

## SMA Reach-back Report

### Counter-Messaging to Prevent Radicalization

**Question (R6.4):** *Knowing that religion is only one (and not the most important) stimulus for disgruntled Islamic youth to join VEOs, what could/should be the domestic messaging to youth to prevent their “radicalization” and joining the VEOs? To what extent could a continued presence of Western military in the Middle East (even only as instructors/trainers) undermine this messaging in the region?*

#### Contributors

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## Executive Summary

Sarah Canna, NSI Inc.

After the fall of Mosul, as it became clear that Daesh could no longer creditably claim broad swaths of territory for its caliphate, it deliberately reverted to a strategy of insurgency, according to Syrian expert Hassan Hassan.<sup>1</sup> Its withdrawal into the rural desert landscape—and to what a radicalization expert, Haroon Ulla, calls the “cloud caliphate”<sup>2</sup>—has implications for counter-radicalization messaging. Hassan reminds us that when the organization was defeated in the late 2000s, it came back stronger than ever. He notes that its messaging has recently pivoted to attempts to erode trust between Sunni Arab populations and any form of legitimate government. Daesh’s messaging is fueled by the recent memory of the failure of the Sahwa (or Awakening) movement to produce meaningful political reforms for Sunni populations in Iraq. In Syria, Daesh still benefits from the ongoing conflict and enduring Sunni Muslim grievances. At the same time, hardened foreign fighters are leaving Syria and Iraq for other regions where extremism is flourishing including the Sinai region of Egypt and Yemen (Hassan). And, of course, some foreign fighters are returning home across the globe where they can be incubators of future generations of extremists (Hassan).

So given Daesh’s return to insurgency and its embrace of information age recruitment techniques, what are the grievances<sup>3</sup> driving the radicalization of youth in Iraq and Syria, and what messages would be effective in tarnishing the appeal of extremism?

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<sup>1</sup> Hassan, H. (2017). Insurgents Again: The Islamic State’s Calculated Reversion to Attrition in the Syria-Iraq Border Region and Beyond. *Counter Terrorism Center Sentinel*. vol. 10 (11). Retrieved from <https://ctc.usma.edu/posts/insurgents-again-the-islamic-states-calculated-reversion-to-attrition-in-the-syria-iraq-border-region-and-beyond>

<sup>2</sup> Ullah, H. (2018). Countering the Weaponization of Information. Event held at the Middle East Institute, Washington, DC. Retrieved from <http://www.mei.edu/events/countering-weaponization-information-0>

<sup>3</sup> Grievances are a factor for radicalization in some cases, but can also be a spuriously correlated driver of behavior at best, and one that instead is only used to justify social mobilization after the fact, not cause it (McCulloh). Malign behavior is the result of at least a two-phase process, where people become susceptible to alternative means of behavior when their social strain becomes high, and those susceptible populations can be easily persuaded with alternatives, such as extremism (McCulloh). Cognitive openings can also come from the very opposite of grievance – the sense of empowerment offered to an otherwise neutral party (Meredith). These otherwise empowered individuals/groups take up the radical cause, only to have their justification for violence center on grievance after the fact (McCulloh, Meredith). Organizational life cycles play a role here as well – groups have incentives to move joiners, to supporters of violence, to then perpetrators of the message through the method (Meredith). Our strategy must become more sophisticated to be able to offer alternatives to susceptible populations, reduce social strain for groups aligned with US interests, and increase social strain for groups opposed to US interests (McCulloh).

Table 1 Population grievances and counter radicalization messaging

Drivers of Radicalization	Suggested Messaging	Messenger <sup>4</sup>
<b>General lack of positive messaging:</b> <sup>5</sup> (Meredith)	Messages that express satisfaction with an individual’s or group’s purpose, family, identity, material possessions, etc.	Corporate-NGO partnerships over the long term; led at local level to tie local values/meanings, supported by US/partners for resourcing; much harder to emphasize contentment values in Syria, so go heavier on “build” approach (clear, hold, build)
<b>Political social marginalization</b> (Kluver, Meredith, O’Shaughnessy)	Actual evidence of progress towards reform (not just words) is the most important element here. Still will not convince all, but can take the initiative on messaging away from Daesh (Meredith)	State & local governments, but the USG can publicly encourage governments to make meaningful reforms
<b>Unstable or authoritative governments</b> (Kluver)	Like political social marginalization, actions not words are the most potent messages	State & local governments, but the USG can publicly encourage governments to make meaningful reforms.
<b>Harsh socio-economic conditions with few opportunities</b> (Kluver)	Like political social marginalization, evidence of personal economic improvement is the most potent message	State & local governments, but the USG can promote economic development and regional stability and support the distribution of foreign aid
<b>Religion</b> (Shaikh)	Focus on scriptural reference conducive to social cohesion and community development and focus on the correct interpretation of jihad through social media and public messaging platforms	Credible theologians (Shaikh, Styszynski) particularly those from Jordan (Meredith), <sup>6</sup> in parallel with sustained efforts to work with Muslim radicalization experts from Coalition countries (Shaikh)

<sup>4</sup> We know that “any effort we engage in will fall flat without the appropriate channel delivery (in other words, we need to think through WHO delivers the message and for what purpose).” (Ligon)

<sup>5</sup> “Perception” is key (Meredith). We are in an age where information is designed by nature to be discontending, which generates unavoidable perceptions of discontent (Meredith). Therefore, messaging must be designed to encourage contentment with realistic goods with life, family, social history, material possessions, etc. – satisficing rather than maximal thinking inherent to radicalization (Meredith).

<sup>6</sup> The USG should look to Jordan’s religious and political leaders as a strategic partner in the region, who have historically been seen as legitimate “bearers of Muslim traditions/truths across difficult times” (Meredith).

It bears repeating that effective counter extremism messaging in Iraq and Syria requires state and local governments to match promises of reform with actual reform (Kluver, Sager). Dr. Sager reminds readers that between 2007 and 2009, Daesh disappeared from Iraq as the result of the Sahwa movement. But once promised political reform failed to actualize, Daesh came back. This failure of reform cemented the conclusion that the only way to enact reform is through violence. As Hassan notes, Daesh has already begun sowing doubt along these lines.

What is concerning to Dr. Ian McCulloh, a social science researcher and proponent of field research/population surveys, is that the USG has yet to realize that the remaining population of military aged males in Iraq—those most vulnerable to a new round of recruitment from Daesh, Al Qaeda, or other groups—has been stripped of its hard-core ideologues. Those who have not been killed, captured, or fled are likely to be poor, illiterate, and have limited access to social media. These factors may indicate that social media campaigns will have limited effect on this kind of population.

So if the most effective counter radicalization tool is visible political reform, the primary role for the US in counter extremism messaging is a supporting one encouraging regional governments to make meaningful reforms that address the driving forces<sup>7</sup> of radicalization among marginalized Sunni groups (Kluver, Sager). When the USG engages in messaging, it should focus on 1) legitimizing government partners, 2) promoting economic development and regional stability, 3) supporting foreign aid, and 4) reinforcing cultural norms (Sager). For a discussion on how to undermine Daesh’s leadership, please see Dr. Gina Ligon’s article *Leveraging Organizational Fissures to Degrade ISIL Top Management Team* in the contribution section.

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<sup>7</sup> There are many different “driving forces” for different audiences even among the same basic demographic (i.e., young Sunni males) beyond those listed in Table 1. Therefore, there is no single message that will resonate with any one population segment, although experts suggest the guidelines listed in this paragraph provide a starting place.

## Effect of US Presence on Radicalization

Table 2 Effect of US presence on effectiveness of counter radicalization messaging

Type of Presence	Impact on counter-radicalization messaging	SME recommendations for mitigating impact
Instructors/Trainers Only	Negligible for populations who tend to see instructors as real partners (Meredith) but for others could be a trigger for radicalization because all uniforms look like boots on the ground (Kluser)	To be seen as a sincere partner, US needs to message historical examples of outsiders as partners, building off warrior cultural concepts of honor, sacrifice, loyalty, etc. (Meredith)
Active drone campaign	Extremely negative impact on radicalization: fuels perception of US as occupiers (Kluser, Meredith, O'Shaughnessy); increases population perception of powerlessness (Meredith); seen as indiscriminate violence (Meredith)	Create urban safe zones with no drone targets while also increasing local policing to prevent those areas from becoming safe havens for Daesh (Meredith); reduce drone activity for use in only extreme circumstances (Kluser, O'Shaughnessy)
Boots on ground	Not problematic among audiences that see US troops as legitimate partners/providing necessary security which is becoming harder to justify post-military defeat of Daesh (Meredith); could also trigger "foreign occupier" narrative, fueling radicalization (Kluser)	Attempt to limit US presence to specific facilities and ensure that Iraqis are seen taking the lead outside of those few areas (Meredith, Kluser). Recognize that the perception of US shadow presence would likely remain (Meredith, O'Shaughnessy)
No US presence whatsoever	Reduces occupier narrative (Kluser); however, the perception of US shadow presence likely would remain among some audiences regardless (Meredith, O'Shaughnessy)	There is no way to prove US absence (Meredith); the potential negative cost to stabilization without US presence may not justify the effort (Kluser, O'Shaughnessy)
University partnerships	Establishing these partnerships would have minimal effectiveness because problems facing country too great to make a difference (Meredith)	Could coordinate university-foreign government relationships, but adversaries could easily message this partnership in negative way (Meredith)

While a foreign military presence may be deemed necessary for a short time, contributors believe US military presence generally fuels radicalization narratives (Styszynski). Dr. Sager emphasized that in order to avoid undermining counter-radicalization messages with the presence of Western forces, the US should be seen as a catalyst for genuine political reform that benefits populations most at risk of radicalization: Sunni Arabs. The USG should exercise caution, however, to not take adopt general guidelines without further critical analysis, according to Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois of NSI. If, for example, hardliners win Parliamentary elections in Iraq, visible US support for an

administration that is viewed by many Sunni Arab Iraqi as opposed to their interests could fuel further political marginalization, alienation, and radicalization.

