rebel governance and centralization have on FF violence against civilians because as Ansar al-Islam evolves into Ansar al-Sunnah, the governing structures that were present under the former are not seen under the rule of the latter. This provides a unique opportunity to analyze the impact of rebel governance because it allows for variables such as time period, number of foreign fighters, the ideology of foreign fighters, leadership, goals, ability, ideology, and 3rd party support to be controlled for. This allows for the variable of rebel governance to be isolated and for it to be tested for its effect on FF civilian violence. Additionally, the level of foreign fighters that are present in this case study is representative of nearly a quarter of rebel groups that include foreign fighters. This leads to the assumption that the findings gathered here could provide insight into a large portion of the rebel groups that contain foreign fighters.

Civilian victimization is the dependent variable utilized in this analysis and focuses on the amount of civilian death that is documented. These data are gathered from various sources including primary literature, documented interviews, and secondary news reporting on the attacks conducted.[3] Attacks that result in the death of solely military personnel will not be considered in this analysis. When attacks result in both the death of military personnel and civilians, the amount of civilian death will be the only number taken into consideration. Additionally, rebel group tactics will also be analyzed. This data will also be coming from primary literature, interviews, and secondary news sources. To provide a definition, tactics will

[3] Academic literature consists of papers such as Lia, B. (2022) *A Kurdish al-Qaida? Making Sense of of the Ansar al-Islam Movement in Iraqi Kurdistan in the Early 2000s*, Schanzer (2004) *Ansar al-Islam: Back in Iraq*, Steinberg (2006) *The Iraqi Insurency: Actors, Strategies, and Strcutures*, among others. Interviews and reporting were gathered from a plethora of news sources such as The New York Times, The Associated Press International, Agence France Presse, Herald Sun, The Times, and the Qatar News Agency.

be considered brutal if there is the presence of torture before the killing, beheadings, and video executions. These will be analyzed at from the group level which is the same method that was implemented by both Moore (2019) and Doctor and Willingham (2022), seminal works in regard to foreign fighters and civilian victimization.

The independent variable that is implemented in this study is rebel group centralization. Centralization can be defined as "the extent to which a group's system of command is characterized by a clear hierarchical structure…decision-making is concentrated to the high echelons of the organization and positions of authority are strictly determined by placement in the chain of command" (Doctor 2020). When addressing centralization, four aspects will be addressed: 1.) Clear chain of command 2.) Judicial system for accountability 3.) Oversight of soldiers' actions and 4.) Oversight in recruitment. A clear chain of command assures that the orders and decisions that are advocated for by the leadership are effectively carried out by the junior leadership of the organization. This included the implementation of a system of deputy emirs that were loyal to the emir. These individuals were part of a sophisticated communication network that was spread out throughout the territory that was held. A judicial system is vital to provide a clear system of punishments if the actions of members of the group deviate from the acceptable norm. Oversight of the actions of soldiers signals that the leadership of the group is present and cognizant of how the soldiers are behaving and provides an avenue of accountability. For example, Ansar al-Islam had a system of Islamic Courts that was consistently updated with the most recent edicts and opinions of the leading Salafi scholars. These rulings were then upheld within the group. Lastly, because foreign fighters are embedding themselves within the group, a system of oversight of recruitment is analyzed. This came through the Information Committee of Ansar al-Islam, which was in charge of not only the media that was shared but also the

recruitment and interview processes that were present. When leaders can more effectively monitor who is joining the organization and the reasoning behind their desire to join, there is a greater level of centralization within the group. These data were gathered from various academic sources, governmental documents, and secondary news sources.

Regarding confounding variables, I will discuss the time period, the number of foreign fighters, the ideology of foreign fighters, leadership, goals, ability, ideology, and 3rd party support. The *time period* addresses if there was any intervention or major change in the status of the conflict that would result in variation in the dependent variable. The *number of foreign fighters* is addressed to show that the number within each group remained at a similar level. This variable is gathered from the Rebel Foreign Fighter Dataset. The *ideology of foreign fighters* is determined from quotes and descriptions of the fighters gathered from sources such as The Candian Press, The Telegraph, and the International Crisis Group as well as academic literature (Schanzer 2004, Lia 2022). These sources show that the foreign fighters were seeking the same goal from their involvement in the conflict. The *leadership, goals, territory, ideology,* and *3rd party support* were controlled for to ensure that variation in the level of civilian victimization was not being driven by factors other than centralization of the rebel group. The *leadership* variable shows how similar the leaders' goals were, whether the leadership within the groups remained constant, and, if there was a change, did this change result in variation. The *goal* and *ideology* variables were established from quotes and interviews with leaders and official statements of the rebel groups to convey that the rebel groups were seeking the same outcome from the conflict and had similar motivations. The *territory* variable was added to show that both rebel groups had equal control over the territory. This variable is important because Kaylvas (2006) showed that the more territory that is held by the rebel group the less likely it is that the

group will commit violence on the civilian population. This is measured by comparing the number of cities that the rebel groups held control over. Lastly, the *3rd party support* was included to show whether the addition of a 3rd party supporter of the rebel group had an impact on the actions taken by the rebel group. These data were gathered from various academic sources as well as documentation gathered from the NEXIS database.

Ansar al-Islam

"They are extremists who have no match anywhere in the Arab world, even the Taliban are not like them … they are even worse than the Taliban."(August 22).

Jalal Talabani, Former President of Iraq

Ansar al-Islam, *Supporters of Islam*, is an Islamist group that has taken a substantial hold within the conflict in Iraq. The rebel group is led by Mullah Najm al-Din Faraj Ahmad. The group rose from the dust weeks before the 9/11 attacks and flaunted the slogan “Ten minutes to Heaven” which is meant to reference the time they believe it takes for a martyr's soul to reach paradise following their death in battle (March 28). Because of their brutality in combat, the Ansar became renowned in the region with the head of the PUK stating that they “have no match anywhere in the Arab World, even the Taliban are not like them…they are even worse that the Taliban” (August 22). Various motivations permeate the ranks of Ansar al-Islam such as support for al-Qaeda, and opposition to President Saddam Hussein and his allies but overwhelmingly the group seeks to “expel those Jews and Christians from Kurdistan and join the way of the Jihad, and rule every piece of land with the Islamic Shari’a rule” (Schanzer 2004). While foreign fighters have been documented among its ranks, the leadership of the organization remains entirely Kurdish even after the group began to expand (Lia 2022). While their leadership may

have come from Kurdistan, much of their training was gathered abroad. Foreign fights among the ranks of Ansar al-Islam were documented to have attended both military and religious training across the border in Afghanistan (Carol 2002). Ansar al-Islam started out a small coalition of fighters called *Jund al-Islam*, but they effectively created a centralized system of governance which transformed them into a "highly sophisticated machine that apparently can operate in many parts of Iraq without drawing attention to themselves (Nance 2014).

Ansar al-Islam Structure

Within the tumultuous environment of Iraq, Ansar al-Islam was able to retain order and structure among its ranks and provide a strong hierarchical structure that allowed for oversight and judicial order. Mullah Krekar, one of the most influential leaders of Ansar al-Islam (AI), emphasized that he was trying to create a strong community structure that placed an emphasis on "obeying the leader of the movement to create a strong force" (Krekar 2015). Within AI, the leadership has the ultimate say over the decision-making process. The individuals that hold authority positions within the organizations are forced to attend monthly meetings in order to discuss the need for changes or improvements coming from the branches. Furthermore, the leadership of Ansar al-Islam requires that the more junior leaders provide two reports annually that discuss the actions of the committee and "proposals for progress" (Krekar 2015). These mechanisms were put in place in order to establish a clear hierarchical structure and to ensure that the committees within Ansar al-Islam were continuing to implement actions in the way that the leadership deemed appropriate. Furthermore, AI's "fighting force is said to be reorganized into small units of ten to fifteen members, each headed by an 'emir'" and, according to Lt. Gen. Norton Schwartz, had been quite successful in building infrastructure within the territory held in Iraq (Schanzer 2004).

