SMA CENTCOM Reach-back Transcripts

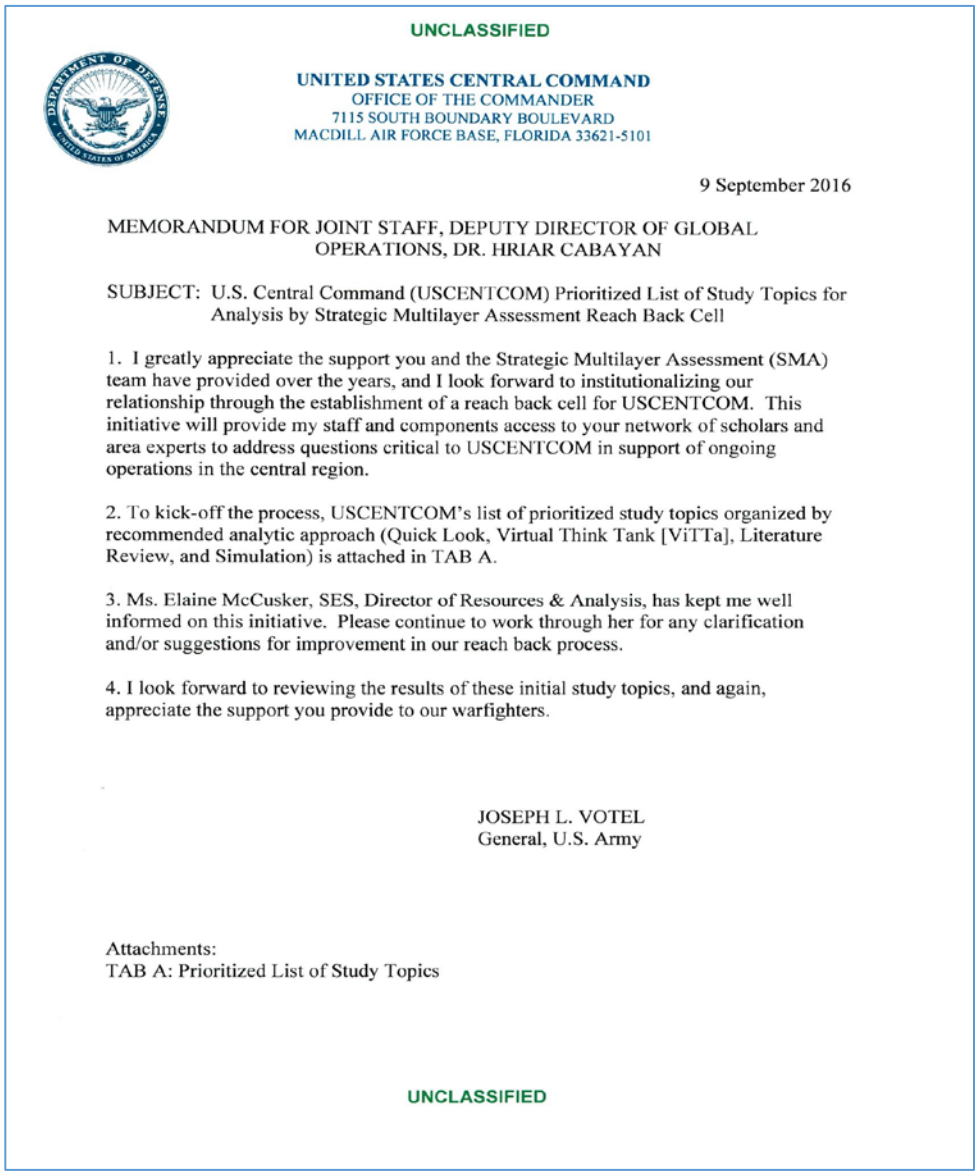
Supplemental Transcripts

The enclosed reports discuss wide-ranging issues related to the defeat if ISIL and stabilization of Syria and Iraq supplementary to the 9-part series of SMA Reach back responses to questions posed by USCENTCOM grouped by theme. Series reports may be obtained from Sam Rhem in the SMA Office at samuel.d.rhem.ctr@mail.mil

21 February 2017

At the request of United States Central Command (USCENTCOM), the Joint Staff, Deputy Director for Global Operations (DDGO), jointly with other elements in the JS, Services, and U.S. Government (USG) Agencies, has established a SMA virtual reach-back cell. This initiative, based on the SMA global network of scholars and area experts, is providing USCENTCOM with population based and regional expertise in support of ongoing operations in the Iraq/Syria region.

The Strategic Multi-Layer Assessment (SMA) provides planning support to Commands with complex operational imperatives requiring multi-agency, multi-disciplinary solutions that are NOT within core Service/Agency competency. Solutions and participants are sought across USG and beyond. SMA is accepted and synchronized by Joint Staff (JS/J-3/DDGO) and executed by ASD(R&E)/EC&P/RRTO.



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9 September 2016

MEMORANDUM FOR JOINT STAFF, DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF GLOBAL OPERATIONS, DR. HRIAR CABAYAN

SUBJECT: U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) Prioritized List of Study Topics for Analysis by Strategic Multilayer Assessment Reach Back Cell

1. I greatly appreciate the support you and the Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) team have provided over the years, and I look forward to institutionalizing our relationship through the establishment of a reach back cell for USCENTCOM. This initiative will provide my staff and components access to your network of scholars and area experts to address questions critical to USCENTCOM in support of ongoing operations in the central region.

2. To kick-off the process, USCENTCOM's list of prioritized study topics organized by recommended analytic approach (Quick Look, Virtual Think Tank [ViTTa], Literature Review, and Simulation) is attached in TAB A.

3. Ms. Elaine McCusker, SES, Director of Resources & Analysis, has kept me well informed on this initiative. Please continue to work through her for any clarification and/or suggestions for improvement in our reach back process.

4. I look forward to reviewing the results of these initial study topics, and again, appreciate the support you provide to our warfighters.

JOSEPH L. VOTEL
General, U.S. Army

Attachments:
TAB A: Prioritized List of Study Topics

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Discussion Session with Naval Postgraduate School – 1 Nov 2016

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, remain in Iraq, or travel to Yemen, Libya, and the Sinai as well as 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 makes, and it remains to be see whether they will put up a fight or melt away like they did in Fallujah in 2004, Ramadi in 2007, or Diyala in 2008 with a strong rear guard accent 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, have 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 Dr. Hafez 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 it 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 also have critiques of these overarching strategies, which are now blowing 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. I think that the key decision point that CENTCOM has to make right now is 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 it 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, you have the ability to make those transformations, and that could be more dangerous than allowing this insurgency/chair 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 groundwork 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 Nujaifis and Nineveh**,** but in other places as well. Anbar has similar problems on its back. Some of the key issues that CENTCOM should concern itself with in this trajectory include Sunni governance (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 informal economy which was 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. 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 talked 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 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. For instance, the "United States" and "President Obama" went from the 36th to the 66th most mentioned to 8th and 16th respectively. 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 or whether it was just reactive. If they stopped the bombing, would the narrative switch back to the old narrative?

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. 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 individiuals 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.

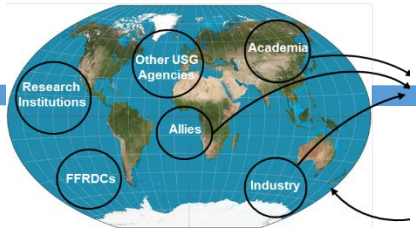
Sean Everton is an Associate Professor in the Department of Defense Analysis and the Co-Director of the CORE (Common Operational Research Environment) Lab at the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS). Prior to joining NPS in 2007 he served as an adjunct professor at both Santa Clara and Stanford universities. 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 form 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.

9 February 2017



SMA Reach-back Report

Discussion Session with Naval Postgraduate School 18 January 2017

***Speakers**: John Arquilla, Ryan Gingeras, Glenn Robinson, Hy Rothstein, Naval Postgraduate School*[1]

***Transcript Prepared By**: Nicole Peterson, NSI*

[START OF TRANSCRIPT]

Glenn Robinson: Let me go over the agenda very briefly. As I mentioned yesterday Doc, unfortunately Craig Whiteside has come down with a very nasty stomach virus so unfortunately will not be joining us today.

We'll start with Ryan Gingeras, who is a Turkey expert at the Naval Postgraduate School, and then I will follow Ryan. Then let's have a discussion at that point, some Q&A.

At which point John Arquilla and Hy Rothstein will be able to join us, and they will each speak, John on strategic narrative, development, and information operations more generally and Hy Rothstein on some of the lessons learned in Iraq when it comes to influence operations.

After those two sets of comments, we can again open up discussion and Q&A. Does that sound reasonable to everyone?

[1] Biographies available in Appendix A

Doc Cabayan: Sounds good. Adam, okay with you?

Glenn Robinson: Have we lost CENTCOM?

Adam Gable: No. Hey Doc, sorry, pressed the wrong button. That sounds good, Doc.

Doc Cabayan: Okay, perfect.

Glenn Robinson: All right, very good. We'll start with Dr. Ryan Gingeras on some thoughts on Turkey's role in response to your questions.

Ryan Gingeras: Okay, I'd personally just like to thank Glenn for the opportunity to talk and share my thoughts today on Turkish interest and policymaking in northern Iraq and Syria.

I'd like to start with an apology that I'm afraid I can't really speak too authoritatively about the tactical or technical nature of Turkey's recent action in the region. For that, I'd recommend one looks at the work of individuals such as Aaron Stein at the Atlantic Council, who has really written here and there about the capabilities, as well as limitations, of the Turkish Armed Forces in the region.

For the sake of time, I'd like to simply leave everyone here with three core points regarding Turkey's interests and intentions in northern Iraq and Syria. I'll be happy to expand on these points or on other issues during Q&A.

Firstly, I'd like to say that Turkey's incursion into northern Syria I think should come as no surprise. It's fundamentally driven by domestic concerns. As I'm sure you're all aware, Ankara considered the PYD one and the same as the PKK and not from Ankara's perspective, it's a part of the greater effort, or the incursion at least is a part of the greater, I'm sorry, the PYD is a part of a greater effort to partition Kurdish land in Turkey.

While one could debate the semantics of how close the PYD and the PKK actually are, the true extent to which these two groups, as well as groups like Kosh [the primarily Kurdish HDP party in Turkey], coordinate is not 100% clear. It is clear that nationalist Kurds in Turkey have followed events in Rojava very closely, and let me say, from a Turkish nationalist perspective, a Kurdish nationalist perspective I should say, it is the most important and the most successful turn of events in the history of Kurds.

Even if one considers the autonomy and influence, Barzani and the KRG regime influences and enjoys today, the PYG's gain in Rojava more genuinely embodies the nationalist and ideological aspirations found among Kurds in Turkey today. Ankara knows this and therefore seems quite intent upon snuffing the PYD out.

The second point I'd like to leave you all with is I think it's hard to know what Turkey's long-term intentions are in Syria, let alone northern Iraq. With respect to Ankara's perspective on Assad, it would seem that Turkish Syria policy is becoming maybe a bit more fluid, or perhaps maybe a better term would be a bit more muddled.

Regarding combating the PYD, I think it's abundantly clear that Ankara has no real exit strategy. What had begun as an effort ostensibly spearheaded by Ankara's allies in the SSA, has increasingly become an effort both managed and executed by the Turkish Armed Forces.

The Sultan al-Bab suggests that the Turkish Armed Forces is clearly having trouble on both of these counts, both in terms of managing the SSA as well as executing anything like a sustained and successful campaign. While taking al-Bab and perhaps Manbij in the future, it's clearly foreseen as essential to blocking the PYD from linking to other Kurdish groups in northern Syria, especially in Afrin. I have trouble guessing what comes after that. Even if they are successful.

The same can be said for Turkish plans in northern Iraq. The base in Bashiqa appears to be going nowhere despite recent talks between Ankara and Baghdad. Strategically it's really isolated and remote in relationship to declared areas of interest in northern Iraq, at least from Turkey's perspective.

It is possible, although not very likely, that Ankara foresees a long-term military occupation of the region much like what we see in Northern Cyprus. But at this point, I have to say I'm only speculating.

The third and last point I'd like to leave you with is this. I don't think it can be emphasized enough that Turkey risks grave amounts of self-harm in this operation, regardless of the outcome. Ankara is gambling mainly on the prospect that the Turkish Armed Forces can suppress the PYD and that the ISIS threat, more than anything, will simply go away. When I say go away, I mean solved largely exclusive of Ankara's own action.

Should the PFK or the Turkish Armed Forces on both counts fail, one can only imagine that the rate of terrorist violence in Turkey will escalate dramatically. One can only imagine that the Turkish Armed Forces' failure would already worsen the already depleted state of the army's morale, which may in turn directly undermine the stability of Erdogan's regime.

But even if Turkey is somehow successful, and the PYD can be turned back from Manbij and al-Bab, and Raqqa falls, with or without the help of the PYD, the Turkish Armed Forces still face a lengthy stay in northern Syria. I find it difficult to

imagine a scenario in which Turkey completely returns the PYD genie back into its bottle.

The minefield that awaits Ankara in northern Iraq is arguably fraught with even greater uncertainty. There appears to be no clear strategy for dealing with the growing pro-PKK sympathies found among Yazidis and the Kurds in the Sinjar mountain region, no plan for re-incorporating the region of Tal Afar with the KRG, let alone dealing with the long-term sectarian divide that will emerge after ISIS leaves Tal Afar, and no clear trajectory for the base in Bashiqa. All these factors point to a deepening Turkish quagmire abroad and greater instability at home. Thank you.

Glenn Robinson: Thank you very much, Ryan. Any quick questions or clarification? I know we'll have a broader discussion in a few minutes, but any clarification questions for Ryan before I go on?

Question: You mentioned that you saw Turkish morale potentially suffering if they aren't able to successfully end the Syrian conflict or help get rid of ISIS. What do you see as potential follow-on to that decrease in Turkish military forces' morale? Is it likely to step up into a popular overthrow? Is it just going to collapse the economy? Where do you think that goes?

Ryan Gingeras: I think, again, this is over speculative, but if one considers the fact that already the officer corps at various ranks have been depleted really mightily, and those who are replacing them are either deemed politically reliable, or some of whom are returning officers who were persecuted under the Sledgehammer trial of a few years back, I think you have a really combustible atmosphere in which you could have one of two scenarios.

One, another coup or open conflict within the armed Forces. I mean those are the worst-case scenarios. I think the most likely scenario is that it will cease to be able to hold onto, not simply territory within Syria, but also perhaps these larger amounts of territory to the PKK in Turkey.

It's really unknown at present what the play is in southeastern Turkey because there's very little press coverage. It's very clear that the Turkish government is trying to keep affairs in Eastern Turkey out of the news. But that may become more difficult if, for example, there are more terrorist attacks or if there are high rates of casualties in eastern Antalya.

Either way, it flows back within the government, it also is in society. But I think this is why one should have some cause for concern regarding Turkey's plans in Syria and Iraq.

Glenn Robinson: All right, let me make a set of remarks as well, then we'll again open it up before Professors Arquilla and Rothstein arrive. What I'd like to do is make four sets of comments that are, I hope, germane to the questions that were asked.

The first set of comments is on issues of local governance. Second set of comments on issues about the style of the political institutions. A third set of comments about, and this goes back a little bit to our last conversation about after the caliphate, what happens when that territorial state is ultimately defeated.

Then a final set of comments on the Shia-Sunni issues that you raised and how that links more broadly into the Westphalian or the state system and the revival of the state system in the Middle East.

All right, so let me begin with local governance. This basically goes to questions about what happens in Raqqa, in Deir ez-Zor, and the Euphrates River Valley more generally in Syria, what happens in Mosul and the area after the territorial state of ISIS is defeated, what sort of political arrangements can be made afterwards.

Let me start with a set of general comments and then bore down a bit. In my judgment, the absence of real local governance has been one of the most important political problems, not just in Syria and Iraq, but frankly throughout the Arab world and in much of the Third World more generally.

Because what you saw in these regimes that came to power, this is true as well with the Baathist regimes that came to power in Syria in 1963, Iraq in 1968, but again, more broadly, in the '50s and '60s, is of regimes that frankly had uncertain relations with their own societies.

These were new states, new boundaries that had been created in the decades previous, not a lot of history in most cases to these new states. You have regimes come to power that really wanted to hoard power to the epicenter. They jealously guarded that power and resources at the center and have denied any significant local autonomy, local governance, local decision-making.

When I talk about meaningful autonomy, I'm talking about the combination of resources and authority. That you actually have resources – taxes and other revenues -- that local governments control, and they have the authority to make decisions on local issues without having to get permission from the center.

Now, there's been a lot of pressure from the US and other actors for a number of years on these highly centralized regimes to decentralize power, to push resources and decision-making authority down to local levels. What has generally

been the response by most regimes in the region is not to decentralize authority, but to deconcentrate authority.

That is, create systems where local decision-makers - mayors, governors, typically- are not representatives of the local level that speak up for the local level to the central authority, but instead representatives, and in fact appointed by the central authority, to represent central authority interests at the local level. To speak down, as it were, as opposed to speak up.

This has been a huge problem throughout the region where there are very few resources at the local level, no real ability at the local level to make decisions, no ability to plan for their future. It basically creates an absence of representative local governance.

That's a broader problem that you see throughout the Arab world and throughout much of the Third World as well. Now, in the case of Iraq and Syria, I think you have this problem on steroids. Currently Baghdad does not trust the population of Mosul and most of the Sunni Arab population in northwest Iraq. Equally so, Damascus does not trust the population of Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor and other areas that are overwhelmingly Sunni Arab.

In both cases, you have a strong resistance by the central authority in Baghdad and Damascus to truly accept decentralized local government in the aftermath of the liberation of these areas. But that is absolutely the key in terms of stability and cooperation with the local population: decentralization where resources and decision-making authority can be found at the local level for local level problems.

Now the US obviously has a lot more leverage in Baghdad with the central government than it does in Damascus with the central government there. But in both cases, in both Iraq and Syria, post-liberation success is going to largely depend on how the center-periphery dynamic plays out between central authority and local populations.

Cooperation and stability are going to depend largely on the ability of local actors to actually have authority and have resources to make decisions on local matters. Obviously, security arrangements are going to be very important and sensitive as well.

So, just a final comment on local governance. In both the Mosul area and the Euphrates River Valley area, keeping existing institutional boundaries and arrangements, existing boundaries for cities and provinces, for example, even tribal areas, that's perfectly fine. I don't think there's any reason to reinvent the wheel as far as that goes.

But the key is going to be to infuse them, or making sure they are infused, with real decision-making authority and real resources at that local level. Then I think you'll find a much higher level of cooperation and stability in those areas.

As opposed to them essentially either being completely ignored, but without resources by the central government, or the central government comes in and tries to essentially dictate terms to the local areas, which is a recipe for disaster in my judgment.

Next, a few remarks on Salafi political institutions. This is Islam's version of the conservative populism that you see in so many places around the world. From Brexit to Marine Le Pen to Mr. Trump to lots of other folks. This is kind of the Islamic version of that, the Salafi trend in recent years.

There is a broader cultural political Salafism, which is more cultural than political historically, but we, I think, are more interested today in what's often called Salafi jihadism. The person who coined that term has also offered, I think, the best critique of the Salafi jihadi movement, was Abu Musab al-Suri, who I'm sure you're all familiar with.

His basic critique of Salafi jihadism was that they were too puritanical to be able to make strategic alliances with like-minded but slightly different jihadi groups. This was in his judgment an enormous problem in Afghanistan, for example, where the Salafi jihadis, again, the Arab Salafi jihadis, tended to not work with the Taliban because they viewed the Taliban as not pure Muslims, pure Salafi. There were differences that they did not accept as legitimate.

So, they have a difficulty in creating durable workable alliances with groups that are similar but not exactly the same. It's the Stalinists and the Leninists, and they don't agree with each other. They make the other out to be evil.

Now, how does this impact what we are seeing in the region today? I think the Salafi overreach, from the stories that we've gotten in recent weeks, was evident in Eastern Aleppo and actually helped weaken the grip of groups in Eastern Aleppo. Obviously, Russian and Syrian pounding of that region was the most important thing in the fall of Eastern Aleppo.

But it's fairly clear that the Salafi groups that were running things there had over time lost the support of the local population in large measure. Support that they used to have when they were seen as organic groups that grew out of the realities, needs, and experiences of the local population. They were of them.

But over time they grew more puritanical, more Salafi and created wider and wider gaps with the population that they at least said that they represented. It

was very clear to me by the time Eastern Aleppo fell that there were some pretty wide gaps between the people and the Salafis that were in charge of the area.

More broadly, hardline Salafi institutions, even taking away the Jihadi part, just hardline Salafi institutions, have a fairly limited appeal throughout the Muslim world, including the Arab world. It does appeal to a segment of the population, but a fairly small segment. Typically, it will appeal to somewhere between 5 and 20% of the population of any Muslim majority country. Now, 20% can be significant, but that's at the high end.

