SMA Reach-back Report

R4 Question #4: **What does a successfully concluded campaign against ISIS look like? Considering costs, reputation, and balance of influence, how should the U.S./Coalition define success? Is the defeat of ISIS a success if it causes the balance of power in the region to shift towards Iran, Assad, or Russia?**

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Executive Summary

Scoping "Success"

The responses provided to this question have either directly or implicitly pointed to a divide between what should be considered a "successfully concluded campaign against ISIS" in the operational theater in Syria and Iraq, versus at the global, strategic level. Standards for defining success on both levels tended to coalesce around similar benchmarks across all the responses.

Success at the Theater Operational Level

There is broad consensus among the respondents that a successfully concluded campaign against ISIS at the operational level, does not have to be defined by the total destruction of the group. Rather, a *significant degradation of capabilities* (particularly the ability to hold territory and the capacity to carry out extensive or highly lethal attacks), coupled with a reduction of the group's threat to overall U.S. policy interests in the region, may be sufficient. Liebl offers that the total destruction of the group should be an aspirational goal, but acknowledges that this is unlikely in the near term and so success should be defined by different metrics. Braun suggests that the ISIS must be *perceived* as having been defeated to prevent the remnants from transmogrifying into some other virulent regional or global movement. Itani explicitly states that ISIS is an important threat at an operational level in Syria and Iraq; the danger is not existential to the US. Some respondents (Maye and Serwer for example) also noted the importance of creating stable circumstances for civilian populations, in the aftermath of a kinetic victory over ISIS and their subsequent

loss of territory across the region. The challenges of this, particularly in avoiding redistribution of land and other assets away from the original owners, as well as avoiding the Iraqi perception that ISIS is being replaced by a hostile Shia regime, are well noted.

One point of divergence on specific metrics of degraded capabilities is based on the notion of organizational decapitation. Some responses (Lustick, Ligon, et al) make a case that success must include the elimination of ISIS leadership. Ligon and her colleagues make a more tactical argument, analyzing the data on the capacity of ISIS to carry out sophisticated and deadly attacks during times when the leadership is strong and organized, versus times when it is weak and in transition. Their analysis makes a compelling case that decapitation would severely hamper the operational effectiveness of whatever remained of ISIS forces. Other respondents raise doubts over the efficacy of a decapitation strategy noting that the targeted killing of many key militant leaders over the last sixteen years has not produced a long-term degradation of the threat (see Smith for example).

Success at the Strategic Level

"Successful elimination/destruction of Da'ish won't occur in any conventional sense on the battlefield in Iraq, Syria or elsewhere," writes Burki. In one sense or another, most of the respondents concur that *strategic* success against ISIS cannot be measured through the same lens as operational success in Syria and Iraq. Some authors (Ligon, Liebl, Lustick, and Burki for example) point to the ongoing capabilities of ISIS fragments and their tendency to recruit and embed themselves in Iraqi populations, in order to conduct ongoing social media strategies and to generally remain a presence on the global scene. They point out that the vast corpus of media and messaging already produced by ISIS can continue to radicalize individuals around the world and that their message may be just as focused on "martyrdom" as it was when they were highly successful on the battlefield.

An additional argument (Marten, Burki, and Anonymous) raises the prospect that at a strategic level, success against ISIS may not be a relevant concept as long as the overall concept of Salafi Jihad is not defeated. Strategic success in this view is less defined by the existence of the group itself and more by mitigating the circumstance that allow it to proliferate and thrive. The theme of the disenfranchisement of Sunni populations and the broader and more pressing struggle between Sunni and Shia forces in the MENA region, directly links to the rise of ISIS and other groups. These authors also tend to question the ability of the US to play a decisive role in achieving strategic success in this arena—casting much of the regional responsibility back to the local populations in conflict.

In looking at the big picture, Venturelli argues that success can be advanced through two strategies: 1) creating an integrated approach at the theater, strategic, and balance of power levels (Iran, Russia, Syria) and 2) focusing on the 'exploitation' of opportunities created by ISIS across these success components. This analysis rests on the belief that the situation in the Middle East presents opportunities to reshape MENA security and order and to mitigate challenges more effectively.

Is a Defeat of ISIS a "Success" if the Balance of Power Shifts to Favor Russia, Iran, or Assad?

Keeping with an orthodox view of US policy goals, the majority of respondents who addressed this sub-question indicate that a shift in the balance of power to favor Russia, Iran, or Assad, would undermine or negate the value of 'defeating' ISIS. Conversely a few contributors disagreed with that assessment, parsing

the issues into very separate responses by actor, or disputing the validity of the question's premise altogether.

The most in depth analysis (Itani) casts a post-ISIS state of play that sees an ascendant Iran as anathema to US interests; however, Russia is viewed as an actor that can more easily be accommodated in an acceptable regional framework. "Belei's analysis views a post-ISIS future that favors Assad as a pessimistic scenario, but one which is very "likely." Burki's analysis rejects the entire premise of the sub-question and re-frames it from an operational space to a strategic one, stating that the relevance of the defeat of ISIS is not about a power vacuum in Syria, but rather its impact on the global trends in Salafi Jihadism—pulling us back to the point made above.

Subject Matter Expert Contributions

Anonymous 1

Successfully concluding the campaign against the Islamic State is different from declaring success against the Islamic State. As we have seen in the past, the group's current existence is a result of strategic rebranding and an evolved ideology from a previously existing violent extremist organization – al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) – which we previously declared 'success' against. U.S. and Coalition efforts in truly 'defeating' AQI however, were not merely a success, but rather a victory in achieving a *manageable* or *contained* level of influence - a humble first step to truly defeating the enemy. Failures largely at the hands of Iraq's Shi'a led government left predominantly Sunni areas broken, disadvantaged, and marginalized from an Iraqi system perceived to be an Iranian surrogate. Remnants of AQI and its undefeated ideology, thus evolved and adapted to fit the modern grievances of Sunnis against oppressive Shi'as, and subsequently reemerged as the appropriate narrative to give ideological relevance and justification to their struggle.

The existence of the Islamic State, and other violent extremist organizations, such as al Shabaab, Hezbollah, Hamas, Jabhat Fatah al Sham, etc. almost certainly requires a) a convenient ideology providing justification for a cause, b) popular grievances, and c) conditions within an operational environment which allow such groups to thrive, notably lack of governance and resources. Iraq is a hot bed for all three where political, social, and economic grievances will continue, with groups in power oppressing their perceived enemies for the foreseeable future. Hence, we can successfully conclude a military campaign against the Islamic State if we achieve a containable or manageable level of influence and control. However, without addressing political and economic tangential issues, the ideology which drives the Islamic State and other violent groups to action could simply remain dormant rather than defeated.

In addressing the balance of power shifting to Iran, Russia, and Assad upon any perceived victory against the Islamic State (particularly in Iraq) – one must consider the variations of what that victory means, which depends on the audience being asked. Sunni states led by Saudi Arabia will be the strongest advocates against the balance of power shifting to Iran, in particular. In response, a coalition of predominantly Sunni states will increase support to militias countering a perceived Shi'a regional dominance. This will certainly exacerbate the ongoing proxy war between Shi'a groups supported by Iran, and Sunni groups primarily supported by Saudi Arabia.

Iran will perceive an Islamic State defeat or minimization of influence (particularly in Iraq) as an opportunity to refocus efforts to other dire strategic interests which have become costly, i.e. Syria, and ensuring Hezbollah maintains control in Lebanon (currently teetering on the boundaries of yet another civil war). Iran has already coordinated Iraqi Shi'a militia groups in conjunction with Hezbollah support to fight in Syria. Liberation of Islamic State territory in Iraq and beyond will free up more Shi'a militia groups to partake in Syria and other Sunni-Shi'a battleground territories. Many Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps/Qods Force Officers have been killed in Syria, which has increased Iran's need to utilize more proxy fighters, regular Artesh Iranian soldiers, Basij members, and Afghans to preserve their invaluable elite military wing.

From a U.S. perspective, less influence from Sunni (Saudi Arabia/Gulf) and Shi'a (Iran) external actors would support a victory against the Islamic State and similar regional VEO threats. Doing so will likely 'de-weaponize' externally supported militias, exalt a unifying national identity over sectarian divisions, and

limit destructive political influence that facilitates the oppression of certain groups while guaranteeing the political, economic, and military dominance of others.

Bogdan Belei, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

In the fall of 2014, President Obama addressed the nation with an objective to "degrade and ultimately destroy" the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). This approach has been fiercely debated among its supporters and its critics who argue that long-term containment, may be more realistic given the limits of American power. Indeed, the United States has witnessed the resiliency of similar groups in the past, particularly in a region where structural underpinnings (or the lack thereof) have contributed to the cyclical nature of violent extremism. It is precisely the existence of favorable environments—dysfunctional failed states and emerging power vacuums—which has led to continuity among terrorist organizations. Diminishing the real capabilities of ISIS to conduct transnational terrorism and territorial expansion is certainly a priority for the United States, but achieving "success" will ultimately require stabilizing the aftermath.

A successfully concluded campaign against ISIS can only be defined through an evaluation of real U.S. national interests at stake. The United States seeks to end the group's terrorist threat and it's abilities to further destabilize the region. Both objectives rely on a web of contentious assumptions, such as the value of destroying terrorist safe havens or the feasibility of maintaining the resources or political will necessary to stabilize regional security over a long period of time.

Ideal Scenario

Ideally, the United States would eradicate the group's territorial control in Iraq and Syria and supplement this military accomplishment with subsequent capacity for governing institutions.

In Syria, this outcome would ultimately conclude with a stable power-sharing agreement at the national level. A successful outcome would require any assuming authority to maintain a stable security environment. If Kurdish or local Sunni forces assume control over cities such as Raqqa or Deir Ez-Zor, the United States will share an interest in stabilizing these regions far beyond the departure of U.S. troops. This will require a substantial cost in military, diplomatic and humanitarian assistance.

In Iraq, a successful outcome would envision a similar scenario in which Baghdad would assume control over all of its lost territory. Given the United States' relationship with the Iraqi government and the threat of Iranian influence, the commitment would be more urgent and the nation-building project more broad. Unlike Syria, the government in Baghdad is at present friendly to the United States. Preserving this status quo in Iraq should be placed in higher priority than any aspirational regime change in Damascus.

Balance of Power

In a worse, but likely and still acceptable scenario, the Assad government would resume control over territory currently held by ISIS. In this scenario, Russia and Assad would share the burden of establishing a stable security environment while simultaneously eroding an imminent terrorist threat to the United States. While the balance of power would shift toward Russia and Syria, this had been the status-quo prior to the Syrian civil war. Even in a future Syria where international actors secure their stakes in a power-sharing agreement, it is unlikely to expect limited Russia influence over Syria's domestic situation.

In Iraq, as previously mentioned, the stakes are different. Any displacement of ISIS which could lead to increasing Iranian influence in the midst of political and security vacuums would result in a net loss for U.S. national interests. As a previous iteration of this exercise concluded, any successful outcome "will

require significant strengthening of State Department and non-DoD capacity to help build inclusive political institutions and processes."

