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Trafficking as Terrorism

A Theory-testing Case Study on the Islamic State's Human Trafficking of the Yazidi

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Abstract

Human trafficking is considered one of the gravest violations of human rights. It dramatically deprives people of their humanity, dignity and freedom but is also considered a serious threat against national security and international peace. From traditionally being the crime of choice for criminal networks, human trafficking has been increasingly incorporated as a strategy by terrorist organisations as means to advance in their objectives. The Islamic State's human trafficking of the Yazidi provides one of the most notable instances of this growing nexus – a nexus that has been largely unexamined by scholars.

By means of a qualitative theory-testing case study, this dissertation evaluates the empirical validity of one of the most common frameworks in the study of terrorism, the strategic theory, on IS's human trafficking of the Yazidi. The strategic theory posits that terrorism is a deliberate and calculated course of action used to achieve terrorist organisation's stated political objectives. Human trafficking has been said to be incorporated for strategic purposes, but can the strategic model explain it?

The findings from this study suggest that the strategic theory can explain IS's human trafficking of the Yazidi until taking into account external responses, resulting in costs exceeding the benefits of human trafficking. One possible way to fill this gap could be by looking into IS's internal organizational dynamics and their perpetual struggle for survival.

Keywords: Human Trafficking, Islamic State, Yazidi, Strategic Theory

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Table of Contents

1 Introduction

Human trafficking is considered one of the gravest violations of human rights. The atrocious crime involves a number of illicit activities, including sexual exploitation, forced labour and recruitment of children into armed groups. Generating an estimated $150 billion annually, it constitutes one of the most lucrative forms of crime (Kassab & Rosen 2019, p. 111). It not only dramatically deprives people of their humanity, dignity and freedom but is also considered a serious threat against national security and international peace (UNCTED 2019, p. 4).

Traditionally, human trafficking has been the enterprise of choice for groups and networks of organised crime (Welch 2017, p. 165). However, it has been increasingly incorporated into the *modus operandi* of a number of terrorist organisations as means to advance in their objectives. In addition, used as a source of income and method to extort ransom, it may serve to further contribute to the potential success and survival of these groups (Bigio & Vogelstein 2019, p. 1; UNCTED 2019, p. 10). In areas of war and conflict, that provide especially fertile ground for these illegal activities to thrive and prosper, human trafficking risks exacerbate conflict and severely impede the restoration of peace and security, resulting in a vicious cycle of violence and instability. Despite a growing connection between terrorism and human trafficking, the two have been kept seen and treated as two separate phenomena (UNCTED 2019, p. 11; 16).

One of the most prominent instances of this phenomenon is the Islamic State's (IS) abduction and enslavement of thousands of Yazidi men, women and children in August 2014. The atrocities against the Yazidi community has been recognised as crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide and has placed IS at the nexus between modern slavery and contemporary terrorism (El-Masri 2018, p. 1). Although IS has lost all its territory since August 2014, its human trafficking practices risk being revitalised in its re-emergence or replicated by other terrorist organisations in the future (Al-Dayel & Mumford 2020).

Strategic theory, one of the most common frameworks in the study of terrorism, posits that terrorists are rational actors who use terrorism as means to achieve their political ends. They are assumed to be political utility maximisers who resort to terrorism when the expected political benefits exceeds the costs. Numerous counterterrorism efforts are based on these assumptions, designed to prevent terrorism by increasing the costs of action (Abrahms 2008, p. 78). With IS's grandiose ambitions that reaches far beyond conventional politics, there is the possibility that the strategic theory is insufficient to explain how human trafficking has been incorporated into their

repertoire of terror. Human trafficking has been said to be employed for strategic purposes, but does it conform to the strategic model?

The purpose of this dissertation is to evaluate the strategic model's empirical validity on IS's human trafficking practices, by testing it on the case of the Yazidi. There is a plenitude of literature concerning the atrocities committed against the Yazidi but far less on the human trafficking aspect and how it has been used as a terrorist strategy. By examining the strategic theory's validity on IS and the case of the Yazidi, this study can provide a broader understanding of this understudied phenomenon. In addition, if the strategic framework proves valid, the theory can be strengthened and one can assume that conventional counterterrorism measures could combat terrorism in the form of human trafficking. If it does not, however, the theory may be weakened and there could be reason to revise current counterterrorism policies as they could have limited effect on defusing this increasing terrorist threat that experts suspect we have not yet seen the last of. By building on previous research on strategic terrorism, this dissertation aims to contribute cumulatively to the academic field of terrorism but also, to some extent, that of human trafficking (Teorell & Svensson 2007, p. 17). In accordance with these objectives, this dissertation more specifically aims to provide an answer to the question:

How, and to what extent, can the strategic theory explain IS's human trafficking of the Yazidi?

The dissertation is structured as to initially, in the following section, provide a definition of terrorism followed by a brief background on IS and human trafficking respectively. The third section presents the case of IS and the Yazidi. Thereafter the methodological approach is introduced, including its respective advantages and disadvantages. The fifth section presents the theoretical framework, the strategic theory, from which operational indicators and hypotheses are deduced. In the sixth section, the theory's explanatory power will be evaluated on the empirical material. The results from the analysis will be presented along with a discussion about the theory's explanatory power in the seventh section. Finally, concluding remarks on the conducted study will be presented.

2 Background

2.1 Terrorism

Terrorism is by no means a new phenomenon. It has existed for centuries across the ideological and political spectra. However, since the end of the Cold War, the nature and characteristics of terrorism have shifted into an unprecedented scale of global dimensions (Shukla 2006, p. 165). Despite this urgency, there exists no universal agreed-upon definition of terrorism. As the term is often politically charged, reaching a value-neutral definition has been an elusive task for policy makers and politicians. In addition, terrorist behaviour is seldom heterogeneous and neither are terrorist motivations nor terrorist objectives. Thus, attempting to provide a satisfactory definition of the phenomenon would require more than an entire essay in itself. Nevertheless, it is possible to define two common elements in most contemporary definitions of terrorism: (i) Terrorism involves violence directed against civilians and (ii) terrorism is intended to influence a target audience and alter that audience's behaviour so as to serve the interests of the terrorists (Victoroff 2005, p. 3).

2.2 The Islamic State

The Islamic State, also called Daesh or IS, is a Salafi-jihadist terrorist organisation that has become infamous for its brutal and indiscriminate violence against civilians, including mass killings, beheadings and crucifixions (Zech & Kelly 2015, p. 83). The essence in the Salafi-jihadi ideology is the aim of establishing a Caliphate governed under the Islamic laws of Sharia and reverting the religion back to the glory days of the Prophet Muhammed. The ideology excommunicate all Shia Muslims as well as anathemises infidels, apostates and all others who are considered enemies of Islam (Oostervald & Bloem 2017, p. 5-6).

