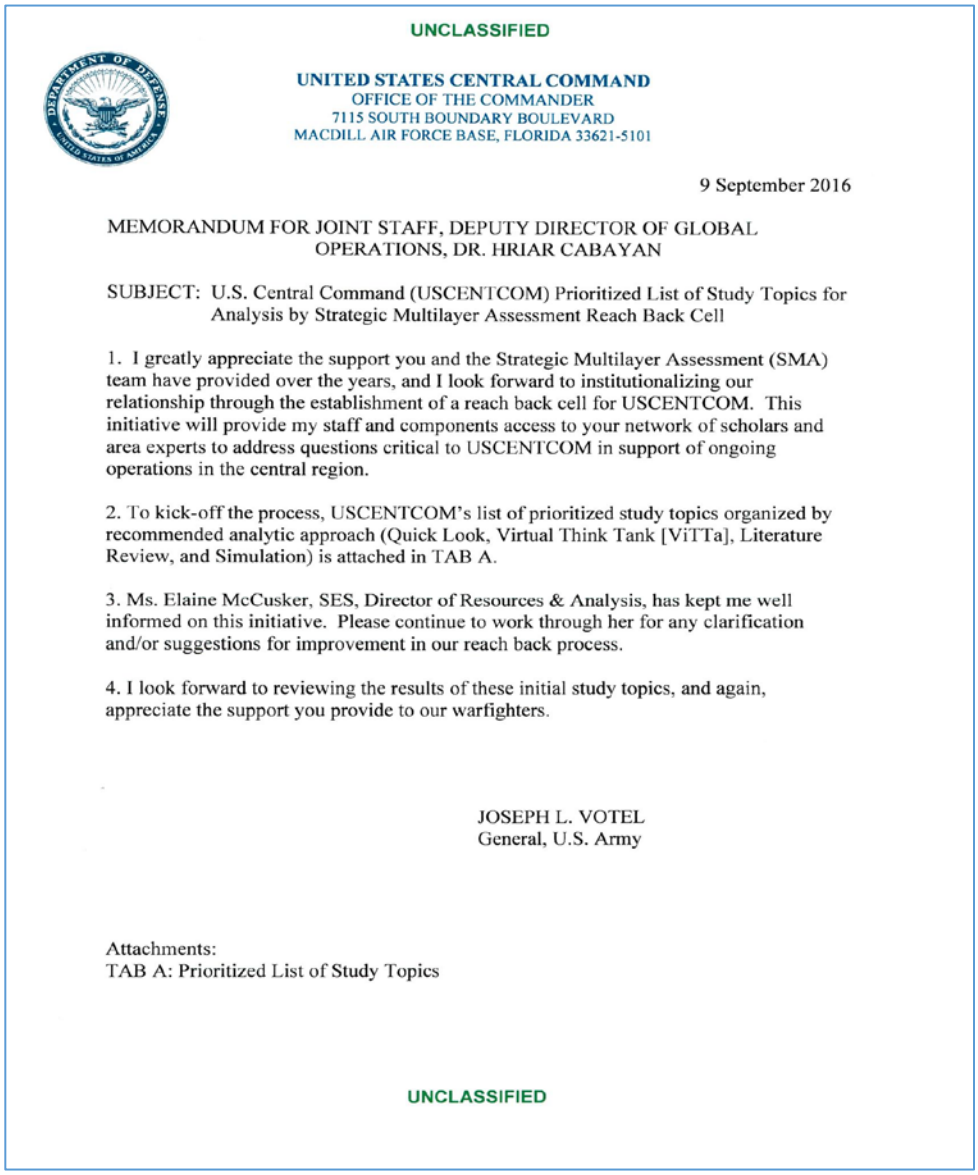
SMA CENTCOM Reach Back Cell Feedback and SMA Publication Website Statistics

March 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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UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND
OFFICE OF THE COMMANDER
7115 SOUTH BOUNDARY BOULEVARD
MACDILL AIR FORCE BASE, FLORIDA 33621-5101

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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To date the SMA CENTCOM Reach Back Cell has responded to 40 questions and conducted several key interviews and panel sessions.

All reports and panel transcripts can be found at the following website: http://nsiteam.com/sma-reachback-cell/

Feedback from CENTCOM

CENTCOM after receiving the Reach Back Cell Reports distributes them to the staff for their review and the reports ultimately are disseminated throughout the Command and placed on the "Strategic Studies" portal on the CENTCOM Homepage (under "Community of Interests") and available for download and search by members of the Command. The NSI team also posts the reports on their website (URL above) and they are also searchable on the NSI website. There exists a feed-back loop on the SMA SIPR page. The command will solicit feedback from the various directorates and sub-Commands there and then distill a succinct response after reviewing each paper to give confidence that the findings have reached and been reviewed with the relevant Plan Teams. CENTCOM is also planning to conduct a survey and feedback from that survey will be disseminated. Feedback that has been provided so far included the following:

These assessments bring added value for CENTCOM since at least they provide context and different perspectives. Most likely, these papers inform different divisions at a time depending on the subject.

SMA products are geared for general planners, those that need to increase their knowledge on the region, and should be perused as a matter of professionalism.

SMA is free, casts a wide net, and provides quality products - it is an excellent resource to address leaders questions that aren't taken up in other venues. SMA products are a great starting point for those that need to brush up on prevailing expert opinion.

The Operational Assessments Group (OAG) are a small group and are tasked to think bigger picture, like Weapons of Mass Destruction and Virtual Caliphate (projects that last weeks/months). For example, OAG provided the Commander with a lot of the information for the Virtual Caliphate article he published in the Center for a New American Security. SMA products are right in line with the types of information they process and for the types of projects they work on.

The largest portion of the CENTCOM J2 is the Joint Intelligence Center (JIC), and most JIC analysts are geographic or regional experts who are tasked to provide mostly quick turn (1hr/1day) products based on SIGINT/HUMINT "intel facts." The SMA info is generally too long and not directly traceable to intel facts to be plugged into their products.

I think these assessments bring added value for CENTCOM since at least they provide context and different perspectives. We intend to read a few of the most recent reports and apply a bit of a checklist to key findings - determine what, could be/needs to be, purposefully tasked for inclusion in our campaign design or perhaps referred to other agencies for policy action – CCJ3 Plans.