Under the rule of the emir, the structure of Ansar al-Islam provides two deputies: “one acts as an operations officer and the other as chief administrator of the organization. (Nance 2014). These individuals are vital aids to the emir and ensure that his will is disseminated to the four departments that reside within the group which includes the Shariah Committee, Military Committee, Security Committee, and Information Committee. Each of these institutions that were established by Ansar al-Islam was supervised by a trusted member of the central city council in order to ensure that the rules that had been established were being followed (Krekar 2015). When discussing the various committees and regional branches, Krekar stated that “the central administration is responsible for the performance of all the decisions that have been assigned to itself and its branches” (Krekar 2015).

Within the Shariah committee, there was the implementation of juridical committees, which were used to provide authoritative juridical rulings (Lia 2022). To carry out the rulings of these committees, formal Islamic Courts were created that were tasked with remaining in contact with the leading Salafist scholars throughout the Middle East to remain up to date on their rulings (Lia 2022). The doctrine of AI laid out by Krekar provided that the leader of the court needed to be “an expert in war, law, and human rights” but emphasizes that “no punishment shall be imposed without the consent and decision of the Amir” (Krekar 2015). As Ansar al-Islam continued to grow its judicial infrastructure, it created ‘Our Doctrine and Program’ which adequately laid out the doctrine and vision of the group as well as the system that they were attempting to build and evolve (Lia 2022, Ansar al-Islam Website 2003g). Because the ruling system of Ansar al-Islam continued to expand in the regions that is holding power, it was said to be the “most prominent example of a small “Islamic emirates” with de facto territorial control” and could be best described as a “small jihadi proto-state” (Lia 2015). This control stretched

throughout the Abyan province, and Ansar al-Islam even invited several journalists there to allow them to document daily life under their rule and the mandates of Sharia Law (Lia 2015).

Power is further passed down the chain in the Military Committee to various deputy emirs. These individuals are in charge of organizing, planning, and arming "the overt and covert aspects of the terrorist or guerrilla insurgent missions of the organization (Nance 2014). These groups are not put in place solely to wage war against rival organizations or the U.S. invaders, but they were also provided the vital task of protecting the surrounding towns within their territory (Nance 2014). These deputy emirs were vital in planning the safety and protection of the towns within Ansar's proto-state. Because of their sophisticated communication network, deputy emirs were able to order the various battalions to "come together to act as a self-defense force when threatened by the Kurdish political parties or operate covertly when infiltrating the borders of Iran, Turkey, or Syria" (Nance 2014). Not only did the deputy emirs wield the capacity to manage the Iraqi nationals within AI, but they were also able to effectively utilize the foreign constituents. Because the foreign fighters within Ansar al-Islam tended to form their own training camps to continue training militarily, religiously, and spiritually, Ansar al-Islam leadership was tasked with overseeing their actions. When these fighters traveled between camps or throughout the region, "AI leaders often accompanied them" (Tønnessen 2014). Successful foreign fighters were even rewarded with leadership positions, which shows that there is likely a high level of military cooperation between the foreign fighters and the AI leadership. This is seen in Ansar al-Islam allowing a Jordanian national to lead a military operation against the PUK in 2002 (Lia 2022).

In addition to the Shariah committee and the Military Committee, Ansar al-Islam also had a security committee and information committee. The Security Committee "provides secret

pathways to communicate and dispatch weapons and equipment and…performs internal police and executive protection duties, including security vetting of visitors and new recruits" (Nance 2014). This was vital not only to the communication between deputy emirs but also to the security of the group as the conflict continued to escalate and more foreign fighters were joining the group's ranks. The Information Committee was the "media arm of the organization, which produces press releases, arranges interviews, and processes videotapes taken in the field by the military committee of successful attacks. As Ansar al-Islam continued to grow its governing structure and centralization of its command, it steadily transformed "from the fleeing remnants of the Baath Party to a highly organized command structure capable of embracing those opposed to the U.S.-led occupation" (Jack 2003).

Within the solidified structure that was created for Ansar al-Islam in Iraq, there were clearly defined punishable offenses for the member. Above all, Mullah Krekar emphasized that the members of the group needed to protect the "unity of the movement" and not do or say anything that would bring humiliation to the group (Krekar 2015). He further emphasizes that there was to be no dissenting ideology stemming from the soldiers to the group and they were not to disrespect the movement or the leadership in any way. Any soldier that is seen to be distorting the truth, hiding it, acting in an ingenuine manner, or attempting to utilize the group for his own benefit will suffer the consequences of the courts. Lastly, Krekar emphasizes that any soldier that does not follow through with the command given by himself or the commanding leadership will face retribution (Krekar 2015). The Mullah states that the leadership will provide a warning to any such soldier that breaks any of the rules of AI. Following a warning, the individual will be suspended from the group for a span of six months and face financial fines.

This is followed by the seizure of assets or land, then forces banishment, and if the crime against the group or the leadership is severe enough, public execution (Krekar 2015).

Katibat al-Ghuraba

When the invasion of Iraq started, thousands of foreign fighters from across the region and the world were documented to have traveled to Iraq to take part in the conflict. Ansar al-Islam was there to provide a home for up to 400 of these foreign fighters (David 2003). Individuals from many countries such as Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Syria, Morocco, Jordan, Palestine, Tunisia, and Afghanistan with Saudi nations making up the largest portion of the FFs (March 28, Robert 2003, Schanzer 2004, Lia 2022). As the foreign fighters continued to fill the ranks of the group, Ansar al-Islam created a specialized unit called 'The Battalion of Foreigners' (Katibat al-Ghuraba) (Ansar al-Islam Website 2003i). The consensus from the foreigners who were traveling to fight in Iraq was a communal hatred towards the United States invaders as well as desiring the beginning of an Islamic State. This hatred towards Americans is exemplified by a Palestinian foreign fighter who stated that his reason for traveling to Iraq was solely to "kill Americans" (Schanzer 2004). Not only were the Americans a target for these individuals, but any group that was deemed to be supporting the United States' cause. This is why fighters who trained in Afghanistan streamed into northern Iraq to "weaken the pro-western Kurdish forces" (April 10). The foreign fighters that traveled to join the ranks of Ansar al-Islam were a "critical factor in introducing an expanding the use of the martyrdom weapon" with many of the attacks being carried out by non-Iraqi Arabs (Lia 2022). Ansar al-Islam would orchestrate the suicide bomb attack against military checkpoints and installations.

Civilian Victimization

While there is no dispute that Ansar al-Islam commit violence against civilians at times, most of their time was spent targeting military personnel and their installations within Iraq. Ansar al-Islam has implemented various tactics such as suicide bombings, car bombs, assassinations, and raids to attack militiamen in the Kurdish region (Robert 2003). The attacks that were conducted are going to "minimize injury to Iraqi citizens because their fight is with coalition forces, not Iraqi citizens for the most part" (Alisha Ryu). In saying that, there were instances in which civilians were victimized by Ansar al-Islam.

Suicide Bombings

One of the first successful Ansar al-Islam suicide bombings occurred in March of 2003 when Saudi national, Abd al-Azaz bin Su'ud bin Muhammad al-Gharabi, drove his car filled with explosives to a military checkpoint and detonated it. While attempting to kill the military personnel residing there, the bomber ended up killing an Australian photojournalist, Paul Moran, that was in the vicinity along with three military personnel. This resulted soon after the United States conducted air raids on many of the camps that Ansar al-Islam had sustained. The suicide attacks that Ansar al-Islam have been targeted not at the civilian population but at American soldiers, militiamen, and Kurdish officials claiming on their website that they "will make Iraq a cemetery for the Crusaders" (August 12; March 27; March 31).