But typically, the hardline Salafi interpretation of Islam is simply not very popular with the general Muslim population. We see that in public opinion polling. We see that in elections, local and national elections in various countries, that it is a pretty self-limiting interpretation of Islam.

So, that self-limiting aspect, I think, also applies to Ahrar al-Sham if they have the chance to more or less freely control parts of Idlib and Aleppo provinces in the next few years. I think it unlikely that Ahrar al-Sham will have that opportunity, but if they do, they will face that same legitimacy problem. In other words, the more hardline, more Salafi they go, the less support they will have from the broader population. The more that they rule and deal with problems in a sort of organic, representative way, the better off they will be.

Now we know from the ISIS experience that terror and coercion can work for at least a while. That doesn't garner you a lot of popular support but it can keep you in office, at least for a period of time. But the broader point here is as these groups, again, in particular, if they are allowed to rule and deepen their rule over a period of peace and stability in that part of, again, mostly Idlib and Aleppo regions, the more Salafi they go, the less popular they will be. That is the general rule that we see throughout the Muslim world.

The third set of comments I want to make, and this overlaps a little bit with what we talked about last time, is what happens after the caliphate. What happens to Daesh or ISIS and the other folks. So a few comments on that.

First, once Daesh or ISIS, ISIL, whatever you want to call them, once they lose their territorial state, which is, I think, coming rather soon, frankly it will be just another Jihadi group. We've got lots of Jihadi groups out there. It will have its own kind of brand, its own history, so it will have some distinction. But frankly, it won't be anything particularly special once it has lost its territoriality.

I do expect that it will pop up from time to time in various towns and villages. Plenty of ungoverned spaces in the Muslim world. From time to time, you'll have some local group grab power and declare themselves a new emirate of the

caliphate. I suspect that's almost certainly going to happen. But as a coherent organization, losing its territorial state will make ISIS simply another Jihadi group in my judgment.

Going back to Abu Musab al-Suri's criticism, again, Salafi jihadis have a history of having a hard time forming meaningful and durable alliances because of this very puritanical streak that they have. That suggests to me at least that you will continue to see terrorism and violence from time to time under their banner. But it's, again, very self-limiting; there will be no contagion of the spread of ISIS.

Now, what happens to the fighters of the caliphate as Mosul and Raqqa fall? They will continue, or at least many of them will continue to aspire to the global jihad and the creation of the new caliphate somewhere else. Which is why, I don't need to tell you guys this, but it's really rather important to capture or kill as many of the fighters as possible as Mosul and Raqqa falls.

Because frankly I don't think we want them popping up in the Balkans or in Europe or elsewhere anytime soon. This of course was an enormous problem after the success of the Afghan jihad in the 1980s. As a lot of these jihadis went back home, the so-called Arab Afghans, for example, and created a lot of problems in the Arab world in the 1990s and beyond.

The fall of the caliphate is not going to do anything to change the basic persistence of Sunni Arab grievances against Baghdad and Damascus. Only policy changes from Baghdad and Damascus will do that. Given that US influence is much more significant in Baghdad than it is in Damascus, one can imagine that it's possible that the central government in Baghdad can adopt policies that are more welcoming of the Sunni Arab population in Iraq.

There's going to be enormous resistance to doing that, as everybody on this phone call knows. But again, it's terribly important for those steps to be taken because without that, it might not be an ISIS, but they'll be other forms of Sunni Arab grievance-making against the central government in Baghdad because of this feeling of alienation and lack of representation in the Iraqi state.

So again, strong decentralized local government can help. It's not Nirvana but again, it's incumbent upon Baghdad to make those policy changes so that you don't get some newest iteration of ISIS or something else, but basically, it's Sunni Arab grievances alienation against the central government popping up again in the future.

The last point on after the caliphate is, and it's a point I made last time but I do want to reemphasize it, and that is you cannot un-ring the bell of the caliphate. That this is going to be, in my judgment, the one enduring victory of ISIS. That is,

it has captured the imagination of many Muslims. Not ISIS in particular and all the violence and really sort of grotesque activity, but the notion of reestablishing a caliphate in the Muslim world that Atatürk got rid of in the mid-1920s. That has captured the imagination of a lot of Muslims, although not in the ISIS form.

I have no idea if some sort of more legitimate caliphate is going to be established in the years or decades ahead. There's probably good reason to believe that it won't be. But I think it's an issue that's now on the table in the Muslim world. It is critical, in my judgment, for the United States to make that distinction between ISIS as a terror group and the notion of a caliphate in Islam, which is essentially not our business. That's an issue for Muslims to debate and decide.

So, it's important that we guard against the degradation of the word "caliphate" in the same way that we saw the degradation of the word "jihad" in English, where jihad in English has become a synonym for terror. That's not its meaning in Arabic, and it's rather a sort of insulting interpretation that the West makes. But that has happened for particular reasons.

We need to guard against that same degradation of the word caliphate. The idea of a caliphate itself is neither good nor bad. I think we need to be relatively indifferent about it. But it should not become another synonym for terror and ISIS brutality in the way that we use it.

Let me turn to a fourth and last set of comments, this time on the Shia/Sunni divide and the state system, reviving the state system in the Arab world. Just very briefly, the collapse of the state system in the Arab world, since late 2010-early 2011, has made fighting terror groups so much harder. Frankly, the United States, I think, does have, and ought to have, a bias towards stable states in the region.

A functioning Westphalian state system in the region remains terribly important in order to diminish the impact of terror and instability in the region, again, mostly towards its own people but as well towards the US and our allies elsewhere.

There is no intrinsic difference in my mind between Shia and Sunni extremism. There's nothing in the history and literature of Shiism or Sunnism that make it more or less likely to have extremism, to have terrorism, to have violence. But it does happen from time to time in each tradition. It's all about the circumstances of the context, what's happening in the world at the time, that you see extremism predominate in one or the other, or in some cases both, traditions.

Here I'll take a moment to just kind of poke fun a little bit. My former professor, the late Fouad Ajami made a distinction years ago, perhaps in jest, that violence in the Sunni world tends to be homicidal and violence in the Shia world tends to be suicidal. It was a silly distinction to make and doesn't have any real truth to it.

Ajami's distinction happened to reflect what was happening at the moment in the 1980s in the region, but again, there's no intrinsic difference in terms of extremism. You have many, many examples of extremism in both of those traditions and many examples of peaceful coexistence in both of those traditions as well.

What is the context today? Today, Shia groups, and here I'm thinking of Hezbollah, the various Iraqi militia, to some degree the Houthis in Yemen, although that's a little bit more marginal, all have links to Iran. Therefore, they have links to a pretty stable, functioning state in the region and so, by comparison, they tend to reflect state interests and tend to be a force for "state-ness" in the region.

Hezbollah is busy fighting and dying in Syria, but they are fighting and dying in Syria to try and protect the Syrian state and the regime of president Assad within that Syrian state. Same thing with the Iraqi militia that are there fighting and dying to defend the Iraqi state and particularly the Shia regime, the Shia privileges within the Iraqi state. So, they tend to be a force for state-ness in today's context.

Sunni extremist groups by comparison today, generally are not closely tied to a state, although some clearly get resources from various states. But they are not an organic outgrowth of the state. They tend to, in today's context, tend to be more disruptive toward the state system in the region. Again, this is not something that is intrinsic or will historically be the case in 100 years, but just in today's context that's just the way it is.

This creates a conundrum for the United States, it seems to me, that we need to work through in a more coherent way than we have up to this point. That is, we want to strengthen the state system in general for the sake of stability and security. We don't like ungoverned spaces and state breakdown because it creates room for terror groups and criminal groups to thrive, and that's simply not a good development.

But in order to support the state system and to support functioning states, to do so coherently, in my judgment, requires a fresh approach towards Iran. Iran is a country that is one of the most functioning and stable states in the region. Right now, we have, it seems to me, a fairly incoherent approach. When it comes to Iran, on the one hand it's still considered the biggest regional enemy in some regards of the United States.

On the other hand, we are in implicit alliance with Iran when it comes to a lot of our activities in Iraq. There's a bit of an incoherence there that I think needs to be thought through in a broader, more conceptual way about how we approach

states, stable states, and non-state actors in the region. On that point, I will end. Let's just open it up for questions and comments from you folks. Over.

Male Speaker 1: Yeah, so starting back with local governance. You mentioned Iraq and distrust of the population in Mosul in Syria and distrust in Deir ez-Zor and that being a necessity to address by pushing down or distributing power to local governance. What's the impetus for that to occur when the broad population is not distrusted in the rest of the regime territory? That they should change their design for these outliers?

Glenn Robinson: The US has so little leverage in Damascus to begin with that pressure for decentralization or federalism becomes a much, much more difficult thing to implement. But what is predictable is if that doesn't happen, there will be more instability and violence. That will happen in the future if Damascus attempts to re-centralize power that has effectively been decentralized simply because it's been taken over by both Kurds and Sunni Arabs in the eastern two thirds of the country. So Damascus has to think about the long-term solution to its domestic stability problems, which will inevitably involve a federal approach to the state – which Damascus will likely resist.

Again, meaningful decentralization and federalism are not Nirvana, it's not a silver bullet. But to get Damascus and Baghdad to think through that having a more federal system where you have significant autonomy -- not independence but autonomy -- at the local levels, that is a stabilizing influence. This is something that will help the regime stay in power for the long-term.

Getting them to accept that I think is going to be extremely difficult and particularly, essentially impossible for the United States to do in Syria. In Iraq, I think there's a lot more that can be done by the United States in that regard. I know Ryan wants to get in on this too. Go ahead.

Ryan Gingeras: Just really quickly, I think that in the case of Syria, Damascus may not have much of a choice if it considers that part of its future will rest on what it does about the PYD. The path of least resistance is, at least for the time being, to put off the question of trying to destroy or incorporate the PYD directly.

It may simply try, it may opt for some sort of limited federal arrangements just so it doesn't have to deal with the PYD directly right this minute. Why create more enemies now when the state play is still pretty precarious? Over.

Male Speaker 1: While we are playing with this, do you see possibly, if they do take the steps for self-preservation, is that also being the first step to fragmentation? If you start giving these places autonomy and then these autonomous places actually having a sort of relationship with each other that they don't then say, "Well, why do we

need to be autonomous under three different governments? Why not be autonomous under one of our own?"

Glenn Robinson: Right, exactly. This is exactly the argument the central states make. That if we move towards a more federal system away from a highly-centralized system, this is going to inevitably lead to demands for independence from various regions that have different tribal, ethnic, religious, or other cleavages. I think in some countries that fear is probably justified.

But it's also the best way to prevent actual demands for independence. If people are satisfied and happy that most of their day-to-day decisions in life get handled at a local level by themselves, the people that are accountable to them, that they know, that they go knock on their door etc., that tends to deradicalize regions.

Stability is more threatened when all complaints can be laid at the doorstep of the centralized government. So, anything that goes wrong, I mean problems with your water system, with your electricity, with sewage disposal, garbage pickup, etc. all get blamed on the central government. If every single thing can be laid at the doorstep of Baghdad or Damascus, then you're just inviting trouble, and you're inviting demands for actual independence. If those kinds of problems can be handled at the local level, I mean, you're always going to have some true believers out there trying to stir up trouble. That's just the nature of life.

But it's going to have far less, and then we just see this in so many places, far less ability to influence broader populations in that regard. So, the decentralization, this has been a cornerstone of US policy, certainly through the State Department, USAID, not just for years but for decades, to try and get meaningful decentralization in a lot of these countries for exactly these reasons.

Because it does provide long-term stability much better, this has been shown again and again, much better than these highly centralized systems. So, it has been a cornerstone of US policy. It's a matter of how do we now push it and try to get the Iraqi, and to whatever degree we can, the Syrian state to actually adopt this. I think it's a wicked problem. It's a very tricky thing to do. Ryan?

Ryan Gingeras: One thing I think people are learning in the greater Middle East is that achieving autonomy does not necessarily lead to independence. Because from a global leadership standpoint, you see this in the case of somebody like Barzani, you have greater likelihood of having your cake and eat it too while being autonomous as opposed to being independent.

If one looks at the case of the KRG, independence removes a really valuable negotiating tool that Barzani has because it forces the KRG to be entirely self-

sufficient and have to solely depend upon the kindness of its neighbors, and thus the United States.

At this point, the KRG can still rely upon certain elements about Baghdad. Draw upon certain support from Turkey and the United States all at the same time while not having to go through very serious informal negotiations, particularly with other local political competitors, namely in this case, PUK.

The same may be also said for PYD. If the PYD becomes independent, they are going to have to essentially come to terms with the PKK, not as equals but as competitors as well. In the long term, that's not to say that the original argument being made is incorrect, but I think there are countervailing factors. The immediate one, a local leader that would make them a little bit more hesitant to think about a process leading them towards independence irrevocably.

Glenn Robinson: One other comment just to throw in there is an example from Iraq itself. Inside Iraq when did the Kurdish troubles, rebellion, push for not just autonomy but independence, when did that begin? Well, it began in the early 1960s and it began, why, because in response to the Iraqi revolution of 1958, the Iraqi state in Baghdad decided it wanted to centralize authority in all of the territory of this new country of Iraq and push exactly that, centralized decision-making and resources in Baghdad from all areas of the country, including the Kurdish north.

It was in response to that that the Kurds then started to agitate and take up arms against the central government. Prior to that, they had essentially been left alone to handle local decisions locally, and things were essentially much more quiet. It's not the same situation today as it was in the early 1960s but that kind of dynamic between center and periphery, I think, remains largely the same.

Question: Okay. With regards to this last discussion, I have a comment and a question. I'm having a hard time seeing a condition under which it would make sense for the central Syrian government to give a good deal of federal autonomy to the PYD. If only because of the regional implications, and this was the start of the issue with Turkey in the first place, right? Wasn't that basically allowing the PYD to sort of move out on its own?

I mean I suppose if they don't fear that there will be a backlash from Turkey, then maybe that sounds like a good idea. But I can't imagine that the rest of the alliance would think that that's something that the alliance would support, and maybe I have that wrong.

But then also I have to play devil's advocate on this important discussion and the criticality of local governance, both in Syria and Iraq. In many areas, as you know,

there aren't necessarily local governors with the legitimacy or the span of constituent support to serve as credible, likely effective, global administrators currently, at least to directly understand local views.

So, in that case, I'm wondering what you would advise the US and the coalition to do. I mean no one's going to argue that ideally down the road local governance, awesome. But how do we get there other than have patience while the current governing structures basically evolve organically?

Glenn Robinson: You want to start?

Ryan Gingeras: Okay, I'll go first. I don't want to be mistaken, but your point is really well taken. I don't think Damascus in the long term as it's constituted now is willing to live with a federalized Syria. In the long term, I think you're correct. Confrontation is inevitable. Especially given what Turkey's policy is now towards the PYD.

My point was more in terms of in the short term, what is Damascus's option? I'm not entirely sure but I think that confrontation between the PYD and Damascus in the short term is irreversible. I think that it really depends on factors other than just Damascus's own interests and policies, and also the degree to which Assad proves to be flexible. It would just be speculative.

Regarding Turkey's own interests, my original point was that I'm not 100% sure if Ankara has a fully thought out game plan with respect to Syria. I don't know if they actually have a strategy beyond simply blocking Rojava from Afrin and then see what happens from there. I'm really not sure.

I will say though that there are people who do speculate that once the presidency is firmly in Erdogan's hands and the presidential system is fully in his hands, we may see a radical change of policy. That may be the case, I'm not sure. But there are those who speculate that there may be something over what he, that Erdogan may tack back somewhat on his positions regarding Kurdish nationalism or even a resumption of some kind of peace talk.

Glenn Robinson: To add to what Ryan said, in my judgment, the problem set that is facing both Iraq and Syria on the issue of local governance is pretty much identical. But the prospects for reform in that case, to move towards serious local government, in both cases it's hard, and there's resistance, as I said up front. There's going to be strong resistance from both Baghdad and Damascus.

But here I'd like to split off Syria from Iraq because even though the problem set is extremely similar, and I think the long-term solution is extremely similar, I think the chances of getting there are radically different in both cases.

In the case of Syria, again particularly given the recent advances by the regime, the regime is showing absolutely no incentive whatsoever to have some sort of grand bargain to reform the system to create a more representative and federalized system. It is strongly arguing against all that and the US has very little leverage to help change his mind.

Now, I do think in the case of Syria, it's frankly highly unlikely that the regime will be able to assert territorial control in the Kurdish areas of the northeast. I think autonomy, if not recognized in a legal way, is a de facto reality. My guess is it will remain a de facto reality for many, many years to come.

I just don't think the regime has the wherewithal to, and presumably assuming that the Americans stand firm with the Kurdish allies in that area, I just don't think that's a practical matter that's going to be the reassertion of the risk of governance by Damascus in the Kurdish areas in the northeast. So, de facto I suspect is going to stay more or less the same.

Now, in the case of Iraq: One of the reasons I'm raising this issue and pushing on it is because I think it is part of the overall solution to long-term stability and sovereignty in both of these countries. In Iraq, you may actually have the opportunity to get it done there, in part because the US has a lot more influence and leverage in Iraq than we do in Syria.

Again, the regime in Baghdad is not supportive, and there is going to be push back from them going in this direction. But the reason I think there is at least a little bit more reason to be optimistic in the case of Iraq is the liberation of Mosul and the reassertion of Iraqi sovereignty over all of its territory will create an opportunity to renew a grand bargain in the Iraqi state which has not been done since the Americans went in 2003.

It will present an opportunity. One of those rare opportunities for significant change and kind of political renewal. It has to be seized. It's not going to happen by itself. If things just drift along, then you're going to once again get the reinsertion of centralized authority by Baghdad.

So, it does create an opportunity but it's a matter of the actors seizing hard on that opportunity to create a grand bargain that includes, again, a more federal system and significant local governance authority and not just the Sunni Arab areas but the Kurdish areas and elsewhere.

Question: So, what would you need to incentivize the current central government in Baghdad to devolve, I mean to seriously devolve power, as opposed to being some sort of lip service to this idea?

Glenn Robinson: I think that's a great question and it gets really to the heart of the matter. I think that is kind of worth a separate discussion on its own about what are the kinds of steps that the Americans can take. What can we expect from the Kurdish regional government and Kurdish actors as well? What can we expect from non-state actors within the Shia world in Iraq?

I mean there are a number of things that I think can be done to incentivize that transition. As I said, I think that's worth a long and really focused discussion on its own.

Question: I agree with you there. Thank you.

Glenn Robinson: Hy Rothstein has joined us and is prepared to say a few remarks on the kind of lessons learned from Iraqi information operations to the present day, unless there are further questions for either Ryan or myself.

Question: One more question. Or actually, one short one tangentially tying the two together regarding the Iranian US policy coherence in the region that needs to be addressed and whether or not that may leverage an example of a country that has a centralized government with some autonomous regions demonstrating stability. What do you think on that?

Glenn Robinson: Absolutely true.

Question: Okay, thanks.

Ryan Gingeras: I hesitate to compare Iran to any other countries in the Middle East because, I mean if we are going to sort of wade into the weeds of history and the way it reverberates in contemporary politics, Iran has successfully been able to pivot towards a more centralized government because over the course of the last 200 years, there's been an implicit agreement among many elite and among large sections of the population that the Iranian Empire became the Iranian nation state by consensus.

I think that if there's one thing that Iranians of various stripes appear to agree on, it's that the borders of Iran are legitimate. That the integrity of the state, of the lands that are encompassed around these borders, is legitimate and that there is a common shared heritage.

If one compares that to Iraq or Syria, let alone even a country like Turkey, these kinds of points of consensus do not exist, at least they do not exist among significant chunks of the population. This can work in a couple of different ways. I think, just to leave you with this point, I think this can also work in irredentist ways.

I think one thing that we've discovered in the last few years is that there's a very strong irredentist streak in Turkey. Whether or not that actually manifests itself as policy remains to be seen. It may be very unlikely, but given the amount of noise that has been made over the last two years, one can see a push within governments, it wouldn't be completely unexpected given the amount of noise. But a push within the Ankara government towards revising the borders of the contemporary Middle East.

As far as how that works out vis-à-vis local government, I agree with everything Glenn just said. I agree that it's an important solution. It's an important solution to the long-term health of the region, but I think the question is who would take up the mantle of the local governments? I think that's a vacuum, and unfortunately, in many countries, the most likely and maybe the people who are best qualified to do that, they are either not trusted by the central government or they've left those countries altogether as refugees or exiles.

Glenn Robinson: Let me just add a couple of points to that. I largely agree with Ryan. First, on the coherence of the Iranian state, I often tell my students to think of the Middle East as book ends with Iran on one side and Egypt on the other. Iran and Egypt have long histories. They have coherence. They have national identities that are strong. They have generally just much more coherent body politics.