Realistic Scenario

Given the unfavorable political reality of increasing U.S. involvement in the Middle East, it is unlikely that the issue will obtain the necessary level of commitment needed for an ideal conclusion of a campaign against ISIS. As such, the United States should be wary of launching a large scale conventional offensive. A strictly military approach will spend costly U.S. resources, while only further exacerbating regional security issues and opening the door to hostile terrorist organizations or foreign governments.

For now, the United States should continue to wage a limited campaign with support from regional and local actors. The U.S. military should support these forces, but simultaneously be conscientious of the power dynamics between advancing forces and local populations. In the Middle East, U.S. national interests are threatened by poor governance, civil wars, and related issues. While ISIS and its transnational capabilities threaten the American homeland and allies in the region, U.S. policy should not be overly focused on or limited to counterterrorism.

Aurel Braun, University of Toronto & Harvard University

Ironically, it may be considerably more difficult to define what a successfully concluded campaign against ISIS would look like compared to failure by the U.S. and the Coalition. An ISIS takeover of Syria and/or Iraq would have been an unambiguous and disastrous failure for the U.S. and the Coalition. Yet, neither failure nor success should be defined in rigid, maximalist or minimalist terms. Conceptualizing "success" involves both empirical evidence and perception. That is, defeating ISIS would encompass a heavy military component that first of all would force ISIS to lose control of *all* the territory that it holds in Iraq and in Syria. Such military steps however would not necessarily end ISIS's capacity to wreak havoc through various forms of terrorist acts in Iraq and Syria and in other parts of the world. The reality is that ISIS has metastasized and it threatens people not only in Raqqa and Mosul, but in Paris, London, San Bernardino and elsewhere. ISIS is a movement and an ideology with a network that recruits and finances globally. Consequently in a successful campaign ISIS would need to be reduced to some kind of low-intensity threat that would more resemble older terrorist fringe groups like the Baader-Meinhof Gang in Germany or the Red Army in Japan. Crucially, there would also have to be a corresponding change in the perception of ISIS. It would need to be seen as a small, limited, truly fringe group, first within the Islamic world and second globally. In sum, ISIS would need to be perceived as having been defeated and that whatever remnants are left would have no potential for regeneration, or could not transmogrify into some other virulent regional or global movement posing a similar threat to the current movement.

For the U.S. and the Coalition, to reduce ISIS to the level described above, there would need to be a consistent, focused effort that effectively combines hard and soft power. The U.S. and the Coalition also would need to project the willingness to settle for nothing less than the defeat of ISIS which would at the very least lead to an essential eradication of any territorial control by the group and where if there's any remnant, the latter could be dealt with through police action.

Should such success be achieved in terms of the defeat of ISIS, this does not necessarily mean a larger geopolitical victory. Failure by the West to intervene in Syria and defeat the Assad regime years ago when there was still a viable secular opposition, or to act decisively in Iraq when the Obama administration came to power and might have prevented Iranian dominance of the Iraqi government, means that there is already a massive shift in the balance of power in the region toward Iran and Russia. Further, as Turkey is moving toward an Islamist dictatorship under President Erdogan who has also rekindled the conflict with Kurds, all this restricts the ability of the West to support Kurdish forces which have been most effective against ISIS and possibly against Assad.

Consequently, a defeat of ISIS would leave a very volatile situation on the ground where it's entirely conceivable that the big winners would be Iran and Russia rather than the Iraqi and Syrian people. In Syria it could be a situation where Iran and its proxy Hezbollah would even more deeply dominate the Assad regime and, with the support of Russia, would be facing and likely defeating various Al Qaeda affiliates including Al-Nusra offshoots. In Iraq, a defeat of ISIS would strengthen the Shia forces, which encouraged by Iran to take revenge on the Sunni population, might well sow the seeds of further conflict. In other words, Syria in particular and even Iraq may prove to be ungovernable entities with Iran striving to increase its dominance and build a "Shia arc" to the Mediterranean and with Russia seeking to enhance its military position. This is why the U.S. and the Coalition need to have a larger strategic plan for the region that recognizes that the defeat of ISIS may be the beginning of new obligations and involvement. The latter might necessitate drastic steps such as confronting Iran and Russia and constraining President

Erdogan's own ambitions for a Caliphate. It may even force the unthinkable - the possible creation of some international mandates that would govern Iraq and Syria for an interim period of considerable duration.

Janet Breslin Smith, Crosswinds Consulting

We have no strategy against Islamic violent aggression, be it ISIS, AQ or any other Salafist group using violence to achieve its objectives. We have tactical and operational campaigns that do not satisfy.

As Clausewitz famously advised, it is the duty of the soldier and statesman to understand the nature of the war at hand, not to make of it something that it is not.

Following this command, I propose a recasting of strategy.

Up to now, the United States has referred to "a struggle between Islam and the West." Actually ISIS uses this theme as well, and it is also picked up in Europe. I contend that this narrative has left us in an uncomfortable and frustrating position, which I will address below.

I propose that we rethink the premise of this struggle, away from "us-versus-them."

Might we have new strategic insights if we acknowledge that what we are really watching is indeed a profound struggle—but it is WITHIN Islam, within the culture.

We see this struggle played out every day in every Muslim majority nation. Those attracted to global ideas, modernization, debate and expression are opposed by those who embrace the comfort of the past, the rigidity of faith. In simple terms, those sensing that "the West is the Best" confront those who shout and enforce " Islam is the answer".

This is a profound, existential challenge to a rigid faith community and culture that cannot confront this struggle. We are at a moment in history where an ancient faith and culture are in crisis. The region is beset with violence, poverty, mass migration, misery. Islam and the culture of the faithful are in crisis.

And this crisis is hidden right before our eyes. We tend to ignore the stories of violence against Muslims in their own countries, mobs killing lawyers in Pakistan, killing teachers in Africa, killing or threatening those who question Islam—in almost every Muslim majority nation. This is a struggle among Muslims for their own hearts and minds.

In light of this reality, I propose a change of premise. This is not a struggle of the US against Islamic radicalism. This is not us against ISIS, or AQ or Boko Haram, or any of the other violent groups.

This is, more accurately a struggle within Islam, within the culture. The only groups who can truly "defeat ISIS" are Muslims themselves. Indeed, it is their responsibility.

If we begin from this new premise, can our strategic thought improve? Can we see ways to shift the burden on Muslims themselves, in the Gulf, the Middle East, South Asia—across the Muslim world.

At the end of the day, this is their region, their religion, their culture. These are their children.

I am not dismissing the traditional geo-strategic dynamics of the region. Certainly there is a temptation to search for stability, which usually implies support for strongmen and authority governments. Iran and Russia and even China are comfortable with the authority model and it may buy time in the short term. I once thought President Trump might join with Russia and even China to support the strong men in the region: Sisi, Gulf monarchies, now Turkey and even Assad, in order to combat ISIS and "bring stability." There is much talk about our "partners and allies" in the fight against ISIS.

But as the recent chemical event in Syria by Assad points out, support of strongmen gets you strong-arm tactics.

And none of this addresses the struggle at hand, within Islam and culture. Our "partners" in the region all face the same struggle—within. They may want the diversion of "U.S. Leadership" to distract their populations from these hard questions of faith and culture. But they also make themselves vulnerable to charges that they are aligned with the West, and thus fall into the internal struggle themselves.

The ideological/ theological roots and language of ISIS rhyme with the traditions and language of the land of the two holy mosques. We need to think hard about this.

We killed Osama bin Ladin, we have killed many leaders of the various groups and factions of groups. But the cry to "defend Islam" lives on.

Considering costs, reputation, and balance of influence, I would propose a new approach to put the intellectual burden on those in the region to address the struggle within Islam. It is time to engage the leaders of the region, to support the efforts of King Abdullah of Jordan and el-Sisi of Egypt, who have raised these issues. It is time to put the responsibility squarely on their plate. By the way, the struggle is alive and well within Iran as well, and it is equally vulnerable to this pull between the West and Islam—among Iranians and between the leaders and the population.

It is time to think anew.

One last comment on the difficulty we have as Americans and policy professionals addressing religion in the context of policy, I noted in the recent SMA conference on the region and topics related to ISIS that there was really no discussion of the religious/ideological component of motivation. We need to address this issue.

On the one hand, as Americans we support our constitutional and democratic standards of tolerance, respect, and inclusiveness. We believe in separation of church and state and hesitate to bring religious discussions into the policy arena. This is natural and good.

On the other hand, we cannot ignore—and indeed must focus on — the motivational appeal of ISIS and like groups. Just as we studied Marxism during the Cold War to understand the economic attraction of socialism and centrally planned economies, so too must we understand the culture and religious components of this struggle. This is NOT a competition between Christianity and Islam; this is not a comparison of which religion is better or which is bad. I am simply asking for a way to analyze and discuss the key factor as expressed in the rhetoric of ISIS, AQ, etc. This can be done, and it needs to be done.

Shireen Khan Burki, Independent Consultant

Success against ISIS/Da'ish would be the inability of ISIS to inspire recruitment to their cause in order to undertake "jihad' as they define it irrespective of traditional constraints imposed by Islamic law. When fellow Sunni Muslims view everything this movement stands for to mirror the traditional prohibitions in warfare in Islam's battle for global conquest (i.e. spread of the message), which is halal or legitimate per scripture. To date, many Sunnis do view Da'ish as anathema. But enough don't. Not yet.

Successful elimination /destruction of Da'ish won't occur in any conventional sense on the battlefield in Iraq, Syria or elsewhere. Dai'sh's leaders will continue to appeal to new recruits for the battle against the *kuffar* and *murtadd* regime from their mosques, and through the internet. It a battle of ideas and of minds. As long as their message resonates, the recruits will continue to undertake pinprick terror operations in the West as lone wolves with some links, or none at all, to Da'ish. While their foot soldiers in their so-called Khilafat/Caliphate will fight until death, convinced that their halal or legitimate actions will ensure them a quick trip to *Jannat* (heaven) and the beautiful *houris* that await them. It is this narrative which must be delegitimized: They are soldiers of Allah and their cause is religiously sanctioned per scripture (their modus operandi, not to mention their "Khalifa" or Caliph, are both illegitimate).

Defeat of ISIS, Al Qa'ida et al is one that will have to be fought by Muslims, who challenge the methodology of these worldly (read: terrorist) groups who do leverage certain tenets of Islam in order to present their cause as a just one that must be fought, or contributed to, by all Muslims. In the ideological battlespace, the West has little if any role to play. This is a long-term struggle within Islam. It is an ancient one. ISIS and their fellow Salafi (some call them "Takfiri") and Wahhabi ideologues, as literalists will have to be doctrinally challenged by other Muslims. Problem is the literalists (Asharite traditionalists who fear the use of *aql* or reason in Islam) have always been a rather violent (some would describe as "rabid") lot in comparison to the rationalists (Mutazilites and neo-Mutazilites). But they have, and will, be eliminated only to reassert themselves again and again through Islam's history. We are currently in the midst of yet another reassertion. This is the latest revival of the Asharites.