Reach Back Cell Products - Survey Results

A survey was posted by the SMA team and the link forwarded to our Community of Interest. Some of the highlighted results are discussed below.

Affiliation Results

Answer Choices –	Responses –
Government Civilian	31.94% - 23
Military	8.33% - 6
Academia	31.94% - 23
Private Industry	13.89% - 10
Think Tank	5.56% - 4
Other (e.g., independent consultant)	8.33% - 6
Total	72

Most respondents were either Government Civilian or Academics

Primary Job/Responsibility

Answer Choices –	Responses –
Planner	12.68% - 9
Analyst	21.13% - 15
Supervisor	5.63% - 4
Researcher/scholar	53.52% - 38
Other	7.04% - 5
Total	71

The most common Job respondents had was researcher/scholar, followed by Analysts

The majority of respondents read between 1 – 20 of the reach back cell reports.

A large majority, 85%, of respondents used the reach back cell reports for background information to inform their current work. One notable comment on report usage was "SMA reports aid in contextualizing current intelligence reports and in many cases provides insights into topics that planners or intelligence practitioners do not have expertise or insights."

51% of respondents found the executive summaries to always be helpful and 44% said the SME inputs were often helpful.

44% of respondents found the level of information in the reports about right. One notable comment was "The thought is that these reports stitch together academic rigor that was void or absently previously which is a positive aspect. Recommend that these reports tip into current or future relevance relative to on-going operations and the associated inter-relationship of these topics with combatant commands, State Department and USAID."

Comments on ways to improve the reach back reports:

- Develop a knowledge management approach and compile the reports and components that enables quick review and discovery of relevant information - and references/links back to deeper / technical resources.

- Perhaps provide a summary of the exec summaries once a quarter?

- I found the Reach-back reports to be of great value in general. It would be good if the reports could build on or lead to broader objectives or themes so that there is a bridge that links the efforts. I know that is not always possible but just a thought. I find the research efforts overall to be very helpful.
- Many publications have guidelines for contribution that help authors keep on topic and meet reader expectations. For example, reviews of books (similar in length to quicklooks and also distilling a dense topic to key takeaways) are very prescriptive about how to keep the 'so what' factor high in each paragraph. With such a disparate group of contributors, a set of guidelines for their work might help the authors channel their expertise into a format and purpose for their audience or for the project. This may also help in the long run for indexing for decision-making analyses.

- Feedback from end users would be nice.

General Comments on the Reach Back Reports

- SMA and associated reports need better marketing. I've passed several reports to some of my colleagues but most have never heard of SMA.

- There is a gap in some of the reports, due to having similar voices and perspectives included. More diversified perspectives should be represented to provide for a comprehensive picture

- How can we broaden the group? This is not widely known outside of the group. How do we actively recruit participants? Use of technology for presentation. Skype or DCS.

- I have found them to be interesting and I think the multidisciplinary approach has been very useful.

SMA Publications Statistics

SMA Publications Overview

Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) is a multidisciplinary, multi-agency portfolio of projects that assesses and studies challenging problems associated with planning and operations of DoD, military services, and Government agencies.

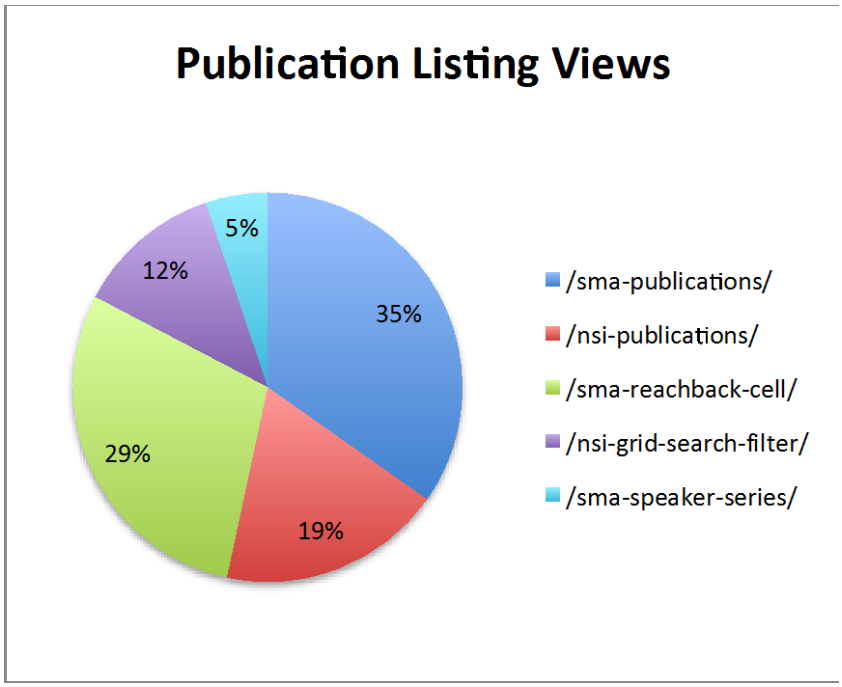
The SMA Publications is the collection of analytical reports, proceedings, white papers, and various other related materials that correspond to the multitude of SMA projects from 2007 to current date, all organized and metadata tagged to facilitate easy and efficient document discovery, retrieval, search and filtering.