IS originally emanated from the remnants of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI)[1], founded by the Jordanian militant Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in 1999. However, it was not until the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 that the organisation gained momentum (Wright 2016, p. 10). The organisation took advantage of the rising sectarian tensions that followed from the dissolution of the Baath regime as well as the frustration and perceived neglect from the Sunni population. Former Iraqi militants joined forces with jihadi groups and formed the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI). Despite being an initial affiliate of al-Qaeda, ISI embraced a far more radical strategy with sectarianism deeply embedded at its core. While al-Qaeda focused on the Western enemy and the expulsion of American soldiers from Iraqi soil, ISI's priority was the Shia and the establishment of a Caliphate (Siebert et al. 2016, p. 26). In 2010, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi became leader of the group and renamed it the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/ISIS) as the organisation advanced and gained ground in Syria (Kelly et al. 2017, p. 3). As ISIL swept across Iraq and Syria they seized large swaths of territory, intensified their violence and simultaneously attracted tens of thousands recruits from all over the world (Wright 2016, p. 5). In June 2014, al-Baghdadi ultimately declared the Caliphate, hence claiming religious authority over all Muslims across the world (Schmid 2015, p. 10). The organisation thereafter referred to itself simply as the Islamic State (IS), due to its lack of territorial definition. Less than two months after the proclamation of the Caliphate, IS set their sights on Sinjar in an attempt to eradicate one of the world's oldest minority groups, the Yazidi.

[1] Originally named *Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad*

2.3 Human Trafficking

Almost every country across the globe is affected by human trafficking to some extent. However, the crime tends to take on particularly repulsive dimensions in areas characterised by conflict. Human trafficking in areas of conflict often encompasses sexual exploitation, sexual slavery[2], child recruitment, forced recruitment and forced marriage, most commonly perpetrated against women and girls. However, men and boys can also be victims of this exploitation (Bigio & Vogelstein 2019, p. 3). According to the Trafficking in Persons Protocol, human trafficking, or trafficking in persons, is defined as:

> [T]he recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, including child slavery for the purpose of recruiting child soldiers, servitude or the removal of organs.
>
> (A/RES/55/25, p. 32)

In accordance with the definition stipulated in the Protocol, human trafficking encompasses three main elements. These are (i) *act* (what is done): the recruitment, transport, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons; (ii) *means* (how it is done): threat or use of force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or vulnerability, or giving payments or benefits to a person in control of the victim and; (iii) *purpose* (why it is done): for the purpose of exploitation (A/RES/55/25, p. 32). Exploitation refers to "using someone unfairly for your own advantage" (Cambridge University Press), and can, as noted, take various shapes.

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[2] Sexual slavery includes the main elements that "(i) the perpetrator exercise any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership over one or more persons, such as by purchasing, selling, lending or bartering such a person or persons, or by imposing on them a similar deprivation of liberty and that (ii) the perpetrator caused such a person or persons to engage in one or more acts of a sexual nature" (El-Masri 2018, p. 1051).

3 IS and the Yazidi

On 3 August 2014, hundreds of IS fighters left their bases in Syria and Iraq and flooded into the Sinjar district, located in northern Iraq and home to the majority of the world's Yazidi population (A/HRC/32/CRP.2, p. 6). The Yazidi, a Kurdish-speaking minority, have for centuries been targeted because of their non-Abrahamic faith. Yet, despite a long history of discrimination, oppression and violence, it has never been as systematic, brutal and inhumane than that initiated in August 2014 (UNCTED 2019, p. 22).

The stream of armed fighters that flooded into the region seized towns and villages around Mount Sinjar. The Kurdish Peshmerga, responsible for protecting the area, quickly retreated, leaving civilians to the mercy of IS (Cheterian 2019, p. 4). Checkpoints and road controls were set up to capture fleeing Yazidi and within hours, thousands of men, women and children found themselves surrounded by IS (A/HRC/32/CRP.2, p. 6-7). Hundreds of men were taken to nearby locations to be executed instantly, either by gunshot or beheading. The fighters separated the remaining captives based on gender and age and gave them the option of conversion or execution. Many chose conversion. However, that did not save them from being enslaved (Al-Dayel & Mumford 2020). The captives were transferred by buses and large vehicles to temporary holding sites located in IS-controlled Iraqi and Syrian territory and within 72 hours of the attack, Sinjar was cleared (A/HRC/32/CRP.2, p. 7-8). Authorities and human rights organisations have estimated that between 2,000 to 5,5000 Yazidi were executed, over 7,000 were kidnapped of which 5,000 were sold into slavery (Malik 2017, p. 22). To this date, half of the kidnapped Yazidi remain missing, suspected of either being killed or deeper forced into IS's human trafficking operations (Al-Dayel & Mumford 2020).

Upon arrival at the holding sites, women and children were registered with name, age, marital status and number of children and some were photographed. Eighty percent of the captured women and girls were made available for purchase, whereas the remaining twenty percent were seen as "spoils of war" and collective property of IS. As such, they were distributed over military bases to fighters and commanders. The ones available for purchase were sold in slave markets and at online slave auctions on encrypted applications (A/HRC/32/CRP.2, p. 11-12; Malik 2017, p. 23). A screenshot from one of IS's online slave markets suggest that it was not only women and girls who were sold, but also boys for the purpose of serving as household slaves (FIDH 2018, p. 24). In Syria, the Committee for the Buying and Selling of Slaves organised

the slave markets. An authentic IS document informed that fighters were required to pre-register to attend slave markets in Syria. Furthermore, the document provided information on how bids were to be submitted in a sealed envelope, and how winning bids were binding. Another document included a price list of slaves, which also stated that fighters were not allowed to purchase more than three slaves, unless they were foreigners (Webb & Rahman 2014). Victim testimonials suggest that the price ranged from $200 to $1,500, a price based on marital status, age, number of children and perceived beauty. The sale and purchase of slaves were registered in contracts that stipulated the full rights and ownership over the slave, who could be resold, gifted or distributed according to the owner's wishes. Women and girls were often sold multiple times, traded and transferred between different fighters and subjected to brutal sexual violence and rape (A/HRC/32/CRP.2, p. 13; Callimachi 2015). The slave markets were strictly governed by rules on the sale and resale of captives. However, these guidelines were frequently violated by IS fighters (Malik 2017, p. 23; 28; A/HRC/32/CRP.2, p. 14). Reselling the Yazidi to non-IS members was strictly forbidden in order to prevent them from being sold back to their families. However, the financial incentives for individual fighters to violate this rule was immense, as the Yazidi could be sold back to their families for an estimated $10,000 and $40,000 (A/HRC/32/CRP.2, p. 15-16). Smugglers or intermediaries were often used to release the captives, charging around $10,000 to carry out the rescue operations, although some charged up to $50,000. The rescue operations were mainly funded by Yazidi families, but the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) also facilitated the release of captives through payments of a total estimated $1,5 million. The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq has estimated that in 2014 alone, IS received between $35 million to $45 million from the Yazidi community alone (S/2016/92, p. 7).