As to the second question, the destruction of ISIS/Da'ish isn't a zero sum proposition. One which somehow implies that the demise of Da'ish would lead to a power vacuum resulting in political gains for any of the parties mentioned (Iran, Russia or the Alawite regime in Syria) above. The destruction of Da'ish would be a serious setback for fellow ideologues based in Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Turkey. But to assume that the end of Da'ish would mean a Shia/Iranian hegemony backed by the Russians is ludicrous. Notwithstanding Khomeini's vow to "spread the Islamic (read: Shia) revolution and to strive to remove *taghut* regimes, the Shia gains in the Middle East are restricted to the Shia populace. A minority in Islam at around 20%. While the Mullahs in Tehran love to bluster and stomp their feet, claiming moral superiority, the Sunni man (or woman) on any Middle East street would rather die than convert to such a heresy. Both sides, Sunni and Shia, begin the indoctrination process against the other at the mother's breast, followed by madrassah sessions for Qu'ranic readings and lectures as children. Yes, even the so-called "moderates."

As for the Assad regime, as long as the Syrian Ikhwan al Muslimin (Muslim Brothers or Brotherhood) reassert themselves, the Alawites hold on power remains precarious and only possible with brute force at this stage. The overthrow of Assad's regime would further weaken Syria and ensure genocide against the protected minorities (especially the dwindling Middle Eastern Christian population). Assad has more to worry about than just Da'ish. Russia retains its military bases, particularly its naval facility in Tartus. But

there would be no significant "balance of power" shift in favor of the Iranians or Assad or Russia with the removal of Da'ish from Syria and Iraq.

Vern Liebl, Marine Corps University

The easy answer to the above question is that the ideology of the Islamic State, as doctrinally expressed by "Caliph" Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi al-Husseini al-Qureshi, is utterly eradicated not only from the Middle East and the larger world but also from Islam. As well, all its current and potential future adherents will, if not themselves have been killed, openly renounce the ideology of the Islamic State and reject efforts to defend, maintain or extend the religious-political entity called al-Dawlat al-Islamiyah. Finally, the referenced entity will have been completely defeated in all aspects, militarily, societally, governmentally, educational structures, etc. Comprehensively defeated, discredited and erased from any future resurrection.

The likelihood of the above happening is, to say the least, remote if not impossible.

First, it appears that there is an unwillingness to recognize even the name of the entity in question, much less any other aspects of it. The term "ISIS" ended on 29 June 2014 when Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced the establishment of the "Islamic State" (al-Dawlat al-Islamiyah), or the "Caliphate." The "Islamic State of Iraq and al-Shem" (ISIS, or ISIL, or Daesh), was in existence from April 2013, when the then Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) rejected its sponsor Al Qaeda, initiating open conflict between the two (resulting in a conflict resulting in the death of approximately 3,000 fighters from both sides. Bottom line, the entity being referenced should correctly be termed the Islamic State, or IS.

When looking at the ideology of the Islamic State (IS), it must be placed within the context of the Deen of Islam, which is where few non-Muslims wish to look. Even more so, it is a knowledge of which most Muslims themselves are unaware and some Muslims do not want non-Muslims to ever explore. The creed of the Islamic State is clearly Sunni Muwahhidun (Wahhabi), by their own admission and practice. This creed already exists within Saudi Arabia and Qatar as a part of the larger "Salafi" movement within Islam, but the IS believes that the Muwahhidun of Saudi Arabia and Qatar have become "too liberal" and corrupt. Additionally, IS "knows" that all Muslims must be brought back to the strict and austere belief of the Tawhid of the Rashidun Caliphs (as articulated by Ibn Tammiyah [13th century] and Mohammad Wahhab [18th century]). In accordance with IS religious-ideological doctrine, the al-Dawlat (State) intends to purify Islam and Muslims, in fact, it must.

The IS uses quotes directly from the Quran to support its position, citations which are admittedly "cherry-picked" to support their doctrine (however, as the Quran is not organized chronologically but in longest Surah [chapter] to shortest, all citing out of the Quran is essentially "cherry-picking"). As a few examples of citing, the following are Surah and Ayah (chapter and verse) IS uses to support its actions and aims: 3:32, 9:29, 48:29, 9:73, 4:24, 9:111, 5:33, 47:35, 9:5, 2:106, 8:12, 3:151. While admittedly espousing violence in the way of Islam, if one is to believe that these are the direct revelations of Allah to Muhammad via the Archangel Jibril, the problem is being that they are also accepted within the mainstream of the rest of Islam (with the possible exception of the Ahmadiyya). So, employing Ahadith to "correctly" interpret Quranic citations, the IS "knows" it is the "mainstream" of Islam and must bring all others to the "true" Deen.

Assuming the military defeat of IS forces by overwhelming power in the near future, does that invalidate the message and canon of the Islamic State? No, it does not. It just means that Allah does not yet want the Islamic State to triumph, that more "testing" is required, as the current defeat must be the Will of Allah. It does not invalidate the effort to purify the Deen, it does not invalidate the willingness (and

necessity) of sacrifice, it does not mean they are wrong. Therefore, the religious-ideological doctrine of the Islamic State will not just go away with military defeat. And it will still exist, to a degree, within Saudi Arabia and Qatar as well (expansion upon which is not within the purview of this document).

While it would be nice to not have to discuss IS in such religious terms, which many U.S. decision makers find not only difficult to comprehend but politically abhorrent (as they believe it opens them up to cries of discrimination, religious hatred, etc.), the very foundational nature of the Islamic State is based upon an eschatological outlook, meaning the part of theology concerned with death, judgment, and the final destiny of mankind. Without grasping this, any understanding, much less the defeat of IS, is exceedingly difficult.

There are real consequences, on the ground in Iraq, which show this. Currently, Iraqi and Coalition forces are hyper-focused on the re-conquest of Mosul. As this is underway, IS "stay-behind" cells are functioning in areas supposedly reclaimed by the Baghdad government. Additionally, there is an awareness that IS infiltration is ongoing within Sunni Arab areas of Iraq. Much of this is being enabled by the Baghdad government policies of using Shia Hashd al-Shaabi PMFs (Popular Mobilization Forces supported, equipped and often led by Iranian officers) and/or Federal Police units (predominately Shia) for rear area security and consolidation forces in recently recaptured Sunni Arab regions. Despite the fact that the Baghdad government really has no choice in doing so, as its best forces are engaged in Mosul and the remaining forces are little better than a corrupt jobs program, this validates the IS contention that if Sunnis do not support the IS, they will be ruled by apostate Rafidah ("rejecters", a pejorative term for Shia).

Unfortunately for those engaged in combatting IS, while the organizational infrastructure (be it a proto-state or a terrorist organization) may be destroyed, the religio-ideological tenets are here to stay. Time and competition within the greater theology of Islam may ultimately extinguish it or redirect those energies, however, religious "sects" and movements sometimes prove long-lasting and recrudescent, such as the Ibadiyya of Oman today (originated as a Hejazi rebellious religious movement in the 740s). Alternatively, it may minimize itself quickly, such as the Jund As-Samaa (Soldiers of Heaven), a heretical Shia Mahdist group originating in Iraq in 2007 and, at least so far, largely suppressed by 2008. It is very likely that when IS is defeated militarily, many of the remaining adherents will likely slip into Al Qaeda, increasing AQ reach and lethality. Still, now that the IS has resurrected the Caliphate as a concept, it will be very difficult for devout Muslims bent on expressing the supremacism of Islam from walking down a now well-trod path. Which very likely means recurring takfirist rebellions in Sunni areas.

As to how the U.S./Coalition could define success for themselves in the region, that could be when there is no longer a requirement for U.S./Coalition forces to remain within any country in the Middle East in order to prop up a government which does not enjoy the legitimacy of its own population. This does not necessarily preclude no basing of U.S. forces within the Middle East, as long as they are not a trigger for an IS recrudescence.

In looking at the defeat of IS as a possible regional balance of power shift in regards to Iran, Russia or a Syria still led by Assad, the situation is complicated. Iran, while seemingly on the leading edge of a successful construction of the "feared" Shia Crescent as described by Jordanian King Abdullah II in 2004, is grossly over-extended. While Iraq is largely a Shia populated state, it is not a willing part of Iranian imperialist/Islamist designs. It does provide much of the expeditionary manpower for Iranian-supported Hashd units in Syria but ultimately, at least so far, Iraqi nationalism has proven to be an adequate counter-balance to Iranian designs. Likewise, while the Lebanese Hezbollah have traditionally been seen as the

fullest supporters of Iranian efforts within Lebanon and Syria. Recently less than adequate support to Hezbollah forces in Syria has led many Lebanese Shia to understand that Iran, when given a choice of who to sacrifice they will toss Hezbollah into the furnace vice Persian Shia from Iran. The opportunistic Alawites (heretical Shia) and Christians in Syria in working with Iran is short-term at best. Iran is trying hard to avoid upsetting its own populace, which is why Hazaras of Iran and Afghanistan have been recruited (possibly as many as 20,000) to fight in Syria as proxies (mercenaries, actually). Further afield, it is Iran which has been presented with a serendipitous and short-termed opportunity to support the Houthis in Yemen against the major Iranian antagonist, Saudi Arabia.

The position of Russia in regards to the defeat of the IS is difficult for this analyst to divine. Clearly Russia intervened in Syria for several reasons. One was the lack of willingness of the U.S. to intervene (at least from 2014 to 2016) in to Syria. A second reason was a Russian desire to both support the Assad government as well as preserve Russian bases and interests in Syria. Once in, Russia was pragmatic enough to solicit and find potential future allies such as the Kurdish statelet called the PYD (the Democratic Union Party, or Rojava). Yet it may be that the primary reason for Russian intervention and continued presence is to conduct "Zachistki" (clean-up operations) against the numerous Chechens operating in Idlib governorate in Syria (where those Chechens are training terrorists to go to Russia to conduct suicide attacks).

The destruction of the Islamic State will grant breathing space to all parties in the Syria/Iraq region but it will likely be short-lived at best. AQ-linked and FSA insurgent organizations will remain an ongoing presence as long as Turkey and the Arabian Peninsula countries continue to flow money into Sunni proxy forces. The Syrian government and its security forces do not have enough manpower to regain and securely hold those areas which have not been under the control of Damascus since 2011/2012. The Kurds and their goals, also outside the purview of this document, have fundamentally changed the power structures of the Middle East and nobody yet knows how this will shift out.

Just to show the continuing volatility of the region in regards to the IS, consider the Druze. To date, Islamic State forces have conducted few attacks against Druze inhabited areas in Syria. However, IS forces are driving southwest, despite the mesmerizing focus of all upon Mosul (and to a formerly lesser extent, Aleppo). Representatives of the Druze in Syria, while nominally remaining supporters of the Damascus government also realize they cannot depend on security from Damascus forces. So, arrangements are being explored with the Druze of Israel to request, in the advent of major IS activity against the Syrian Druze, Israeli military intervention. Just imagine what a "humanitarian" Israeli intervention into the Jabal al-Druze of southern Syria would do to the situation in the Middle East.