Beheadings

As the first years of the conflict progressed (2001-2006), reports of beheadings began to appear. While the number of these gruesome incidents was not large, the media attention that these beheadings gathered was quite substantial because of their inherent brutality. Three American civilians, Nick Berg, Eugene Armstrong, and Kenneth Bigley, and one South Korean, Kim Sun-

il, were regretfully the victims of these heinous attacks (July 9). Military personnel sought to find the group that conducted these killings, and many fingers were left pointing at Ansar al-Islam. While AI was a reasonable assumption, these killings were claimed by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (Lincoln 2004, Tom 2004, Don Van 2004, July 18). al-Zarqawi was linked to several groups within the conflict including Ansar al-Islam, Al-Qaeda, and Tawid wal Jihad with some articles claiming he is definitely part of one group or the other but "he has been an independent agent, with his own network and ways of doing things that are distinct" (Don 2004). al-Zarqawi had "a horrific pedigree of terror and a reputation of brutal, merciless killer" that he was willing to spread to many groups throughout the conflict. For that reason, this raises questions about whether these beheadings can be attributed to Ansar al-Islam when they were conducted by a man that was not tied to a singular group at this time.

Ansar al-Sunna

"As for you the slaves of the cross (coalition forces)...we can't wait to sever your necks with our swords…To the slaves of the cross, and their agents, listen to our loud anger, which will deafen you and paralyze your forces" (June 12).

-Abdullah bin Rashid al-Baghdad, Shura Council Head

In 2006, Ansar al-Islam officially changed its name to Ansar al-Sunnah. This decision came from the Shura council because over the years they believed that the rebel group had grown from a simple militia into the groundwork of a society (Lia 2022). While this change was simply semantic, it "signaled a broader strategy of building a political-ideological platform for the coming phase of state consolidation in Iraq" (Lia 2022). There was speculation about whether Ansar al-Islam and Ansar al-Sunnah were the same group or whether they were separate entities,

but many scholars support the idea that they are the same group with a rebrand because “since Ansar al-Sunnah was founded, Ansar al-Islam has completely disappeared” and “the current leader of Ansar al-Sunna, Abu Abdallah al-Hasan bin Mahmud, is presumably the same person as the former Kurdish leader of Ansar al-Islam, Abu Abdallah al-Shafi’i” (Steinberg 2006). Furthermore, there has been further confirmation via the internet and various clips released by the group that Ansar al-Sunnah is made of the same individuals that inhabited Ansar al-Islam (Sirseloudi). Ansar al-Sunnah is a metamorphosis of Ansar al-Islam and espouses the same rigid Salafi ideology with the goal of achieving the “Muslims’ hope of an Islamic country where Islam and its people are strong” (Ansar al-Sunna). AS stressed establishing the Islamic State along with expelling the foreign occupiers because, in their eyes, ridding the country of the Americans would be meaningless if the state power was “handed to a secular apostate Iraqi who served the Americans as a slave..” (al-Marsad al-I‘lami al-Islami 2003 - Lia 2022). The Sunna conducted attacks throughout Iraq “not solely intended to drive the occupation forces out of Iraq, but also to create widespread insecurity among the public, engender sectarian polarization, and produce economic collapse” (Hafez 2006). By the end of their reign of terror, Ansar al-Sunna was said to have more blood on their hands than Al-Qaeda in Iraq (November 30).

Ansar al-Sunna Structure

American officials report that the insurgency that was occurring from 2005 forward was largely “horizontal as opposed to hierarchical, and ad hoc as opposed to unified” and “there is no center of gravity, no leadership, no hierarchy; they are more a constellation than an organization” (Dexter 2005). Several of the groups, including Ansar al-Sunna, “lacks jihadi leaders and senior operatives” and the area that they controlled was left empty (lia 2022). Akin to children left

without parental supervision, the low-level jihadists that were members of Ansar al-Sunna were acting largely without accountability in the Northern Iraqi region.

Many of the actions that were taken and plots that were executed by Ansar al-Sunna resided in the shadows of what the group used to be under Ansar al-Islam. Because of a lack of leadership and preparation, these attacks were "said to be 'amateurish' and the plotters' plans 'chaotic'" (Der Spiegel 2005). It is no surprise that reports show that "leaders usually don't have anything to do with details" of the attacks which are left to the low-level militiamen (Dexter 2005). Ansar al-Sunnah was largely not able to implement the same level of hierarchy and infrastructure that they had under Ansar al-Islam. Ansar al-Sunna was similarly able to hold certain cities such as Mosul but lacked the ability to build anything substantial in the territory that they held and were said to be only remnants of what they used to be (August 4). Additionally, the lack of infrastructure and stability within the cities led them to be open to conflict with other militia groups residing in the region which further deteriorated their abilities (Jennifer 2014).

Additionally, because of the radical actions that Ansar al-Sunna was taking against civilians, they were struggling to form alliances with the local militias and they were becoming extremely isolated (Lia 2022). They were not able to grow their power base by gaining supporters, but increasingly the other groups were turning against them which led to open conflicts with other groups. Because of this isolation, there began to be internal descent within the organization which would eventually result in their split in 2007 (Lia 2022). Instead of being the organized, structured base for an Islamic society that Ansar al-Islam was beginning to create, the units of Ansar al-Sunna had a lack of structure where "small, adaptive cells operate independently without central guidance. There may be some loose coordination of attacks, but

then cells go their separate way" (Greg 2005). Small, highly trained cells are acting on their own fruition advertising "their skills on the Internet and are temporarily contracted on a per-job basis, but otherwise remain autonomous" (Greg Grant 2005).

The Martyrs Brigade

Ansar al-Sunnah continued to have foreign fighters among its ranks throughout the conflict coming from countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, Morocco, Syria, Palestine, and Afghanistan (Schanzer 2004). There was no shortage of insurgents streaming across the border with one US army intelligence officer saying that "they're being replaced quicker than we can interdict their operations. There is always another insurgent ready to step up and take charge" (Dexter). The foreign fighters that were traveling to Iraq to join the insurgency were "armed with heavy machine guns, mortars, and antiaircraft weaponry" and "sought to create a Taliban-like regime" (Schanzer 2004). The foreigners also had an intense drive to fight against the perceived American crusaders with one foreigner claiming that "we have returned to the land of Iraq, which was invaded by US crusader forces…to sow fear in their hearts" (January 19). This mentality is further exemplified in a statement from Abu Hareth Abdul Rahman al-Dousry, a Saudi national who detonated a suicide vest

> "To my mother, father, wife, and brothers…I did not leave you to punish you, but instead to heed God's call to jihad. How can I live happily knowing that this country is being violated, usurped, and raped and that the infields are storming our homes and sanctuaries and violating our religion? (Hafez)

A Time Magazine reporter was able to confirm from video footage that the suicide bombings that were being carried out were being conducted by non-Iraqi foreign fighters which "form a

large part of the suicide bomber brigade that carry out a lot of the most devastating attacks in Iraq" (July 6, August 4). This statement has been confirmed by several US and Iraqi military officials that have largely placed the blame of the violent suicide attacks on "a harder-core insurgent element" of foreign fighters that have increased the suicide attacks and implemented a "greater ruthlessness of the attacks" (Edward Wong, May 10). These foreigners have been shown to "play a prominent role in coordinating and directing major attacks" resulting in the doubling of car bomb attacks (May 10, Los Angeles).

