

NPS Discussion of CENTOM Reach Back Questions

On 1 November 2016, a team of experts from the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) prepared a two-hour panel discussion based loosely on the first round of CENTCOM's reach back questions. The team addressed the following topics:

1. How the Mosul campaign shapes the future of Iraq - John Arquilla
2. Potential of dispersing foreign fighters - Mohammed Hafez
3. Two trajectories of a future ISIS insurgency in Iraq post-Mosul - Craig Whiteside
4. Lessons from ISIS's use of social media - Sean Everton
5. Thoughts on war-gaming the coming instability of a Nation after ISIS - Rob Burks
6. The future of the global jihad after the loss of the caliphate - Glenn Robinson

Topic 1: How the Mosul Campaign Shapes the Future of Iraq

John Arquilla, Chair of the Defense Analysis Department, spoke about how the Mosul campaign will shape the future of Iraq.

John Arquilla: Thanks so much for giving us this opportunity, and we really enjoyed the last time that we did this (for SOCOM in 2015). You may recall that we had some unique perspectives on the situation in Iraq, and I remembered Glenn Robinson in particular speaking to the belief that ISIS might not have been as strong as we thought at the time. We suggested that it would not be wise to overreact strategically.

Since that time, we've seen a kind of emergent Obama doctrine based on the notion of a small military investment and a heavy reliance on working indigenous fighters and allies. That seems to have made a great deal of progress, so we are very pleased by that. At the same time, we're now looking at what is probably a real inflection point in the campaign against ISIS, and of course, it centers on this whole question of Mosul. I like the way CENTCOM framed it so much, this notion about thinking about 'the day after.' It reminds me that many, many years ago, I participated in "day-after" scenarios thinking about nuclear conflict. A lesson from those exercises was always that we had better think a lot about the day before if we are going to find our way to a day after where civilization is still persisting. Later on, and this goes to the mid-90s, I remember day-after exercises that... the way Roger Molander and I had crafted 'the day after in cyberspace,' which is a similar sort of thing. You reach an inflection point where cyber capability might cause tremendous **disruption**, what would you do today to avoid that? And so, when I think of the problem of the day after ISIS in Iraq, I'm thinking about the aftermath.

We represent a couple of different departments here around campus today, and I think one of the things that brings a special flavor to work at the Naval Postgraduate School is that we break down disciplinary barriers, both in the classroom and in encounters like this, and what I was saying before you

came on was that this whole notion of day-after reminds me of earlier exercises of this sort having to do with both nuclear and later on cyber matters. I think it's exceptionally critical to set up this notion of the day-after for ISIS in Iraq. How we think about that as an inflection point I think has a lot to do with what happens next in Mosul. I have to say, from my own perspective, and we have some Syria experts here, Mo Hafez and Glenn Robinson, and some strategic folks like Craig Whiteside and analysts like Sean Everton, I come at this from kind of a strategy-policy-ethics perspective. For me, **the biggest ethical concern has to do with the possibility of humanitarian crisis in the wake of a battle for Mosul.** I think if we're looking at a situation where Mosul looks anything like Fallujah did after it was liberated, we are looking at a catastrophe in policy and ethical terms. Repairing our reputation in that region and within Iraq—and of course the effect that turning Mosul into an Alamo or a Stalingrad or even a Thermopylae—will speak also to the issues that some of our contributors here today are going to be addressing about foreign fighter matters, about how ISIS might continue or even rekindle operations within Iraq, and how the network itself might be affected by this. I think there is a **narrative inflection point here that is as important as the operational one**, and so we have to think, I believe, very, very hard about how to proceed in a way that avoids mass casualties, and of course our adversaries know that this is a tremendous vulnerability. That's why they're driving people out of the outlying villages and why they're going to use them in ways that will, from their perspective, maximize collateral damage in what comes ahead.

So, as good strategists, it should lead us to think about a couple of different options, and I want to be mindful here not to go past my 10 minutes; there will be plenty of time for cross-talks and questions later on. But it seems to me that we have some alternatives here, and if T E Lawrence was running this campaign, he would probably say, "Whoa, they've got 5,000 fighters in Mosul; leave them there." He never took Medina in WWI and left 40,000 Turkish soldiers sitting there till the end of the war. So, one strategic alternative would be to consider a campaign against ISIS whether in Raqqa or elsewhere, that bypasses major force concentrations. Thus, while ISIS leaves a massive amount of their combat capability sitting and waiting in Mosul, we go elsewhere. Nibbling around the edges of Mosul as we have so far doesn't rule this out at all. We could simply continue to do that, keeping them on edge, keeping them pinned down as Lawrence did in the rail lines leading into Medina while we use our other power against more vulnerable elements to try to prevent a humanitarian crisis. So, that would be one alternative.

Another interesting alternative I discussed this with General Mike Rouleau, Commander of Canadian Special Operations forces this morning, and he's of course fresh back from over there and basically commands all of the international special operations operators over there right now. He was very fascinated when I said, "Well, how about this: another alternative would be to encourage the possibility of the departure of these fighters before we engage in a full battle. What if instead of encircling and cutting them off, we left them a route of escape to Syria, and what if we also made it quite clear that the post-ISIS rule in Mosul would retain elements of the civilian population there, including some that were amenable to ISIS's presence." This I think is an interesting possibility, and also, we should couple this with threatening actions in the vicinity of Raqqa that would encourage ISIS command to bring fighters back for defense of Raqqa. So, that's another option, and what General Rouleau mentioned to me this morning was that Haider Al-Abadi is actually very congenial to this point of view. So, the key is that there are options to what we've told the world we're going to do. I've been in the defense business a very long time, so I know that we are probably going to steam ahead with this battle, and if we do, I think the

idea of gradual progress over a long period of time plays into our enemy's hands and allows them to create, extend, and deepen the humanitarian crisis that we know would be disastrous to our cause. So, I would suggest the possibility of much more rapid attacks in the city, even if it didn't deal with all of the fighters section by section. We flood the city, we swarm the city, we work with locals who are part of the resistance that we know exists there, we reach out to many of the Sunnis again, even those who were amiable to ISIS's presence, we say, "Look, we are trying to protect innocent life here and restore order." So, even though there would be continued fighting, this would be a kind of mini thunder run that I think would be far superior. In my terms, I'd like to call this the swarm attack; we'd come in from many directions simultaneously, and we would be blanketing the city quickly and, I think, minimizing the possibility of mass civilian slaughters. The Israelis did something like this in Gaza a while back; it didn't come off as well, and they used a kind of swarm tactic there, and it did at least succeed at moving in very quickly. I think that this is something that we have studied, and the idea has continued to be studied in the years since, and if we are going to go ahead, I think a very swift swarm is probably far superior to a step by step advance. The slower approach will undoubtedly cause a great deal of collateral damage.

So, to review before I hand it off here, we have strategy here: the Lawrence strategy of leave them in Mosul and do other things. We have the strategy of encouraging them to depart Mosul, the sort of Haider Al-Abadi preference here, and we have a strategic alternative of moving in right away. If I were to vote on this, I am probably a big fan of Lawrence, all you know his reputation is overstated certainly, that wonderful critique of him by Suleiman Mousa takes him down a peg or two, but I think that a Lawrence-like strategy would be the most workable in this situation, but we do have all of these alternatives. I think that each of them plays out differently in different ways: they address questions that will be the focus of other contributors here.

Topic 2: Potential of Dispersing Foreign Fighters

Mohammed Hafez, Chair of the National Security Department, is a major contributor to the literature on local Jihadism writ large and discussed the issue of dispersing foreign fighters.

Mohammad Hafez: Thank you Glenn, and thank you for the opportunity. Let's start by stating that we need a decisive victory in Mosul. It's hard because of the broader campaign of defanging the narrative of ISIS: that it is a state, one that can attract people and create a viable alternative to the current state system that exists. So, I think that part of the strategy is countering ISIL's ideology while the other part is defeating it territorially. A decisive defeat in Raqqa might achieve this, but it is much more challenging than Mosul due to dealing with a different state and the different actors involved there.

