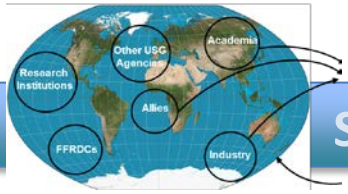

SMA Reach-back

Breaking News

The Fall of Dabiq

The fall of Dabiq presents CENTCOM with a valuable messaging opportunity (Shaikh, Ingram). ISIL's apocalyptic narrative rests on Dabiq being the final battlefield. This development undermines its prophetic legitimacy (Kuznar) and highlights their willingness to forsake not only their soldiers but their word (Spitaletta). It should be used to raise doubts about what ISIL would be willing to forsake next. Additionally, CENTCOM should use this opportunity to encourage populations to forswear ISIL's calls for lone wolf terrorism as its caliphate erodes (Ingram).

Question (V1): *What are USCENTCOM and the global counter-ISIL coalition missing from countermessaging efforts in the information domain?*

Executive Summary

"Western countries have failed to match the coordination, intensity, not to mention zealotry of the communication effort of [Daesh's] global, decentralized movement." Peter Welby, Centre on Religion & Geopolitics

One way for evaluating CENTCOM and the global counter-ISIL Coalition messaging is to break the idea into its three component parts: the content, the medium (the way the message is transmitted), and the messenger (see Beutel). Figure 1 below provides a very brief summary of what's missing from Coalition messaging based on expert contributions.

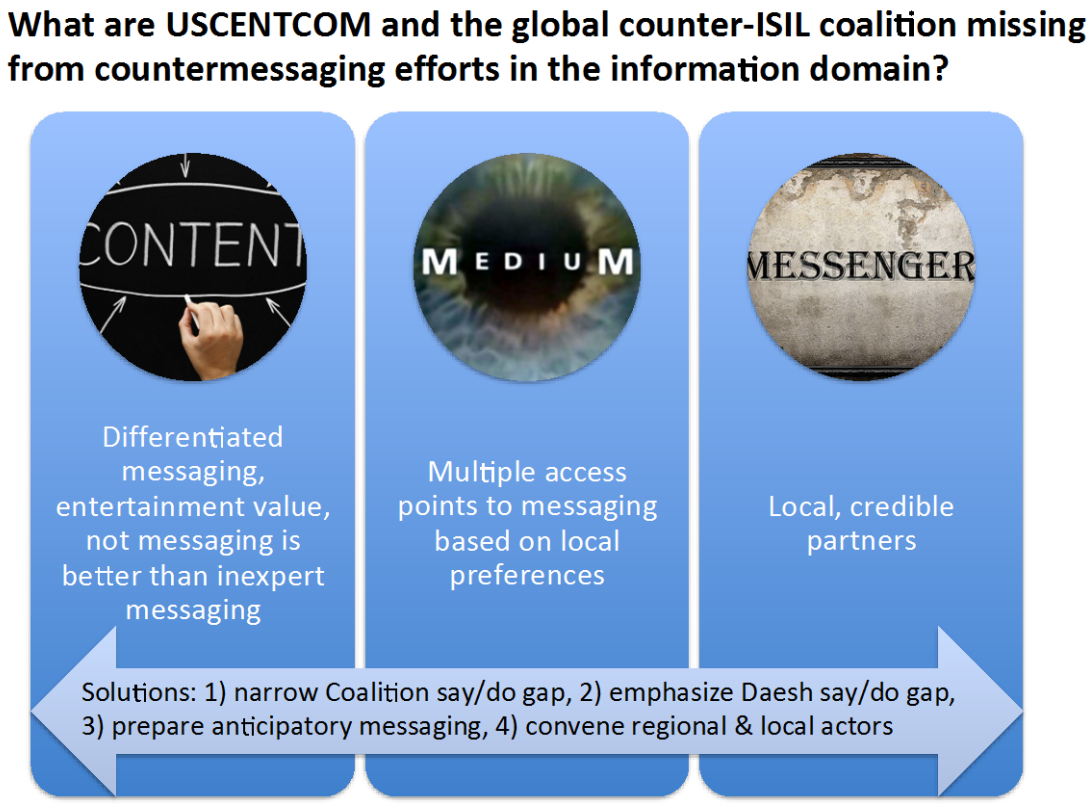

Figure 1. What is missing from CENTCOM counter-messaging efforts?

Content

To be most effective, messaging need to be targeted to specific populations, politically/ethnically correct, and entertaining. First, while there is a need for transnational messages (often those that

seek to introduce alternative narratives—a mass targeting technique that uses non-linear messaging to achieve desired outcomes [see Beutel and Ruston]), messaging is most effective when it is tailored to local circumstances; presented by trusted, local voices; and in a format preferred by the target audience (radio, television, social media, religious services, etc.). This requires that information operators clearly understand the motivations, interests, and world views of potential adherents (Zalman). Based on analysis of extremist narratives by Scott Ruston at Arizona State University, an effective system of alternative narratives must recognize the need for justice, recognize threats faced by the target audience, must offer some route to glory (resolution), and must offer some subjection to a higher ideal (whether that is family, tribe, or nation). Nuanced understanding of the target audience can serve to not only contextualize the type of messaging effort and its aims but also to provide a necessary constraint upon the expected return of these programs (Huckabey & Picucci).

Related to this, because existing rivalries, ethnic differences, and stereotypes are so difficult to unravel in MENA, extra caution should be employed not to inflame tensions during conditions requiring a fast response (Briant). Unsuccessful counter-sectarian messaging could exacerbate or entrench divisions. Erring on the side of caution is better than attempting and failing counter-sectarian messaging.

Third, compared to ISIL messaging, Coalition messaging is frankly boring (Bean & Edgar, Taylor, Welby). MAJ Patrick Taylor, 7th Military Information Support Battalion USASOC, noted that "to entertain is to inform and to inform is to influence." Yet, Coalition messaging lacks humor and is sonically sterile. ISIL frequently utilizes music and sound (often via *nasheeds*) to strengthen and complement its written or spoken message (Bean & Edgar). Aside from incorporating music and sound into Coalition messaging, satire and humor may be used to expose ISIL's failings, inconsistencies, and false claims (Taylor).

Medium

Effective messaging conveys targeted messages to local communities via preferred channels (Beutel). This could be via radio, television, trusted religious leaders, etc. Social media is not the only or best way to reach all audiences. Therefore, information operators need to develop "multiple access points" so that populations have various way to access and interact with the message in familiar formats (Taylor).

Messenger

Experts largely agreed that a significant obstacle facing Coalition messaging efforts is that it lacks credibility. Government entities are not credible voices (Beutel). While there is a significant cohort (Abbas, Braddock, and Ingram) that argues in support of better leveraging and supporting local, credible partners to disseminate messages, there is another cohort (Briant, Beutel, Everington) that believes that credible voices have to be free of any kind of government support, which threatens to taint the source if discovered. But one thing the USG can credibly do is to amplify the voices of defectors and refugees from ISIL-held areas to call attention to ISIL's failure to live up to its promises (Elson et al).

Strategies for Filling in the Gaps in Coalition Messaging

A team of experts from George Mason University, led by Dr. Sara Cobb, argued that engagement, rather than countermessaging, is the most effective shaping tool. Efforts to transform existing narratives through engagement would satisfy the same objectives often achieved through

traditional messaging while still "disrupting" adversary conflict narratives and shaping conditions conducive to later stability and/or peace operations.

Similarly, Alexis Everington, who has conducted primary research in Syria, noted that we are in a post-messaging phase in the region where "messages are no longer useful and their potential ran out several years ago." Efforts should now be focused on **narrowing the "say/do" gap** (Beutel, Briant, Everington, Mallory). Beutel and Mallory argue for a narrative led operation that closely ties US messaging to the operational action plan.

As the Coalition narrows its say/do gap, it should work to create a wedge between ISIL and its target audience by **highlighting ISIL hypocrisies and failures** (such as violence against Sunnis, failure to provide services, or evidence of corruption of its leaders) (Ingram, Elson et al). It is important also to respond quickly to contradict disinformation (Beutel). Another effective strategy would be to **prepare messaging ahead of time** for anticipated events in order to be able to disseminate quality messaging as events unfold in real time (Mallory, Ingram).

In terms of enhancing effectiveness of current messaging, recognition of how red understands the goal and vulnerabilities of its own messaging efforts can provide improved guidance on where counter-messaging can be effective and where non-response may be a more productive approach (Huckabey & Picucci). Furthermore, the authors suggest that implanting a graduated process toward achieving desired end-states can be leveraged to provide a stronger linkage between measures of performance and measures of effectiveness.

Finally, Alejandro Beutel, a researcher at the University of Maryland's START center, believes that one of the best things the USG can do is to **play the role of "convener."** While CENTCOM may not be credible to the target populations, CENTCOM is at least credible to the credible messengers. So what CENTCOM might be able to do is to play the role of convener to have gatherings where actors in the region can interact with one another and start to establish some mediums of communication and relationship building.

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***Editor**: Sarah Canna (NSI)*

SME Input

Comments on CENTCOM Messaging

Hassan Abbas
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What are USCENTCOM and the global counter-ISIL coalition missing from counter- messaging efforts in the information domain?

ANSWER: Credible partners in the field who can project the message in local languages and idiom. It is not about the absence of such people but US/Coalition failure to reach out to them.

Comments on CENTCOM Messaging

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USCENTCOM and the global counter-ISIL coalition are potentially missing from countermessaging efforts a clear understanding of the role that Islamic chant, *nasheed*, plays in moving radicalized audiences to further the cause of extremist groups such as ISIL, or attracting audiences to the ideological messages of such groups in the first place. *Nasheed* is a rhythmic, vocal chant (similar to a religious poem) that is usually performed in Arabic by one or more people. While a handful of scholars have discussed the role of *nasheed* within jihadi history and culture more broadly, more needs to be known about how ISIL videos incorporate *nasheed* and other sounds in non-discursive ways that strengthen the appeal of the group's central discursive (written or spoken) message, namely, ISIL's members are "winners, competent, and pious," while its enemies are "unjust and unbelievers" (Zelin, 2015, para. 19). We do not argue that watching ISIL videos that contain *nasheed* and other sounds somehow "brainwashes" viewers into supporting the group or committing acts of terrorism. We agree with Pieslak (2015), however, that it is mistaken to deny that music and sound play an influential role in radicalism. Scholars are just beginning to understand the importance of the sonic, non-discursive dimensions of extremism and counter-extremism video messaging, as well as the connection between these dimensions and issues of cultural and religious identity, masculinity, and violence.

"Scholars are just beginning to understand the importance of the sonic, non-discursive dimensions of extremism and counter-extremism video messaging, as well as the connection between these dimensions and issues of cultural and religious identity, masculinity, and violence."

Insights from the emerging Communication subfield of genosonic analysis can help stakeholders better understand the allure of extremist messaging, as well as the ineffectiveness of U.S. counter-

extremism messaging. Our claim is that the non-discursive qualities of *nasheed* and other sounds contained in ISIL's video messages corporeally reinforce the group's emotional appeal. ISIL's textual narrative, similar to other extremist narratives, "posits a world in chaos and disorder that must be set right again by political action inspired and ordained by the divine" (Furlow & Goodall, 2011, p. 221). The affective dimensions of the sounds of *nasheed* catalyze imagined social bonds and strong emotions (Pieslak, 2015) in ways that facilitate (but do not deterministically cause) an individual's movement of the narrative action "from the story line to the streets" (Furlow & Goodall, 2011, p. 221). The sounds contained in ISIL videos encourage listeners to corporeally *feel* themselves to be virtuous heroes and self-sacrificing defenders of cherished and sacred values, even in the absence of a clear understanding of the videos' overt ideological inducements. The omission of affective equivalents in U.S. counter-extremism video messaging reflects American cultural anxieties concerning singing and masculinity. Critically, this absence renders U.S. State Department video messages designed to support the government's "countering violent extremism" (CVE) efforts sonically sterile in comparison to the extremists' video messages.

Sound aids the production and interpretation of discursive meaning. Discursive content may matter less in ISIL and U.S. CVE videos than the embodied experience that the videos compel listeners to share. Current CVE scholarship, like rhetorical scholarship in general, reflects the bias of symbolicity over and at the expense of the material (Ott, Bean, & Marin, 2016). If scholars want to better understand why ISIL video messages are effective (or not), it is imperative that they supplement their analysis of discursive content (e.g., their preoccupation with ISIL's narratives) with sustained attention to the experiential quality of the videos themselves. Understanding the way in which ISIL's message is made to feel ordered, shared, and compelling—even when that message includes images and sounds of horrific brutality—is urgently needed. Our findings thus contribute to Pieslak's (2015, p. 239) "destabilization" of the idea that ideology always proves a stronger motive for extremism than social or emotional forces.

Furlow, R. B., & Goodall, Jr., H. L. (2011). The war of ideas and the battle of narratives: A comparison of extremist storytelling structures. *Cultural Studies<—>Critical Methodologies*, *11*, 215-223. doi:10.1177/1532708611409530

Ott, B. L., Bean, H., & Marin, K. (2016). On the aesthetic production of atmospheres: The rhetorical workings of biopower at The CELL. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 1-17. doi: 10.1080/14791420.2016.1195505

Pieslak, J. (2015). *Radicalism & music: An introduction to the music cultures of al-Qa'ida, racist skinheads, Christian-affiliated radicals, and eco-animal rights militants*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

Zelin, A. Y. (2015). Picture or it didn't happen: A snapshot of the Islamic State's official media output. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, *9*(4). Available from http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/445

Comments on CENTCOM Messaging

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*This is a transcript of an interview conducted by Sarah Canna on 14 October 2016.

Sarah Canna: So, first of all, can I record this session so I can write a transcript and not take notes?
Alejandro Beutel: Yeah absolutely. You'll have to pardon some of the background noise because as we're speaking, I'm getting ready to head off to a service. So, forgive me if there's a little bit of background noise.

Sarah Canna: Okay, no worries, and hopefully I won't take up too much of your time. But the question that we need to address today is Virtual Think Tank #1: What are US CENTCOM and other global counter ISIL coalitions missing from counter messaging efforts in the information domain?

Alejandro Beutel: Okay. So, I mean, from my vantage point as a researcher, I think obviously it's sort of getting a better understanding of some of the dynamics that are taking place. Often times, I think, it's making the very conscious differentiation between sort of the transnational brand of ISIL and then sort of the localized narratives that often take place as well.

Sarah Canna: And how are they different?

Alejandro Beutel: So, it really comes off a lot in content. It may also at times have to do with sort of the platforms that are going to be messed with. If we're talking about in a place like Iraq and Syria, a lot of the messaging platforms (things like radio and television) because they want to have the veneer of being a state. So, those are traditional sort of mediums that are associated with the state, whereas in other areas they are less stateless and more like insurgencies and terrorist organizations, where they may not be holding territory and where they're not acting like a state, the platforms are much more Internet-oriented and such.

Sarah Canna: So, do you think that there's an opportunity to target local communities based on their preferred way they receive messages?

Alejandro Beutel: Correct, that's correct. And then in other cases as well, like sometimes in certain parts of the world where social structures differ…I mean, for instance, the whole tribal system that may take place in certain parts of like the Horn of Africa or in the Middle East, that's not necessarily going to apply in somewhere like Southeast Asia, although they do have extended family networks often times in things like _____ that may be of use in value in terms of outreach as well.

Sarah Canna: So, it sounds like we need to be focusing on local messaging and focusing on the mechanisms by which they receive messages, but what about the fact that the US is not perceived as a credible messenger?

Alejandro Beutel: So, when I look at this issue, I look at it in sort of three categories. I look at it in terms of not just the message, but then the medium and then the messenger as well. Right?

Sarah Canna: Mhmm.

Alejandro Beutel: And so, up to this point, I think that there has been a lot of focus at times on the message and, to a lesser extent, the messenger and, even lesser, the medium. This is just sort of my non-scientific observation. In terms of the messenger, government entities in general, I don't think, are as likely to be credible. Often times, it's because they may be associated with corruption since good government is not necessarily always the strong suit.

If it comes from the United States source, I think that, often times, because there are narratives that are already well-entrenched, even among main stream communities, the United States is often seen as a malevolent actor. I'm not always necessarily sure that the United States is often going to be the best messenger. So, for me, I see several societies as the ones that are the most likely to be the most credible messengers. In terms of message, I just want to go back to that in terms of content. One thing that I also do see that is lacking is sort of a better understanding, not just of counter narratives but also alternative narratives.

"The United States is often seen as a malevolent actor."

Sarah Canna: I was just going to say what's an alternative narrative?

Alejandro Beutel: Right, without getting too academic about it, basically, it's sort of addressing the messaging and narratives that are put out by groups like Daesh and Kazakh, etcetera, but doing so much in a more indirect sort of manner. So, for instance, let me give you an example domestically in the United States. ____: They used to very commonly say that US's Muslims could not be both a fully observant Muslim and a loyal American citizen at the same time for a number of different reasons and that the history with the United States and its actions has always been historically hostile to Muslims and even to other minorities saw well. They sort of point towards these examples. The counter narrative was to often to say that there is nothing inherently incompatible between a standard democracy on a theological and religious basis. The alternative narratives would often be that American Muslims are part and parcel a part of this country like any other immigrant group, or that Muslims played a huge part in the civil rights movement in the struggle for African American civil rights and other things, like American Muslims have been an important part of the American fabric since its founding and giving a bunch of historical examples in that regard. So, that's sort of what I see as potential alternative narratives. They are things that are not directly targeting and seeking to directly address the messaging that's put out by extremists but ends up having the same sort of intended outcome anyways.

Sarah Canna: So, I mean, this one is a little confusing for me because…what you're saying is that a group like ISIL will say, "Okay Americans, you can't be both Muslim and American," and then the alternative messages… you know, not only can you be that but, you know, Muslims immigrants are essential to the American melting pot and that sort of thing. But isn't that a counter? I mean, not sure how an alternative versus a counter message…

Alejandro Beutel: Right. So, one of the distinguishing features between alternative and counter narratives and messages is simply whether or not they are directly tethering themselves to a message, and the other thing is sort of audience levels. So, alternative narratives for the most part are going to be community level and mass level. When we look at the most effective counter narratives, they're going to be much more, almost individual level, one-on-one or maybe specific sort of subcultures and groups. So, there's a certain specificity that is now sort of coming with counter narratives as opposed to alternative narratives, which I would see as much more broad-based, much more mass level.

Sarah Canna: Mhmm. So, I was talking to Hassan Abbas just a couple of days ago about this topic, and he said essentially, there is no message that CENTCOM could promulgate that would be received well by the populations in Iraq or Syria or Europe or wherever. He said that the only thing that can be communicated by CENTCOM is action, what actions are they taking. Do you think that's accurate?

Alejandro Beutel: Yes, I would say so. At the end of the day…let me put it this way. In fact, I just got done reading a really interesting article…I'd say, for the most part, yes, but with a caveat. I think that what needs to happen is that there almost essentially needs to be what one scholar has termed 'narrative leg operations.' Are you familiar with that?

Sarah Canna: I'm not.

Alejandro Beutel: Okay. So, in traditional sort of military planning, when it comes to strategic messaging and even a narrative generation, what ends up happening is military planners end up forming their own sort of operations (their own planning, what their strategic objectives are), and then the narratives are simply there as a secondary thought to support those already pre-ordained, pre-planned operations. Narrative-led operations, on the other hand, are already embedded from the very get-go into the planning process itself. It's very different. I don't want to go so far as to say that it's that operations are there to support the narratives where it sort of turns the planning process on its head, but what narrative operations does though is that it makes narratives a very very important part of the planning process itself so that, if it comes down to, you know, engaging in certain kinds of kinetic operations or whatever, people may give them second thought or at least try to then have much better planning around the messaging before some sort of operation is undertaken. Does that make sense?

Sarah Canna: I think so. So, I think about this sometimes in terms of how sometimes, American values are in conflict with our strategic interests, and so, clearly, messages that resonate are probably ones that are deeply-held American values that probably other people share as well (perhaps representative government, that kind of thing). It seems that messages that can be backed up with real narratives, real heartfelt things that we believe in are clearly going to be much more credible than just "how are we going to get our way?"

Alejandro Beutel: Right. Basically, in order for a narrative to have any sort of credibility, it has to align itself with the realities on the ground. There is this notion among a lot of narrative researchers and practitioners of the say-do gap, essentially, that if the rhetoric does not match the reality on the ground or at least doesn't even have some sort of way of…you can only spin a cent on the ground so much before people call BS; let me put it that way. So that, I think, is where I think Dr. Abbas may be coming from, and if that is the standpoint that he's coming from, then I would agree with that, and so for me, I would say that then actions are important. It's not necessary to dismiss them altogether, but then that's one way to sort of perhaps think about a better alignment between narratives and operations and sort of the closing of this say-do gap or at least the narrowing (I think that's a better way to put it, the narrowing of the say-do gap) might be through a concept such as a narrative-led operation.

Sarah Canna: You know, I was talking to Kurt Braddock a couple days ago too…well, his write up actually, and he was saying that there isn't a whole lot that CENTCOM itself can do, but he said there is one area where they might find success, which is finding people who have defected from ISIL or Al Qaeda and have them talk to vulnerable populations back in the United States or in Europe,

which of course wouldn't convince anyone in Iraq and Syria, but he said that that would be an effective use of CENTCOM's resources to channel them back to our own populations. Do you think that's at least a sort of effective…?

Alejandro Beutel: So, okay. That gets really complicated though. There are a number of different potential credible messengers, but part of what makes credible messengers credible is their arm's length relationship to any government basically because what a lot of cynics could potentially say when they see a former is they could say, "Oh, they're being pressured to do it" or "Oh, they're getting off easy" or, you know, they struck up some bargain with their government so that if they say something like what they're saying right now, then they'll get less jail time or they won't get executed or something like that. So, there is a lot of cynicism that people have to sort of anticipate. I saw this even in the United States, looking at it, with Muslim communities when they were talking about some recent news of a former who got hired at a think tank here at DC, and basically people were like, "Oh, well this guy got his jail sentence commuted…was his jail sentence commuted then simply because he decided to get hired and now he's speaking out? What's the relationship there with the government?" So, there has to be some sort of arm's length relationship there. If there's any relationship with CENTCOM, that I really think has to be minimized as much as possible.