The SMA Publications is hosted and maintained at NSI's website. Below is the URL for the SMA Publications along with the URLs for various related publication listings:

- SMA publications: http://nsiteam.com/sma-publications/
- NSI publications archive: http://nsiteam.com/nsi-publications/
- Reachback Cell publications: http://nsiteam.com/sma-reachback-cell/
- SMA Speaker Series publications: http://nsiteam.com/sma-speaker-series/
- Grid Search | Filter tool: http://nsiteam.com/nsi-grid-search-filter/

SMA Publications Analytics

Google Analytics – Google's web analytics service – is used to track and report website traffic to the SMA Publications and Reachback Cell publication listings, along with traffic to some of the key publications found in those publication listings. Below is a summary of some of the website traffic for Feb 2017. In the charts that follow, a "view" corresponds to a pageview in Google Analytics parlance, which is the total number of times the page was viewed (note: repeat views of the page by a single user are each counted).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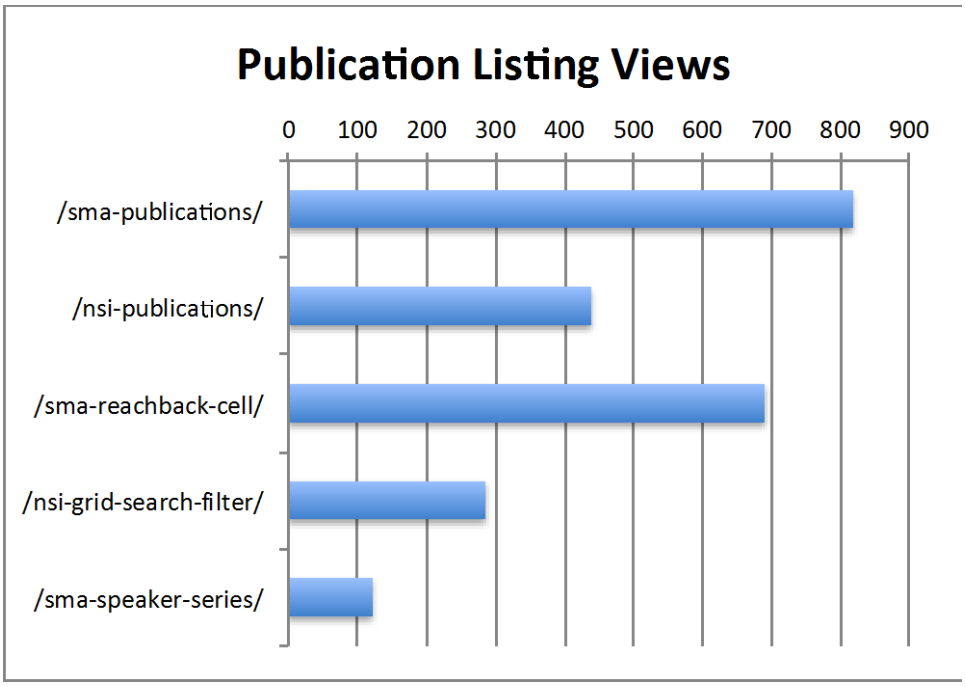
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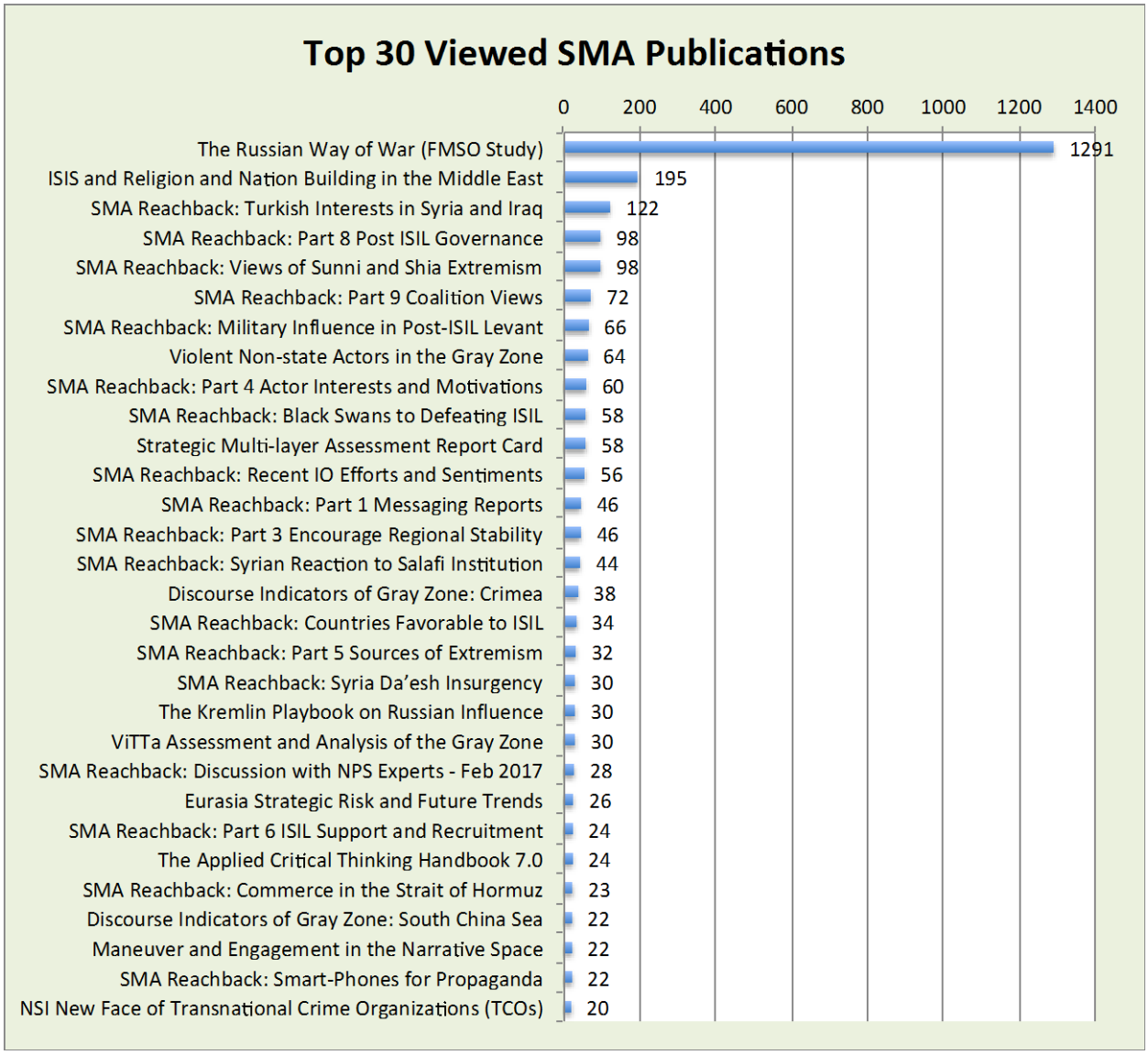
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200
400
600
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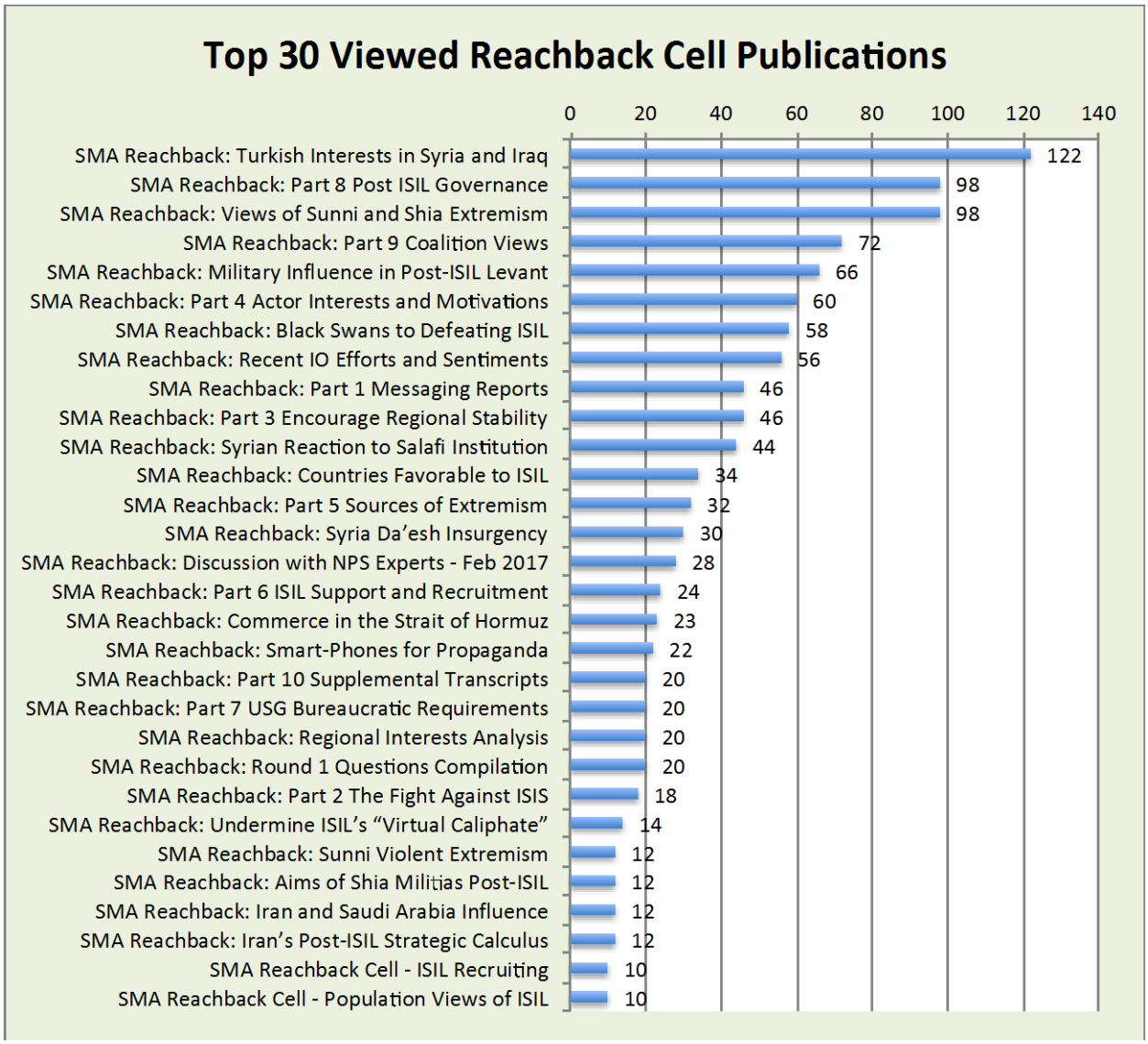
1000
1200
1400
The Russian Way of War (FMSO Study) 1291
ISIS and Religion and Nation Building in the Middle East 195