But everything in between is not. Everything in between is essentially a made-up structure over the last century or so and it does not have the history, the coherence, the sense of national identity, etc. It's a much tougher issue, and I absolutely agree that it becomes tougher in between those bookends than it does in the book ends itself.

Iran does have a, I mean it's not a truly federal system, but it does have fairly significant provisional autonomy in Tabriz, the Northwest, or Lorestan or elsewhere. There's a fair amount of autonomy that's granted to the local governors and to cities in Iran, and that does create a stability, a political stability, or it helps in that regard quite a bit in the case of Iran, even with that added advantage of being a coherent body politic already.

The final point, you know, you look at South Africa. I mean it has gone, since 1994, gone through an enormous transition. Would the place stay together? Would it fall apart? There are lots of problems, of course. One of the things that the South Africans did in the 1990s as it transitioned to this new world was to create a federal system.

The provinces in South Africa and the cities have significant autonomy to undertake and handle their own problems, to raise revenues, to the authority to

make decisions. I would argue that that has been, again, I don't want to make this out to be nirvana here, the silver bullet that cures everything. But I would argue that the decision to federalize the post-apartheid state in South Africa helped create a much higher level of stability in South Africa as it underwent this enormous transition.

Again, Iraq and Syria and elsewhere are likewise undergoing an enormous transition, and I think having legitimate decentralization of authority and resources must be part of the answer for the sake of stability, as it has been in Iran and South Africa. Alright, Hy Rothstein has joined us, so let me turn over the floor to him for a few minutes and hear what he has to say. Hy?

Hy Rothstein: Good afternoon I guess at your end. I'm not sure exactly what transpired during the first parts of this discussion, so if I walk on some of the ideas that somebody else talked about, just let me know, and I'll move on. I'm going to talk a little bit about ideas in the narrative but then I'm going to move into something more concrete, and that's actions and give you an example of what we should not do again. I'm really talking about Iraq.

The first thing we need to consider is where does a good narrative come from? And second, when does a good narrative gain traction? Or alternatively, when does it collapse?

Winning wars requires a combination of the right deeds. You are doing the right things, as well as the right words. Both are a necessary condition for what some people refer to as successful strategic communications.

ISIS looks like it's on the ropes and will be defeated but then what? Will another apocalyptic Islamist group rise in ISIS's ashes? Possibly. If it does, we risk another botched job in Iraq.

So, what is the purpose of an information strategy or a narrative? The purpose is very simple. It's really to explain, promote, and defend principles. By principles I mean the justice of a cause. He who wins the argument about justice wins the war of ideas.

If you think about it, power without an expressed higher purpose does not earn or deserve the trust of others. If the exercise of power is not set in the context of a just cause, it will be seen for what it probably is and that's an expression of raw self-interest. So understand the justice of the cause, explain it, and act accordingly.

So, with that I'm going to talk a little bit about some of the lessons of reconstructing security forces in Iraq. Let me just start with interventions may

again create insurgencies. You can even argue that the larger and more intrusive the intervention, the greater the attraction for forces opposed to that action.

However, experience in Iraq has shown that there is a high cost of defeating a well-established counter state that is grounded in an idea. We would be much better at preventing these counter states from rising in the first place.

Let me talk again specifically about the Iraqi security forces. In 2007, retired Marine Corps General Jones led an independent evaluation of the state of Iraqi security forces. The commission reported that the Iraqi army in particular was doing quite well. That they were increasing their effectiveness and that they were about ready to assume responsibility for Iraq's security.

At the same time, another assessment was done by a guy named Anthony Cordesman, and what he said I think is very interesting, very telling and actually more revealing when you look back. He said that the report that Jones did, did not address the degree to which the elements of the Iraqi security forces from the Prime Minister's office down had links to Shiite efforts to retain and expand power. This is an indication of anything but a just cause.

So, Cordesman's assessment really helps explain why our investment in security forces - recruiting, training, advising, and assisting the Iraqi army failed and resulted in the Islamic state. Unless we find a way to mitigate some of these sectarian divisions, our plans may only delay the rise of the son of ISIS.

Again, conventional wisdom with regard to developing security forces, again, conventional wisdom from the United States' standpoint, holds that the formation of a capable Iraqi army will ensure security. By late 2005, coalition efforts to build a capable Iraqi army did seem to be paying off.

By early 2006, there were three Iraqi brigades conducting operations independently. The Iraqis were demonstrating a strong combat proficiency, and the insurgents were never able to really rally the Iraqi army. Now, never, you didn't see this at all. But what was interesting, increased army Iraqi competence correlated with increased insurgent acts.

Unfortunately, strong combat performance by the Iraqi army had little to do with insurgent activity. In fact, insurgent attacks increased while the Iraqis were capably executing counterinsurgency operations. Now, you would think that the best performing Iraqi units would actually face fewer attacks within the areas that they were operating in, but this was just not the case.

What's the reason for this? I think back to Cordesman's assessment. The reason the competent Iraqi Army continued to suffer insurgent attacks was that the

population did sympathize with the insurgents and rejected the Iraqi army. They viewed it as a mostly Shia militia and a symbol of what was going on in Baghdad. So, the insurgents continued to have an intelligence advantage over the Army.

Now, if this Shia identity of the Iraqi army was an impediment to reducing levels of violence, you might expect that a Sunni-dominated unit operating locally would have more success. This was in fact what happened in one brigade that had a substantial number of Sunnis in its ranks. It was the third brigade in the seventh Iraqi division that occupied Al-Qa'im in early 2006.

The brigade faced fewer insurgent attacks despite being severely undermanned. In fact, the casualty rate of this brigade was 75% less than that suffered in Falluja, a town of similar size, population, and geography. Most interesting is the presence of this uncertified, undertrained, and undermanned brigade resulted in significantly reduced insurgent attacks.

This fact undermines the notion that increased training and numbers are critical to the Iraqi army's ability to defeat the insurgents. The success of the third and seventh Iraqi brigade was directly related to the Albu Mahal tribe, the most powerful tribe in the area. As many as 40% of the brigade's men came from that tribe.

They disliked the heavy-handed tactics of Al Qaeda at the time, and they disliked the type of control measures that Al Qaeda was putting on the population. So, after the 37th brigade moved into the area, the tribe readily provided their fellow tribesmen with information on Al Qaeda's operations, safe houses, ammunition caches, and bombmaking facilities.

What we saw happening was the notion that the population viewed this brigade as being part of a just cause. This brigade was now using information that was provided to them by the population, and their just cause was generated information that provided security in the area.

So just in conclusion, these deeds are why this is part of the important narrative. This case offers insights to what might be relevant about minimizing the likelihood of some sort of son of ISIS coming to fruition. So, Washington and Baghdad, I think, need to support more local single identity security forces to maintain the local order or risk continued sectarian violence down the road.

The Iraqi government will probably gain better control over Iraq by supporting the existence of permanent levels of Sunni security forces. This does match words and deed and does really reinforce the idea of a just cause, and this is a necessary element of any narrative that will result in a more secure and peaceful nation.

Glenn Robinson: Thank you Hy. John Arquilla has joined us as well. He'll also be speaking on strategic narrative information operations as well, but I think it would be best if I just turn the floor over to him, and he can make a few remarks. Then we will open it up once again for discussion. Thank you.

John Arquilla: Thank you Glenn. My apologies if I say anything that's repetitive of what you've heard earlier. I'm just coming from another meeting. I'm not going to stay in the lane of strategic communications and influence. I caught the last part of Hy's remarks and can only say that I want to associate myself very closely with them.

As both Glenn and Hy will remember, back in 2004, I began writing and speaking and getting in a lot of hot water for saying we needed to start talking with the Anbaris as a way to drive a wage between them and Al Qaeda in Iraq.

I hope this is consistent with Hy's recommendation. I think we can drive that wedge once again between ISIS and most Iraqi Sunnis who of course were sympathetic to the rise of ISIS in 2014 precisely because of what they thought were the unjust policies and practices of the Maliki government.

What I did want to address in this kind of influence and information dimension is the question of how what we are doing today, what is happening today, will influence what in the list of questions I saw is referred to as the post-ISIS Iraq. I think the character and shape of relations in that period are going to be profoundly influenced by the manner in which the campaigns to extirpate ISIS in Iraq is conducted.

I have great concerns about this. I have great concerns that so far, we have seen a lot of little Stalingrads unfolding. The liberation of cities has been accompanied by their destruction in too many cases, not only of larger cities like Falluja but in smaller towns as well. The sheer levels of destruction are inconsistent with a conciliatory message about one Iraq and bringing the Sunnis back into governance and respect as a people, as tribes.

I think this problem is only magnified by this larger scale of Stalingrad that is unfolding. The last time we had a teleconference like this, I believe I was recommending against the slow steady approach to going at Mosul, that it would go on for month after month after month. It would lead to more humanitarian outrages.

I don't simply refer here to the killing of noncombatants, but I think as I view the camps that are unfolding right now among so-called liberated people of Mosul, it's very troubling to see how families are being torn apart, how Shia militia are in fact acting sometimes in fairly heavy-handed ways.

There are better practices here that need to be put in place immediately among those liberated. The sons of so many families should be reunited with them. They are in the camp, after all. We have the ability to do vetting without the kind of sequestration and incarceration of so many which only will create resentment and allow ISIS to rebuild an insurgency once this battle for Mosul is over.

Now, Hy made a great point about linking deeds to our words, to our narrative. I want to suggest that it's not too late to think differently about Mosul. We are at a natural inflection point in the campaign there as the eastern part of the city has largely been cleared, and the question now of moving across the Tigris into western Mosul comes up.

This is an area, of course, where there are vastly more civilians and where frankly the indigenous support for ISIS is far, far greater or at least quite strong still. I think a concern about avoiding a humanitarian catastrophe remains a very, very high priority. Again, if one wants to think about rebuilding a peaceful and secure Iraq.

It is, just as a footnote, kind of interesting that Haider Al-Abadi chose today to ask for a formal American apology for having invaded Iraq. As an early opponent, even before Donald Trump was against invading Iraq, I was. So, to Prime Minister Al-Abadi, I say, "I'm sorry. I tried to stop the invasion, but I'm too small and obscure a professor to have been able to do it." [Laughter]

But it's not only something for which we should apologize but should realize that we have fundamentally disturbed the balance of power in the Middle East- socially, politically, strategically- in ways that will take many decades to rectify, if at all.

So, the question now is when you're in a deep hole, as Hy Rothstein likes to say, "The first step is to stop digging." I would say in this battle of Mosul right now we could stop digging by doing one of a couple of different things.

You may recall from the last teleconference, those who were on that, I suggested options to the slow, steady advance into Mosul which was going to maximize suffering, I believe, all around. Maximize Iraqi military casualties, maximize civilian suffering, and maximize the opportunity for ISIS to portray this in their narrative as a kind of Arab Alamo.

So, what would these options be? From the last time, I suggested a kind of T.E. Lawrence option, which is don't go straight at the city. Lawrence left somewhere between 35 to 40,000 Turkish troops in Medina until the end of the war. He made it all the way to Damascus without ever going after Medina.

Mosul may be ISIS's Medina. That's one way to look at this, and so to knock away the props of destroying that other area. Perhaps even, again, this is a grand strategy question, whether to go straight for Raqqa first. That I think would be an interesting option, and it would put the Sunnis in Mosul who are sympathetic to ISIS in an interesting position if everything else about ISIS had been dealt with prior to an assault on the city. So, the Lawrence model would be number one.

A second option would be what I call the open city model and suggested last time. It's something that I know General Rouleau, head of Canadian Special Forces Command, as well as Haider al-Abadi, supported. While there is still an escape route, and there still is, encourage ISIS fighters to leave under some kind of truce, and let them get across the border.

This second option strategically breaks the ISIS problem in two, into a problem in Iraq and a problem in Syria. It could be a very neat solution here. ISIS fighters are encouraged to leave. If they do, go across the border, then the campaign against ISIS is basically buttoned up in Iraq, and we leave Syria to Assad and the Russians and, perhaps to some extent, the Turks.

That's not a particularly pleasant solution for Syria, but it does restore order in Iraq, and frankly the American game in Syria is already lost with Putin's intervention, the revival of the Assad regime, and the Turkish position that has come around and been more regime-aligned. That's a kind of cut your losses with Syria to solve the Iraq problem.

The wild card there is whether ISIS fighters would leave. Now, we know that insurgents left Aleppo when given the chance to do so and continued the fight from elsewhere. I think that's another strategic option that should be considered. It would probably have the most beneficial effect in terms of post-ISIS Iraq. Again, it would allow even for the kind of awakening or reawakening movement that Hy, I think, was implying in some of his remarks.

What's the third option? The third option is that the campaign to take Mosul is going to continue. I would only suggest here, and I know this is probably what's going to happen, just as months ago, I said, "Well, I think you are probably going to attack Mosul anyway. Please don't, but you are going to."

Now, we are there, and there's probably a lot of inertia aimed at finishing the campaign for the city, which again, I think, is only going to give ISIS an Arab Alamo and create massive humanitarian problems if we go step-by-step from east to west, west Mosul.

The third option here is what I described last time as a swarm attack. I think it is possible, particularly with the kind of incorporation of tribal-based units that Hy

has been talking about. A different concept of operations that would see us moving into the city rapidly.

I think if this happened, the American rules of engagement would have to be relaxed to allow the leavening provided by American forces to enable an operation of this sort. But a kind of mini thunder run that gets all through Mosul, links up with resistance units and basically throws the entire ISIS defensive structure out of balance by coming at it from unexpected directions. Right now, they are well-prepared for what comes next and will provide their strongest resistance.

Those are the three options. There is a Lawrence option, sort of let ISIS wither on the vine in Mosul while we do other things. There's the open city option, which is a kind of a negotiated withdrawal of those fighters onto Syrian territory and an end of the ISIS campaign in Iraq.

And this third one, if we insist on taking the city, let's do it in a more creative way. Iraqi forces have been taking far too heavy casualties so far in this fighting. This is a way to really unbalance the defenders. They are not prepared for an omnidirectional simultaneous assault.

Again, in order of preference, I'd probably prefer them one, two, three as I presented them here. Although I'd probably add, one and two are close. I do like the open city or the Aleppo model, if you will. I've gone about 10 minutes or so here, and I know we want to keep to that so as to allow maximum time for questions and discussion. Glenn, I'll hand it back over to you.

Glenn Robinson: Thank you very much, John. Let's open it up for any sort of questions or discussion. Over

Question: Interesting proposals. As you summarized at the end, option one, the wither. How long do you think that would take for them to wither, and what suffering are we ignoring during that period?

John Arquilla: Well, I think we don't allow suffering and do allow humanitarian aid. The Aleppo model certainly allows for that. Even on a wither on the vine, Lawrence didn't cut off Medina. What he did was he made it a little more difficult for those troops and the people to be supplied. It creates a great burden on the enemy.

I think the timeline is one that, again, would depend on higher policy and a willingness to work with others. We have a president coming into office on Friday that said he wants to work with Russia to destroy ISIS. Well, if that actually were to come to pass, I think a Russo-American, Turkish, and Syrian regime collaboration on taking down Raqqa and the rest of ISIS would happen very, very

quickly, much more quickly than the fighting has gone on in Mosul already, certainly well within a couple of months' period.

I don't see time as the big problem. I'm sensitive to the humanitarian issue, as you are and think that we would have to make provisions to allow humanitarian aid. That is, not to bomb the convoys bringing humanitarian aid. Because ISIS has been continuing to supply even during these few months, we probably want to make it a little more difficult for them, but allow that to happen.

We have to be ready to provide, even as it withers on the vine to provide for the people of Mosul. It's a very, very large number and again, our number one aim should be to avoid a massive humanitarian catastrophe there because that will sully relations for the foreseeable future in Iraq if we allow that to unfold in Mosul. Great question.

Question: A couple of follow-ups again. On that, do you think they will allow that humanitarian aid? Not use that as a control mechanism? Then jumping to your third one for multi-access. You know, do more quickly multi-access. You're talking significant US and other coalition forces?

John Arquilla: Yes, absolutely. They need to be involved. Look, this is a campaign we're fighting. We say ISIS is a great enemy, not only to ourselves and our allies but to the world. Is it not worth fighting for? Are the innocent people under ISIS rule not worth fighting for?

I am frankly appalled at how restrictive the rules of engagement have been, and what we know is with a very small leavening of advanced forces, allied forces, indigenous troops can do a lot better. When the Taliban were toppled in the fall of 2001, that was with about 200 sets of boots on the ground, 11 Special Forces aid teams. We are at our best and nimblest when we work, and I think Lawrence himself said, "The smaller the unit, the greater its effectiveness."

As far as ISIS trying to impede humanitarian aid, I think that, first of all, is a great propaganda win for the people bringing the aid, but it also forces them to expose themselves and so the aid convoys themselves could be traps set for ISIS that gets them out of their prepared fighting position. So, there's, I think, a tactical way to, and again, a strategic information advantage out of the use of humanitarian aid.

I note that there's no question about the open city, option two. I would just hope that some in the high councils of CENTCOM and in Doc Cabayan's office will think about this open city possibility. It is the most unusual of the three options, but I think the most intriguing, and I hope that you all give it a close and hard think because there might be something there.

Question: Well, I do have one on that, to continue. I guess that we draw the Shia out of Syria and get them in control as opposed to the world wide spread where it's a worldwide concern.

John Arquilla: Yeah, that's the whole point of the open city model, right? When they left Aleppo, they were bussed over to Idlib. Same sort of thing. You know, we'll give you safe conduct out but you can't then get into the bloodstream of Iraqi society by filtering everywhere. It is a way to avoid the problem that a chaotic fall of Mosul might result in the scattered seeds of ISIS flowing all over Iraq. That's a nice point. I think our ability to control the dispersion of ISIS around Iraq is perhaps best served by an open city policy.

Question: Hey, one question for Dr. Rothstein. You talked about the two different studies regarding the police and the proportional demographics of the army and the different brigades. From experience working with DOJ, the police tended to have a better result of that kind of integration and involvement of the tribal local governance, as our prior discussion talking about local governance being a role, does the army necessarily play as important a role as potentially focusing on the police?

Because none of these discussions occur if we don't get ISIL out of there. Then considering what shifts people from a local organic cell of the government or whatever you have there, and putting police mechanisms, which are much less oppositionally viewed by local populations than an army. Can you expound on that?

Hy Rothstein: No, you're right. What I talked about long-term does not predicate the ability to push an entrenched organization like ISIS out of these areas. What John presented has to precede what I talked about.

In terms of local security forces, yeah, police might be fine if you get to a point where the population is actively involved in providing their own security and actively involved in providing information to police forces if there are still remnants of an insurgent organization that's powerful enough to do some damage.

Now, you may need some sort of local militia force in conjunction with the police force. In a perfect situation, a competent police force made up of locals to maintain security and keep crime from creating a problem, know that would be sufficient. But I think to start with you are going to need more than just police. You can eventually move in that direction.

My point is, whatever the security forces are after ISIS is pretty much removed need to be mostly local people. Coming from the tribes that are indigenous to

those towns, villages and regions. That will actually create, again, more stability and more control from Baghdad. Giving up some direct authority I think will result in more control from the center. I hope that answers the question.

Question: Yeah.

Glenn Robinson: Any other questions or comments?

Question: All those things we are talking about in my mind, examples of counterproductive behavior from local levels, tribal levels, senior leaders. Fundamentally, does anyone see a condition for a bit with the leadership skills in the following?

You know, if you take that step backwards, you get a step ahead across the board. All these countries pride themselves on their tribalism, happily that is, but it's also in my mind incredibly self-destructive. It just breeds greed and parochialism. Just some of those examples, we talk about local militias or local groups exerting a bit of authority.

Over time we have lots and lots of examples where that just grows into vandal warlords and just coalesce into bigger warlords, bigger expands to control and then with their own self-interest. Does anyone see any positive or anyone see a way of reshaping that behavior?

Hy Rothstein: No. I mean, it depends on what you're trying to do. If you're just trying to create a stable area or country that doesn't produce violence that undermines US interests and the interests of our allies, then it's a more minimalist approach. What goes on at a local level can, you know, it's not our business.

If you are really trying to change the Middle East like we've attempted to do, you get the push back that we've gotten over the last dozen years. It's probably not doable anyway. I think we should go take an appetite suppressant and not worry about what goes on at a local level. If things are going to change at a local level, it has to be organic and not pushed from the outside. So, is tribal conduct contrary to the way you and I think about what a proper existence is? Probably, but I don't care.

Question: I guess we spoke before though about the support that they feel. That support comes with money, arms, training, all the rest of it.

Hy Rothstein: It doesn't have to. That's the thing. That's what we think it has to come with, but as I mentioned in the case of the 37th brigade, they were undermanned. They didn't get any US training. They didn't get any equipment. They were not certified as the other brigades were, and they were much more effective.