"Part of what makes credible messengers credible is their arm's length relationship to any government…"

Sarah Canna: Right. So, this gets to what is essentially my last question. The hard thing is that for this assignment, we have to tell CENTCOM what they can do or what they should stop doing. Do you have any advice with regard to what specifically what they can or should stop doing?

Alejandro Beutel: Let me start off with what they can potentially do; I think that's a better place to start. I think that CENTCOM… one of the best things that they could potentially do is to play the role of the convener. It goes back to a 2001 Rand report where… I think it was David Archillian(?)… that was the guy… he basically said that you have to cite a network with a network. The problem with a lot of formers or a lot of, for lack of better term, mainstream Muslim communities, is that their networks are fractured, and the left hand often doesn't know what the right hand is doing. Yet, what is so interesting is that while these different potential fragments of a network don't necessarily talk to each other, they all somehow, often times, because of CENTCOM and because of the pragmatic nature of the operators on the ground, they talk to government actors, whether that is Iraqi government, whether that's CENTCOM, or whomever; they talk to those people. So, one of the best things that could potentially be done is that, for these potential credible messengers, while CENTCOM may not be credible to the target populations, CENTCOM is at least credible to the credible messengers. So, what CENTCOM might be able to at least do is to play the role of the convener and have these gatherings and forums for people to network with one another and at least be able to establish some sort of mediums of communication and get in some sort of face-to-face contact there, mediating those kinds of relationships there so that then there might be potential avenues for partnership and collaboration, capitalizing that among those folks there. The only other thing that I would say then that CENTCOM could potentially do is just to make sure that they have, and I think they're already doing this anyways, rapid response to any sort of disinformation that is put out there to local communities and whatnot. But beyond that, CENTCOM is really not the most credible messenger. Governments in general are not going to be the most credible messengers. Looking at how the awakening was so successful when they got the word out, my reading of how things went down on the ground was that you had tribal ____, tribal shares that were the people that were the disseminators of the message out there. They were the ones that

sort of got on board and were the ones who rallied people against Al Qaeda in Iraq in the most effective way possible. I hope that helps.

Sarah Canna: That does, thank you. Is there anything that CENTCOM should stop doing?

Alejandro Beutel: Probably a lot of the direct messaging that they may or may not be doing.

Sarah Canna: Because it's not effective, they're not a credible voice, and they're essentially just digging the hole deeper, increasing mistrust?

Alejandro Beutel: Yes, and if anything, to some cynics who may be sitting on the fence, that might actually be a perverse source of the validation for the very people that we're trying to combat in the information space.

Sarah Canna: Right. Alright, well, Alejandro, thank you so much for talking with me. What I'm going to do is, you know, I'll have a transcript made, I'll send it to you in case you feel like reviewing it, and the transcript will be included in the compendium, and then I'm going to write a 2-page kind of executive summary of all the papers that have been submitted.

Alejandro Beutel: Thank you Sarah, and I appreciate your time, and I appreciate you working with me.

Comments on CENTCOM Messaging

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This file is a PDF and will be sent separately.

Comments on CENTCOM Messaging

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My research is not focused on 'what's missing' from Counter-ISIL propaganda. However, from my recent/current work on Iraq, I would highlight a couple of points/thoughts in response to the question you sent, in the hope they are helpful in some way.

Within theatre, one concern emerges from how existing rivalries, ethnic differences or stereotypes may at times have been utilised to leverage a tactical outcome; whichever audience you are targeting, it is important to be wary of reaffirming any ethnic tensions in ways that will be ultimately unhelpful - in a fast-response conditions erring on the side of caution. In past planning and communications Sunnis were perceived and believe they were treated as 'a problem' to be tackled, this cannot be allowed to happen with any group and this requires great sensitivity in the design of every policy, document or communication. Sectarianism is obviously a fundamental barrier in establishing security and stability. Messaging aimed to counter sectarianism could also, in fact, reinforce or further embed these difficulties - especially if such divisions are not being fundamentally undercut in other aspects of planning and reform. Understanding the tragedy that has befallen Iraq, it is of course crucial to at least not worsen sectarianism (!) and anyway the most effective 'messages' are delivered by actions and experiences - effective Iraqi government has to be communicated by actions, and this reality perhaps echoed outwards through the different community/media channels, it is essential to evidence real ability to establish an effective and legitimate state and at the moment, still, heavy-handedness by the Iraqi Military with Sunnis 'communicates' more loudly than PSYOP ever will.

"Whichever audience you are targeting, it is important to be wary of reaffirming any ethnic tensions in ways that will be ultimately unhelpful—in a fast-response conditions erring on the side of caution."

With online and community-based CVE communications, there is a very strong need to avoid any efforts with grassroots organisations, journalists etc. of the kind attempted by the UK government recently: **https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/may/02/uk-government-covert-propaganda-stop-muslims-joining-isis** such efforts invariably come out and greatly undermine relationships with the Muslim community, also leaving people feeling patronised, alienated, vulnerable, angry and without sources of reliable information they feel aren't 'government propaganda' - if someone is doing something you think is positive, please leave it alone.

From Countermessaging to Narrative Transformation: Information Operations 2.0

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Question (ViTTa1): *What are the USCENTCOM and the global counter-ISIL coalition missing from counter-messaging efforts in the information domain?*

SME INPUT

BLUF: "Countermessaging" efforts are suboptimal methods for engaging the existing narratives in CENTCOM's AO. Efforts to transform existing narratives through engagement would satisfy the same objectives often achieved through traditional messaging while still "disrupting" adversary conflict narratives and shaping conditions conducive to later stability and/or peace operations.

Introduction

As the nature of conflict has changed over the past 25 years, how we respond to conflict must also change. The U.S. military has, like any learning organization, responded to these changes by

reflecting on its own performance, as it did in the *Decade of War.* The findings of the Joint and Coalition Operations Analysis Division of the Joint Staff (JCOA) call for attention to the "battle of the narrative" with a clear recognition that the contest over meaning is just as important as the physical battlefield.

Conflict narratives inhibit communication and countermessaging approaches may exacerbate the problem. The following paper offers narrative-based approaches to information operations (IO) as a way to engage friendly and enemy narratives in conflict systems that create and legitimize violence. Rooted in the scholarly literature on narrative approaches to conflict resolution, this work provides analysis of how narrative-based engagement would differ from current IO countermessaging approaches. Moving beyond simply a "think piece" this paper also offers a theory of change as well as implications in the form of steps necessary to implement a series of IO efforts based on narrative engagement. The information contained in this document provides a partial answer to the Strategic Multilayer Assessment question: What are USCENTCOM and the global ISIL coalition missing from countermessaging efforts in the information domain? As the product of academic analysis, this study has certain limitations. The researchers engaged in this effort did not have access to current USCENTCOM or global counter-ISIL coalition countermessaging plans or products. Rather, the researchers' point of departure focused on the potential benefits of narrative engagement for USCENTCOM and the global counter-ISIL coalition as well as initial thoughts on how to go about implementing such a process.

We argue that in order for Information Operations to meet the challenges posed by the "battle of the narrative," it would be useful to shift from a simplistic "countermessaging" frame to a "narrative transformation frame." To that end we provide a review and assessment of current doctrine on countermessaging and note the limitations of this frame for managing narrative dynamics in military operations in the kinds of conflicts that predominate today (Part One); we offer a narrative lens on communication that has import for a foundation of information operations seeking to alter the narrative battlefield; based on this lens, we lay out a staged model for information operations that would include components and processes that would enable the U.S. military to transform narratives (Part Two); using cultural data recently gathered from in Iraq, we lay out the narrative landscape, as a case study (Part Three); and finally, we apply the staged model of narrative transformation to the case study, to identify implications and to exemplify the proposed model using real data (Part Four).

The paper addresses the question "what is missing" from the information operations in Iraq. We argue that what is missing is a narrative lens equipped to enable information operations to respond effectively to narratives in the operational environment.

Part One: Review and Critique of "Narrative" in Military Doctrine

United States Central Command (USCENTCOM), the military organization responsible for American military operations in the Middle East region of the world has prioritized counter-Islamic State in Iraq and Levant (ISIL) messaging as an effort to shape conditions for a decisive civil-military ground victory. Currently, Information Operations (IO) is the vehicle for the Department of Defense (DOD) Counter-ISIL messaging efforts. In DOD Joint Publication 3-13 (2014) the Secretary of Defense characterizes IO as the integrated employment, during military operations, of information related capabilities (IRCs) in concert with other lines of operation to influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp the decision making of adversaries and potential adversaries while protecting our own. IO are planned using the Joint Operations Planning Process (JOPP) and heavily informed by the input

of traditional messaging assets such as Military Information Support Operations Specialists (MISO, formerly PSYOP), Public Affairs Specialists (PA), and Electronic Warfare experts (EW). Institutionally, this approach is sound, battle-tested even. However, the embedded norms and assumptions in existing doctrine and practice create a glaring gap in CENTCOM's IO approach to defeating ISIL.

ISIL, and groups like them, do have messages, messages that make up parts of narratives; so does USCENTCOM. Doctrinally, DOD privileges the "messaging" aspect of IO while tentatively acknowledging the implications of these messages on current narratives within the operating environment (OE). Although distinct, we saw a doctrinal conflation of "message" and "narrative." There are concrete definitions of narrative within the Defense Department; they are dispersed throughout the myriad of service-specific and organizational/functional doctrine. Marines define narrative in Marine Corps Manual *MCRP 3-32.1 Influence Activities Handbook.* Here, the Marines borrow from our British IO counterparts; they define narrative as stories, powerful tools that can be used to transmit a message. In MCRP 3-32.1 (2013) we find:

> Coherent narratives are an increasingly important aspect of operations in the land environment because of the ubiquity of onlookers and media coverage, on a scale rivaled only in cyberspace'. Such a narrative must resonate with the local population - use their words and imagery in order to tap into deep cultural undercurrents - and provide a counter to adversary/negative influencer's propaganda in this battle for the people's support. (p. 13)

Reviewing the MISO and Public Affairs (PA) literature further reveals an institutional adherence to asymmetric inform-influence messaging models. As institutional pillars of Inform and Influence Activities both MISO and PA personnel are uniquely positioned to have a nuanced understanding of the narratives people within an operating environment (OE) are living and/or telling. *Joint Publication 3-12.2* (2014) reveals MISO personnel are tasked to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals in a manner favorable to the originator's objectives. MISO, through its seven-step process, is selective. There are defined objectives with associated audiences targeted for their abilities to meet MISO objectives. During the target audience (TA) analysis phase of the MISO process, MISO personnel encounter the narratives of the people they are targeting. MISO personnel may not articulate it as such during this phase, but it does come out explicitly when MISO planners need to describe their TAs environment. MISO's PA counterparts are even more direct in their organizational understanding of narrative.

Per *Joint Publication 3-61* (2016) some of the primary roles of DOD PA are, to tell the truth in a timely manner while also telling the Department of Defense's story. DOD PA defines narrative as short stories used to anchor military decisions and provide context to said operations and situations. In addition to informing an audience, PA's overarching goal is, according to JP 3-61, to achieve superiority over adversary narrative by minimizing it and making it irrelevant. Narrative is recognized as a subjective, fluid item that can be corrected in DOD's favor through good messaging and themes. PA doctrine goes to great lengths to characterize friendly efforts as a narrative and the adversary narrative (note the singularity here) as conflicting, false, information or miscommunication. Finally, PA doctrine seems to both recognize and endorse the use of what the Center for Narrative and Conflict Resolution (CNCR) would call a radicalized narrative (see Cobb, 2013, p.130-132).

> **In war, narrative is much more than just a story. Narrative may sound like a fancy literary word, but it is actually the foundation of all strategy, upon which all else-policy, rhetoric, and action-is built. War narratives need to be identified and critically examined on their own terms, for they can illuminate the inner nature of the war itself.**
>
> **War narrative does three essential things. First, it is the organizing framework for policy. Policy cannot exist without an interlocking foundation of "truths" that people easily accept because they appear to be self-evident and undeniable. Second, this "story" works as a framework precisely because it represents such an existential vision. The "truths" that it asserts are culturally impossible to disassemble or even criticize. Third, having presented a war logic that is beyond dispute, the narrative then serves practically as the anointed rhetorical handbook for how the war is to be argued and described.**
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> **Michael Vlahos**
> **The Long War: A Self-Fulfilling Prophecy of Protracted Conflict-and Defeat**
> **The National Interest**
> **September 5, 2006**

Both MISO and PA conduct their own versions of media analysis; both entities come across the existing narratives within the OE. Unlike their Public Relations counterparts in the civilian sector, where relationships are prioritized and built on mutual trust, the MISO and PA approaches are asymmetric and short sighted. This asymmetric relation can materialize on the ground as a mismatch between the problem, as it is framed, and the solutions that are applied.

DOD understands the difference between messages and narratives and still comes back to a communications model as a solution. At the joint-level, DOD relies on the JOPP (found in JP 5-0). During the mission analysis phase of planning, planners articulate the specific variables of the OE. These variables (all of which exist within narratives) include the political, military, economic, social, information, infrastructure, physical environment, and timing (PMESII-PT) situations of the OE. From an IO perspective, the purpose of this portion of JOPP is to prepare the information environment and its associated map overlay. Planners describe operational variables in a narrative format; they are written within the annexes of operations orders and verbally articulated in a military briefing format to decision makers.

Interestingly, planners unwittingly articulate what we would understand as radicalized narratives. For the purpose of brevity, the narratives that inform PMESII-PT mission analysis and planning are often relatively thin, even radicalized at times. Radicalized narratives legitimize exclusion (a key, paradoxical tenant of counter-insurgency operations) and have built-in, self-evident solutions to them; in the context of the DOD, that solution is a good message. Nowhere is this more perfectly illustrated than in DOD's Joint Publication 3-13.2 Military Information Support Operations (2014).

DISRUPTING THE INSURGENT NARRATIVE

Military Information Support Task Force–Afghanistan (MISTF-A), assigned to United States Forces Command–Afghanistan (USFOR-A), was tasked with disrupting the insurgent narrative and promoting the legitimacy of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA). The MISTF-A planners and staff used the military information support operations (MISO) process to gain a clear understanding of the mission and to create a MISO plan to drive dissemination. The mission analysis resulted in a comprehensive information preparation of the environment that determined the insurgent narrative cycle, key insurgent themes and lines of persuasion, and key target audiences. The MISTF-A determined the insurgent's critical requirements as the perceived legitimacy of the insurgent narrative and the freedom of maneuver to disseminate towards that narrative. The MISTF-A developed a series execution matrix that required support from traditional MISO capabilities and precision information-related capabilities organic to the task force, as well as capabilities residing in outside organizations (maneuver forces, special operations forces, intelligence assets, and tactical military information support teams) not assigned to the task force. Message delivery in support of the program required integration and synchronization across the breadth and depth of the USFOR-A information battlespace.

The MISTF-A Commander led the operational planning team, which included planners from USFOR-A and key partner nations units, to ensure that operations were synchronized, integrated, and resourced prior to execution. Implementation of the plan was timed to coincide with the insurgent influence cycle. MISO and cyberspace activities eroded the legitimacy of the enemy message by pointing out discrepancies between the insurgents' words and deeds. The MISTF-A series was augmented by maneuver force and intelligence operations conducting tactical-level engagements and human interaction designed to expose the discrepancies between insurgent leaders and fighters through print, radio, and face-to-face dissemination. Electromagnetic spectrum broadcasts disseminated tactical communications products to adversary command-and-control radio networks. The previously unchallenged insurgent information environment was now challenged by blanketing the insurgent target audience with messaging aimed at questioning the legitimacy of the insurgent cause while also supporting GIROA legitimacy. Combined disseminations continued throughout the identified insurgent narrative cycle that further confused the insurgent target audience.

The example above is considered a successful information operation. The adversary's narrative was engaged and delegitimized, minimized and disrupted with destabilizing messages (in the military sense). This is the point of counter-messaging efforts, to asymmetrically shape the information environment in the favor of friendly forces. DoD's underlying assumption (or rather, the theory of change) is that "correct" information/messaging and suppression/disruption of adversary narratives will result in a defeated narrative. In the short term, this approach may prompt individuals within the OE to support CENTCOM efforts or merely refrain from interfering with friendly maneuver elements. After all, this is IO's ultimate function, seizing the cognitive terrain so military elements can physically carry out their missions. But privileging the physical for the cognitive may come at a cost because narratives are resilient. Through ground victories and IO, CENTCOM could, in theory, have better access to communities within the OE and thus be able to dominate the information domain through subversion and outright narrative suppression. Ultimately, marginalized or suppressed narratives may manifest into the thin narratives that support radicalization, violence, and extremism.

In the sections that follow, we offer a recursive narrative lens as a foundation for information operations, differentiating it from the linear model that undergirds the "countermessaging" framework. We argue in favor of a "narrative transformation" framework that would enable information operations to contribute to the reduction of violence and radicalization, and promote stakeholder engagement.

Part Two: From Countermessaging to Narrative Engagement: Toward Information Operations 2.0

A brief overview of narrative establishes the terms of reference from which this section flows. A narrative is more than a story. Although the terms seem interchangeable, a story conveys a sequence of events while a narrative has a point (Labov and Waletzky, 1967) or renders judgment (Labov, 1972, 1982). The evaluative point depicted in the plot sequence of a narrative is what gives it its power, meaning, and significance (Cobb, 2013, pg. 36 and Abbot, 2008 pg. 23). People naturally prefer to receive information in the form of a narrative with a beginning, middle, and an end (Abbot, 2008).[1] As such, narratives provide a prism through which societies construe reality, collect new information, interpret their experiences, and then make decisions about courses of action (Bar Tal, 2007, pg. 1446). Narratives as social constructions coherently interrelate a sequence of historical and current events providing accounts of people's collective experiences embodied in certain belief systems, while representing the collective's symbolically constructed shared identity (Fisher, 1989). Narratives not only account for past actions because they address how individuals understand those actions, that is, how humans make meaning (White, 1973). Narrative has the capacity to express identity, values, moral basis, legitimacy and vision around which entities (organizations or activities) can unite (Multinational Information Operations White Paper, 2014). From this perspective, narratives contain the history, purpose, and achievement of a collective entity while framing what is possible in the future (Buthe, 2002). Narratives also structure perceptual experience and organize memory as they segment and purpose-build the very events of life (Bruner, 1987, pg. 15).

Friendly forces use narratives to express organizational rationale, intent, and aims. Narratives also reflect 'how' organizations go about accomplishing a given mission in articulations of vision, strategy, logic of action, and theory of victory. They may manifest in something as simple as an idea used to orient the force around a unifying theme or something as complex as the expression and essence of an organization for internal and external audiences. In this sense, narratives are essential to guide the planning, organizing, decision-making, communication, and action of every member of an organization (MNIO, 2014). This overview should widen the scope of the concept of narrative and highlight the potential and possibilities of engaging in the narrative landscape.

War has its roots in the way we tell and interpret stories (Smith, 2005). But conflict narratives, friendly and enemy, constitute much more than simple stories. They are the cause and consequence of conflict (Cobb, 2013) as well as a projection of possible futures (Frank, 2010). They encompass a number of overlapping and layered stories that provide the plot sequence, set of characters, and

[1] In all cultures, complex narratives have been communicated through stories and fairy tales, which become a centerpiece for education and tradition. Such stories convey meaning in an effective way resonating naturally with our understanding of the world. Stories connect complex topics with context and emotions in a culturally attuned manner using metaphors (Multinational Information Operations Experiment White Paper *Narrative Development in Coalition Operations* v 1.0, 01 September 2014, 7).

moral frameworks that authorize and legitimize a particular history and a given identity (Cobb, 2013). Conflicts are also a function of the stories we tell, as well as those that cannot be told or heard (Cobb, 2012). In order to resolve conflicts, parties must engage the narratives therein. The challenge with conflict narratives is that over time they lose complexity ceding control of the narrative landscape to dominant groups while those marginalized find it increasingly difficult to story their experiences and perspectives.[2] When people become separated from narrative, they lose access to the production of meaning and neither protest nor politics is possible (Ranciere, 2006). Scholars suggest that violence may ensue when people lose access to words (Scarry, 1987). Narrative-based approaches to resolving conflict "take stories seriously" and as a result, treat them as though they have the power to shape experiences, influence mindsets, and construct relationships (Winslade and Monk, 2008, pg. 1). The foregoing description of narrative will now inform an examination of the challenge of using countermessaging IO in conflict environments.

The messaging and countermessaging approach to IO is a problematic model for communication. Messaging is linear in nature (from sender to receiver), rather than recursive (receivers are senders and vice versa). The former approach disables attention to communication system dynamics. This type of communication is rarely effective when groups adopt and elaborate simplistic storylines in the most complex, contested landscapes characterized by high levels of violence and instability. Messaging functions if communication is accurately conveyed to the intended receiver. But in conflict environments, noise in the system including cultural differences or simple miscommunication can cause messages to miss the receiver entirely. Communication also suffers when, in interaction, one group positions themselves as legitimate and their Others, as delegitimate. Friendly forces may inadvertently lose groups who would otherwise serve as a resource if IO messaging positions them as delegitimate. Overall, messaging places emphasis on the content of the exchange but communication is really about the meaning systems that are struggling for dominance. This is especially true in situations where communication is filtered through the lens of conflict and violence.

Narrative is the architecture for meaning and action in a given operational environment. Meaning is governed by internal structures including the plot, characters, and themes. As such, narratives anchor, justify, and forecast behavior (enemy and friendly alike). It is crucial for friendly forces to understand the retrospective – prospective quality of narratives that enable them to be both accounts of the past and predictions of the future, not only reporting the past but shaping human actions through anticipating outcomes (Smith, 2005, pg. 22). The internal structures of narrative draw on, and reflect, cultural narratives. These cultural narratives anchor identity, group formation, and belonging. This is what gives narrative its power as a rhetorical tool because it activates much more than rational logic. It leverages an aesthetic dimension and a cultural dimension in order to construct a logic wherein decisions are made based on the narrative validity (combination of internal coherence and external fidelity or familiarity), cultural relevance, and emotional/aesthetic resonance (Fisher, 1989). From this perspective, narrative preserves legitimacy and dictates action, as the performance of moral values. It connects people to collectivities and serves as the basis around which groups (enemy and friendly) assemble (Frank, 2010, pg. 15).