## Expert Contributions

### Dr. Skye Cooley and Team

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#### 1. Knowing that religion is only one (and not the most important) stimulus for disgruntled Islamic youth to join VEOs, what could/should be the domestic messaging to youth to prevent their “radicalization” and joining the VEOs?

Population segment	Grievance	Description of Grievance	How significant is the grievance to the population segment? (scale of 1= nominally significant to 5= the most vital grievance)	Appropriate counter message	Appropriate messenger	Does the USG have a role in this kind of messaging?
<b>Disgruntled youth in Middle Eastern nations (e.g., Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen).</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Political and social marginalization</li> <li>Unstable governments</li> <li>Authoritative governments</li> <li>Harsh socio-economic conditions</li> <li>Few economic opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many youth believe USG desires to dominate and destroy Islam</li> <li>Many youth feel distant from and not represented by their national governments.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Afghanistan = 5</li> <li>Iraq = 5</li> <li>Lebanon = 1</li> <li>Pakistan = 5</li> <li>Palestine = 4</li> <li>Saudi Arabia = 3</li> <li>Syria = 5</li> <li>Yemen = 3</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>USG desires economic growth and stability for region</li> <li>USG supports socially positive Islamic values.</li> <li>Provide locally-based counter-</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moderate religious figures</li> <li>Geopolitical diplomats.</li> <li>Multimedia networks, platforms, mediums, and communication</li> </ul>	The USG can publicly encourage these state governments to make meaningful reforms. Furthermore, the USG can generate messages to: 1) legitimize gov. partners, 2) promote economic development

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many of the national governments are either unstable or highly authoritative.</li> <li>• The socio-economic conditions are often very harsh with limited employment opportunities.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the legitimacy and capacity of government partnerships.</li> <li>• Encourage economic development and regional stability.</li> <li>• Stimulate foreign economic aid to undercut recruitment.</li> <li>• Reinforce cultural norms and proactive gender norms.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• channels (e.g., traditional news and online news outlets, and social media platforms).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• and regional stability, 3) support foreign aid, and 4) reinforce cultural norms.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Disgruntled youth in African nations (e.g., Cameroon, Chad, Libya, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, and Tunisia).</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political and social marginalization</li> <li>• Unstable governments</li> <li>• Authoritative governments</li> <li>• Harsh socio-economic conditions</li> <li>• Few economic opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many youth feel distant from and not represented by their state governments.</li> <li>• The socio-economic conditions are often very harsh with limited employment opportunities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cameroon = 2</li> <li>• Chad = 2</li> <li>• Libya = 4</li> <li>• Niger = 3</li> <li>• Nigeria = 3</li> <li>• Somalia = 3</li> <li>• Tunisia = 4</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce marginalization.</li> <li>• Encourage stability and development.</li> <li>• Endorse foreign economic aid.</li> <li>• Reinforce socially beneficial cultural norms.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geopolitical diplomats.</li> <li>• Multimedia networks, platforms, mediums, and communication channels (e.g., traditional news and online news outlets, and social media platforms).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The USG promote economic development and regional stability,) support foreign aid, and reinforce socially beneficial cultural norms.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Disgruntled youth in Central Asian nations (e.g., Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan,</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political and social marginalization</li> <li>• Authoritative governments</li> <li>• Harsh socio-economic conditions</li> <li>• Few economic opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many of the state governments are highly authoritative.</li> <li>• The socio-economic conditions are often very harsh with limited</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Azerbaijan = 2</li> <li>• Georgia = 2</li> <li>• Kazakhstan = 2</li> <li>• Kyrgyzstan = 2</li> <li>• Tajikistan = 2</li> <li>• Turkmenistan = 2</li> <li>• Uzbekistan = 3</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce marginalization.</li> <li>• .</li> <li>• Encourage economic stability and development.</li> <li>• Endorse foreign economic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geopolitical diplomats.</li> <li>• Multimedia networks, platforms, mediums, and communication channels (e.g.,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• USG should promote economic development, cultural development, and integration into global networks.</li> </ul>



Turkmenistan, & Uzbekistan).		employment opportunities.		partnerships.	traditional news and online news outlets, and social media platforms).	
<b>Disgruntled youth in East Asian nations (e.g., China and Russia).</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political and social marginalization for ethnic minorities</li> <li>• Authoritative governments</li> <li>• strong national pride among dominant ethnicities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many youth from ethnic minorities (especially Muslims) feel distant from and not represented by their governments.</li> <li>• Both governments are highly authoritative.</li> <li>• extreme competition for jobs and economic opportunities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• China = 3</li> <li>• Russia = 2</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce marginalization by integration into economic growth opportunities.</li> <li>• Encourage global economic development and partnerships.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geopolitical diplomats.</li> <li>• University and college engagement</li> <li>• Stars from popular culture</li> <li>• Multimedia networks, platforms, mediums, and communication channels (e.g., traditional news and online news outlets, and social media platforms).</li> </ul>	The USG needs to demonstrate that it acts in good faith with national governments, but also is sympathetic to concerns of the marginalized minorities..
<b>Disgruntled youth in Southeast Asian nations (e.g., Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, and Singapore).</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In some nations, ethnic minorities control economic wealth.</li> <li>• In some, there is sympathy for wahabic interpretation of Islam rising concern over China's impact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unequal distribution of wealth</li> <li>• In Muslim majority nations (Malaysia, Indonesia, Bangladesh) anti-US sentiment is aligned with belief that US opposes Islam.</li> <li>• In Philippines, India, and Singapore, concern over Chinese economic and political clout.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bangladesh = 2</li> <li>• India = 2</li> <li>• Indonesia = 2</li> <li>• Malaysia = 1</li> <li>• Philippines = 1</li> <li>• Singapore = 1</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage stability and development.</li> <li>• Endorse foreign economic partnerships.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geopolitical diplomats.</li> <li>• University and college engagement</li> <li>• Stars from popular culture</li> <li>• Multimedia networks, platforms, mediums, and communication channels (e.g., traditional news and online news outlets, and social media platforms).</li> </ul>	The USG will act in good faith to regional governments, and will work with national governments to ensure regional stability.

**2. To what extent could a continued presence of Western military in the Middle East undermine this messaging in the region?**

<b>Type of presence</b>	<b>Negative impact on counter-radicalization messaging</b>	<b>How to mitigate this impact</b>
<b>Instructors/trainers only</b>	Any US person in uniform looks like boots on ground. Triggers occupier narrative, which increases radicalization.	No US military in uniform, or US military personnel restricted to Baghdad or bases.
<b>Active drone campaign</b>	Drone activity provides evidence of the occupier narrative, and, subsequently, increases radicalization.	Reduce drone activity for use in only extreme or justified circumstances.
<b>Boots on ground</b>	All first-hand sightings of US military personnel in public, civilian areas triggers occupier narrative, which increases radicalization.	Reduce US military “boots on the ground” as much as possible in public, civilian areas.
<b>No US presence whatsoever</b>	Reduces occupier narrative, and, theoretically, decreases radicalization.	No US military presence is likely to reduce the occupier narrative and decrease radicalization. However, measures should be developed to externally monitor VEO recruitment.
<b>Other type of presence (please indicate)</b>	N/A	N/A

**3. Please feel free to add any other key points you would like to make below.**

In spite of widely held assumptions, our original research for the SMA noted that ISIL’s social media strategy was neither particularly sophisticated nor effective. Although ISIL and associated groups eagerly utilized social media, that was to very little effect. ISIL has done a relatively poor job of aligning local economic growth and stability with its narrative of a return to pure Islam. As a result, the movement has very little credibility in its home region. USG efforts should continue to monitor destructive narratives that will emerge with the further development of information technologies, such as deepfaked videos that will portray various USG figures in a negative light. USG messaging should continue to reinforce message that USG welcomes the implementation of socially beneficial religious values, that it is committed to economic growth for the region, and that the US is not a colonial force.

The information provided in the above tables comes from various studies and reports. See the following page for these reference citations. Our team is most confident in our original data collection in the Arabic, Russian, and Chinese domains, where it draws upon original data sources. Our understandings and recommendations for sub-saharan Africa, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia are derivative from other sources, and should not be considered authoritative.

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## Dr. Gina Ligon (Contribution 1)

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### **Leadership Fissures Matrix Concept: Degrade ISIL Leadership (for Doc Cabayan effort) updated from the 2015 CENTCOM Support Effort**

Background: Upon examining what is left of the ISIL leadership team (both formal and informal leaders) for past seven years, we have identified that they have a more heterogeneous Top Management Team (TMT) than other VEOs, particularly than their peers in the Global Jihad Industry. To date, these differences have been either overlooked<sup>1</sup> or seen as a strength<sup>2</sup>. However, in conventional TMTs, we can see such heterogeneity as leading to significant barriers to collaboration<sup>3</sup>, and these barriers can lead to fissures and seams that can cause decreased decision making, splintering, and other organizational tensions. In short, while a strength of ISIL is their diverse workforce, in conditions of external pressure and competition, this diversity can also result in tremendous barriers to collaboration for this group. In short, now is the time to foment more discord among those left in leadership roles.