SMA Reachback: Turkish Interests in Syria and Iraq 122
SMA Reachback: Part 8 Post ISIL Governance 98
SMA Reachback: Views of Sunni and Shia Extremism 98
SMA Reachback: Part 9 Coalition Views 72
SMA Reachback: Military Influence in Post-ISIL Levant 66
Violent Non-state Actors in the Gray Zone 64
SMA Reachback: Part 4 Actor Interests and Motivations 60
SMA Reachback: Black Swans to Defeating ISIL 58
Strategic Multi-layer Assessment Report Card 58
SMA Reachback: Recent IO Efforts and Sentiments 56
SMA Reachback: Part 1 Messaging Reports 46
SMA Reachback: Part 3 Encourage Regional Stability 46
SMA Reachback: Syrian Reaction to Salafi Institution 44
Discourse Indicators of Gray Zone: Crimea 38
SMA Reachback: Countries Favorable to ISIL 34
SMA Reachback: Part 5 Sources of Extremism 32
SMA Reachback: Syria Da'esh Insurgency 30
The Kremlin Playbook on Russian Influence 30
ViTTa Assessment and Analysis of the Gray Zone 30
SMA Reachback: Discussion with NPS Experts - Feb 2017 28
Eurasia Strategic Risk and Future Trends 26
SMA Reachback: Part 6 ISIL Support and Recruitment 24
The Applied Critical Thinking Handbook 7.0 24
SMA Reachback: Commerce in the Strait of Hormuz 23
Discourse Indicators of Gray Zone: South China Sea 22
Maneuver and Engagement in the Narrative Space 22
SMA Reachback: Smart-Phones for Propaganda 22
NSI New Face of Transnational Crime Organizations (TCOs) 20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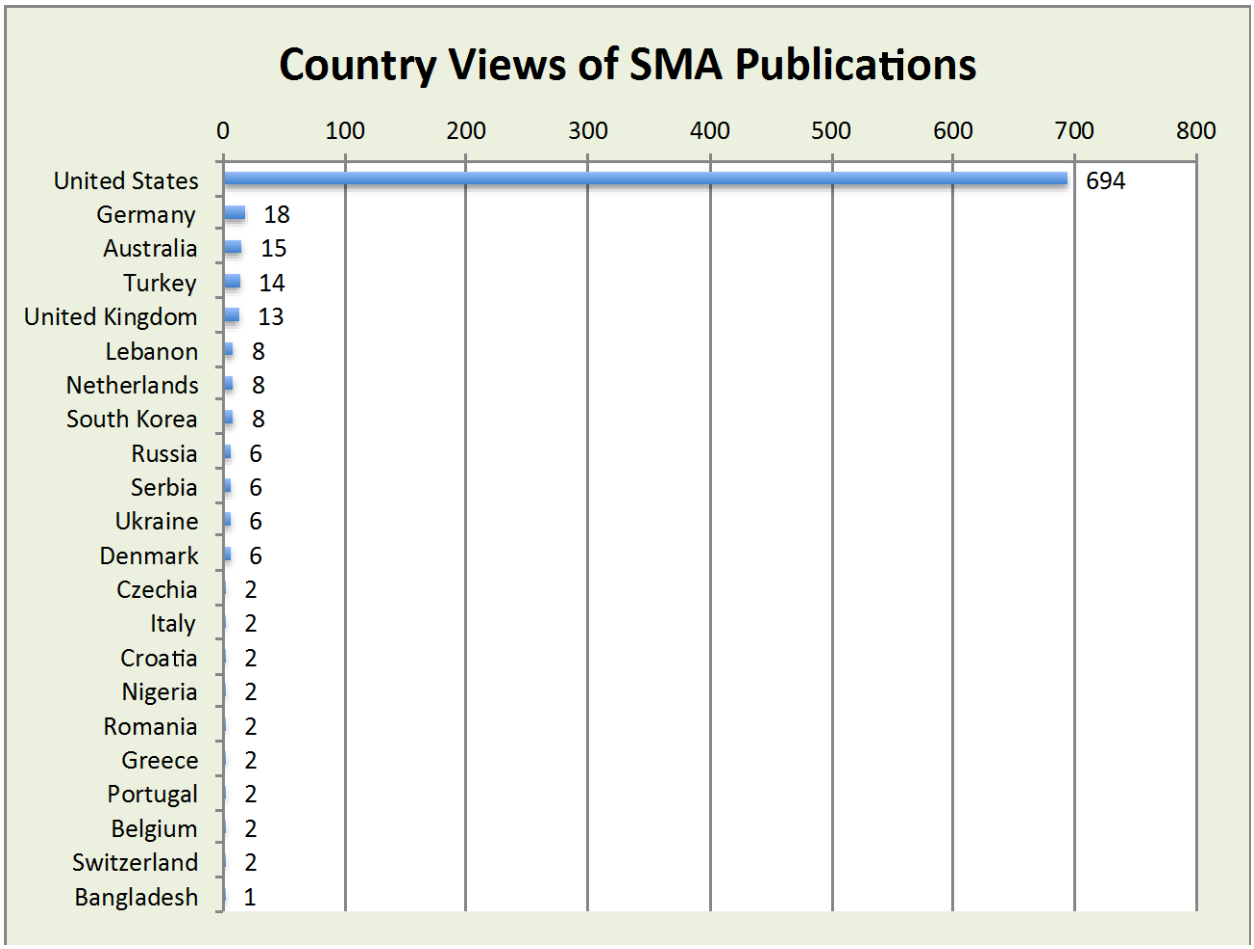
40
60