Having said that, let me get into my 10 minutes of brief on what I think is going to happen with foreign fighters. So, the question that I start out with is as follows: if we defeat ISIL and Mosul and then follow on with defeating them in Raqqa, what will happen to the thousands of foreign fighters that are there? So, that's a broad question, and the way that I want to deal with that is kind of break it down into four sub-questions and see how that could potentially be useful to you. So, the first sub-question is what is the scope of the foreign fighters' problem? What are we talking about here? At a very high level, obviously, the problem is big.

In looking at previous waves of foreign fighters, we start with the Afghan Mujahideen and their supporters in the struggle against the Soviet Union. After the battle, those fighters moved on to Bosnia and Chechnya for the second wave/generation of jihadists. The third wave emerged in Iraq in the 2000s, and now we have a fourth wave in Syria. This last wave has far exceeded the previous waves in terms of the pace, the magnitude of recruitment, and the diversity of recruits.

At the peak of 2015, the CIA estimated there were about 30,000 volunteers from 86 countries, which is quite troubling. I don't think in my research on previous waves on foreign fighters that we've seen that many. For the fourth wave, I found that 17-20 percent came from western Europe, which means they have western passports that grant them potential access to the US homeland. The other thing to notice is that many of these individuals have gone to Syria with their families. We did a recent study on German foreign fighters, and about a third or so have travelled with entire families.

If we assume a peak of 30,000 foreign fighters going to Syria, it is not clear how many have survived given that many of these individuals are used in suicide attacks and high risk attacks and given the fact that we've been bombing ISIS for a while. If we assume that about one fifth of the 30,000 have survived, we're looking at about 6,000 foreign fighters remaining, and if we further assume as Thomas Hegghammer does, that one in nine foreign fighters come back home to attack their homeland, we're looking at an estimate of about 660 potential terrorists. Now, that may seem small from 30,000 to 660, but if you look at 9/11, at the time, Al Qaeda had about 500-1,000 full members, so this is not an insignificant threat. This actually matches the size of Hezbollah in early to mid-2000s. So, if we go with a very conservative estimate, we are still dealing with a very big problem. Now, some of the returnees to western countries have been put in jail or entered into a deradicalization program but many may have just simply melted back, so we don't know. Regardless, the size of the problem is quite big. We can expect that about 660 foreign fighters will be coming back to try to attack but not necessarily the US homeland but their own country.

The second question I want to ask is: what are the likely pathways that returning foreign fighters will take based on recent historical examples? I did a study on foreign fighters, of the Arab Afghans, and I came up with seven pathways that they could take, and later on, I'll talk about which ones that I think are probably the most feasible for this 4th wave of foreign fighters. The first path is to remain and fight as a terrorist group and live the jihadi life. So, some did actually stay; they became trainers and sort of instructors for explosives and so on. We saw this in Iraq, and while some Iraqi foreign fighters in Iraq did disperse, many of them stayed with al Qaeda, where they scaled down their activity from being a major insurgent group to a smaller terrorist organization, and I see that potentially happening. Iraq isn't going to become stable and secure any time soon and, therefore, it is possible that some of these fighters will remain there.

The second potential path, and I think this is also very likely, is that they'll join an ongoing conflict. The most likely candidate would be Syria because it's right next door, but we also have Yemen: a sectarian civil war which they'd like; Libya: tremendous weakness and stability and civil conflict there; and the Sinai Peninsula is a potential area where they could potentially flock to given the fact that there is an organization there already. Now, when they go to those areas, they could become fighters, they could become trainers, they could become explosive experts, and that's what we've seen in the past. Another path is that they will return home to reintegrate. This raises the question, as some have suggested, that we try to figure out which ones are likely to become serious security threats and potentially throw them

in jail. But which ones are amenable to deradicalization and reintegration? That's something that we need to think about. Another path is to return home and attack and recruit. Some have settled in a country that is willing to host them, so a lot of the first generation foreign fighters actually went to Europe and settled there. I don't think that's feasible today, but nonetheless, that is an option. Some have become freelance terrorist experts, some have created new terrorist groups themselves, and the most worrisome of all are used as assets by governments. Yemen and Pakistan use foreign fighters as assets in their struggles against their adversaries.

The third question is: what is the most likely scenario based on these various pathways? I think that there are two potential models. One is to assume that these individuals will go back to their home countries and, if we assume that, then the countries that are most vulnerable would be Jordan, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Russia, Turkey, and France, largely because those are the countries that have contributed in absolute terms the most foreign fighters. But, the second model and the one that I'm more inclined towards is to say that it's not that they'll return back to their home countries, but they'll go to where the opportunities are found. The opportunities there that they usually look for are ongoing conflicts, weak state capacities, sectarian divide, and cities controlled by radicals and, if that's the assumption, then most likely we'll see foreign fighters go to Syria or remain in Iraq or in Yemen, Libya, and the Sinai but also you have Somalia. So, my prediction is that they'll go to where opportunities exist, and we can talk about that.

The fourth question, and I'll conclude with that is, what does that mean in terms of the threat to western countries? Is the threat small? Is it big? I think some like Dan Byman and Jacob Shapiro say "worry, but don't over worry." I actually do worry, not necessarily in the short term, but I do think that the nature of the threat is really a long-term threat.

I started off by talking about four waves or four generations of foreign fighters. However, we are still dealing with the effects of the first generation. Ayman al-Zawahiri is a first-generation Afghan veteran. He is the head of Al Qaeda today. Leaders of al-Shabaab and other groups are also first generation Afghan veterans, but now there are four generations of foreign fighters. So think of the timeline of how long that is. But most importantly, what these people can do is they can reconstitute a transnational terrorist network composed of experienced commanders, trainers, explosives experts, ideologues, recruiters, and others—and that's what got us to the Al Qaeda that we struggled with for so long. While I am worried about attacks on the homeland, the greater threat is the reconstituting of a transnational network of experienced jihadists and extremists. I think that's what we will have to deal with.

Topic 3: Two Trajectories of a Future ISIS Insurgency in Iraq Post-Mosul

Dr. Craig Whiteside, a professor in the Naval War College, spoke about the two trajectories of a future ISIS insurgency in Iraq post-Mosul.

Craig Whiteside: Thank you. You heard my pitch on the revolutionary warfare from my two journal articles, so I'll try to keep it short, but this talk is based on these articles. The two trajectories are the ideas that are based on those two articles as well as a War on the Rocks piece that I did with a partner called 'Don't Kill the Caliph.' It touches on a territory and control over Iraq; it's a major function of ISIS's relative military power, which in turn allows the civil political agenda that they feel is crucial. I mean,

look at the Iraqi government. To them, it's about prestige and sovereignty and regaining Mosul, and that might not be the most convincing argument whereas for the Islamic state, this is a requirement for them, that territorial control in which they altered the social, political, religious, and economic dynamics of this particular area. So, while it is a vulnerability, and a lot of people are looking at territorial vulnerability of the Islamic state, it's also a critical requirement for them to implement the dynamics.

There seems to be a well-orchestrated and smartly managed coalition effort to liberate Mosul right now. ISIL has some choices to make, and it remains to be seen whether they will put up a fight or melt away like they did in Fallujah in 2004, or Ramadi in 2007, and Diyala in 2008 with a strong rear guard action that allowed the destruction of the city, which fulfills their own propaganda.

Human capital seems to be ISIL's center of gravity. If you look at how this movement has evolved from 1999 in Afghanistan into Iraq in the early days, their struggles in 2006-2008, and their ability to recover from that, it has always been predicated on their ability to preserve their own expertise, future leaders, and the management and grooming of these future leaders like Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who joined in 2005. They've managed to keep these people alive, experience moving from different aspects of their organization, and then, when they're able to lead at the larger level, they have all of the skills that are necessary. So, as Mo said, the key concern is their ability to preserve. What is their ability or actions to take that will preserve their human capital for future insurgencies? And that being said, these are the kinds of assumptions that I'm looking at when I look at these two trajectories.