Women with young children were sold in the slave markets as a package but once girls reached the age of nine, they were often taken from their mothers and sold as slaves (A/HRC/32/CRP.2, p. 17). Once boys reached the age of seven they were forcibly transferred to training camps. Upon arrival, they were given Islamic names, became indoctrinated with IS-propaganda to ultimately be recruited as IS fighters. They had to learn about *jiha*d, the war against 'infidels', to recite the Quran and learn how to handle weapons and grenades. After completing military training, some ended up on the battlefield whereas others were assigned roles as checkpoint guards or to perform other duties demanded by their commanders (A/HRC/32/CRP.2, p. 19). Boys were often drugged with amphetamine in order to dull their fears when sent to the front lines. Some were trained to become suicide bombers and

were forced to wear suicide belts ready to detonate if attacking troops came to close to the front line (Dozier 2019).

Men who converted to Islam were transferred to Tal Afar, Mosul and Baaj where they were forced to work on construction projects, digging trenches, cleaning streets and work with farming (A/HRC/32/CRP.2, p. 9). Furthermore, male captives had to adopt the Islamic religion and customs by praying and growing their beards. Those who refused or tried to escape were executed (Al-Dayel et al. 2020, p. 6; The Cairo Review 2016). Women and young children were often forced into domestic servitude, including cooking, taking care of children, cleaning and washing clothes for their owners and their families (Al-Dayel et al. 2020, p. 6-7; A/HRC/32/CRP.2, p. 25).

IS attempted to ideologically and religiously justify their "revival of slavery" by selective quotations and interpretations of the Quran. By portraying slavery as something religiously meritorious and inherently good, it would bring the fighters closer to God. Because the Yazidi were not considered "people of the Book", as opposed to Jews and Christians, enslaving them was permitted. References were made to slavery during the Prophet as well as the righteousness of bringing people into Islam through enslavement. In December 2014, IS's Research and Fatwa Department published detailed instructions on how to hold and sexually abuse female captives. In addition, the fourth and ninth number of the IS official magazine, *Dabiq*, addressed and provided ideological justifications for the enslavement of Yazidi women (UNCTED 2019, p. 24; Human Rights Watch 2015). Viewing the Yazidi as "devil worshippers" or infidels, they could rightfully be raped, sold and resold according to IS's interpretation of Sharia (Malik 2017, p. 23).
In accordance with the definition of human trafficking[3] it is evident that the enslavement of the Yazidi includes elements of human trafficking. Those who were not executed were abducted and forcibly transported from Sinjar to various holding sites in Iraq and Syria, and then, for some, distributed between different fighters who were in control of them. From the moment of capture, the Yazidi were, depending on factors such as age and gender, drawn into various forms of exploitation.

[3] See previous section

4 Methodology

4.1 Theory-testing Case Study

This dissertation will be conducted as a theory-testing, single case study with a qualitative research design. Case studies are useful when investigating complex phenomena as they can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the subject at hand by enabling in-depth analysing. In addition, they are generally the preferred method to answer questions of *why* or *how* (Yin 1984, p. 20). Accordingly, the study takes an idiographic approach, focusing on explaining one particular instance rather than generalising to the broader population, as is usually the case in quantitative studies with a nomothetic ideal (Teorell & Svensson 2007, p. 11; Yin 1984, p. 23-25; Bryman 2016, p. 61).

Theory testing studies attach their research to existing theories on the subject in order to test them against new empirical material and evaluate their tenability (Teorell & Svensson 2007, p. 48). IS's violence against and exploitation of the Yazidi is a hitherto unexplored phenomenon within the frame of terrorism which indicates that it can act as a critical case to evaluate the strategic theory's theoretical boundaries (Bryman 2016, p. 62). From the strategic theory, hypotheses will be deduced and subjected to empirical testing in the analysis. Hence, the study takes a deductive stance which involves a "top down" procedure, beginning at the general to end at the specific. Embedded within the hypotheses will be concepts that need to be translated into qualitatively measurable entities. These will be presented under the theoretical framework. Possible gaps that emerges from the analysis will subsequently be discussed and suggestions on how to revise the theory or fill these gaps will be provided, hence moving from a deductive to an inductive approach (Bryman 2016, p. 21). The suggestions from the inductive approach will only briefly be presented in the discussion and concluding remarks, as theory-testing is the predominant ambition of the study. Consequently, this thesis does not aim to develop a comprehensive alternative framework to explain IS's human trafficking activities. Neither does it aim to completely discard or falsify the strategic theory. Rather, it could be seen in terms of a pilot study, evaluating the explanatory power of the strategic theory and paving the way for more extensive research on this understudied phenomenon.

The limited possibilities of empirical generalisation, or external validity, is one often criticised aspect of single case studies. An extensive approach with more cases would provide greater opportunities of generalisation. However, in the light of the complex and multifaceted

nature of both terrorism and human trafficking, an extensive study could risk overlooking important details. Thus, an intensive approach is considered more suitable, but at the expense of generalisation (Bryman 2016, p. 64). Nevertheless, findings derived from the inductive approach could possibly be theoretically generalised in relation to the theoretical discourse situated on a more abstract level (Yin 1984, p. 21). In this study, this would refer to illustrating how a revised theory suggested to explain IS's use of human trafficking, *could*, theoretically, be used to explain other terrorist organisations' use of this practice. Showing how well it actually does work to explain other cases would be a task left for future scholars to determine (Esaiasson et al. 2012, p. 42). However, generalisation is not an ambition of the study, and neither is developing a fully comprehensive framework, hence both empirical and theoretical generalisation of this study may be difficult to achieve.