80
100
120
140
SMA Reachback: Turkish Interests in Syria and Iraq 122
SMA Reachback: Part 8 Post ISIL Governance 98
SMA Reachback: Views of Sunni and Shia Extremism 98
SMA Reachback: Part 9 Coalition Views 72
SMA Reachback: Military Influence in Post-ISIL Levant 66
SMA Reachback: Part 4 Actor Interests and Motivations 60
SMA Reachback: Black Swans to Defeating ISIL 58
SMA Reachback: Recent IO Efforts and Sentiments 56
SMA Reachback: Part 1 Messaging Reports 46
SMA Reachback: Part 3 Encourage Regional Stability 46
SMA Reachback: Syrian Reaction to Salafi Institution 44
SMA Reachback: Countries Favorable to ISIL 34
SMA Reachback: Part 5 Sources of Extremism 32
SMA Reachback: Syria Da'esh Insurgency 30
SMA Reachback: Discussion with NPS Experts - Feb 2017 28
SMA Reachback: Part 6 ISIL Support and Recruitment 24
SMA Reachback: Commerce in the Strait of Hormuz 23
SMA Reachback: Smart-Phones for Propaganda 22
SMA Reachback: Part 10 Supplemental Transcripts 20
SMA Reachback: Part 7 USG Bureaucratic Requirements 20
SMA Reachback: Regional Interests Analysis 20
SMA Reachback: Round 1 Questions Compilation 20
SMA Reachback: Part 2 The Fight Against ISIS 18
SMA Reachback: Undermine ISIL's "Virtual Caliphate" 14
SMA Reachback: Sunni Violent Extremism 12
SMA Reachback: Aims of Shia Militias Post-ISIL 12
SMA Reachback: Iran and Saudi Arabia Influence 12
SMA Reachback: Iran's Post-ISIL Strategic Calculus 12
SMA Reachback Cell - ISIL Recruiting 10
SMA Reachback Cell - Population Views of ISIL 10