I'm sure there are more than two trajectories, but I'm going to focus on two general ones to keep it short. One is collapse and fracturing. Most of the experts are saying that that will not happen to an organization of this stature and longevity, right? I think fracturing is possible post-Raqqa (not post-Mosul...it's really post-Raqqa). You do have internal dissent; you have critiques of the strategies, these overreaching strategies that they had that are now blown back on them. It's going to cause the collapse of their overarching political goal, which is the caliphate. They've got elements of this senior governing directory, which is really underneath Abu Bakr who has these well-set views, and I think that the key right now is a decision point that CENTCOM has to make and that's whether Abu Bakr stays alive or not. I read an article with quotes by the CENTCOM Commander about this recently, and I understand the political kind of top push to get Abu Bakr, but what we've seen in the past with this organization is that when their leader is decapitated, they use that as an opportunity to kind of shift gears, such as in 2006 when they were able to remove a perception of their foreign fighter nature and make it an Iraqi organization under Abu Omar al-Baghdadi who was a political leader at the time. And that's what helps them recruit a lot of other organizations to their banner, which is what helped them stay alive. So, if he's still alive and the caliphate collapses, it's a loss of legitimacy. He's not the charismatic leader; he's not a firebrand like Adnani was. He's the legitimate leader, and when the caliphate collapses, it will cause a loss of that legitimacy. If he is on the scene that allows them to make some changes, what would those changes look like? They can reimagine this organization yet again, to this, definitely a virtual caliphate but the caliphate of the future of course. It could allow them to create yet another variation of the organization where they leave behind some of the bad press that they've had, and they're able to steal away people from JFS or the FSA and create this new organization because there's a large debate right now whether they will ever reconcile with their former comrades in JFS. Most people say no because JFS has gone so far away from the core ideology that those governing members of ISIS have. Even the dissenters still say that Joulani is mistaken and wrong and they shouldn't destroy Jabhat al-Nusra very early on. If Abu Bakr is dead again, you have the ability to make those transformations, and that could

be more dangerous than allowing this insurgency/chaos group to kind of die a natural death or at least their relevancy as it's done a second time. I think it's easy to convince people that you can come back this first time, which they did in 2008-2011. It's much more difficult to convince the same population... it's subscribed to get a possible fantasy of a second return after the experience they've gone through.

The other trajectory is that they move into an insurgency; they retrograde back from the decisive phase (of Maoist style warfare). They're used to it, they're very good at it, they have a very good model that was very successful from 2011-2013 in setting the judiciary for the collapse of the Iraqi governance: terror, assassinations, provoking occupiers, that kind of thing. This creates a lot of difficult conditions because the key period to look at is 2008-2013. We blame Maliki for a lot of the problems in Iraq, and he deserves a lot of it at a grand level, but a lot of these are local dynamics, and it's the inability of Sunnis to govern Sunni provinces, particularly the Nujafis and Nineveh, but in other places in Islam because Anbar has similar problems on its back. Some of the key issues that CENTCOM should concern itself with in this trajectory are Sunni governing (how do Sunnis govern themselves regardless of what their relationship is to the larger national government?). They're not able to govern at the local level, which they absolutely were not as the Islamic state kind of turned the tables on them, and that's going to be a major problem. The second one is economic regulation and not simply from the elimination of criminal aspects of the underground economy. The little economy which would have been fairly extensive during this time period, but the fact that the Islamic state harnessed almost all of that, this laissez faire approach to economic regulation under governed areas of the Sunni provinces, particularly Nineveh with the assets that they have, that was a primary cause for the Islamic state to come back after 2008. If it's not looked at, and there's no rule of law or economic regulations or a serious look at who is actually making money from these various enterprises, it feeds the insurgency from just a purely economic standpoint. And finally, the detainment issues. Almost all of the people that I study from the Islamic state have done time in Camp Bucca, and they've done time in various drug prisons. They were freed from those either through corrupt officials, through poorly thought out amnesty programs, or jailbreaks, and a large number that went back to the fighting; they were the type that you don't want to go back to the fight. They're experienced, hardened, and they also have no future in Iraq regardless of whatever reconciliation efforts they're going to have for inmates. We, I think, need to help as much as possible with helping the Iraqis figure this particular problem out because both the United States and the Iraqis did not get that right in 2008, and you see that. The deputy for the Islamic state most recently was released under one of these amnesty programs, and he was a founding member of the movement, and nobody knew this but it's very indicative of our understanding and knowledge of this particular group, how it's involved, and the dangers of hoping that they'll reconcile on their own, which is not going to happen.

Finally, we've got to look hard at Diyala and places like north Babel, which are backsliding; they're going sideways if not backsliding. We're not paying careful attention to the ISIS members that are flowing in these directions and reestablishing core areas of their own. What you're going to see is a very strong case to try to possibly even a return to some territorial control of parts of Diyala. I don't think it will happen in north Babel because of the way that Shia militias are governing it, but that in and of itself is the problem, and I'll end there.

Topic 4: Lessons from ISIS's Use of Social Media

Dr. Sean Everton, Co-director of the CORE lab and faculty member of the Defense Analysis Department. Dr. Everton will talk about lessons learned and not learned yet from ISIS's use of social media.

Sean Everton: I'm a methodologist of sorts, so I specialize in social network analysis, and we use network analysis techniques to explore social media. Along with a couple of colleagues in the CORE lab, we spent some time using social network analysis techniques to analyze the ISIS narrative that was appearing in social media, in particular Twitter. Briefly, what we did was, back in late August/early September 2014, using Arizona State's Tweet Tracker archives, we pulled upwards of almost a million Tweets. We used about 2 ½ weeks' worth of Tweets, which translated into almost a little over half a million user accounts, I mean, directed ties between 85,000 user accounts, which is a lot of people. We searched with the term 'Islamic state' written in Arabic. Obviously, other people would use that hashtag, but it was probably the most common hashtag that was used or a key term that was used by the Islamic State. So, after we pulled all of these data, we used some algorithms to identify influential user accounts. We used an algorithm called, "Hubs and Authorities," which allowed us to identify which user accounts were being followed a lot and which were exerting a lot of influence. And so, using these methods, we identified 30 different hubs that were tweeting a lot and whose Tweets were being either followed or being retweeted. We pulled all of the content of all those Tweets, and then we conducted a semantic network analysis of the content of those Tweets. What we were interested in seeing was whether there are certain themes and concepts that were prevalent within the content of these Tweets. What we found was that certain terms were coming to the fore, certain concepts were coming towards the fore during this period of time.

What's interesting is about a month before we did this analysis, we had done sort of a baseline analysis doing a similar analysis of Tweets. The baseline analysis was conducted before the US started its bombing raids in Syria and Iraq. The second gathering of Tweets was after the bombing had started, and what we had noticed was a marked shift in what was being emphasized. In the Tweets, the narrative before the bombing, there was an emphasis on the near enemy. ISIS came across as a very sectarian movement; most of its vitriol was directed at local enemies, regional enemies, the terms that they were using were derogatory terms related to local jihadist movements that they thought were not pure enough and that sort of thing. In the second set of Tweets, there was a complete shift. It was like they were shifting from a near enemy to a far enemy, focusing on the West, the US, President Obama. These kinds of concepts came up much more frequently. Like for instance, the "United States" and "President Obama" went from the 36th to the 66th most mentioned concepts up to 8th and 16th positions. So, we wrote a paper on this shift, and we never attempted to publish it, but we presented a few PowerPoints, and our basic argument was that the bombing caused a shift in the narrative that was prevalent in ISIS. We weren't sure at the time whether it was permanent, whether it was just reactive. I mean, if they stopped the bombing, would the narrative switch back to the old narrative? But when we find it interesting in and of itself.