4.2 Material

The material that serve as the foundation of this paper mainly constitutes of secondary data, in the form of reports and academic literature collected through revision of open-source material on terrorist strategies and human trafficking. The data on IS's human trafficking of the Yazidi were mainly collected from the Human Rights Council report *They Came to Destroy* (2016). The report has the advantage of providing a detailed account of the subject as it is based on victim testimonials, interviews, documentary material, including statements, photographs, satellite images and reports (A/HRC/32/CRP.2, p. 3). Furthermore, the vast majority of literature on the subject have based their findings on this report, which further substantiates its originality and relevance. It is worth emphasising that as the material used in the study is of secondary, and not primary data, it may be subject to various degrees of uncertainty. However, it has been carefully selected from revision of a wide scope of literature, assuring that the chosen material conforms with the purpose of the study and meets the criteria of reliability, currency, tendency and objectivity (Esaiasson et al. 2012, p. 288-296; Teorell & Svensson 2007, p. 104-106).

4.3 Credibility of the Study

What determines the credibility of a study is most commonly judged by the methodological ideal criteria validity, reliability, generalisability, objectivity and intersubjectivity (Teorell & Svensson, p. 54-56). The degree of validity essentially refers to whether the study has answered the research question. Since the analysis is based on material restricted to the strategic theory, IS and their human trafficking of the Yazidi, the study should have relatively good validity. Reliability refers to whether the study can be repeated and the results replicated by another scholar (Bryman 2016, p. 41). As the material was collected from open sources, this is considered possible. However, whether it would result in the exact same results depends on how another scholar would conduct and interpret the analysis. Generalisability concerns to what extent the study can be generalised to similar instances that are outside the empirical scope of the study. This study's ambitions is, as noted, not to generalise, but rather to evaluate the strategic theory's validity against the specific case of IS's human trafficking of the Yazidi. In order to be as objective as possible and provide intersubjectivity, multiple sources are used and the research process is intended to be as transparent as possible (Esaiasson et al. 2012, p. 210-211; 25).

4.4 Limitations and Delimitations

The case of this study is IS and their human trafficking practices of the Yazidi. Thus, the units of analysis are the different forms of human trafficking, including sexual slavery, child recruitment and forced labour. The time span chosen is that of IS's invasion of Sinjar in 2014 until 2017, which was the time of IS's occupation of territory in Iraq and Syria as well as when IS's use of human trafficking was at its height (Al-Dayel & Mumford 2020). Recognising that other communities were subject to IS's human trafficking practices, they will be left out of the scope of this study. Furthermore, this study is restricted to the human trafficking that the Yazidi were subjected to, and not the multiple other crimes committed by IS against the Yazidi community. These limitations reflect a choice motivated by what is considered relevant for the purpose of the study. It should also be noted that, although theory-testing studies implies an explanatory ambition, this study is not explanatory in the sense that it aims to explicitly identify independent variables that explain the variation in IS's use of human trafficking (Teorell & Svensson 2007, p. 44-48). Rather, the study's aim is to more generally explore the phenomenon and the strategic theory's ability to explain it.

5 Theoretical Framework

5.1 Previous Literature on Strategic Terrorism

Literature on terrorist organisations and their decision-making are often based on a strategic framework. At its essence, the strategic theory assumes that terrorism is a deliberate and rational choice used as means to achieve a stated political end. It has been used and adapted by multiple scholars in the academic discipline of terrorism (e.g., Crenshaw 2001; Enders & Sandler 1995; Pape 2003). Neumann and Smith (2005) present a framework of strategic terrorism, arguing that it is a progress of creating disorientation, target response and legitimacy. Strategic terrorism is thus considered a process where the terrorists first need to cause disorientation in order to get the population to be confused, afraid and consider the regime incapable of protecting their citizens. When disorientation has emerged, the terrorists aim to act with the purpose of getting the government to respond with illegitimate violence, something that will turn the disoriented population further from the government and closer to the terrorists. Finally, terrorists seek to gain legitimacy by exploiting the psychological effects of violence to provide an alternative political message to attract sympathisers.

Kydd and Walter (2006) argue that terrorism is a form of costly signalling used to demonstrate power and dedication to the terrorist cause. Because terrorists are the weaker part in a power relation of competing interests, they cannot do so with regular communication. This signalling usually takes the shape of attrition, intimidation, provocation, outbidding or spoiling, which are each done with the purpose of delivering a message and receiving a response, usually a response from the government that the terrorist organisation can benefit from. Similarly to Neumann and Smith, Kydd and Walter argue that these acts are strategic in the sense that they are calculated actions conducted to provoke a certain reaction from the government or the population they wish to gain power over.

The strategic theory provides a useful analytic tool to predict terrorism behaviour and, looking back at history, there are numerous examples of terrorist attacks that have been successful and served their purpose strategically. However, not all terrorist organisations seem to act based solely on a political agenda, which may cause them to deviate from the strategic model as they aim to achieve other objectives (Van Um 2011, p. 161).

5.2 The Strategic Theory

The strategic approach to the study of terrorism is originally derived from the economic rational choice theory. It sees the resort to terrorism as a rational choice made by people who aim to achieve political objectives (Abrahms 2008, p. 78). According to economic theory, rational agents are assumed to (i) have stable and consistent preferences; (ii) compare the expected costs and benefits of available alternatives; and (iii) choose the option that generates the highest utility. However, as individuals rarely have complete information and sometimes face cognitive constraints that inhibits their ability to maximise utility, a relaxed version of these assumptions is often used. The weaker rational choice model posits that rational agents are assumed to (i) have relatively stable and consistent preferences; (ii) compare the expected costs and benefits of the most obvious alternatives; and (iii) choose the option that generates the highest expected utility (Abrahms 2008, p. 80). The strategic theory is based on the latter version.

The strategic model assumes that terrorist organisations act on the basis of *collective rationality*, as compared to an individual rationality that is used in the economic rational choice model (McCormick 2003, p. 481-482). The choice to act is motivated by what maximises the political utility for the group and not what is the most rational for the individual. Furthermore, the theory assumes that terrorism is an *instrumental* and calculated course of action used to achieve a stated political objective, hence means are logically related to ends (McCormick 2003, p. 481-482). Furthermore, the decision to use terrorism and the shape of that terrorism are based on expected *consequences* from any given act. Terrorism is used if expected political returns from a given act are expected to exceed the costs. The returns may be in terms of publicity, increased support or a government response that the terrorist organisation can take advantage of. The costs may be in terms of the direct costs of pursuing an act, but also the estimated costs of a failed act or extensive government responses. Terrorism is also *preference-based*, in the sense that alternative strategies are considered in terms of their expected impact on the terrorist organisation's objectives. This implies that terrorists evaluate both violent and non-violent acts and their expected impact on their state political objectives, and choose the most efficient option for their cause (McCormick 2003, p. 481; Abrahms 2008, p. 80-81). The choice of terrorist strategy can be seen as one of constrained optimisation where terrorist organisations seek to *maximise the political returns* for any given level of input or to minimise the expected costs required to achieve their stated goals. The international arena forms a playing field where actors coexist with the reciprocal and ultimate objective to win. Therefore, the terrorists' act of choice is dependent on the moves

of its adversaries and all other actors who may influence the environment in which the terrorists operate (McCormick 2003, p. 481).