University of Nebraska Omaha: Gina Scott Ligon, Ph.D., Margeret Hall, Ph.D., Michael Logan, M.A., Clara Braun, and Samuel Church

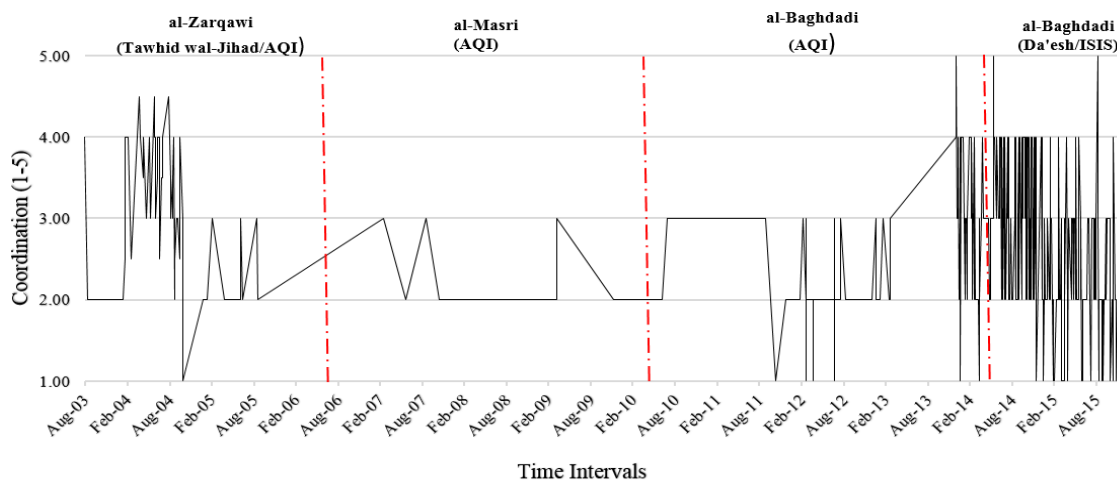**What does a successfully concluded campaign against ISIS look like?[1]**

Examine Malevolent Collaboration as a Metric of ISIS Degradation

One measure of a successful campaign against ISIS/Da'esh is the degradation of its organizational capacity and resilience. The Leadership of the Extreme and Dangerous for Innovative Results (LEADIR)[2] project monitors changes in organizational performance of violent ideological groups, and our assessments indicate changes in their collaboration and coordination across both attacks and cyber presence.

Attack Planning. Table 1 highlights changes that were observed in attack coordination based on leader decapitation events over the lifespan of the organization that is now Da'esh. The graph is broken up into four different time-periods denoted by the vertical line (in red). The first period represents Zarqawi's leadership of Tawhid and Jihad, and subsequently AQI, from August 18, 2003 until his death on June 7, 2006. The second period represents the represents AQI's attack coordination after Zarqawi's death until the killing of AQI's second emir, al-Masri, on April 18, 2010. Finally, the last two periods represent AQI and Da'esh under the group's current emir, al-Baghdadi. Despite having the same leader, the graph is split into two sections to highlight trends in attack coordination before and after Baghdadi formally declared the caliphate on June 29, 2014.

Table 1. Longitudinal Malevolent Collaboration: Attacks

Da'esh Attack Coordination (2003 - 2015)

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[1] This is in response to Round 4 of CENTCOM 2017 Reach back, question 4: What does a successfully concluded campaign against ISIS look like?1 Considering costs, reputation, and balance of influence, how should the U.S./Coalition define success?   Is the defeat of ISIS a success if it causes the balance of power in the region to shift towards Iran, Assad, or Russia?

[2] This project provides a longitudinal examination of violent extremist organizations and can be accessed at http://www.start.umd.edu/research-projects/organizational-determinants-violence-and-performance

Towards the present question is the period when AQI was under the leadership of al-Masri. Specifically, our data support the idea that AQI was on the decline and sustainably diminished compared to AQI under Zarqawi's leadership, and has had an increase in its capacity given the leadership structure and organizational resilience under al-Baghdadi. Examination of the leadership team during this time period under al-Masri shows degradation of formalization, organizational collaboration, and leadership influence. Similar to other types of organizational performance[3], highly coordinated attacks require some degree of planning centralization, connectedness, and functional specialization – characteristics of high performing terrorist organizations[4]. When terrorist organizations lack one or more of these elements, they often risk infiltration and/or losing the appropriate inter-organizational collaboration necessary to execute a highly coordinated attack. As such, examining the coordination of attacks is a useful strategy toward developing a measure of success at counterterrorism efforts to degrade and ultimately defeat Da'esh. We are currently assessing attacks in 2016[5] to analyze how collaboration has degraded to present, and preliminary results indicate that attack coordination is weakening similar to under al-Masri's leadership period.

Cyber Collaboration. We define cyber collaboration by measuring a VEO's use of social networking sites, the presence of comments on posted content, views on pages, and use of encrypted messaging sources[6]. The reasonable radicalization pathway is ISIS/Da'esh actively engaging audiences with publicly available social media and social networking sites, then moving conversations into encrypted spaces to support recruitment[7]. Looking at these four metrics and differences in usage of these content sharing formats over the timespan 2015-2017, we find significant differences in usage patterns across years as highlighted in Table 2. Particularly of note:

- 2015 was the peak year for increased use of social networking sites as compared to other years in the dataset.

- 2015 had significantly more views on pages than 2016 and 2017.

- 2015 was the major year in use of encrypted messaging on the open web as compared to all other years in the dataset.

- Comments on pages were significantly higher in 2015 than in 2016. However, 2017 is significantly higher in user commenting than all other years in the dataset.

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[3] Ligon, G.S., Simi, P., Harris, D. (2012). Putting the "O" in VEO: Examining violent ideological organizations. *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict Journal: Pathways toward genocide and terrorism.*

[4] We recognize that terrorist organizations can be successful without a high degree centralization, connectedness, or specialization; however, our longitudinal LEADIR dataset does not support this to be the case.

[5] The Global Terrorism Database, from the National Consortium of Studies of Terrorism and Responses (START) to Terrorism, releases prior year's attacks in June each year.

[6] For a full description of our cyber sophistication and collaboration metrics, please review the 2016 LEADIR Technical Report, available at START or by contacting the principal investigator gligon@unomaha.edu

[7] Hunter, S.T., Shortland, N., Crayne, M., & Ligon, G.S. (2017). Recruitment in Terrorist Organizations. *American Psychologist Special Issue on Terrorism.*
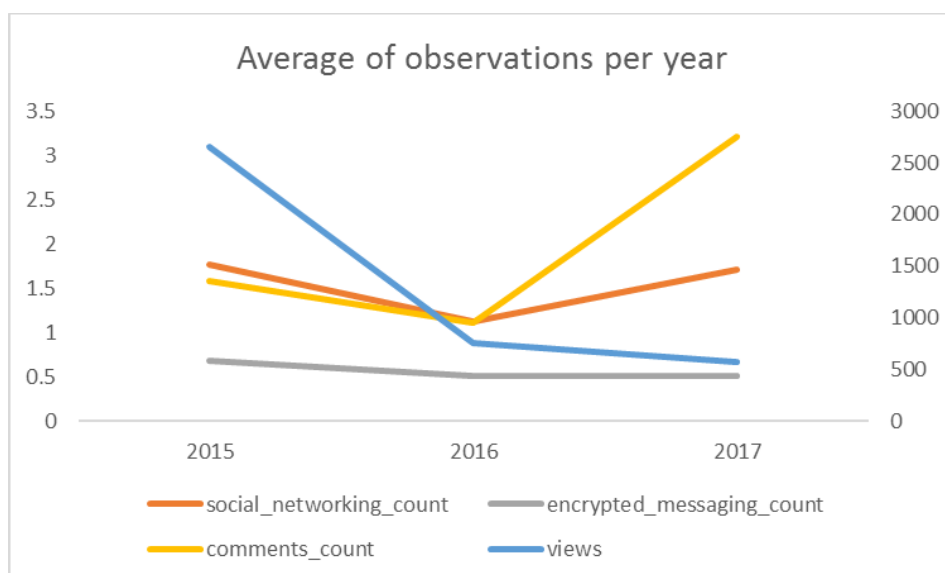
Table 2. Longitudinal Malevolent Collaboration: Cyber

These findings reflect the timeline found in attack planning. 2015 was a strong outreach year in order to support the global caliphate or plan (and/or celebrate) international and national attacks. Likewise, 2015 was the height of open broadcasting for these groups, which was important to spread groups' messaging and garner broad support from stakeholders. Decreasing public cyber presence decreases ISIS/Da'esh's chances of successfully radicalizing other (young) messaging-vulnerable individuals via internet content sharing. This holds true even as the group moves towards encrypted messaging, as without a steady stream of new content for vulnerable individuals to consume, they are less likely to be able to initially engage in content exchanges.

It must however be noted that while the comments on pages initially dipped after 2015, there appears to be resurgent interest since the beginning of this year; however, demand is not being matched by supply according to our dataset. This is a further sign of degradation of capacity of ISIS/Da'esh.

Summary

Thus, we recommend expanding the measure of success against ISIS to include measures of organizational degradation, such as decreases in collaboration and coordination across physical and cyber domains. Examining the degradation of ISIS to not only include loss of territory but also malevolent collaboration across physical and cyber domains can provide some indication of success that is not currently discussed. For example, in cyber it is important to consider the supply and demand of publicly available content and access to encrypted content. When demand is lower than supply, the group is unlikely to have a successfully operating recruitment strategy.

Degradation in these capabilities should be linked in time and space to efforts from the Coalition in order to maintain a close causal tie to Allies in the region. Moreover, Turkey should be a central partner in understanding how Coalition efforts are tied to specific organizational degradation efforts above and beyond terrain lost from ISIS/Da'esh. If Turkey were to credit Russia with defeats against Da'esh, this could cause some weakening in their alliance with the United States, specifically[8]. Alliance Theory suggests that

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[8] Hanioglu, S. (April 4, 2017). Is America's alliance with Turkey doomed? *Strategic Culture Foundation Journal.* http://www.strategic-culture.org/news/2017/04/17/is-america-alliance-with-turkey-doomed.html

given the shift in Turkey's political climate away from the West, a central component of their willingness to concede to US requests is tied to their perception that we provide elements of National Security against strategic threats to the region. Thus, associating Coalition actions to the degradation in organizational capacity of Da'esh is one mechanism to strengthen that alliance.

Ian Lustick, University of Pennsylvania

My analysis of ISIS is that it represents two very different kinds of threats and so success in defeating ISIS means two very different things.

Threat 1. At the concrete level of brutality, murder, destruction, destabilization, and barbarism in the areas where it is most active—Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, etc.—success means bringing about an end to all operations organized, directed, and implemented by those who subjectively imagine themselves or objectively appear to be working on behalf of that organization. I consider the main motor behind ISIS— the leadership cadres who govern its strategic operations and who train and oversee its commanders and its budgets--to be much more like STASI or Gestapo organization of ex-Saddam *mukhabarat* and intelligence people, and much less like an "authentically" jihadist or an Islamist-motivated group of leaders. Whatever façade of Islam and Jihad these men use to advertise and recruit the thousands of suckers they attract as cannon fodder, or to justify their ostracism and destruction of all competitors in areas where they seek to dominate, they are in it for money, for power and for protection, now, against revenge. They must be brought to justice, as it is said, one way or another.