[2] The narrative landscape consists of a set of dominant narratives that provide context and support for a given overarching narrative. Although there are other, perhaps marginalized stories in a given landscape, they may not surface if dominant narratives compress that which does not contribute to the dominant narrative's coherence or closure. Sara Cobb, Alison Castel, Nina Selwan, Fakhira Halloun, and John Winslade, *Intractability and Meaning Making: "Narrative" as a Dynamical* System in Conflict, Processes Narrative Compression Working Group at the Center for the Study of Narrative and Conflict Resolution, at the School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, George Mason University, 2016.

Conflict narratives have a unique set of characteristics and dynamics. They exhibit thin plotlines as conflicting parties work to condense, shorten, and simplify the Others' narratives in a process of mutual delegitimation (Nelson, 2001). Frequently the characters in a given conflict narrative morph into caricatures of people making it easier to attribute negative traits and intentions to Others and positive traits and intentions to Self. In conflict, narratives operate along binary moral frameworks demarcating the sacred and the profane. Communities in conflict experience a reduction in the ability to develop "critical intelligence" (Dewey, 1992). This is the kind of (non-military) intelligence that supports communal learning, not only about the issues, but also about itself as a constellation of different perspectives (Cobb, 2013, pg. 7). Escalation ensues when parties engage in a process of mutual delegitimation as fractures materialized and anchored by "attractors" (meaning nodes) in conflict narratives, are cemented. Narratives reflecting and creating those fractures are progressively radicalized, become increasingly simplistic, and "smooth out" details that are contrary to a given storyline. From this perspective, conflict disables a community's capacity to deliberate, to engage in conversations that enable learning, and to support the evolution of the narrative landscape. The determinativeness of conflict narratives reinforces certainty as it shuts down reflection and dialogue. (Cobb, 2013, pg. 38). Parties may find themselves disabled from the exploration of the Other(s) in all their complexity and can lead to a tendency to, through narrative, create the enemy we seek to destroy (Cobb, 2013, pg. 4). These radicalized narratives enslave speakers and marginalize "enemy" Others. At its worst, radicalized discourse supports fixed polarization making the reform of personal (or group) attributes impossible so evil has to be permanently excluded from society or destroyed (Smith, 2005, pg. 23).

Narratives are always situated in a structure of power. Dominant or hegemonic narratives are the strongest and most polarizing of all genres (Smith, 2005, pg. 26).[3] The narrative landscape consists of a set of dominant narratives that provide context and support for a given overarching narrative. Although there are other, perhaps marginalized stories in a given landscape, they may not surface if dominant narratives compress that which does not contribute to the dominant narrative's coherence or closure (Cobb et al., 2016). Compression occurs as dominant narratives erase, blend, or warp key components of marginalized narratives. The latter struggle to be framed as legitimate but if the content does not fit into the dominant plotline, it may go unacknowledged or face erasure. If unable to gain traction with a counternarrative, parties may be tempted to escalate the conflict and resort to violence. Blending happens when marginal narratives get reframed, defused, or absorbed by the dominant narrative. Warping occurs when the narrative field becomes so polarized that moderates no longer participate, leaving certain groups on the sidelines of the compressed discursive environment (Cobb et al., 2016). Of course, sitting out does not prohibit groups from participating in politics or violence. Through this phenomena of erasure, blending, or warping the master narrative compresses the meaning of marginalized narratives, colonizing their power, disrupting their potential to alter the master narrative (Cobb et al, 2016 pg. 28). This elaboration of conflict narrative landscapes informs the following theory of change necessary to shift from an IO messaging effort to one of narrative engagement.

Conflict is a struggle for narrative primacy, for establishing the privilege of being able to tell the story and set the interpretative framework in place that adjudicates the negotiation over meaning. To this end, parties in conflict often adopt and elaborate simplistic narratives in the most complex,

[3] An initial definition of dominant or master narrative is, "…the stories found lying about in our culture…consisting of stock plots and readily recognizable character types, repositories of common norms…exercise[ing] a certain authority over our moral imagination." H. L. Nelson, *Damaged Identities*, *Narrative Repair* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press:) 2001, 6.

contested landscapes characterized by high levels of violence and instability. This poses difficulties for friendly forces because acting within a dynamic system requires rapid learning, something that proves challenging for hierarchical organization.[4] Nevertheless, narrative engagement offers a theory of change based upon destabilizing the dominant narratives in a given landscape. Doing so gives space to marginalized narratives that may have been subject to compression. Legitimizing marginalized narratives, via elaboration, increases their centrality, viability and as such, changes the narrative landscape. This idea is similar to that found in systems theory whereby engaging in the system, changes it. Attention the content, structure, and functions of different stakeholders' narratives may offer new insights into the conflict or open up new ways of describing present challenges and future solutions (Cobb, 2013, pg. 21). This sort of engagement, via elaboration, legitimizes the very people who anchor marginalized stories and increases positive relations with them. A more diverse narrative landscape may lead to a reduction in violence while increasing collaboration across group boundaries. Shifting from a static messaging model focused on "target audiences" to dynamic engagement (where friendly forces are senders and receivers) is but one way of adding complexity to simplistic narratives. If conflict is based on certain dysfunctional and self-perpetuating narratives, then friendly forces should undertake efforts to deconstruct them in order to support relational shifts between the parties. There is no specific level or place where this can happen. While large-scale narratives provide context for mezzo and micro narratives, it is at the "lower levels that conversations are adopted, elaborated, and promulgated" (Cobb, 2013, 8). Indeed, scholars suggest that civil society is the "dialogical hydraulic, squeezing together events, meanings, and evaluative criteria such that intense pressures eventuate on those who are perceived as violating normative prescriptions" (Smith, 2005, pg. 12).

The narrative engagement approach stands out for its focus on meaning making, power dynamics, and the parties' language within the context of the conflict (Cobb, 2008, pg. 101). Narrative-based approaches to Information Operations could possibly engage stakeholders' (friendly and enemy) who have lost their capacity to deliberate as a way to engage in conversations that enable learning, and to support the evolution of the narrative landscape. It also accounts for the extent to which societal oppression adversely affects the entire society, the oppressors and oppressed alike, by dehumanizing them and giving certain groups advantages at the expense of others (Hansen, 2008, pg. 406). This approach may surface narratives based in civil society, not often included in elite-level discourse and in doing so, add complexity to simplistic narratives circulating in a conflict environment. This approach requires attention to the meanings behind the stories of those in conflict, something uncommon in interventions involving hegemonic powers or coalitions of state-based actors.

Implications for Information Operations: A Staged Model

The theory of change, outlined above, has implications for the development, and implementation of an IO campaign which requires, in this order, assessment, understanding, engagement, elaboration of marginalized narratives, and finally, destabilizing dominant narratives. We argue, given the logic inherent in our Theory of Change, that each step in this progression sets up the conditions needed for the next stage and together, they comprise the set of narrative strategies that would enable U.S. forces, through an IO campaign, to alter the narrative landscape in ways that would reduce radicalization, de-escalate violence, and promote collaboration. Each of these stages can also be seen as ongoing and overlapping; while each provides the foundation for subsequent stages, each stage can continue over the course of the IO efforts. This model provides a roadmap for analysis and

[4] Yaneer Bar-Yam argues that hierarchies cannot perform complex tasks or solve complex problems. Instead, they amplify what a single person wants to do. See Yaneer Bar-Yam, *Making Things Work: Solving Complex Problems in a Complex World*, (Massachusetts: NECSI Knowledge Press, 2004), 260.

strategic action that would enable IO to not only close the say/do gap, but to ensure that, through their efforts, the narrative landscape will be less productive of violence over time and more productive of collaboration and development.
The five stages are: Assessment, Engagement, Supporting Marginalized Narratives, Destabilizing Dominant Narratives, and Supporting Stakeholder Engagement.

Figure 1

Stage One: Assessing the Narrative Landscape (NL)

Narratives exist in a landscape of narratives and draw their meaning from this landscape, which contains the historical and cultural narratives that anchor identity and forecast behavior. There are several dimensions of the NL that mapping should identify: first, it should identify the marginal and dominant narratives in circulation; including the characters, plot lines and value systems within each of these. This process should familiarize IO operators with the contours, as well as the content, of the NL. Second, the dominant and marginal narratives should be mapped onto the social networks such that associated key leaders are identified and the links between social networks are marked as resources for future engagement. This analysis of the dominant/marginal narratives should include analysis of the ways in which the dominant narrative compresses the NL. Finally, it is imperative that the US IO teams also map the presence of the U.S., as an actor in the landscape, identifying who elaborates or contests the U.S. narrative on the ground. An Actant analysis[5] of the U.S. policy narrative would be critical, as it reveals its deep structure, as well as the nature of the social networks that contest or support it. Actant analysis of the dominant and marginalize narratives that populate the NL would not only display their deep structure, enabling the IO to avoid attribution errors, but it would also reveal the core cultural values that are central to the various identity groups. Stage One would give teams a strong baseline on which to strategically plan future actions. This map should be the foundation for IO operations.

Stage Two: Engaging the Narrative Landscape

Once the NL is mapped, it become possible to engage it, to interact with it. This engagement is a process of building relationships with key leaders across a host of sectors. This is done by identifying them and then communicating with them in a manner that legitimizes their core values and the integrity of their worldviews, without affirming their means or their stated ends. The key leaders of each of the narrative blocs in the landscape should be engaged. At this point, in order to thicken the web of relations, IO teams should seek to engage the networks of the leaders, moving across at least three levels of linkages, engaging those that are connected to the leaders (second level) as well as those that are connected to the second level (third level).

[5] Actant analysis is a form of narrative analysis that captures the deep structure as a snapshot. Because it requires a focus on the empirical data, it reduces the likelihood that IO teams will make the "fundamental attribution error" through which they use their own assumptions about the traits or intentions of the actors, rather than the empirical data from the narratives. For descriptions of the use of actant analysis see Barthes and Duisit (1975).

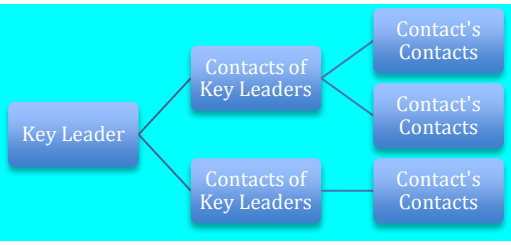

Figure 2

In this way, the relational web, so critical to effective engagement of the NL, is developed. Additionally, there is more nuanced information available to IO teams, thickening their understanding of the social networks and meaning systems that are in the operating environment.

The outcome of Stage Two should be the development of a network of relationships between US officials and local leaders and their networks. But in order to accomplish this, the "engagement" should be designed so as to ensure that the interviewees are legitimized by all US interlocutors, in the sense that critical portions of their narratives are elaborated by the U.S., and affirmed. This is not difficult nor would require stepping beyond the Commander's intent: legitimizing Other's narratives involves elaborating with them, acknowledging aspects of one of more of their core values, and attributing either positive traits or positive intentions. The work of the IO team in this stage is draw on the data analysis done in Stage One to be able to predict, for themselves, how they might be able to legitimize different leaders and their networks, across different segments of the landscape.

Stage Three: Supporting Marginalized Narratives

Again, referring back to our Theory of Change, we assume that conflict, as well as radicalization, are functions of the presence and persistence of marginalized narratives. There are two mechanisms that need to be addressed in this phase of the work. First, because they are marginalized, these narratives are sites of grievances, resistance, and potentially radicalization, if not terrorism. Reducing marginalization by engaging them, not in formal negotiations, but in conversations, meetings, planning sessions, etc., signals to the other members of the NL that these marginalized parties are considered important to U.S. operations. Second, because these narratives are marginalized they are not able to contribute to the complexity of the narrative landscape, leaving space for dominant narratives that rule and regulate the social, economic and political environments. When marginalized narratives are engaged and circulated, their presence in the public realm not only decreases the risk that their members will radicalize, but their presence will also increase the complexity of the NL. This enrichment inevitably opens up alternatives, increases flexibility for U.S. forces, and builds the foundation for security.

There are specific tools that can be used to support marginalized stories: first, simply elaborating and circulating them as "reports" defies the dominant narratives' restrictions. IO teams could produce radio spots that contain vignettes of the marginalized stories, legitimizing them in the process. IO teams could conduct, and circulate in social media, interviews with key leaders who are telling these marginalized narratives. Any effort to support those that speak the marginalized stories could increase their presence and visibility; of course this would need to be done in a manner that would not put the marginalized at increased risk of violence. However, this can be done by framing the marginalized not as perfect, but as an important contributor to the "solution" that needs to be developed over time. This kind of statement simply posits the marginalized as a

legitimate part of the NL. The support of marginalized narratives could be accomplished across multiple media in such a way that the NL landscape is more complex, and inevitably less fragile.

Stage Four: Destabilizing Dominant Narratives

The narrative landscape is always regulated from within by the dominant narratives. These stories perpetuate conflict, increase the risk of violence, and reduce the possibility of changes to the NL. However, it is precisely the change of the NL that IO operations, at some level are working to produce. Destabilizing dominant narratives is posited to come later in the IO process because, to be effective, the IO must have built knowledge, relationships, networks as resources for supporting the emergence of new narratives, as well as marginalizing ones that have, to date, been destructive. This requires the destabilization of the dominant narrative. "Destabilization" refers not to attacking it, denigrating it, challenging its validity, or "countering" it; rather destabilization is a strategy that uses the very terms of legitimacy that the dominant narrative provides and opens up spaces for "thickening" the value system, the plotline, or the characters. Basically, any change to the dominant narrative system, plot character roles, and value/themes *destabilizes* it. This is not tantamount to erasing it, for indeed the dominant narrative remains. But it is a systematic method to force the narrative from its homeostatic responses, and can, in the long run, lead to its evolution. But so often, the IO is more concentrated on "countering" the dominant narrative in an effort to reduce its footprint on the NL. However, research shows that "countering" is a form of attack and this actually s*trengthens* the dominant narrative as it immunizes itself against these arguments/logics. On the contrary, destabilizing is a process that seeks only to disturb the equilibrium of a dominant narrative. Counterintuitively, dominant narratives are destabilized through the process of *joining* which involves the elaboration of some portion of the narrative, affirming it. This process of joining could take place on radio and in social media, as well as in public meetings and written documents. The goal of joining is to affirm some portion of the dominant narrative's value system, its characters (traits or intentions) or episodes in the plotline. This process signals respect for the Others who speak this story and sets the stage for re-organizing the map of the NL. The nature of the affirmation, as well as the associated process of joining would need to be tailored to fit the circumstances as well as the Commander's intent, but given that there are many ways to create a new branch off an existing narrative trunk, it would be possible to do this kind of joining even with an enemy of the US. For example, *"The Taliban are people who fear change and are working to keep their culture in place"* is a description that legitimizes their effort to keep their culture and traditions and yet this description does not affirm the violence they perpetrate. Ironically and tragically, if IO would affirm their narrative, it, and they, would not only be more open to US, they would be less likely to resort to violence, should this affirmation be circulated, and elaborated in public settings.

Dominant narratives can also be destabilized by adding to the complexity of the NL, in general. This could take the form of producing compelling or "sticky" narratives that do not disappear with the news of violence. For example, MSG Shaikh recounts his work to engage the dominant narrative of a group of Afghans who believed that the US wants to undermine the Islamic faith by taking them to participate in the Hajj. He was affirming their commitment to their faith and their belief in the necessity of the Hajj and then implemented his affirmation by enabling them to participate. This is an excellent example of joining. Joining is not coterminous with "agreeing" with the dominant narrative. Instead it is a process of creating narrative complexity. The cognitive dissonance of the Afghans was clearly productive of the development or evolution of their own stories about themselves, as well as about the US.

Working with dominant narratives, instead of against them, opens back up the space where conversations can occur, precisely so that meaning can evolve. And indeed, it is the evolution of meaning, the development of narratives that would seem to be a central goal for IO. In turn, efforts to engage dominant narratives so they, in turn, evolve, opens up the discursive/narrative space, increasing the complexity of the NL. But this also reduces the potential for violence/radicalization precisely because people can speak and be heard, by the U.S. and others, in places where the dominant narrative had shut down alternatives to itself and policed the places where new stories could be told. Opening up these new spaces, in the media and on the ground, sets the foundation for the last stage in the IO narrative process focused on stakeholder engagement.

Stage Five: Supporting Stakeholder Engagement

Once the narrative landscape is more complex and the dominant narratives are less dominating, it is then time to focus on the creation of spaces where conversations about core issues can take place and ripen the collective's understanding of their context and what is at stake. Public deliberation is both a sign of and the result of a more complex NL. Creating opportunities for public deliberation not only legitimizes the deliberative processes themselves, as an alternative to autocratic decision-making, but it also enables people to build relationships across social networks and the racial, ethnic divisions which reflect and perpetuate violent conflict.

Many cultures already have long and deep traditions in public deliberation, whether it means gathering under a tree and talking for several days, or it refers to city planning groups working on education or development. The point of this stage is not only to have the stakeholders engaged but also to have support for them to do this in public. IO could put together World Cafés[6] where youth from different social networks address employment challenges, and then film these events and circulate them on social media. Public dialogues also break down barriers and themselves tell a story about the need for change, for new relational (narrative) maps. Scenario planning[7] and community conferencing with groups, then circulating the story of those processes has a double benefit: the group can work to develop practical solutions to problems, but their efforts also tell a meta story—"we can work together." It is this meta narrative that could be the object of IO efforts, for indeed it would change how people understand themselves and their relationship to their Others. Again, these conversations can become the object of an IO, circulating photos, testimonials, and videos, out on the web and in local materials.

Supporting stakeholder engagement would also provide a way to thicken NL by ensuring that civil society is not only included, but catalyzed to develop and grow, thickening their relation within their communities Indeed, it is within communities, at local levels, that long-term change takes place; in this way, through this type of engagement, local communities are inoculated against the toxic dominant narratives that might work to reduce the diversity of voices, or their promulgation.

	Assessment of Narrative Landscape (NL)	Engaging the Narrative Landscape	Supporting Marginalized Narratives	Destabilizing Dominant Narratives	Supporting Stakeholder Engagement
Associated	Understanding	Learning how	Violent	Radicalization	Violence is

[6] See Brown, Isaacs, and Community (2005) for discussion of World Café.
[7] For more on "Scenario Planning" see Kahane and Heijden (2012). For more on "Community Conferencing" see http://www.mediate.com/articles/moored1.cfm.

TOC	the NL increases capacity to create and assess strategies for intervention.	to position Self/Other within the NL builds relationships and leads to cultural competency.	conflict is reduced when the NL is more complex.	and violent conflict are decreased when dominant narratives are destabilized.	reduced as stakeholders take responsibility for their issues.
TOC Indicators	Strategic planning will include knowledge and understanding of NL	Increased effective engagement with diverse groups in NL	Marginalized narratives circulate in the public sphere; There is a drop in civilian deaths.	Marginalized groups challenge dominant groups, gaining legitimacy in new social networks.	Diverse segments of the population participate in stakeholder engagement processes, at community levels.
Associated Practices	Narrative Mapping overlying social science research	KLEs *across different sectors,* using circular questions, (collecting relational information) World Café; Positioning Analysis	Circulate marginalized narratives via broadcast, through diverse social networks	Enact 5 stages of destabilization process, in broadcast media, and in interaction across social networks	Stakeholder engagement: Scenario Planning, Community based planning processes; reconciliation processes
Outcomes	Narrative Landscape Analytic Maps	Increase in US's social network, in diversity and breadth	Increased links between diverse social networks,	New leaders emerging in NL; Public elaboration of problems/issues	Improved local decision-making and governance; reduction of terrorism

Figure 3 depicts the intersection of the Narrative Staged Model Information Operations 2.0.

Summary

The stages of the IO process, outlined using a narrative lens on communication and conflict, is premised on the notion that "information operations" is more than sending out the right message, to the right target. Rather it can be understood as the design of operations that would build relationships, and complexify the narrative landscape along with the social networks. Basically, we argue that narrative is more than a "message"---it is an optic for assessment of the NL and how to increase its complexity. In the sections that follow, we work to extend the narrative lens on IO 2.0.In the section that follows, we offer a case study of the core narratives that populate the Iraqi

landscape. After describing these narratives, we apply the "narrative transformation" model, as a framework for information operations.

Part Three: Iraq's Narrative Landscape

Background – Iraq's Major Fault Lines

After the fall of the Ottoman Empire and from its inception as a nation-state in the 1920's, Iraq has remained an amalgamation of hostile ethnic, national, and religions entities forced together by the British after World War I. Socially, Iraq is divided into three major ethnic groups; each is based in different areas within the country. Sunnis dominate areas in the center and the west of the nation and make up approximately 20% of population. Shi'ia Arabs reside primarily in the center and south of the country, and according to most estimates account for nearly 60% of the Iraqi people. This generalization can be further caveated by the cleavage between wealthy, upper-class Shi'ia, and the majority factions, which tend to be more religiously oriented and less economically prosperous. The historically oppressed Kurdish minority lives in the north and accounts for approximately 20% of the population.

In order to address this question, of what USCENTCOM and the global counter-ISIL coalition forces are missing in terms of counter-messaging efforts in the information domain, it is important to understand the complexity of Iraq's narrative landscape. While the analysis in this report is obviously not representative of every individual or even every group in Iraq, some clear narrative frames have begun to emerge. Benford & Snow (1998, 2000) identify three framing processes: diagnostic, prognostic and motivational. These can be simplified into: as "What do I see?" "What should be done about it?" and "Why do I care enough to be engaged?" Looking at these four factions: Sunni Arabs, Wealthy/Upper-Class Shi'ia, Shi'ia Majority Factions, and Kurds, there are points of convergence and points of divergence in the narrative landscape. There is also a clear disconnect between "U.S." frames and "their" frames, which will be a challenge for USCENTCOM as the coalition seeks to promulgate a certain narrative.