Goal of Current Effort: The proposed effort is to synthesize work that has been done by the SOCCENT COI leadership researchers<sup>4</sup>, we request early feedback about the concept of leveraging organizational fissures to degrade ISIL TMT Collaboration. We have identified three primary classes of leaders:

- . 1) Ideologues are those that are characterized by formal ideological training, networks of Muftis/Elite Clerics, and a focus on ideological goals in decision-making (e.g., return to past levels of greatness, use of negative mental models/experiences for making sense of new problems). They are deep and true believers. They use symbolic imagery, rituals, and inspirational appeal for influence.
- . 2) Violent Seekers are those that have militant training or criminal involvement, often Foreign Terrorist Fighters motivated by violent themes. Their goals center around punishment for infringements of Sharia and/or more pragmatic rules. They have heterogeneous networks of other foreigners outside of Syria and Iraq, and use coercion, violence or the threat of violence for influence.
- . 3) Pragmatics are those that have more secular, and tangible goals (e.g., land, control of government and critical resources), experience in pragmatic roles in former careers (e.g., Baathists, scientists, engineers), and are those that focus on data analysis and rational persuasion for influence.

Across these three leader types, there are likely organizational, biodata, and individual differences that drive their differences.

- . 1) Organizational Roles/Function (e.g., are they in the militant wing or the political/governing wing? Do they have a large span of control? Did they recently experience a loss of territory for their AOR or a gain (nothing breeds organizational cohesion like a win, nothing tears it apart like a loss)?

- . 2) Biodata/Life History (e.g., educational background, ethnic backgrounds, degree of military training)
- . 3) Individual Characteristics (e.g., political skill, penchant for leading others to violence, Integrative Cognitive Complexity, Age/Stage of Moral Development, Risk Aversion<sup>5</sup>).

Where you see large differences among a given set of leaders (e.g., Figure 1, these leaders differ on religious history and militant history), you will likely see very different leadership decision making calculus. Thus, the following graphic in Figure 2 represents competing goals and decision making strategies of these three classes of leaders, based on key differences.

Based on these differences in goals and decision making behaviors, there are likely fissures to capitalize upon in a narrative framework to destabilize the top management team. Table 1 illustrates this fissure matrix with sample messaging content. We think this is a logical approach for message crafting using both the content of what we know about the group as well as the neuro- cognitive influencing principles we know in general. However, any effort we engage in will fall flat without the appropriate channel delivery (in other words, we need to think through WHO delivers the message and for what purpose).

There are two purposes for messages WRT fissures:

1) Catalyst for Deteriorating Collaboration: accelerating internal discord fomenting distrust within leadership team and close followers. Thus, after a particular coalition success, sowing the seeds of discord quickly with a messaging campaign as to why a particular group was selected/targeted. Once we make a decision as to a particular strike/campaign effort, make it RIGHT with messaging. In a top management team with internal discord already, this can help break it down more.

<sup>1</sup> In Ely Karmon's 2015 article comparing ISIL to AQ, we see a homogeneous ISIL that seems to describe the only ideological core of the group, [Perspectives on Terrorism](#)

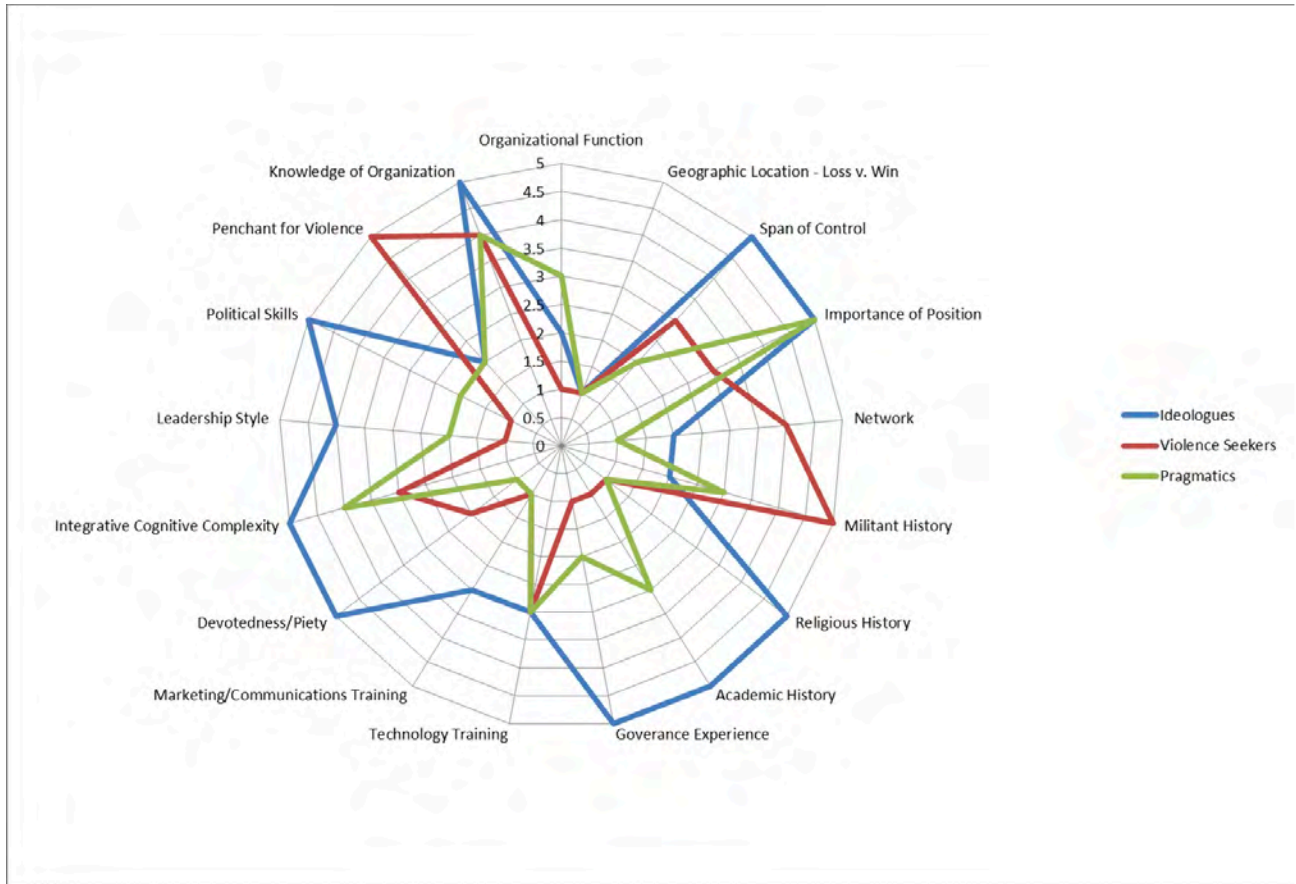
<sup>2</sup> In [Weiss and Hassan 2015](#) book, we see a terrific distinction between the Pragmatics and Ideologues. However, limited attention given to Violence Seekers.

<sup>3</sup> [Hansen's 2009](#) book on barriers to collaboration in conventional organization suggests that inter-group competition is easy to foment in an organization; the challenge for most organizations is overcoming those differences.

<sup>4</sup> We first described this phenomenon in our [2014 Technical Report](#) for the Year One SOCCENT effort. <sup>5</sup> Larry Kuznar & Jason Spitaletta examined differences in Integrative Cognitive Complexity, risk aversion, and moral development.

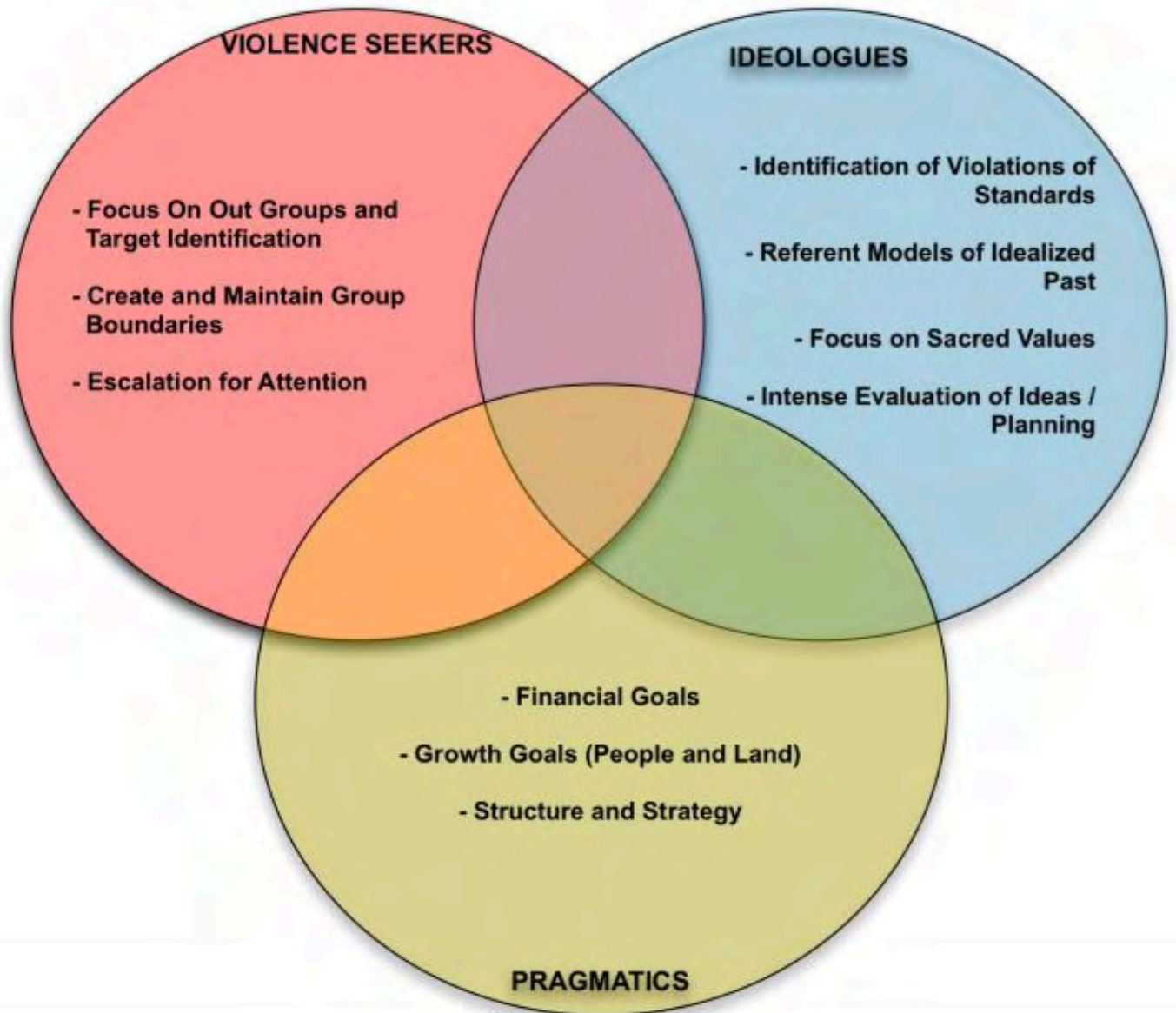
2) Delegitimizing ISIL to Key Elites and Potential Recruits: ISIL plays on a brand of legitimacy and strength. If we are to demonstrate to potential supporters (key elites in the Athena group's model) that it is actually a poorly function organization with infighting, managerial discord and competing visions, we can chink into that veneer of firm legitimacy. This approach - delegitimizing--is based on research that firms try to do to drive down an acquisition price in for-profit organizations.