Now, of course, we are interested in what's going to happen to ISIS the day after, right? And of course, this analysis was from 2014, but what I was going to suggest is that we can use a similar type of approach to map a post-ISIS narrative, and whatever happens, happens. We could pull Tweets say on a monthly basis to detect what might be going on, and I think it would be very informative to sort of what might be actually occurring on the ground then. I should also mention with regards to the development

in the foreign fighters network; this is something that I think we could also use these social network analysis techniques to map the social networks of the foreign fighter networks that were mentioned earlier, and this would help us in crafting strategies to deter these networks and also deterring the strategies from this run. So, briefly, that's it.

Mohammad Hafez: A student of ours did a study of data on a qualitative level, and he looked for three things. One was gain that if you apply to the state you will gain a job, a bride, a salary, or so on. The second was a sense of duty, that this is your religious duty. The third was phrased in terms of loss that if you don't have that the state will be gone, will go away. You found this in the first wave of Gaza articles, and a heavy emphasis on duty, very little on sense of gain, but since the bombings began, there has been a tremendous emphasis on loss—that if you don't come to defend the state, Islam will lose, you will lose something that has died. So, that kind of matches with shift in focus, and the dynamic nature of their messaging is very important. And we just analyzed social media; we can actually analyze texts as well. So, this seems pretty intuitive to me that once the Americans started bombing, you look at the far enemy. Now, once they start bombing the state itself, it's under greater stress. But what I think is interesting here is that it's not clear at all what the intuitive answer at the narrative level is in the battle for Mosul. So, the question Sean would be, could you monitor if indeed they pursue this gradualist strategy? Would you be able to monitor that and narrate that in real time?

Sean Everton: I think we could. I think we could. It might be worth doing.

Mohammad Hafez: What will happen to the narrative is that they'll unfold over time as collateral damage grows. The fighters, by all accounts, are fighting pretty hard in the outlying areas. So, I'm not sure what that does.

Sean Everton: The last thing I'll say before I run out of time is that this methodology would be a way that we could almost real-time monitor what was going on in Mosul and in Iraq as this unfolds.

Topic 5: Thoughts on War-gaming the Coming Instability of a Nation after ISIS

Rob Burks, Senior Lecturer in the Defense Analysis Department of the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) and the Director of NPS' Wargaming Activity Hub, spoke about wargaming and the potential instability of Iraq after ISIS.

Rob Burks: I don't want to spend a lot of time talking war gaming because I was just out there in August talking with CENTCOM about the war gaming potential futures, and I know that we are still having discussions right now for the upcoming February war gaming workshop that we are doing out there. But, obviously, this is a great environment for war gaming—to help us try to understand the future probabilistically and to try to start tackling these potential futures. We know there will be multiple factions acting at the operational and strategic level both internal and external to the region. They all have a role in this environment, and they're all going to want to have some potential actions or impact for their own benefits and their own gains. Now, the question is how are all of these players going to interact together? It's nice to start talking in about what you would expect an organization A or offset B to do, but they don't get the opportunity to operate in isolation. They will be operating against each

other; they will be developing their own coalitions even if only for a short period of time and gain whatever it is that they're attempting to gain for their own purposes.

So, the question is how does this all come together? What are the potential futures when these guys start playing and counteracting each other? I think war-gaming methodology and matrix-type gaming or structured seminar gaming are perfect methodologies to employ in this situation. From previous games, we know that the certain things are going to happen, it's just a matter of who is doing it and how much have they done. We know that social network media operations and exploitations are going to occur; everyone is going to do it. They're going to do it at all levels: national operations, strategic, etc. What is going to be the impact going in if groups are competing for the same audience: the population. All groups are going to attempt to manipulate the population. The question is at what level and where the impact will be.

Many of you have considered subversion as well. Fighters will remain in the region. ISIS will not be gone no matter what we say; they're going to be there at some level. When the militants come back, who are they going to side with? What are they going to do? What are their actions? What are the actions against them? These strengths and weaknesses need to be looked at all together. Like it or not, the day after ISIS is defeated, the next question is going to be what does the future of Iraq look like, and the only thing we know for sure is that it will be unstable once all of these individuals who are a coalition of convenience right now begin to start to carve out what their own particular interests are, and I'll leave it at that.

Topic 6: The Future of the Global Jihad after the Loss of the Caliphate

Glenn Robinson, political scientist and on the DA faculty at NPS, spoke about the future of global jihad and the loss of the caliphate.

Glenn Robinson: I think without question that the impending loss of the territorial state will represent a crisis point for the global jihad. So, I'd like to make just five brief points.

The first point is to look back and remember why ISIS succeeded to the degree that it did. What was the basis for its success, even a temporary success? **It was operating in a stateless vacuum.** I think we need to always remember that in Syria, because of the civil war, you essentially had no government left in the Euphrates River Valley and in the Aleppo provinces, not to mention the Kurdish areas. Additionally, the Iraqi state functioned in the greater Baghdad area and in the south; the Kurdish areas in the north are essentially autonomous. But to the northwest, you essentially had no state to speak of. It was in this stateless vacuum that ISIS had some success. That doesn't discount the other effective tools they used including a brilliant marketing campaign, which generally was far better than Al Qaeda's. Also, their strategic use of violence was quite impressive. The **sex appeal of declaring a caliphate** was also very significant. But it was the stateless vacuum that, I think, that we always need to come back to.

If ISIS had tried to hold territory and declare a caliphate in a relatively stable state like Jordan or Saudi Arabia, they would have been rolled up in a day. It would not have been a major strategic problem. So, it was that statelessness that I think that we always need to come back to. In places where we see the

collapse of states and the inability of states to actually govern effectively in various parts of this territory, it's those kinds of places that you might see some version of an ISIS 2.0.

That's the first point. Second point is more on territoriality, and that's the debate within the global jihadi community. This is the longer debate that they have had over territoriality, and it's always been the goal of really everybody in the global jihadi community to emphasize the need at some point to hold territory. Some people will argue to push that off; some people, including, of course, ISIS, wanted to expedite that process, but this is what made ISIS different. It was **the emphasis on creating a territorial state and doing it now** and not waiting. Now, it's also why other global jihadis, and Al Qaeda in particular, but others as well, warned against declaring a territorial state instead of declaring a caliphate. Why? Because once you declare a Caliphate, you cannot lose. You must hold, you must remain, because if you lose a caliphate, it is a catastrophe for the global jihad movement. What we are about to see in their own words is a catastrophic event for the global jihad movement writ large. So, I think this argument about the importance of territoriality where it kind of sits in the global jihad movement writ large is going to get extra emphasis in the months ahead and in the day after the fall of ISIS and the caliphate. Where a global jihadi group might be on the verge on an ISIS 2.0 and actually hold territory, there may be a greater resistance to actually declaring a caliphate as opposed to an emirate or something else, and there's a big difference between those two things.

The third point that I want to put on the table is **the idea of a returning caliphate**, of reestablishing a caliphate nearly a century after it was abolished by Ataturk. The return of a caliphate is a powerful notion -- you cannot un-ring that bell -- that has captured the imaginations of a lot of people throughout the Muslim world, so I suspect that one of the things that we are going to see in the day after is a growing sociopolitical movement, **not necessarily a violent jihad movement but a sociopolitical movement seeking to reestablish the caliphate**. After Ataturk abolished the caliphate, there were several attempts to reestablish it that did not lead anywhere ultimately, but one has seen a much stronger ideological tendency in that direction in the broader Muslim world as a result of the ISIS experiment, so this idea really has captured the imagination of a lot of people. What you might see is that nation states see the value in revisiting this issue, and you might get competition amongst states to establish the caliphate and, therefore, control it to some degree. Obviously, some states that might attempt this role would include Turkey, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, among others, but I think this notion of a caliphate and reestablishing a sort of Muslim version of papacy is back on the table after having been off the table for nearly a century.