Sunni Arabs

During this analysis, common themes emerged amongst Iraq's Sunni Arabs. The first is that they feel abandoned by U.S.; from their perspective, one U.S. forces left the country, the Iraqi government began to abuse their power. Many of them stated that they were caught between the Islamic State on the one hand, and a complacent and even vengeful Iraqi Government on the other. They also believe they have a lack of mature or viable political alternatives; and when a new Sunni political player does emerge the individual is often accused of collusion with Ba'athist or Salafist forces. The absence of strong Sunni political leaders and what they perceive to be an Iraqi government is corrupt and kept in power by U.S. has created a no-win situation for many of them. For much of 2014 and 2015, Sunni Arab tribes in the western provinces were caught between swearing allegiance to the Islamic State, or supporting a government in Baghdad that ignored or rebuffed their political advances. Therefore, some Sunni tribal leaders decided the Islamic State was a more viable and organized alternative than the Iraqi central government.

Sunni Arabs in Iraq also suggest that the Shi'ia militias (*Hash'd al Shaabi*) are not well trained; seek revenge, and that Iran is too powerful and too involved in local politics. For many Arab Sunnis, their perception is that the U.S. does not understand Iraqi politics, and furthermore, they suggest that the U.S. has no plan for what happens after the liberation of Mosul from the Islamic State. They believe the U.S. has the power to help but does not care. Some suggest that the U.S. actually wants to punish

the Sunnis. Another common theme is that while Saddam Hussein was awful, at least the country was functioning. The conundrum for Iraq's Sunnis is that despite a disdain for the U.S., they believe only the U.S. has the power and legitimacy to fix their political and economic situation. **In summary, the Sunnis see their lack of a voice in Iraq's political system as their most significant problem, and while they do not like it, they believe that only the U.S. has the power and legitimacy to address that problem. They believe that if the U.S. does not insist on good governance in Iraq, it will result in their eventual termination.**

Upper-Class/Wealthy Shi'ia

Many of Iraq's Shi'ia have the advantages of education, internet access, opportunities for foreign travel, and relatively lucrative job prospects. After years of economic stagnation under the current government, many urban Shi'ia have expressed dissatisfaction with Baghdad's ruling elite, and those that have travelled outside of Iraq often voice complaints about the corruption by entrenched Iraqi politicians. The problem for Iraq's politicians is that they know they have to appease their constituents, many of which are impoverished and do not have access to the same luxuries as the urban elite. Many see Iran's soft power as a threat and suggest that the Iranians are using social services to appease the masses. Many of the urban elite are tired of the religious sectarianism pushed in the mosques, yet they do not want to push back too hard on Iranian influence because of the potential repercussions. Many of Iraq's Shi'ia are especially wary of Turkey's interference in northern Iraq; they did not fare well under Ottoman occupation, and many carry a deep suspicion of Turkey's foreign policy goals, especially with regards to Mosul. Many powerful Shi'ia businessmen and politicians have suggested that the U.S. is staying in the background (regarding the latest offensives against the 'Islamic State') and that they will put the Iraqi military and Iraqi Security Forces at the front of the offensive. They perceive this as a good move by the U.S---to put an Iraqi face on the offensive. **In summary, wealthy, urban Shi'ia elites see Iranian and Turkish interference in Iraqi affairs as the most significant problem facing their group, and they believe they need more security and more weapons to address the problem. Generally speaking, they believe that not having control over their territory will result in continued political sectarianism and civil chaos.**

Shi'ia Majority Factions

The majority factions in Iraq, the urban poor and rural Arab Shi'ia, see Iranian influence in a positive way. Iranians are spending millions to bolster Iraq's social services – especially in the south. Iran is responsible for funding mosque restorations, pilgrimage facilities, urban housing, and even militias. From the majority perspective, the militias (*Hash'd al Shaabi*) are winning the war against the Islamic State. For many of the majority factions, this point of time for Iraq is a major political victory; after so many years of subjugation they finally have a say in the politics of the state. The major point of contention for the majority factions is the perception of Western influence. Many are suspicious of the West, and religious rhetoric in the mosque heavily rejects Western influences. **In summary, Iraq's majority factions see U.S./Western interference as the significant problem facing their group and believe that by supporting Iran and remaining pious it will address that problem. Generally speaking, they believe that if they do not reject Western influences it will result in a threat to their religion and to their way of life.**

Kurds

Tensions between the Kurds and Arabs of Iraq have ebbed and flowed over the past century. The initial revolts against Arab governance were led by prominent sheikhs from the large Barzani tribe

in the Irbil-region of northwest Iraq, who rejected the primacy and legitimacy of Baghdad's governance. During the first three decades after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the Barzanis conducted several insurrections and attempts at secession from the newly established Iraqi state. Today, Iraq's Kurds are internally divided between the Barzani family in the northwest and the Talabani family in the southeast. There has been discussion amongst all Iraqis about who will seek to fill the power vacuum in Mosul after the liberation. The Barzani tribe has a claim to Mosul which they say goes back to the period of the Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, many Kurds see this as their time to seek independence; they have the international stage and a legitimate claim to create a nation. Much like Iraq's Arabs, many Kurds believe that Iran is too involved in power struggles between their political factions. Unlike the Sunnis and Shi'ia, however, the Kurds are also dealing with Turkish interests in their affairs. Many Kurds believe they will be better served as an independent state. **In summary, the Kurds of Iraq see Baghdad's mismanagement of people, resources, and political power as the most significant problem facing their group. Generally speaking, they believe more political autonomy will solve that problem, and that if they do not have autonomy, it will continue to cause discord and political friction for the Kurdish people.**

Summary

The narrative landscape in Iraq is complex, and one explanation certainly does not encompass the entire reality or dynamic of the conflict. This analysis simply serves as a generalization of how four of the major social factions in Iraq perceive reality. Each of the groups outlined in this analysis has a different, and oftentimes conflicting, view of the role of the U.S. and coalition forces, as well as the role of their own group. Because each group sees a different problem, each believes in a different theory of resolution, which may or may not coincide with the coalition's theory of resolution and/or desired end-state.

Part Four: Implications for Practice

Based on review of IO doctrine and professional literature, a summary of the core features of narrative research and practice, and a broad analysis of the narrative landscape of Iraq, several implications emerge for USCENTCOM and Coalition IO Campaign planning and execution. These implications are organized into five categories of practice: Assessment of Narrative Landscape, Engaging the Narrative Landscape, Supporting Marginalized Narratives, Destabilizing Dominant Narratives, and Supporting Stakeholder Engagement. Additionally, the final section includes recommendations for practices to avoid.

Again, it is important to note that without access to specific examples of current "counter-messaging efforts," existing theories of change, or time and resources to conduct rigorous population studies, this paper does not reflect a comprehensive critique of current USCENTCOM and global counter-ISIL coalition efforts. It is virtually impossible to assess the efficacy of any messaging effort without knowing the intended audience, desired effects, specific products and methods of engagement. Because IO, and specifically narrative engagements, are heavily influenced by existing and developing perceptions, specific analysis of any IO campaign would require a researcher to engage with the intended audience, determine if the message was received by that audience, analyze how that message was perceived, and then make an assessment as to whether or not specific changes or outcomes were achieved. Instead, the following implications reflect the results of a combination of theoretical and practical analyses focused on the relationship of narrative to conflict, with rudimentary examples drawn from one complex narrative landscape—Iraq. The following implications and case analysis are not intended to provide a fully-developed

exemplar, but rather a practical example of a methodology that could and should be deepened by analysts and practitioners familiar with the complex landscape of Iraq.

Assessment of Narrative Landscape

Similar to intelligence preparation of the battlefield, stakeholder analysis, operational design and other structured analytical techniques, narrative mapping is essential to understanding the narrative landscape. However, rather than conducting analysis based on the relationships of enemy, friendly and non-combatant groups, narrative mapping focuses on key actor analysis and narrative structuration within each social group in order to identify those actors or groups who are responsible for the legitimation and promulgation of specific storylines and sustainment of the dominant narratives. Narrative mapping also seeks to develop a deeper understanding of the structural elements of a given narrative including how groups see themselves and their motivations and objectives, how they see other's motivations and objectives, how they explain and predict phenomena that occur in their environment, and how these perceptions and interpretations are justified and legitimized. Illuminating and comparing narratives supports identification of dominant and marginalized narratives.

The dominant narrative is not simply a particular storyline that is most prevalent at any given moment, a religious text, or a published doctrine or code of conduct. Instead, the dominant narrative is a cohesive and resilient system of stories and sensemaking tools that explain and predict phenomena in a way that makes sense of an individual's environment. Dominant narratives are composed of a repertoire of storylines and narrative tools to explain relationships, describe events and predict outcomes. Because these narratives are part of a system of sensemaking, efforts to "defeat" or "delegitimize" them are unrealistic. Establishing a dichotomous relationship between narratives—the "Battle of the Narrative" idea—usually serves to reinforce conflict rather than support resolution.

While on the surface, identification of key actors seems relatively simple, particularly in hierarchal social systems, often historical and cultural narratives anchored in religious or familial traditions transcend simple hierarchy. A reflective example would be the relationship between the overarching anti-ISIS coalition narrative of intervention and the narratives of each of the participating countries. Although all participants may agree on the final disposition of ISIS, the specific theories of change, methods of resolution and desired end-state relationships among key players are strongly influenced by how each country's leadership and population makes sense of the environment. In effect, each participating nation diagnoses the situation, develops a theory of action (cause and effect), and assesses their role and stake in the outcome based on historical and cultural experiences with intervention.

Implication: Narrative mapping differs from most military analytical techniques in that it seeks a deeper understanding of different worldviews, considers all narratives as legitimate if perceived so by a particular social group, and fundamentally requires deviation from a simplistic, binary view of a particular conflict. The process should not focus on classifying "right and wrong" or "good and bad" but should instead look to illuminate all significant conflict narratives and identifying those that are dominant and marginalized. Rather than seeking simplicity—which would better facilitate transmission within hierarchal military structures—narrative mapping seeks complexity. Finally, narrative mapping includes a deeper level of introspection regarding how the intervenor is positioned within their own narrative and the narratives of other groups.

Iraq example: Since Sunni tribes in Iraq lack strong unifying leadership, it becomes more important to understand the relationship of individual tribal narratives within the larger Sunni conflict narrative. Oversimplification of a "Sunni Narrative" would fail to account for the underlying reasons why some tribes choose to align with ISIS and others do not. Failure to fully understand the complexity of the Sunni narrative landscape leads to a "thin" narrative approach that actually supports the conflict rather than providing opportunity for resolution. This thin narrative legitimizes the conflict narrative of an intractable Sunni-Shi'ia divide that serves as a recruiting tool for ISIS and anti-government groups.

Engaging the Narrative Landscape

Narrative engagement refers to the process of building communication links to and with key leaders or representatives and engaging with members of each social group. Rather than the traditional military model of coalition-tribal or coalition-government engagement characterized by shuras or other community meetings, narrative engagement means to interact with the narrative and elaborate in order to increase narrative depth and complexity. By listening to stories, posing open-ended questions focused on *who* and *why* rather than *how* and *what,* and interacting with group members beyond the primary level of leadership the key elements of the conflict narrative emerge alongside a better understanding of the complexity of the group itself. Engagement in this way defeats the perception that there exists a vulnerable population are consistently in a state of cognitive dissonance (a *tabula rasa*) waiting for someone else to interpret phenomena on their behalf. It is as if every time an explosion occurs, an attack happens or an organization issues a statement, it constitutes a new event that can only be explained by the good guys or the bad guys. This is in stark contrast to the reality that each person and social group has a repertoire of explanations that are already developed and validated through experience, historical accounts and stories interpreted and passed on by legitimate authorities.

Implication: Questionnaires or other highly-structured interview techniques will often result in data that are framed in the context of the interviewer's conflict narrative and fail to identify the underlying narrative structures and systems of sensemaking. In contrast, open-ended questions that are intended to elicit stories and perceptions in the words and format of the respondent will provide deeper insight into the complexity of the social narrative while also potentially identifying similarities between groups that may support conflict resolution. Speaking only with key leaders or defining a narrative only by referencing official statements fails to consider the complexity inherent in any social system. Restricting the ability for practitioners engage with different narratives by employing a top-down, nested narrative approach reinforces the concept of simplicity and puts the practitioner in a position of artificiality; unable to legitimately engage and breakthrough the simplified conflict narrative. Finally, presuming that the responsibility for interpreting phenomena is a contest between ISIL and the Coalition is to discount the agency of individuals and groups to make sense of their own circumstances and neglects the fact that they probably already have long before the "message" is crafted.

Iraq example: Why do wealthy, urban Shi'ia elites see Iranian and Turkish influence as their primary concern? Understanding the underlying reasons for concern as articulated by leaders and members of this group thickens the narrative and leads to a deeper understanding beyond the simple characterization of a struggle for power and influence. Further thickening of the Majority Shi'ia and Kurdish narratives see a similar fear of the effects of outside intervention even though the targets of their animosity differ.

Supporting Marginalized Narratives

In order to sustain conflict, opposing groups seek to simplify narratives by erasing certain events, characters and moral values that might delegitimize the conflict narrative. By de-erasing these narrative elements, the intervening organization supports reification of those elements of particular narratives that may be similar to those of other groups. Additionally, conflict often achieves marginalization of narratives that conflict with or potentially challenge the dominant narratives. Marginalization of a narrative or particular narrative elements strips individuals and social groups of their legitimacy and removes their voice from the conflict landscape. Restoring these marginalized narratives reintroduces complexity into the narrative landscape and empowers marginalized groups.

Rather than focusing on a tactical approach intended to supplant or defeat the current conflict narrative, strategic engagement focuses on reifying stories that share common elements and stimulates re-evaluation of the conflict narrative. Finally, elaborating marginalized narratives in the public sphere legitimates them while also restoring their complexity and, by association, the complexity of the dominant narratives.

Implication: Practices designed to defeat or supplant conflict narratives may offer tactical results but fail to address the underlying systems of sensemaking that contributed to the escalation of the conflict. Strategic engagement with marginalized narratives in order to legitimize alternative perspectives and illuminate previously suppressed viewpoints addresses the inherent need for social legitimacy while simultaneously opening up alternative paths for resolution beyond those articulated in the simplified conflict narrative. One of the first steps is to acknowledge that ISIL is not a monolithic organization and its members come from a multitude of different backgrounds with different personal beliefs and objectives. To presume that all are irreconcilable and to propagate a theory of resolution that ends with their death serves primarily to simplify the conflict narrative and prolong the conflict.

Iraq example: Certain marginalized narratives exist within the narrative landscape of Iraq with the most obvious being that of Iraqi Nationalism. Existing conflict narratives include stories of Sunni oppression, Shi'ia retaliation, Kurdish insurrection, and genocidal actions against multiple minority and ethnic groups. These narratives gain dominance within each group by erasing periods of co-existence, shared values and morals, and historical examples of Iraqi nationalism. With the exception of the Sunni narrative articulated in the earlier section, many of the groups in Iraq share a common fear of outside intervention by other states or international organizations. For instance, Iraq's Sunni Arabs are concerned about U.S. intervention, however they continue to see the U.S. as a powerful entity; one of the only foreign entities that can actually effect their long-term outcome in a positive way. Braiding elements of the intervention narrative together represents one example of how to approach strategic intervention.

Destabilizing Dominant Narratives

Fundamental to this process is to encourage and allow for each conflict group to elaborate on their own narrative but also to build, with them, a more complex account of the other groups. Destabilizing the dominant narrative hinges on deconstructing simplified descriptions of the Other and introducing dissonance and complexity. This is inherently a process that must be owned by the primary conflict parties and facilitated by the intervening organization. The stability of a dominant narrative relies on its ability to explain and predict and, therefore, relies on simplification and generalization. Destabilization occurs when the narrative is challenged from within by a failure to adequately explain or predict phenomena or a contradiction with perceived reality However, rarely

can someone from outside the group successfully challenge the narrative. Dominant narratives are dominant for a reason; they are built to withstand challenges from outside—usually by labeling the challenger as illegitimate. Therefore, it is imperative that the dominant narrative is analyzed from within and that the complexities of the narrative landscape and the Other emerge from introspective practice.

Implication: The primary responsibility of an intervening organization is to understand their own level of agency in the resolution of the conflict. To presume that USCENTCOM or the Coalition or any other outside organization can *prove* another group's narrative to be *wrong* or *convince* another group that one's own actions are *right* is unrealistic. It is essential to understand that dominant narratives are simplified and resilient and a head-on contest between narratives is rarely successful. Instead, the coalition must determine how to work within current narratives to increase complexity and allow for challenges to develop from within. Finally, attempting to defeat or delegitimize dominant narratives increases the significance of the say-do gap. Any perceived hypocrisy in what we say and what we do becomes *ipso facto* proof that our narrative is illegitimate.

Iraq example: The minority Sunni fear of extermination at the hands of majority Shi'ia reflects an over-generalized view of their Other and assumes an inability to coexist without the intervention of the U.S. or other outside entity. Digging deeper into the narrative to illuminate why this fear resonates with the Sunni community will identify concerns beyond simple extermination. Engaging with Sunni leaders and group members to help them reconstruct a deeper, more complex view of the Shi'ia community and the stories of individual members of that community help to destabilize the overly-simplistic conflict narrative. Encouraging a re-examination of history to help Sunni see why Shi'ia might perceive them as a threat and how Sunni actions under Saddam Hussein, and previous regimes going back to the Ottoman Empire, contributed to the current conflict begins the process of sharing responsibility for development and sustainment of the conflict. Finally, by circulating more complex explanations of the conflict and thicker perceptions of their Others within the Sunni community and throughout Iraq (and internationally) destabilizes the larger conflict narrative and opens space for renegotiation of a different collective narrative based on shared desires and understanding.

Supporting Stakeholder Engagement

This final step in narrative engagement requires the creation of opportunities for social groups to engage *across* the narrative landscape, for social networks to interrelate further increasing complexity and challenging conflict-derived stereotypes. Organizing communities of interest centered around shared values, beliefs or aspirations rather than group identity provides an opportunity to focus on constructive issues and provides legitimacy to previously marginalized groups. Circulating information about these events through social media, traditional media and other communication methods legitimizes interaction between groups and models non-conflict behavior as respectable and celebrated.

Implication: For the Coalition, the biggest challenge will be to balance the desire for international news outlets to focus on tragedy (reinforcing the conflict narrative) with the necessity for conflicting groups to see symbols of hope and reconciliation (destabilizing the conflict narrative). This situation is virtually impossible to control but should not prevent a dedicated effort to provide space and opportunities to bring social groups together. Understanding that narratives change from within should focus efforts on bottom-up *evolutionary* change rather than top-driven *revolutionary* change. Additionally, it is not the role of the intervenor to denigrate the Other by attributing

negative attributes or traits. This will only escalate the conflict. Instead, focus on recognizing them as human beings and facilitating society's judgment of their actions.

Iraq example: Different groups within the Iraqi political and social landscape must be seen interacting and actively pursuing conflict resolution. This must transcend typical meetings between political elites and include community engagements, problem-solving workshops, town-hall meetings and other venues that cross typical religious or economic divides. Shi'ia majority factions, representative of the large majority of poor and uneducated Iraqis need to be provided a legitimate voice in their communities to elaborate upon their grievances and, more importantly, agency in development of means to address those grievances. Meeting with other impoverished social groups will further destabilize conflict narratives while also giving all parties a stake in the outcome—potentially reducing the justification of Iranian investment in social programs and, therefore, reduced Iranian influence in Iraqi affairs. Documenting these events and celebrating even the smallest of achievements further complicates simple prejudices and unravels any moral justification for Iranian or Turkish interference.

Practices to Avoid

- One size fits all narrative approaches; particularly those that are framed as binary choices
- Hierarchal control of practitioners reducing their flexibility to engage as active participants
- Focusing on communication techniques rather than engaging with larger systems of sensemaking
- Viewing narrative as ammunition for an IO weapons system rather than understanding it as systems of sensemaking and understanding
- Overestimating agency of the intervenor to interpret or explain events
- Overestimating legitimacy of the intervenor to control how he is perceived
- Attempting to completely supplant another group's narrative
- Denigrating the Other by negatively positioning him with undesirable attributes or traits rather than recognizing them as human beings and focusing on the social implications of their behaviors
- Denying, justifying, or excusing Coalition actions in response to an accusation by the Other which generally serves only to reinforce the accusation (for example, "collateral damage" is a term that reinforces conflict narratives)
- Propagating or supporting narratives that co-opt the Coalition as primarily or significantly responsible for the outcome of the conflict including narratives that ascribe a more permanent role for US & Coalition governments that is significantly above the traditional relationship between sovereign nations

Part Five: Conclusion

A narrative is more than a story and much more than a set of discrete messages. It is the architecture for meaning and action in a given operational environment. Meaning is governed by internal structures (including the plot, characters, and themes) that have been evaluated, refined and passed down for multiple generations. As such, narratives anchor, justify, and forecast behavior and provide meaning anchored in concepts of logic and legitimacy. As is readily apparent in the example of Iraq, systems of narratives comprise a complex and adaptive landscape that is difficult to summarize and even more difficult to simplify or generalize. Yet, this is exactly what conflict narratives are designed to accomplish.

Conflict narratives are the stories and rationales that explain a conflict scenario, including the nature of the Self and Other, logic for actions taken by conflict parties, moral justifications or condemnations for those actions, and a vision and prescription for the outcome of the conflict. They are thin and naturally reduce complexity in order to sustain stereotyped versions of the Other and legitimize radical solutions. As such, they are situated in a system of power that includes dominant and marginalized narratives that position actors and allow or censure their voices. In effect, conflict is a struggle for narrative primacy, for establishing the privilege of being able to tell the story and set the interpretative framework in place that adjudicates the negotiation over meaning. Conflict narratives inhibit communication and by reducing complexity and sustaining the relationships within the conflict narrative, countermessaging approaches may exacerbate this problem.