Country Views of SMA Publications
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Germany 18
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Serbia 6
Ukraine 6
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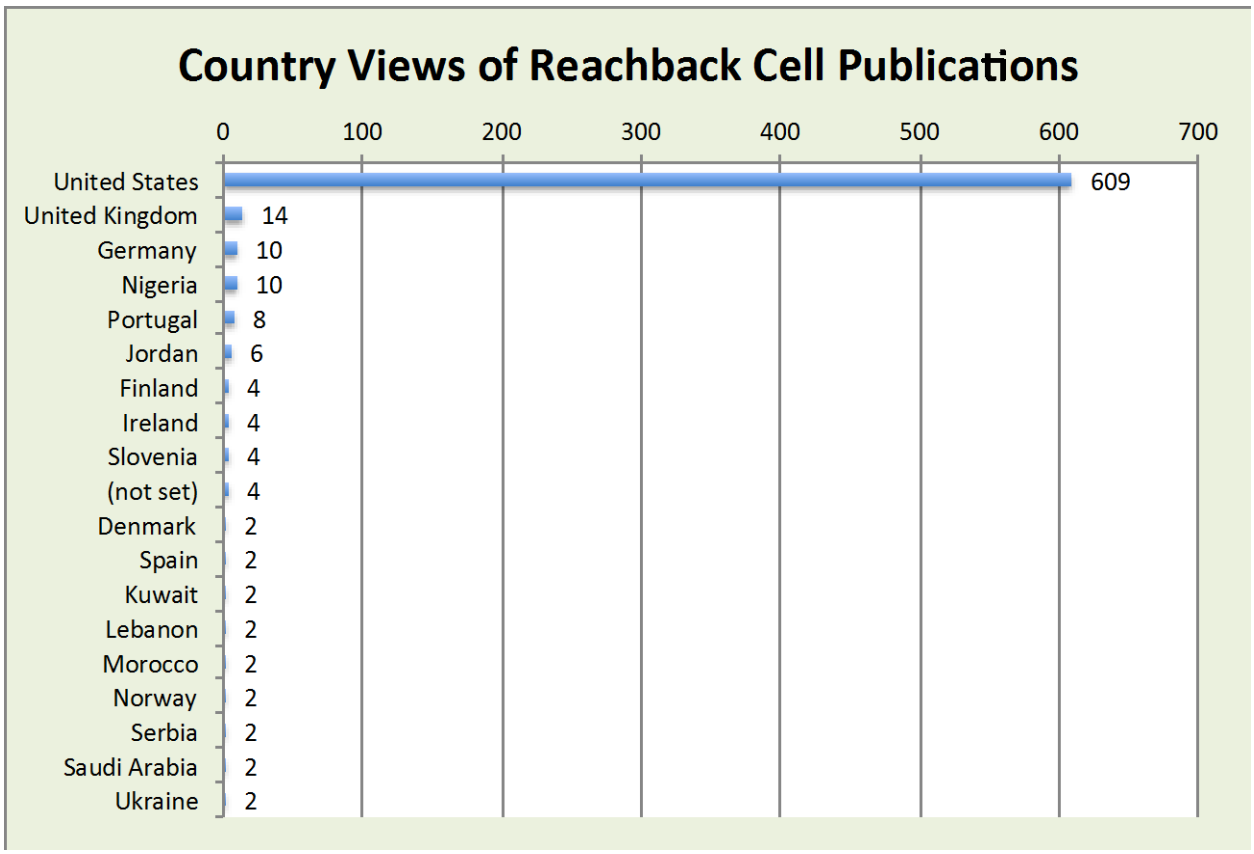
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Saudi Arabia
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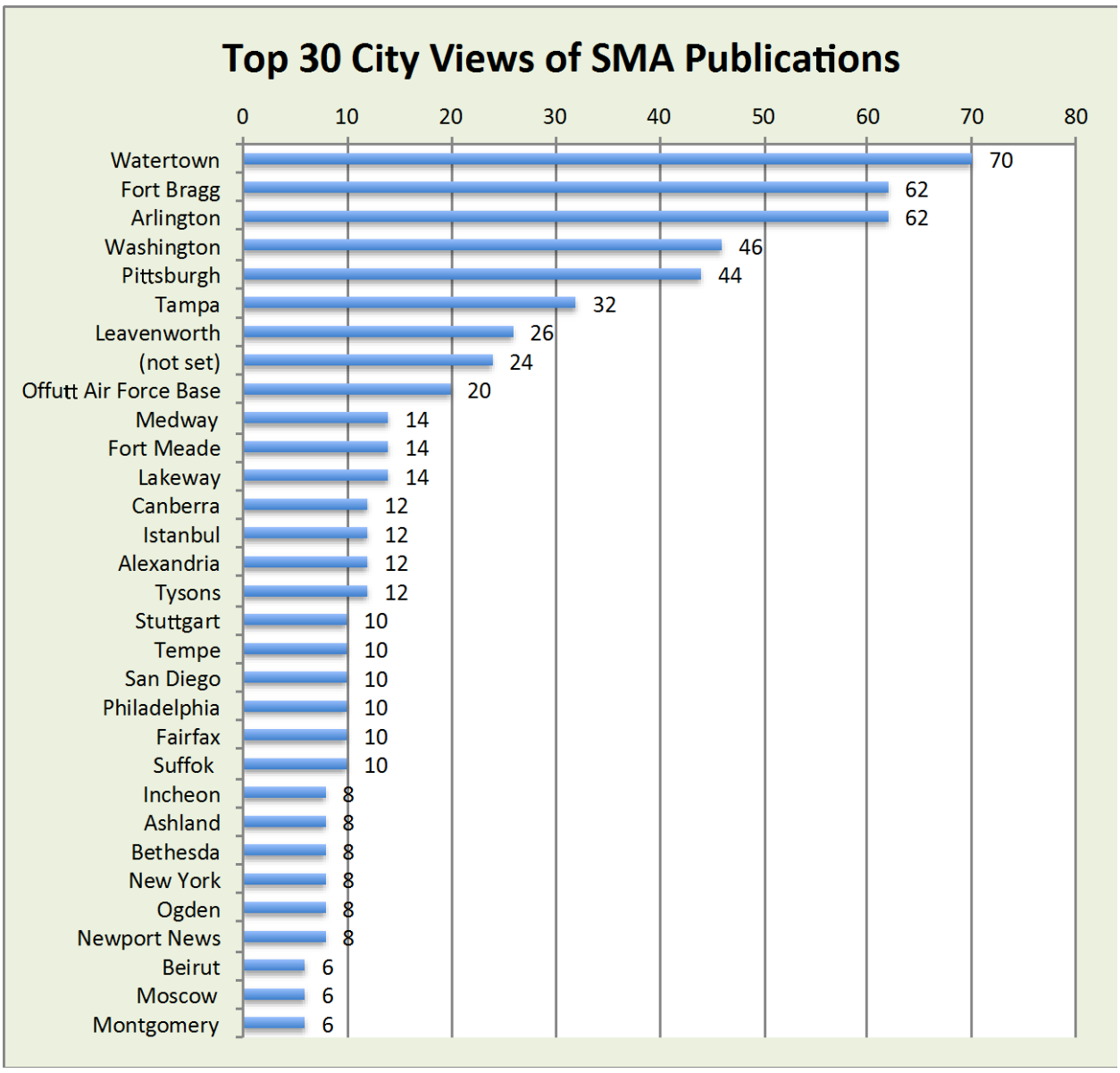
Top 30 City Views of SMA Publications
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Fort Bragg 62
Arlington 62
Washington 46
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Tampa 32
Leavenworth 26
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Offutt Air Force Base 20
Medway 14
Fort Meade 14
Lakeway 14
Canberra 12
Istanbul 12
Alexandria 12
Tysons 12
Stuttgart 10
Tempe 10
San Diego 10
Philadelphia 10
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Ashland 8
Bethesda 8
New York 8
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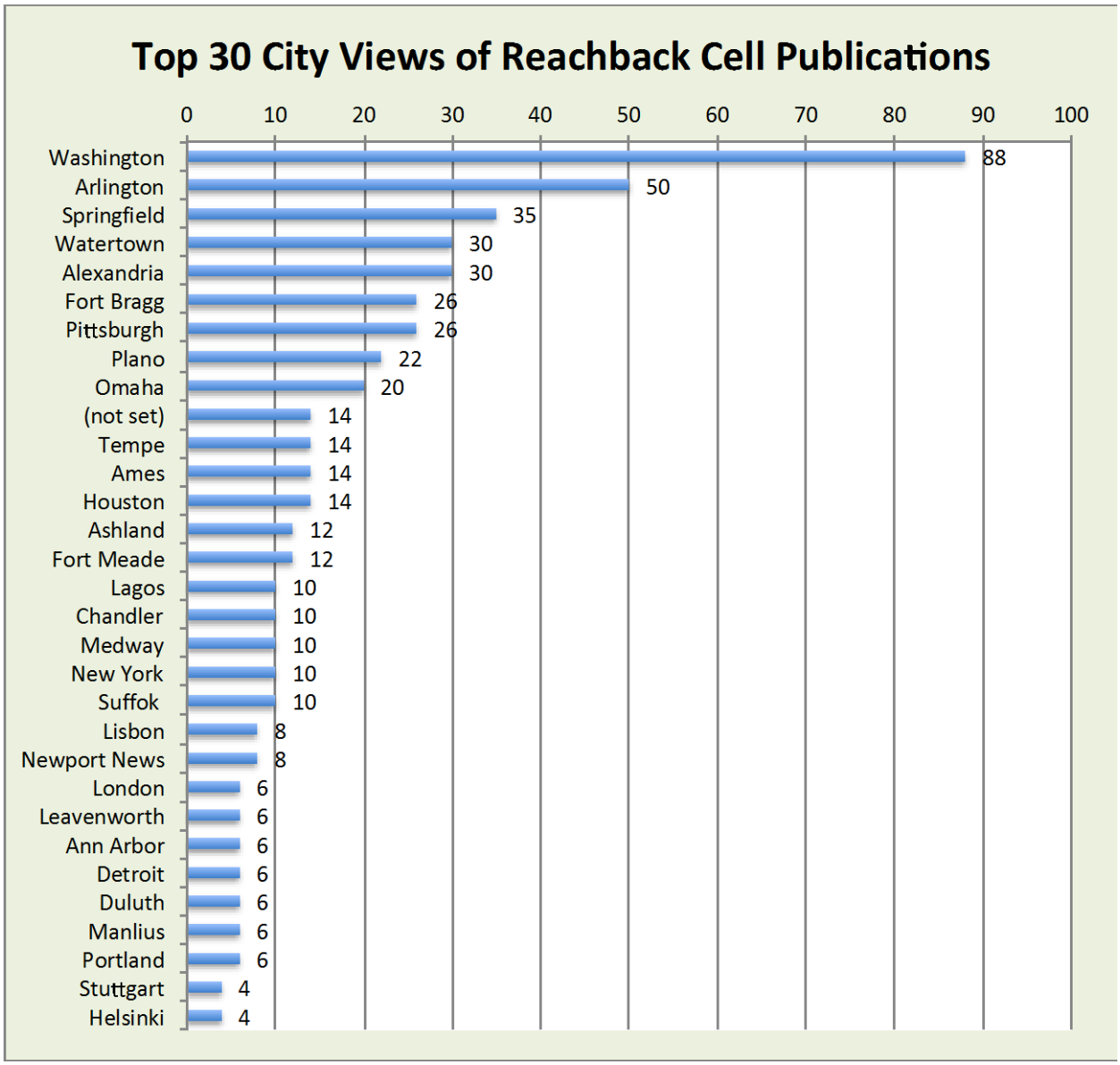
Newport News 8
Beirut 6
Moscow 6
Montgomery 6