Civilian Victimization

Not only has "Ansar al-Sunnah been responsible for some of the most vicious attacks in Iraq" (Khalil 2005), but they increased the targeting of civilians alongside military personnel and have increased the dissemination of their actions via the internet. This brutality is shown in a statement from the group after the brutal slaying of a Sweden and British citizen:

> "In these blessed days of Eid al-Adha…Muslims all over the globe seek to get closer to God by slaughtering sacrificial sheep. But your mujahedeen breather in Iraq Sacrifice what is greater for God" (January 21)

As Ansar al-Sunnah began to grow in prominence, they began to build a reputation for being extremely violent and ruthless killers that were willing to murder anyone that was seen to even remotely be deemed to be helping the United States and its allies. While Ansar al-Sunnah's name may not turn heads as quickly as that of al-Qaeda or the Islamic State, some reports show that "Ansar al-Sunnah have more innocent blood on their hands than Zarqawi's Tawhid wal Jihad and al-Qaeda in Iraq" (November 30). AS was able to carry out more attacks over a broader land area than al-Qaeda which resulted in over 1,600 attacks within Iraq (Lia 2022, Nance 2003).

Ansar al-Sunnah surpassed “most other Sunni insurgent groups in perpetrating violence against Iraqis…determined to punish collaboration with the enemy” (Lia 2022). Various tactics such as suicide bombings, beheadings, and videoed executions were utilized by the group to maximize the damage against their perceived enemy which, many times, included the civilian population.

Suicide Bombings

The most notorious suicide attack that was carried out by Ansar al-Sunnah occurred in February of 2004 at the PUKs and KDPs headquarters in Irbil. Citizens flocked to the location to take part in the beginning of the annual Eid al-Adha festivals that were going to take place that day leaving the area packed. Four suicide bombs detonated by members of Ansar al-Sunnah ripped through the crowd, which had been eager to celebrate their religious holiday. An attack that took mere seconds to conduct resulted in the deaths of at least 105 civilians (Lia 2022). The Deputy Operations Chief of the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq was clear that it was the foreign element among the Ansar that was to blame for this attack (Maher 2004).

Another occurred in a busy market area in Tikrit where citizens usually wait to get hired for day jobs, a car bomb ripped through the street and businesses surrounding it. The explosion resulted in the death of 38 civilians (May 2012 - Iraq Ablaze). The claim was that the group was targeting Iraqis that were attempting to work for the US forces, but they held little regard for the civilians that were simply caught in the crossfire. This unprecedented number of suicide missions and car bombs occurred in local markets while Iraqi citizens shopped for Ramadan, gas stations, restaurants, Shi’a mosques, Christian churches, and Kurdish political parties with one report from May of 2005 stated that these attacks have “killed more than 400 people since the start of the month” (Ansar al-Islam CFR; May 2012 - Iraq Ablaze). These attacks are not anomalies and became a common occurrence seen throughout Iraq in various neighborhoods of Iraq such as

Huriya, in the town center of Samarra, and one directed at Iraqi's that were attempting to apply for the police force that resulted in almost 50 casualties (Alissa 2009, February 5, May 4)

Beheadings and Video Executions

AS not only implemented the gruesome tactic of beheading their enemy, but they became notorious for it. One reporter even noted that it almost seemed as if Zarqawi's al-Qaeda and Ansar al-Sunna were competing to see who could behead the most civilians (September 23). In late 2004, Ansar al-Sunnah kidnapped a Japanese backpacker and following Japan's refusal to withdraw its troops from Iraq, was beheaded (May 11). Another attack was conducted in October of 2004, when a civilian Kurdish translator, Luckman Hussein, was beheaded because he was judged to have been working for the enemy (October 11). A tactic that is implemented by AS is kidnapping a perceived enemy collaborator and then torturing them until they admit to aiding the enemy, which results in their death, innocent or not. This was seen in the beheading of an Iraqi engineer, an Iraqi citizen who was installing sewage pipes in a US base, and two Macedonian citizens in 2004 (October 2, October 19).

Ansar al-Sunnah not only continued to conduct widely violent attacks against the people living within Iraq, but they also were keen on catching these moments on video and sharing them with their sympathizers. In August of 2005, Ansar al-Sunnah was reported to have kidnapped and, shortly after, executed twelve Nepalese laborers and quickly shared it online for the world to see. The video caught every detail and the members of AS restrained the first Nepalese man and began to slice at his head. His screams were silenced as his head was removed from his body and proudly placed on his chest for the camera to witness. The video then documented "11 hostages shot in succession with an assault rifle as they lay next to one another, face down in the sand" (Jaish Ansar al-Sunna GS). Seif Adnan Kanaan, an employee at the Mosul airport, was

beheaded by AS in 2004 (October 23). To make more money for himself and his family, Seif picked up a second job delivering beverages to the US army. Because of his contact with the US soldiers, Ansar al-Sunna judged him to be a collaborator with the enemy, which resulted in the innocent young man being surrounded by three hooded gunmen, kidnapped, and beheaded on camera (October 23).

This gruesome video was not the sole film disseminated by the group. Other videos included three Kurdish civilians having their throats slit and the execution of a Jordanian trucker driver by the name of Hamad Ismail al-Saneh. Al-Saneh was kidnapped by the group because he worked for a Jordanian supply company that was taking supplies to the US bases in Iraq. The video included al-Saneh "kneeling down with his hands tied behind his back, apologizing and calling for fellow Jordanian drivers to stop transporting goods to US forces in Iraq" right before an AS fighter shot him several times in the head (May 23 - Al-Qaeda). Another particularly gruesome beheading was conducted on Jamal Tewefic Salman, an *alleged* CIA agent. While there is no substantial support for this claim, Ansar al-Sunnah disseminated a video and photos of his lifeless body with the message:

> "We call on those living off the blood of the Mujahideen to repent to God and stop what they are doing…or else the Mujahideen's and God's hands will reach their necks one by one" (42)

General Killings / Assassinations

Because of the dynamic nature of the battlefield, exact numbers for civilian killings and targeted assassinated are unattainable, but these attacks were conducted alongside with other indiscriminate suicide attacks and publicly shared executions. Aside from military personnel, these attacks have included "government officials, politicians, judges, journalists, humanitarian

aid workers, doctors, professors, and individuals thought to be collaborating with foreign forces in Iraq, including translators, cleaners, and others who perform civilian jobs" (Ansar al-Islam CFR). These attacks were directed at foreign civilians such as the 6 Sudanese drivers that were shot by AS because they worked for a Jordanian Firm that supplied the US bases or the "some 80 Turks, most of them truck drivers" with members of Ansar al-Islam asserting that "the rule of God was implemented" against the drivers (April 28, March 2). In saying that, the Iraqi civilians were forced to bear the brunt of the attacks stemming from this violent group. For example, the bodies of 14 civilians were found in trash heaps in Baghdad, and 22 civilian Shiite Muslim men were found in the Abu Disher neighborhood "bearing signs of torture and summary execution" linked to Ansar al-Sunnah (May 9). This violence was not limited solely to men with many women found among the executed also showing signs of torture preceding their death (September 23). Not only did Ansar al-Sunnah conduct killings on the civilian population, but it also required members of the civilian class to commit these actions on their behalf. Dr. Luay Omar Taie was an Ansar al-Sunnah sympathizer, and he was recruited and paid by the organization to kill police officers and soldiers that were residing in the Kirkuk Hospital (March 26). Dr. Taie admitted, "I used to stop the breathing machines or cut the electricity in the operation room or reopen the wounds" all on the dime of Ansar al-Sunnah (March 26).