The fourth point I want to address is to mention the name of every academic's favorite jihadi ideologue, Abu Musab al-Suri, and I think the day after ISIS, we return to his world, the kind of challenges that he thought through at quite some lengths back 12 years ago when he published his very, very long 1600 page manifesto on the Internet shortly before he was arrested, and it viewed the global jihad as under siege at the time. They had lost their influence in Afghanistan, the Americans were far better he said at killing leaders of the global jihad than the Americans themselves even realized. He thought through the issue of how do to live to fight another day, **how to keep hope alive for the global jihad** under circumstances that were not compatible with immediate success given everything that was happening in 2004 when he was writing this. I think you're going to see a basically similar kind of discourse within the global jihadi community of what do we do now. ISIS is gone, Al Qaeda central at least is mostly gone, what happens next? How do we keep hope alive? Abu Musab al-Suri's answer was that the individual jihad – ***jihad al-fardi*** (translated as "leaderless jihad") is the answer; it is the only way that the global

jihad can live to fight another day. Leaderless jihad is the most likely form that the global jihad will take in the years ahead. I think that is the far more likely outcome over the next 5 or 10 years than an ISIS 2.0, frankly.

Alright, last point and that is on the policy issue. What is the overarching problem or issue that I think the Americans and our allies face in dealing with the global jihad the day after? Many of the structural problems that create radicalism in Iraq and elsewhere I think will remain; I don't think there is going to be some sort of magic solution to Arab-Sunni inclusion in the Iraqi state, for example, nor do I think the Syrian civil war is going to be solved any time soon. So, a lot of these **problems that have given rise to radicalism will remain** and, here, since we're maybe under the rubric that there's not really such thing as a new idea, and we're mentioning lots of old dead people like Lawrence of Arabia and others who were very smart; let me throw Sam Huntington into the mix who wrote nearly 50 years ago that **the real problem is not the nature of the government or the type of government, it's the extent of governance**, and I think that's the problem that you're seeing in the CENTCOM AOR that we're going to be dealing with for a long time. We have to consider the ability of state institutions to do things that alleviate some of the issues that lead to radicalism. I think that's going to be the major issue that we face, but there are some significant policy implications of emphasizing "stateness" as opposed to other criteria. One of which, for example, (also one that we have some of the greatest problems with) is Iran. Iran is a functioning state that is not a source of internal radicalism. The Saudis are a different matter. Iran's ability to help reconstruct states in the region and state institutions and actual governance, etc., that's going to be absolutely essential, not just the day after, but a decade after.

Question & Answer Session

Note: All questions are in italics and have been anonymized.

Could Dr. Whiteside talk a bit more about how ISIL was able to use lack of economic regulations to their benefit?

Craig Whiteside: Sure. RAND does the best work on this; it analyzed captured documents from the Islamic State movement from about 2005 all the way through 2010, and they were able to really paint a pretty thorough picture due to the bureaucratic robustness of the Islamic state's organization. ISIS started as a network, but they quickly evolved for a variety of reasons into a bureaucracy. This is documented extensively by their own documents, which were captured by the US, translated, declassified, and then released, so I refer you to those first of all. Second, and Glenn Robinson spoke about this, the lack of government led to a vacuum where ISIS could thrive. ISIS was able to fund their organization not just through extortion, but also taxation. This is not a novel concept, but it is novel in how they set up criminal enterprises where profits fed ISIS operations. They were able to do that because of ideology. In the Iraqi government, a lot of people who were supposedly governing city provinces were actually profiting tremendously from corruption and turned a blind eye to illegal economic activity. The state was losing immense amounts of income to ISIS, which it used to recruit fighters, stage suicide bombing attacks, to keep the organization alive when it was really at a low point. I don't think ISIS is as dead as many people claim in retrospect, but certainly, it was in much worse shape than it is today and in much worse shape than it will be after Mosul and Raqqa fall, and a large part of it, of course, is economics. ISIS has to pay people, it has to be able to pay the widows of fighters. What's included in the RAND documents is pretty amazing actually, but I think that's obviously got to be an

aspect of putting them back in the box post-Mosul, some type of government regulation of the economic market. It cannot be a free for all. There is a significant amount of resources there due to the oil in that province that has to be regulated or controlled, and that might be impossible but there has to be a better attempt than that was made last time.

With declining economic resources, how will ISIS meet its financial obligations to foreign fighters, their families, and those who have committed themselves to the organization?

Craig Whiteside: You've seen the tremendous stress it has done as far as their pay cuts for their fighters. I think actually one of the areas that they're saving money is on families, which is probably a short sighted policy on their part but nonetheless, it's a requirement because they have to pay fighters right now because of the military pressure on them. I think that could be part of the reason there is a discouragement of foreign fighters and the fact that they're not taking care of these families—that's been happening in Indonesia. Some return back to Indonesia, mostly because they weren't able to get paid and sustain their family. The points about the RANDs reports are very important. The financing of ISIS's illicit activity is key to their ability to scale up and scale down depending on the security environment, so that's why it's a key aspect of dealing with the economics of illicit networking and trafficking. But with regards to the decline in flow of foreign fighters, I think part of it is security awareness, the other part involves concern that they will not get paid enough to support their families. Although, initially there were reports about foreign fighters expressing discontent because they were not getting paid fairly, and that created another kind of schism.

Although there seems to be some consensus that Daesh will be defeated militarily, there also seems to be consensus that the ideology and some people will survive. People often talk about the virtual caliphate. My opinion on that term digital or virtual caliphate is that we shouldn't use the term at all because when we use it, we already confirm something. We did that by using the so-called term or the term of the so-called Islamic state. If we use the term digital caliphate, we do something similar. We confirm that there is some kind of caliphate, although it's only in the web and in the digital world. So, I would appreciate if you give your opinion on that.

Craig Whiteside: It's a very good question. Let me say something about ideology more generally, and then I'll talk about the specific question. There's some research that deals with insurgent movements and ideology, and they tend to argue that as insurgent groups begin to account for wartime defeat or battlefield defeat that they become interested in merging with other groups. Therefore, ideology becomes very malleable and can shift. I think evidence shows that ideology is malleable. On the other hand, there are some people that argue that ideology is baked into their DNA and keep making the same mistakes over and over. It is amazing how much of what happened in the Algerian conflict we see replicated in Syria in terms of insurgent fratricide based on a strong ideology that used to exert hegemony of the movement. So when we talk about a digital caliphate or a virtual caliphate, do we actually end up taking a concept and making it real? Yeah, I think that's a fair point. We can use the term that these are violent extremists, but this means that these people are not able to sustain real state. How are they able to sustain a virtual state? I mean, this is actually nonsensical to most ordinary Muslims; they want the state that can deliver the goods, to Glenn Robinson's point. It's not about the nature of the state; it's about a state that's actually going to get governed and provide public goods, private goods, economic goods, security, and so on. So, honestly I'm not sure if could can really call it a state. I think that for most Muslims, it is offensive to say that these goods represent a caliphate. It's the

same discussion we have in the US about whether to call it Islamic terrorism. I tend to side with the argument that you shouldn't call it Islamic terrorism, and by extension, I do think we shouldn't call it a digital caliphate or a virtual caliphate.

Glenn Robinson: I just want to underline one of the points that Mo made about the malleable nature of the ideology. This is a point that I thought Will McCants made very well and that is in the lead up to the establishment of the Daesh states, there was a tremendous amount of millenarian discourse amongst the ISIS folks. Once they had proclaimed their caliphate, the discourse shifted markedly from millenarianism to the state and the requirements of state. So, this is not a fixed ideology; it is rather malleable and can change based on the circumstances.

This question is related to the remarks about social media rights. You talked about that the bombing caused a shift in the Daesh narrative and that by having a look at the Twitter accounts we can observe that shift in that strategy. I would appreciate if you could go a little bit more in detail how that would help us to adjust our own narrative/messaging because in my opinion, in general, the narrative doesn't change; it has more effect in changing the messaging.

Sean Everton: So you're asking about how we change the narrative. Changing the narrative strikes me as very difficult to do.