The idea that training, equipping, and US advisors are key to making a difference, it's just not true. Now, I think US advisors can make a difference as long as they don't try to create brigades that look like US brigades and operate like US brigades.

Glenn Robinson: Just to make sure some of my earlier comments on local governance are clear, when it comes to Iraq, I mean, I'm going to agree with Hy here, the United States cannot set up the system. We are not the ones to set it up and provide all the resources and what have you. The issue is to get central government in Baghdad to recognize the necessity of a federalized, decentralized system, a truly decentralized system, for its own long-term stability and quality of life for the people in the country.

The role that the United States can play in the larger strategic narrative is to use the influence and leverage that we have with the centralized authority to move in that direction. That's not something that we can just go and create on our own in Mosul or anywhere else.

Hy Rothstein: At a broader level, I think what we've seen over the past 13 years is the failure of an effort to reroute the currents of culture and history by armed force. These tribal societies are not going to be wished away with even the most advanced arms or the ablest advisors. It seems to me that to some extent President Obama has begun to realize this by accepting, for example, the military coup in Egypt by the realization that we are not going to try to change Saudi Arabia, another important ally.

Clearly, I'm in the camp that wants to apologize to Haider al-Abadi for the invasion. We had a system that was stable in Iraq, and in our interest, the idea that somehow trying to transform this society into something that looked like a modern representative democracy was well-ahead. We got way out in front of our headlights on that. The culture and history of this country suggested that they weren't ready for it.

I would also say, just in passing, that sometimes a tribal society can be incredibly stable. The world was in flames between 1933 and 1973, the years of the reign of Zahir Shah in Afghanistan who wielded not too much more central authority than about the size of the room the three of us are sitting in at the moment right now, yet he was respected. They had almost nothing in terms of a national military, but crime was low.

I know my old hippie friends all said Afghanistan was the place to go for the best dope, and you didn't have to worry about being attacked or robbed or anything

like that. Afghanistan was the key place on the hippie trail. That was a place with very little central power of government but a high degree of legitimacy.

Again, I think there are different models that the cultures and histories of different peoples have. Iraq is a particularly thorny problem because of the ethnic differences in the country. It seems to me that the kind of authoritarian rule they had, or at least authoritarian rule of a kind, was much more logical from the perspective of those looking on the outside in and saying, "What is in our best interest?"

We pulled the cork out of that bottle, and now we are trying to put something back in, and I think Hy's points and Glenn's points about decentralization and the respect for whatever is centralized for the decentralized elements in the society are probably the best we can hope for at this point.

But it's a knotty problem that we have created and will take a very, very long time to resolve. I think the particular efforts underway now, again, if they are undertaken in a wise way that minimizes the alienation of the large Sunni minority within the country at least gives us a chance for a federated but still decentralized society to have a reasonable level of security. Over.

John Arquilla: I talked about justice during my few minutes, and this is justice as viewed by the people who live in the area, not by what we consider just. We think democracy is justice.

Hy Rothstein: A lot of Americans would dispute that.

John Arquilla: That's right, Americans might dispute that now too, but in a lot of these countries being elected is not what's considered legitimate. Religious and dynastic sources are what creates legitimacy, and that's fine. So, justice based on the eyes of the people who live in those areas, that's what we need to make part of the narrative and part of action that we undertake. Anything other than that will be associated with an unjust cause, and we'll see, again, a botched, another botched job in Iraq or wherever else we go.

Glenn Robinson: Doc, is there anything else on your end?

Doc Cabayan: No, we're good. I want to thank everybody. Glenn for organizing this, Hy, John and Ryan. Like we did last time, we'll go ahead and, this has been recorded. You'll get the edited minutes, you'll review them, and then we'll hopefully forward them to CENTCOM. I want to thank you all.

Glenn Robinson: Thanks very much. We look forward to getting the edited transcript, and we'll be very prompt in turning that around and getting it back to you.

Doc Cabayan: Thank you.

Hy Rothstein: Good talking to you again, Doc.

John Arquilla: Yeah, always a pleasure Doc. Thank you so much for involving us in this.

Doc Cabayan: Oh, absolutely. Thank you. CENTCOM over to you. Adam, anybody else from your end? Any final comments?

Male Speaker 4: From CENTCOM, thanks very much. That was obviously a lot of good expertise around the microphones and a lot of good points. This is a great forum and a great use of the reachback cell. Thanks. Adam, you got any endpoints for any other?

Adam Gable: Nothing else to add sir, thank you.

Male Speaker 4: Well, thank you all.

Male Speaker 5: Look forward to the next one.

Glenn Robinson: Very good. Thank you all very much.

[Other callers say goodbye; call over]

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]

Biographies

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- 1991 - present - Research Associate, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Univ of California, Berkeley.
- Associate Editor, Middle East Studies Association Bulletin.
- Research Fellow, Truman Institute of the Hebrew Univ of Jerusalem
- Fulbright Scholar, Univ of Jordan in Amman
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- Committee on Academic Freedom in the Middle East and North Africa
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- Relationships between regional peace and domestic disorder in the Middle East.
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AWARDS:

- Outstanding Research Achievement, NPS, 1997
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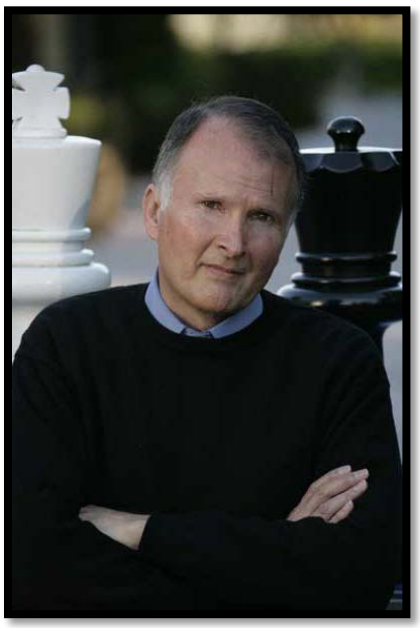

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- Middle Eastern History to 1918
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- Organized Crime

EXPERTISE:

- Organized crime in the Balkans, Turkey, and the North Caucasus
- Nationalism in the Balkans, Turkey, and the North Caucasus
- Inter-communal violence in the Balkans, Turkey, and the North Caucasus

Interview Transcript – Murhaf Jouejati, National Defense University

Sarah Canna: Thanks so much for talking to me today. Is it okay if I record the audio of this session?

Murhaf Jouejati: Absolutely, absolutely.

Sarah Canna: Thank you

Murhaf Jouejati: When I asked you about the recording, it wasn't that I mind the recording. It was that I didn't know who was going to appear in the questions and so on. So, I don't mind whatsoever.

Sarah Canna: Okay, so what I'm going to do is I'm going to record the audio, I'm going to make a transcript, and I'll send it to you so you can review it if you want. The way that this whole thing for CENTCOM works is…you know, they ask us these questions. We are reaching out to a bunch of people, we are putting all of their primary source material in a document, and then I have to write a 2-page summary of everyone's wonderful insights to send back to CENTCOM.

Murhaf Jouejati: Oh boy.

Sarah Canna: It's not easy, but it's a good brain exercise.

Murhaf Jouejati: Yeah. Well, I looked at the other thing you sent me by Sam.

Sarah Canna: Sam Rhem?

Murhaf Jouejati: Yeah…about Iraq, and it is absolutely huge. So, in order to make your life easier, I have made mine so much shorter, you know? But, I tried to capture the most important things that I have, and what I did is divide your question into the macro and the micro.

Sarah Canna: Okay.

Murhaf Jouejati: Would you like us to start now?

Sarah Canna: Yes, go. Please.

Murhaf Jouejati: Please feel free to interrupt me at any time.

Sarah Canna: Okay.

Murhaf Jouejati: At the micro level, I divided that into the international and the regional direction. Of the international level, one of the most important factors, of course, is the Russian engagement in Syria, which is shaping the future of Syria. If Syria is left in the near future in one unit, it is going to remain as it has been for the past 50 years in the Russian cap, which means that, for me, the opportunity to flick Syria into the Western cap would be lost. It would give Russia a great strategic advantage over its international rivals in that it would have this major airbase in Syria, which it already has, extending its reach into the Middle East. Also, it could have the access that it does to the Mediterranean through the

Port of Tartus. So, it would be a great strategic advantage for the Russians, and Syria would be much much more than, I don't want to say a Russian province, but certainly it would lose its autonomy, and this is a disadvantage of western countries.

Another international factor (and here, it has to do with the United States and that also, I think, impacts the future of Syria) is the partnership (it's been some time now) between the United States and the PYD. I'm sure it is well-intentioned, but what that does is create more friction than already exists between Kurds and Arabs. Even though the United States has been making efforts to include in this Syrian democratic force a lot of Arab elements, still, the optics are that this is in support of the Kurds, which attracts the ire of the Arab force and attracts the ire of Turkey (an ally). So, I think what that does…the impact of this in the future is it will increase the ethnic strife between the Arab and Kurd.

At the regional level, of course, the major influence is Iranian, and that is already shaping the future of Syria. Iran not only has its IRGC there, not only has its advisors, and not only has its allied Shia militia in Syria, but it also has, as you know, the credit lines to Syria. With that is buying a lot of property, whether private property or even public property, and the Iranians are truly consolidating their power on the ground and their economic power on the ground in addition to their military, making it such that in the future, Syria is going to be again no more than an extension of Iranian power into the Levant. That would truly cement that bridge between the Teheran and Damascus and Hezbollah in the south of Lebanon. The impact of that is also very nefarious, that would be, if at all possible, even more sectarian strife between Sunnis and Shiites, which inevitably is going to lead to a lot of radicalization among Sunni Iraqis. Now, the Sunnis in Syria aren't a majority, but this Shia minority keeps on growing in power, so you're going to have increasingly (I think) Sunni terrorism coming out from Syria as a result of this increasing Iranian influence.

At the national level, the ethnic and sectarian strife in Syria has never in recorded history been higher, but still, I think we have a window still. It is not too late. There is a sense of a Syrian national identity. I don't want to say it supersedes the sub-national identities, that would not be true, but there is still a sense of a national identity, and if played right, there is no reason for Syria to break up and to cause more headaches to not only the region but internationally as well. You know, if this strife continues to increase, if everything stands as it is today, of course there is going to be even more spillover into the region, and you are going to have increasing cross-boundary strife along sectarian lines with all its implications for the Saudi-Iranian rivalry. I know there's a lot more to add on this factorial level, but these are the most strategic things that I can think of.

At the micro level, I'm looking at the economic aspect and where reconstruction is going to take place in the future in Syria, that is going to shape the future of Syria, and it all depends on the assistance where it mostly comes from. Since the Iranians are consolidating their power now in Syria (their economic power) my guess is that a lot of the reconstruction contracts will go to the Iranians and the Russians, and that is going to again cement a Syria with Iran and with Russia at the expense of the West. There are already the demographic changes that Iran is trying to force. There are neighborhoods and homes that had been Sunni and that have been devastated and now are being increasingly being taken over by Shias and ____; the same is true in Damascus. In Damascus, even in the old city, some Christian

neighborhoods are beginning to feel this increasing Shia influence in that a lot of Shias are buying places there. You have the same phenomenon happening in _____, which was recently vacated by force and, again, you do have Shias moving in there. So, the regime has an interest in changing the demographics so that in the areas of its power, like Damascus, it would have a more equitable balance of sectarian power. Also, at the economic level, if Syria had been carved out, if the regime continues to control the areas it controls now, which is, of course, along the Mediterranean coast down to the central city of Homs in Damascus, and you have the breakup of Syria, you have the rest of the land to worry about. It would be landlocked, and there it is dominated by tribes. What you will have is a tribal coalitions and even potential alliances with those who have become radicalized, and there you have a very very dangerous marriage of tribal coalitions and terrorist groups. So that is something to worry about.

At the social level, I am really not only in fear but almost in a panic for Syrians because now, we have a generation that is going to grow up of mostly displaced people and mostly traumatized people. You have, now, the youngsters without an education who have been displaced and who…some of them have no more parents. So, you have a social recipe for disaster, and this is going to, in the future, lead to a lot more crime, and certainly, terrorist organizations are going to do a lot of recruiting among those traumatized youth, and we will have on our hands a huge map power?? of terrorists. So, again, sectarianism is at an all-time high, which is not only true in Syria, I feel that here; it is across the region. So, if everything remains the same, as our friend Kenneth Waltz says, if everything remains the same, you are going to have, in the future (I don't know when, I don't have a crystal ball), but the potential for a redrawing of the Middle East map. So, something has to be done now.

Now, I've heard all of the different ideas about what people would like the United States to do. There's a whole cabbage?? of things. I'm not going to say that the US should invade Syria and fight the Russians; I am not that crazy. But, there are a certain number of things that the United States, or at least the next administration if not this administration, can do. One is to support the Turkish efforts in the north, and these Turkish efforts happen to supply and to support the free Syrian army. Everybody has poo-pooed the free Syrian army. If the free Syrian army has been weak and divided, it is as a lack of foreign support. But once Turkey put its mind to it and grouped these folks, they did very well on the ground, and they were very good partners for the Turkish initiative. What the US can do is to support the Turkish initiative and also to bring in in order if the US is interested. In order to create some sort of harmony among ethnic groups in the north, it could bring in the KNC, the Kurdish National Council. These are, in fact, a majority of the Kurds who aspire to some sort of autonomy, aspire to be under some sort of federal system in Syria but do not want to break away. In this manner, we Americans would be helping our Turkish ally in its quest for security along its border without the fear of any Kurdish violence. It would bring Arab and the Kurd together, and it's a force that already exists on the ground. So, I think that if the United States were able to partner with the partners of our Turkish ally, the FSA, if it were to make an effort to unify the Iraqis, to train, and equip, I think we would have on the ground a force that could be credible and that we could count on. You know, the FSA…I have been to Turkey, and I have been to Lebanon, and I have not been to the Jordanian camps, but in Lebanon and Turkey (certainly Turkey), inside the camps and outside the camps, you have hundreds of former ____ army officers who have defected, who are moderate. There is nothing Islamist or jihadist about them. They

are itching to go back home, and they are itching to participate in this. But they are not alone. They are not alone outside the camps or, in the case of those I met in Gaziantep, they are not also alone to move around. So, you have a formidable manpower that is available that is pro-Western, that is pro-democratic, and that is trained as a result of their past professions who provide major support to this Turkish effort, and again, if the US and Turkey can marry their efforts, I think they would do wonders. In terms of containing the Russians, we can end the Assad regime and fighting ISIS because the FSA has fought ISIS and, in many instances, has won battles against ISIS. There is also, if the US were to take this track…and then I am not talking about US boots on the ground; I'm not talking about US armed force against anybody. But, if the United States were to make some effort also in terms of information and to bring back the lights up to the fact that this is not a western imperialist Zionist conspiracy against the Syria of the access of resistance, but this is a national uprising against a dictator and that the people want freedom.

Now, especially in the United States, most folks seem to think that this is a fight between a regime we don't like very much because it is bloody and brutal and corrupt and a bunch of thuggish murderers in ISIS ____. Well, it is those who are sandwiched in between who are our natural allies and who could make things far better for them and for us in the future. Am I making sense, Sarah?

Sarah Canna: That is actually very beautiful. I mean, you have laid out everything so beautifully, but I have so many questions.

Murhaf Jouejati: Yes. My dear Sarah, I have to tell you, I prefer to find myself as an analyst rather than a revolutionary this and that. This makes sense to me, and if, I don't want to go into the past to cry over spilled milk, but if these things had been done in the past, we wouldn't be here today. I still have all of you, and maybe I'm in la la land I don't know, but I'm still of the view that things can change for the better for Syrians and the region and the entire world if things are properly stopped. I'm really not giving you any bias or any propaganda on either side; I'm just trying to be analytical, and I may be totally wrong, but I'm giving you my genuine analysis.

Sarah Canna: I really appreciate that. You know, coming from inside the DOD, its really hard because everyone in the region hate the United States, and it's so hard for us inside because we're trying to do our best…

Murhaf Jouejati: My dear Sarah, the best thing, and again, I don't say this in a propagandistic manner, the best thing I have ever done in my life is to become a US citizen, and it has freed me, and my heart is in the United States. But truly, what has come out of Washington in the past 5 years would only exacerbate those negative feelings towards the United States because the view in Syria and in the Middle East, and I think throughout the world, in the beginning, was this is an open-shot case. These are peaceful demonstrators demonstrating for freedom, much as in Hungary in 1956 or in Prague in 1968 or in the wall falling in Berlin or the Iron Curtain breaking, and outing?? these democracies flourish in Eastern Europe. So, people were thinking of these things when this happened, and then the United States would, again no boots on the ground, would support them in their fight for freedom. What we got is a United States that tied its hands behind its back, allowed the Russians everything under the sun,

allowed the Iranians everything under the sun, and still, 6 years into this, there is hesitation in Washington. So, you're right. It doesn't feel good to be hated. Why should we run to a place where we are hated, but by not doing anything also, we are creating even more hatred.

Sarah Canna: And it's really…it seems to me that the US reputation is a huge problem in the area, that we have so little credibility that some polls in ISIL controlled areas, which who knows how good they are, are saying that they would rather have ISIL than the US on their territories. So…

Murhaf Jouejati: The United States is not a reliable partner. It's not because it wants to be not a reliable partner, but because there are domestic politics in the United States. When you are in the United States, and you feel these domestic politics and the debate inside; those outside don't see it. What they see is a decision from the US, regardless of what happens inside, and the decision of the United States now is, despite chemical attacks against the civilian population, despite a Russian air force bombing hospitals day in and day out, despite Iranians and all of their allied militias, including Hezbollah, killing right and left, the United States wants to pursue diplomacy, which is good, but a diplomacy without teeth, and diplomacy without teeth does not work. So, you and I know this, but the United States continues in its diplomacy without teeth, and so, people now have come to question the credibility and the reliability of the United States.

Sarah Canna: This is concerning because what happens if the populations prefer Russia's involvement in the region because they are a more reliable partner? I know that's hard for the Sunni population in particular to ever embrace Russia, but…

Murhaf Jouejati: My dear friend, let me take off my American hat. Let me put on my Syrian hat. When I was in Syria, and we had doses of Bulgarian movies at night and Soviet movies, and so on. We knew that we had to be patient and wait for Thursday nights until *Love Boat* comes on, and this is true for Sunnis and Alawis and Christians and everybody else. We wore jeans, we liked Madonna… you know, the Russian-Syrian connection is not an ideological one, but it comes only as a result, and I don't want to divert your attention from what we are talking about, but it came mostly as a result of the US-Israeli partnership. No, Syrians do not prefer things Russian to things American, but America is not investing where it should.

Sarah Canna: So, I had another question getting back to what the US can do. So, what has to happen first: do we have to get rid of ISIL first or get rid of Assad first? Or what's the first step towards stability? Or is it not that simple?

Murhaf Jouejati: Well, it's not simple. The US should continue, I think, in what it is doing in this US-led coalition against ISIS; there is no doubt about that. But, it should now take steps against the Assad regime. Again, analytically, and I have looked at a lot of articles and a lot of evidence and so on. There has been cooperation between the Assad regime and ISIS; ISIS is in the interest of the Assad regime. ISIS is in the interest of the Assad regime because Assad can portray himself to the world as the secular leader opposed to Islamic fundamentalism. If ISIS did not exist, the man would be in very serious trouble. He had released what is now the top leadership of ISIS from Syrian jails in the name of releasing

political prisoners. He has bought, and continues to buy, oil from ISIS. He has bought, and continues to buy, power from ISIS. So, he has enriched them in many ways. Talk to the very recently defected mayor of Palmyra, and he will tell you how the entire loss and recapture of Palmyra was a hoax. He was there, and Assad had every interest to show ISIS in Palmyra, and the destruction of Syria's cultural heritage, which is humanity's cultural heritage, and then of him, thank the Lord, taking it back. I don't know if these things are difficult for Westerners to see, but Middle Easterners and Syrians see through Assad in everything that he does. So, it is very important to take ISIS out, but it t is also very important to take the other side of the coin out, not with boots on the ground, not with American boys and girls coming back in body bags, but employing a local population that wants him out.

Sarah Canna: So, let's skip ahead to the point where the civil war is over, and we're ready to do political reconstruction. How is that possibly going to work when Sunnis are a majority, and the Shia minority is not used to giving up power?

Murhaf Jouejati: Your question is all a function of whether Assad is in there or not, but the equation that was agreed upon by the United States and Russia, initially, in Geneva, is a very good one. It is a transition to a transitional government, and that transitional government would be half regime, half opposition. The regime part and the opposition part would include people with no blood on their hands. In other words, you could have as minister of something or another, _____, and you could have ____ of the other side as minister of this or that, but you cannot have a chief of a _____ agency and somebody who has belonged in ____ on screen; it's a massacre. Both sides have to agree on the selection of the others, and in this way, and only this way, it has to be constitutional as well; minorities would have a guarantee that they are represented at the table.