As the months passed by with continued attacks on both military personnel and civilians, Ansar al-Sunnah had become "the most prolific perpetrator of executions and decapitations of prisoners and hostages among the Iraqi insurgent groups" (Lia 2022). Their tactics ranged from kidnapping foreign nationals to execute, video-taped civilian beheadings, to exploding four suicide bombs at a Ramadan festival. From April to August 2005, The Iraqi Defense Ministry

reported that 1,413 civilians had been killed due to the attacks that Ansar al-Sunnah was carrying out (August 3).

Confounding Variables

These two rebel groups both took part in the conflict in Iraq (2003-2011). Ansar al-Islam was created in 2001 and, while reports of its activities following the creation of Ansar al-Sunnah are nonexistent, is said to have been alive in Iraq until 2014. Ansar al-Sunnah was created in 2006 following the rebranding of the group with reports of their actions within Iraq lasting until 2014 (May 5). While Ansar al-Islam was in action before the United States invaded Iraq, they were in action for several years following the involvement of foreign entities during the conflict. Similarly, Ansar al-Sunna took part in the conflict involving the United States and continued taking action following the withdrawal of the United States in 2011. Both groups were, first and foremost, seeking to push the United States out of Iraq and were focused on taking actions that would force this removal. Because they are interacting within a common environment during the same war with the same enemy, the slight variance in the time period is unlikely to affect the level of victimization that was perpetrated.

To calculate the foreign fighter number, the ordinal coding of the Rebel Foreign Fighter Dataset is implemented. The Rebel Foreign Fighter Dataset provides ordinal coding, running from 0 to 8, for the number of foreign fighters that are included in a rebel group. Reports on exact number of foreign fighters is difficult to come by, but even at the best estimate range, both groups are coded as a 3 including 100-500 FF. Regarding ideology and goals, both the foreign fighters that inhabited the group and the group itself held a Salafi Islamic worldview. The FFs and the group sought not only to fight back against the United States invaders and use violence to push them out, but they also were seeking to establish an Islamic State in which Sharia law

could be implemented (Schanzer 2004, April 10, January 19). This was seen by their many attempts at rebel governance and establishment of rule of law in the regions and towns that they held control over (Schanzer 2004, Ansar al-Sunna). Both Ansar al-Islam and Ansar al-Sunna, along with the foreign fighters that joined the groups, held the Salafi ideology with the goal of fighting the United States and establishing the Islamic State. Because of these similarities, foreign fighter numbers and ideology appear to be unrelated to civilian victimization.

Abu Abdullah al-Shafi'i was the first leader of Ansar al-Islam. He withdrew from the position and allowed Mullah Krekar to take his place, but he remained second in command as Krekar's deputy. As Ansar al-Sunnah began to take shape, its leader was known to be a man named Abu Abdallah al-Hasan bin Mahmud. While this individual led under the name bin Mahmud, he is presumed to be Abu Abdallah al-Shafi'i, the leader of Ansar al-Islam acting under an alias (Steinberg 2006). While it is unclear why sl-Shafi'i began using the name bin Mahmud, it is reported that he continued to have power both under Ansar al-Islam and Ansar al-Sunnah. Not only did al-Shafi'i create the group, Ansar al-Islam, but he also remained second in command during the rest of AI's reign. This means that the established leadership for both Ansar al-Islam and Ansar al-Sunna is the same. For that reason, the leadership of the two groups also seems unrelated to foreign fighter civilian-directed violence.

While neither party held expansive territory, they each had notable chunks of land that were held by the groups for substantial periods. Ansar al-Islam was said to hold control of around 10 villages in the north of Iraq which amounted to control over around 4,000 civilians (March 23). They were reported to have a high level of control in areas such as Biyara, Tawila, and other towns in the Suleimaniya governorate (Lia 2022). These areas are where AI was able to implement the governing structure and judicial system that was discussed previously.

Similarly to Ansar al-Islam, Ansar al-Sunna did not hold large amounts of territory within Iraq. The group was reported to have held control of the towns of Ramadi, Latifiya, Yusufiya, and Mahmudiya and the province of Diyala, as well as, areas of Ramadi and Mosul (Hashim 2008, January 31). Neither Ansar al-Islam nor Ansar al-Sunna was able to capture and control large regions of Iraq during their fight against the invaders. While the locations varied, they both had the opportunity and the ability to rule over various populated towns. For this reason, the amount of territory that was obtained would not have had a large effect on the amount of civilian victimization that occurred.

The sources on the level of third-party support that both groups received are contradictory and largely speculative. Phone conversations have been picked up between the Iraqi government and Ansar al-Islam, so there is speculation that the Iraqi state provided funding for the group, but these claims cannot be corroborated by publicly available information (Catherine 2022). Additionally, there are reports that Iran was providing aid to the group because they "openly allowed the group to operate along its border" with allegations that goods and weapons were provided (Schanzer 2004). These fighters can utilize Iran as a base to retreat to, then reorganize and plan before heading back into Iraq to conduct further attacks. These speculations are further corroborated by intelligence reports that "elements of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps have provided safe haven and training for Ansar al-Islam members" (November 22). Additionally, there is sparse reporting that Syria may have provided some financial backing to the Ansar al-Islam, but it is not clear from who and in what capacity this aid is being provided (November 22). Like its predecessor, Ansar al-Sunna held a comfortable relationship with Iran. U.S. intelligence has been able to confirm that Iran is at the forefront of providing financial support for the actions of Ansar al-Sunna in Iraq (Tony Snow). Additionally,

the reports show that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps was willing to continue its support and aid for Ansar al-Sunna (Pamela 2007). Some reports are saying that there is aid coming from Syria ranging from former Ba'ath party members providing funding to the provision of safe houses near Damascus (Tony Snow, February 20). The extent of the external support isn't clear, but there does not appear to be any stemming from the Syrian government itself. The intelligence reports are quite clear that both Ansar al-Islam and Ansar al-Sunna received financial support from Iran as the conflict progressed within Iraq. Because of this addition, third-party support likely had little effect on civilian victimization.

Analysis and Discussion

In this analysis of the evolution of Ansar al-Islam to Ansar al-Sunnah, I hypothesize that a centralized command structure allows for the leadership of a rebel group to hold foreign fighters, a group that has been shown to attack civilians at a high rate, accountable for their actions. A process tracing method is conducted to detail how the change in centralization structure in the group affected the amount of civilian victimization that was committed. By implementing the process tracing method, this analysis clearly details the mechanism by which civilian victimization increases. More specifically, I show how the implementation of rebel group centralization affects the actions taken by foreign fighters against the civilian population. Ansar al-Islam provided an organized structure within the rebel group that allowed for the leadership of the group to not only have its orders followed but also have strict oversight of the actions of the rank-and-file soldiers, especially the foreigners. Within Ansar al-Islam there was a clear chain of command, a judicial system, and leadership oversight of soldiers' actions and recruitment. These things allowed for the leadership to hold the foreign fighters, who have been shown to conduct