USCENTCOM counter-messaging efforts do not fully engage the narratives within the AO. While the doctrinal approach to messaging is important, it oversimplifies the relationship of narrative to meaning and will unlikely override or replace the lived, articulated experiences (narratives) of people on the ground. Attempts to silence, subvert and delegitimize narratives with asymmetric messaging can exacerbate problems and potentially hinder future civil-military operations by sustaining stereotyped roles of the Coalition. "Winning" in the narrative space must be considered a long-term strategic investment rather than a series of tactical victories. The goal is not just cancelling out the "bad" narrative but rather evolving the landscape, and in that process, building a relationship with that landscape. This requires a staged approach to narrative transformation, engaging with and increasing the complexity of the narrative landscape. Above all, we must consider ourselves as part of the landscape, bringing our own attribution bias and constantly interacting with an adaptive system that responds to us but is not controlled by us. Because we are merely one part of a complex narrative landscape, we need to make sure we understand it, and are prepared to engage with it.

We argue that in order for Information Operations to meet the challenges posed by the complex and competitive narrative landscape, they must also change, moving from a "countermessaging" frame, to a "narrative transformation" frame. We believe that what is missing from IO doctrine and process is a narrative lens equipped to enable information operations to respond effectively to narratives in the operational environment. A narrative lens is both a set of discrete tools (externalization, circular questions, positive connotation) as well as a lens to track the dynamics of meaning making—an analytic method which would increase understanding of the operating environment and support conflict reduction, and prevention. We suggest a five-stage model that moves away from a targeting approach towards an engagement approach based on gaining a deeper understanding of the narrative landscape, engaging dominant and marginalized narratives to increase complexity, and creating conditions for conflict groups to engage across the narrative landscape.

Understanding that the major socio-economic and religious groups in Iraq and Syria tend to have different perceptions of U.S. and Coalition efforts is an important first step towards acknowledging the historical grievances, experiences and motivations of the people and groups we engage. However, the most important step is to understand how these people see and understand the world in which they live. Applying a narrative lens and arming planners with a deeper understanding of the narrative landscape will support more effective engagement and transformation, not only to win the "battle," but ultimately providing opportunity for long-term resolution…a much better return on investment.

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Comments on CENTCOM Messaging

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In the information domain, USCENTCOM and the global counter-ISIL coalition can benefit from the inclusion of particular message themes as well as techniques drawn from the behavioral sciences. This write-up will elaborate on each of the two broad categories.

With regard to message themes, Harvard professors Jessica Stern and J.M. Berger (in their book *ISIS: The State of Terror*) note that Western messaging sometimes reinforces ISIL's goals, such as news stories that repeatedly describe ISIL's videos as "terrifying." Statements like these are attempts to combat ISIL's message with a similarly simplified message, but they ultimately reinforce ISIL's attempts to portray a cosmic battle between pure good and pure evil.

"Western messaging sometimes reinforces ISIL's goals, such as news stories that repeatedly describe ISIL's videos as 'terrifying.'"

According to Stern and Berger, calling attention to ISIL's barbarity does not undercut its messaging goals; rather, doing so can help accomplish them. This is because amplifying the messages may further energize those who are already most susceptible to their radicalizing influence.

An alternative approach would be to call attention to the war crimes and atrocities ISIL has committed against Sunni Muslims in the regions it controls. As it is, ISIL advertises its war crimes against Shi'a Muslims and religious minorities such as the Yazidis. Stern and Berger note that an ISIL massacre of hundreds of Sunni tribesmen evoked outrage among global jihadists on social media. Publicizing these crimes can potentially make an impact on how ISIL is perceived by those most susceptible to its ideology.

In addition, Stern and Berger suggest amplifying the stories of defectors and refugees from areas ISIL controls and backing these up by using aerial and electronic surveillance as well as remote imaging to show what really happens in the "belly of the beast."

It may also be possible to degrade the perception of ISIL's strength and its claims of victory by publicizing its failures, especially within its borders, including cases where local people rise up against its control, failures of infrastructure, corruption, poverty, and other forms of domestic disintegration.

Drawing from the behavioral sciences, one powerful means of changing attitudes, beliefs, and behavior is to create narrative representations (Nabi & Green, 2015), and these representations could depict the themes suggested above. A substantial body of evidence attests to the persuasive power of narratives (e.g. Appel & Richter, 2007; Escalas, 2004; Green, 2004; Green & Brock, 2000; Hormes, Rozin, Green, & Fincher, 2013; Marsh & Fazio, 2006; Morgan, Movius, & Cody, 2009; Strange & Leung, 1999; Wang & Calder, 2006). Narrative persuasion has many applications, from combatting stereotypes to promoting health behaviors. In particular, narratives may be especially effective under conditions in which individuals might otherwise resist persuasion (Green, 2006; Kreuter et al., 2007; Moyer-Guse & Nabi, 2010; Slater & Rouner, 1996).

As a final suggestion, Stern and Berger emphasize the importance of countering ISIL's messaging by refusing to play into its apocalyptic narrative. For example, ISIL wants to enact prophesies regarding the end times, such as a victorious confrontation with the "crusaders" in the town of Dabiq. Stern and Berger point out that Coalition policies and military actions need not rise to this bait. For military and messaging purposes, it may be foolish to show up at exactly the place and time that ISIL most desires.

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Comments on How Audiences Receive ISIL propaganda

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I am not aware of any effective CVE messaging currently carried out among populations under ISIL control. A few attempts are made but these are hardly effective (e.g. online discussions when the majority of the population does not dare engage or has more important priorities or have become distrusting of attributable campaigns to the West or have become cynical about western preparedness to actually do something). Indeed, I believe we are in a post-messaging phase. Messages are no longer useful and their potential ran out several years ago. Now it is about ACTION and then communicating around that action. But without that action, communication will have no effect.

What are USCENTCOM and the global counter-ISIL coalition missing from counter-messaging efforts in the information domain?

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Abstract
Rather than emphasize the tactical elements of message content and tone, audience selection, or dissemination platform this effort to identify elements "missing" from USCENTCOM and broader Coalition counter-messaging efforts approaches the question by seeking those elements that might better enable the command to focus and constrain the aims of these programs. That is to say that there are aspects and implications related to the planning and assessment of these operations that may not be fully appreciated and internalized within the command. Three areas of particular importance are identified and briefly discussed: blue understanding of the target audience, red understanding its own messaging vulnerabilities, and articulation of a graduated process toward achieving desired end-states. Each of these three is briefly discussed so as to facilitate future dialogue between SMA participants and relevant elements of USCENTCOM.

Key Points

- Nuanced understanding of the target audience can serve to not only contextualize the type of messaging effort and its aims but also to provide a necessary constraint upon the expected return of these programs.
- Recognition of how red understands the goal and vulnerabilities of its own messaging efforts can provide improved guidance on where counter-messaging can be effective and where non-response may be a more productive approach.
- Greater emphasis on a graduated process toward achieving desired end-states can be leveraged to provide a stronger linkage between measures of performance and measures of effectiveness.

Introduction

We begin with a cautionary note regarding the "war of ideas." Although rapidly changing technologies and the ubiquitous nature of social media makes it far easier to disseminate extremist messages, these same platforms have expanded the reach of globalization and modernization and pushed these trends down to the level of personal contacts across societies. As a consequence, Western cultural elements have penetrated and been incorporated, at deeply unconscious levels, into even the most closed of societies. A core weakness of the message of the Salafi-Jihadists, recognized in their own words, is the attractiveness of Western culture and media and the "corruption" this engenders in their most prized demographic target: the Islamic youth (Stout et al, 2008, pp. 231-232).

On the largest of scales and the broadest of timelines, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), and more generally those supportive of reactionary barbarism as an appropriate response to political conditions, comprise an intensely small percentage of the global population.[8] This is not to say that even these modest fractions are not capable of significant global disruption. Nonetheless, it does suggest that ISIL and counter-ISIL messaging are playing at the margins of a shift that is generally favorable to U.S. and Western interests over the long-term.[9]

As a point of clarification, we are confining our definition of counter-messaging to mean efforts to engage with the violent extremist organization (VEO, in this instance ISIL) messaging campaigns in order to disrupt their effectiveness. This includes both direct counters to ISIL messaging efforts as well as the provision of alternative narratives, which may not directly counter specific ISIL traffic. Rather, these narratives provide a distinctly different interpretation of situations, contexts, and alternative paths of action for targeted audiences. In light of this definition, US Central Command (USCENTCOM) and coalition efforts to systematically degrade or deny ISIL's ability to engage in messaging are outside of this analysis. A second point of clarification: we take a narrow definitional position with respect to the term "radicalization."[10] In order to avoid an overly broad definition, we confine radicalization to the processes whereby individuals, regardless of cognitive beliefs, willingly provide some form of material support to a VEO.

In keeping with the functional expertise of the authors, this paper only tangentially refers to concerns surrounding kinds of message type, tone, and/or content. Instead it focuses on three operational elements of the existing counter-messaging campaign: blue force understanding of the population being targeted by their counter-messaging efforts, red messaging to counteract its vulnerabilities (and the appropriate blue response), and lastly, a perceived absence of a linkage between current operational measures of performance and existing measures of effectiveness rooted in desired end states.

Blue Understanding of the Target Population

USCENTCOM and coalition counter-messaging lines of effort recognize that the population receiving counter-messaging is not uniform and that the desired end-states for these separate

[8] The existential question persists as to whether this represents a permanent feature of the human condition: will there always be those willing and even eager to look to violence to redress perceived grievances?

[9] Of course, the historical trends are more complex than presented. Although support for evolutionary shifts in societal values (see Inglehart & Welzel 2005 and Welzel 2013) is well grounded these shifts are neither uniform across societies or in what values are altered (the MENA region still remains region least adoptive of what is loosely referred to as post-materialist culture). Nor are these evolutionary shifts entirely devoid of the potential for fostering reactionary elements; see The Civic Culture Transformed: From Allegiant to Assertive Citizens (Dalton & Welzel Eds.) 2014.

[10] As Aly & Striegher (2012) point out "academic literature on radicalization suffers from a lack of a cohesive definition of radicalization and a conflation of terms."

population elements do differ from one another. We suggest that full appreciation of the meaning that these nuances entail for counter-messaging operations is the first "missing" element. Understanding the audience is a crucial element of counter-messaging campaigns. In various models of counter-messaging, (Davies et al, 2016, pp. 62-64) this identification of audience is a necessary precursor to understanding the specific "social processes involved in radicalization" and the "drivers of the radicalization process." We would suggest that audience identification and understanding are also crucial elements for understanding the limits of what can be achieved and whether those achievements can be of operational and strategic significance.[11]

While there are numerous means of characterizing the audience of counter ISIL messaging, we presume that the broadest relevant characterization are those individuals to whom the religious beliefs espoused by ISIL resonate.[12] Caricatures aside, this is a tiny fraction of the worldwide Muslim population, roughly corresponding to a sub-component of those holding Salafi beliefs.[13] Salafi-Jihadists[14] (those ascribing to Salafist beliefs that also adhere to the belief that violent action is the preferred, or only appropriate, method of social change – thereby rejecting working within existing political systems) are by all accounts a small fraction of the Salafist population which, in turn is a small fraction of the Sunni population.[15] This begs the question of just whom within the population is receiving counter-messaging and what the aims of these efforts are. Identifying that a significant portion of coalition efforts are targeted at ideological delegitimization only raises further concerns. Are these efforts targeted at the Salafist population as a whole, with the goal of discrediting Salafism? Are they targeted at the Salafi-Activist or –Purist population with the hope of preventing a move toward Salafi-Jihadism? Are they targeted at the Salafi-Jihadist population with the expectation of either delegitimizing their beliefs or delegitimizing ISIL as the standard bearer for those beliefs? Each of these faces crucial difficulties that suggests that the proportion of the targeted population that may actually be swayed by counter-messaging is exceedingly small. Furthermore, most research on attitude and belief changes suggests that it requires personalized contact and persistent cultivation to succeed; this implies a need for a far more targeted form of counter-messaging than is currently undertaken.

We take coalition efforts at face value and assume they are not a fruitless attempt to discredit Salafism itself; however, even treating the Salafi population as having the potential for radicalization (essentially turning a purist or activist into a jihadist) ignores the incredibly powerful barriers that Salafi beliefs impose upon such movements, in particular the core Salafist belief against personal interpretation of Islam.[16] The move from activist to jihadist necessitates fundamental change in the interpretation of one's Salafi beliefs and is a far higher barrier to change

[11] The call for greater understanding of the target audience is not new; for example previous SMA efforts have called attention to differences in the radical population (see Rieger 2011) but most such distinctions focus on impacts to message type and do not link audience differences to constraints on achievable outcomes.
[12] The authors are well aware that employing this form of distinction does not account for those at risk of materially supporting ISIL out of strictly instrumental rather than ideological desire. Our conceit is that those individuals largely lie outside of the audience being targeted by counter-messaging efforts.
[13] Even this distinction is not without academic controversy see Lauziere 2015 & 2016 and Griffel 2015.
[14] The Economist (Politics and the Puritanical Jun 27, 2015) divides Salafists into three categories: the purists or quietists, activists, and the jihadists. A similar division occurs in Wiktorowicz (2006) that uses the terms purists, politicos, and jihadis. Both sources describe the Jihadist category as the smallest, by far, of the three.
[15] All credible accounting known to the authors suggest that this number to be well under 1% of all Muslims and this reflects the entirety of Salafi-jihadists amongst whom positions taken by ISIL, particularly declaration of the Caliphate, are controversial.
[16] See Wiktorowicz (2006) for a more in depth discussion of Salafist beliefs and differences within the movement.

than a re-evaluation of what is or is not an appropriate strategy. This also casts doubt upon the ability to leverage more moderate (purist or activist) elements for the purpose of preventing radicalization or for de-radicalization; simply put the jihadist population already discredits these voices as fundamentally incorrect in their interpretation of true Islam.[17] As Ashour (2010) suggests, messages for the prevention of radicalization or for deradicalization are most effective when they come from figures known to (at least by reputation) and respected by the target population. This suggests an extreme narrowing of the counter-messaging effort such that it seeks to enable existing Salafi-Jihadist figures and disillusioned former ISIL members. Direct enablement, whether overt or covert, however entails substantial risk as any linkage between such individuals and coalition efforts risks discrediting these most valuable voices. The extent to which counter-messaging efforts can create safe social media spaces for these voices may well be a critical element of the campaign.

A second population target are those jihadist elements that willingly espouse support for ISIL, or at least ISIL's aims, but are, as yet, unwilling to materially support the organization through membership, financing, facilitation, or harboring/protecting. Efforts to target this population presumably would be focused not on delegitimization of beliefs, but on reinforcement of the material reasons for non-active support. Emphasis on ISIL's use of violence, even in its most extreme, are likely to be unproductive to this audience as it already rejects the utility of working within existing political frameworks. Likely more effective is messaging focused on undercutting the legitimacy of ISIL as the movement's appropriate standard-bearer. To this end, existing USCENTCOM and Coalition efforts at boosting the signal on corruption, misuse and mistreatment of resources and personnel, and blatant ISIL fabrications are highly appropriate (and further highlight ISIL vulnerabilities, as outlined below). However, the limited population likely to be affected must be understood. So too should the potential for transference of support. The existing Salafi-Jihadist population is already heavily targeted by VEOs competing for their attention and material support.[18] Just as we have seen disillusionment with AQAA result in movement of material support to ISIL, we should be cautious of the potential for success in discrediting ISIL to lead to increased material support to competing Salafi-Jihadist VEOs.

The preceding discussion focused upon religious differences within the Salafi population as a means of illustrating the nuanced nature of the population and should not be interpreted as any kind of authoritative division. There are clearly population elements supportive (ideologically if not materially) of ISIL that do so outside of religious rationales (but likely draped in religious justifications). The takeaway concerns should be an understanding of just how small a population is likely at stake in the messaging/counter-messaging campaigns and how focused counter-messaging efforts need to be to affect even this population. A second potential "missing" point from USCENTCOM and Coalition counter-messaging response is the red understanding of their own vulnerabilities and their efforts to mitigate them.

Red Understanding of Their Vulnerabilities

It is important to recognize that ISIL appreciates its own vulnerabilities and is striving through messaging, directed to both regional and global audiences, to counteract these weaknesses. Indeed, it is vital that ISIL hide as many deficiencies for as long as possible from its actual or potential followers. These weaknesses resulted in previous "jihads" failing to meet the requirements for

[17] This element was bolstered by the declaring of the Caliphate and ipso facto making the head of the Caliphate the arbiter of true Islam thus obviating any need to engage in ideological/religious justification for their actions. This is a significant difference between ISIL and AQAA but also a substantial weakness as said authority rests upon the success of the physical existence of the Caliphate.

[18] The 13 September 2016 interview with Ahmed Al Hamdan posted to www.jihadica.com clearly indicates the competitive nature of the messaging campaigns of ISIL and AQAA.

success and are well-documented using primary sources, such as captured records and the writings of al-Qaeda associated thinkers such as Abu Musab al-Suri. Requirements included the need to have a viable strategy and the sanction (authority) for actions; to garner widespread support from Sunni Muslims; and to secure a sanctuary from which to sustain the efforts over the long term (Huckabey, 2012). In particular, ISIL's information operations (IO) strategy has shown remarkable progress, compared to earlier efforts by the global Salafi-Jihadist movement, in crafting a compelling radicalization and recruitment narrative and counteracting many of these vulnerabilities. Nonetheless, ISIL -- with its self-declared, but precariously-held caliphate – has the same obstacles to overcome that doomed earlier efforts to hold and grow a base from which to pursue its ultimate goal of the restoration of the caliphate and triumph over the West.

An understanding of the vulnerabilities that Salafi-Jihadist groups such as ISIL face --and that they are often their own worst enemy by their policies and actions -- should be a part of any counter-messaging effort by USCENTCOM and its partners. Often there is little need for a blue response. To date, ISIL has clearly benefited from their successful campaign in the heart of the Middle East, but with setbacks on the ground they are more susceptible to the apathy to join/support as ISIL moves into more peripheral locations, a widespread backlash to its brand, the lack of unity of effort that inevitably comes from dissent and infighting, and the need to explain their territorial and battlefield losses. Examples of these vulnerabilities are outlined in the table below.

Red Vulnerability	Discussion	Red Messaging	Blue Response
Apathy: Large numbers of potential foreign fighters remain disengaged and "on the couch;" continued call to "join the caravan" in more peripheral theaters such as Afghanistan, N Africa, & W Africa go unanswered	Successful operations are also potent recruitment tools; conversely, failure on the ground can lead to disinterest, disappointment, defections	ISIL gains in Iraq & Syria beginning mid-2014, amplified by IO, energized followers. Face a return to AQI days under Zarqawi when messaging could not overcome apathy (Stout et al, 2008, p. 209)	Blue kinetic success feeds the apathy spiral. Messaging emphasizes sharp drop off in individual interest, marked decline in number of foreign fighters
Ridicule: Paired with the irrelevance of ISIL that comes from apathy, the ridicule of its ineffective and incompetent leaders, especially in military matters, can be powerful	ISIL has set a higher bar for military effectiveness than previous AQ-associated groups. Any battlefield losses through mistakes of leadership, cowardice of fighters are now even more relevant	ISIL shows their fighters as brave "lions" and martyrs even as they lose battles in large numbers and the facts on the ground indicate otherwise	Leave to regional media voices that mock Daesh through satire; blue carefully selects instances of military leadership failure, such as video of Zarqawi and barrel of hot gun (CNN, 2006)
Branding: ISIL has built its global reputation from control of a "caliphate" through violent means; Risk long-term damage to the brand from loss of territory and excessive violence (incl. terrorism)	Salafi-Jihadist groups in past outcast or marginalized due to perceived excessive killing of other Muslims, such as GIA in Algeria in 1990s or AQI (Stout et al, 2008, p. 54)	An eventual name change (re-branding) to be expected and rationalizations that this is a positive step. Al-Baghdadi said jihadi group names are not "revealed from the sky" (Quoted in Ingram, 2014).	Most damage to brand done by red actions. Blue emphasis on killing of large numbers of Muslims (evidenced by mass graves). Any name change to cover past failures/war crimes
Dissent: previous Salafi-Jihadist efforts devolved into *fitna* (sedition) and declarations of takfirism (accusation of apostasy) (Huckabey, 2012, p. 90)	More failure/frustration for ISIL will feed internal dissent and with any partner groups that further degrade its effectiveness and promote a schism. Already happened to extreme degree in ISIL's case with existing AQ groups	Cast opponents as *takfiri* while at same time emphasize *tawhid* (unity); try to prevent any defections from regional branches *wiliyat* through disagreements or disillusion	Little blue response to dissent except document its true scope and impact (e.g., through captured documents)
Insufficient faith: Losses in battles or of territory must be explained as a test of faith – outcome due to insufficient faith, weakness of followers (Gambhir, 2014, p. 9)	Battlefield losses also have an impact on the theological underpinnings of ISIL and further their claim of righteousness and correctness	Eventually losses must be attributed to human, not divine, errors	No blue response on the religious-based component to failure. Allow moderate voices and rival groups to examine this claim

Operational Assessment

While the previous two sections were focused on understanding of just whom blue is trying to affect and what red is trying to accomplish, a final "missing" element centers upon operational assessment. While clearly the interlocking organizational chains within the USG and, more broadly, the Coalition efforts provide some avenue for expression of operational assessment, our understanding is that results are often couched in either the gritty details of measures of performance (such as numbers of messages released, website hits, or news releases read) or in measures of effectiveness presented as movement toward the desired end states of various lines of effort. As a consequence assessment all too often appears to be Janus-faced: large success in performance but little if any end state differential. We submit that this gives a negative impression of the success of counter-messaging efforts and does so in a way that jeopardizes existing programs and requests for further authorities. The apparent disjuncture is better be understood as an inability to link measures to specific operational goals within a graduated, long-term plan for achieving the desired end-states. In kinetic terms this is akin to reporting aggregate numbers of successful tactical engagements while stating that the enemy has yet to surrender. Without a clear articulation of what the engagements and their cumulative effects are trying to achieve operationally, progress toward the desired end state is masked. The goal is not to create metrics that demonstrate success but rather to create metrics that can clearly demonstrate whether objective progress toward those end-states is being achieved.