Figure 1. Differences among Three Classes of ISIL Leaders: Ideologues, Violence Seekers, and Pragmatics<sup>6</sup>



<sup>6</sup> For the detailed codebook of these ratings, please email the study PI [gligon@unomaha.edu](mailto:gligon@unomaha.edu) or Sam [samuel.d.rhem.ctr@mail.mil](mailto:samuel.d.rhem.ctr@mail.mil)

Figure 2. Sample Goals and Decision Making Behaviors of Three Classes of ISIL Leaders



**Table 1. Sample Fissure Matrix**

	Identification of Violations of Standards	Referent Models of Idealized Past	Focus on Sacred Values	Intense Evaluation of Ideas / Planning	Focus On Out Groups and Target Identification	Create and Maintain Group Boundaries	Escalation for Attention
Financial Goals	Personal leader goals / desires are not ideologically congruent (e.g., wealth)		Sacred values are not deeply held by the leader		Outgroups have significant wealth to finance operation.		
Growth Goals (People and Land)		Leader's vision is different from past glories					Leader team seems slow to act in name of strategic land goal.
Structure and Strategy	Adherence to ideology is counter to pragmatic / good strategy	Objectives that are driven by past glories and importance rather than current	Ideological values, rituals impede operational considerations and strategic objectives	Over evaluation of pragmatic, and time sensitive action			



		operations					
Focus On Out Groups and Target Identification			Targeting certain groups overrides leader's goals				
Create and Maintain Group Boundaries							
Escalation for Attention		Attacks dissuade progress from idealized past (e.g., attack disrupts orderly markets).		Overplanning slows leader's objectives and plans			

## Dr. Gina Ligon (Contribution 2)

University of Nebraska at Omaha

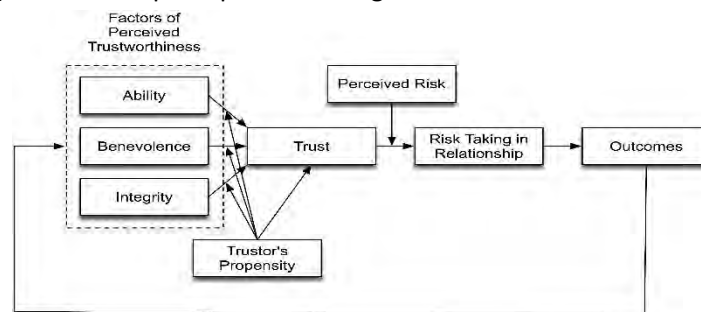
### Background:

Upon examining the ISIL leadership team (both formal and informal leaders) for past seven years, we have identified that they have a more heterogeneous Top Management Team (TMT) than other VEOs, particularly than their peers in the Global Jihad Industry<sup>1</sup>. To date, these differences have been either overlooked or seen as a strength<sup>2</sup>. However, in conventional TMTs, we often see such heterogeneity leads to significant barriers to collaboration<sup>3</sup>, and these barriers can lead to fissures and seams that can cause decreased decision making, splintering, and other organizational tensions. In short, while a strength of ISIL is its diverse workforce, in conditions of external pressure and competition, this diversity can also result in tremendous barriers to collaboration.

Barrier to Collaboration – Distrust across Factions/Subgroups. Using social identity theory, social dominant theory, and information processing theories, there are typically three types of subgroups in organizations: 1) Identity-Based Subgroups 2) Resource Based Subgroups 3) Knowledge-Based Subgroups<sup>4</sup>. ISIL's TMT has identifiable subgroups based on ALL THREE of these drivers. Analysis of the targets (i.e., message, receivers) for the three subgroups/ISIL leader typologies (i.e., Violent Seekers, True Ideologues, and Pragmatics) follows on subsequent pages. Messaging to each of these groups should take into account their decision making style (and errors/biases), organizational functions, life history, psychological characteristics, network, influence levers<sup>5</sup>

Message Goals: Fomenting TMT Distrust – Mayer's model<sup>6</sup> of trust among leaders is based on TMT members perceiving each other's 1) **Ability** (expertise source), 2) **Benevolence** (to each other and external "in-group actors"), and 3) **Integrity**. One way to foment distrust and cause a barrier to effective collaboration (e.g., C2, decision making) is to erode perceptions among the TMT of each other's ability, benevolence, and/or integrity. Thus, messaging should have these goals to accelerate fissures and barriers to collaboration among the three identified leader groups.

Figure 1. Adapted from Mayer et al.



<sup>1</sup> For a detailed report of our longitudinal study of VEO leadership teams, please visit

<http://www.start.umd.edu/research-projects/organizational-determinants-violence-and-performance>

<sup>2</sup> Weiss and Hassan's 2015 book described the role of the former Baathists as a significant operational advantage in early Iraq territory gains.

<sup>3</sup> M. Hansen's (2009) work on barriers to collaboration informs how to foment organizational factions.

<sup>4</sup> Carton, A. M., & Cummings, J. N. (2012). A theory of subgroups in work teams. *Academy of Management Review*, 37: 441-470.

<sup>5</sup> Influence mechanisms based on Yukl's model (1990) of inspirational versus rational appeals.

<sup>6</sup> Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman (1995). An integrative model of organizational trust. *Academy of Management Review*, 20 (3), 709-734.

## **Analysis of the Target (i.e., Message, Receiver): ISIL Leader Typologies<sup>7</sup>:**

### True Ideologues:

- (1) **Decision Making:** Focus on ideological goals in decision making (e.g., return to past levels of greatness, use of negative mental models/past experiences with failure to inform on lessons learned and mistakes to avoid (thus, historical references valued), use of symbolic imagery and rituals in communications.
- (2) **Likely Cognitive Errors:** black and white thinking, lack of flexibility, can overly attend to potential negative consequences.
- (3) **Likely Organizational Functions:** Sharia Council members at Central or Regional/Province levels; governing wing and administrative functions; high organizational knowledge/expertise.
- (4) **Biodata/Life History:** Highly educated, strong understanding and identity with tenets Islam; 10 years or more in formal religious training.
- (5) **Psychological Characteristics:** Deferent to authority, High Allegiance to ISIL<sup>8</sup>; Risk-taking; Patient with new converts and loyal to those with ideological expertise.
- (6) **Network:** Muftis and Elite Clerics; tangential connections to some former Baathists.
- (7) **Influence Levers:**
  - a. Inspirational Appeal – Emotional requests or proposals that arouse enthusiasm by appealing to Takfiri values and ideals, or by increasing their confidence they can do something well.
  - b. Upward Appeal – persuade him that the request is approved by upper leadership, or appeals to upper leadership to gain compliance with request (insinuate approval by individuals they perceive as powerful, expert, or trustworthy).
- (8) **Factors of Perceived Trustworthiness:**
  - a. **Ability** – perceived inspiring cohesion, commitment to cause; expertise in Sharia; seen as the conscience and Spiritual leader.
  - b. **Benevolence** – Equitable distribution of ISIL resources to populace, as long as seen as compliant with ISIL.
  - c. **Integrity** – Seen as pure and deeply committed to religious ideals.
- (9) **Message Characteristics:**
  - a. **Do:** craft inspirational messages in ideal of Islam and purity. Focus on incongruence of decisions of other subgroups that are in conflict with historical vision of Caliphate.
  - b. **Don't:** attack ideology, don't have incomplete or weak arguments based on misunderstanding of Islam. Don't use Apostates to deliver message.
- (10) **Message Characteristics ABOUT THEM from CREDIBLE SOURCE:**
  - a. Attack source of expertise: focus on his hypocrisy.
  - b. Focus on lack of data behind decisions (if to Pragmatists)
  - c. Focus on lack of penchant for violence (if to Violence Seekers)
- (11) **Message MOEs:**
  - a. Questioning pragmatic and violence goals/decisions
  - b. Increased Risk-Taking
  - c. Weakening loyalty to other leader subgroups
  - d. Greater attention to potential negative consequences of action.
  - e. Silo communication (lower communication, information sharing with other leaders)

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<sup>7</sup> Please email [gligon@unomaha.edu](mailto:gligon@unomaha.edu) and [dcderrick@unomaha.edu](mailto:dcderrick@unomaha.edu) for more information on this effort.

<sup>8</sup> Please email [lkuznar@nsiteam.com](mailto:lkuznar@nsiteam.com) and [Jason.spitaletta@jhuapl.edu](mailto:Jason.spitaletta@jhuapl.edu) for more information on psychological profiling.