John Arquilla: Let me throw an idea out. If the bombing sparked the shift in the narratives towards the foreign enemy, then just stop the bombing. There are ways to engage militarily without overuse of drones. So if this is their hot button issue in not only this area of conflict but in other areas where we use them, we can adjust how we engage militarily as a way to influence narratives. If indeed the shifts are based on our own behavior, then we have to look at our own behavior as a generator of narratives, and so we might be able to change it by changing our approaches.

What opportunities are there for CENTCOM to shape the environment and move Iraq towards greater stability?

Glenn Robinson: Let me start with I think an obvious point, but just because it's obvious doesn't make it easy. We need to think through ways, and I know CENTCOM is already doing this, to make the Iraqi state more inclusive of its citizens. That's been the problem since we reconstructed the Iraqi state into essentially a Shia nationalist or a Shia revivalist state. I mean, it's obviously more complicated than that, but the various means at the local level, at the regional level, and at the national level to try and create greater equity in terms of distribution of material wealth, programs, etc. should be pursued. Craig mentioned the regional governance and the importance of doing that well, with which I fully concur. These are centrally important to try to make Iraq; I never bought the idea that Iraq was a failed state. It was a functioning state. Well, we broke it, but when it got reconstituted post-2003, it was reconstituted as a relatively functioning state but just not in its entire borders. It was a relatively well-functioning state in the Kurdish areas and in the area from Baghdad south. It was the vast Sunni Arab areas where you had those less governed areas. So, again, it's an obvious point but a difficult one in terms of trying to make the Iraqi state inclusive of all its citizens and not just what, up to this point, has essentially been a Shia nationalist state.

So, Glenn, what's the implication then for reconciliation? ISIS wouldn't have had that blitzkrieg in 2014 without a lot of Sunni support. So, how about reconciliation with the Sunnis, which is part of this shaping of the post-ISIS environment?

Glenn Robinson: I think one of the lessons learned, we realized, was that the state did not meet the needs of the entire populations. We ought not repeat this error when it comes to Mosul and the general Sunni Arab population. ISIS gained so much support because it was a new game in town that challenged the status quo for this marginalized group. In terms of broad reconciliation, we have to be sure to include even those folks who worked with ISIS in Mosul and surrounding areas. It is a necessary step.

Mohammad Hafez: Let me just add a couple more points. One, I think there are certain fault lines regionally that we need to look at, especially given the activities in Iraq. First, there is a Turkey-Iraq conflict brewing. Turkey has its eyes on the Kurds, and this is problematic. It calls into question the state legitimacy of Iraq when at the same time we need Turkey's cooperation in maintaining the security of Iraq. Second, there is a contentious relationship between Gulf States and Iraq. The reason that Iraq turns toward Iran is because it does not trust the Gulf States, who have arguably been promoters of sectarian discourse and calling into question the legitimacy of the Iraqi state. So how one puts Iraq back together is going to be dependent partially on the regional environment, and the more Iraq feels like the Gulf States are against them, the more they are going to lean towards Iran. So, I think those are the fault lines that we need to explore.

One of our students recently wrote a thesis of this kind of slight shifting, and it goes to Glenn's point. He wrote a thesis on why we spent 100 billion dollars on Iraq and Afghanistan, and we don't really, in terms of security sector reform and building the security capacity of Iraq and Afghanistan see results. The key answer is not about a lack of fighting capabilities or their lack of will to sacrifice of their power or so on, but it's the lack of state legitimacy. State legitimacy is very important for maintaining the fighting capacity and the will of people to fight as opposed to people throwing away their uniform and running away the next time an ISIS or a group like ISIS comes back. So, I think that's a tough challenge. I'm not sure if it's something for the Pentagon to deal with. It's something that I think is more for leadership and the State Department to deal with but, nonetheless, state legitimacy is going to be key to making sure that ISIS doesn't come back.

Craig Whiteside: I looked hard at the 2008-2013 period. Efforts to reconcile the Sunni population with the government were actually underway. I know this because the Islamic state prioritized this after targeting efforts to undermine this reconciliation. They were killing the Sunni sheiks that were actually collaborating with the government, and they went through an extensive campaign to do this, which to me showed me that there were actually strong reconciliation efforts, but those reconciliation efforts cannot in themselves be successful without the governance, economics, and the defensive policy that I talked about. Those fail to work in those areas that undermine reconciliation, which is mostly perception and identity questions in the first place. So, for you, it's really a political question. I think what you're asking is what's the role of the United States. I think the best idea is supporting good governance and rule of law.

Mohammed Hafez: Let me just second Craig's point. I think that there is a long-term American role here; there should be a focus on reconciliation and stability. ISIS was able to do what it did because Baghdad was not conciliatory towards the Sunnis. The disaffection of Sunnis was what gave rise to the ISIS blitzkrieg in 2014. My big fear would be that the US walks away once again after ISIS is defeated,

allowing the same problem to emerge again. We have created a situation with a kind of bureaucracy in Iraq where a Shia majority is going to look more to Tehran than they will to Washington, and so without this kind of very well-articulated American presence, not just military but other governance factors, we're just going to see this all over again.

I'd like to just pull on that extreme a little bit more. Obviously, for reconciliation to be successful, it's got to be two sided. So, how do we, and this is broader than just military, but how do we think about getting this Sunni population to demand in a positive way to be included as part of the government, and how do we develop some sort of perhaps international backing for that kind of thing, that kind of political pressure?

Glenn Robinson: Let me just start the discussion on this subject. This is a great question, and there was polling and other empirical work that was done in the post-2003 period on Sunni perceptions of themselves that had some very interesting findings. For example, a common Sunni Arab perception is that they constituted a majority of the population in Iraq instead of the 20-25% that they actually do. It's a sense of victimhood when they had been the dominant community not just under Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath party, but going back to the Ottoman period as well. So, there were a lot of empirically false perceptions in the Sunni Arab narrative of themselves and their place in Iraqi society after 2003, also a strong perception that ruling Iraq was essentially a God-given right for them. So, they often shared a view of the basic illegitimacy of any regime in the new Iraqi state. So, there are some very significant internal perceptions among Sunni Arabs that need to be overcome. Reconciliation is a two sided street. How has the ISIS experience changed that perception from a decade ago? Has there been an awakening, if you will, of the new reality in Iraq that will make Sunni Arabs, at least leaders in the Sunni Arab community, more inclined towards reconciliation? And I think that there is some positive development. There are certainly leaders out there that are saying the right things, so I think those are waters that definitely need to be tested. We'll see how far it goes, but I think there's at least some reason for optimism that the last 10 years have changed some of those quite hostile perceptions.

Mohammed Hafez: I think there are at least three political science models of post-conflict political order and I think we need to talk to experts of these theories on how to move forward. The first model is the consociational model, kind of like a quota system, of ethnic representation. I think the last time we had a conference on this, the evidence that a consociational system might appeal to certain leaders, but it tends to create really poor governance in a society. You see that in Lebanon: two years without a president. They just appointed one, one who was oddly enough a Maronite Christian but very pro-Hezbollah. The second model is that of a democratic model of majority rule/minority rights. I think Iraq is some time away from that. The third one is a kind of federalist model where the Kurds have their own region with strong autonomy even almost quasi-state. The Shiites have that as well, but it does not work as well for Sunnis due to economics. I honestly don't know which one is the right answer; I am still mining the problem. I'm not sure that there are any other models out there that one needs to explore, but naturally, what we need to do is go back to and figure out what works. If I had to say something, I think federalism is probably what's happening on the ground now.