One potential way forward is to interpret desired end states in ways that make progress toward them more easily measured. However we recognize that leeway in this area is minimal as these end states represent strategic objectives provided to the command within existing policy and planning guidance. What is within the purview of the command is a phased campaign plan that links counter-messaging efforts to shifts in specific elements of the target audience.[19] Effectiveness can then be assessed by progress toward phase specific end-states, each of which represents incremental movement toward the strategic objectives. For example, phase one goals could simply be the dissemination of counter-message/counter-narrative information and making said materials readily available for existing counter-radicalization elements to make use of. While in this phase measures of message production and indicators of positive usage of those messages would be appropriate. A second stage might focus on achieving penetration of produced messages into otherwise closed social spaces: the "echo chambers" of radicalization. Production levels become less relevant measures in this phase. One could make the argument that at some point in the campaign, production levels actually become negatively correlated with campaign effectiveness – assuming the desire is to achieve a status at which the US and coalition are not the primary sources of counter-messaging materials.

The crucial element is that measures of effectiveness are well developed and strongly linked to the phase objectives which progressively build toward the indicators of desired end-states. Unfortunately creating and obtaining pertinent data for measures of effectiveness that are phase specific is a substantially more resource intensive task than aggregate end-state measurements and this will create additional burden upon the command for finding appropriate means of obtaining these measures. Combinations of tools such as sentiment and social network analysis have to be tailored to the specific elements of the counter-

[19] Open source documentation makes it unclear the extent to which this is already undertaken. IDA is available to engage with USCENTCOM at the classified level on issues related to counter-messaging campaign planning and phase specific operation assessment.

messaging audience that are the focus of that phase's operations. Efforts to use them to characterize the entirety of the counter-messaging audience space are likely only appropriate in the latter stages of a campaign. Toward this end developments in automated content analysis and machine learning should be supported and monitored for the ability to more finely distinguish between social media users. As an example, improvements in identifying relatively new users (not just new accounts) within known radicalized social media circles has tremendous value for monitoring radicalization processes and their success and failure levels over time.

Conclusion

The three preceding topic areas are only "missing" by degree not by complete absence. To an extent they are also interrelated. Development of more sophisticated phase-specific assessment measures is necessarily related to better and more nuanced understanding of the target audience and to understanding of the degree to which ISIL perceives itself to be succeeding in its messaging objectives. Both of these latter factors are necessary to understanding the baseline that USCENTCOM and coalition counter-messaging efforts are attempting to change and the degree to which the subset of the population that is vulnerable to counter-messaging is sizeable enough to be operationally significant.

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USCENTCOM & Global Counter-ISIL Coalition: Counter-messaging in the Information Domain

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- Current trends in ISIL propaganda themes – 'decisive minority' targeting, defense of Caliphate, reversion to guerrilla warfare, incite 'lone wolves'– will become more pronounced as politico-military defeats mount creating opportunities for targeted 'offensive' and 'defensive' messaging within and outside the CJOA by USCENTCOM and partners.

- Across the CJOA and broader region, USCENTCOM (and other Western partner) messaging should deploy a spectrum of persuasively-framed, fact-based messaging that particularly focuses on exposing ISIL's 'say-do' gap (e.g. reality of Caliphate life) *and* how Coalition messaging and politico-military actions are closely aligned. Captured intelligence should inform targeted 'attributed' and 'unattributed' messaging to create 'wedges' between ISIL, its networks and the broader population.

- A range of indigenous partners within and outside the CJOA should be encouraged to produce messaging with a focus on (i.) exposing the realities of 'life in the Caliphate', (ii.) highlighting the ISIL 'say-do' gap, and (iii.) drawing attention to symbolically pertinent losses (e.g. Dabiq, Mosul, Raqqa) and issues (e.g. *mubahalah*). 'Ideologically-focused' messaging should be left to these indigenous partners.

- Given ISIL defeats will create politico-military and information 'vacuums' that a range of local, regional and transnational actors will seek to fill, USCENTCOM and partners must prepare persuasively-framed, fact-based 'offensive' and 'defensive' messaging for these contingencies synchronized with actions in the field.

Just as ISIL's rise through 2013-2014 was dependent on winning over and mobilizing 'decisive minorities' – those who have a disproportionate influence on who the population supports (and how) due to factors such as social status, social connectedness, access to resources or zeal for the cause – ISIL understands that slowing its defeat, maintaining presence and 'sowing the seeds' to rise again will depend on these 'true believers'. Since late-2015, ISIL propaganda has been dominated by messages that appeal to 'true believers' to defend the Caliphate ('keep the dream alive') or become 'lone wolves' (especially in the West), deflect from defeats by focusing on 'successes' and explains their growing reversion to guerrilla warfare strategies. Trends in 2014-15 ISIL propaganda tended to frame their politico-military successes as manifestations of divine-approval and defeat as evidence of divine-disapproval. This was augmented by a flood of messaging promoting how ISIL was practically addressing the local population's needs – an effort to win popular support (i.e. behavioral support) in areas of control. Recently this narrative has been increasingly eclipsed by a focus on the honor of engaging in the struggle itself – appeals more likely to resonate with 'true believers' (i.e. attitudinal/perceptual support). As ISIL rely on increasingly coercion-centric measures to maintain control in its strongholds, a trend that will be reflected in its messaging, starker schisms between itself and the broader population will emerge. These trends will create opportunities in the information domain for counter-ISIL messaging efforts.

The aforementioned trends will provide valuable opportunities in the information domain for persuasively-framed, fact-based 'offensive' (messaging to fill a void or provoke adversary counter-messaging) and 'defensive' (counter-messaging in response to adversary messaging) counter-ISIL messaging. Merely providing the 'facts' and letting those 'speak for themselves' will be insufficient and likely provide ISIL with counter-messaging opportunities. Rather, *all* messaging should be designed to persuade audiences in accordance with objectives. ISIL will use propaganda to fixate audiences on successes and deflect from failures and 'defensive' messaging by USCENTCOM and partners will need to be selectively deployed as a counter measure. However, priority should be given to 'offensive' messaging – especially before, during and after major operations – as a means to force ISIL into a defensive posture in the information domain. As ISIL propaganda increasingly focuses on their 'decisive minorities', this will create opportunities for counter-ISIL messaging to drive wedges between ISIL and the broader population. Intelligence collected during operations should be used to inform 'attributed' ('white') and 'unattributed' ('black') messaging for more targeted objectives such as identifying ISIL members and networks or creating 'wedges' between ISIL and its 'decisive minority' networks.

A key theme for counter-ISIL messaging, especially in the CJOA and MENA more broadly, is to highlight the disparity between ISIL's messaging and actions ('say-do' gap) especially related to life in the Caliphate. As ISIL are removed from its territories, USCENTCOM and partners should endeavor to rapidly produce and disseminate persuasive fact-based messaging, especially using footage taken during or immediately after the capture of such territories, to show ISIL's true face. This effort should be augmented by positive messaging that promotes how coalition forces are practically addressing the needs of local populations and are committed to their welfare. Indigenous partners within and outside the CJOA should be encouraged and supported to produce messaging for local audiences based on similar themes. Indigenous partners, especially those catering to more localized audiences, could play an important 'grassroots' role in highlighting the disparity between ISIL's previous promises and reality. While USCENTCOM and Western partners should avoid 'ideologically-focused' messaging (e.g. that questions or counters ISIL theologically/jurisprudentially), indigenous partners may wish to engage in such messaging. However, these more ideologically-focused themes should be tied to practical realities. For example, ISIL narratives tended to place great symbolic importance on capturing certain cities as part of their claims to legitimacy and divine-approval (e.g. Dabiq, Mosul, Raqqa). When ISIL is removed from these cities it will create valuable opportunities in the information domain that could have deep ramifications for how ISIL is perceived in the short, medium and long term if leveraged effectively. Additionally, the *mubahalah* between ISIL and the since renamed Jabhat Al-Nusrah could provide opportunities for 'offensive' messaging but this would require nuance to avoid potentially inflating the latter's appeal. More broadly, the politico-military and information vacuums created by ISIL defeats will attract local (e.g. tribal), regional (e.g. proxies) and transnational (e.g. Al-Qaeda and affiliates) actors who will seek to fill these voids requiring CENTCOM and its partners to engage with and against certain actors in the information domain. ISIL-centric counter-messaging will need to be prioritized at times but messaging that seeks to promote coalition efforts should ideally keep this broader perspective in mind.

Recent ISIL appeals to Western audiences have emphasized engagement in 'lone wolf' terrorism (over traveling to the Caliphate) and this theme will remain prominent as defeats mount. USCENTCOM and partners can prepare 'offensive' and 'defensive' messaging

campaigns, particularly online, that highlight ISIL desperation and re-frames ISIL's calls for 'lone wolves' as calls for 'cannon fodder'. Messaging to western audiences should not engage in counter-proselytizing but instead focus on pragmatic-appeals (e.g. ISIL desperation, coalition successes helping civilians) and highlighting the diversity of identities in western audiences (not just religion). A potential approach to 'offensive' messaging would be to emphasize how ISIL are claiming attacks by individuals who are mentally disturbed and/or have limited to no knowledge of the group thus further underscoring their desperation. The case of Man Haron Monis (2014 Lindt Café siege in Sydney, Australia) is an example of such an opportunity being missed. The development of post-incident messaging plans could be a useful way to shape responses in the information domain if/when another 'lone wolf' attack occurs.

Comments on How Audiences Receive ISIL propaganda

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This is a broad question that could be repeatedly examined from various angles with some benefit due to the complex nature of how messaging functions and the situation outlined here. However, in this paper I chose to focus in on narrative because there is some evidence that narrative is being utilized in ways that limit the power of messaging efforts.

Abstract
Utilizing narrative is gaining importance to the DoD, but narrative seems to be viewed as something extra that can be executed in isolation, without integrating it with other aspects of military operations. This is a gap of paramount importance. Narratives—even if perfectly crafted to tap into the master narratives of the audience—can cause more damage than good if our actions contradict them. Master narratives are fluid and dynamic. Even though that makes them slippery and difficult to interact with, if we invest in our ability to navigate in the narrative space, if we integrate it into our other warfighting capabilities, this fluidity of master narratives can work to our advantage. For example, in areas where we have no power to act, we can leverage our intelligence superiority to create narratives that are ready for release in near real-time with the events as they unfold. Our narratives can tap into the master narratives in the region and reframe action taken by any group in an attempt to align master narratives with our mission. There is no way that this will work, however, unless narrative-creation and its understanding takes a prominent place in strategic planning. For narrative to be an effective stopgap, it has to be tied to operations in every aspect, it cannot be an isolated activity that one group of one branch of the military engages in.

Introduction
Whenever a new weapon of significant importance is accepted into military operations there is a natural tendency for the culture and mindset of the force to use it in the same ways that current weapons are being utilized, without examining how its capabilities can expand the efficiency of the force. It is important, therefore, to not only attempt to utilize new weapons and understand their full potential and limitations individually, but also to examine how current Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (TTP's), might exclude or hinder

their usefulness. As much as this is true of new weapons systems, it is also true of messaging.

Definitions

Specific definition is key in this discussion, so I will define a few terms and explain how I am using them in this paper. (Note that some of these definitions are significantly different from the definitions used in the joint military doctrine[1] that addresses narrative use. Instead, the definitions I use in this paper are drawn directly from the field of Narrative Studies. Future papers can examine how the definition discrepancy is problematic, but that goes beyond the scope of this paper.) For the purposes of this paper, then, *messaging* is the act that USCENTCOM and its coalition partners engage in when communicating for the purpose of persuasion.

In order to be successful, the messages that are used in this endeavor have to be designed with a full understanding of *the master narratives* that are held by both the audience and by the people who design the narrative. These *master narratives* are complex entities in themselves and can be addressed more fully in another paper, but for the sake of this paper, I will define them here as "beliefs that guide understanding." The important thing to remember, however, is that the word "belief" or "motivation" cannot be substituted for *master narrative*, even though they are similar. *Master narratives* are much more fluid than beliefs (in the sense that PSYOP TTP's use the term "beliefs"). Rather than falling under the category of religious or ideological motivation, *master narratives* encompass a much more complete whole-of-person belief system. However, different from belief systems that can be held by groups or individuals, *master narratives* are not individually constructed but are always constructed in relation to and interaction with other people, situations, and experiences. This is important because it shows the utter dependence of *master narratives* on lived experience. Which means that if we wish to engage in *messaging* that has a chance to influence the *master narratives* in a region or population, then we have to see coalition actions as part of that endeavor. Narratives never stand alone but must acknowledge and integrate actions and events around them or they are not truly narratives.

Master narratives are also generally more changeable than beliefs. This is important because while it makes *master narratives* complex to understand and monitor, it means that they are indeed a vulnerability in the human population that leaves room for negotiation of meaning by means other than kinetic force.

To return to defining terms, the word *narrative* by itself refers to messages that are purposefully designed to hook into the *master narratives* of specific audiences. Narratives can exist in many mediums of communication. A few examples of these mediums are: communication in the form of videos, images, and audio, any of which can printed, posted online, or disseminated in some other form. Each of these can be considered narratives. Narratives can be disseminated by in-person communication as well. The inverse is not true, however: not all communication is narrative. One easy test to see if a piece of communication is a narrative or not is to ask ourselves if the communication was created in a vacuum based on expert ideas or if it was created in response to, conscious of, or in relation to existing *master narratives*. In this way, then, even though *narrative* is a key component in the future of warfare, it is not very much like the weapons we are familiar with: it cannot be created at a distance and used against targets. It cannot even be created out of specific materials in order to "stick" to the target audience and then fired out into

communication spaces. Narrative has to be integrated with events and actions in the region, its results monitored and then narrative design adjusted in accordance with all those constantly-moving components of a situation.

For the purposes of this paper, *messaging*, then, refers to the physical and cognitive process involved in disseminating the *narratives* that have already been designed in accordance with existing *master narratives*.

Narratives Do Not Exist Without Action

In order to be effective, a narrative must have two overarching qualities: It must be able to make a connection to the audience's personal, lived experience (we call this narrative fidelity) and it must make logical sense to them (narrative cohesion). This means that an essential part of successful narrative creation is integrating it with actions and events happening around it. During the 2016 SMA-hosted Counter-Da'esh Messaging Simulation[2], one of the gaps that we identified was the failure of the blue team to consider what kinetic and other actions were being taken in the region by our military, and how those actions could potentially undermine the narratives we sent out. From my vantage as an observer/analyst on the J39 team, one of my takeaways was that utilizing narrative is beginning to be important to the DoD, but that narrative is also viewed as an extra thing that can be utilized by itself, without integrating it with other aspects of military operations. In terms of what is missing from coalition counter-ISIL messaging, this is a gap of paramount importance. Narratives—even if perfectly crafted to tap into the master narratives of the audience—will cause more damage than good if our actions contradict them. This need for action in concert with narrative ties into both the fidelity and coherence aspects of narrative: for a narrative to be believable or for an audience to engage in uptake of it, it must ring true to their own experience and it must make sense. Our actions in the region have a direct impact on both the fidelity and the coherence of our narrative, especially in an age where news is almost instantly available and is disseminated by social media and framed with the comments of public populations.

"Utilizing narrative is beginning to be important to the DoD, but narrative is also viewed as an extra thing that can be utilized by itself, without integrating it with other aspects of military operations…This is a gap of paramount importance."

Narratives Can Reframe Actions

Another aspect that relates to narrative needing to be tied to and correlated with actions is the ability of narrative to frame actions and events in the region. What this means is that narrative can become a force multiplier in our weakest areas where we don't have the power to control the events of the region. In those regions in particular, we can utilize our intelligence superiority to create narratives that are ready for release in near real-time with the events as they unfold. Our narratives can tap into the master narratives in the region and reframe action taken by any group in an attempt to align master narratives with our mission. There is no way that this will work, however, unless narrative-creation and its understanding takes a prominent place in strategic planning. For narrative to be an effective stopgap, it has to be tied to operations in every aspect, it cannot be an isolated activity that one group of one branch of the military engages in. And there must be a feedback loop reporting back the impact of the events and narrative on the local population so that narratives can be changed to address the shifting narrative needs of the population.

An important quality of narratives that should be noted, is that master narratives are dynamic and fluid. They are influenced by lived experience and the framing of that lived experience. So from the time one set of narratives is sent out to frame an anticipated or recently-occurring event, to a few hours after the event, the master narrative on the ground could change enough to render the initial set of narratives ineffective if reused. The personnel who create narratives need the flexibility to monitor indications of shifts in master narratives of the target population and the ability to revise and re-send narrative that will continue to reframe current circumstances/events in accordance with the commander's intent. Master narratives are fluid and dynamic, and as much as that makes them slippery and difficult to interact with, if we invest in our ability to navigate in the narrative space and integrate it with our other warfighting capabilities, this fluidity of master narratives can work to our advantage. People live their lives, make their decisions, and ultimately take sides based on master narratives, and often in the face of competing master narratives, which makes it all the more important to align narrative-creation with actions.

Challenges of Identifying Master Narratives

One of the challenges of monitoring ever-shifting master narratives for the purpose of revising the narratives we send out, is the challenge of differentiating between a shifting master narrative and the symptoms of that shifting master narrative. Being able to tell the difference is key, because creating a narrative that responds to the symptoms of a master narrative rather than the master narrative itself can exacerbate conflict in unintended ways and produce the opposite effect as intended by the narrative. Let's take an example from my days as an incident investigator in the Navy: Sailors getting in trouble.

We were in the middle of consolidating several commands into one. It had been a nightmare for months, but the personnel had adapted and generally had a good attitude. But then I started noticing a stark rise in incidents/accidents. There was no discernable pattern in them, either: some were domestics, some obviously anger and alcohol-related, but others were neglect-related, like getting injured as a result of failing to wear safety gear. Many of the incidents didn't seem appropriate to the people involved, most of whom had a track record of being responsible, trustworthy folks. I interviewed the Sailors, using my history in the command as an opening to try and get the details that would help the phenomenon make sense. But nothing in the reports I gathered made sense. If we had been creating a narrative in order to attempt to change this behavior (we weren't, but as an example), command leadership would look at the actions and it would likely identify the master narrative that the Sailors were operating under as "lack of safety training" or "Ignoring good order and discipline." But if we had created narratives to counter that as a master narrative, our narratives would have proved ineffectual. That's because those were symptoms, not the master narrative. Had we attempted to understand the Sailor motivations utilizing the PSYOP 7 Phase communication plan (FM 3.05.301)[3], the result might have been identifying this symptom as a master narrative. But the visible problem wasn't the motivator—it wasn't the master narrative. The only way I was eventually able to find out the master narrative was by listening, intently—not in order to create a narrative or effective reply, but listening just to understand—to the comments and conversations the Sailors made in small groups when their leadership wasn't around.

The Sailors' master narrative ended up being "The command is working us nonstop with no expressed reason." Which ended up being true. The Sailors were accustomed to working nonstop on workups and when aircraft were down, or when they were on deployment, but the situation didn't fall into any of those expected categories. In spite of the lack of obvious reasons, a normally rotating duty section where the same people normally had duty one weekend a month, had turned into a schedule where all duty sections worked full time during the week and then worked the weekend as well. The Sailors were overworked and frustrated and lacked a sense of mission. It turned out that the CO didn't know what was happening because the schedule was orchestrated at the senior enlisted level. Once the CO found out what was happening and addressed it, he called quarters and spoke to his people about the situation (he was creating a narrative). In this narrative, he explained that he had just found out about the overworking and under-explanation and had put a stop to it. Then he laid out a plan for forward movement. He addressed the master narrative effectively. Not just because he created a narrative that acknowledged the actual problem, but because he also orchestrated actions that lined up with the narrative he created.

Another point this example illustrates is the reframing power of narrative when used in concert with action. What the CO did when he spoke to his people was essentially create a narrative that framed an event that had already occurred—one where he lost credibility in the eyes of many. From a junior Sailor perspective, he was the boss, and people were suffering, and so he was to blame. Why did the same junior Sailors believe him when he got up there and spoke to the issue? Because he reframed their own experience: telling them that he had not authorized the overtime and didn't know about it, and now that he was informed, he had put a stop to it. Looking at that situation from a devil's advocate perspective, he might have actually known about the overtime, and even if he didn't, he was still to blame since it was his command and he didn't know what was going on. However, no matter which of those things was true, he was able to gain back the respect of his people and change the master narrative by giving us a believable reason for the problem and offering a solution.

Had the CO not reinforced his narrative with actions that junior Sailors saw go into immediate effect, then the master narrative of "the command is working us nonstop with no expressed reason" would have changed to a master narrative of "The command is working us to death for no reason, *and* the CO doesn't have the power to stop it, even though it is clearly harming personnel and equipment." The situation would have gone from bad to worse. The takeaway here is that perfect narrative without action to give it coherence and make it ring true in lived experience can make a problem worse. There would have been a similar negative result if the CO had spoken to the symptoms of the master narrative by cracking down on discipline and doing more safety training. The symptoms of a master narrative have to be differentiated from the master narrative itself, the narrative has to be constructed to address the master narrative, and actions have to reinforce it—or the created narrative has to reframe actions. For example, if the CO had responded to the command problem by explaining that a classified threat existed that he hadn't been able to divulge, but that our help was of vital importance. In that case, the narrative would reframe the negative situation that existed, but because the narrative hooked into our master narratives of duty to country and team over self, it would have turned the tide of incidents into the kind of mission-driven motivation we experienced on workups for deployments.

Narrative Does Not Function Like a Kinetic Weapon

The tendency to conceptualize narrative as a kinetic weapon can reduce its effectiveness. As a former Sailor I understand military culture and drive, and the value of being willing to look in the face of terror and embrace combat as an option. As an analyst with academic training, I understand now, more than ever, how vital that kind of bravery is, because so much of the population cannot stomach that reality. However, this very strength of eagerness to fight can be our weakness when it comes to conceptualizing narratives and master narratives and designing a place for them within military operations.