### Pragmatics:

- (1) **Decision Making:** Focus on secular, tangible goals in decision making (e.g., control of government, critical resources, strategic revenue streams such as highly traveled roads); use data and facts to make decisions, rational and incremental progress toward long-term goals. Focus on solving day-to-day problems for organization and people.
- (2) **Likely Cognitive Errors:** analysis paralysis from overly analytical approach; can overly weigh importance of pragmatic goals versus ideological goals.
- (3) **Likely Organizational Functions:** Shura Council members, military functions (with some rotations to administrative functions – high levels and large span of control).
- (4) **Biodata/Life History:** Highly educated, typically secular in nature. Some ideological training, but far less than true ideologues. Technical training (e.g., accounting, engineering functions), military training. Many are former Baathists who saw ISIL as a way to regain power.
- (5) **Psychological Characteristics:** Deferent to authority, Moderate allegiance to ISIL (seen as a way to meet more pragmatic goals); low risk-taking; pragmatic loyalties based on perceived usefulness.
- (6) **Network:** Baathists; some Yazidis if from Northern Iraq; distrustful of formal government in Iraq.
- (7) **Influence Levers:**
  - a. Rational Appeal – Use logical arguments and factual evidence to persuade him that a proposal or request is viable and likely to result in attainment of task objectives.
  - b. Exchange Appeal – Make explicit promises or implicit promises that he will receive rewards or tangible benefits if he complies with a request or supports a proposal, or remind him of a favor to be reciprocated.
- (8) **Factors of Perceived Trustworthiness:**
  - a. **Ability** – perceived as expert problem solvers and planners; often have special technical expertise and training that makes them assets.
  - b. **Benevolence** – Lowest of the three characteristics for them; situational kindness (almost always based on pragmatic exchanges)
  - c. **Integrity** – Seen as loyal to the ISIL organization, but may actually view the organization simply as a means to an end.
- (9) **Message Characteristics:**
  - a. **Do:** craft rational messages based on data, facts, and logical arguments. Highlight how ideological goals and violent goals conflict with more data-driven, incremental approaches. Remind them of their education, training in academics. Praise their attention to detail and careful planning.
  - b. **Don't:** Use ideological or inspirational appeals to influence them.
- (10) **Message Characteristics ABOUT THEM from CREDIBLE SOURCE:**
  - a. Attack source of expertise: denigrate his planning, technical skills.
  - b. Focus on identifiable outgroup characteristics (Baathist, relationship to Yazidis)
  - c. Focus on lack of religious conviction (if to Ideologues).
- (11) **Message MOEs:**
  - a. Questioning ideological and violence goals/decisions
  - b. Slower decision making
  - c. Weakening loyalty to ISIL organization and other leader subgroups
  - d. Focus on day-to-day short term goals over long-term, strategic goals.

### Violent Seekers:

- 1) **Decision Making:** Focus on adventure seeking, sensation seeking activities; short-term decision-making; escalation of violence and means to punish others.
- 2) **Likely Cognitive Errors:** Overlook pragmatic and ideological goals of organization in name of increased violence and excitement.
- 3) **Likely Organizational Functions:** Military or Hisbah if administrative; if from Western country or Tunisia, likely in higher level and greater span of control.
- 4) **Biodata/Life History:** Variable levels of education, but experience with crime, hunting, or combat. Likely experienced prison or detention early on; problems with authority. Early evidence of thrill seeking. Novice in ideological training.
- 5) **Psychological Characteristics:** Difficulty following authority unless very brutal, controlling; high risk taking, low allegiance to ISIL as an organization. May appear fervent in commitment, but is likely a recent convert with superficial understanding of Islam.
- 6) **Network:** heterogeneous, but made of foreign fighters outside of Iraq and Syria.
- 7) **Influence Levers:**
  - a. Pressure Appeal – use of demands, threats, or intimidation to convince him to comply with a request; responds to assertiveness.
  - b. Exchange Appeal – Make explicit promises or implicit promises that he will receive rewards or tangible benefits if he complies with a request or supports a proposal, or remind him of a favor to be reciprocated. Rewards should be tied around thrill-seeking and violence.
- 8) **Factors of Perceived Trustworthiness:**
  - a. **Ability** – perceived as expert fighters; also perceived as knowledgeable about home country (e.g., targets of interest).
  - b. **Benevolence** – Lowest of the three characteristics for them; situational kindness (almost always based on opportunity for excitement)
  - c. **Integrity** – Seen as committed as they traveled from comfortable home countries to join; but over time, may be seen as imposter/foreigner.
- 9) **Message Characteristics TO THEM:**
  - a. **Do:** craft messages about chance for violence; need to escalate (and other's slow decision making); do use forceful messengers who have expertise in fighting
  - b. **Don't:** Use ideological or rational appeals to influence them.
- 10) **Message Characteristics ABOUT THEM from CREDIBLE SOURCE:**
  - a. Attack source of expertise: denigrate his fighting ability.
  - b. Focus on identifiable outgroup characteristics (accents, skin color)
  - c. Focus on lack of religious conviction and/or intellectual skill.
- 11) **Message MOEs:**
  - a. Questioning ideological and pragmatic goals/decisions
  - b. Impulsive decision making
  - c. Weakening loyalty to ISIL organization and other leader subgroups
  - d. Low information sharing and decrease in exchange.

## Dr. Ian McCulloh

Johns Hopkins University, Applied Physics Lab

Munqith Dagher, IIACS, and I have been collaborating on an egonetwork study of recently captured DAESH fighters. Data suggest that most detained fighters (~90% are illiterate with no access to social media). Most of the ideologues chose to die fighting. Currently, there is no funding for egonetwork data analysis, which is less susceptible to subjects' lying. CENTCOM should fund data collection and analysis to better understand the media that is trusted and relied upon by the youth likely to join DAESH or a similar organization. The other key finding from this work, is that existing surveys and online data over-represent a more educated population that may not remain in Iraq today. Perhaps increased offline polling, focused on rural areas is needed to better understand relevant populations.

Dr. Spencer Meredith III

National Defense University

1. Please fill out the table below. \*I am sure others will highlight specific groups, but we ought not to miss the underlying factors that give rise to them – this will shape how we address them as more than one-off challenges.

Population segment	Grievance	Description of Grievance	How significant is the grievance to the population segment? (scale of 1= nominally significant to 5= the most vital grievance)	Appropriate counter message	Appropriate messenger	Does the USG have a role in this kind of messaging?
<b>Youth regardless of geographic location</b>	Perceived lack of voice (key is perception)	Inherent to the age when information designed by its very nature to be discontenting is so readily available – marketing breeds action so unavoidable perceptions of discontent	3 as inescapable background condition	satisfaction with purpose, family, ownership of “stuff” – highlight the range of motivations from ideational/emotional, relational, material	corporate-ngo partnerships	advising, working with intl foreign direct investment partners, ngo’s and Iraqi partners as key but not lead role at this point – they need time to grow into responsibilities for building rather than complaining about what has failed (culture

						of discontent pervades, understandably)
<b>Religious practitioners</b>	Failure is all around Iraq (violence, corruption, hypocrisy)	Inherent to core belief systems (not just religious, not just this region) - need to blame someone/something	4 as inescapable background condition	“Need to build” is as imperative if not more than blame; provide historical examples tying current mess to past successes – shows the way ahead	Internal and external Muslim partners (Jordanians are a key player in this – they have record of including role of religion in strategic communication domestically, internationally; historic legitimacy as bearers of Muslim traditions/truth across difficult times	Support Jordanian efforts as key strategic partner in the region (historical relationship borne out in other conflicts in the region)

2. To what extent could a continued presence of Western military in the Middle East undermine this messaging in the region? Depends on how it is messaged – need dedicated, persistent, adaptable messaging that highlights US as reliable partner based on shared values, goals, interests.

Type of presence	Negative impact on counter-radicalization messaging	How to mitigate this impact
<b>Instructors/trainers only</b>	Negligible even in uniform, IF sold as partners	Need historic examples of outsiders as partners in defense, soldiers defeated ISIS – play off of this culture (honor, sacrifice, loyalty)
<b>Active drone campaign</b>	Really, really bad for morale of society	Non-urban targeting, designated safe zones.



	because indiscriminate (perception of powerlessness goes through the roof)	Obviously, this leads to the baddies harboring so to counter – need community policing and strict guidelines for police/internal security personnel for those areas = makes those places MORE safe without drones, so drone strike become associated with “lawless” rogue areas (incentivizes others to join in this community policing approach)
<b>Boots on ground</b>	Not necessarily negative depending on how it is sold, but US boots are inherently problematic post ISIS (from US domestic audience, and Iraqi justifications)	Specific facilities, Iraqis control outside those few areas
<b>No US presence whatsoever</b>	Still perception of shadowy figures, hard to exercise the ghost of US presence	Cannot prove the absence...
<b>University partnerships, local policy</b>	Minimal effectiveness when compared to problems facing country (more importantly, how those problems get messaged by Iran, Russia, China, internal anti-US factions, etc.)	Tie in with elected officials, BUT this exposes them to risk for failures of larger US strategic goals, external IO to discredit all associated with US = cutting tomorrow’s partners off at the knees

3. Please feel free to add any other key points you would like to make below.

## Dr. Nicholas O'Shaughnessy

Queen Mary, University of London, UK

<b>Population segment</b>	<b>Grievance</b>	<b>Description of Grievance  (AS UNDER 'GRIEVANCE')</b>	<b>How significant is the grievance to the population segment? (scale of 1= nominally significant to 5= the most vital grievance)</b>	<b>Appropriate counter message</b>	<b>Appropriate messenger</b>	<b>Does the USG have a role in this kind of messaging?</b>
<b>Iraqi Sunnis and Sunni tribes</b>	<b>Non-inclusion</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>Great efforts are being made to give Sunnis a fair share e.g. equity in government appointments</b>	<b>Tribal leaders; radio in Iraq; Iraq press</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Pashtun youth</b>	<b>Low status jobs in 'warrior' culture</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>A positive future via employment in infrastructure, armed forces etc.</b>	<b>Tribal elders; radio; infrastructure projects to give employment</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Pakistani youth</b>	<b>Unemployment; antagonism to US</b>		<b>4</b>	<b>US wishes Pakistan to</b>	<b>Cinema; social</b>	<b>Yes but very</b>

Syrian exiled population	Resentment at forced exit and problems integrating with new countries; and poverty		5	succeed; stress examples of Pakistani success e.g. businesses  Stress measures being taken to help them	Media  Information from the relevant government authorities of the countries they are in exile in.	indirectly  No
Sunni Syrians in Syria	Deep anger at Alawite regime and lack of hope		5	(Difficult since they are at the mercy of a regime over which we have no power). Offer help in reconstruction	Reconstruction assistance	Yes
Young Egyptians	Resent authoritarianism of regime; unemployment		5	Difficult since we have no real influence on regime	Essentially no direct message or messenger	No
Moroccan, Tunisian, Algerian youth	Unemployment, and the corruption and nepotism of these states			Stress economic assistance e.g. from EU, and the ways in which these countries are advancing	Social media	Possibly?