Table 5: Centralization Confounding Variables

	ANSAR AL-ISLAM	ANSAR AL-SUNNAH
CENTRALIZATION	1	0
CONFLICT	Iraq (2003-2006)	Iraq (2006-2014)
# OF FF	3	3
FF IDEOLOGY / GOAL	Islamist; Anti-US	Islamist; Anti-US
GROUP IDEOLOGY / GOAL	Islamist; Anti-US	Islamist; Anti-US
LEADERSHIP	Abu Abdallah al-Hasan bin Mahmud	Abu Abdallah al-Shafi'i
TERRITORIAL CONTROL	0	0
3RD PARTY SUPPORT	1	1

high levels of civilian victimization, accountable for their actions and curtail the violence that stemmed from this population. As the war droned on and change was deemed necessary to further the goals of the rebel group, Ansar al-Islam evolved into Ansar al-Sunnah. This change resulted in the devolution of the solidified, centralized structure that had been built under the previous organization. Because of the utter lack of oversight and weakened organizational control, there was an increase in the amount of civilian victimization that was present. Therefore, this research finds support for Hypothesis 1: as the amount of centralization decreased there was an increase in the amount of civilian victimization that was perpetrated. The attacks transitioned from targeting solely military personnel and outposts with the occasional death of civilians that were in the vicinity to the purposeful and meticulously planned attacks on the civilian population. Hypothesis 2 additionally finds support from the research. Ansar al-Sunnah began to increase not only the violence that was conducted against civilians but also the dissemination of video content depicting the attacks. Video-taped executions and, more specifically, beheadings of the civilian population became a trademark of the group. This tactic was not something that was experienced under the leadership of Ansar al-Islam's strict hierarchical structure that demanded accountability. When rebel groups have a high level of centralization, there is a higher level of accountability and responsibility that is enforced within the ranks of the group. When there is a clear hierarchy within the rebel group, ground soldiers cannot disperse across the land dealing out punishments as they see fit.

This analysis supports the idea that foreign fighters tend to conduct violence against the civilian population at a higher rate than local fighters. When foreign fighters were given the free will to act on their own behalf under Ansar al-Sunnah, the level of civilian victimization increased. Furthermore, this work supports the conclusions stemming from the rebel group

centralization literature. In a general sense, centralization can curtail the violence that may otherwise have been present because it provides an avenue of oversight and accountability. Bridging the gap between these two bodies of literature, the conclusion of this analysis shows that rebel group centralization can decrease the amount of civilian victimization that foreign fighters conduct. These findings contribute to the literature in two ways. First, the literature on how rebel group centralization affects the actions of foreign fighters has thus far been unclear. Scholars have argued that centralization provides the rebel group leadership the ability to keep its fighters in check and monitor the actions that are being taken (Haer, Jung, and Wong 2012). This finding, while beneficial, does not address foreign fighters specifically and is addressed to the actions of the rebel group as a whole. Additionally, other scholars such as Doctor (2020) have claimed that as centralization increases, there is also an increase in civilian victimization because the leadership can better utilize the benefits that can be had from victimizing the civilian population. When looking at the conflict in Iraq and the evolution of Ansar al-Islam into Ansar al-Sunnah, the results do not fit the conclusion that Doctor (2020) arrived at. The relationship that exists between the foreign fighters and the rebel group that they belong to is extremely complex with many variables at play. This research proposes and supports the novel hypothesis that foreign fighters are going to be held less accountable under a decentralized organization, which leads to an increase in the victimization of civilians. Secondly, the findings outlined in this paper can begin to provide a major contribution to foreign policy. As much as some policymakers and politicians would seek to alleviate civilian suffering that occurs during wartime, resources are limited. With the tens of thousands of foreign fighters that traveled to fight in Ukraine, it is clear that the foreign fighter phenomenon is not going anywhere. For that reason, it is vital to be able to pinpoint the locations in which aid, support, and even intervention

would be of most use to save the most lives. Understanding the role that rebel group centralization plays in foreign fighter civilian victimization allows political elites to better select the conflicts to assist. This allows for more targeted policy and hopefully more successful and efficient action taken.

This finding runs contrary to the only study that was conducted attempting to understand the effects of centralization on foreign fighters. While the actions that were taken by Ansar al-Islam against enemy military forces were dramatic and deadly, the tactics implemented by Ansar al-Sunnah escalated substantially and grew to target civilians. Because of the focus on a singular case, this analysis cannot provide a broad theory of the relationship between foreign fighters and rebel group structure, but it does point toward the need for future studies to be conducted. This case study is being used to showcase the logic behind my argument, while also providing a starting point for a broader regional and global analysis of this relationship. Other regional case studies that could be conducted to understand how centralization affects foreign fighter action include al-Qaeda in Yemen and the Islamic State in Syria. These organizations both grew and shrank in centralized strength throughout the conflicts that they were involved in. Furthermore, using the data from the Rebel Foreign Fighter Dataset and centralization data can allow for a large-n global study to be conducted (Schwartz 2023). Additionally, both groups included foreign fighters and have instances of civilian victimization linked to them. For that reason, mapping the evolution of these two groups could potentially lend support to the conclusions drawn from Ansar al-Islam and Ansar al-Sunna.

CONCLUSION

The idea of the modern foreign fighter came to prominence following the start of the war in Syria in 2011 and the extensive propaganda campaign that enticed tens of thousands of fighters to join the Islamic State. The over 20,000 foreign fighters that have streamed across the border of Ukraine to push back against the invading Russian forces in 2022 have shown scholars that the foreign fighter phenomenon is not a trend of the past and will likely continue to plague contemporary conflicts. Because of the prominence of this phenomenon in modern warfare, it is vital to understand the factors that can impact the actions that these foreigners take on the battlefield to work towards mitigating the amount of civilian death that is perpetrated. One such factor that can play a role in dampening the violent tendencies of foreign fighters against civilian victimization is rebel group structure. This research seeks to understand how and to what extent rebel group centralization and rebel governing structures can reduce the amount of civilian victimization that stems from foreign fighters in conflict. To answer this question, this dissertation provides a novel dataset that includes an expansion of data on foreign fighters and the structure of the rebel groups in which they join. This dataset is paired with two in-depth case studies on Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen and Ansar al-Islam in Iraq exploring the effect of rebel governance and centralization, respectively, on foreign fighter action toward the civilian population. In other words, the purpose of this dissertation is to evaluate the impact that inclusive governing structures and a strong centralized command structure have on dampening the violent nature of foreign fighters.

There is a consensus within the literature that foreign fighters are positively related to increases in civilian victimization. Increased civilian victimization can stem from rebel groups that recruit foreign fighters because they become less dependent on the local population for material support, which results in less protection for citizens (Conrad et. al. 2019; Doctor and

Willingham 2020). If the rebel group depends on the local population for resources or manpower, then the group is unlikely to commit large-scale violence against the locals. When the group is not dependent on civilians due to the material capabilities provided by foreigners, rebel leaders are less likely to discipline soldiers for taking violent action against civilians. Additionally, foreign fighters themselves are more likely to conduct violence against civilians than local fighters because of the disembeddedness that is present (Moore 2019). The foreigners, for the most part, do not have prior knowledge of local traditions, culture, values, or language. A majority of the foreign fighters lack a legitimate connection to the location population and, at times, do not have language capabilities or the cultural knowledge to even begin to engage with citizens. This disconnect drives a wedge between the foreign fighters and the local civilians which has been shown to be a catalyst for future civilian victimization stemming from the foreign fighters.

The literature thus far has proposed several factors that may affect foreign fighter action such as ethnicity, location, language ability, and ideology (Moore 2019), but one that has been largely overlooked is rebel group structure. More specifically, the literature has failed to explain what impact rebel governing structures and centralization can have on the actions that foreign fighters take. The previous literature has largely foregone any conclusions about the relationship between rebel governing structures and foreign fighters. This research argues that rebel governing structures can decrease the disembededness that foreign fighters experience. By increasing the amount of embeddedness that is experienced by rebel groups, the amount of civilian victimization decreases. Inclusive governing structures force foreigners and locals to interact and even work together within the conflict. This budding relationship between two disparate populations can eventually lead to a decrease in the potential hostilities that are felt

between the populations which in turn decreases the violence perpetrated. In addition to rebel governance, an extensive body of work looking to understand the impact that rebel group centralization has on the actions of foreign fighters doesn't yet exist. Thus far, there has been a singular study attempting to understand the relationship between rebel group centralization and foreign fighter action. This study finds that foreign fighters are more likely to commit violence against the civilian population when they are within centralized rebel groups because the leaders are better able to utilize the violent tendencies of the foreigners. While this conclusion cannot outright be rejected, there are several historical case studies, such as the rebel groups in Chechnya and al-Qaeda, that show that rebel group commanders tend to despise the ultra-violent tactics utilized by foreigner fighters and see their actions as detrimental to the group's goals and aspirations. This negative perception of foreign fighters calls into question the conclusion previously drawn.