Communication theorists talk about the problem with communication in the world today being partly born of everyone's eagerness to respond. It has become cultural habit in the West to listen just long enough to formulate a response and then volley that response back at the earliest possible break in conversation. Based on my observations of the Counter-Da'esh Messaging Simulation, it looks like this tendency has crept into our perceptions of what it means to analyze an audience and then create a narrative to use with them. Partially, our nomenclature indicates this gap in understanding: when we engage in analysis in the human domain, we refer to people as a "target audience" or "TA." While we do need a name for those people whose master narratives we seek to understand, I wonder how our processes for understanding their master narrative would be different if we didn't use the word "target"? I don't mean to make a judgment on the idea of targets in general—the military exists to execute action in relation to designated targets. My point is that, in order to look beyond our own master narratives, beyond the fog of war, and beyond the symptoms of master narrative, we need to temporarily suspend focus on future actions taken against a TA while we analyze them. Master narratives are difficult to accurately discern in the first place—even for academics who are sitting in safe places with no personal master narrative that includes the mission to act upon a target. The intense nature of information warfare adds increased pressure, making it even more difficult to discern TA master narratives from our need to know how and when to target them.

First, Listen in Order to Hear, Then Act and Disseminate Narratives

This suggestion to suspend action seems to fly in the face of what I have been advocating all along, which is that narrative requires action to reinforce it. However, it's not a contradiction, but an aspect of time and division of mission: you can't hear while firing a weapon. In the same way, during the phase of analyzing master narratives, we will be more accurate if we attempt to see and hear them in a way that is mentally separate from conceptualizing the mission. Once the master narratives have been assessed, then incorporate plans for narrative creation with other operational plans. According to FM 3-05.301[4] Psychological Objectives (PO's) and Supporting Psychological Objectives (SPO's) are set *prior* to analyzing audience and prior to assessing what narratives have a chance of success. This can limit success by forcing a narrative into a situation where the PO's might be conceptualized differently if the audience was analyzed prior to or at the same time the PO's and SPO's were being set.

The issue is one of being able to detect and recognize master narratives even if they don't fit with our expectations, and expectations are intensified with the setting of PO's and SPO's. If there is a way to step back from expectations and mission and truly listen (similar to my strategy with the Junior Sailors), and then incorporate that knowledge into operations planning, I think we give narrative a much greater chance of proving its value to modern warfare. As we see every day with Da'esh, narrative can be a powerful weapon. However, when we conceive of narrative in the same we way we conceive of kinetic weapons, then we

shut out the most powerful part of narrative warfare: the ability to hear and understand others' master narratives and then prepare a preemptive response.

An additional difficulty is that U.S. and coalition forces are at a disadvantage because Da'esh doesn't have to listen very hard to find our master narratives; they are obvious in our movies, our free press, our social media. On the other hand, we must become skilled at "master-narrative espionage," if you will, hearing not what an enemy wants us to hear, but truly detecting the master narratives so that we can use narrative messaging and actions to create change.

Conclusion

Those conducting messaging operations must understand master narratives in order to create persuasive narratives. Narratives cannot exist apart from action: they need to either accompany purposeful action or reframe actions and events as they unfold. A much as we want to, we cannot just create the desired master narrative and overpower the TA with it—that will only feel like an assault to them, and we will not emerge with the win. We have to show that we understand their master narrative and engage them in it—in both overt and covert ways. (Imagery is the more covert form of narrative). The first step is to thoroughly understand the existing master narrative. Second, we need to differentiate the master narrative from its symptoms. Third, create a plan of action that includes narratives, a way to monitor them and collect feedback to form new ones. Finally, we must carry out actions that reinforce the narrative or reframe the actions we know/suspect will occur.

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Comments on Messaging

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First, without access to examples of what has been included in the "counter-ISIL messaging" campaign makes answering the question about what is missing from the campaign more difficult. However, based on the relatively small amount of material I do have access to, as well as past experience, I offer the following points:

Narratives operate as — and within — systems, and therefore thinking in binaries is unhelpful. (i.e., thinking that the audience is either pro-ISIL or anti-ISIL, or that a message is either 'pro-ISIL' or 'anti-ISIL' is not as productive as understanding how ideas, concepts, desires and action nest into the narrative trajectories audiences encounter, comprehend, etc.). If a message is based on an appeal to concerns of safety, how does it nest into issues of identity? Narratives circulate as systems in landscapes ("landscape" used here metaphorically, but there's a literal dimension, too); they intersect with one another, sometimes in complementary or supportive ways, sometimes in oppositional ways. Groups, even opposed groups, share narratives and narrative materials/components, but they get leveraged in different ways. To often we think with the frame of mind that "our" narrative will stop "theirs"; this is another example of binary thinking, where a holistic and integrated perspective is necessary.

Provide alternative narratives. Humans make sense of their lives through stories: they understand the past in narrative terms and they chart their futures in narrative terms. Narratives are born in conflict (can be any conflict, to include a lack such as a lack of safety, lack of identity, lack of employment prospects), and that conflict generates desire, which motivate actions. Rather than "countering" or "disrupting" the opposition's stories (in part because of the credibility problems cited by other contributors, but also in part because narratives don't work like anti-aircraft systems where if you take out the radars you can fly your aircraft with impunity), provide stories that address the core conflicts and desires of the populace, provide heroes to believe in and model, provide resolutions to aspire to, and map out actions that can lead to a culturally consonant resolution. Based on analysis of extremist narratives, an effect system of alternative narratives must recognize need for justice (that's a common desire evident), recognize threats (that's part conflict), must offer some route to glory (resolution), must offer some subjection to a higher ideal (family? Tribe? Nation?)

- See the pro-Jordanian forces videos produced by the GEC. They contain some of these elements: they are designed to showcase heroes and emphasize military strength and weapons (cultural referents, appeal to masculinity); they showcase the soldiers' service to a higher ideal: Jordan as country and prosperous Muslim community
- Extant research shows that money, jobs and marriage are significant desires of the recruitable population. Additionally, Syrians have expressed a long-standing lack of education in how to pray properly, which is indicative of lack of confidence in identity and a lack of education (two 'lacks' that are forms of conflict establishing potential narrative trajectories). **Therefore, a component of alternative narrative should draw from Islamic history (for fidelity) and should educate and reinforce key tenets, and how that education can be enacted and how that Islamic identity can be enacted.**
- It's not enough to point out hypocrisy or violence of IS leaders; those are useful characteristics to highlight (disrupts coherence of IS narratives), but pro-Coalition narratives must offer a roadmap of what to do and why (and with fidelity and coherence.

Make Them a Laugh: Satire and Ridicule as the Missing Piece of CENTCOM Messaging

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Abstract:

The purpose of information warfare is to use information as a weapon of war. The premise of this paper is that in warfare and political conflict, to entertain is to inform and to inform is to influence. ARSOF and USSOCOM in general, are properly situated to be the thought-leaders within the US government for planning the redesign of the behavioral modification element of US strategy against global jihadist threats. It seems that there are few things that our adversary fears more however than loss of legitimacy and respect, in shame based culture, honor is all-important. Satire and humor, help to expose subtle failings in persons and organizations, and can ultimately help to bring down any organization. We get the word "satire" from the ancient Greek satyr, the mythical drunk, hedonistic or otherwise naughty man-goat. Satyrs performed the fourth and final part of a tetralogy drama, usually in a burlesque performance that poked fun at the preceding serious or tragic trilogy. The audience would leave the performance satisfied and upbeat. Americans have used ridicule as a potent weapon to cut its enemies down to size since the Revolutionary War. Ridicule has long served two wartime purposes: to raise the people's morale by helping them to laugh at their enemies and to dent the morale of enemy forces. That time has come again.

Introduction:

The Islamic State (IS) has reached its high water mark as a revolutionary state. The action of coalition partners and the US is having significant impacts on both territorial control and the Islamic State's ability to govern. The one place where IS continues to make gains is in the cognitive domain. This advance will only cease to be a threat if we can show it and its leaders for what they truly are and depict them as amoral and unworthy of support. In the words of Dr. Sebastian Gorka,

"We must make a concerted effort to Within Iraq and Syria US IO and PSYOP must target the real center of gravity of the Islamic State: Abu Bakr al Baghdadi's claim that he and his followers are the only authentic Muslims. The information campaign must have a simple objective: ***delegitimize Abu Bakr and his so-called Islamic State****."* (Gorka, 2015)

The Need for a Narrative approach

The narrative, supported by external efforts and driven by local partners, should be something as simple as: Islamic State = Un-Islamic Corruption. All narratives must lead to the same place: ISIS/IS is only interested in itself and not the local populations. (Gorka, 2015)This overarching narrative is supported and furthered by effective series and PSYACTs, actions taken to enhance psychological effect, developed at the local, tactical level. The integrated effects of these tactical actions is managed at a regional entity such as the Military Information Support Task Force-Central (MIST-C). The strategic campaign management, i.e. linking of efforts in different AORs, such as Syria, Yemen, and Iraq, should

be managed at the CENTCOM level. CENTCOM should help to ensure that tactical and operational actions are within the overarching narrative goal by providing a synchronization and assistance function.

The Message

This message must be developed along key subordinate lines of effort. First, we must support friendly narrative and offer an alternative narrative with multiple access points, i.e. ways to receive and interact with the message, that is focused on building support for and tying the population to public institutions, where possible. The second line of effort must be enemy focused and look to drive a clear wedge between hard supporters, those who are deeply committed, and soft supporters, those who can be swayed.

Weaponeering

This is the missing aspect of CENTCOM messaging. The wedge must be articulated by local sources through the use of humor, satire, and ridicule. Arab-American comedian Ray Hanania has written, "If there were a bit of humor in the Middle East, I think that there might not be so much fanaticism." (Hanania, 1996) Humor can be a counter to the environment that breeds fanaticism and terrorism. According to Psychology , humor is the most to prevent individuals from becoming Islamic suicide bombers, however, to be effective, the humor has to come from within the Muslim community and it has to be "aimed at the culture's sacred values." (Fong, 2010)) According to psychologist Molly Castelloe Fong, "Humor has the potential to gradually, over time, alter what it means to be a heroic martyr in the mind of extremist groups."(Fong, 2010). Agence France-Presse has reported that "Satire and ridicule can help win the fight against Al-Qaeda by stripping it of its glamour and mystique." (Moutot, 2010) The Demos group, a think tank in the United Kingdom, is among the academic institutions that have suggested that satire can be an effective tool in undermining support for violent jihad. According to some terrorism experts, successful recruitment for violent jihad depends upon convincing potential recruits that jihadis are "pious warriors of God." (Waller, 2007)) They postulate that by "highlighting their incompetence, their moral failings, and their embarrassing antics," it may be possible to "undermine" support for violent jihadi organizations including Al Qaeda and the Taliban.(Waller, 2007 and Fong 2010) Researchers for Demos recommend satire as a means of undermining the popularity of violent jihad, noting that "satire has long been recognised as a powerful tool to undermine the popularity of social movements: both the Ku Klux Klan and the British Fascist party in the 1930s were seriously harmed by sustained satire." (Gardham, 2010))

"Humor is the most powerful tool to prevent individuals from becoming Islamic suicide bombers, however, to be effective, the humor has to come from within the Muslim community and it has to be 'aimed at the culture's sacred values.'"

How To Begin

CENTCOM already has assets in place and aids in the development of this type of strategy. The Regional Web Interaction Program (RWIP), is well suited to begin to develop these types of messages in a controlled and measured way. To further this effort, CENTCOM should work with USSOCOM and reenergize portions of the Trans Regional Web Initiative (TRWI) to support localized dissemination of content. These efforts are complimentary and supporting to efforts on the ground.

In conclusion, in order to more effectively counter IS messaging CENTCOM should:

- Use ridicule and Satire as weapons.
- Use preexisting resources to begin the process.
- Manage the narrative by helping to sequence tactical and operational level action into a coherent story.
- Build a competitive cognitive environment with multiple choices to encourage their narrative's potential for selective advantage.

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Comments on CENTCOM Messaging

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Since its meteoric rise in 2014, in both the digital and physical space, ISIL has developed unprecedented strategies for targeting and tailoring its message to specific constituencies. Research from the Centre on Religion & Geopolitics (CRG) into ISIL propaganda reveals an important distinction between the core Salafi-jihadi ideology that underpins the group's objectives, and the narratives spun to communicate and sell this worldview. Reflecting our research, we focus here on the narrative, rather than physical, means by which certain populations are targeted, both globally and locally.

"Western and Middle Eastern countries have so far failed to match the coordination, intensity, not to mention zealotry, of the communications effort of this global, decentralised movement."

The first point to note is that Salafi-jihadi ideology 'universalises' local grievances. It makes them globally relevant, and presents a picture of a joined-up global struggle against oppression. Meanwhile, Western and Middle Eastern countries have so far failed to match the coordination, intensity, not to mention zealotry, of the communications effort of this global, decentralised movement.

ISIL's competency in maximising their potential influence is demonstrated in how the group tailors narratives to their intended audiences. A 2007 survey by the University of Maryland found that three quarters of respondents across Egypt, Pakistan, Morocco, and Indonesia believed in the need to "stand up to America and affirm the dignity of the Islamic people." Jihadi propaganda pushes this very idea. It emphasises restoring honour to an oppressed community. References to the 'nobility' of jihad appeared in 71% of a cross section of propaganda that the Centre on Religion & Geopolitics analysed.[20] Claims that groups were fighting on behalf of persecuted Muslim communities, from Bosnia to Myanmar, appeared in 68% of output.

However, these global narratives of a violent struggle on behalf of the worldwide Muslim *ummah* are offset by propaganda that is strongly rooted in specific language and place. Videos, *nasheeds* (songs), and articles in languages ranging from Bahasa Indonesian to Uighur to Russian, provide a religious and geopolitical framework for profoundly local factors. For example, in the case of both Bangladesh and Bosnia, ISIL propaganda targeted at these countries has presented the conflict in Syria and Iraq as the inheritor of domestic 'jihad', with a specific retelling of the history of conflict in these countries to fit their own narrative.

However, in contrast to this breadth, ISIL also attempts to maintain control over information, ensuring that the group's media affiliates are viewed as the sole legitimate

[20] Please note that this report constituted a comparative analysis of three Salafi-jihadi groups; ISIL, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, and Jabhat al-Nusra. However the findings of the entire report largely echo those specific to ISIL, with a shared ideology found to be present between all three groups.

disseminators of news and content. Circulation of the weekly al-Naba newsletter and regular radio bulletins from al-Bayan radio are an effort to ensure that information is released through a semi-centralised, controlled manner, in a manner in which ISIS itself takes responsibility for providing details, rather than allowing news to reach its supporters via mainstream media.

Looking at more prosaic forms of how ISIL reaches target populations, recent research published by the Centre on Religion & Geopolitics into the accessibility of extremist content through the Google search engine found that using certain keywords related to ISIL that are often used in media coverage are often sufficient to provide seekers with access to the group's publications. While hosting or clearing sites such as Jihadology.org and Archive.org play an integral role in providing researchers and analysts with access to ISIL material, if these websites are so easily accessible to researchers it is also just as convenient for others with more nefarious objectives to gain access to such content via a simple search query.

Case Study: Distinctions between Arabic and English Language Propaganda

While much of the Arabic propaganda [analysed by CRG] shares the same themes as the English material, some distinctions are apparent. Most noticeable of these is the observable emphasis on the near enemy within the Arabic propaganda. While a number of the Arabic sources within the sample contain a combination of references to both near and far enemies (consistent with the English material), all Arabic sources contain heavier emphasis on reference to Shia groups, including those in Iraq, Iran, Yemen; to regional Muslim regimes including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia; and to other ethnic groups, such as the Kurds.

In a speech made by now-deceased ISIL spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani on 23 June 2015, titled 'O Our People Respond to the Caller of Allah', references against the near enemy are rich in detail and coverage, with a particular emphasis on the Iraqi Shia community. Adnani's speech is particularly driven towards an Iraqi Sunni audience, which is addressed directly throughout the statement. As is consistent across AQAP, Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS material, the Shia are referred to by the pejorative term, 'al-Rafidah' (the rejectors), while the far enemy is regularly referred to broadly as 'the Crusaders'. However, the references to the far enemy in the Arabic content are minimal, and when reference is made, it is done so in a context of further alienating and demonising the Iraqi Shia. Following a detailed depiction of wrongdoings afflicted on the Sunni population of Baghdad, Adnani states:

"O Ahlus Sunnah [adherents to the Sunnah] everywhere, the Crusaders resolved to clear Iraq of Ahlus-Sunnah completely and to make it purely Rafidi".

However, Adnani then returns to the subject of the Shia in Iraq, paying only brief attention to the so-called 'Crusader Rafidah' coalition. In this way, the emphasis remains on inciting anger against the Shia and marginalising minority sects in an effort to unify Sunni communities.

Similar tactics are evident in numerous Arabic language videos that were either created by provincial media outlets or from other official media outlets, but not translated into English for non-Arabic speaking audiences. In many of these videos, another common emphasis was on the state-building theme. In a video released on the 28 May 2014 by ISIL' al-Furqan Media, titled 'The Best Ummah', evidence of the state-building process features dominantly

throughout. By following a member of the so-called Hisba Office ('religious police') in Raqqa, viewers are taken through the streets and witness inhabitants interacting positively with ISILS officials. In this way, stronger emphasis on the pull factor in Arabic propaganda is evident when compared to the emphasis of English-language content.

Furthermore, consistent with Adnani's speech, references to the near enemy are made throughout the video as the viewer is encouraged to look to the times of Assad as deviation from Islam, corruption and shirk. Consistent with the emphasis on the near enemy, the video concludes with footage of the demolition of a Shia mosque that had supposedly hosted 'idolatrous' shrines.

In all the Arabic content analysed within the sample, sectarian rhetoric and emphasis of the near enemy over the far enemy appears to drive and, at times, drown out the other themes that more regularly featured throughout the English propaganda. This demonstrates how jihadi propaganda, though increasingly global, is able to tactically shift its narrative emphasis to suit its target audience.

[From 'Inside the Jihadi Mind: Understanding Ideology and Propaganda, Centre on Religion & Geopolitics]

Comments on CENTCOM Messaging

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The conceptual framework that promotes USCENTCOM and the global counter-ISIL coalition communications efforts as a "counter-messaging" effort can be made far more productive than it is currently. Cognitive psychology and empirical analysis in a range of fields tells us that people do not suddenly abandon their worldview in favor of an alternative on the basis of rational logic. Counter-messaging logic relies on a faulty metaphor: the premise that an alternative better message may appeal to a particular adherent.

"It is … advisable to begin messaging efforts by seeking to appreciate and understand the worldview of potential adherents in a holistic way—by taking into account the widest possible range of motivations and circumstances of potential adherents or recruits."

It is for that reason advisable to begin messaging efforts by seeking to appreciate and understand the worldview of potential adherents in a holistic way—by taking into account the widest possible range of motivations and circumstances of potential adherents or recruits.

Asking questions about the widest possible range of motivations that might drive a new recruit to make an extreme decision of his (or her) own to make a commitment. There is a growing body of evidence indicate a range of various psychological and social motivations afoot. Messaging efforts that demonstrate an appreciation for these motivations and speak to them implicitly may prove powerful.

For example, messaging efforts that charge ISIL with hypocrisy and the murder of Muslims may give someone committed to the goal of defending Sunni Islam a second thought [although, we might also note that this message legitimizes the premise that violent action against perceived enemies of Islam; what it says is that ISIL is not executing that action in the 'correct' direction]. However, the same messaging may do little for someone who is seeking a positive identity through affiliation, and is less concerned with the object of their actions.

Second, anecdotal evidence is mounting that social marginalization and feelings of disenfranchisement matter, whether this is easily observable to outsiders (as in the case of Muslim immigrants in some circumstances in Europe)or not (as in the case of individuals who feel psychologically or socially isolated even though they are not geographically displaced).

This may be paired with the recognition that ISIL engages in a great deal of one-on-one and face-to-face recruitment, which suggests that the role of social media in recruitment (and self-radicalization)may be less than previously thought. Both of these data points suggest similarities in the ways that gangs and cults operate, and to the need for social services and other ameliorative measures in vulnerable communities which may proactively head off some of the motivations that drive people to look for psychological strengthening, on and

offline. Such efforts may be beyond the scope of efforts here, but can play a part in resourcing a 'whole of coalition' approach.

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- MALD and Ph.D. from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University
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Research Interests

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Hassan Abbas is Professor of International Security Studies and Chair of the Department of Regional and Analytical Studies at National Defense University's College of International Security Affairs (CISA). He serves as a Carnegie Fellow 2016-2017 at New America where he is focusing on a book project on Islam's internal struggles and spirituality narrated through the lens of his travels to Islam's holy sites across the world. He is also currently a Senior Advisor at Asia Society. He remained a Senior Advisor at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University (2009-2011), after having been a Research Fellow at the Center from 2005-2009. He was the Distinguished Quaid-i-Azam Chair Professor at Columbia University before joining CISA and has previously held fellowships at Harvard Law School and Asia Society in New York.

He regularly appears as an analyst on media including CNN, ABC, BBC, C-Span, Al Jazeera and GEO TV (Pakistan). His opinion pieces and research articles have been published in various leading international newspapers and academic publications. His latest book titled *The Taliban Revival: Violence and Extremism on the Pakistan-Afghanistan Frontier* (Yale University Press, 2014) was profiled on *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* in August 2014. Abbas' earlier well acclaimed book *Pakistan's Drift into Extremism: Allah, the Army and America's War on Terror* (M E Sharpe, 2004) remains on bestseller lists in Pakistan and India. He also runs WATANDOST, a blog on Pakistan and its neighbors' related affairs. His other publications include an Asia Society report titled *Stabilizing Pakistan Through Police Reform* (2012) and *Pakistan 2020: A Vision for Building a Better Future* (Asia Society, 2011).

A detailed list of his publications is available here.

Hamilton Bean's research intersects the fields of organizational discourse and security. From 2001 to 2005, he served in management positions for a Washington, DC-based provider of analytical support services to U.S. and international clients in government and industry. Since 2005, he has been affiliated with the National Consortium for the Study or Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) – a U.S. Department of Homeland Security Center of Excellence based at the University of Maryland.