Craig Whiteside: Yes, more specifically, I'd like to add that there is opportunity here. I think there is a lot of talk about after Mosul; that there is going to be sectarianism and the status quo will remain, but I think there's two dynamics that have changed that your organization and the larger US government can capitalize on and that's the fact that the Shia recognize that they have failed in some way shape or form

and this fulfilled, this shady kind of mantra that the Shia were never going to be able to lead in the first place. This is exactly what happened, of course it's a little bit of a self-fulfilling prophesy on the city side. But the Shia recognized that they better approach this in a different manner, that the way they did before was not super successful. This is not to say that there aren't militias that still want to, that we weren't hard enough on these guys and that we needed to tighten them up, and we all know who those troops are. But I'd say that the larger government, Abadi for sure, understands that there needs to be changes in Shia governance, and the Sunnis themselves who, once they see their Sunni champion, if you will, the Islamic state defeated by the people they said were inferior and can't defeat them, that should allow a kind of window for the cognitive kind of frameworks of the Sunni elites at least to change. We don't want to see ISIS 3.0, but I think you'll actually see more Sunnis actually be willing to engage in reconciliation. So, there is opportunity here. So, I wouldn't be so gloomy about the prospects of the post-Mosul new government. There's an opportunity there, but it needs to be acted on or else it will go back to the status quo.

Glenn Robinson: If I could just throw one point in there, and that's to underline something that John said at the very beginning and that is how the battle of Mosul goes will shape very dramatically the prospects for reconciliation.

If I may follow up on that comment you just made and revisit John's three strategies, professional strategies, the Lawrence strategy, let them leave strategy, the swarm strategy, and I'm simplifying all of this, and given that the region is thoroughly divided with who knows how many groups, ethnic, sectarian, and everything between them, the Kurds themselves are thoroughly divided, the Iraqi Shiites are thoroughly divided. Now, all of that now is subsumed because everybody is preoccupied with the ISIL and Mosul, and if the Mosul thing is not handled well, and these groups like a unifying enemy, is there a danger of these groups going after each other and becoming a much bigger problem than something that is more contained? Which strategy would knock the region into a worse nightmare than what it is in right now?

John Arquilla: You raise a wonderful insight here. The defeat of the enemy could uncork the bottle on all of these other problems. So, if that's the case, then I think the larger strategy should be to let these 5,000 fighters holed up in Mosul remain while keep nibbling away at the edges to keep them busy. That would free forces to focus on taking ISIL out of Raqqa. What a great strategic insight: do not knock them out too soon because it might create another problem.

A couple of years ago, Gina Ligon from UNO, looked at ISIL from an organizational perspective. Her findings provide a simplification of the three kinds of fighters: ideological, pragmatists, and violence seekers. There are some who have bunker mentality who want to die in place while others may want to go down a foxhole and re-emerge at a better time. So it's not clear that there is going to be a clearly unified group of post-ISIL group. If that's the case, are there off ramps we can offer to the pragmatists who do not have too much blood on their hands? Or how would you create fractures within these types of fighters?

Mohammed Hafez: So, if I may speak, I recall the Algerian armed Islamic group, which I think is very analogous to the situation here. It was a very extreme group: quite fratricidal both in terms of attacking civilians as well as attacking fellow insurgents, very ideologically pure, had aspirations of really imposing a kind of sharia state, and had transnational links. In the mid-2000s, GIA experienced a crisis both in terms of fighting with other insurgent groups as well as the Algerian state gaining support from France

to fight the group. What emerged was a more pragmatic group known as the CSBC became much more targeted in its attacks, did not attack civilians, did not attack other insurgent groups, and effectively attacked the government. It persisted for a few years and eventually reconstituted itself into Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. So, being a pragmatic organization is not necessarily a good thing. It might be less bloodthirsty and in that sense be less threatening to the West but, nonetheless, a pragmatic organization can actually be quite a challenge to deal with.

John Arquilla: This question also echoes back to how things unfolded with al Qaeda in Iraq in 2007. We turned 80,000 people who had been so-called insurgents to our side through the Awakening effort. Violence dropped 90 percent in the months following that program. So I think you're on to something. These factions within ISIS do present opportunities. However, I do share concern that pragmatic terrorists are the most dangerous ones. But at an individual level, people are pragmatists. At the time of the Awakening, our information strategy was pretty skillful in showing how the core al Qaeda fighters were actually taking advantage of the Sunnis. So, we played on those cleavages and were able to get them useful off ramps that turned the campaign around, so I think that's something that should maybe still be in our playbook as we move ahead here.

Glenn Robinson: I have to agree with my colleagues to begin with. There are two basic organizational types of these terrorist/insurgent groups. One is the **cult-like organization** and the other is **institutionalized leadership**. Different policies can be effective against different types of structures. For cult-like groups such as Bin Laden's al Qaeda and Boko Haram, when you defeat them, the group does not entirely go away but becomes a shadow of its former self. Other groups like Hezbollah and Hamas are more institutionalized in their leadership. So killing of a leader here or there might hurt, but it's not going to destroy the organization. Daesh, I think, falls into the latter category that if Baghdadi were to have a heart attack today, Daesh would continue. They would find a way to replace. But groups with institutionalized leadership provides far greater opportunities to be nuanced and complex about how you deal with it. After Daesh gets defeated in Mosul, there are going to be a many kinds of leaders and followers with different incentive structures. It is going to be complicated, complex, but opportunistic from a US perspective than a cult-like jihadi group would be.

Craig Whiteside: I would like to point out that for every group you pick off and fracture, half of its leadership is going to go somewhere, and they could go to groups we do not particularly like. In the past (2006-2010) there were lower level individuals that abandoned ISIS because they were demoralized mostly from fighting other Sunnis. Internal documents showed ISIS spent amazing amounts of time trying to inspire these people to come back to fight. They stayed home until there was some momentum and then they started coming back. So, one problem with lower level defection is they're always available to come back because they want to work for the organization. So that's another second-order effect to think about. The problem I'm worried about is there's a great piece in West Point's CTCs yesterday called 'Dissent in the Islamic State.' Even a lot of the dissenters in the Islamic state are not what we would consider people we would ever work with. Some defected to other groups. Dissenters can still be very ideological and seek to support other, equally dangerous organizations.

So, you probably are aware that ISIS is changing some of their communications and communication strategies and, if we couple that with some of the divisions within the organization, what opportunities

do you think we may have to use either information operations or deception to help perhaps further fracture the organization or cause the dissent within the ranks?

John Arquilla: I think there's very fertile ground for this. There's a lot of division within ISIS and so exploiting those cleavages would be one way to go. I think the best strategic deception we can do right now is continue to make them think that there is going to be this major assault on Mosul while we're busy doing something else and keep those fighters that are defending Mosul busy fortifying and hiding and not doing other bad things while we strike at ISIS in other areas, including perhaps even a move towards Raqqa. But it seems to me that we have a world of opportunities in the area of what we call information strategy but, sadly, deception is something close to a lost art, so it's wonderful to hear you even use the term. Of course, there are all kinds of administrative impediments and hurdles that have to be followed when doing deception, including such things as are we deceiving the American people, are we deceiving our own allies?

Mohammed Hafez: I would encourage defections through potential amnesty. So, for instance, those who surrender now will be not put to the gallows but actually could potentially be given some sort of deal. I know that amnesty programs create a lot of internal fratricide because there are those that want to possibly take them up and those that appear to be negotiating with a government or appear to be reaching out to face them itself could actually create a lot internal defections in an organization. So, I'm not a specialist on this, but I know amnesty programs do create a lot of internal defection and potential for defection.

Glenn Robinson: I'll just add one comment briefly and that is to raise the name of a long-dead, nasty organization from an earlier generation and that was the Abu Nidal organization, which essentially committed suicide based largely on IO deception campaign of others, and that was to my understanding a highly successful operation that perhaps lessons can be learned from that organization's demise.

John Arquilla: Yeah, just a footnote on the Abu Nidal operation. It was based on an understanding of where he kept some of his money, and instead of freezing or seizing his money, it was inoculated to make Abu Nidal believe that his operatives were stealing from him. So, you have 300 core operatives, and he assigned about 100 of them each one person to bump off that he thought was stealing money, and everybody else just took whatever they could get their hands on and ran. So, the whole operation basically came undone on the basis of that, and I don't know how much we know, but I know that they're sitting on wads of cash because ISIS got their hands on some bank cash. So, I don't know how their monetary system is working, but financial scam deception, that's an old reliable. We blew up a lot of their cash, and maybe we shouldn't have....