Sarah Canna: Well, Murhaf, I really enjoyed talking with you this afternoon. So, what I'll do is I'll type up the transcript, you can review it if you'd like and redact anything you'd like if you want to, and then we'll send this out to… now, General Votel has been reading all of our reports personally, and we've been getting feedback from him. So, we will send any feedback we get back to you with any follow-on questions…

Murhaf Jouejati: I want to urge you to ask me and to contact me and to Skype me. I want to contribute.

Sarah Canna: Thank you.

Murhaf Jouejati: I want to help the United States, and I worked for the Department of Dense…I spent 10 years at the National Defense University, so you know where my heart is, and I want us to do the right thing. So, I am free to any of your questions, and I'm also free to your criticisms. You might find that, from time to time, again, I'm in la la land. Bring me back down to Earth with questions and so on. I urge you.

Dr. Murhaf Jouejati

Dr. Murhaf Jouejati is a Professor at the National Defense University's Near East South Asia (NESA) Center for Strategic Studies. He is also an adjunct Professor of Political Science and International Affairs at the George Washington University and the Former Director of the Middle East Studies Program at the George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs. Dr. Jouejati has previously served as a political advisor to the European Commission delegation in Syria. Additionally, he has worked as a consultant to Bureau of Arab States in New York with the UNDP and served as National Program Officer in Syria. He is also the Former Information Officer at the U.S.-Arab Chamber of Commerce.

Dr. Murhaf Jouejati received a B.S. at Lemania College; M.A. at Georgetown University; and Ph.D. at University of Utah. His countries of expertise are Lebanon and Syria. His issues of expertise are: Political Economy, Peace Process, Middle East Affairs, Economics, Development, Democratization, Culture and Society, Commerce and Investment, Arab-Israeli Relations, Regional Security.

Interview Transcript – An Academic Who Wishes to remain Anonymous

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Allison Astorino-Courtois: Thank you for giving us some time from your day. I know especially at this time of year you must be really busy.

Anonymous: It's a pleasure.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: So, here is the first question. What are the critical elements of a continued Coalition presence following the effective military defeat of Daesh that Iran may see as beneficial? What can we do that Iran's not going to hate? We got a response from Ambassador Robert Ford, and he said this, "Iran will not view any Coalition presence as desirable. It does not support a generally unified, independent, and sturdy Iraq and thus won't welcome long-term Coalition training of Iraqi forces." But then we got input from Alex Vatanka from the Middle East Institute, and he said, "Continued US military presence is the least alarming for the Iranians. It nicely complements the capacities of a new, Iran-allied state." So, I want to turn it over to you.

Anonymous: I think actually, Allison, they're both right in some ways. It is true that Iran does not want to have the Coalition, let's say. It's led by the US, really, they're the largest element in it, continuing to orchestrate the security of Iraq. At one level, Robert, in a sense, is right regarding that, but the other side of the coin is equally correct and that is that Iran is in no position to guarantee anybody's security in Iraq, frankly. You saw recently that during Ashura, hundreds of Iranian pilgrims were killed in Karbala. If it can't guarantee the security of its own citizens travelling to Iraq while it has a military presence in the holy site, what chance does Iraqi government have of Iranian reliance or guarantees for their security? That's one. The other part of it that's also important is Iran is now really aware of the negative blowback in the rest of the region for its presence in Iraq, in Syria, and in Lebanon with Hezbollah. The last thing I think they want right now is, with Daesh thrown out of Iraq, for Iran to be the new bogey occupying Iraq. That provides the Saudis and the rest of the Sunni Coalition a real grand card to mobilize the Sunnis in Iraq against Iran, to get Turkey on their side finally, and again, Iran does not want to play that bogeyman post-

Daesh in Iraq. The only way it can avoid that is to have the Coalition continue to underwrite national security over Iraq. Thirdly, the Kurds are also not too pleased with the Coalition staying, on the one hand, and also would be a bit nervous about Iran replacing the Coalition because they don't want to take any orders from Tehran. As you saw, even in the fighting for Mosul's liberation, they are loath to be working closely with the Shia militias because they do not want to be associated with one group. Also, they're very sensitive about getting too close to the Iranian flame that will burn the whole Kurdish agenda, which of course has a strong presence in Iran itself. So, they would much rather have the Coalition's presence than post-Daesh destruction, [they] withdraw and hand Iraq over -- as the Sunnis see it -- on a golden platter to Tehran.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: So, basically, you're suggesting that there's a pragmatic element here to Iranian foreign policy, the way that it sees itself in the region. So, turning to domestic politics then, is that something that the Grand Ayatollah is manipulating? Is it coming from the Revolutionary Guards (RGC)? Who's pushing this within Iran?

Anonymous: Both Iraq and Syria are not squarely in the hands of the National Security Council, and, while the executive has some say over it, it is largely the Leader, and therefore, the RGC who are facilitating policy in both Iraq and Syria, and because these are now not foreign policy, these are security policies in both Iraq and in Syria. So, whatever kind of contours that you see are ones which are being drawn by the Leader's office in consultation with the RGC and the National Security Council. That is the collective of all of the leadership, political, military, security, and intelligence, anyway. But nevertheless, it's that security coalition that draws strategy for both Iraq and Syria. For the RGC, they simply are in no position to be involved against Daesh in Iraq, partly because they don't want to rile Daesh any more than they have to. The last thing that they want is to be seen as a frontline against Daesh in any shape or form because that would just crystalize this Sunni-Shia dimension to the level that Iran would then have to be seen as a defender of the Shia agenda because the Sunnis certainly will not rally around Tehran in any kind of anti-Daesh coalition. So, the RGC is fully aware that they can't really, for practical and ideological and pragmatic reasons, manage a post-Daesh Iraq by themselves, and they're not going to go away. The Shia militias, which have been mobilized, are going to stay mobilized, partly because they're an important element, a pillar of Iran's own influence in Iraq now. Iran is not that keen on the Iraqi government either and is much more committed to working with the Shia militias to maintain grass root presence and influence, dare I say control, of the vast areas of Iraq which are now Shia dominated. So, it wants to work below that radar level rather than at the grand state level, and so, maintaining a lower profile is always the RGC's preference in these situations. This also suits the Leader because it can always give him possible deniability as well.

*Allison Astorino-Courto*is: Okay, so, I have a question on this issue. I'd like to flip the question that we got from CENTCOM around and ask you what are the critical elements of a continued Coalition presence that Iran would see as most threatening? What shouldn't be done?

Anonymous: In many ways, to extend the Coalition's presence in what Iran regards to be its spheres of influence in and around the holy sites, the triangle of Najaf, Karbala, and Hillah and also in the south round the Basra area where, unfortunately, Iraq desperately needs a Coalition to stabilize the energy sitting

down there that is going to fly in the face of Iranian influence in that part of Iraq. The southern regions are now dominated by Iranian businesses and security offices and so on. So, the Coalition would seem to have two roles that Iran would not find sufficiently threatening. One is the security of the central government, the green zone, that they can't do nor do they want to be seen doing; and secondly, to pacify the Sunni triangle, that they don't want to be doing. The rest of it [Iran] would like to be allowed to get on with it, make sure that the … sides are protected. They would love the Coalition to stabilize Iraq all the way to the borders, if possible, of Syria but not force or push an agenda that would disarm the militias, for example. They would see that as a direct challenge to their authority in Iraq. So, it's a combination, if you'd like, of political issues and security issues. So long as it's the Iraqi government that makes the requests of the Coalition, I think Iranians would be finding it very difficult to challenge it, in public at least; it may do it in private with the Iraqis, but not in public. Beyond that, I can't see the Iraqi government also stepping too much out of line against Iran's interests because they recognize that Iran is going to make a lot of trouble for them in Iraq if they felt miffed by whatever Iraq does with the Coalition.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Right, okay. So, thank you, and this actually is a very similar question that we got, which is what are the aims and objectives of the Shia militia group following the defective military defeat of Daesh?

Anonymous: I think their agenda is somewhat similar to Al Sadr's agenda in, say 2004 post-fall of Baghdad, and that was to get as much control of government as possible, as quickly as possible. Al Sadr was, for all his faults, representative of a national voice and a very credible pedigree from this other tradition. These militias have little long roots in Iraqi political order, and so they realize once the war is over, they will lose their present Daesh in a sense, and they will need to find other ones. That would be, I think, to find a niche in internal security from which they could then begin to collect rent and from which they can begin to build their political base. I think in both of those instances, Iran is not going to be unsupportive of them. So, I see this Coalition…some of the **Mohandis** … I think some of them are there for the money, for the fight, and for ideology and may very well go back there to the farms and what have you, but there will be others who will have tasted power will see this as an opportunity to consolidate, to build, to develop, and to enrich.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Do you know, or can you tell at this point, which particular groups those might be or who they may be led by?

Anonymous: I can't on the top of my head; I have information on it that I can communicate to you later, because there are hot spots. Some of them don't like fighting in some places, and they don't do it. They stay back, or they go in for a cleanup job, and there are others that are much more keen to come flying a Shia flag into Sunni heartlands and are determined to take control of those areas. Iran has shamelessly worked with all of this range of groups itself because it sees them as nodes of influence in the broader part of Iraqi society and community. I don't think it would be for Iranians to decide how many of them stay how many of them go. Some of them, of course, once Iraq is free of the Daesh menace, will be encouraged to move into Syria to shore up Assad. I think Iran will be very direct in pushing some of these guys westward into Syria, and again, I think this is fluid. It will depend on how the battle for Mosul unravels and what post-Daesh fighting is left to do there. I don't think the Iraqi government is going to have much

say or control over these guys. They obviously are alongside the Iraqi military units, but I don't think in terms of the chain of command, once they get in a battle situation, they'll necessarily be closely following the Iraqi government's tactic. I think they seem to be doing some of their own stuff. Some of it is very ugly, as you know; some of it is kind of in keeping with the direction of travel as far as the Coalition and the Iraqi government are concerned.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: So, there aren't particular groups. I'm thinking of the Kurds, right? Some people tend to talk about the Kurds as if they're all the same. Even in Iraq, you have the different groups and parties, and the Shia militia, it's just too fluid you'd think to categorize in terms of any of the groups.

Anonymous: I think it's a shorthand, what we view as a Shia militia. I think, you know, some of them break down into neighborhoods or families even of individuals who get involved, and others are the ones who have spent time in Iran in the 1980s and grew up there and are not involved in the militias. It really is a very mixed bag of individuals who have come from many parts of Iraq, and some of them I suspect would just want to go back to where they came from once the call for liberation and this subsides and there isn't a battle to fight any longer in Iraq itself.

*Allison Astorino-Cour*tois: It seems to me that this is a dangerous shorthand.

Anonymous: I agree with you. I think it is because some of these folks are in there for different reasons, even though normatively it might appear that they're all for the liberation of Iraq, for the Iraqi sovereignty, and the defeat of Daesh. I think they have somewhat different objectives in the last analysis, and post-Mosul liberation is when we'll begin to see this crystalize. I'm not saying that they're all under Iran's control. I think, again, post-Mosul liberation we'll see how much influence Iran has over these guys, but if there are those that want to carry on with a military campaign, I think it will be the Iraqi government which would encourage Iran to shift these guys into Syria because the government doesn't want to have a battle-hardened bunch of men carrying weapons driving back to Baghdad.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Do you think… will the Iranian government listen to the Iraqi central government if they say, "Hey, move those guys into this or that area in Syria?"

Anonymous: I think Iran will listen because for that, they will then get that corridor that they want, the corridor into Syria, which is vital for them. That has been facilitated, as you know, by the Iraqi government, that they keep that access going, which is important for them, and that Hezbollah kind of not be seen when it is in Iraq as well. That would be, I think, be something that Iran would like to see happen. So, you know, Hezbollah helping the Shias professionalize, if you'd like, if that's not a contradiction in terms, while mobilizing some of the others to finish off Daesh and the so-called opposition to the rest of Syria, that would suit the government, I think.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: This is the Iraqi government?

Anonymous: Yeah.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Alright, well thank you so much for that. I think that at least in my head that clears up some of these questions that I had. We have another question which deals with internal Iranian politics, and it's this: what internal factors would influence Iran's decision to interfere with the free flow of commerce in the Strait of Hormuz or the Bab el Mandeb?

Anonymous: Yeah, I found that question really interesting, Allison, because to be honest with you, I don't myself see it in the immediate term, let's say, the prospect of Iran interfering with both of those choke points actually. I don't see that serving their national interests.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Both or either?

Anonymous: Either of them, yeah. I don't see them doing it for Hormuz or for Bab el Mandeb. I don't think it's in their national interest at all, and I think for the establishment in Tehran, at least that kind of thing is self-defeating. They might poke a missile, in the worst-case scenario, across the Persian Gulf and target shipping probably, and without doubt, focus on the American naval presence and western Coalition there, but interfering with the whole Strait of Hormuz, even though RGC keeps bragging about this, I simply do not see it happening. Even the RGC, it's clear that they don't have the capacity to block it, and it's interesting that the question doesn't pose blocking the Strait of Hormuz but it talks about interfering. That interference is what happened in the 1980s, poking at maritime trade, poking at the US Navy and what have you. You know, given their economy and their, again, growing dependence on all exports, I simply don't see that happening. That is, at one level, suicidal.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: So, even the Revolutionary Guard, if they feel that they're losing political influence relative to the [central] government or, for some reason, their fortunes are heading downward, would they act on their own to harass shipping? I mean, is there a domestic political impetus for this kind of action?

Anonymous: Again, I don't see it. So long as the RGC takes orders from their Leader, and you know, I mean, that's an if that we can talk about, and analysts have a different view of this now about how much influence the leader actually has over the RGC, but if we assume that they still report to him and that the establishment as a whole sees the RGC accountable to their Leader and therefore the National Security Council, if that assumption is correct, I don't myself see a scenario in which they would make a policy decision to disrupt shipping in these strong points. Bab el Mandeb, I would put it actually in the last analysis in different categories. I think the Strait of Hormuz is a national interest issue. Bab el Mandeb is a bit more open, given that not so much of Iran's trade is to the east and given that it is trying to open up its land routes to get over into Europe. Bab el Mandeb has more of a security rather than economic importance to Iran, and therefore, it's something that they might be prepared to play with, but I don't see them having the resources, Allison, to be honest.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Well, they could certainly harass from the shoreline by, I don't know, giving Houthis some kind of weapons to shoot at passing ships. Is that a possibility? Then they'd have plausible reliability if it's coming from Yemen.

Anonymous: Possibly, possibly. But you know they've got SSMs anyways, so it wouldn't be difficult to do that, but I'm not so sure that the Houthis are that dependent on Iran either to be honest. That's a whole different can of worms, but the Houthis are much more of an indigenous force to Yemen than we give them credit for, and in a different configuration, the Houthi-Saudi thing can be managed in a much much smaller theater arrangement than what we have now. So, you know, how much say Iran will have in persuading the Houthis to use their weapons in Iran's interest is questionable in terms of what can Iran really do for the Houthis that's more than what they've done so far. You know, there isn't much else that Iran can provide for the Houthis right now, and that stalemate is unlikely to change unless Iran moves the RGC directly into Yemen, but in that scenario, we're actually talking about an open warfare between Iran in Saudi Arabia, really. I don't think we're there yet. I don't think we're anywhere near that to be honest, and I don't think the Houthis want their tail in the trap of the Iran-Saudi conflict anyways.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: So, they have a limit and no real incentive to expand their mission to helping Iran in…

Anonymous: Right now, I don't see it.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Okay. So, we have an interesting question. It started out oddly, but what I'd like to do is focus on the second part of that question which is: how do Sunni and Shia communities perceive the Coalition position on battling extremists? I think what they're getting at here is whether there is a narrative or a policy which can be pushed to enhance US/Coalition influence in the region?

Anonymous: Yeah, no I get it. I think you're right. I think the second half is real interesting, actually. Yeah, and it is the 'how do' bit which I found interesting as well, Allison. I agree with you. You know, when you look at things like public opinion surveys and young, student-level correspondence -- blogs, and tweets what have you -- it's interesting that there is considerable support for the Coalition's effort to contain extremism, to combat Daesh. I think it's now very clear that that exists. What is also clear, ironically, is that the Syrian effort is woefully inadequate and therefore opportunistic. I don't think the Sunni community understands the constraints the US/Coalition has had to work [with] in Syria, and I don't think they even care to understand it because of our own propaganda about freedom, about human rights, about how bad Assad is and so on. They said all of that is posturing against what the Coalition has really done, right, and then they say well, they're only after their own interests, you know defending their own patch and sending in their own allies and are not really interested in the big picture of combatting, defeating, fighting extremism, and this narrative, it's the same narrative, Allison. It's both… "look at what the Coalition is doing, great", and "look what they're not doing. They're only doing it because it is in their own interest. If extremism serves their interest, they will even tolerate or even support extremism." So, it is really, really convoluted, and given that, these guys continue to thrive on conspiracy theories. They would not really believe anything that comes from the West and from a post-2016 US. They're going to have even less confidence in what comes out of the US. … That's going to come into play, I'm afraid. Yeah, so that's going to affect their mentality of -- here I'm focusing on the Sunni communities in particular -- the Coalition's position on all of the Syrian problems, like Aleppo, like Raqqa, like Mosul and the rest of it. You know, in some ways, some of them actually see target bombing, drone bombing as cynical rather than as lowering collateral damage.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: How so?

Anonymous: You see, that's cynical because they view it… as [the US] don't want to get their hands dirty. They don't want to be here fighting monsters. This is a cheap way of fighting their wars and then leaving when they're done. Ironically, Allison, they see this as lack of commitment rather than as an effort to save innocent lives.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: You know, there's truth in that.

Anonymous: Yeah, so, even the method of warfare, if you'd like, is now being questioned, you know. Amongst the Shia communities, it's ironically actually more straightforward. The politicized Shia want nothing to do with the Coalition because, to the vast majority of them, the Coalition is a creator of Daesh. It's the supporter of the Sunni majority and therefore cannot be trusted. They can have tactical maneuvers with them over a common enemy like Daesh, but beyond that, they actually have very little confidence in the Coalition doing anything that would be in their communal or, in the case of Iraq, for example, national interest. So, their bond is very different than the Sunni bond.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: If you remove the US from the Coalition, are there any members of the Coalition that seem to be more acceptable, or is nobody going to believe that the Coalition isn't going to be directed by the US whether the US claims to be there or not?

Anonymous: Yeah, nobody buys it, and you know, our own Prime Minister May can be blue in the face saying that Britain is back east of Mosul, but you know, it's going to take a lot of convincing, and in any case, they don't see even the thinnest paper between the French, the Dutch, the British, the German, the American, the Canadian, the Polish, whatever participants of a western alliance here. In that, I think it's partly our own fault for not having been able to co-opt Turkey as a frontline NATO member, fully in our strategy. I think, frankly, in [the US] position … I would focus on Turkey and where it's going, primarily as a Sunni actor in this region. Forget its European-ness, forget its NATO membership, forget all of that, and look at it as a regional player here. I worry about how the Turkish government is beginning to reposition itself.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Hopefully people in NATO are as well. So, apropos to that, where do you think, in your view, the Turkish government is headed? What's driving them?

Anonymous: In my view, I think they're becoming oriental. I think they are deoxidizing, if you'd like, and again, this is partly Europe's fault who has dragged membership along the grass like a carrot for possibly half a century, Allison, and they're rightly asking, "Well, you know, when are we going to eat the bloody carrot?" Given the relationship between NATO and Russia, it must be remembered Turkey sits right at the pinnacle of that relationship where it is. I think they have begun, perhaps unwisely, to review all of their strategic priorities in the region. Some of the lessons they're learning are, you know, how much can we rely on NATO to come to our defense, and really, how can NATO defend our interests in Syria when it is the Russians that are sitting there? Do we really need NATO in our dealings with Iran and the GCC countries? Not really. Thirdly, given that NATO cannot come to our defense, doesn't our future then lie eastward a bit, and so long as our western borders are secure as they are for the foreseeable future? I

would argue, if they don't see a Cypress war flaring up or Israelis taking more Turkish ships in the eastern Mediterranean, then they can, if you'd like, afford to look at the Caspians, the Caucuses, to look at China's bridge and road initiative. The Turks clearly fit at the final segue of that into Europe. So, you know, in theory, they expect to gain from it, and say, "Well, alright. We'll passed on the European agenda, and we'll develop our Asian or oriental agenda." The problem with that is, of course, they'd been trading all of the stability of Europe for all of the instability of Asia and the orient, and I don't see them being equipped to deal with any of it, frankly. If they can't [deal with the instability], they'll become more erratic; they'll become more libertarian as they have done. In fact, you can plot on a graph the orientalization and the organization of the Turkish government as it moved away from Europe … as it hooked up with the Middle East and Asia. So, I suspect that we'll see a bit more of that if this trend continues.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Do you think that the Turkish government believes that it has the bandwidth to pursue with its own interest in, or even take a leadership role in the orient whilst it's been a second-class citizen in Europe?