Threat 2. The gruesome videos that the group has distributed over the web and over social media, and the "myth" of a return of the Caliphate as a real state governing real territory, have a proven capacity to capture the imaginations of disturbingly large numbers of people in both Muslim and non-Muslim countries. It is probable that the first sort of victory over ISIS, described above, could be accomplished, without bringing to an end the circulation of propaganda that promotes the ISIS myth and thereby spurs the emergence of lone-wolf or small cell activity around the world by those who would, out of their own personal interpretation of that propaganda and their own personal circumstances, seek to advance the jihadi or Caliphal program in the name of ISIS. While the eradication of such propaganda from the web and from social media is probably an impossible standard for success, the absence of attacks publicly credited to ISIS or declared to have been carried out in the name of ISIS would, in my judgment, be an excellent benchmark for success in countering this second type of threat.

Victory over ISIS (threat 1) may have marginal, but largely unpredictable impacts on the larger diplomatic and balance of power in the region, though with respect to relations among Kurds, Turks, Iraq, and the Assad regime, the absence of ISIS may have immediate tactical and political implications. But overall these calculations are not performable with enough reliability, and the scale of the implications are not sufficiently potent, to interfere with a straight-out effort to destroy ISIS as a political-military-terror-producing organization.

Kimberly Marten, Barnard College

1. Nothing the US does will ever eliminate the threat of radical Islamist terrorism; that threat will be with us for the foreseeable future. Most likely a battlefield defeat of ISIS will cause those who espouse its goals to look elsewhere for another leadership iteration of a like-minded movement, much as ISIS morphed out of Al Qaeda in Iraq, which itself morphed out of the Al Qaeda base, which morphed out of the mujahedeen and probably had its roots in anti-establishment movements in Egypt and Pakistan in the 1960s. It will likely take a few years—but even if Raqqa falls, something like ISIS will be back eventually, if the fundamental causes of the movement's success are not addressed.

2. There are two important factors that will limit the ability of ISIS and similar movements to thrive in the future. (1) If Sunni populations (throughout the world, including Europe as well as the Middle East) believe that their political interests are being served and that they have the ability to thrive, ISIS and like-minded movements will lose their attraction. At that point like-minded terrorist attacks may still happen from time to time, but will likely be weak and unsupported with a home base. (2) Scholarly evidence indicates that the factor most allowing large terrorist movements to thrive on the ground is the chaos of civil war. The prevention and curtailment of civil wars in states with large Sunni populations should thus be a high priority.

3. If the US wishes to minimize the possibility for ISIS or like-minded movements to thrive in the future, then the most important actions it can take are diplomatic and political, aimed at the two intertwined problems of encouraging inclusive policies toward Sunni populations, and preventing or curtailing civil war. Military force might be useful in some parts of this enterprise, but the problems are fundamentally political.

4. My own assessment is that the US does not have the global influence at the moment to lead this effort—but that the US could end up inadvertently making things worse, if it is seen by Sunnis as being on the side of their "oppressors." Oppression can be defined either in sectarian terms, or in terms of corrupt secular leaders who steal from their people.

5. Causing the balance of power to shift toward Assad, Iran, and Russia completely undermines the goal of protecting Sunni populations, since each of those regimes treats their domestic Sunnis badly. However, if those regimes are strong enough to prevent civil war from arising in their countries in the future, then this will limit the ability of ISIS or like-minded organizations to thrive on their territories. In that case, ISIS or like-minded organizations will not disappear; they will merely seek greener pastures elsewhere, such as an unstable AfPak border or Yemen or South Sudan, while continuing to attract travelling adherents from places like Syria and Chechnya.

6. The worst thing the US could do for its own interests would be to seem like an ally of Russia, Iran, or Syria in putting down Sunnis. That would direct ISIS or like-minded organization wrath back on to US soil. For this reason, the US should not be seen as supporting the rule of Bashar Assad.

Diane Maye, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University

A successfully concluded campaign against ISIS has an end-state where an **elected government** has a **monopoly on the legitimate use of force**. ISIS could easily mutate in other another form and regenerate as soon as U.S. and coalition forces leave the region. Therefore, Iraq needs balanced, secular, and decentralized governance, especially in areas where ISIS held territory. Furthermore, Iraqi governance that favors American interests needs robust American engagement to offer **incentives** and **consequences** (*carrots and sticks*).

One of the central issues for Western policy makers is that the Syrians, Turks, Iranians, and the Russians have considerable influence in this region. Yet, their influence has only served to bankrupt the economy and the people. Iran is expanding their power and exporting the Islamic revolution espoused by Ayatollah Khomeini. Iranian networks throughout Iraq and Syria helped sustain Tehran while they were under the embargo imposed by the West. Iran's interference with the internal polices of countries across the Middle East is causing political tension and unrest. If Iran and Russia continue to seek hegemony in the Middle East, the entire region will continue to see the deterioration of the power held by their governments and the stability of the nation-state system created after the fall of the Ottoman Empire.

Once the kinetic military campaign against ISIS has commenced, the coalition needs to ensure there will be no looting, nor political infiltration from Iranian-leaning militias. Next, the liberated grounds must be returned to their rightful owners. This process needs to be just, legitimate, and straightforward; and it will take time. Next, there needs to be a rebuilding campaign. This is where the U.S. can gain a considerable amount of influence and soft power. Yet, this needs to be done in a way that does not create more corruption. During this period, the Iraqi military and the Iraqi security forces need to hold ground and stabilize the area. The Kurdish population in this region is weak and can be easily swayed by Turkish and Iranian political influences. The Kurds are interested in holding Mosul, and without a strong coalition presence on the ground, there will be intense jockeying for power amongst the regional players. Finally, the United Nations needs to be present during the next election cycle. Syrian, Iranian and Russian influences need to be thwarted; **none of this will be possible without an enduring coalition presence on the ground**.

The Iraqi military can either be a catalyst for religious fervor or the harbinger of reconciliation on the population; what is most important is that they are directed in the proper manner. The Iraqi military follows their leadership, and many of the leaders are loyal to a particular party or political leader. In order for the concept of "Iraqi" nationalism to begin to resonate with the masses, Iraq needs firm and fair leadership, a commitment to institutions that benefit the people, and the **revitalization of national (secular) symbols of prestige**. Conscription may be one way to accelerate reconciliation if done in a proper way. During the Iran-Iraq war many young men were given favored positions in the military based on their family's political connections, so it will be extremely important that conscription is done in a way that will not benefit any one group (or person) over another.

The defeat of ISIS is not a success if the power vacuum gives rise to Iranian, Syrian, or Russian influence in the areas ISIS currently holds. It is important to note that U.S. isolation and rapid withdrawal is the wrong recipe for Middle East, unless we want to cede power and influence to nefarious actors. Likewise, the U.S. needs to retain important and historical alliances in the region like those with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt. For instance, a policy of isolation will not give U.S. policymakers any *insight* or *influence* into how the KSA uses their American-made weapons or how the Egyptians confront internal threats to their state.

Furthermore, without the U.S. in the region to act as a buffer, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Egypt, Turkey and Iran will continue with their hegemonic aspirations. One impact may be a Middle East arms race, and the more the U.S. retreats from the region, the more likely it is that the arms race will be nuclear.

PiX Team, Tesla Government Services

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Daniel Serwer, Johns Hopkins University

Success in Syria should be defined in terms of sustainable peace and security. That won't be possible under Assad or with the Russians and Iranians playing the roles they play today in propping up a minority dictator and repressing the majority Sunni population. So long as Assad is there, Syrians will be fighting him. The longer it lasts, the more those Syrians will be extremist.

After a successful campaign against ISIS, Syrians in different parts of the country should be able to govern themselves, repress terrorist activity with forces that do not oppress or attack the rest of the population, begin to return economic activity to prewar levels, and return to their homes or resettle freely without fear of persecution. We are a very long way from that, even in the most stable parts of the country (some Kurdish-controlled areas and parts of the south).

Martin Styszynski, Adam Mickiewicz University

Post-Islamic State Scenario in the Middle East

Introduction

The continuing military setbacks suffered by the Islamic State (IS) terrorist group in Iraq and Syria, the shrinking territory of the so-called caliphate, declining revenues, the decimation of top military commanders, fewer recruits as well as infighting and desertions, indicate that the group is on a systemic decline. However, despite experiencing losses on the main battlefields, IS global networks remain operationally active, both in the virtual and physical realm. A prognosis of the threat landscape post-IS must therefore take into account the following factors: the strategic withdrawal of IS from strongholds into less-populated areas to plan and carry out terrorist attacks; IS' expansion of terrorist frontlines and returning IS fighters; the rise in sectarian and religious conflicts; and Al Qaeda's re-emergence.

Strategic Withdrawal of IS Insurgents

To date, IS has lost a significant percentage of its territories, including the Iraqi bases in Ramadi and Tikrit, as well as the Syrian branches in Kobane and Palmyra. One estimate put the territorial loss at over 60% in Iraq and 30% in Syria. Currently, IS is fighting a losing battle in western Mosul which is under heavy attack from US-led Coalition forces, and preparing for the impending all-out offensive against them in Raqqa, IS de facto capital.

As IS' focus shifts from being localised to becoming more globalised, IS is likely to shift to less populated areas with deserts or mountainous terrains to avoid direct confrontations with government forces and their Western allies. The group will also relocate to smaller strongholds to conduct terrorist activities and to create political and social unrest in the Middle East. Already Syrian jihadist groups like *Jabhat Fateh al-Sham* (previously al-Nusra) or *Harakat Ahrar Al-Sham* have taken the lead and begun moving from their bases in Idlib province to smaller strongholds in Al-Bab, Deir al-Zor or Wadi Barada near Damascus.

Such a strategic withdrawal is not new, as Iraqi jihadist groups like Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), Mujahideen Council or the Islamic State of Iraq had similarly relocated to smaller strongholds following the US intervention in 2003 and collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime. Initially, these jihadists started their terror campaign in Sunni strongholds in Falluja and Ramadi but resumed terrorist attacks on checkpoints, security forces and civilians in smaller districts and villages (Diyala, Baiji, Sinjar, Taji, Husseiniya, Haditha and Haswa) following the raids on their terrorist bases.

Expanding Frontlines

In 2016 IS' spokesman, Mohammad al-Adnani (killed in August 2016) had encouraged IS supporters to establish local branches and to carry out attacks in other parts of the world. To complement the establishment of IS *wilayats* (provinces) globally, IS has also coordinated terrorist attacks and called on jihadist fighters to strengthen an asymmetric terror campaign and activate new frontlines in the Middle East, in a move that is touted to be a diversion tactic aimed at refocusing the attention away from IS' losses in Iraq and Syria. This was evident on 20 December 2016, during the attack targeting the Karak Castle in Jordan, which killed 10 people. IS claimed responsibility for the attack and referenced what it called the symbolic role of the Karak castle in the crusade wars against Islam. This was the second IS assault after a suicide attack at a military outpost at the border with Syria in June 2016. It demonstrates the intensifying jihadist offensive along new frontlines, especially in neighboring countries bordering Iraq and

Syria. In January 2017, an IS supporter rammed a truck into a group of Israeli soldiers killing four and injuring 17 in Jerusalem. In February 2017, IS also claimed responsibility for a rocket fire on Eilat, an Israeli resort.