Top 30 City Views of Reachback Cell Publications
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Houston 14
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Lagos 10
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Detroit 6
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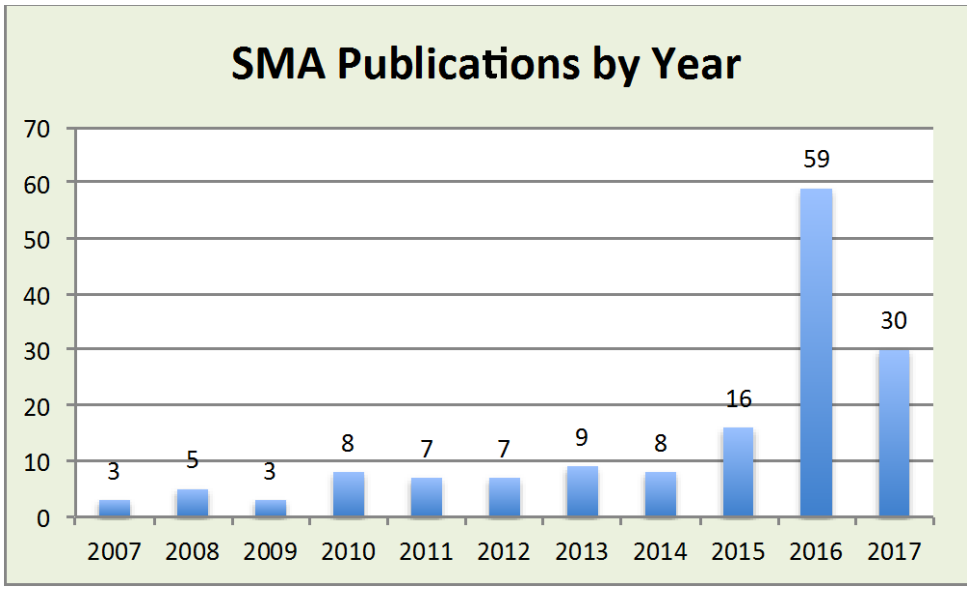
Manlius 6
Portland 6
Stuttgart 4
Helsinki 4