Anonymous: No, I don't think for a moment that they think they've got the resources. I mean, they can't even secure their own border with Syria or even Iraq for that matter as we speak. So, they're aware of their limitations, but what they are interested in is to explore non-western options, not non-western alternatives, I'm not using the word "alternative" here, but non-western options in which they find other ways of economic development beyond European Union membership, for example. You know, they're interested in much closer links with all the Persian Gulf states, and if they can only take this Kurdish thorn out of the side of Iraq, even with Iraq, but for now, that one remains a problem. Into the Caucuses, into Central Asia, as you know, they have talked about and looked at the "Look East" strategy and have flirted with China, the Chinese have shown interest in that from their side, and so, just moving some of their eggs from the Western basket and putting it in other baskets is in a way diminishing Turkish commitment to the West. That's all that I'm saying.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Well, and in some ways, it diminishes their risk if you think in terms of diversifying your own portfolio I guess.

Anonymous: Yeah, I agree. Yeah.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: So, there's one last question, and I know that we've gone over time. So, this one is huge, and it's: what major economic, political, strategic, and military activities do Saudi Arabia and Iran conduct in Bahrain, Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon to gain influence? … I wanted to ask you particularly about Iran and Iran's motivation and what the ultimate goals are.

Anonymous: Okay, let's take all of them in turn; I'm happy to do it. Actually, let me do the Saudi one quickly and then move on to Iran. With the Saudi one, I think Bahrain is… in many ways, it's Hawaii. You know?

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Okay?

Anonymous: So, alright. For me, that tells you everything you everything you need to know. It is… in many ways, Saudi Arabia is Midway. With Lebanon, the Saudis have fairly strong cultural links with the Sunni communities there and with the Sunni elite, which is extremely wealthy, more educated and very Saudi centric as well. So, the Saudis are key to making sure that that elite is not deprived of a political voice in Lebanon. But, the way they're going about it is to punish the Sunnis for being too weak in the face of the Shias, and they realize that that was a mistake, a bit late now because, of course, the presidency is now lost to them. They are trying to rebuild that Sunni constituency in Lebanon.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: How does it do that?

Anonymous: It's a hot potato for both Iran and Saudi Arabia. So, I don't think they will be getting too heavily involved in Lebanon but rather try and engage with the Sunni elite as best they can. Syria is a huge geopolitical issue for Saudi Arabia because it is the only Sunni country dominated by a heretical minority, and it's the only Sunni majority country that Iran has massive influence in. These are, for me, enough reasons for the Saudis to be so focused on Syria, but recovery of the Sunnis in Syria… for them, it's a zero sum game. I think I'm correct in this calculation, because it will then deprive Iran of influence in Syria. I think both Iran and Saudi Arabia get this, and that is why Syria is this bloody theater for both of them. Saudi Arabia cannot afford to see Yemen lost to anybody that's disloyal to Saudi Arabia. Again, they're screwed up by this war that they unleashed. If they've learned any lessons from 2009's skirmishes with Houthis, that is that all of their gleaming weaponry are not sufficient to deal with an insurgency. I don't think they've learned the lessons from 2009, and that is why we are in the mess that we are, but I think the further they've gone into Yemen, the bigger the hole that they've dug for themselves. You know, somebody was saying from the UN that there is nothing that is left to bomb in Yemen. I think that he was right. I think that the Saudis have taken out whatever target was on their wish list, and this is not a war of attrition, and it's likely going to continue until the Saudis accept a compromise with the Houthis or, rather, until they persuade the government in exile to accept the national Coalition. For me, the Iranians have signed up to this actually, but nobody is taking any notice of them. I think the Iranians will be happy to see a government of national unity in which the Houthis can have a say, and Iran is going to walk away from that. You know, I don't think they'd be able to use the Houthis to destabilize Saudi Arabia's borders. But this is why Saudis are paranoid about this, and why Iranians and the RGC in particular have this dream of weakening Saudi Arabia's underbelly and what have you. In practice, I'm not sure if that has actually been effective or if it's sustainable in the long run. So, I think the Iranians will cut a deal over Yemen if they could find this formula. As you know, John Kerry is looking for this formula as we speak, and if the Coalition can land this, then good on them. That's one less dark spot for us to have to worry about. For Iran, alternatively, Bahrain is a perfect pinprick to annoy the Saudis with, but Iran has no control of Bahrain's Shias. That [narrative] is something that the Bahrainis and the Saudis put out. Sure, there are links, sure Khomeini is a martyr for many Bahrainis, sure his photographs are everywhere, but you know, I think there is more of a religious cultural undertone to it than a political.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: And people are able to make that distinction?

Anonymous: I think the Bahrainis don't. I know the Saudis do because it serves their agenda of Iranian interference in Bahrain. I think Iran has influence, don't get me wrong. I don't think it is actually pulling

the strings in Bahrain, and the Bahraini Shia have been slowly deliberately distancing themselves from Tehran because they don't want to be seen as Bahrain's stooges. You know, these are well-established religious and ethnic communities, Allison, in Bahrain. They don't want to be brushed with this sectarianism, they're really don't, but I think it serves both Saudi interests to show this Shia coalition and Iran's interest to show its great influence in Bahrain to carry on this charade that we have in Bahrain. I myself don't see an end to this so long as al-Khalifa makes considerable change domestically …. So, this one is something that we have to play with, but of course, you know, Bahrain is important for the US for all sorts of reasons, including military, of course. So, what happens in this Saudi-Bahraini-Iranian relationship, I think, has a very direct impact on the US and will have a growing impact on us even given what Theresa Mays just said in Manama a couple of days ago. So, I think our presence there is in some ways debilitating because we have little options but to see the law of the land from the perspective of allies rather than objectively speaking. Given that, I think it limits what we can do. For Iran, Lebanon is vital, vital not just because of Hezbollah, but Hezbollah is the most important pawn that it has in the Arab world, but also because it continues to be the bit that Iran can play around with Israel, and it knows it. It knows that Israel's borders are susceptible, and it will not want to lose its foothold in Lebanon, and the most telling part of this was when Ahmadinejad in one of his goodbye trips actually went to the border where he looked into Israeli territory and saw it as something which is accessible to Iran and Iran's allies. This has brought us to them, and it's important strategically for them as well. You know, to talk of a forward mobilization strategy, Hezbollah and Lebanon are it for Iran. Iraq is a very convenient backyard now. I don't think going forward, maybe in 10 or 15 years, anybody's going to check Iran's influence in Iraq. It's up to the Iranians to decide how much they want to be in Iraq, to be honest. At the same time, Iraq now competes with Iran in the market, completely. …. But to them, that's a small price to pay because Iraqis are actually doing a lot more trade with Iran than at any time in the past. So, economically, it's important to them. Politically, it's important to them. In terms of military, Iranians have said many times that they would never allow Iraq to become a launch pad for aggression against them, and that means that they have to stay in Iraq to ensure that that doesn't happen, and they will do that. So, Iraq is… for want of better word, it's Iran's backyard now, and that really riles the Saudis.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Yes, because it's their backyard too.

Anonymous: Yeah, Iraq is so important geopolitically, and they feel that they've lost it. They've lost it through no fault of their own, and this really bugs them; this really bugs them. As I have said, with regards to Yemen, I think Yemen is much more of a tactical thing for Iran than strategic, and if it can cut a deal that would secure a Houthi voice and therefore an indirect Iranian voice in Yemen, it would be happy with it and let it be. I don't think this idea of encircling Saudi Arabia that has been posited runs, to be honest, because I don't think Iranians actually have much control of the theater in Yemen unlike Iraq, unlike Syria, unlike Lebanon.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Wow. So, I thought this was an enormous question, and you answered it in five minutes, so thank you so much for that. That's really helpful.

Anonymous: My pleasure, Allison.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: One last question, and that's really about Iran's ultimate goal. So, I've heard, obviously, people say that Iran's grand strategy is to be seen as regional leader or defender of the Muslim world. Do you have a sense of Iran's enduring strategic goal or even…?

Anonymous: I love you for this question, Allison, because I can plug my new book now. I have a new book that will be out January/February time called *Iran, Stuck in Transition.* I haven't wrapped up publishing yet, and it's available as an eBook, paperback also, and it's looking at everything, domestic, political economy, interrelations, security, and future prospects what have you, and my central argument in the international relations chapter of the book is that for all our perceptions of Iran marching towards this, if you'd like, the dawn of their hegemony for each of the areas that it has a presence, influence, and voice in, it's actually, at a strategic level, questionable and weak.

Take Syria, for example. Iran was in support of the Assads from 1980 onwards, Allison. Right? The Iranian military has been in Syria since the 1990s because that's going to conduce for contact with Hezbollah and presence in Lebanon, and yet, when uprisings happen, half of Syria falls away, and it's only the Russians that can rescue Assad's crown, not Iran. Yet, over 1,000 Iranians have lost their lives fighting in Syria, and if you believe figures, upward of 10 billion dollars a year have been sunk into the Syrian war, money that Iran can ill afford. Where is hegemony in that? Let's assume that this pro-Assad coalition manages to recover all of Syria for Assad. How long did it take Vietnam to recover from their American withdrawal after the withdrawal of 1975, Allison? This is the Syria that Iran is going to inherit. Where is the strength in that? Let's take Iraq as another example. For all of Iran's influence, presence, cultural affinity, empathy, and so on, when the chips are down, where does Iraq go, the United States? So, you know, where is Iran's hegemony in Iraq when the Kurds tell it, "Don't tell us what to do, thank you very much. We'll mobilize your Kurds against you"? When the Iraqi government comes to Washington asking for support to train its troops and not the Iranian RGC, where is hegemony in that? Where is hegemony in Yemen when all you have are ethnic groups, which are really fighting their own domestic battles, Allison? You know, the Houthis are not fighting to liberate Yemen against Saudi Arabia. Their goals are far more parochial than we give Iran credit for in that regard. Where is hegemony in Yemen? Where is hegemony in Bahrain when the leaders of the Al-Wefaq party phone to Iran publicly and say, "Do not speak in our name"? Where is this Shia present when the majority of the population in Azerbaijan who are Shia have absolutely no empathy with the Iranian system of government there? Where is Iran's voice in Afghanistan when it's the Coalition and the Pakistani government and now with the Russians, thank you very much, trying to cut a deal to stabilize Afghanistan? Where is this giant neighbor influencing the geo-politics in Afghanistan? You know, I don't see it. The only place where they have a role is in Lebanon, and that is thanks to Hezbollah, but the more that Hezbollah is indigenized, the less influence Iran has…

[cut off; end of phone call]

Interview Transcript – Nader Hashemi, University of Denver

Nader Hashemi: …no longer exists. I mean, the country has been completely destroyed over the last 5 years, and I'm not talking about simply the people, but I'm talking about the infrastructure, any sense of sort of normality, government system. So, the country would have to be completely rebuilt from scratch, and one of the big factors that I think will weigh in on any sort of future viable Syrian state will be whether the scars of the war will be able to heal, and I'm speaking specifically about this deep virus of sectarianism that has spread throughout the country. Syria did not have deep seeds of sectarianism before, but now they're so deep that they're trying to patch that up and put together some sort of cohesive political community where everyone can cooperate together in the context of a functioning state. That will be an immense challenge; it will be a generational challenge; it will take several generations. But first and foremost, none of that can happen… we can't have a serious conversation about the future of Syria unless the fundamental underlying root problem of why there has been a conflict in Syria is addressed. That goes back to the 45-year-old rule of one family in Syria, the house of Assad (currently the son), and his inability, refusal, reluctance to share power and concede power is I think the number one factor that has produced this war. Until there is some clarity on what is going to happen with the Assad family, whether he will depart the country, whether he will be relegated to some area of the country, that's the million-dollar question. I don't think there can be any sense of stability in Syria as long as that person and that political regime are still in power. The war will still continue in some form or another as long as that regime is around. So, I think that's the big question.

Of course, because of the diplomatic paralysis that we're facing right now, it doesn't seem as if that question is going to be resolved any time soon because Russia and Iran are in the driver's seat. The US government refuses to get involved directly on that issue with respect to Syria. So, I think this speaks to the… the biggest factor is really the question of the internal political settlement in Syria. If there can be some political settlement that has at least a semblance of legitimacy in the eyes of Syrians, that there can be some sense of a transition to something better, a process where there will be genuine self-determination for Syrians, a genuine sense of inclusiveness and political stability, then we can start to talk about reconstruction, rebuilding, reintegration, return of refugees, etcetera. Until then, those underlying issues are at the heart of this conflict, and they revolve around the political issues related to the house of Assad and the legacy of 45-year-old rule. With what has happened particularly over the last 5 years, unless we start dealing with those questions, any talk of a future Syria I think is completely irrelevant.

Sarah Canna: So, I struggle with this myself because when you think about the future of Syria, as you said, you hit this roadblock of, you know, is Assad going to stay or is he going to go. Do you have any sense of whether a political settlement can be reached with Assad in power?

Nader Hashemi: Yeah, he would have to go because he symbolizes all that has gone wrong in Syria over the past 5 years in terms of the war and also all that has gone wrong with Syria over the last 45 years in terms of the legacy of political authoritarianism, the individual figure of Assad. If he's still in power, even sharing power hypothetically or with his power diminished, he will be such a lightning rod of opposition because he embodies that in the eyes of the vast majority of Syrians, and I would argue to people in the

Arab and Islamic world, the embodiment of political tyranny. So, he would have to go, that person and his family. Now, what happens afterward? Will some remnant of the regime be allowed to stay or not? That's where we give in to difficult issues of interpretation and judgment. My understanding of Syria is that the country is now effectively run like in a mafia state. So, if you remove the mafia don at the top, all of the other ministers and people in positions of power are all so loyal to the mafia don so that if the mafia don leaves, then everything else collapses.

Now, having said that, there has to be, I think, when you talk about the future of Syria, a consideration and a set of built-in safeguards so that if Assad leaves that there are guarantees for minority protection, particularly among the 12% Alawites that are supporting the regime. The ruling family comes from that community, and they have legitimate fears of retribution and revenge should there be a transition to political power. That guarantee of protection of minority rights, broadly speaking, would have to be built in. Now, how that works itself out, what the arrangement will be, those are subject to debate, but in my view, this conflict cannot end and will not end as long as the figure of Assad and his ruling regime are still in power and control the military, the major institutions of the state. This is of course a big stumbling block because Russia and the United States and their respective allies don't agree on this, and Russia and Iran still I think mistakenly believe that you can have political stability and a future for Syria while the house of Assad still remains in power, and they're hoping to do this militarily and crush the opposition. Let's say they were able to crush the opposition and recapture Aleppo. I would argue that you would have a low intensity war of attrition that would carry on for decades, and if you just stop and think about it for a moment, this shouldn't be difficult to fathom. According to all of the human rights assessments, the Assad regime is overwhelmingly responsible for the vast majority of war crimes and crimes against humanity, totaling about half a million over the last 5 years. To think that the person responsible for that level of violence can be retained in power and that could preside over a period of stability is wishful thinking at best. He has to go, and as long as he doesn't go, this conflict will continue, either at a high intensity or a low intensity, but it certainly will continue.

Sarah Canna: Now, the difficult part of this question is how can we, the US, best affect positively the future of Syria? If you assume that the US interest here is in regional stability, you know, what can the United States do?

Nader Hashemi: That's a good question. Well, I think one problem now is the United States has a credibility problem in the eyes of most Syrians and in the broader region, but we want to just focus the conversation among Syrians right now. Syrians are deeply frustrated and angry and upset because as these atrocities have been taking place, as Aleppo has been besieged, US aircraft are flying in the same airspace that the Russian aircraft is and that the Syrian government aircraft is, bombing civilian targets, while the United States is not engaged and has no interest in stopping those atrocities. So, one, there's a sense that the United States in the past 5 years under President Obama did not want to do anything substantive to help a political transition or to help the process of political change. So, you talk to most Syrians today, they're very frustrated with the United States. So, that's one big problem; there's a credibility problem.

Assuming that we can get over that, what the United States I think can do and should do is the United States has to be on the side of the political aspirations for self-determination, for dignity, and for democracy that I think most Syrians aspire to. Right now, the United States doesn't have that reputation. Right, now the United States is viewed by many Syrians in a very confused way. They sort of see the United States striking a deal with Iran, and Iran is backing the dictator; they're unsure of what US intentions are. But broadly speaking, beyond those perception problems, I think the United States has an interest in a stable Syria because, as we've seen over the last 5 years, because Syria has become unstable, it has created a vacuum where ISIS has inserted itself, and it has created this terrorist state.

So, you know, the way that you deal with that question is there has to be a process in place in Syria where there is a political transition away from the old regime. There has to be a sense that Syrians have a voice in a future post-Assad regime, there's a sense of economic reconstruction, political stability, minority rights protection, and that people are not going to be living as second class citizens effectively as they have been under the Assad regime, where if you weren't part of the ruling apparatus, you were essentially disenfranchised. The United States has to be a part of that process, and because the United States is the biggest country, most powerful country still in the world, people, even Syrians who are critical of US foreign policy, still look to the United States for leadership. They see the United States very half-heartedly engaging with Russia, going to conferences while Russia is bombing hospitals and creating mayhem, that doesn't instill confidence and doesn't help the reputation of the United States in Syria.

Of course, there is a broader, deeper historical problem where the United States is viewed by most Arabs and Muslims as the inheritor of great power legacy and great power influence in the region. In other words, the United States is viewed as sort of the successor to British and French great power politics in the Middle East, and they don't view the United States as a country that is aligned with the popular aspirations of the people on the street, for democracy, for social justice, for dignity. They view the United States as striking deals with dictatorial regimes and pursuing an agenda that is at odds with the aspirations of the average person and that allows extremist groups like ISIS, like Al Qaeda, to exploit and recruit young people who see this chasm between when the United States rhetorically says it stands for, its values, and what it actually does in terms of pursuing its interests, which are, you know, allying itself with dictatorial regimes or not getting involved when there is mass atrocities. Extremist groups exploit this tension, this chasm between US values and US interests, and they're successful in recruiting some people who have no other choice.

So, there is I think long term things that the United States can be doing in terms of the stability of Syria, and that requires I think a fundamental reorientation of US foreign policy towards the region where it is more supportive of democratic transitions, political reform, democratization. In many ways, some of the things that president Obama said during the Arab spring uprisings where he gave several important speeches in 2011 sort of articulated those goals. Specifically, with respect to Syria, the United States I think can play a positive role if it sort of starts to champion what it has done in the past and in other violent conflicts where it is a voice for a process of transitional justice for the accountability of war crimes, for making sure that there is a judicial system in place that will try war criminals and bring them to trial and allow the Syrian society to start to heal again. Those types of things are something that the United

States has a lot of strength in based on its past record: the role in the Nuremburg trials, the support the United States gave for the international war tribunal in the former Yugoslavia, those types of things will go a long way in terms of increasing the prestige and the image that the United States has in the eyes of many Syrians.

Sarah Canna: Now, do you think that a unified Syria is the only future pathway that's going to result in stability? What about like a smaller, an Assad Syrian, a Sunni?

Nader Hashemi: Yeah, that's the big question these days, and I don't think there is any possibility of dividing up Syria and creating new states. Number one: because there is zero support in the international community for redrawing the borders despite what some people may think, and I don't think the problem in Syria as your question sort of implies is because the borders that were drawn were colonial borders and were illegitimate borders. Yes, they were colonial borders, and yes, they were in that sense illegitimate. However, the problem in Syria today is not because the borders were drawn on the wrong places on the map. The problem is what has been happening inside those borders by political leaders who have come to power in the post-colonial era. Having said that, if you talk to most Syrians today, the vast majority of them even on different sides of this conflict still identify with this sense of Syrian nationality. They are still proud to be Syrians. They still want to see a cohesive and united country. Now, where there is difference of opinion and where I think there is some room for reconfiguring the structure of politics in Syria is to keep the borders intact but to redraw the internal administrative borders so there can be more localized representation among the different groups that exist in Syria. I'm talking about specifically a federal type of arrangement where, for example, Syrian Kurds will have more autonomy in terms of the governing of their own affairs, or Syrian Alawites may be able to have their own sort of autonomous federal region, but within the framework and within the overarching architecture of an existing Syrian state that coincides with the current borders. That's I think where there is room for discussion and where questions of minority rights and representation can be accommodated, but trying to dismantle the Syrian state and redraw the borders along an Alawite state or a Sunni state, that's not in the cards. There's zero support for that internationally, and the main reason is because people fear the precedent of what that might mean for other countries if we start redrawing the borders. Internally the redrawing of the administrative borders along a federal system I think is where we should put our emphasis in terms of trying to solve some of the tensions until perhaps some future time when Syrians can overcome their sectarian differences, which are a result of this war and then perhaps among themselves agree on new administrative guidelines and structures of governing themselves. But I don't believe that the redrawing of the borders is really a serious option.