5.3 Operationalisation

In order to evaluate the strategic theory's explanatory power on the empirical case, the theory needs to be deduced into operational indicators, or ways to qualitatively measure human trafficking as a terrorist strategy (Bryman 2016, p. 21). The operational indicators will be derived from the framework's most central assumptions. Furthermore, key concepts need to be clarified in order to connect them to the operational indicators and understand their meaning and significance for the subsequent analysis. The identified key concepts in the strategic theory are: *collective rationality, instrumental choice* and *political utility maximisation.* An instrumental choice can be defined as "a deliberate choice designed to achieve a defined objective". Collective rationality refers to "a single, stable and ordered set of preferences and political objectives" and political utility maximisation can be defined as the "maximisation of political returns for any given level of input or minimise the expected costs necessary to achieve a specified set of political objectives" (McCormick 2003, p. 481). By identifying these concepts in the analysis, they can be empirically measured. It is worth emphasising that the concepts and indicators can be measured in other ways than presented in this study, which may make it difficult to evaluate the level of validity. However, as both the operational indicators and the concepts are drawn directly from the theory's assumptions and are all permeated with the rational element that the theory is based on, the analysis should achieve good validity (Bryman 2016, p. 157-158). The operational indicators are presented in Table 1, along with hypotheses on the corresponding expected results based on the strategic theory. Human trafficking is used as a generic term in the table, for the three identified types of exploitation that meets the definition of human trafficking. If the hypotheses are consistent with the empirical analysis, the validity of the strategic theory can be strengthened, whereas if the hypotheses are falsified, the strategic theory's validity may be weakened.

Table 1. Strategic Terrorism: Operational Indicators and Hypotheses

Operational Indicators	Hypotheses
Terrorist organisations act on the basis of collective rationality.	H1: [Human trafficking] is a collectively rational choice.
Terrorism is instrumental: means are logically related to political ends.	H2: [Human trafficking] is logically related to IS's political objectives.
Terrorism is consequential: decisions to use terrorism and the nature of terrorism are based on expected political returns and costs of action.	H3: [Human trafficking] is used because the expected political returns from action exceeds the expected costs.
Terrorism is preference-based: alternative courses of actions are evaluated. Terrorists choose the option that generates the highest expected political utility.	H4: [Human trafficking] is the option that generates the highest expected political utility, as compared to other possible options.

6 Analysis

To evaluate the strategic theory's explanatory power on IS's human trafficking of the Yazidi, the hypotheses will be tested on the empirical case. In order to do so, however, it is paramount to know what IS aim to achieve as that is what motivates their choice of action. Siebert et al. (2016) suggest that IS's ultimate objective is the establishment of a Caliphate. Moreover, they aim to control and govern the Caliphate, expand Islam and Sharia and reclaim the power of Sunni Islam (p. 26). According to strategic theory, human trafficking should have been incorporated as direct or indirect means to achieve any of these objectives. From the empirical material considered in this study, three primary forms of human trafficking can be identified. These are sexual enslavement, child recruitment and forced labour. The analysis will test the hypothesis against each three of them separately to evaluate how well they conform to the strategic framework. Primary focus will lie on sexual exploitation and recruitment of children, as those are the most documented, but forced labour will also be considered.

6.1 Sexual Slavery

Sexual violence is a common strategy in war and armed conflict, used as a cheap weapon to punish, terrorise and destroy populations (Mukwege Foundation). With the severe physical and mental trauma associated with sexual violence and enslavement, it could be argued that the Yazidi women and girls were the ones who suffered worst from IS's atrocities. However, the violence and exploitation they were subjected to also had consequences that reached beyond the women and their suffering. In a number of ways, IS's relentless brutalities against women contributed to putting the entire Yazidi community at the brink of destruction. According to Yazidi religion, a child must be born from two Yazidi parents in order to be a Yazidi. Therefore, women who became pregnant with IS fighters were often forced to choose between their family and their child in captivity (Dozier 2019). Furthermore, women who had been raped were often ostracised and excluded from the Yazidi community or considered "unmarriageable" (Global Justice Center 2016, p. 6). Also taking into consideration the execution of hundreds of Yazidi men, this could serve to severely inhibit the reproduction of the Yazidi minority, and therefore, the group's long term chances of survival. This could reflect an attempt to eradicate the Yazidi by destroying their community and their ability to reproduce.

Furthermore, treating women and girls as "spoils of war" could be considered the ultimate way of dehumanising the Yazidi women, reducing them to disposable commodities to be used and sold over and over again. In addition, in a society with deeply entrenched gender norms, the enslavement of Yazidi women could also have been a form of de-masculinisation against the surviving men by demonstrating how they were incapable of protecting the women of their community (Ahram 2015, p. 58). Thereby, the direct act of enslaving and subjugating women could also indirectly humiliate men. Moreover, IS could make profit on the slave trade, hence it could act as a supplement to their economy. Enslaving women and girls could also serve as means to attract new fighters by offering them slaves but also to keep fighters by encouraging and rewarding them with "trophies" for their service (Seedat 2016, p. 31). The sexual enslavement of women could also serve to exert control over other groups under IS's grip, using the fate of the Yazidi as an intimidating example (Kydd & Walter 2006, p. 66-67). In addition, it could contribute to destabilise the region by creating mistrust for the Kurdish Peshmerga as well as for the Iraqi government, who did not do their utmost to protect and rescue the Yazidi. It could also serve to create a greater divide between the Yazidi and the Sunni Arab community. Such destabilisation could have served to undermine the support of IS's adversaries, hence changing peoples' perception of the "winning" team (McCormick 2003, p. 484).