I'd like to make a remark on the conceptual theme, but from, let's say, the German perspective. I can only recommend to not conduct deception information operations because as soon as you do that, what you do is you put at risk the most important thing you have within these optional operations and that is your credibility. I understand that there are reasons for doing deception operations and everything, but once again, as soon as you do that, you are at great risk to lose your credibility.

John Arquilla: Well, I would say this is one of the items of evidence to point out why deception is becoming a lost art in many advanced western militaries, and I think it's very sad, and my own experience in this area goes back to operation Desert Storm where actually a major deception was actually able to divert 14 Iraqi divisions towards the Kuwaiti coast while we made a front well inland and

surrounded basically 40 divisions. So, there's this kind of deception that I spoke about which is putting the pressure on Mosul but acting militarily elsewhere while we leave the ISIS fighters on the line there in Mosul. That will hardly ruin our credibility, and one of the best ways to assure international credibility is to actually do well, and deception has from biblical times to the present been a useful military tool. I believe in Asian strategic culture, Sun Tzu once said that all war is based on deception. If we only do what the enemy expects, the enemy will know exactly what to do against us.

If you are referring to Operation Desert Storm, I mean, I don't want to call it a technical win but does that really fit though? Does it really help you achieve your goal of strategic victory? That's my first question, and the second thing is if you said not doing or not linking deception to information operations, that doesn't mean on the other hand to completely refuse to do deception. My recommendation is only not to link it to informational operations because that once again puts your credibility at risk.

John Arquilla: I'd say deception here is a fundamental form of information operations and, again, the attempts separated from there is why deception is in decline. I believe our Russian friends use deception quite regularly and integrate it closely with military operations that have been highly successful at low cost, and that goes back to Desert Storm. Did deception work there? Yes, we were able to achieve the liberation of Kuwait in 96 hours with virtually no casualties to ourselves and relatively lighter Iraqi casualties. It was a less bloody and a shorter war, and there was a 30-nation coalition in full support of this, so I would say that would be a very successful example. There are ways to think about this use of deception today, and I'm delighted that it was raised by CENTCOM, and I hope it leads to some serious discussion as you move forward.

Craig Whiteside: I've got something to add on the information operations discussion to define or to exacerbate fractures you talked about. While Abu Bakr does get credit for establishing the caliphate, he often gets the misplaced credit or the credit/discredit for establishing and inspiring a coalition to come and crush that caliphate and again, he's going to be blamed for strategic blunders of fairly strong magnitude when, if he'd played his cards a little bit smarter, he would have had his emirate/eventual caliphate if he had not pushed their buttons. So our campaign and the hunt for Abu Bakr will solve a major problem for the Islamic state. Don't kill the caliphate; let him live miserably in an Iraqi jail. I don't know if that's information operations as much as it is allowing or even playing up the information operations. It's about how many mistakes he's made and then let them live with this caliphate that they can't knock off themselves and still maintain some legitimacy, and that's what could possibly fracture them in the long run. It's about having a loser of a caliph.

Biographies

NPS Bios

John Arquilla is professor and chair of defense analysis at the Naval Postgraduate School where he has taught in the irregular warfare program since 1993. He is best known for having predicted, back in the mid-'90s, the rise of terrorist, insurgent, and transnational criminal networks. His books include *Networks and Netwars* (2001), *The Reagan Imprint* (2006), and *Insurgents, Raiders, and Bandits* (2011). He contributes regularly to *The New York Times*, *Foreign Policy*, and *Politico*.

Mohammed Hafez is the Chairman of the Department of National Security Affairs at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. A specialist in Islamic movements and political violence, his books include [*Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World*](#); [*Manufacturing Human Bombs: The Making of Palestinian Suicide Bombers*](#); and [*Suicide Bombers in Iraq: The Strategy and Ideology of Martyrdom*](#). Dr. Hafez is also the author of several scholarly articles on Islamic movements, political radicalization, foreign fighters and jihadist ideologies. He regularly briefs government and military analysts on issues related to terrorism, war of ideas, and countering radicalization. Dr. Hafez current research seeks to explore the micro-mechanisms of extreme violence, and he is also opening a new line of inquiry into the origins of fratricidal rebels in civil wars. Dr. Hafez has made several appearances on *News Hour with Jim Lehrer*, *NPR*, *CNN*, *C-SPAN*, and other national and international media outlets. He earned his Ph.D. from the London School of Economics and Political Science in 2000.

Craig Whiteside is an Associate Professor at the Naval War College Monterey, California where he teaches national security affairs. He is a senior associate with the Center on Irregular Warfare and Armed Groups at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island and a fellow at the International Centre for Counter-terrorism – the Hague. Whiteside's current research focuses on the doctrinal influences on the leadership of the so-called Islamic State movement and its evolving strategies. He has a PhD in Political Science from Washington State University. His recent publications on the Islamic State can be found [here](#).

Sean Everton is an Associate Professor in the Department of Defense Analysis and the Co-Director of the CORE (Common Operational Research Environment) Lab at the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS). Prior to joining NPS in 2007 he served as an adjunct professor at both Santa Clara and Stanford universities. He earned his MA and PhD in Sociology at Stanford University (2007) and wrote his doctoral thesis on the causes and consequences of status on venture capital firm performance. He has published in the areas of social network analysis, sociology of religion, economic sociology, and political sociology and

currently specializes in the use of social network analysis to track and disrupt dark networks (e.g., criminal and terrorist networks). His monograph, *Disrupting Dark Networks*, was published by Cambridge University Press in 2012. His latest book (written with Daniel Cunningham and Philip Murphy), *Understanding Dark Networks*, was published by Rowman and Littlefield in March of this year. He is currently working on a book that explores the interplay of social networks and religious belief and practice.

Colonel (R) Robert E. Burks, Jr. is a Senior Lecturer in the Defense Analysis Department of the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) and the Director of NPS' Wargaming Activity Hub. He holds a Ph.D. in Operations Research from the Air Force Institute of Technology, a M.S. in Operations Research from the Florida Institute of Technology and a bachelor's degree in Aerospace Engineering from the United States Military Academy. He is a retired logistics Army Colonel with more than thirty years of military experience in leadership, advanced analytics, decision modeling, and logistics operations who served as an Army Operations Research analyst at the Naval Postgraduate School, TRADOC Analysis Center, United States Military Academy, and the United States Army Recruiting Command. He has led multiple analytical study teams responsible for Army Transformation (organizational change) issues and his work includes applying analytical methods to develop solutions for complex problems in support of the Combined Arms Support Command, the Army's sustainment think tank and premier sustainment learning institution. In addition, he has served as the technical expert on studies involving deployment, equipping, manning, training, and logistics operations of military forces in multiple theaters of operation. He currently teaches the Modeling for Decision Making and Statistics Courses at NPS. His research interests include Irregular Warfare and Stability Operations modeling, Information Operations modeling, Wargaming and Agent Based Modeling and Simulation. His recent major awards include the Military Leadership Award (2013), Joint Service Warfare Award (2013), Military Operations Research Journal Award (2011) for developing analytical methods for solving the Theater Distribution Problem, and the Omar Bradley Fellowship for the Study of Mathematical Sciences (2011).

Glenn E. Robinson is a political scientist with over 35 years experience studying and living in the Middle East. He has been on the faculty of the Naval Postgraduate School since 1991. Robinson earned both his BA (1982, with Highest Honors) and PhD (1992) from the University of California at Berkeley. He has been a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Jordan (1985-86), and a Senior Political Scientist at the RAND Corporation (2003, on leave from NPS), and has studied at the American University in Cairo (1980-81, 1989), Yarmouk University in Jordan (1984), and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (1989-90). Proficient in both written and spoken Arabic, Robinson has spent time in virtually every country in the Middle East and North Africa. He is the author or co-author of three books on Palestinian politics and development, and is currently writing two books: on jihadi information strategy (Stanford University Press) and on the comparative politics of the Middle East (CQ Press). He is the author of over 40 published journal articles and book chapters on Middle East politics, development, and security.