Sarah Canna: Now, I have one more question before I want Allison to have the chance to ask a couple of questions. Someone has mentioned that they are concerned that the Sunni population in Syria is just so exhausted by the war that they might be willing to forgo a fair settlement and just become part of Syria under Assad once again. Do you see that as a potential future?

Nader Hashemi: Absolutely, and Syrian people are no different than any other people. This has been a brutal war, and people are exhausted. Now, it's just a question of survival. But, if that were to happen, that would simply be a short term proposition because eventually, within a short period of time, the same

set of political grievances, the same set of frustrations that led to the uprising in March of 2011, will resurface again. It's basically suggesting now that Syrians are so exhausted of trying to break out of the jail that they were in that they are simply willing to go back into the prison system to recuperate. But, eventually, they're going to want what everyone else in the world wants, and that's a basic life of dignity where they have political representation, when there is a judicial system that functions with some resemblance of justice, where people can have the freedom to travel. The notion implied in this question is that somehow the best way out of this mess is to just try to convince Syrians to just go back into the collective prison that they were in under the house of Assad, and then we can all just sort of wash our hands and go home. That might be very tempting, and many Syrians might want that in the short term, but that's a guaranteed I think recipe for disaster in the medium and long term because the same sets of political grievances will inevitably resurface, and on top of that, we've got 5 years of a brutal borderline genocidal war. To think that the genocidal mastermind of this war who's overwhelmingly responsible for the vast majority of war crimes and crimes against humanity can reconstitute power and political legitimacy and by rule of force keep his society under control. Again, it might be a short term possibility, but that's going to eventually lead to reprisals, revenge, instability. There's no way that someone who has presided over this much bloodshed can be a force for stability. So, I think the premise of the question in my view is a complete non-starter.

Sarah Cana: Alright. On that note, Allison, did you have any questions that you would like to ask?

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Yes, actually, and thank you so much for your insight and really interesting views on this. I really wanted to ask you a little bit more about what happens after Assad goes. So, it's my understanding, and you yourself suggested that we have a sort of mafia-run state, right? So, should we not expect that there would be additional civil warfare even if Assad were to go tomorrow between the various groups within the Syrian opposition now, or do you think that would be such a relief that Nader Hashemi: No, I think that if Assad goes, you'll have another Libya, and that's perfectly understandable. Let's not forget the enveloping context here. This has been a war that has been far more bloody than Libya, far more bloody than Iraq; it is a war that has taken place against the backdrop of 40 years of extreme political tyranny and then the last 5 years of a borderline genocidal war. To expect that after the demise of the dictator that you're going to get all of these liberal-minded political actors agreeing to reconstitute a new Syria is wishful thinking. People are going to respond based on the recent political history that they're coming out of, and that's a political authoritarian regime, arguably of the worst sort that the Arab war has seen under the Assad family and then 5 years of a bloody and brutal, borderline genocidal war.

So, the forces that are going to come out of this, they are going to be at each other's throats. There's no reason to expect a transition to political stability, and that speaks to I think the bigger question that we cannot seriously envision a future Syria that is stable unless we have a very detailed and sophisticated plan in place for the day after. So, if Assad leaves, if he packs up and goes, what's the plan for political stability, stabilization, and a transition in the immediate aftermath of his demise? I think that's a very difficult question to answer, and it requires a lot of political thinking. It would require a serious international intervention of some sort to make sure that you don't have a situation that replicates what

we saw in Libya. There has to be a plan in place for a ___ by security forces that could then lead to a political process, but thinking that it's just a question of removing Assad and then Syria is going to transform itself into Sweden or Canada as some people implicitly think, just suggests that there's a complete disconnect from the reality of what's happening in Syria today.

So, the answer to the question is that if Assad leaves, that's not the end of the story. In many ways, that's the beginning of a new phase, and there has to be a serious concrete plan in place in order to guarantee that the situation doesn't go from extremely bad to arguably much worse in the aftermath of the collapse of the Assad regime. There has to be a detailed plan for someone to take political authority that has legitimacy, and there has to be a stabilization force. Now, who's going to compromise that stabilization force which troops which countries, no one has really investigated or talked about that yet, and I think that's where the conversation should be going.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Is there anybody or are there any characters now that you could see who might serve as that legitimate political leadership?

Nader Hashemi: No, I think that's something that ultimately in terms… if you're talking about political leadership. That's something that I think the Syrians themselves are going to have to determine, and I think that the way that that could be suggested is that there has to be a very clear plan that's announced well in advance of the demise of the Assad regime, this is how it's going to work. So, there will be a transitional authority whose job will simply be governing and trying to stabilize the country until we can get to a point where there can be an election that can represent the aspirations of the Syrians, and that sort of election would start to provide the political leadership that has some sense of political legitimacy. But there's not one particular individual now I suspect that's, given my reading of Syrian public opinion, there will be a multiple number of potential political parties or leaders that could contest for leadership, and the best option at least would be some sort of national governing coalition that represents the sort of broadest, sort of swath of Syrian public opinion to preside over a period of political transition. But no, there's not one individual that can take over, and I don't think there is one individual that I can finger at this time.

So, it's less about individuals, and it's more about sending a message to the Syrian people, but now that the old dictatorship is gone away, there will be an opportunity within the foreseeable future for the Syrian people to exercise their voice and to elect their political leaders who will then be accountable to them, and if they don't measure up, they will then be subject to democratic checks and balances. That has to be built into the plan, and then we have to leave it up to the Syrian people to see who they would elect as a leadership.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Okay, so one last question on this, and thank you so much for indulging me, but you're suggesting that the plan needs to be…the US role really could be in helping just forge a plan before moving forward, not determine the plan, not shape the plan, but helping the party to form it themselves?

Nader Hashemi: Yes.

Allison Astorino- Courtois: So, it seems to me that that would then require us to do one of the things that you, and this is just practicalities… one of the things that you suggested was detrimental to sort of the perception of the US as an honest broker in the area, which is to come to some agreement with Iran on what's going to happen at least in sort of western areas of Syria, right? So basically, what we're telling the US government here is, "Okay, you need to suck it up, and people in Syria are going to feed into their already suspicious view of the US, but this is what has to happen." Do I have that correct?

Nader Hashemi: I see what you're saying, but I think there are still things that can be done. I think if, in the aftermath of the election in November, assuming Hillary Clinton gets in, if she comes and announces that she is articulating a new US foreign policy towards Syria that breaks with the old policy, the United States will now be on the side of the Syrian people and strongly support the agreed upon peace plan articulated in UN Security Council Resolution 2245. The United States is now going to be a voice for peace and for political transition in Syria, and it actually demonstrates that it is going to stand up to the Russian position, stand up to the Iranian position, and try to identify both rhetorically and practically with the aspirations of most Syrians. Then, I think the Syrian people are going to start to judge the United States based on what it's actually doing, and so if the United States provides some sort of no-fly zone or safe zone for Syrian civilians as Hillary Clinton has said, that's going to affect hearts and minds. If the United States' aircraft are simply not going to fly over Aleppo and watch the devastation down below but perhaps send a message to Syrian aircraft that if you're going to bomb Aleppo, you're going to come up against our aircraft, and we're not going to allow you to fly in this no-fly zone. I think that if you take just one concrete example, if Hillary Clinton were to announce that we are having a no-fly zone over a section of Syria, this is going to be a safe zone where Syrian civilians can go where they'll be protected from Syrian regime bombardment. That immediately would have a huge transformative effect in how many Syrians view the United States.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Unfortunately, US's own strategic interest would argue against that course of action, right?

Nader Hashemi: Right. That's the positon of the Obama administration, right. Although, Hillary Clinton has articulated a different vision, and there is a debate, as you know better than I do. I was just watching Charlie Rose the other night, and he is just one voice among many where he had a long, detailed interview (it's worth looking at) on these specific issues. He was interviewing General Petraeus, and General Petraeus was going into a detailed analysis of what could happen and might happen that would change the political balance of power in Syria and would lead to something better, and he was saying basically what I just articulated.

So, I think also that the role that the US can play under a new administration, if the United States were to show that it's actually using its power and influence on the global stage to bring the world together, to organize, let's say, an international conference on reconstruction and economic development in Syria. The United States leads the way in bringing together the best experts in international criminal law to establish a war crimes tribunal for accountability in justice, and the United States is seen as being the leading voice in organizing and bringing the international community together, of course, ideally, better under the auspices of the United Nations, which would give it more legitimacy. That type of activity that

the United States did play post-1995 in the context of Bosnia, where the United States effectively laid out a political strategy, mobilized the international community, used its military to sort of assure that the different parties were in compliance with the contact group plan as it was called back then and then set up a period of… it had forces on the ground, it led to a process of transition, and also at the international level, it presided over a war crimes tribunal, which was an international war crimes tribunal, but the United States was one of the leading parties in making sure that that was established. That's a potential model there that I think is worth investigating. It's not a direct parallel, but I think there's lessons to be learned from the conflict in Bosnia that also apply to the question of Syria.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Thank you so much, and I will hold the other one million questions that I have for you for another time; I don't want to use up all of your day.

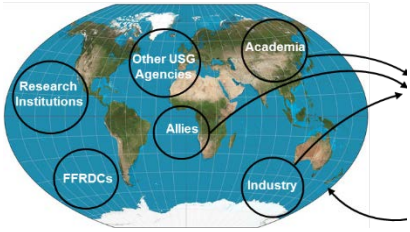
Sarah Canna: So, I said we would take half an hour, and we're at that point. So, what we're going to do is I'm going to make a transcript of this conversation, and I'll forward it to you if you'd like to review it. Allison and I are going to collate all of the responses. We have a number of people who are contributing to this question; they're going to be put into a report, and Allison and I are going to write an executive summary, a 1-2 page… a review of what everyone has said and the key points, and you'll get a copy of that. As we get any feedback from CENTCOM, we'll be sure to forward it to you.

Nader Hashemi: Wonderful, thanks. Good luck.

Nader Hashemi

Nader Hashemi is the Director of the Center for Middle East Studies and an Associate Professor of Middle East and Islamic Politics at the Josef Korbel School of International Studies at the University of Denver. He obtained his doctorate from the Department of Political Science at the University of Toronto and previously was an Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow at Northwestern University and a Visiting Assistant Professor at the UCLA Global Institute. His intellectual and research interests lie at the intersection of comparative politics and political theory, in particular debates on religion and democracy, secularism and its discontents, Middle East and Islamic politics, democratic and human rights struggles in non-Western societies and Islam-West relations. He is the author of *Islam, Secularism and Liberal Democracy: Toward a Democratic Theory for Muslim Societies* (Oxford University Press, 2009) and co-editor of *The People Reloaded: The Green Movement and the Struggle for Iran's Future* (Melville House, 2011), *The Syria Dilemma* (MIT Press, 2013) and *Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East* (Oxford University Press, 2017). He is frequently interviewed by PBS, NPR, CNN, Al Jazeera, Pacifica Radio and the BBC and his writings have appeared in the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto), CNN.com among other media outlets.

14 February 2017



SMA Speaker Event, ISIS & Religion & Nation-Building in the Middle East, Dr. Joshua Landis, University of Oklahoma

1 February 2017

Speaker: Dr. Joshua Landis, University of Oklahoma

Biography: Joshua Landis is Director of the Center for Middle East Studies and Professor at the University of Oklahoma's College of International Studies. He writes "Syria Comment," a daily newsletter on Syrian politics that attracts over 100,000 readers a month. Dr. Landis travels frequently to Washington DC to consult with government agencies and speak at think tanks. Most recently he has spoken at the Woodrow Wilson Institute, Brookings Institute, USIP, Middle East Institute, and Council on Foreign Relations. He was educated at Swarthmore (BA), Harvard (MA), and Princeton (PhD). He has lived over 14 years in the Middle East and speaks Arabic and French fluently. He has lived four years in Syria, and spent most summers in Damascus until the revolution began.

***Transcript Prepared By**: Apptek and Sarah Canna, NSI*

[START OF TRANSCRIPT]

Joshua Landis: I will try to give some background to what I think is happening through my "Great Sorting Out" thesis and then come back to where I see the situation today and the possibilities for president Trump. My main point is that Assad is winning today and I presume he is going to continue to win and push back against the rebel territories. There's a new security architecture that's being established in the Levant states, which include Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq. All of these states are dominated by Shiite forces that are pro Iranian.

This new security architecture that is allied to Iran and to Russia will be hard to undo. I imagine it will persist for several decades to come. It means that Russia has a new position in the Levant and the Northern Middle East. It has successfully extended its sphere of influence to its southern. And we've seen Turkey bow to this new reality because Syria's rebel forces are extremely fragmented. Sunni forces in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon are in chaos and cannot resist the power of better organized Shiites.

It will be hard for those who joined rebel forces to reestablish some sort of modus vivendi with the state in Syria and Iraq.

The more they try to resist, I believe, the more likely they are to be ethnically cleansed or driven out of their homes. Many Sunnis in Syria believe that a genocide is being carried out against them. The parts of Syria that fell under rebel control have been badly brutalized. I would like to touch on that in the end.

No fly zones: I think they're by and larger a bad idea because they commit the United States to a long-term policing role in Syria that could easily become a nation building role. They do have a short-term benefit to some people, who will find protection inside them and receive money, education and medical assistance from foreign sources.

Kurds: I think the US is likely to deepen its relationship with the Kurds in Syria particularly as the US pushes forward with the battle in Raqqah. That relationship will have to be balanced against interests with Turkey and keeping Syria one state. These five issues -- Assad winning, new security architecture, fragmented rebels, no fly zones, and Kurds— are the key issues I will come back to.

Let me start out by trying to do a little history here. What are the main drivers of what's going on in Syria today?

I would say is what I've called the great sorting out. I'd like to make a comparison between the nation building process in the states that were carved out of the Ottoman lands and those carved out of the great multi-ethnic empires of central Europe.

Why Central Europe and why do I make the argument that it's a useful comparison? I argue it is useful because the World War I is often known as the empire destroying war. The Russian empire, German, Austro Hungarian, Ottoman Empire were all destroyed by nation states. In the Paris peace conference in 1919, new borders were drawn up all way from Poland down to Palestine. Peoples were stuck together in these new states that didn't necessarily want a live together. and every one of the states from Poland to Palestine, there was a failure--a failure

to produce a common, organic political community where people trusted each other and could develop a constitution and common rules.

This led to the great sorting out as I've called it in central Europe, which explodes in World War II. Where the people are changed. The borders aren't changed to fit the peoples of the region, the peoples are changed to fit the borders. And that means a country like Poland, which was only 64-65 percent Polish before World War II was 100 percent Polish by the end of World War II. Three million Polish Jews were destroyed. Seven million Germans were expelled from Poland or killed and I'm including the East Prussia in this, just north of Poland, so in overall central Europe thirty one million people were ethnically cleansed.

Between the years a 1944 and 1948, at the end the war--after the war had already been called--that includes about twelve to thirteen million Germans scattered about the Austro Hungarian empire and other lands as well. If we take a little country like Czechoslovakia, thirty two percent minorities before the war, all of them are wiped out during the war, in particular the Germans in Sudetenland, three million Germans, who were ethnically cleansed from Czechoslovakia.

But even then Czechs and Slovaks couldn't live together ultimately and decide on their velvet divorce after the fall of communism. but right down central Europe, you get to this big sorting out and we've seen it continue more recently with Yugoslavia blowing up. Tito, I would argue, is a like a Saddam Hussein or an Assad—a little Ottoman Sultan keeping his land, multi ethnic empire today. When he dies, it explodes and seven nation states are created and that is the exception where the international community changes the borders in order to fit the people rather than letting the people be sorted out to fit the new borders.

Now in the Ottoman lands, to Anatolia, Anatolia was twenty percent Christian in 1914. By the end of Turkish national consolidation under Ataturk, 1922-23, all those Christians were wiped out. We know what happened the Armenian Christians—1.5 million in the east who were accused of being a fifth column for the Russians. They were distrusted and driven out.

The Greek Orthodox on the other side were accused of being a fifth column for the Greeks who invaded and moved almost to Ankara. The Turks wiped them out and deported them all to Greece, a big population exchange. So Turkey goes through this ethnic cleansing process in its national consolidation. This is about nation building.

And I think what we're seeing in Syria and Iraq is also about nation-building. That is in a sense what ISIS is trying to do and it has failed to do because the west and

local powers are going to chop it up and dispatch ISIS. So that effort to build a new sectarian state will have failed.

But let's go to our sides beyond Turkey. Of course, turkey's got to digest their Kurds at that's the big undigested minority. for minorities in all this process, it's long and bloody. it's a zero sum game. They stand a high chance of getting wiped out and driven out as they did in central Europe.

But if we look a little Cyprus with our next model, you see how before the Turkish invasion, in the 70s, Muslim communities, which are shown in green, are sprinkled about the island and mix in with Christians. After the Turkish invasion, rise of nationalism, all the Muslims live in the north, all the Christians live in the south. It 's completely sorted out and that's what's happening.

I'm going skip over Lebanon because it is complicated and go to Iraq where, of course, the United States swans into Iraq in 2003 thinking it's going to wipe out the state dictatorship, replace it with power sharing democracy, etc. What it does is it unleashes this great sorting out process; Kurds, Shiite, Sunnis begin to duke it out over who owns Iraq.

The Sunnis who have owned Iraq or had been the dominant power in Iraq twenty percent minority get cast down to through deBaathification and disbanding the army. And they of course fight not to be marginalized and to regain their authority and, in doing so, they joined al Qaida, which had the deep back bench, expertise, all sorts of things, and we know how the story goes.

The United States helps Shiite destroy al Qaeda and to form a new government but of course once the US leaves, ISIS comes back in 2014, threatens this American plan for Iraq. America has to go back in to deal with ISIS, which were still doing. So in a sense, we're helping once again Shiites to build up their army and to destroy Iraqi cities, whether it's Fallujah, Tikrit, etc., which we know how that's going. It's not ethnic cleansing because presumably the Sunnis will come back to their cities, but it looks pretty brutal, and many Sunnis are leaving Iraq. Certainly the ones who collaborated with the ISIS need to get out of there because their future could be pretty bleak.

Let me switch over. I could look at Palestine which I shoehorned into the model of nation building. And there the minority of interest in every one of eleventeen states, it's worth noting that because of colonial occupation, their constitution is a little bit different from central Europe. Because the minorities come to power in every level eleventeen state because the colonial powers in the interwar period divide and conquer, help the minorities, give them a leg up.

And when they leave after the Second World War, the minorities take power in every single Levantine tea state. The Marionites get the lion's share in Lebanon; Sunnis through the Baath party gets the lion's share in Iraq. The Alawites are going to be in Syria and it's the Jews in Palestine.

The Jews are only about five percent of the Palestinian population in 1850 before the rise of Zionism. By 1914, that's about 15 percent and by 1948, after the holocaust, Jews are about a third of the population in Palestine.

By the time the British leave, Palestinians believe that they're going to be able to dominate this Jewish minority and ruled Palestine. Of course, they lose the '48 war rather spectacularly. Almost two-thirds are driven out of their homes and become refugees, and the Jews are able to gather and they're the only minority in the Middle East which are able to turn themselves into a majority in or to dominate Palestine. Of course to be fair to the Jews, they have already been sorted out in both Europe and the Middle East.

Where big Jewish populations scattered from Baghdad to Yemen in Aleppo and Damascus are all cleansed. And half of the population of Israel today is Middle Eastern Jews. So this is a great sorting out. There are no more Jews left in the Middle East. They're all in Israel were gone to the west. Same with central Europe.

So Palestine fits this model to a degree. This leaves us in Syria. And of course we, I think everybody is pretty familiar with the Syrian story. The Alawites get a leg up by the French because they joined the French army in Syria in greater numbers than others. Lots of minorities join whether it's Armenians or Druze or even Sunnis from the countryside turning against Sunnis in the city. All are overrepresented in the Syrian army when the French leave in 1946. The Alawites will make their way up the ranks.

By 1955, they're already 65 percent of the non commissioned officers are Alawite. But with repeated coups and failed coups, they go up the ranks until the 1970s when Assad takes over and is able to stabilize Alawite domination over the security apparatus.

Of course the face of the regime--the Sunni parliament the prime minister and so forth--it's Sunni. The economy is largely dominated by Sunnis, but the security structure underneath it all--the Praetorian Guard--is Alawite at the top. And that's the way it remains of course is challenged with the Hama and the uprising of the Muslim brotherhood in the late 1970s going to the big climax to 1982 when the hama uprising and the Muslim Brotherhood is destroyed. But that remains the architecture of Syria, the political architecture, until the Arab spring in 2011.