The goal of this dissertation is to explore the influences on foreign fighter behavior, particularly behavior toward civilians. Prior to this study, the literature on foreign fighters was in agreement that there was a strong correlation between foreign fighters and victimization of civilians. This link is not clear cut, and when the data from the Rebel Foreign Fighter Dataset in introduced, there is complexity that needs to be examined. Chapter 1 demonstrates that the central tenet of the foreign fighter literature needs further clarification, so I sought to understand what factors might affect whether or not foreign fighters will victimize the civilian population and what causes the variation in victimization experienced. To do this, the case studies in Chapters 2 and 3 investigate the complex link between foreign fighter civilian victimization and rebel group structure. In addition to giving prospective case studies that may be used in a future, more comprehensive research, I aimed to utilize these two examples to demonstrate the rationale

behind my contention. My thorough investigation of these cases has given me the historical and cultural background I need to construct a more complete theoretical model that would explain foreign fighter civilian victimization in the context of various and particular rebel groupings.

In my first chapter, I present a novel dataset that provides a substantial contribution to various topics within conflict studies. Details regarding foreign fighters from 65 different conflicts and 282 different rebel groups are included within this dataset. It includes information on the number of foreign fighters that were present, the group that they resided in, and the presence of centralization within the rebel group. Working in tandem with the dataset to analyze the relationship between foreign fighters and rebel group structure, I utilize a process tracing model on two case studies in the following chapters. Process tracing was chosen because it is "an analytical tool for drawing descriptive and causal inferences from diagnostic pieces of evidence - often understood as part of a temporal sequence of events or phenomena" (Collier 2011). Because these studies are focused on the evolution of two specific groups and the gradual implementation of rebel governing structures and centralized command, the process tracing model was deemed an appropriate method to capture this relationship. In the second chapter, I detail the evolution of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen and how its implementation of inclusive rebel governing structures impacted the actions of foreign fighters. These inclusive governing structures include state-building mechanisms, social service provision, grievance adoption, and power-sharing mechanisms. In the second chapter, I approached the rebel group structure from a different angle and analyzed the impact that rebel group centralization had. I examined the impact that accountability stemming from hierarchical leadership impacted foreign fighters as Ansar al-Islam transitioned into Ansar al-Sunnah in Iraq. The specific aspects of

centralization that I focus on are a clear chain of command and a judicial system for accountability along with oversight of soldiers' actions and recruitment.

Findings

In Chapter 1, the Rebel Foreign Fighter Data set is introduced. As compared to the Foreign Fighter Project, The Rebel Foreign Fighter Dataset was able to evaluate 44% more battles in Chapter 3. (Malet 2007). Also, I increase the number of dyads accessible for analysis by over 500% thanks to my focus on "State vs. Rebel Group." Given the dearth of information about foreign combatants, it is critical to collect as many data points are possible to establish reliable, generalizable findings. I not only add to the amount of evidence on the number of foreign fighters that is now accessible, but the data also strongly contradict earlier inferences. I discovered that there appears to be a threshold that must be reached before foreign fighters have an impact on civilian sexual victimization while utilizing the new ordinal coding technique that is supplied by the Rebel Foreign Fighter Dataset to rerun Doctor (2021). Unless there are over 1,000 foreign combatants, their presence does not significantly affect "some" levels of sexual victimization. Therefore, unless there are over 100 foreign combatants, their impact on "high" levels of sexual victimization is minimal. This contrasts sharply with the findings of Doctor (2021), who concluded that foreign fighters—regardless of number—were strongly associated with both "some" and "high" levels of sexual victimization. Additionally, a *centralization* and *governance* variable are included within the dataset. The Non-State Actor does include a centralization variable, but it only included 2.87% of the rebel groups that are included in the Rebel Foreign Fighter Dataset. Similarly, there is information regarding rebel governance in the K.E. Albert’s Rebel Quasi-State Institutions Dataset, but this dataset only includes 8.96% of the

rebel groups that are included in the Rebel Foreign Fighter Dataset. For that reason, I deemed it necessary to collect my own data so that conclusions could be drawn regarding the relationship between foreign fighters and rebel group structure. The RFFD includes over a 70% increase in the amount of information regarding the centralization of rebel groups in which foreign fighters have joined. Additionally, the RFFD includes over a 50% increase in the amount of information regarding the rebel governance of rebel groups where foreign fighters joined.

A process-tracing model of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula is used in Chapter 2 to demonstrate how inclusive rebel government structures can reduce the amount of disembeddedness that foreign militants suffer, which in turn reduces the amount of civilian victimization committed. In other words, as rebel governing structures are implemented within the group, foreign fighters become more integrated with the population which leads to a decrease in the amount of disembeddedness that they feel. For that reason, rebel governance has been shown to decrease the amount of civilian victimization that is perpetrated. AQAP failed to put in place a structure of administration for its militants or the people it dwelt in during its initial period of existence (2009–2011). Due to the presence of foreign combatants, there was a significant amount of violence against the civilian population. There was a discernible transition away from civilian victimization by the foreign militants who were part of AQAP when it entered its second phase (2012–2016). The adoption of inclusive rebel governmental structures including state-building mechanisms, social provisions, power-sharing agreements, and the inclusion of local grievances, was shown to be associated with this shift in strategy. These processes significantly reduced the disembeddedness between the foreign combatants and the locals that existed earlier and contributed to the violence that was experienced. The amount of

civilian victimization has decreased because of the local community being increasingly identified with the rebel organization and, more especially, with the foreign combatants.

A process-tracing model of the transition from Ansar al-Islam to Ansar al-Sharia is used in Chapter 3 to demonstrate how rebel centralization gives commanders a way to hold foreign soldiers, who have been demonstrated to commit violence against civilians more frequently, responsible for their actions. Because of this, as the amount of centralization of the leadership structure within the group increased there was less civilian victimization attributed stemming from the foreign fighters. The rebel organization showed significant centralized authority when operating under the Ansar al-Islam banner (2003–2006). The stringent obedience of the emir's deputies, the establishment of a Shariah Committee to punish legal violations, the comprehensive supervision of the fighters' conduct, and a rigorous screening process for recruits all served to sustain this centralized organization. By using these techniques, Ansar al-Islam was able to monitor the militants' behavior, particularly that of the more aggressive foreign fighters, and ensure that no actions were taken that would be harmful to the group's objectives. On the other hand, the centralized procedures that existed under the prior structure were no longer felt when the group developed into Ansar al-Sunnah (2006-2014). The group's behavior started to become rather erratic and disorganized. Ansar al-Sunnah seems to be made up of several cells working independently rather than as a single cohesive force in the fight. For this reason, it was seen that when the governing structures disintegrated, the level of victimization of civilians rose rapidly. Foreign fighters were free to behave as they saw appropriate, even victimizing the civilian population because there was no structure of responsibility for the foreign combatants inside the group.