The ultimate objective for IS is the establishment of an Islamic State. The attempt of "cleansing" territory from un-Islamic influences can thus be seen as based on a *collective rationality* (Al-Dayel et al. 2020, p. 7). This rationality is based on IS's ideology that regards Yazidi as infidels that could rightfully be held and sexually enslaved. However, as the rules, directly drawn from IS's ideology, were often violated, individual fighters frequently deviated from the collective rationality. In order to prevent the Yazidi from being sold back to their families, selling them to non-IS members was for example punishable by death (Human Rights Council 2016, p. 15). Even if the sexual slavery itself was based on a collective rationality, this rationality was seemingly not consistent among all the fighters. This implies that the fighters either did not have full information about what was collectively rational, or that they were not acting based on a collective rationality. Thus, the initial choice by IS to resort to sexual may be collectively rational, but the subsequent choices in relation to that enslavement may not be. This could entail limited support for the first hypothesis.

The second hypothesis states that sexual slavery is *logically related* to IS's objectives. The enslavement of Yazidi women served terrorise and destroy the Yazidi community and limit its long-term chances of survival. This is line with IS's objective of establishing and governing a Caliphate where the Yazidi had no place. In addition, it could be used to exert control over other

populations under IS's grip, which is connected to IS's objective of controlling the Caliphate. Hence, sexual slavery can be seen as an *instrumental choice*, implying that the second hypothesis is valid. The third hypothesis states that the expected political returns of sexual slavery exceeds the costs. The direct costs of sexual enslavement are not known but due to its organised manner, it can be assumed to have required mobilisation of resources. Simultaneously, however, it almost destroyed the entire Yazidi community, served to spread fear, attract recruits, control populations and cause destabilisation. It was also a way for IS to project an image of themselves as powerful and invincible, all for a comparatively low initial cost. Hitherto, only one person has been accused for the crimes committed against the Yazidi[4], implying that fighters could commit these crimes with almost full impunity. Thus, from the strategic advantages that sexual slavery entailed, it could be argued that it was a *consequential* and *politically utility maximising strategy*, where the political benefits exceeded the costs, hence supporting the third hypothesis. The fourth hypothesis states that sexual slavery generates the highest expected utility as compared to other options. It is difficult to conceive other strategies that could amount to the magnitude of destruction and fear that the sexual enslavement of the Yazidi generated, which makes it a *preference-based* course of action, hence supporting the fourth hypothesis.

However, there is one empirical aspect that may come to question the conformance of sexual slavery to the third and fourth hypotheses. Only four days after the Sinjar attack, a US-led coalition launched targeted airstrikes against IS, of which IS's grave human rights violations against the Yazidi were one of the key factors (Cooper et al. 2014; Fordham 2015). The campaign was not a response to the sexual enslavement *per se*, but a response to the atrocities in which human trafficking, and sexual slavery, was included. As the airstrikes ultimately led to IS's near destruction, it could be argued that sexual slavery entailed costs exceeding the political advantages by far. It could imply that IS, as suggested by the strategic theory, acted based on the information they had, and expected that sexual slavery would generate political returns that exceeded the costs. The fact that it did not could then be a result of deficient information. However, as the strategic theory states that terrorists include other actors into their cost-benefit analysis, it could also be argued that IS expected that their human trafficking operations could result in a response from outside actors, entailing costs greater than the benefits (McCormick 2003, p. 481). This would falsify the third hypothesis. In addition, it would imply that the fourth hypothesis could also be falsified, as other courses of actions could probably have been chosen at a lower cost,

[4] On 24 April 2020, a 27-year old man went on trial in Frankfurt, Germany, accused of genocide, human trafficking, torture and murder. This marks the first trial concerning the atrocities against the Yazidi (Lily & Schwarz 2020)

albeit with possibly fewer benefits. As the US-coalition's airstrikes were a response to all of the human rights violations committed by IS, this also applies to child recruitment and forced labour, but will be further elaborated in the discussion.

6.2 Child Recruitment

Terrorist organisations are heavily reliant on recruits to achieve their objectives (Mironova 2016). Gaining recruits and sympathisers increases capabilities and resources, and could therefore have been seen by IS as a short term objective to support their ultimate long term goals, the establishment and governing of a Caliphate. After separating the Yazidi according to gender and age, boys aged seven and above, who had not yet reached puberty, were taken to military training camps where they were given Islamic names, became indoctrinated with IS propaganda and were taught how to handle weapons. The Yazidi boys were often sent to the front lines or were assigned suicide missions, used as human shields to fight IS's battle (A/HRC/32/CRP.2, p. 19). By recruiting and indoctrinating young boys, IS could expand their military capacity but also securing future jihadists to carry IS's ideology and objectives forward. The forced recruitment of young boys could also contribute to the destruction of the Yazidi minority by turning children against their own families and community. One boy, after being ransomed back to his family for $10,000 after three years of captivity, tried to run back to IS, threatened his family and called them infidels. In addition, many boys that returned to their families only spoke Arabic and had no memory of their families and their pasts (Dozier 2019). Thus, the benefits of recruiting Yazidi boys as child soldiers is twofold as it both increases IS's recruits and military capacity and simultaneously contributes to the elimination of the Yazidi identity and the destruction of the Yazidi community, by turning boys into a future generation of jihadists. This could represent not only a strategic choice but also a highly symbolic one, as the Yazidi boys were recruited and indoctrinated not only to hate and kill IS's military adversaries on the battlefield, but also their own people. In addition, children are easy targets as they are easier to deceive and indoctrinate, cheaper to maintain, and more receptive to coercive methods (Beber & Blattman 2013, p. 68). By exposing children to violence, they often become numb to feelings of guilt and remorse associated with participation in brutalities. Yazidi boys allegedly had to practice beheadings on dolls as part of their military training, under instructions that they were the heads of infidels (Mortimer 2015). Subjecting the Yazidi boys to such indoctrination could thus make them more inclined to commit violence, adopt the Jihadi ideology, and ultimately turn into future loyal IS fighters. In addition, the use of child soldiers often attracts greater media attention and can be

seen as a demonstration of strength, power and authority (Anderson 2016, p. 28-32). Furthermore, forced recruitment of Yazidi boys could blur the lines between perpetrator and victim by turning innocent children into potentially dangerous terrorists. This, in turn, could also serve to spread fear and confusion among the Yazidi as well as among other civilians. In addition, counterterrorism measures are far more difficult and controversial when children are involved, something that IS could take advantage of by using the accidental death of children as evidence of the indiscriminate violence perpetrated by their adversaries, hence increasing support and recruits (Anderson 2016, p. 35).