<b>E.g., Iraqi Sunni Arab youth in rural areas in Northern Iraq</b>	Lack of political voice	Many Sunni Arab youth feel distant from and not represented by the central Iraqi Government in Baghdad	5	Only actions, not messages will be effective here because...	Government of Iraq	While the USG cannot generate messaging on this topic, it can publicly encourage the government to make meaningful reforms.

2. To what extent could a continued presence of Western military in the Middle East undermine this messaging in the region?

<b>Type of presence</b>	<b>Negative impact on counter-radicalization messaging</b>	<b>How to mitigate this impact</b>
<b>Ex. Instructors/trainers only</b>	Any US person in uniform looks like boots on ground. Triggers occupier narrative, which increases radicalization	No US military in uniform, or US military personnel restricted to Baghdad or bases.
<b>Active drone campaign</b>	Negative impact	By stressing the care taken to avoid 'collateral damage'
<b>Boots on ground</b>	Negative impact	By confining them to soecialists, training cadres and commanders; by stressing aggregate numbers which are likely to be low since these are not combat armies
<b>No US presence whatsoever</b>	Positive perceptual impact but negative practical one	Non –presence would sell itself well to the middle eastern masses but there would be other costs e.g. increased and not decreased de-stabilisation
<b>Other type of presence (please indicate)</b>		

3. Please feel free to add any other key points you would like to make below.

**Dr. Abdulaziz Sager**

Gulf Research Center and Sager Group Holding

The most important domestic messaging has to be around the link between reform and radicalization. It is important to remember that between 2007 and 2009 with the Sahwa movement, ISIS disappeared completely from Iraq. However, once it was discovered that the Sahwa movement was not accompanied by political reform from the Iraqi government and instead Iran was able to broaden its influence inside the country, ISIS came back. The idea thus took form that the only manner through which to enact reform and change the environment is through violence. In order not to undermine the message by the continued presence of Western military forces, it is important to have one integrated message that includes the fight against extremism but also emphasizes the parallel need for genuine political reform efforts. As long as people feel alienated from a system, they will be subject to radicalization efforts.

## Mr. Mubin Shaikh

### Independent Subject Matter Expert

Domestic messaging that is designed to prevent the radicalization of Muslim youth in Muslim countries, could be done in conjunction with competent theologians from both Muslim denominations. It would focus on scriptural references that are conducive to social cohesion and community development instead of this supposed reliance on the very powerful notion of Real Jihad which needs to be portrayed as “the martial tradition of Islam with clear rules of engagement.” The ability for terrorism to masquerade as Real Jihad, undermines not only Muslim nation states but – it can be argued – undermines the religion itself. This can become a strong bulwark against the rise of vigilante jihadist groups and requires deployment in social media and public messaging components if we are to actually undermine their narrative. I respectfully submit that Coalition has many great minds and operators who can achieve messaging-mission objectives at a fraction of the cost and bureaucracy that is currently seen to be stifling any such significant influence operations capability.

It is necessary for Coalition members here who work in tandem with their Muslim colleagues. If coalition is able to project a collaborative and consultative approach, it is more resistant to being undermined.

\*One fact of the matter here especially as it pertains to the grievance narrative of Western military presence, is that the Jihadists will not suddenly start playing nice with the population should the U.S. leave.\* There is an interpretive and epistemological foundation on which these issues are constructed and a deep and strategic understanding of this scripture-based epistemology is required in order to continuously calibrate this strategic message of presence, based on the criticisms that are sure to come against it.

## Dr. Marcin Styszynski

Adam Mickiewicz University; Poznan, Poland

Recent terrorist attacks in the world as well as return of ISIS fighters to their countries after the collapse of the so-called caliphate in Iraq and Syria became the main concerns for different authorities and governments around the world. In 2014 at least 30,000 foreign fighters joined ISIS from various countries across the world, including around 6000 militants from European countries, 8000 from Maghreb, 8,240 from the Middle East and 4,700 from former Soviet republics (The Soufan Group 2015).

In fact, jihadist groups such as ISIS or Al-Qaeda often exploit religion to legitimize their terror activities. For instance, they emphasize the idea of *takfir* (excommunication), which considers non-Muslims and fellow believers as infidels and apostates who deserve damnation and extermination because they do not rule according to the sharia. Jihadists also limit the meaning of jihad to armed struggle against unbelievers and defensive warfare against oppressors (Maher 2016).

Recently, ISIS or Al-Qaeda have been involved in an ideological debates concerning the religious credibility of their leaders and fighters. For example, **ISIS's spokesman Abu Mohammad al-Adnani issued various manifestos, in which he criticized Al-Qaida Central and defined the ideological separation between Al-Qaeda's leader Ayman al-Zawahiri and the rest of jihadists. Al-Adnani stated that al-Zawahiri betrayed insurgents and distorted basic ideas of jihad and sharia, which divided the militants in the world. He also condemned Al-Qaeda's leader of cooperation with infidels and secularists** (Kamolnick 2016). It should be also be noted that ISIS became dominant in June 2014 after the announcement of the caliphate by its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who delivered a symbolic sermon in the main mosque in Mosul, Iraq (Atwan 2015: 73). Liturgical character of the speech, theological phrases, pathetic words as well as suggestive slogans and demands demonstrated the importance of religious background in jihadist activities.

Moreover, military actions, protection of borders, verification of documents and surveillance of individuals seem insufficient, and they do not improve the struggle against jihadist threats. Different authorities are beginning to recognise the importance of deradicalisation and rehabilitation programs. Unfortunately, deradicalisation processes usually focus on economic initiatives but they omit theological factors, which are main inspiration and stimulation for radical Islamists. Saudi Arabia seems to be exceptional in the field of rehabilitation programs because of the religious feature, which plays a crucial role in various initiatives.

Saudi rehabilitation programs started in 2004 after series of terrorist attacks against Western facilities and residential compounds (Porges 2010). For instance, 39 people were killed and 160 wounded after series of bombings, which took place in Riyadh in 2003. In addition, terrorists from Al-Qaeda carried out kidnappings, shootings, executions and car bomb attacks against Westerners and security forces (BBC News 2003). Implementation of rehabilitation initiatives was also a consequence of terror threats and jihad activities declared in nineties by Al-Qaeda and its leader Osama bin Laden who accused the Saudi monarchy of blasphemy, betrayal of Islam values, and cooperation with infidel Western governments (Lawrence 2006).

Saudi ministries such as the Ministry of Interior or the Ministry of Religious Affairs were involved in deradicalisation projects. First initiatives focused on six-week rehabilitation courses for prisoners, including 1,200 former Guantanamo detainees handed over by US authorities. Saudi officials admit that

80% of terrorists have successfully reintegrated into the society (Porges 2010). The authorities intensified the reintegration programs in 2007 when the Mohammed bin Nayef Center for Counseling and Advice was formally opened. The Center started a 12-week therapy session that provided psychological and religious support as well as social and educational care. The programs also involved prisoners' families who participated in the process and encouraged former fighters to reintegrate into the society and family life (Casptack 2015). In fact, former jihadists lived for a long time in isolation and cruel battlefields that affected their feelings and behaviors. Saudi institutions also reintegrated former jihadists to their friends and local communities or workplaces. Moreover, participants of the programs shared common living spaces, everyday tasks, and they participated in religious ceremonies, including Ramadan (Gardner 2017).

The Mohammed bin Nayef Center for Counseling and Advice is currently offering three main components in its programs: counseling, rehabilitation, and care. The first module reflects individual, group, preventive, or female programs that are implemented inside and outside the detention centers. The method relies on an explanation of the correct concept of the Quran and removing of suspicions and misperceptions regarding Islam. The second component contains educational, training, culture or sports activities aiming at integration of detainees in the society. The third module includes psychological and social initiatives for persons released from the Center. The programs also focus on families and surrounding environment that contribute to rehabilitation process outside the prison (Mohammed bin Nayef Center for Counseling and Advice 2017).