SMA Publications by Year
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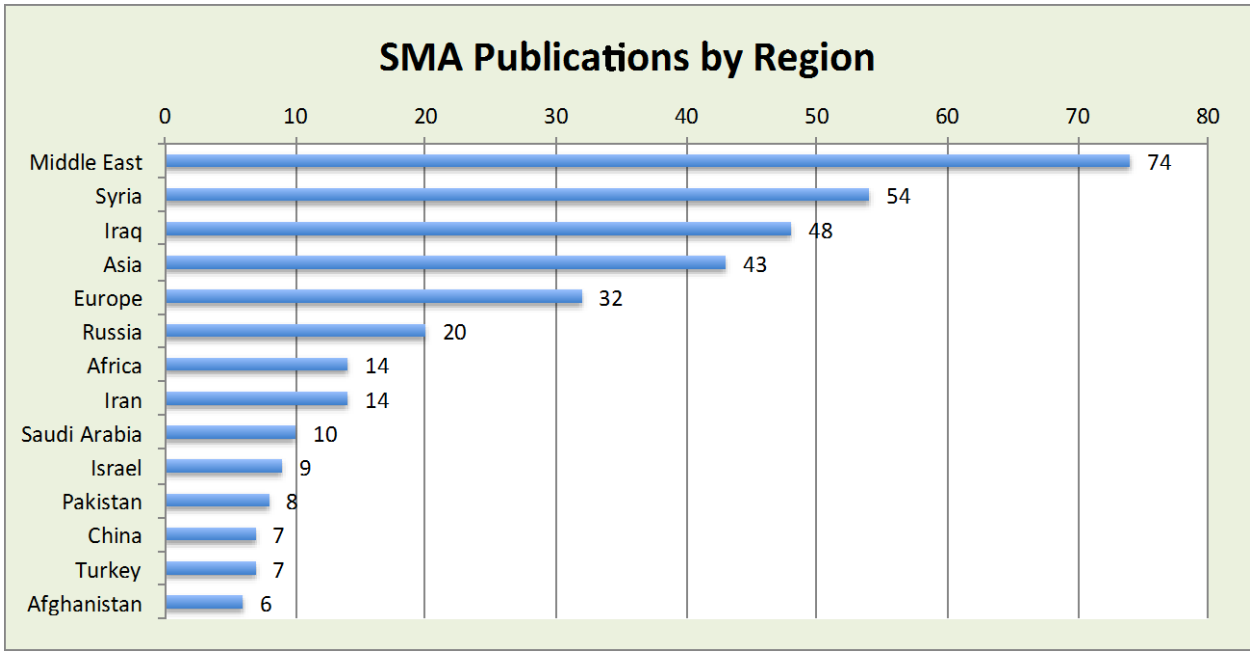
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Syria
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Iraq
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Asia
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Europe
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China
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Turkey
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Afghanistan
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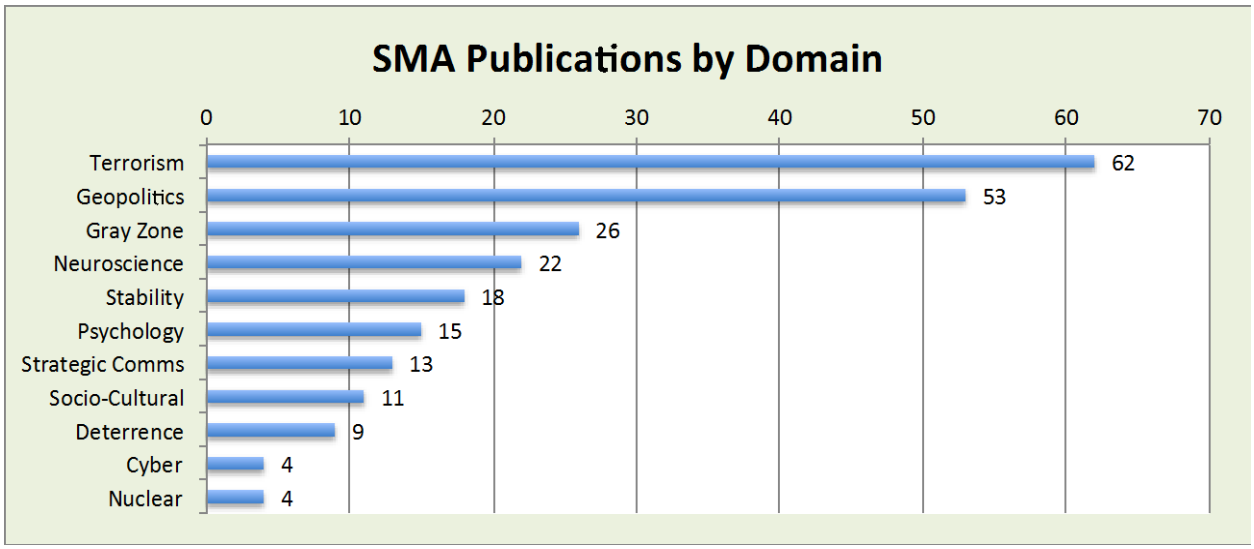
SMA Publications by Domain
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Terrorism
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Geopolitics
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Gray Zone
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Neuroscience
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Stability
18
Psychology
15
Strategic Comms
13
Socio-Cultural
11
Deterrence
9
Cyber
4
Nuclear
4