By that time minorities have a decrease in overall weight. Christians, who were 15 percent of the Syria population after World War II, have become less than 5 percent by the time 2011 comes along. And Sunnis have expanded through higher birth rate. So Sunni Arabs are 70 percent of Syria at the outset of the Arab spring.

They take courage watching what happens in North Africa and believed it's their chance to take power. And many other people were feeling oppressed by this very corrupt and oppressive regime, they rise up. Of course the Alawite and the Assad regimes see this as extremely dangerous. The zero sum game for them. If Sunnis take over, they believe it's going to be Islamists. They're taking out a cell a month or every several weeks--jihadist cells. Their security people are telling them the jihadis will dominate if we fall from power and our necks are on the block. So they shoot instead of negotiate, and we get civil war that we know.

Today Assad is winning. Why? many of us thought that he would lose, if not immediately, then over a war of attrition would lose because Alawites are only twelve percent of the population and that they just couldn't put up enough men, that the regime was not that popular, and they'd be mauled. But we were wrong. We were wrong because the borders of Syria are not fixed. This became a regional war. There are more Shiite Arabs between Lebanon and Iraq than there are Sunni Arabs.

So the Shia dominate and Hezbollah sent in its forces. Al Haq, another Iraqi militia sent in their Shiite forces, Iran sent in military. But the Shiites rallied, and Syria had better friends than did the Sunni rebels.

That's the major reason, and most people haven't done the math that Shiite Arabs are majority in this area, which suggest they can hang on for a long time. Even thought they're a very small minority in Syria, even if we had in Druze and other religious minorities, they are only twenty percent of Syria, so it does seem like a precarious balance. It 's not a recipe for stable Syria.

On the other hand, what other factors have led to the success and come back of Assad? An important factor is that the Sunni community is extremely divided. The Sunni elites, the business elites, stood by Assad by and large. The US put sanctions on them thinking it could split them from the Assad regime. That did not happen. It didn't happen largely because the rebels were much worse for the wealthy than the Assad regime. Certainly the Assad regime is not loved by wealthy Sunnis. Alawites are seen as country bumpkins who've taken over—the muwaffadeen, (interlopers from the outside) as they are called.

But, they can only eat a portion of the riches earned by the Sunni elite. This is the nature of the corrupt business deals made by the President's cousin, Rami

Mahaluf, who is know as Mr. 10%. The Alawites need the Sunni elite, however, and cannot eliminate them. The rebels do not need the old Sunni elite and would happily take all their riches. We see how this occurred in Aleppo where over a thousand factories were completely stripped of all their goods and machinery, which was sold off in Turkey. Rebels accused wealthy Syrians as collaborators and showed them no mercy. Facebook lists were made of all the rich people in the major cities who were seen as collaborators. Rebels and activists were encouraged to kill or imprison them because they had worked closely with the regime.

If you got rich in Syria, chances were you had to work closely with the regime, even if you dislike it. So the lesson of the uprising for the rich was that it was better to keep some of their money and stick with the Assad regime than to defect to the rebels and possibly lose all their money. The rebels might steal your car, your TV and kidnap your kid. We saw all of that happen in rebel controlled areas. Because social dividing lines in Syria separate city from countryside, rich from poor and one religious community from another, many factors made it difficult for the rebellion to win over key populations. I wasn't just sectarian.

Why else did they lose? The rebels lost, in part, because radical Islamists emerged as the most powerful militias. America abandon the rebels because ISIS, Nusrah, Ahrar al Sham, and other Salafist militias became the most powerful military factions.

Each of America's three major strategies for building up rebels to overthrow the Assad regime failed because of the strength of the Islamists and fragmentation and weakness of the "moderates." The first strategy was to build up Salim Idriss as head of the Supreme Military Council. The second strategy was to provide arms directly to militia leaders inside Syria such as Jamal Maarouf and his Syrian Revolutionaries' Front or the Hazm Movement. The third strategy was to bring vetted individuals out of Syria for a train and equip operation completely constructed by the Department of Defense. Each of these efforts failed miserably. The pro-American forces were conquered by the Salafists. All American arms were stolen from the moderates and taken by the radicals that America was theoretically trying to defeat. So over and over again, America saw its strategies fail. Ultimately this led the Obama administration to turn away from arming the Sunni rebels and to move toward supporting Kurdish troops which were more reliable and motivated by the desire to establish an independent Kurdish nation. Syrian activists accused Obama of feckless leadership and accused him of doing too little too late. They argued that more money and arms would have killed allowed the moderates to unite in order to kill the radicals, killed Assad, and taken over Syria.

The argument of the activists and Syrian opposition is extremely improbable. I think that 's partly why the Obama administration didn't try to go down that road. People in Washington saw it as a recipe for getting sucked into a Syrian quagmire and losing. But of course that meant that ISIS and radical Islamist militias grew.

Let me just stop here for a second and say what does this mean? This picture that I've drawn of the great sorting out? And nation building process that is akin to what happened central Europe where minorities were ethnically cleansed? And you get a core, national, ethnic identity around which the nation forms, whether it 's Czech, Slovak, Pole, Hungarian, and so forth and all the others are either completely subordinated or actually purged from the nation.

Syria and Iraq are going through potential purges. The minority in Syria look down that road and thought we're going to get wiped out. Now they won. But it's very unstable. What will be the future of the Sunnis? And if we look at the slide of ISIS at its maximum in 2015, you had giant black territory that stretches from Baghdad to Aleppo. Conquering much of rural Sunni world and urban Sunni world in Iraq. ISIS tried to make a state, a Sunni state.

Now the world turned against it and said you can't do that because you're erasing the border. It could be too much trouble for the Middle East. And we're not going to question borders. The United States has single mindedly been trying to destroy ISIS, reestablish the border between Iraq and Syria, and subordinate the Sunnis to Shiites. now course it doesn't say that's what it 's doing but that is what America is doing because it's helping the Shiite dominated army and government of Baghdad and the militias to destroy the Sunni cities. Over conquer them and hopefully fold the Sunnis back into some kind of Shiite dominated Iraq. Russia is doing precisely what America is doing in Iraq. It's doing it in Syria. It 's helping a Shiite dominated regime destroy Sunni rebels and re-establish its authority over the state of Syria.

Now the United States maintains our policy is that Iran is a bad, malevolent power that is thrusting its influence through the middle east like tentacles of a an octopus. That's our stated attitude toward Iran, that we should be containing Iran. That's what all our politicians say, that we should contain Iran. but our military strategy is diametrically opposed 180 degrees to our stated political talking point because we're helping Iranian influenced in the region destroy Sunni Arabs that are theoretically allied with our allies, whether it's at Arabian Gulf countries or with Israel.

Turkey: So we are helping Iran spread its influence over this new Shiite crescent--this new architecture that is being laid down by Iran and Russia. Is that a bad

thing? Well it's helping the United States destroy ISIS. And Iran is our ally. The Shiites are our ally in destroying Salafist rebel groups in Iraq and Syria.

We try to pretend that we're doing something different, but that's what we're doing. It seems to me it's pretty straightforward and that ends up with the Middle East that's divided between Iranian Shiite zone in the north and the Sunni dominated zone in the south. And the United States is helping to affirm that Sunni zone by helping the Saudis destroyed the Houthis and before that Bahrain, which of course suppress its Shia.

This gets us to our conclusion where I am going to touch on our five little points. I've now concluded with a point of why I see a new security architecture. I think that should Saudi Arabia, the US, and others continue to support Sunni rebel groups with arms, that the chance of ethnic cleansing goes up because they will be seen as a fifth column stabbing the nation in the back, which is the way they're both described in both Baghdad and Damascus.

And I can't see a way that arming Sunni rebels in either country is going to lead to success. They're very fragmented and polarized and now that leaves us with no fly zones. No fly zones is another way to establish mini-Sunni states in Syria. and what I would see them becoming and the only way I can see them in taking root would be if the united states supported turkey in establishing a no fly zone north of Aleppo in the region said it's already conquered. And is helping Sunni rebel groups re-form under Turkish umbrella to separate the Kurds from Kobani and Afrin. And the united states could expand that, help the Turks expand that theoretically down towards Idlib to incorporate the rebel groups there to wash out al Qaeda and other Salafist groups that America does not like and to rule over this Sunni area rather than allowing Assad to reconquer it.

I think Assad would re conquered a given time. Of course, he's weak, so it'll take time. But he's taking a village after village and he, I presume, he would do it eventually. But the Turks could be convinced to push down into that area.

Now that would be taking on Russia and Assad. But if America wanted to make a big show of force, it could perhaps establish this kind of buffer zone and mini Sunni state in the north of Syria. A southern no fly zone could also be established along the Jordanian and Israeli borders, which would then become in a sense, buffer zones for those two countries to keep ISIS and AQ away from their borders, perhaps for Jordan to push Syrian refugees back into Syria and get the international community to pay for them rather than having Jordan pay for them.

That's the danger of the safety zones is that they become permanent American supported regions. Assad would never agree to them. And they become wards of

the United States and the international community, which would have to educate and feed them, kind of like the set up in Haiti or the West bank. That's the danger, the down side, because Assad is certainly not going to welcome them. But that's how I would envisage these safety zones.

Kurds: The Kurds' protection. That could be a very delicate situation because of course turkey is furious at US help. The PYG and Rojava.

On the other hand, America has, in a sense, committed. The way I understand turkey's move towards Russia is that Erdogan is prioritizing. He wants to stop the emergence of a contiguous Kurdish state and to limit Kurdish autonomy in northern Syria. The way to do that is by agreeing and Assad and the Russians. Trading: we won't support the rebels against you any more if you can see your way to imposing your rule back over the Kurds, keeping the Kurds from being a armed camp for the PKK and the Turkish Kurds. If Syria can do that--if it has the muscle and power and Russia can help limit Kurdish economy, Turkey will not support rebels and could eventually move out of Syria.

This would of course force the Kurds to make a deal with Assad. It would push the Kurds back towards Assad. And that 's what I see happening. So the big wild card is America's role in this. The Kurds will look to America to soften the Assad touch and to preserve autonomy against both the Turks and Syria. That's going to take a lot of delicate diplomacy. Let me finish there and open up the question and answer.

To sum up, I see a great sorting out, a very difficult situation. In Iraq, I don't see the Sunnis coming back with much power all because Shia are sixty percent. Kurds already have their de facto state in a sense. And the Sunnis will have to keep their heads down under Shiite authority.

In Syria, much more difficult situation. Today that Sunnis are largely defeated. They're going have to put up with the Assad regime dominating over them. I presume that Assad will take much of eastern Syria back once the United States has finish softening up ISIS territory. That is, if the United States doesn't fire up the Kurds to take a lot of that like in Raqqah. But I don't think the Kurds want to do that, it would be very difficult for the United States to get them to do it. And ultimately, the Arab majority areas are likely to fall back under Assad control. So that's the way I see things happening. The Syrian side of things is not stable, but today it has big advantage with Russian Iranian Shiite domination over a very fragmented and weakened Sunni population. Thank you

Question 1: Right on the other side of Iran, is Afghanistan, which is a very dominant Sunni majority with Shia being very much a minority. I realize that Afghanistan is considered to be in Asia, but does that fit into this discussion at all?

Joshua Landis: It did in the sense that Saudi Arabia and America used jihadists in order to undermine secular Russian soviet support and this turned it into al Qaeda land, if you will, and Taliban land. And an Iran has been trying to undermine Taliban along with United States. We see, in a sense a similar lineup, with the United States ally itself with Iran in Afghanistan as it has done in Iraq, which means that Iran has become an important balance and important partner in the war on terror**.** I guess that it makes it very difficult to contain Iran. Sunnis are 85 percent of the Muslim population. They are dominate. Sunnis in the Arab world have always looked at it as a Sunni world as it was during the Ottoman Empire.

Sunnis dominated in every area in the Arab world where Shiites are a minority like in Lebanon, in Yemen, in Bahrain, in Iraq. Shiites were the dirt farmers, they were the dirt famers, the underprivileged by and large. This is of course a gross generalization. They didn't serve—they weren't supposed to serve in the Ottoman army. They were discriminated against in Aleppo. They were protected, but discriminated against. This drive for dominance in the north is driven in part by a civil rights movement--civil rights but not try to make too many comparisons United States--but they feel very aggrieved and very discriminated against, which they were. We see that in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. There's Sunni chauvinist where they say that Shiites aren't legitimate Muslims and they want don't to recognize them as a religion that is different but equal. And the Middle East is in turmoil because of it. It's very easy for Iran to penetrate and gain support among the Shiite populations because they do feel so aggrieved. And the Sunnis equally feel horrified, that it is unnatural that Iran should have this kind of influence. They see it as a conspiracy that is undermining Islam.

Question 2: A question about the Syrian army. You said the leadership is Shia and the rank and file is primarily Sunni. My understanding is the 70-year between the Syrian army and the Russians, is still there. That army still looks to Russia as its partner may not look at Iran as favorably as you think. So how do you see the dynamics of the Army dominated by the Alawite minority feeling in alignment with Russia but feeling uncomfortable with Iran? How do you see that relationship working out?

Joshua Landis you know, Iran has tried to build up the popular forces, popular militias based on its own experience in the Iran-Iraq war and it did the same thing in Iraq with Shiite militias. But of course Shiites in Iraq are twelver Shiites. They share the same religion and they're the majority. so Iran can and in some ways out flank the Baghdad government by developing these militias that are trained by Iran, helped

by Iran, and it allows Iran to divide and rule in Iraq--gives it a lot of ability to pressure and leverage against the government in Baghdad. It 's tried to do something similar in Syria by developing popular militias. The trouble is the popular militias in Syria are not Shiite. There are some Shi'ites, but they are only one percent of the population—twelver Shiites. Alawites do not identify as twelve Shiites in any way. They have a common cultural world. In other words, they love Ali, they love Hussein, they feel a common distrust of Sunnis and they're very grateful to Iran for support. But they don't like Iran's imperious religious nature. Iran is trying to build, trying to convert people to twelverism and they don't like that. They see as arrogant. Their religion is very different. They don't follow the five pillars of Islam. Even if one goes back a little historically, in 47, a year after independence 14 Alawites traveled to Iraq to go to Najaf. None of them were able to graduate. They were all forced to convert to Shiism. They were not seen as a bona fide Muslims. So Iran looks at Alawites with the same disdain as the Sunnis do. It's a lesser disdain, but there is a deep religious ambivalence and distrust between the two communities which does lead to the Alawites looking towards the Russians and feeling that the Russians are very important backers who can balance this Iranian influence. And you're right, in that sense; I see this as a balancing game. But of course they have so many common interests. Lot of opposition activists and American policy people try to look for deep divisions within the regime between the pro Iranian and pro Russia factions, stuff like that. The thing is they have been able to cooperate very well together. We've seen that, you know, both in the Hariri murder and other things, there has been lots of pressures put on the regime. Activists have consciously thought they would begin fighting each other and kill each other. They haven't done that. They managed to work out their differences because they have such common, important goals. And they will all be destroyed should they fall apart. So I see those important divisions, but I don't see them as deal breakers.

Questions 3: I really liked your approach and how you take on the comparability between the Ottoman and then the post Austrio Hungarian division and other regions to show the category of analysis that show how it transcends, in some ways, time and space, which is sort of one of the challenges in social science and history. So having said that, taking a look at this from a conflict resolution standpoint, what the research we sees it leads to the conclusion that you're presenting and that is that negotiated settlements tend not to be very durable. And the things that bring lasting peace tend to be decisive victory, fortunately though at the cost of genocide or are things close to it. So when you're talking about the great sorting out, recognizing that the difficulties inherent in it and yet it often seems the inevitability of it. Certainly it can be moderated, mitigated, and reduced in some places but you've highlighted several positions that that simply exists regardless of our capacity to influence them. But if that's the case I'd ask you to consider and comment on the possibility of increasing localization--that is national oversight

but over greater localization of democracy instead of trying to build this large national compact. So we have two kind of opposing ends of that: the somewhat early success in Bosnia which now there's tensions that may be breaking down, but at least it last twenty years. And then the longer success of India. So what do you think about that as a possibility in Iraq as a kind of way that it should jump start or at least go end this round of building of a multi ethnic state identity.

Josh Landis: That's a superb question and they are a ton of think tans in DC who have come up with proposals in the last several months. Many were designed for Hillary, but some may have been designed by Gulf States who do not want to see a Shiite win here. And they're trying to come up with, and everybody is trying to come up with, how do you then push federalism? Can America take the lead in trying to limit Assad's ability impose the writ of the Syrian army over big swaths of Syria? And we've seen several proposals that suggest you could have five different autonomous zones: one in the south, in Idlib, a Kurdish zone, but all that means special forces helping to kill Assad if he decides to push in to dominate the way he always does with a rather centralizing mission. In Iraq, it would take the same thing and we're not going to do. It seems to me that the United States is not going to play that role. First of all, it would take tons micromanaging and a commitment for ever. Because Baghdad and Damascus are so clearly more powerful. Neither of those two capitals is going to put up with that. They're going to see this as rank imperialism with and interference in their sovereign governance. The un is likely to see it in the same way because of course is it would be legal in the sense to keep special forces there in order to help Sunni local governments be maintained. That's the difficulty I see. I can see how in theory it 's a great idea but America has had their chance to create a Sunni state where ISIS built one. To try to get rid of ISIS but to preserve a big Sunni state that stretched between Baghdad and Aleppo and decided not to do it. and I don't see where it 's going to find a happy…I think that the Shiites chauvinism in both these capitals is going to make life very difficult for those Sunni tribes and Sunni areas that went over to ISIS and now is going to be taken back. There is going to be deep distrust for everybody. We're going to be seen as possibly having collaborated with ISIS. It 's not going to be happy. We watched all the specials from front line doing a beautiful job of showing what the battle of Mosul was like last night and you could just see the deep distrust and it will be hard to overcome. the best hope in my book would be to bring the war to an end with some kind of Shiite domination but that you don't get further uprising and that some kind of modus vivendi gets worked out at least in Iraq. In Syria it's going to be very troublesome because having the Assad regime continue to rule there is dangerous but not having it would lead to even greater chaos. But it's a conundrum because I don't see a good, soft landing for this regime.

Question 4: I'm an airman and I have to say that most Airmen agree with this "no fly zone" idea would be a massive headache. The question, which relates to the last question that the US elected not to push this idea of Sunni state, which was partly done, I think, because of domestic pressure – they see all the refugees and say we need to do something. I suspect the same kind of pressure will continue to go with that instability. Any thoughts on how we might at least reduce that level of

instability or at least the refugee problem to a point where US population doesn't feel that we need to do something to try to solve this problem, misery we're seeing.

Josh Landis: This opens up the question of what will the US policy be towards the Assad regime, which will presumably survive. Do we turn our back on the Assad regime and say let Russia and China in others rebuild Syria because they own it now. They fought for it. They won, but they're going to have to pay to rebuild. I think there 's a lot of sentiment in that favor to essentially turn our backs and not to deal with Assad in any way because he's a dictator who killed his own people. I think that's a mistake. I understand why one would do it: because you can uphold your principles of not dealing with dictators, human rights, and so forth. But ultimately you've got all the Syrian people. How do you put them back? How do you get Syrian refugees to go home? Even though Assad is there. It seems to me the US can use its leverage, which is considerable in the sense that, yes, we've lost the war and Russia and Iran are the top dogs but we got sanctions. And the west has sanctions imposed on Syria that are very brutal and that have brought its economy to its needs. Assad needs to get out of those sanctions if he wants to rebuild his country. And there is where America's leverage comes. It seems to me that what America could do is trade sanctions relief for certain reforms inside Syria. First, the most important would be in prisons. We know what a terrible killing zone prisons are, where the torture and so forth occur. if the red cross the ICRC could be allowed into the prison to catalog all the prisoners and the visit them at certain times a year just to keep track and to limit the amount of torture and terrible things that are happening in those prisons. It seems to me that America could trade for something like that. Of course what that does is to legitimize Assad, which will be extremely difficult for any administration to do. but those sorts of things --allowing international community back in to build schools and to help with hospitals--health care, schools, prisons-- would help refugees go home and would help mitigate the down side for rebel areas to give up and go back under the Assad regime--offering them asylum and amnesty. If one could police that and follow these people who are accepting amnesty, make sure they are not put into prison, and are not abused, that would be a way to trade that for some kind of sanctions relief it seems to me and it would mitigate some of the worst abuses and it would help to solve this refugee problem because that refugee problem it's going to be explosive. We know what happened with the Palestinians and they were only 800,000 in 1948. Of course today, there are 4-5 million that are under the care of the UN Relief and Works Agency. Refugees from Syria are going to be an explosive radical force in a decade from now as young men grow up in a hopeless situation. For this reason, it is important to get them back to Syria and educated so that they can lead productive lives. That seems to me to be the only way forward.