The Saudi religious debate with jihadists relies on the concept of *al-wala wa al-bara* (loyalty and disavowal), which reflects obedience to Muslim community and rulers including modern authorities represented by the House of Saud, governments or particular ministers (Hassan 2017). The idea refers to the philosophy of conservative Muslim scholars like Abu Hanifa, Ahmad Ibn Hanbal or Ibn Taymiyya and Abd al-Wahhab, who ordered loyalty and cooperation with caliphs and emirs representing the *umma* (Muslim Nation). However, the disavowal or disobedience to the ruler is allowed in cases in case of evident infidelity called *kufran bawwah*. The negative opinions must be elaborated carefully by different theologians who issue common fatwa (legal judgment) against authorities. *Al-Wala wa al-bara* is opposed to the idea of *takfir* popularized by jihadist groups. In fact, the obedience to Muslim authorities excluded condemnation of the Muslim ruler and violent reactions against the state (Abu Ismael 2007).

The theological debate also includes the delivery of appropriate sermons and assistance by accredited imams who correct misconceptions about infidelity, immorality, sins or jihad (Bin Hassan 2015, 15-20). For example, Saudi scholars have emphasized defensive and non-military aspects of jihad, which regards spiritual and moral efforts under the name of greater jihad. It was also classified as a struggle against one's own base impulses, emotions, and weaknesses. However, main tools of the struggle shall consider jihad of the pen and tongue, which include debates and persuasion (Bonner 2008: 13).

Furthermore, Muslim scholars spearhead theological discussions to negate false interpretation and manipulation of Quranic verses. In most de-radicalisation and rehabilitation programmes, religious scholars engage in one-to-one counselling sessions with the detainees. The de-radicalisation process involves different stages concerned with the analysis of detainee's belief and opinion about jihad and sharia laws according to the existing Islamic legal theory and the Islamic jurisprudence as well as studies on the social and personal conditions of the detainees (Bin Hassan 2015, 15-20). In fact, the scholars distinguish between jihadists who were radicalised in peaceful environments and those who participated in battlefields in Syria, Libya, or Iraq. Each group requires appropriate theological procedures, according to their experiences resulting from peaceful conditions or everyday fighting.



Saudi authorities also confront new forms of jihadist activities such as propaganda and indoctrination campaign on the Internet and social media headed by jihadist militants and sympathisers. Muslim scholars are involved in debate preventing the spread of radical ideology and questioning attractive ideas of the caliphate that involve the pride, honour and other similar sentiments related to participation in battlefields in Iraq and Syria (Casptack 2015).

Furthermore, the authorities have created the agency called Tweet-So Team that focuses on monitoring and analysis of jihadist websites and social media profiles. So far, the agency has closed 360,000 ISIS's accounts. The Tweet-So Team admits that jihadists publish around 130,000 different messages daily, which spread chaos and confusion in traditional Saudi society. However, according to last estimations ISIS has decreased its propaganda activities by 75% (Saudi Gazette 2017).

Moreover, the most recent initiative reflects efforts by the Global Center for Combatting Extremist Ideology, which was established during the visit of US president Donald Trump to Saudi Arabia in May 2017. The Center focuses on combating radicalism and monitoring of extremist activities on the Internet. Some innovative techniques include monitoring and analysis of jihadist websites and speeches (Beavers 2017).

The Ministry of Interior claims that ISIS now creates the major threats for local security, especially in the context of ISIS fighters returning from Iraq and Syria. 3,500 Saudis joined the caliphate in 2014. The worldwide anti-terrorist campaign decreased this number to 1,500 insurgents creating future threats for the kingdom.

It should also be noted that jihadists who refuse to follow rehabilitation programs experienced a strong military response from security forces in 2017. For instance, on January 7 two terrorists were killed in an ambush in Riyadh. Police found chemical materials, explosive belts, arms and homemade bombs (Al-Jazeera 2017). On January 21, two suicide bombers blew themselves up in a confrontation with security forces in Jeddah (Arab News 2017). However, antiterrorist teams usually succeed in uncovering jihadist hideouts or weapons' magazines and recently they have arrested more than 5,000 suspects involved in terrorist activities.

Deradicalisation programs for jihadists became an important tool for Saudi authorities confronting jihadists threats in 2004. Rehabilitation initiatives for detained militants focus on psychological, social, and theological assistance, including involvement of families and local communities in the rehabilitation process. However, the Mohammed bin Nayef Center for Counseling and Advice played a crucial role in the anti-terrorist policy of the Kingdom. In fact, theological backgrounds discussion concerning the concept of *al-wala wa al-bara* as well as religious advice for detainees headed by accredited Muslim scholars serve to discouraged individuals from joining jihadist groups. The theological lessons and individual or group sessions reflect explanation of misunderstandings of the Quran and verification of particular values in Islam exploited by jihadists groups.

Moreover, Saudi authorities have confronted recently new challenges regarding jihadist activities on the Internet and social medias. The Tweet-So Team or the Global Center for Combatting Extremist Ideology, which combat extremist threats in the Internet are good examples of institutions that promote these efforts. Saudi authorities also conduct anti-terrorist actions against those militants who reject deradicalisation care. Nonetheless, there is an increasing need for initiatives that will confront new

forms of radicalization on the Internet or will deal with jihadist fighters coming from battlefields in Iraq and Syria.

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## Biographies

### Ms. Alyssa Adamson

**Alyssa C. Adamson** was born and raised in Tahlequah, Oklahoma. She graduated from The University of Tulsa in 2016 with degrees in Communication and Art with a certificate in Advertising and distinction as a member of the Honor Student Class of 2016. Alyssa now attends Oklahoma State University in pursuit of her master's degree in Strategic Communication. Her thesis work will focus on the narratives told in Farsi media and U.S. media and how the framing of the dialogues takes place regarding Nation Branding. Alyssa is in the process of applying to Ph.D. programs across the country and plans to pursue a degree in Communication with a focus on Global Media.



### Dr. Skye Cooley



**Skye Cooley** (Ph.D., University of Alabama) is an assistant professor in the School of Media and Strategic Communications at Oklahoma State University. His research interests are in Russian political communication, global media and digital democracy, as well as civic deliberation online. Dr. Cooley holds certifications of accreditation in public relations (APR) and civilian service peace keeping operations (POTI). He has traveled actively through Europe, Latin America, Asia and Africa; publishing and presenting research on international political communication.

### Mr. Hassan Hassan

**Hassan Hassan** is a senior fellow at TIMEP focusing on militant Islam, Syria, and Iraq. He was previously an associate fellow at Chatham House's Middle East and North Africa Program in London, a research associate at the Delma Institute in Abu Dhabi, and a deputy opinion editor for the *National*, the leading English language daily in the Middle East. Working in journalism and research since 2008, Mr. Hassan focuses on Syria, Iraq, and the Gulf States, and he has written extensively on Sunni and Shia movements in the region, including for think-tanks such as the European Council on Foreign Relations, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Chatham House, and the Brookings Institution.



Mr. Hassan is the author, with Michael Weiss, of *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, a New York Times bestseller chosen as one of the *Times* of London's Best Books of 2015 and the *Wall Street Journal's* top ten books on terrorism. He is a weekly columnist for the *National* and has contributed to the *Guardian*, *Foreign Policy*, *Foreign Affairs*, the *Financial Times*, and the *New York Times*, among others. He has appeared on flagship television programs, such as the O'Reilly Factor, Amanpour and the Last Word with Lawrence O'Donnell. Mr. Hassan received an M.A. in international relations from the University of Nottingham. You can follow him on Twitter: [@hxhassan](https://twitter.com/hxhassan).

### Dr. Robert Hinck



**Robert Hinck** (Ph.D., Texas A&M University) is Professor of Organizational Communication at Monmouth College. His program of research centers on organizational rhetoric, particularly regarding international and diplomatic rhetoric, public diplomacy, conflict and negotiation, as well as global media. His research projects address concerns regarding the formation and sustainment of political cooperation among distinct political communities, and the rhetorical means by which they structure and manage internal and external stakeholders.

### Dr. Randy Kluver

**Randy Kluver** (Ph.D., University of Southern California) is the Dean of the School of Global Studies and Partnerships at Oklahoma State University. Dr. Kluver conducts theoretically driven research on political communication (including rhetorical and new media approaches), and global and new media. His work explores the role of political culture on political communication, and the ways in which cultural expectations, values, and habits condition political messaging practices and reception in a variety of contexts.



### Dr. Gina Ligon

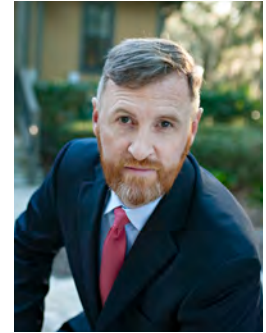


**Dr. Gina Ligon** is an Associate Professor of Management and Collaboration Science at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. She received her PhD in Industrial and Organizational Psychology with a Minor in Measurement and Statistics from the University of Oklahoma. Since arriving at UNO, she has been awarded over \$3,000,000 in National Security-related grants and contracts. She is a member of the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, and serves on the panel for behavioral sciences for the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. Ligon is the Principal Investigator on a grant from Department of Homeland Security (DHS) examining the leadership and performance of transnational Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs), and she is the originator of the Leadership of the Extreme and Dangerous for Innovative Results (LEADIR) database.

Her research interests include profiling leaders from afar, violent ideological groups, expertise and leadership development, and collaboration management. Prior to joining UNO, she was a faculty member at Villanova University in the Department of Psychology. She also worked in St. Louis as a management consultant with the firm Psychological Associates. She has published over 50 peer-reviewed publications in the areas of leadership, innovation, and violent groups, and she is the editor to the academic journal *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict*.