This dissertation set out to understand the impact that rebel group structure can have on the actions of foreign fighters against the civilian population. While the case studies of the evolution of al-Qaeda in Yemen and Ansar al-Islam in Iraq are quite specific and likely will not serve as a test of a generalizable theory of civilian victimization, they are meant to explore the nuanced relationship between rebel group structure and foreign fighter action, something that has yet to be explored in the literature. The results of this work show that rebel group structure does play a significant role in the amount of civilian victimization that foreign fighters perpetrate. As a rebel group becomes more centralized, it is better able to keep foreigners in check and have oversight of their actions to ensure that they are not perpetrating needless violence. As a rebel group implements rebel governing structures, the local population and the foreign fighter are more likely to become integrated together. For this reason, the disembeddedness that has previously been shown to lead to violence from foreign fighters is decreased which leads to less violence being perpetrated against the civilian population.

Implications on Civilian Victimization

The Rebel Foreign Fighter Dataset can be applied to a variety of conflict studies topics, including the influence of foreign fighters on civil wars (including their duration, intensity, the likelihood of victory, the likelihood of peace, etc.), violence once they return home, and victimization of civilians. To draw academic conclusions about the effect that foreign fighters can have and the best methods for dealing with this phenomenon, extensive data on foreign fighters and rebel group structure is necessary. Government officials and international organizations attempting to comprehend the impact that foreign fighters have on the conflict and where their attention should be placed to mitigate the damage will find the results from these studies extremely beneficial.

The Rebel Foreign Fighter Dataset allows scholars to understand processes that can help lead to policy change to decrease the amount of civilian victimization present in the world today.

Both Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 discuss several facets of rebel organization structure and how they influence how foreign fighters behave toward civilians. The literature has only briefly discussed the link between centralization and foreign fighter activity, and it has not yet looked into the link between rebel governance and foreign fighter activity. Due to this, there is a significant knowledge vacuum in the literature about the effects of rebel group structure and the variables influencing the activity of foreign fighters, which is filled by this research. In order to advance future scholarly investigation into these subjects, it offers additions to each of these literatures while also better connecting them together. Furthermore, these chapters offer policy implications. Understanding the effects of a rebel group structure can also help identify confrontations where civilian casualties are more likely to occur. Policymakers would benefit from knowing that some factions are more likely to escalate these activities due to the mechanisms that are present within the conflict to save as many civilian deaths as possible. While decreasing the amount of total death should be the focus, the civilization of civilians has been shown to have an escalator effect on the conflict. It has been shown to"destabilize conflict areas, send rural peasants streaming into urban areas and across international borders, contribute to deteriorating public health conditions, and degrade the productive capacity of the 'conflict state'" (Wood and Kathman). For that reason, it is imperative for government officials to understand where civilian victimization is most likely to occur. Additionally, governmental organizations are unlikely to be able to totally eradicate the phenomena of foreign fighters given the growth in people's capacity to travel to war zones, especially when these individuals are viewed in a favorable light by some governments. For example, there has been a consensus from

policymakers that the over 20,000 individuals that traveled to fight in the war in Ukraine align more with their idea of “freedom fighters” as opposed to “foreign terrorist fighters” with little condemnation. Even more so, governments do not have the ability to completely shut off the movement of fighters between states where borders are not secure such as in many places through the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa. Because this problem is not going away, government officials and international organizations need to be prepared to either prevent future crimes against civilians or be able to foresee where they will likely occur. In order to accomplish this challenging task, it is crucial to understand the environments which will allow foreign fighters to commit the most violence against the civilian population. One such factor that has now been shown to be imperative to understand is rebel group structure.

Future Research

The Foreign Fighter Dataset offers a tremendous chance to revisit earlier research on foreign fighters who may have relied on the dichotomous classification technique. Even though there might not be a difference, the results of performing the Doctor (2021) research again indicate that the new ordinal code will yield a range of outcomes. Also, new research that couldn't be done before due to a lack of data cannow be executed. For many new conflicts, the RFFD supplies foreign combatants and details the groups they belong to. The possibility of insightful qualitative case studies that may be applied to support some of the general quantitative implications of foreign fighters is therefore increased. Furthermore, the centralization and governance variables included permit the continued growth of the study into comprehending the subtleties of this relationship.

Both Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 addressed two different aspects of rebel group structure and how they impact foreign fighters' actions towards the civilian population. There are various directions for further study in the area of rebel government. Among the rebel organization and among the local populace, there are several ways and means by which rebel government might be conducted. These many systems, including the court system, taxes, and the rule of law, among others, may be broken down so that future researchers can determine which of them is the most effective in preventing the victimization of civilians. Second, this dissertation explored four aspects of rebel governance that were working in tandem (state-building mechanisms, social service provision, the inclusion of local grievances, and power-sharing mechanisms). Future studies could seek to understand how these structures would together and complement each other and if there are some structures that are necessary for decreasing disembeddedness while others may only have minimal effect. Lastly, this thesis offers a single case study that can illustrate the connection between rebel rule and foreign fighter attacks on civilians. While other case studies indicate that rebel group structure is an important component of the puzzle, additional studies are required before these results can be applied generally. To assess the generalized link, this may be done either through local research or a more global strategy. The data that are provided from the Rebel Foreign Fighter Dataset now provides researchers the ability to quantitatively explore the relationship between rebel governance and foreign fighters.

In order to develop a generalizable theory addressing the association between rebel centralization and the acts of foreign combatants, further study on centralization must be done. The first step is to examine rebel organizations that have been active for a sizable amount of time. Scholars will be able to comprehend how variations in the hierarchical structure of the rebel organization might affect foreign fighter behavior against civilians by conducting an in-

depth examination of these enduring rebel groupings. Additionally, future scholars can seek to understand if differing environments may have an impact on how effective a centralized hierarchy can be in stopping violence from foreign fighters. For example, if the government is more or less centralized, does this mitigate the effect that rebel group centralization can have? Or if there is a complete lack of law and order in the country, does this increase or decrease the ability of a centralized leadership structure to decrease the amount of violence stemming from foreign fighters? Moreover, large-n quantitative studies addressing this general link are now feasible using the newly constructed centralization and foreign fighter variable from the Rebel Foreign Fighter Dataset.

al-Qaeda and Ansar al-Islam were chosen as initial case studies to begin to understand the relationship with the necessity of conducting a more broad, regional/global analysis of the relationship between rebel group structure and foreign fighters' actions towards civilians. I sought to use these two cases to showcase the logic behind my argument while also providing potential case studies that can be implemented in a broader future analysis. More precise findings may be reached with a large-n analysis with a more sophisticated coding scheme for foreign fighters and more information on the centralization of these groupings.

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APPENDIX

RFFD
https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1TJ4GoS-R6oZz3uAoNZTCRCHPJGUF14r56140YzthOhY/edit?usp=sharing

Dataset Comparison
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1AqefCk6p2TMkv4unY06_V1VU1LjNJe0x/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=109078542991682759661&rtpof=true&sd=true

VITA

Jack Schwartz is a Ph.D. Candidate at the University of Tennessee. While his current focus is on civil wars and, more specifically, the impact that foreign fighters have on the civilian population within civil conflict, he also has a background in biology. He received both a B.S. in Molecular Biology and a B.S. in Neuroscience from Auburn University in 2020. Jack is currently wrapping up his year-long National Security Education Program (NSEP)-funded Boren Fellowship which provided him the opportunity to live in Amman, Jordan in order to study Arabic. He has completed Advanced Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) III and Advanced Dialect II at the Sijal Language Institute in Amman. In addition to his time studying Arabic, Jack was able to work as a research associate at the Arab Institute of Security Studies, a think tank within the University of Jordan. In this position, he was able to research policies related to nuclear non-proliferation in the Middle East and lobby various politicians and policymakers for the future implementation of a novel nuclear non-proliferation regime. Through his time in graduate school, Jack has been able to publish two independent articles in the Journal of Conflict and Terrorism and the Journal of Peace Research.