Alejandro J. Beutel is Researcher for Countering Violent Extremism at the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). Prior to START, Beutel was the Policy and Research Engagement Fellow at the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU), an applied research think-tank specializing in the study and promotion of evidence-based development strategies for positive civic, social, and political engagement outcomes for American Muslim communities. He was also an independent research consultant to several non-profits, private corporations, and think-tanks.

At ISPU, he was Co-Principal Investigator and Project Manager of the "Islamophobia: A Threat to All" study, a research initiative that empirically analyzed anti-Muslim bigotry in the United States and provided actionable solutions to effectively combat it. As a consultant, Beutel authored several publications, including most recently, "Safe Spaces Initiative" a community-based toolkit to combat extremism and violence, published by the Muslim Public Affairs Council.

Beutel graduated from the University of Maryland, College Park in 2013 with a Master of Public Policy. He also has a Bachelor of Science in International Relations and Diplomacy from Seton Hall University in South Orange, NJ.

Chris Blakely Jr. is a student (senior) of both Public Relations and Conflict Analysis & Resolution at George Mason University. He works in social media consulting and currently serves as a Psychological Operations Team Chief in the U.S. Army Reserve. His experience and insights stem from his near decade of service around the world in uniform and at home through academia/volunteer work. His research focus is narratives and their role in forecasting, understanding, mitigating and resolving violent conflict.

John Bornmann completed his Ph.D. at George Washington University in Human Sciences and Cultural Anthropology in 2009, focusing on how privates at Army Basic Training transition their identity from civilian to soldier. At MITRE John has worked on a number of military and non-military projects focused on improving training and awareness of critical thinking by servicemembers, intelligence analysts, and other government employees. Dr. Bornmann is an expert in qualitative data collection and analysis techniques, including focus groups, interviews, and open-ended survey administration, and has taught four

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Kurt Braddock researches the effects of specific types of communication in the processes surrounding the use of terrorism. Specifically, Dr. Braddock's work focuses on (a) how terrorist groups use different persuasive techniques to draw individuals to join their groups, and (b) how counter-terrorists can use similar techniques to get individuals to leave terrorist groups. He teaches a number of courses at Penn State, including CAS100B: Effective Speech, Communication in Groups, CAS553: Disaster Communication, CAS283: Communication and Information Technology, and HLS805: Terrorism, Violence, and Threats. His work has been published in a number of communication, psychology, and terrorism journals, including *Communication Monographs*, *Personality and Individual Differences*, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, and *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*.

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In 2016-2017 I am based as a researcher at School of Media and Public Affairs, George Washington University. I am continuing as a lecturer in Sheffield and in August 2017 I return to Department of Journalism Studies The University of Sheffield Author of: Propaganda and Counter-Terrorism: Strategies for Global Change from Manchester University Press Co-Author of: Bad News for Refugees with Prof. Greg Philo and Dr. Pauline Donald from Pluto Press.

Dr. Sara Cobb is the Drucie French Cumbie Chair at the School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (S-CAR) at George Mason University. She was, from 2001-2009, the dean/director of ICAR (now S-CAR); in her current role as faculty she teaches and conducts research on the relationship between narrative and conflict. She is also the Director of the Center for the Study of Narrative and Conflict Resolution at S-CAR that provides a hub for scholarship on narrative approaches to conflict analysis and resolution. She is co-editor, with John Winslade, of the journal *Narrative and Conflict: Explorations in Theory and Practice.*

Formerly, she was the Director of the Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School and has held positions at a variety of research institutions such as University of California, Santa Barbara, University of Connecticut. She has also consulted to and/or conducted training for a host of public and private organizations, as well as a number of universities in Europe and Latin America.

Dr. Cobb is widely published. Her book, *Speaking of Violence: The Politics and Poetics of Narrative in Conflict Resolution* (Oxford University Press) lays out the theoretical basis for a narrative lens on both conflict analysis and conflict resolution; this perspective presumes that conflict is a struggle over meaning, anchored in and by the stories we tell about victimization. Some of this research is based on case studies from her research in Guatemala, Rwanda and the Netherlands. The blend of academic research, program

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Amanda Nell Edgar is an assistant professor of Communication at the University of Memphis. Dr. Edgar's research explores the entanglement of sound and identity in popular culture. Her work has appeared in *Women's Studies in Communication, Critical Studies in Media Communication, Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies,* and other journals, and has been featured on the National Communication Association's *Communication Currents.*

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Alexis Everington is the Director of Research for Madison Springfield, Inc. His qualifications include 15 years program management experience leading large scale, cross-functional, multi-national research & analytical programs in challenging environments including Iraq, Libya, Mexico, Syria and Yemen. Alexis advised both the Libyan opposition government during the Libyan revolution of 2011 and its immediate aftermath and most recently, the Syrian opposition military. He has also helped train several other foreign militaries and has taught at the NATO School. In addition, Alexis developed the Target Audience Analysis methodology that is currently employed across the US national security community and has been applied most recently in Afghanistan, Jordan, and Lebanon. His educational credentials include a Master of Arts from Oxford University in European and Middle Eastern Studies and his language skills include a fluency in Arabic, Spanish, French and Italian as well as a proficiency in Mandarin. Alexis is currently leading large-scale qualitative and quantitative primary research studies in Libya, Pakistan, Syria and Yemen.

Staff Sergeant (ret.) Eric Grenlin is a M.S. student at the George Mason University School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (S-CAR). Eric was a US Army Military Police Soldier from 2007-2016. He served in Iraq and Afghanistan before being medically retired following a motorcycle accident. Eric's academic and research interests include Iraq, ISIS, the role of power in conflict, US Military narrative(s), and civil-military relations. He is currently the manager of the Center for Narrative and Conflict Resolution at S-CAR.

Jessica M. Huckabey is a Research Staff Member in the Joint Advanced Warfighting Division at the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA). She has led and participated in multi-disciplinary research projects on subjects that include terrorism, intelligence, information operations, operational energy, maritime security, red teaming, and threat perception.

Ms. Huckabey was a key member of a major research project at IDA designed to understand the former regime of Saddam Hussein and the strategic and operational views of al-Qaeda through the analysis of captured records. This research spawned numerous studies as well as the establishment of the Conflict Records Research Center (CRRC) – a public repository of records for future research – at the National Defense University. She was the CRRC's first acting director in 2010.

In addition, Ms. Huckabey was an officer in the US Navy Reserve (cryptology/information warfare) for 23 years. She graduated from The Ohio State University (military history) and holds a Master's Degree in War Studies from King's College London. She is currently a PhD in History candidate at the University of Leeds. Her dissertation focuses on US perceptions of the Soviet naval threat during the Cold War.

Ms. Huckabey's publications include *The Terrorist Perspective Project: Strategic and Operational Views of Al Qaida and Associated Movements* (US Naval Institute Press, 2008); Al Qaida's Views of Authoritarian Intelligence Services in the Middle East (article in *Intelligence and National Security*, 2010); Jihads in Decline: What the Captured Records Tell Us (chapter in *9/11 Ten Years Later: Insights on al-Qaeda's Past & Future through Captured Records: Conference Proceedings,* 2012); Al Qaeda in Mali: The Defection Connections (article in *Orbis*, 2013); and Is the Past Prologue for the Islamic State? (article for War on the Rocks website, 2015).

Haroro J. Ingram is a research fellow with the Australian National University and an associate fellow with the International Centre for Counter-terrorism – The Hague (ICCT). His Australian Research Council funded project analyses the role of propaganda in the campaign strategies of violent non-state actors with ISIL and the Afghan Taliban as major case studies. Ingram is also a visiting researcher with the Naval Postgraduate School's Defense Analysis Department. Please email any questions to haroro.ingram@anu.edu.au

Lawrence A. Kuznar (Professor of Anthropology, Indiana University-Purdue University-Fort Wayne and NSI, Inc.) Dr. Kuznar conducts anthropological research relevant to counterterrorism and other areas of national security. His current research focuses on discourse analysis of Daesh leadership messaging to provide leading indicators of intent and behavior and has applied this methodology to Eastern European State and non-State Actors, Iran, and polities in the Middle East and Asia. He has developed computational models of genocide in Darfur and tribal factionalism in New Guinea, mathematical models of inequality and conflict, and integrated socio-cultural databases for predicting illicit nuclear trade and

bioterrorism. He has conducted discourse analysis of the expression of conflict and enmity in Arabic, Farsi and Pashto, to identify leading indicators of conflict. Dr. Kuznar's recent research has been funded by academic sources, the Office of the Secretary of Defense Strategic Multilayer Analysis, Air Force Research Lab (AFRL), the Human Social Cultural Behavior (HSCB) modeling program of the Department of Defense, and by the US Army Corps of Engineers. He has also served on the HSCB Technical Progress Evaluation panel, and currently serves on a panel for National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) net assessment.

Mr. Michael Lewis joined the faculty at the USMC Command and Staff College in 2013 upon retirement from the United States Army. From 2008-2013 he served as the USSOCOM Special Operations Chair to the Marine Corps University preceded by a tour on the Joint Staff, Deputy Director for Special Operations, J-3 where he served as an Action Officer and Chief, Sensitive Activities Branch. As an Assistant Professor of Strategic Studies, he teaches Security Studies curriculum to military officers from the U.S. and other nations, as well as national security professionals from other U.S. government departments and agencies. In addition to security and national policy specific courses, Mr. Lewis also teaches courses on insurgency from an insurgent's perspective and counterinsurgency theory and practice. He often presents at conferences on special operations, counterinsurgency, human networks, and terrorism, and routinely guest lectures at George Mason University in support of courses in foreign policy, conflict analysis, and insurgency. Mr. Lewis holds a B.S. in Biology Education from Oregon State University, a M.S. in Computing Technology in Education from Nova Southeastern University, and he is currently a Doctoral Candidate in the School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University. His current field of research is focused on identifying and describing the dominant narratives that shape and control military approaches to conflict analysis and resolution.

Angie Mallory is a Ph.D. student in Rhetoric and Professional Communication at Iowa State University. She is also holds a Graduate Certificate in Terrorism Analysis from University of Maryland's START Center, and is a consultant for the Advanced Technical Intelligence Center (ATIC). Her dissertation aims to bring academic theory into usefulness in the field by building a model to assist soldiers on the ground in understanding and influencing existing master narratives in the local populations. She served for six years in the United States Navy and is looking forward to serving again as a persuasive communication analyst upon her graduation from ISU in 2017.

Lieutenant Colonel Angelica Martinez is an active duty U.S. Army Officer and Strategist. Originally from Santa Fe, New Mexico, she is a doctoral student in George Mason University's School of Conflict Analysis and Resolution. Prior to doctoral studies she served in the U.S. Consulate in Jerusalem focused on the peace process, plans, and assessments. Her research interests include conflict transformation, narrative theory, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. She is a graduate of the Virginia Military Institute and holds a MA in Security Studies and International Negotiation and Conflict Resolution from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy and a MA in Military Arts and Science from the U.S. Army School of Advanced Military Studies. Prior to serving in Jerusalem, she worked in the Bureau of Conflict Stabilization Operations in the U.S. Department of State. In this capacity she served as a Political Officer and Election Observer in Senegal. She also worked on grassroots initiatives to curb violence in Honduras and Guatemala.

While serving as an Assistant Professor of International Relations at the U.S. Military Academy, Angelica taught core undergraduate courses as well as a course entitled, "Winning the Peace" designed to provide students with an opportunity to learn about different cultures, religions, and the challenges associated with conflict environments. She also taught cultural immersion courses, placing students in nongovernmental organizations in West Africa and Latin America as a way to understand local dynamics and challenges. Throughout her Army career, Angelica served in conflict environments in the Balkans, the Middle East, and West Africa. She also contributed to defense dialogues Indonesia and Poland, and most recently she taught a course on plans and strategy in Tbilisi, Georgia. She is the co-author of the book *Women's Roles in the Middle East and North Africa*.

Dr. Diane Maye is an Assistant Professor of Homeland Security and Global Conflict Studies at Embry- Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach, Florida, an affiliated faculty member at George Mason University's Center for Narrative and Conflict Analysis, and an External Research Associate with the U.S. Army War College.

She also served as a Visiting Professor of Political Science at John Cabot University in Rome, Italy. Diane earned a Ph.D. in Political Science from George Mason University in 2015. Her dissertation focuses on Iraqi political alignments and alliances after the fall of the Ba'ath party. Diane has taught undergraduate level courses in International Relations, Comparative Politics, American Foreign Policy, Counterterrorism Analysis, Beginner Arabic, and Political Islam. Her major research interests include: security issues in the Middle East and U.S. defense policy. Diane has published several scholarly works and has appeared in online and scholarly mediums including: *The Digest of Middle East Studies, The Journal of Terrorism Research, The National Interest, Radio Algeria, The Bridge, Business Insider, Small Wars Journal, Military One, In Homeland Security*, and the *New York Daily News*.

Prior to her work in academia, Diane served as an officer in the United States Air Force and worked in the defense industry. Upon leaving the Air Force, Diane worked for an Italian-U.S. defense company managing projects in foreign military sales, proposal development, and the execution of large international communications and physical security projects for military customers. During the Iraq war, she worked for Multi-National Force-Iraq in Baghdad, managing over 400 bilingual, bicultural advisors to the U.S. State Department and the U.S. Department of Defense. She has also done freelance business consulting for European, South American, and Middle Eastern clients interested in security and defense procurement. Diane is a member of the Military Writers Guild, an associate editor for *The Bridge*, and a member of the Terrorism Research Analysis Consortium. Diane is also a graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy and the Naval Postgraduate School.

P.M. "Pooch" Picucci is a Research Staff Member for the Joint Advanced Warfighting Division at the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA). Dr. Picucci is a political scientist by training having received a PhD from the University of Kansas and a Masters in National Security Studies from California State University: San Bernardino. Primary work for IDA has focused on the incorporation of human, social, cultural and behavioral factors into the military's operations and modeling & simulation (M&S) communities. Secondary portfolio elements range across COIN doctrine, biometrics, non-lethal weapon systems, service personnel diversity management, war gaming, and population influence operations.

Prior to coming to IDA, Dr. Picucci's work focused on computer-aided content analysis in the study of Islamic radicalism: applying operational code analysis to the leadership of al-Qaeda and Hamas. While at the University of Kansas he also assisted in the dictionary and coding development of various event data projects including the Integrated Crisis Early Warning System (ICEWS).

He is the author of articles on the challenges of integrating social science methods and, more broadly, socio-cultural knowledge and data into DOD modeling efforts; one of which was nominated for the 2013 Larry D. Welch Award. He has twice been nominated for the InterService / Industry Training, Simulation and Education Conference (I/ITSEC) Best Tutorial award.

Scott W. Ruston (Ph.D., Critical Studies, University of Southern California) is currently an Assistant Research Professor with Arizona State University[1]s Hugh Downs School of Human Communication, where he specializes in narrative theory and media studies. He combines academic and practical experience to intersect narrative, cultural studies and media technologies in the study of strategic communication and plans/policy development, and has guest lectured to both military and academic audiences on these topics. He is co-author of *Narrative Landmines: Rumors, Islamist Extremism and the Struggle for Strategic Influence* (Rutgers University Press, 2012), and is co-principal investigator of a major federal grant studying narrative and neuroscience. In addition, he is an expert on the

art, education and entertainment uses of mobile and interactive media and has published in *The Mobile Media Reader* (Peter Lang, 2012) and in journals such as *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies* and *The International Journal of Technology and Human Interaction*.

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 prior to their takeover of Afghanistan in 1995. Mubin became fully radicalized as a supporter of the global Jihadist culture, recruiting others and establishing his network in the extremist milieu. He was affected by the 9/11 attacks which forced to him reconsider his views. He then spent 2 years in Syria, continuing his study of Arabic and Islamic Studies. Rejecting terrorism from Islam, he would go through a period of full deradicalization.

Returning to Canada in 2004, he became an undercover operator with the Canadian Security Intelligence Service and worked several CLASSIFIED infiltration operations on the internet and on the ground. In late 2005, one of those intelligence files moved to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Integrated National Security Enforcement Team (INSET) for investigation. The "Toronto 18" terrorism case resulted in the conviction of 11 aspiring violent extremists after Mubin testified over 4 years and 5 legal hearings in the Ontario Superior Court of Justice.

He now has a Master of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism (MPICT) and is a PhD candidate in Psychological Sciences studying radicalization, deradicalization and violent extremism at the University of Liverpool, Tactical Decision Making Research Group. Mr. Shaikh is considered a SME (Subject Matter Expert) in radicalization, violent extremism and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) to: United Nations Center for Counter Terrorism, Interpol, Europol, Hedayah Center, U.S. Department of State - Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications, National Counterterrorism Center, U.S. DOD Strategic Multilayer Assessment Team, U.S. Central Command - Special Operations Command (as an expert on ISIS), International Special Training Center, NATO (Defence Against Terrorism) and many 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 file. He is also co-author of the acclaimed book, *Undercover Jihadi*.

Jason Spitaletta is a Major in the US Marine Corps Reserve and a psychologist with primary research experience in applied, experimental, political psychology and cognitive neuroscience as well as operational experience in Psychological Operations (PSYOP)/Military Information Support Operations (MISO) and intelligence assignments in the US Marine Corps as well as Joint and Special Operations communities. He has deployed to the Western Pacific, Iraq, and Uganda. In civilian life, he is a researcher at The Johns Hopkins University-Applied Physics Laboratory as well as an adjunct faculty member at National Intelligence University and the Daniel Morgan Academy. He holds a bachelors' degree in biochemistry from Franklin & Marshall College, a master's degree in human factors from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University and a master's degree and Ph.D. in applied experimental psychology from and Catholic University. He also holds a graduate certificate from Stanford University's Summer Institute for Political Psychology.

Major Patrick B. Taylor graduated from the University of Maine in 2004 and was commissioned a 2LT in the U.S. Army as an Air Defense Artillery (ADA) Officer.

In 2004, he graduated the ADA Officer Basic Course and was assigned to Bravo battery 2nd Battalion 44th Air Defense Artillery, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) as a Stinger/Avenger Platoon Leader. In early 2005, he deployed to Iraq in support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM and redeployed in 2006. During his tour in Iraq, Major Taylor was approved for a branch transfer to the Military Intelligence corps. Upon his return to Fort Campbell he served as the assistant battalion intelligence officer before moving to 7th Squadron 17th US Cavalry (AIR) of the 159th Aviation Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault)

Major Taylor became the Squadron Intelligence officer, and deployed with his squadron to El Centro, California in support of Joint Task Force-North in 2008. While deployed, he assisted US Border Patrol intelligence units, and helped develop an integrated intelligence support plan which was key in the success of the squadron's mission.

Major Taylor was selected by the ARSOF board to become a Psychological Operations Officer in 2007, then attended the Maneuver Captains Career Course in 2008. He graduated from the Psychological Operations Qualification Course in November 2009 as a 37A and was assigned to A Co., 8th Battalion, 4th Psychological Operations Group (Airborne) as a Detachment Commander for detachment 8A30. He deployed his detachment to Pakistan from 2010 to 2011 in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, then redeployed and was assigned as the detachment commander for 8A20. In 2011, he deployed to Egypt to support US Embassy Cairo. Upon his return, he then transitioned to the 4th Military Information Support Group and served as the Future and Current Operations officer. He then deployed in support of the Joint Information Support Task Force from July 2013 to February 2014 and served as the Special Operations Command-Central Liaison to US Central Command's Web Operations program. Upon graduation from the US Army Command and General Staff College, MAJ Taylor was then assigned to 7th Psychological Operations Battalion as the Operations officer. He is currently the Executive officer of 7th Psychological Operations battalion (Airborne).

Major Taylor's military schooling includes Airborne School, Unconventional Warfare Operational Design Course, Psychological Operations Qualification Course, Military Deception Planner Course, Joint and Army Cyber Planner Courses, Information Environment Advanced Analysis Course, Mobile Force Protection Course, Advanced Pistol Marksmanship Course, Advanced Rifle Marksmanship Course, US Army Combatives Program, Air Defense Artillery Officers Basic Course, Maneuver Captains Career Course and US Army Command and General Staff College.

His awards and decorations include the Bronze Star Medal, the Meritorious Service Medal, the Army Commendation Medal with V device, the Army Commendation Medal with four OLCs, the Army Achievement Medal with three OLCs, the Joint Meritorious Unit Citation, the Meritorious Unit Citation with one Oak leaf, the National Defense Service Medal, the Iraq Campaign Medal, the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, the Humanitarian Service Medal, the Army Service Ribbon, the

Overseas Service Ribbon with numeral 2, the Combat Action Badge, the Parachutist Badge, and the German, and Italian Army Parachutist Badges.

Major Taylor currently resides in Sanford, NC. He is married to the former Sumer Leigh Wyatt of Princeton, Ky.

Peter Welby is the Managing Editor for the Centre on Religion & Geopolitics. He joined the Foundation in 2013. Prior to that, he spent two years in Egypt where he studied Arabic. He has also lived in Yemen. He has written for Prospect, Newsweek, the Spectator, the Washington Examiner and the Independent, has appeared on the Huffington Post web channel HuffPost Live, and his research has been featured in the Daily Beast.

Amy Zalman

I am a global security futurist dedicated to leveraging the power of storytelling to accelerate innovation by leaders and organizations. I own the Strategic Narrative Institute LLC, which provides consulting services and training to leaders and institutions seeking to strengthen their ability to understand, manage and leverage future change. I am also currently also an adjunct Professor of Strategic Foresight Methods at Georgetown University in Washington DC, and a member of the Board of Visitors of Air University and a Board Director of the Council on Emerging National Security Affairs.

I specialize in helping others understand and address the impacts of change in the global security environment, such as shifts in global balance of power, and similar mega-trends, as well as on the critical roles of cultures, communication, narrative and myth in generating change and innovation.

These are frequent topics in my role as a keynote and public speaker, and as an author. In the past several years, my briefings have included the Atlantic Council Global Strategy Forum, Forbes Mexico Summit, KBS Korea Future Forum, the G20 Young Entrepreneurs' Alliance Summit in Istanbul, Global Reporting Initiative Corporate Sustainability Trends, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, US Congress, USSOCOM, TEDx, and others.

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.