### Dr. Ian McCulloh

**Dr. Ian McCulloh** holds joint appointments as a Parson's Fellow in the Bloomberg School of Public Health, a Senior Lecturer in the Whiting School of Engineering and a senior scientist at the Applied Physics Lab, at Johns Hopkins University. His current research is focused on strategic influence in online networks. His most recent papers have been focused on the neuroscience of persuasion and measuring influence in online social media firestorms. He is the author of "Social Network Analysis with Applications" (Wiley: 2013), "Networks Over Time" (Oxford: forthcoming) and has published 48 peer-reviewed papers, primarily in the area of social network analysis. His current applied work is focused on educating soldiers and marines in advanced methods for open source research and data science leadership. He also works with various medical practitioners in the Baltimore area to improve the effectiveness of public health campaigns. He retired as a Lieutenant Colonel from the US Army after 20 years of service in special operations and improvised explosive device forensics. He founded the West Point Network Science Center and created the Army's Advanced Network Analysis and Targeting (ANAT) program. In his most recent military assignments as a strategist, he led interdisciplinary teams of Ph.D. scientists at Special Operations Command Central (SOCCENT) and Central Command (CENTCOM) to conduct social science research in 15 countries across the Middle East and Central Asia to include denied areas, which he used to inform data-driven strategy for countering extremism and irregular warfare, as well as empirically assess the effectiveness of military operations. He holds a Ph.D. and M.S. from Carnegie Mellon University's School of Computer Science, an M.S. in Industrial Engineering, and M.S. in Applied Statistics from the Florida State University, and a B.S. in Industrial Engineering from the University of Washington. He is married with four children and a granddaughter.



### Dr. Spencer Meredith III



**Dr. Spencer B. Meredith III** is a professor of national security strategy at the US National Defense University. With a doctorate in Government and Foreign Affairs from the University of Virginia, and two decades of research and work on post-Soviet regions and the Middle East, his expertise bridges scholarly and practitioner communities. To that end, he has published widely on strategic topics related to democratic development, conflict resolution, and special operations. He is a Fulbright Scholar and a regular advisor and contributor to several DoD and interagency projects, including multiple Joint Staff Strategic Multilayer Assessments, intelligence community workshops, and JSOC efforts supporting the joint warfighter in the areas of governance, human factors of conflict, and influence operations.

## Dr. Nicholas O'Shaughnessy

**Dr. Nicholas O'Shaughnessy** is Professor of Communication at Queen Mary, University of London, UK and latterly director of their Marketing and Communications Group; Visiting Professor (2016- ) in the Department of War Studies at King's College London, and a Quondam Fellow of Hughes Hall Cambridge University. Earlier in his career he taught for eleven years at Cambridge. Nicholas is the author or co-author or editor of numerous books on commercial and political persuasion.



Ultimately his concern is with the 'engineering of consent'- the troubling matter of how public opinion can be manufactured, and governments elected, via sophisticated methodologies of persuasion developed in the consumer economy.

A co-authored book, *Theory and Concepts in Political Marketing*, was published in April 2013 with Sage. *Selling Hitler: Propaganda and the Nazi Brand* (Hurst) was published in September 2016, and a second volume – *Marketing The Third Reich: Persuasion, Packaging and Propaganda*- has been out since September 2017 with Routledge. 'Key Readings In Propaganda' (with Paul Baines, four volumes, Sage London 2012): Volume One: Historical origins, definition, changing nature. Volume Two: The psychology and sociology underpinning Propaganda. Volume Three: Propaganda in military and terrorism contexts. Volume Four: Advances and contemporary issues in Propaganda.

Other topics in propaganda are pursued in numerous journal articles such as *Selling Terror: The Symbolization and Positioning of Jihad* (with Paul Baines), *Marketing Theory* Volume 9 (2) (pp 207-221) 2009. *The Dark Side of Political Marketing, Islamist Propaganda, Reversal Theory and British Muslims* with Paul Baines et al, *European Journal of Marketing*.V44 3/4 2010. *Al Qaeda message evolution and positioning, 1998- 2008: Propaganda analysis re-visited*, Baines and O'Shaughnessy, *Public Relations Inquiry* pp 163-191 May 2014 .*Putin, Xi, And Hitler: propaganda and the paternity of pseudo democracy. Defence Strategic Communications* (the official journal of NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence) Vol 2 Spring 2017. *The Politics of Consumption And the Consumption of Politics: How Authoritarian Regimes Shape Public Opinion By Using Consumer Marketing Tools. Journal of Advertising Research*, June 2017, 57 (2).

His perspective has always been that persuasion is the hidden hand of history, its core dynamic. And certainly it is the case that propaganda has become again an important part of our global public and civic discourse.

## Dr. Abdulaziz Sager



A Saudi expert on Gulf politics and strategic issues, **Dr. Abdulaziz Sager** is the founder and Chairman of the Gulf Research Center, a global think tank based in Jeddah with a well-established worldwide network of partners and offices in both the Gulf region and Europe.

In this capacity, Dr. Sager has authored and edited numerous publications including *Combating Violence & Terrorism in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, *The GCC's Political & Economic Strategy towards Post-War Iraq and Reforms in Saudi Arabia: Challenges and Feasible Solutions*. He is also a frequent contributor to major international media channels and appears regularly on Al-Arabiya Television, France 24 and the BBC. In addition to his academic activities, Dr. Sager is actively engaged in track-two and mediation meeting. For example, he has chaired and moderated the Syrian opposition meetings in Riyadh in December 2015 and November 2017.

In addition to his work with the Gulf Research Center, Dr. Sager is President of Sager Group Holding in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which is active in the fields of information technology, aviation services and investments. Furthermore, he holds numerous other appointments including on the Makkah Province Council, Advisory Board of the Arab Thought Foundation, Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, Faculty of Economics and Administration at King Abdulaziz University, Saudi Ministry of Education, Geneva Center for Security Policy and German Orient Foundation. Dr. Sager has also sat on the advisory group for the UNDP Arab Human Development Report, and participates in the Think Tank Leaders Forum of the World Economic Forum and the Council of Councils of the Council on Foreign Relations.

Dr. Sager holds a Ph.D. in Politics and International Relations from Lancaster University and an M.A. from the University of Kent, United Kingdom and a Bachelor Degree from the Faculty of Economics and Administration of King Abdulaziz University.

## Mr. Mubin Shaikh



Born and raised in Canada, **Mubin Shaikh** grew up with two conflicting and competing cultures. At the age of 19, he went to India and Pakistan where he had a chance encounter with the Taliban before their takeover of Afghanistan in 1995. Shaikh became fully radicalized as a supporter of the global Jihadist culture, recruiting others but the 9/11 attacks forced to him reconsider his views. He spent 2 years in Syria, continuing his study of Arabic and Islamic Studies and went through a period of full deradicalization.

Returning to Canada in 2004, he was recruited by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) and worked several CLASSIFIED infiltration operations on the internet, in chat-protected forums and on the ground with human networks. In late 2005, one of those intelligence files moved to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), Integrated National Security Enforcement Team (INSET) for investigation. The "Toronto 18" terrorism case resulted in the conviction of 11 aspiring violent extremists after testifying over 4 years, in 5 legal hearings at the Ontario Superior Court of Justice.



Shaikh has since obtained a Master of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism (MPICT) and is considered an SME (Subject Matter Expert) in national security and counterterrorism, and radicalization & deradicalization to the United Nations Counter Terrorism Executive Directorate, NATO, Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), CENTCOM, various special operations forces, the FBI and others. He has appeared on multiple U.S., British and Canadian media outlets as a commentator and is extensively involved with the ISIS social media and Foreign Fighter (including Returnees and rehabilitation) file. Shaikh is also co-author of the acclaimed book, *Undercover Jihadi*.

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### Dr. Ethan Stokes



**Ethan Stokes** (Ph.D., University of Alabama) is an assistant professor of in advertising and public relations in the College of Communication and Information Sciences at the University of Alabama. Dr. Stokes' research interests are in political communication, digital media, and open source intelligence systems. His work examines how narratives move and alter across global media

### Dr. Marcin 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.



### Dr. Haroon Ullah



As BBG Chief Strategy Officer, Dr. Haroon Ullah oversees the Office of Policy and Research (OPR), including the elevation of BBG's policy engagement in the interagency, strategic planning and strategic initiatives functions, and positioning within the broader U.S. government and with key stakeholders. Haroon's main responsibility is to lead the BBG to become a more strategically relevant agency within the national security, foreign affairs, and global media spheres.

Ullah joins the BBG from the Department of State, where he most recently worked on Secretary Tillerson's Policy Planning Staff covering digital innovation, public diplomacy and public/private partnerships. He previously advised three Secretaries of State, traveled with Ambassador Richard Holbrooke's Afghanistan/Pakistan team, and started the first-

ever public diplomacy countering violent extremism office at any American Embassy in the world as the Director of the Community Engagement Office at the U.S. Embassy in Pakistan.

He is also a visiting professor at Georgetown University and is a Term Member of the Council on Foreign Relations. Ullah has also served as a senior Harvard University Belfer Fellow and International Director of SAB Negotiation, and his TV production “Burka Avenger” won a Peabody Award.

Ullah has an MA from Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government and a joint Ph.D. from Harvard and the University of Michigan, and he was a William J. Fulbright Fellow, a Harvard University Presidential Scholar, and a Woodrow Wilson Public Service Fellow. His award-winning books include *Vying for Allah’s Vote* (Georgetown University Press), *The Bargain from the Bazaar* (Public Affairs Books), and the upcoming *Digital World War* (Yale University Press), which focuses on new uses for technology, transmedia, and digital content.

### Ms. Sarah Canna

**Sarah Canna** applies her open source analytic skills to regions of vital concern to US Combatant Commands, particularly the Middle East and South Asia. To help military planners understand the complex socio-cultural dynamics at play in evolving conflict situations, she developed a Virtual Think Tank (ViTTa™) tool, which is designed to rapidly respond to emergent crises by pulsing NSI’s extensive subject matter expert (SME) network to provide deep, customized, multidisciplinary analysis for defense and industry clients. Prior to joining NSI, she completed her Master’s degree from Georgetown University in Technology and Security Studies. She holds a translation certificate in Spanish from American University and has been learning Dari for three years.