Besides terrorist attacks on neighbouring countries, foreign fighters returning from the battlefields in Syria and Iraq will also pose a significant challenge to the security of the host countries as they embed themselves within the civilian population. This was evident in the Paris bombings of 2015 and in Brussels in March 2016, both of which were perpetrated by terrorists who were trained in IS' camps and who had fought in the Middle East.

Increase in Sectarian and Religious Conflicts

One possible implication of the post-IS threat landscape would be the rise in intra-religious and inter-religious conflict in countries already afflicted by Sunni-Shia conflict like Iraq, Syria and Yemen, and the targeting of religious communities. Following the collapse of the Sunni-dominated government under Saddam Hussein in 2003, jihadist groups took advantage of the resulting political changes that privileged the Shias and marginalised the Sunni clans. Clashes erupted between rebels from the Sunni districts in Baghdad, Baquba, Ramadi, Tikrit, Samarra and Falluja and the Shia-dominated government of Prime Minister Ayad Allawi and the US forces in 2003 and 2004. In 2004, the anti-Shia campaign received more traction with the terrorist activities of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi whose group was responsible for conducting several attacks against Shia shrines in Karbala and Baghdad. For example, over 180 people were killed following the car bomb attacks in Karbala in December 2014. Sunni-Shia relations have worsened since then and remain vulnerable to exploitation by various political forces, especially religious extremists and jihadists.

As IS loses control of western Mosul in coming weeks, IS jihadists are likely to play the anti-Shia card again to aggravate antagonisms between Sunnis and Shias, as it is the most effective means of retaining support and influence among the dispossessed and disgruntled Sunnis. To heighten tensions, it has already conducted several deadly suicide bombings in Baghdad in the last few months. For example, a series of car bombings in Sadr city and other parts of Baghdad after the New Year in January 2017 killed 56 people and injured 122. On 10 February, a car bomb in Baghdad killed 10 and injured 33. Destabilising Iraq will be an option jihadists will resort to in order to avenge the setbacks they have suffered and keep the resistance against the Shia-dominated government alive.

IS is also likely to exploit neighbouring areas with Sunni-Shia tensions, particularly in Yemen and Saudi Arabia. In Yemen, IS and Al Qaeda jihadists are capitalizing on the fighting between the Shia Zaydi Houthis, a militant group said to be backed by Iran, and the largely-Saudi-backed government of President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, infiltrating cities and towns and creating enclaves.

In the eastern province of Saudi Arabia with has a significant Shia minority, anti-Shia terrorist incidents have increased. On 29 January 2016, a suicide bomber attacked Shia mosques in Al-Ahsa in the east of the country. At least four people were killed and 18 others wounded. Earlier in May 2016, a suicide bomber attacked the Shia Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib Mosque in Qatif, killing at least 21 people.

IS has also carried out terrorist attacks in districts controlled by Shia-backed Hezbollah in Lebanon. For instance, in November 2015, suicide bombers attacked a Shia residential area in southern Beirut, killing 43 people and wounding more than 200, one of the worst attacks in Lebanon for a decade.

Another dimension of the conflict is the targeting of other religious communities, such as Christians. For instance, on 11 December 2016, IS claimed responsibility for the bombing attacks at St. Peter and St. Paul's Church in Cairo, which killed 29 people and injured 47 others. (Eight days later, IS would again claim responsibility for the Christmas attack in Berlin that killed 12 and injured 56 others.) IS can be expected to execute more outrageous terror attacks against Christians and Westerners in order to provoke strong anti-Muslim backlash and create social unrest and discord.

Al Qaeda's Resurgence

Neutralisation of IS' bases and capabilities is likely to affect the competition between IS and Al Qaeda as jihadist fighters search for new avenues to advance the fight against the West. To further its cause, Al Qaeda relied in the past on Islamophobic narratives and capitalised on the perceived humiliation of Muslim communities during the Western military interventions in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003.

Presently, Al Qaeda still maintains its own structures in Maghreb, Sahel, Yemen and Somalia. The collapse of IS' caliphate could possibly lead to a resurgent AQ, which will incentivise the group to redefine its strategy, increase recruitment, consolidate its enclaves, expand into new territories and intensify terrorist activities to recover its position as the pre-eminent global jihadist movement. In this regard, recently, Al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri has condemned IS for its brutal tactics and encouraged all jihadists to unite and fight for establishing Sharia in the Arab-Muslim world. The terrorist attack that occurred in Russia's St Petersburg on 3 April is a good example in this context. Al-Imam Shamil Battalion claimed responsibility for the suicide attack, which killed 16 people and wounded 45 others, Reuters and BBC reported. Al-Imam Shamil stated that the attack had been inspired by Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri and was in retaliation against Russian military actions in Muslim countries.

A younger generation of jihadists are likely to grow more influential in the future as evidenced by the appearance of Osama bin Laden's son, Hamza bin Laden in AQ's manifestos issued in 2016. In the manifesto, Hamza states that all jihadists are Osama – an obvious attempt to exploit Osama's brand name – and declares revenge for the death of his father and oppression of Muslims in Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq. In an audio message in May 2016, Hamza urged Muslims to join the intifada in Palestine to liberate Jerusalem by attacking Jews and their interests worldwide. It is also pertinent that many insurgents travelled with their children to Iraqi and Syrian territories controlled by IS and AQ. These children were forced to study in IS' schools and were indoctrinated from a tender age; they represent the jihadists of tomorrow and may grow to be a significant security threat.

Conclusion

The final defeat of IS in Iraq and Syria as well as destruction of IS' branches in Sirte (Libya) have forced jihadists to rethink their strategies and future approaches in the Middle East. In fact, jihadists have sought to recapitulate past tactics that have succeeded in Iraq, Libya and Syria. However, in their search for new territories and enclaves, terrorist groups like IS and Al Qaeda will seek out appropriate social and political opportunities ripe for conducting terrorist activities, which will encumber efforts by authorities to prevent

and disrupt the threat. Increased inter-agency collaboration will better enable governments to work together in eliminating such loopholes.

The imminent threat of foreign fighters from Syria and Iraq also requires strengthening the mechanisms for protection of borders, verification of documents and surveillance of extremists and terrorists. Also, the neutralisation of IS' bases will compel a resurgent Al Qaeda to gain more recruits by stirring up Islamophobic tendencies in the West and elsewhere and reinvigorate activities in old strongholds in Yemen, Maghreb or Somalia. Such virulent narratives must be countered by discourse of tolerance and inclusivity, with the objective of censuring intolerant and exclusive voices.

IS' children who grew up in the so-called caliphate will also need to be carefully assessed and rehabilitated so as to shatter the illusion of any hope of furthering the cause of the jihadi progenitors in the like of IS and Al Qaeda.

Addressing root causes of political conflicts and instability will be critical if the significant successes of the Coalition forces in the last two years are not to be in vain. To prevent IS or Al Qaeda from exploiting the marginalization of Sunnis in Iraq, socio-economic discontent, poor governance, corruption and unemployment, it is imperative that action be seen to be taken on these fronts, challenging though they are. The alternative is the revival of IS and the strengthening of Al Qaeda, dire outcomes for political stability and security in and outside the region.

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ENDGAME-ENDSTATE:

Success Involves Exploitation of Threat Systems Converging on the ISIS Conflict

A proliferation of serious threat systems is converging to a single point in the rise and spread of ISIS across the MENA region. The campaign against ISIS has long ago ceased to be about excising a single organizational tumor. Instead, U.S. strategy confronts the imperatives of an integrated campaign against uncontrolled intertwining threats poised to unleash far deadlier conflagration that assuredly and irreversibly undermine U.S. national security. The hyper-complex threat-formation in MENA is comprised of the interacting behaviors and strategic intent of Iran, Russia, Syrian Regime, Turkey, ISIS, Al Qaeda, Sunni populations in Iraq/Syria, Shia militia proxy armies, and China, to name a few actors in the zone. A narrowly conceptualized campaign that ignores the integral threat system faces defeat since all current and future indicators overwhelmingly point to onset of self-sustaining and expanding destructive cycles of regional-transregional conflict.

A successfully executed campaign would constitute multiple domains across capabilities, is multi-environmental across tangible-intangible environments, penetrates across human systems, is multi-layered in impact and effects, simultaneous in rapid exploitation of vulnerabilities, and non-sequential in engagement and outcomes. Interlocked, non-reducible benchmarks of the successful endgame-endstate will include critical components.

The successful U.S./Coalition campaign:

1. **Exploits the MENA endgame to rebuild and strengthen U.S. strategic dominance, influence and alliance networks transregionally, coopting key actors Russia, Iran, China and Gulf states to advance targeted priorities for the Middle East and for global security**. The successful strategy prosecutes the conflict not in narrow terms limited to ISIS leading assuredly to loss of the entire Middle East for this century. Loss of the Middle East to converging regional threats would generate wider progressive collapse of US global security across regions, carrying multiple order effects of deepening global instability. This inevitably invites accelerated near-peer and terror network aggression across every region and domain. The successful U.S. campaign averts these outcomes by exploiting the MENA conflict environment to achieve a wider sustainable security endstate.

2. **Denies ISIS its core assets in Iraq/Syria and shapes the region's environment to prevent the network from regaining control**. ISIS is denied all its territory in Iraq/Syria region, and denied civilian sanctuary among the Sunni groups of the central region. ISIS does not retreat to enclaves of Syria to regroup, regenerate and regain control of local populations in the region (ISIS challenges addressed further down). (See also author's response to Question 3)

3. **Rebuilds an operationally effective Iraqi Army to maintain security and stabilize Iraq.** The Army is then able to promote and sustain Sunni population confidence and renewed national pride in the Army's ability to secure their communities in the central region from elements of Shia militia attacks. (See also author's response to Question 3)

4. **Sunni Population behavior shifts from anger/distrust to supporting the Iraqi Army because basing strategy** now moves to locally-manned and locally-led units whose primary mission is guaranteeing the security of surrounding communities. (See also author's response to Question 3)

5. **Identifies and supports a strong leader of Iraq, either with or without a successful election process.** A strong leader of Iraq is the primary and overwhelming sociocultural requirement of legitimacy among the civilian population because strength to control the military and national territory from internal/external conflict is a historically tested trait (over centuries of time) for maintaining social order among rival indigenous groups. This critical and traditional-governance conditionality is the only marker of political legitimacy that is sustainable and acceptable to Iraqi Sunnis, Shia and Kurds alike. The population expects and recognizes traditional-governance not by the *technical processes* of democracy or elections (which have yielded weak leaders), but by demonstration of strong presidential leadership traits to control security forces, signal a will to maintain domestic security, deter population groups from internecine violence and instability, and maintain groups within their historical areas. Though an uncomfortable reality for the U.S., it is the only political model that works for the constituencies which matter: the citizens of Iraq. It is far preferable for U.S. interests to have a reliable ally in a strong leader who fights terror networks and resists Iranian controlling influence, than work with a weak leader emerging from a flawed election process who lacks legitimacy with the country's populations and whose actions are strategically orchestrated by Tehran. A weak leader unable to secure the Sunni population will invite competing terror groups to the central region and inject ascending Iranian control over Iraq's government and military. The outcome without question will be ever-worsening and wider conflict inflicting a heavy cost to U.S. national security.