With IS's grandiose state-building ambitions they are in great need of securing future jihadists who can pursue their objectives and carry their ideology forward. The forced recruitment and conversion of Yazidi children could thus be based on a *collective rationality* derived from IS's commonly held preferences and political objectives, hence supporting the first hypothesis. The second hypothesis states that child recruitment is *logically related* to IS's objectives. Child recruitment served to expand IS's military capacity, secure future jihadists and expand IS's ideology, while diminishing that of the Yazidi. In addition it could serve as means to demonstrate power and exercise control over populations. Forcing boys to witness and partake in unspeakable violence and teaching them to use weapons could thus be used as effective means to establish and control the Caliphate (A/HRC/32/CRP.2, p. 4). Hence, it could be seen as an *instrumental choice* which indicates that the second hypothesis is in line with IS's forced recruitment of Yazidi children. The third hypothesis states that the expected political returns of child recruitment exceeds the costs. Because child soldiers are far more affordable than adults, the recruitment of Yazidi boys could, in combination with its aforementioned benefits, be seen as *consequential* and *politically utility maximising*, in the sense that it generated high political returns for low costs. Thus, the third hypothesis has empirical support. The fourth hypothesis posits that child recruitment generates the highest expected utility as compared to other options. With its multiple strategic and symbolic advantages, it could be argued that it probably generated higher political utility than other available options, suggesting that it was a *preference-based* course of action, supporting the fourth hypothesis. However, the reasoning concerning the empirical validity of the hypotheses depends, as noted, on how to interpret IS's knowledge of the surrounding world's possible responses to their brutalities as this dramatically heightened the costs of action. Either they acted in accordance with the strategic theory and chose to incorporate child recruitment of Yazidi boys as a political utility maximising strategy based on the information they had. Based on lack of information that turned out to be a miscalculation. Or, they anticipated a costly response but chose to act anyway, hence falsifying the third and fourth hypotheses from the strategic theory.

6.3 Forced Labour

Forced labour is the least documented form of human trafficking practice implemented by IS. Because most men were executed instantly at the time of the Sinjar attack, and because the sexual violence against women and children has predominantly gained the world's attention, the forced labour aspect has been largely neglected. However, the Human Rights Council reports that forced labour did occur. Many of the men who converted and survived execution were transported to various locations in Iraq where they were forced to work on farms or at physically strenuous construction projects, with imminent threats of being beaten or killed if they refused or tried to escape (A/HRC/32/CRP.2, p. 9). Women and children were used to serve the fighters in their homes. They were mainly forced to do domestic work, where some women report being forced to work from dusk until dawn without rest (UNFPA 2016). By transferring the Yazidi men to construction projects and farms, their workforce could be exploited to help build the Caliphate. This could reflect a way of subjugating the Yazidi by controlling them and simultaneously forcing them to contribute to the agenda of the people who slaughtered their families and destroyed their homes. Forcing men to adopt Islamic religion and customs, further served the purpose of eliminating their Yazidi identity, and expanding the boundaries of IS's ideology. Using women and children for domestic servitude could also have served the purpose of subjugating and humiliating the Yazidi, forcing them to relinquish their religion and identity while simultaneously exploiting their workforce.

The first hypothesis derived from the strategic theory posits that forced labour is a collectively rational choice. The exploitation in the form of forced labour of the Yazidi reflects the same *collective rationality* that motivated sexual slavery and child recruitment. Accordingly, IS saw Yazidi as infidels which consequently stripped them of their value as human beings. Instead they were seen as resources to rightfully enslave and exploit. Hence there is support for the first hypothesis stating that forced labour is a collectively rational choice. The second hypothesis states that forced labour is logically related to IS's political objectives. The forced labour can be seen as *logically related* to IS's objectives as it both contributed to the building and maintenance of the Islamic State, but was also an attempt to eliminate the Yazidi identity, religion and culture by subjugating the captives and imposing IS's ideology upon them. As men, women and children had to work under threats of execution or punishment, it also reflects a way of exerting control and instil fear while serving as yet another indicator of IS's power and ruthlessness. Hence it served as a way to control the population in the Caliphate but also to spread Islam by force. This suggests that child recruitment was an *instrumental choice* which supports the second hypothesis.

The third hypothesis posits that forced labour is used because the expected political returns exceeds the costs. Abducting and forcing the Yazidi to work under harsh conditions could be used to exercise and demonstrate control and increase their ideology. Just like with sexual slavery, the abduction and forced labour could also be a way to dehumanise the Yazidi. With the dual purposes of subjugating the Yazidi and erasing their identity while simultaneously exploiting their workforce, forced labour could reflect a *consequential* and *politically utility maximising* means to reach IS's objectives, hence supporting the third hypothesis. This dual purpose could also suggest that forced labour could generate higher political utility than other options, which implies that it was a *preference-based* course of action, in line with the fourth hypothesis. However, as with sexual slavery and child recruitment, the validity of the third and fourth hypothesis could be questioned depending on how to interpret IS's access to information in their cost-benefit analysis, hence the strategic theory can explain forced labour depending on how to evaluate their cost-benefit analysis and anticipation of an external response.

7 Results and Discussion

The analysis has tested the strategic theory's empirical validity on IS's human trafficking of the Yazidi, in the form of sexual slavery, child recruitment and forced labour. The findings suggest that human trafficking as sexual enslavement was primarily used by IS as a strategy to destroy the Yazidi community and their long term chances of survival. Simultaneously, it served as a driver for recruitment, as a supplement to IS's economy and as a method to exert control. The analysis further suggests that forced recruitment and indoctrination of Yazidi children served to expand IS's military capacity and secure a future generation of jihadists to carry their radical ideology forward. Furthermore, the analysis suggests that forced labour contributed to the building and maintenance of the Caliphate and as an additional way to subjugate and humiliate the Yazidi. To more explicitly explain *how* the strategic theory can explain IS's human trafficking of the Yazidi, the analysis provides four primary explanations. Firstly, the strategic theory suggests that IS's human trafficking of the Yazidi was based on a collective rationality reflecting IS's commonly shared ideology and political objectives. Secondly, human trafficking was logically related to IS's goals as it served to decrease the number of infidels by "cleansing" the Caliphate from un-Islamic influences while supporting the advancement in their objectives in terms of spreading Islam and establishing a Caliphate which they intended to govern and control. Thirdly, when considered in isolation without consequential external factors, the political returns of human trafficking in terms of expansion of military capacity, as a source of income, as an intimidation strategy and as free workforce, exceeded the costs of action. Lastly, with regards to the aforementioned advantages, human trafficking generated the highest expected political utility as compared to other options. Thus, when evaluated in isolation, IS's human trafficking of the Yazidi could be regarded as a deliberate and calculated strategy to help achieve their stated political objectives.

