Financing Middle Eastern and African Insurgencies

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Layperson Summary

A key component to stopping insurgencies is to defund the rebel group. Lack of funding leads to decreased communication, decreased power and mobility, and most importantly, decreased ability to carry out attacks. For this reason I began my research by focusing on groups that have high levels of funding and thus are powerful and long lasting. I found that many of the well-known groups such as al-Qaeda, al-Shabaab, and the Sudanese People’s Liberation Movement all contain elements of religious fundamentalism. This brought me to the research question of whether religious affiliation plays a key role in a rebel group’s ability to gain external support. If I can successfully prove there is a link between increased funding due to religious affiliation it will prove why national security should pay particular attention to rebel groups with religious motives versus solely political or ethnic motives, for example. Religious fundamentalism is very deadly because it cannot be negotiated with. There are many cases where the “best outcome” for the individual is a better afterlife, thus displacing concern for self-preservation. Many religions refer to the current physical form being temporary, while the form reached in the afterlife is the true “eternal” form. Fundamental religious groups, especially those belonging to the Abrahamic faiths Christianity and Islam, motivate rebel groups due to their encouragement of defending the name and values of the religion against “non-believers” by force. For this reason rebel groups with religious-based ideologies are more attractive to external support because their religious motives are applicable to a global audience and the group itself is more credible to its claims of violence.