6. **Contains and isolates Assad's Syrian Regime to its population support areas, while maintaining freedom of maneuver to fight ISIS in its enclaves**. This will allow the U.S./Coalition to prevent merger and reconstitution of terror networks seeking to acquire projection capability across the central region. This effort must also target containment in growth of Iran's Shia militia forces intended to extend territorial control within Syria. Iran's militia growth in Syria has multiple objectives, including the need to establish greater access and coordination with Hezbollah, secure areas already under Iranian control, and launch offensive operations on the pretext of protecting Shia shrines. These actions ensure tangible defense of the Syrian regime while gaining territory, military projection, and eventual Iranian control over Syria's territories as well as Iraq's. Assad, meanwhile, is actively cultivating alliances with geopolitical actors that include not just Russia, but also China which has strategic ambition to access the region's economic opportunities and natural resources. Partnering with the Syrian Regime to rebuild Syrian infrastructure provides just such an access point. A Syria-Russia-Iran denial-of-access triangle base in Syria can readily grow even more powerful with the addition of China.

7. **Contains and deters the spread of Iran's regional hegemony**. Iran's actions and intent are perhaps a greater threat to U.S. interests than is the ISIS terror organization because while the latter does not in itself undermine U.S. regional and transregional dominance, Iran's masterful campaign does. Iran accomplishes its goal for regional dominance through a multipronged and multi-domain strategy: (a) Iran has been building and emplaced a network of indigenous

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paramilitary forces or proxy armies across the region modeled after Hezbollah, its militia in Lebanon. Already well underway, the regionally dispersed and Iranian-controlled indigenous militias include Hezbollah in Lebanon, Shia-militia groups in Iraq, Iranian networks within the Iraqi Army, Houthis in Yemen, and formation of plural Shia militia groups within Syria. Cumulatively, the network of militias projects Iranian power and influence to the Syrian-Lebanese-Israeli border. (b) The regional network of Iran-backed militias is reinforced, trained and locally deployed by elements of the Iranian military increasingly inserted across the region to train and direct their proxy armies and shape military and influence outcomes. (c) Building territorial channels or land bridges to convey Iran's physical power from its own borders to the borders of Lebanon requires going through Northern Iraq. This plan is also well underway as seen in Iran's growing influence over the Iraqi Kurds for transit-access to territory occupied by Kurds. (d) Exploit the regions natural resources and economic opportunities in order to bolster its economy. Added together, these steps toward regional dominance is exponentially enhancing Iran's ability to wage war, build a Shia force to protect and expand Shia territory, constrain and influence regional governments and their armies by creating facts on the ground, impose social control among population groups to serve Iran's interests, export its Islamic Revolution to Syria and the entire region, and expand its regional alliance network to expel the U.S. from the region.

8. **Mitigates and disrupts Russian intent to challenge and shrink U.S. dominance in the region through synergistic asset networks with Iran aimed at denial of access and freedom of maneuver in human and other domains.** Using complex influence, intervention, power demonstrations and alliance-building operations, Russia intends to use the MENA region as a launch pad for building a global set of parallel geopolitical pressures in multiple strategic locations (Europe, Middle East, East Asia, Arctic) in order to test and challenge U.S. ability to maintain global supremacy. Constructing alliances that run circles around and compete with existing U.S. alliance framework of regional players is one element of Russia's strategy, while shaping the conflict through military power intervention, such as in Syria, is another. The third and equally important Russian objective is to leverage power and capability utilizing concrete advantages already gained by its ally Iran in military assets of region-wide indigenous armies that protect and expand Iranian-controlled Shia interests. These assets, including the northern land bridge to project power from Iran's border and link up with assets at the Lebanese border can advantage Russia in its coordinated actions with Iran to generate permanent logistical, infrastructural and informational systems-controls within MENA. Russia will not relinquish its own asset gains in the region such as air bases, ports, fuel and armaments depots, and the alliance network it is forging. But it's coordinated MENA strategy with Iran is intended to work synergistically, so every Iranian gain, is also a net Russian gain with the shared aim of denying access and. freedom of maneuver to the U.S. This momentum will be disrupted by a successful U.S. campaign that exploits Russian-Iranian asset-formation through a multi-domain, multi-environmental, multi-influence, multi-layered and integrated operations, and by creating a secure perimeter of U.S. alliance, influence and asset networks.

ISIS Campaign Challenges: Enhanced Regenerative Capability and Default to Indigenous Order

- **ISIS 3.0**:

o <u>Evolutionary & innovative capabilities</u>: ISIS has developed its own analytical discipline to train the network to evolve and innovate rapidly, regardless of serious setbacks and changing environmental conditions. Its evolutionary strategy investigated by the author in a separate SMA report is centered on resilience of reconstituting cells able to propagate into operational networks at any time. This process is guided by an ideological concept that will continue to diffuse and resonate socioculturally across the region and beyond so long as Muslim population groups and individuals perceive a security threat to their identity and community. ISIS will use the U.S.'s *de facto* partnership with Shia-militia forces in the Mosul campaign for long-term propaganda in regaining Sunni support and energizing new thresholds of recruitment.

o <u>ISIS' evolving pattern of regeneration</u>: Based on ISIS's evolutionary pattern, we can safely predict that success of U.S./Coalition in retaking ISIS territory will enhance the network's regenerative potency for a redoubled ISIS return. Al Qaeda affiliates in the region have been learning from ISIS and will most likely also redouble their own network's strength in the aftermath of the current campaign. Even as their cells are scattered through the region ISIS will continue to conduct operations, consolidate and grow networks, expand globally, and generate new campaigns for recruitment. The current and future reality favors their reconstitution at a rate of at least twice network power because they hold a global monopoly with virtually no competition to their concept in the global ideological marketplace. The proliferation of jihadist and Wahhabi Islam will not abate which means radicalization rates will feed ISIS recruitment, ascending to critical mass in the destabilization of populations and regions across the world. Does the U.S./Coalition success strategy integrate a day-after concept of operations to mitigate if not prevent ISIS's redoubled regeneration? If not, this challenge should be addressed without delay through a comprehensive, innovative and dynamic model.

o <u>ISIS will conduct continuous campaigns to test-exploit the Iraqi government and the Iraqi Army's vulnerabilities, especially its rapid-response capabilities and learning feedback loops</u>—This will be particularly felt around the election season. Similarly, the network will test the government's vulnerabilities to hold and maintain territories seized from ISIS as well as territories still to be uncontested by the Iraqi Army. Using an array of tactics, especially suicide attacks and ground attacks, ISIS will monitor the Army's range of speed and strength in rapid-response capabilities. The network's attack strategies will evolve exponentially from its historic pattern to entirely new techniques from rapid identification/analysis of vulnerabilities so the network can operate dynamically across domains to undermine public confidence in any advances the Army gains in its campaigns. The Army is inherently and structurally disadvantaged in this interactive escalation of tactical innovation, because its victories do not generate self-sustaining momentum in capabilities that can be rapidly transferred and multiplied within and across units. Consequently, while ISIS can acquire knowledge to build and produce new knowledge and capability across its network through rapid diffusion and testing, the Iraqi Army's weak innovative and knowledge capacity will require a long campaign of continuous and unbroken U.S. partnered operations. (See also author's response to Question 3)

- o <u>Sociocultural conditions favorable to ISIS in the current campaign</u>: The perpetuation of civilian insecurity after ISIS loses its territory (temporary at best), will intensify as anxiety over more dangerous threats such as the Shia militia retributive campaigns, Iranian control, and deeply entrenched distrust of the Iraqi government, prevent the Army from building population cooperation and confidence in the maintenance of security. Additional advantages to ISIS in the current U.S. campaign include: a) the terror network sustains its momentum of attacks and the ability to interject into the election season in order to worsen insecurity and affect political outcomes; b) regional pressures on the government and Prime Minister Abadi to manage multiple simultaneous threats such as Turkey's threat to intervene in Northern Iraq, Kurdish demands for independence, security environment surrounding the elections, losing the election, or winning at the ballot box but losing popular legitimacy among Sunnis; c) increased op-tempo of Iranian operations competing with the Iraqi Army will drive the election environment and undermine legitimacy of the outcome; d) cumulative security, political and strategic factors that fuel cycles of political instability which are ideal conditions for ISIS to exploit; and e) instability that can cause further expansion of U.S. involvement in Iraq and ignite ISIS recruitment and regeneration, especially in areas along the Iraq-Syria border.

- **Settlement of the Syrian conflict**: The concept of a federally acceptable system is perhaps the most common assumption for eventual culmination of the Syrian conflict. Yet this concept is very difficult to apply and does not derive from the actual context of actors on the ground seen in unfolding dynamic shifts in population displacement and territorial seizures. The Iranians are certainly a prime obstacle to a federal system in their drive to create permanent facts on the ground by claiming territories in the name of Shia populations and 'historic' Shia sites. They are training and fielding multiple groups of indigenous-led militias to increase and defend these territories. Meanwhile, terrorist organizations are retreating to key pockets aided by Sunni civilian sanctuary as Sunni rebel groups and communities confront dual threats in the Regime and in Iranian-led Shia militia groups proliferating around them, along with other risks. The consolidation of Shia territory aided by Iran and the Regime, on the one hand, and the entrenchment of population-embedded terror organizations on the other, will make it difficult if not impossible in the medium if not the long term to achieve settlements that are honored over the course of weeks, let alone months or years. The prospect of solution will likely not congeal around be federalism, but rather around an internationally guaranteed, monitored and secured 'confederation' of sovereign provinces that maintain their cordon of armed militias.   In the final analysis, the regime's acceptance of any settlement model is not determinative; what is determinative in the endgame is that Iran, far more than other actors, holds the cards. If the Iranians and their proxy militias in Syria accept a settlement, the regime may come along owing its deep dependency on Iranian support. Deeper obstacles to Iran's acceptance of settlement is its larger strategy to create an infrastructure of proxy militias to connect across borders using the Hezbollah model. Any settlement must therefore necessarily provide Iran the freedom of maneuver to continue forging this region-wide strategic infrastructure. Since this will be inherently opposed by the Syrian Sunnis, the U.S. and Sunni Arab states, the notion of a settlement, federal or otherwise, remains firmly beyond the horizon.