One weakness that emerges from the empirical analysis is the strategic theory's ability to explain individual behaviour that deviates from the assumption of collective rationality. Deviations from the collective rationality could indicate that individual rationality sometimes outdo the concern of the common good. The collective rationally may hold to a certain threshold, where the incentives for the individual outweighs those of the collective, such as with the immense profits that could be made from re-selling the Yazidi back to their families. However, depending on where these ransom moneys ended up, it could also have contributed financially to the group as a whole, hence violations of the rules could also have been based on a collective rationality. Regardless, the initial *choice* of implementing sexual slavery can still conform

to the strategic theory and collective rationality, which suggests that it can explain IS's choice of incorporating sexual slavery as a strategy.

Of more importance, is the strategic theory's difficulties in accounting for seemingly irrational or politically non-utility maximising courses of actions. From the empirical analysis it is evident that IS's human trafficking practices were in line with the strategic theory, until the US coalition responded with airstrikes. The US-led coalition's targeted airstrikes were partly a response to IS's grave human rights violations and ultimately led to IS's near destruction. Thereby, IS's human trafficking practices ended up entailing costs exceeding the benefits by far. One interpretation of this could be that since IS had been able to act for years with almost full impunity, and because decisions to act are often based on past experience, they might not have had full information about possible reprisals, as there had barely been any prior to the Sinjar attack. With a failing Iraqi state and a weak military opposition, IS could almost unopposed rage across Iraq and Syria imposing death and destruction however and whenever they wished. Therefore, the information in their cost-benefit calculation could have been insufficient to anticipate a targeted response from external actors. Hence, IS's human trafficking could have been rational and in accordance with the strategic model, but due to deficient information, resulted in a suboptimal strategy.

However, as strategic theory also posits that terrorist organisations take *all* actors in their strategic environment into consideration, the possibility of an international response should have been included in their cost-benefit analysis, regardless of past experience. There is a growing consensus that the atrocities against the Yazidi were of such magnitude that they amounted to crimes against humanity, slavery and genocide, which according to international law, requires intervention (Moussa 2014). Therefore, according to strategic theory, although IS hardly see themselves as part of the international community, they should have included the risk of an intervention in their cost-benefit analysis. As they chose to resort to human trafficking anyway, it could be argued that they did not act rationally according to the strategic theory's political utility maximising assumptions, but rather according to some other logic.

One possible explanation could be found in organisational theory, which posits that the overarching goal of terrorist organisations is not to achieve their political objectives, even if those are also of importance, but rather to ensure the organisation's survival. This struggle, however, may undermine the terrorist ability to act rationally and pursue their political objectives. As a clandestine group, they are isolated from their surroundings which often affects their self-image, their view of their adversaries and their ability to calculate costs and benefits from possible courses of actions. Simultaneously, by their very nature, terrorist organisations are under pressure

to act and are impatient for results, which in turn encourages extreme risk taking. Thus, the desperate pursuit of surviving in combination with potentially disillusioned perceptions of their adversaries and a distorted image of themselves, their terrorism can escalate into a politically non-utility maximising nature. Therefore, even if they continue to fight in the name of their political objectives, terrorism becomes less and less related to their original political objectives (McCormick 2003, p. 487-90). This could explain IS's sudden, brutal and specific targeting of the Yazidi, and the rational irrationality in it as a strategy for survival, echoing IS's slogan *to remain and expand* (Azman 2020, p. 82).

Despite the strategic theory's weaknesses, its initial conformity suggests that it need not be discarded, as it provides important insights on IS's decision-making and how it is related to, and justified by, their ideology and political objectives. However, the strategic theory is insufficient to explain seemingly irrational acts that do not follow a politically utility maximising pattern. The organisational framework may be more conducive to explain the irrationality behind the decision to incorporate human trafficking to such a magnitude, and how it could be the result of internal dynamics, rather than for purely political purposes. If terrorism as human trafficking is not based on a strategic rationale, but rather on internal organisational dynamics, it becomes highly unpredictable. Thus, increasing the costs of terrorism can only be initiated retroactively, when the damage has already been done. Actions based on internal organisational dynamics require extensive intelligence access in order to succeed with pre-emptive counterterrorist measures. Evaluating the organisational empirical validity is out of the scope of this study, but could be subject for future research.

What these findings imply in terms of the *extent* to which the strategic framework can explain IS's human trafficking is that the theory shows explanatory value *until* the international community responded with airstrikes. Had the airstrikes not been launched, IS's human trafficking practices could have been strategic, rational and politically utility maximising in accordance with the strategic theory. Similarly, had IS's attack on Sinjar and their following atrocities not been of such extreme nature and included such grave human rights violations, or had the atrocities not reached global attention, an international intervention might not have taken place, and the strategic theory could have proved empirically valid. As terrorism is often analysed in retrospect, this illustrates how the strategic theory can quickly be overthrown by consequential and external events, even if terrorism may initially or seemingly follow a strategic pattern. Furthermore, this demonstrates the difficulties in predicting terrorism when it does not follow a linear and rational pattern or when the pattern is linear and rational but the surrounding circumstances change.

8 Concluding Remarks

This dissertation has by means of a theory-testing case study, evaluated how, and to what extent, the strategic theory can explain IS's choice of incorporating human trafficking of the Yazidi into their repertoire of terror. The study suggests that the strategic theory can explain IS's human trafficking of the Yazidi as a strategy designed to destroy the Yazidi community and contribute to the establishment, governing and controlling of the Caliphate. However, these activities are only in conformance with the strategic theory *until* including the US-led response to IS's atrocities. This response entailed costs that exceeded the benefits from human trafficking by far, hence violating assumptions from the strategic theory and making it a strategically irrational and politically non-utility maximising course of action, suggesting that IS may have acted for purposes other than solely political utility maximisation.

There could be a great number of reasons for IS's seemingly irrational decision to pursue human trafficking. One possibility may lie in their internal organisational dynamics and desperate struggle of ensuring their own survival. If IS's human trafficking of the Yazidi was a result based on internal organisational dynamics, this presents an interesting paradox, where their desperate struggle to survive at all costs resulted in the total opposite. The unpredictability that stems from this logic entails difficulties in launching well-defined and effective counterterrorism measures. However, IS's dangerous and perpetual pursuit of survival may simultaneously be a road that leads to their own ultimate destruction.

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