- **Emergent security and social order**: U.S./Coalition success in destroying ISIS strongholds in Iraq/Syria will trigger a sustained violent struggle for territory, propagation of armed militias, criminal and power networks, and high-stakes conflict among geopolitical actors for influence, control and exploitative advantage in the transformed environment. Human systems in the region must necessarily evolve in real time to survive, thus creating new conditions for population-based civil war as each group seeks competitive advantage by eliminating the others. This is the ideal breeding ground for emergent and dormant terror networks to fill the security gap with imposition of brutal social control mechanisms cloaked in the legitimizing propaganda of their version of Sharia and delivery of 'justice'. Despite these brutal tactics, war-ravaged populations will actively seek terrorist network protection from what they believe are even worse enemies such as the state/regime with their paramilitary armies carrying out political and sectarian vengeance in the name of another type of 'justice'. To protect their families, communities and homes from displacement or destruction, Sunni population groups in both Iraq and Syria will enter into civilian sanctuary and submission agreements with violent jihadist networks even as the latter exploit the chaos to reconstitute themselves interchangeably between ISIS, Al Qaeda, and local affiliates of these brands. Meanwhile, both the Iraqi state and the Syrian regime will remain in the population's perception as dysfunctional if not harmful to their lives and interests, and the instability will produce its own winners on the field able to capture the largest prize: control of territory and social control of populations and communities. This phase of the cyclical conflict will motivate populations to demand return to a known system of protection with deep roots in the region which they trust and now desire most: the return of indigenous order without the state. Once the modern and externally imposed nation state turns into a rump-state unable to deliver the most basic service, namely, security, the region will inevitably, after a long period of destructive conflict, return to its cultural tradition of autocratic governance, first at the local level then rapidly at the state level. This will arise from a period of violent contestation among warlords, networks and tribal networks, contested and crumbling borders, where the notion of democracy as a process of earning legitimacy will appear nonsensical, alien and unworkable in the judgment of population groups whose driving demand for indigenous models of strongmen will discredit this failed model in favor of one that socioculturally resonates with the memory and narrative of sustained peace. The population ultimately seeks the historical peace of indigenous governance where strong leaders maintain internal security, defend their lands, and leave communities alone to pursue their lives and cultural identities. In the long run, this means that the U.S. and its western allies if they wish to re-impose national borders will bear the task of implementation and maintenance—a somewhat unlikely scenario.

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Dr. Margaret Hall is an Assistant Professor of IT Innovation with the School of Interdisciplinary Informatics, and she holds the Position of Excellence for Violent Extremism Research at the University of Nebraska Omaha. Before this, she was a Senior Researcher and head of the Strategic Initiative 'Participation and Crowd Services' at the Karlsruhe Service Research Institute (KSRI). Dr. Hall's research investigates the integration of digital systems and people, and the digital lifestyle. Her PhD concentrated on the measurement of health and happiness for the creation of sentiment-based indicators for community management, specifically in the case of online communities. Prior to starting her PhD, she worked at the United Nations Office in Geneva and at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Audit and Legal Affairs, and at Bayer Business Services in Training and Process Management. She completed her Bachelors and Masters degrees in Policy studies in the United States, Lebanon, and Switzerland. As a member of the ACM-W Europe Outreach committee, she actively promotes the gender equality in science in technology by raising awareness of the importance of women in STEM professions. You can find her at: http://www.unomaha.edu/college-of-information-science-and-technology/about/faculty-staff/magie-hall.php and https://www.linkedin.com/in/magie-hall-7b0b454.

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Michael Logan is a second-year doctoral student in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Nebraska Omaha. He holds a master's degree in criminal justice from Radford University and a bachelor's degree in criminology from Lynchburg College. His research interests focus on the organization structure and leadership of violent extremist organizations (VEOs), individual-level risk-factors for participation in violent extremism, and far-left extremism more broadly. Michael has worked on projects funded by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the National Consortium of Studies of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). Michael is currently working alongside Dr. Gina Ligon on the *Leadership of the Extreme and Dangerous for Innovation Results* (L.E.A.D.I.R.) database on research that explores markers of malevolent creativity and innovation among VEOs.

Sam Church

Sam Church is a second-year master's student in the College of Information Science and Technology at the University of Nebraska Omaha. He is the developer of the Social Media for Influence and Radicalization (SMIR) Dataset and his research focuses on the cyber capabilities and influence of violent extremist organizations.

Clara Braun

Clara Braun is an incoming master's student in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Nebraska Omaha. She recently completed her bachelor's degree in criminology and criminal justice at the University of Nebraska Omaha and is working as a graduate assistant on projects related to violent extremism for the Center for Collaboration Science.

Ian Lustick

Dr. Lustick is interested in comparative politics, international politics, Middle Eastern politics, and agent-based, computer assisted modeling for the social sciences. He teaches courses on Middle Eastern politics, political identities and institutions, techniques of hegemonic analysis, the expansion and contraction of states, and on relationships among complexity, evolution, and politics. Dr. Lustick is a recipient of awards from the Carnegie Corporation, the National Science Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Social Sciences Research Council, the Middle East Peace Foundation, and the United States Institute of Peace. Before coming to Penn, Professor Lustick taught for fifteen years at Dartmouth College and worked for one year in the Department of State. His present research focuses analysis of the fate of the "two state solution" to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, developing agent-based models for solving complex theoretical and forecasting problems, and understanding the dynamics and vulnerabilities of anti-authoritarian political cascades. He is a past president of the Politics and History Section of the American Political Science Association and of the Association for Israel Studies, and a member of the Council on Foreign Relations.

Kimberly Marten

Kimberly Marten is the Ann Whitney Olin Professor of Political Science at Barnard College, Columbia University, and the Director of the Program on U.S.-Russia Relations at Columbia's Harriman Institute. In March 2017 the Council on Foreign Relations published her special report, *Reducing Tensions between Russia and NATO*. She has written four books, most recently *Warlords: Strong-Arm Brokers in Weak States* (Cornell, 2012). Her first book, *Engaging the Enemy: Organization Theory and Soviet Military Innovation* (Princeton, 1993) won the Marshall Shulman Prize. She has written academic articles for *Armed Forces and Society*, *International Peacekeeping*, *International Security*, the *Journal of Intervention and State-Building*, the *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, and *Problems of Post-Communism*, and her policy articles have appeared in *Fortune*, *The Washington Quarterly*, ForeignAffairs.com, the *Washington Post*'s Monkey Cage blog, and the *Huffington Post*, among others. She is a frequent media commentator, and appeared on "The Daily Show" with Jon Stewart. She earned her undergraduate degree at Harvard and Ph.D. at Stanford. She is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations.

Daniel Serwer

Also a scholar at the Middle East Institute, Daniel Serwer is the author of Righting the Balance (Potomac Books, November 2013), editor (with David Smock) of Facilitating Dialogue (USIP, 2012) and supervised preparation of Guiding Principles for Stabilization and Reconstruction (USIP, 2009). Righting the Balance focuses on how to strengthen the civilian instruments of American foreign policy to match its strong military arm. Facilitating Dialogue analyzes specific cases and best practices in getting people to talk to each other in conflict zones. Guiding Principles is the leading compilation of best practices for civilians and military in post-war state-building.

As vice president of the Centers of Innovation at the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), Serwer led teams working on rule of law, peacebuilding, religion, economics, media, technology, security sector governance and gender. He was also vice president for peace and stability operations at USIP, overseeing its peacebuilding work in Afghanistan, the Balkans, Iraq and Sudan and serving as executive director of the Hamilton/Baker Iraq Study Group.

 As a minister-counselor at the U.S. Department of State, Serwer directed the European office of intelligence and research and served as U.S. special envoy and coordinator for the Bosnian Federation, mediating between Croats and Muslims and negotiating the first agreement reached at the Dayton Peace Talks; from 1990 to 1993, he was deputy chief of mission and chargé d'affaires at the U.S. Embassy in Rome, leading a major diplomatic mission through the end of the Cold War and the first Gulf War.

Serwer is a graduate of Haverford College and earned masters degrees at the University of Chicago and Princeton, where he also did his PhD in history.

Martin Styszynski

Marcin Styszynski (PhD) is an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Arabic and Islamic Studies at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, Poland. He also served as the cultural and scientific attaché in the Embassy of Poland in Egypt (2009-2012) and the second secretary in the Embassy of Poland in Algeria (2012-2014). In 2016 he started new duties of Consul in the Embassy of Poland in Riyadh.

Shalini Venturelli

Dr. Shalini Venturelli is Associate Professor of International Communication and International Relations, in the School of International Service, American University, Washington, DC. She conducts international sociocultural field research and multidisciplinary complex analysis of human systems and information environments of conflict regions, including: sociocultural drivers of instability and international security, and asymmetric information capabilities of strategic competitors. She investigates, regional stability systems, ideology & influence production, population and social order control-mechanisms, enhancement of partner security capabilities, strategic communication, evolutionary capabilities of violent extremist networks, social unrest and global social media networks, and assessments of governance, security and stabilization in volatile world regions.

Current projects include:

- Sociocultural analysis support to the Warfighter in conflict regions.

- Evolutionary capabilities and strategic impacts of violent terrorist networks, including ISIL, Al Qaeda and their affiliates within and across strategic regions.

- Design and application of evolutionary models of information dynamics to identify and predict unstable human ecosystems in trans-regional environments.

- Identification of critical drivers of human ecosystem volatility across diverse security and information orders aimed at advancing capabilities in detection, deterrence and information engagement.

- Control systems mechanisms of asymmetric information and influence capabilities of geopolitical power actors Russia, China, Iran and their non-state proxies across transregional land and maritime domains in MENA, Southwest Asia, Euro-Asia and East Asia.

Prof. Venturelli was awarded the U.S. Army Commander's Medal for Civilian Service for her front-line research support to U.S. forces in Southwest Asia and the Middle East with field investigation and analysis of the strategic information environment and sociocultural drivers of conflict. She is also a recipient of the Secretary of Defense Medal for the Global War on Terrorism for her efforts in support of the Warfighter's mission through enhanced awareness of complex human environments.

Dr. Venturelli has multidisciplinary-multiregional expertise, and is multilingual She is the author of numerous studies, publications and reports on information and communication environments,

information networks, the global communication and knowledge revolution, and culture, media and international security. Professor Venturelli received a Ph.D. from the University of Colorado at Boulder in International Communication & International Relations, an M.A. from the University of Chicago in Interdisciplinary Social Science, and a B.S. from Illinois State University in Economics. She conducts graduate seminars, courses and leadership training in intercultural and cross-cultural communication, culture and international security, sociocultural field research in conflict zones, strategic communication in war and peace, among other programs. Contact: sventur@american.edu

Devin Hayes Ellis

Devin Hayes Ellis is principal faculty specialist in the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences at the University of Maryland, and the Director of the ICONS Project - a groundbreaking simulation and gaming center located at the university. As part of the ongoing SMA Reachback Support to CENTCOM, Devin has been overseeing a series of snapshot wargames focused on potential courses of action by key actors in the Syria conflict under different hypothetical conditions of interest.

A policy analyst by training, Ellis' expertise is in the use of simulations for training and policy research, crisis management, U.S. national security and intelligence policy. He has published research on crisis communication and management, and has an active interest in understanding and improving the way governments and non-governmental actors understand and prepare for conflict. Ellis's academic background is in U.S.-China security policy, and he has lived and studied in China. Over the past decade he has been privileged to participate in several groundbreaking Track II dialogues on U.S.-China crisis management. Devin has designed or consulted on crisis management and planning simulations for a range of clients including: the National Security Agency, USAID, the World Bank, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Brookings Institution, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, the National Defense University Af&Pak Fellows program, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the National Counter Terrorism Center, Ford Motor Co., ABInBev, the Fletcher School of Diplomacy, and the Kennedy School of Government, and various parts of the Department of Defense including the Joint Staff, CENTCOM, EUCOM, SOCOM, PACOM, SOCCENT, and USASOC.