SMA CENTCOM Reach-back Reports

Part 1: Messaging
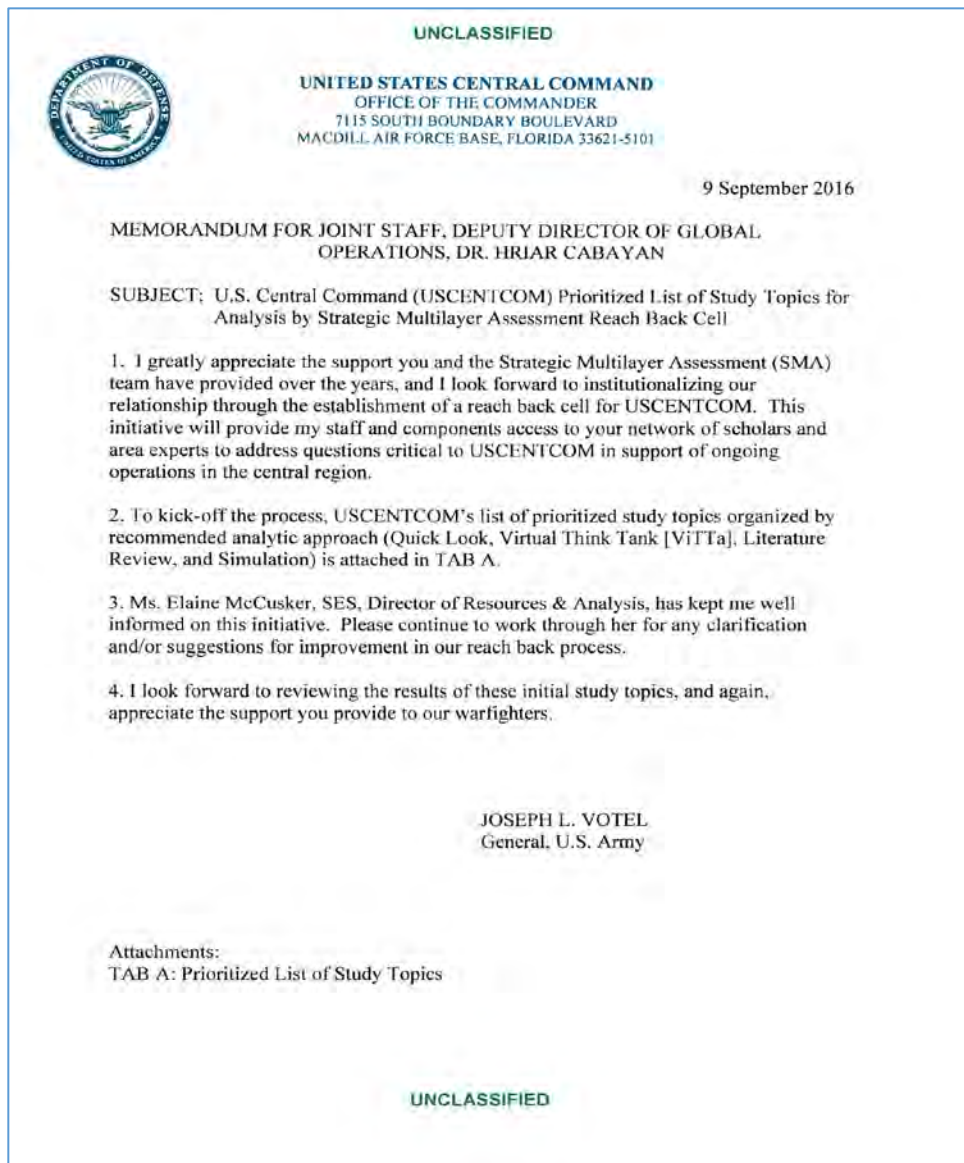
2: The fight against ISIL

3: Encouraging regional stability

4: Regional actor interests and motivations

5: Sources of extremism

6: ISIL support and recruitment

7: USG bureaucratic requirements

8: Post-ISIS Governance

9: Coalition Views

This is Part 1 of a 9 part series of SMA Reach back responses to questions posed by USCENTCOM. Each report contains responses to multiple questions grouped by theme.

13 January 2017

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

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

UNCLASSIFIED

UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND
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9 September 2016

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

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

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

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

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

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

JOSEPH L. VOTEL
General, U.S. Army

Attachments:
TAB A: Prioritized List of Study Topics

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Part 1: Consolidated Responses to CENTCOM questions based on Messaging

Responses were submitted to the following CENTCOM Questions:

What are the predominant and secondary means by which both large (macro-globally outside the CJOA, such as European, North African and Arabian Peninsula) and more targeted (micro- such as ISIL-held Iraq) audiences receive ISIL propaganda?
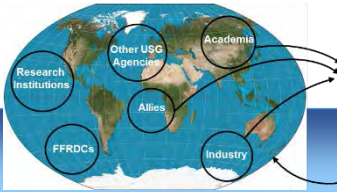
Executive Summary – Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI

The contributors to this Quick Look demonstrate clearly the breadth and diversity of the ISIL media and communication juggernaut identifying a wide variety of targeted audiences, media forms and distribution mediums for both local and global audiences. These are summarized in the graphic on page 3 below.

Smartphones are game-changers; the predominant distribution medium globally and locally

There was general acknowledgement among the experts that wide-spread, public access to smartphones has been both a game-changer for both the distribution <u>and</u> production of propaganda materials. Smart devices with web access were also cited by many as the predominant medium by which both global and local audiences receive ISIL propaganda and the catalyst for the fading of former distinctions between means used to communicate with "macro" versus "micro" audiences. Even ISIL messages primarily intended for local audiences (e.g., weekly newsletters) do not stay local; they are digitized and may be found on the internet and thus are available globally.

Chris Meserole a fellow at the Brookings Institution argues that ISIL communicators have benefitted from two particular capabilities that smart devices put in the hands of users: 1) easy access to impactful video and other visual content has enabled ISIL to transmit highly emotive and pertinent content in near real-time; and 2) users' ability to produce and distribute their own quality images has altered the processes of recruitment and identity formation by making them more interactive: group members who formerly would have been information consumers only, now can readily add their voices to the group narrative by serving as information producers as well.[1]

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[1] It is important to note that although there is clearly increased local agency regarding production of ISIL communications, the teams from the University of Nebraska (Ligon et al), UNC-Chapel Hill (Dauber and Robinson) as well as Adam Azoff (Tesla Government) and Jacob Olidort (Washington Institute) find substantial evidence of centralized ISIL strategic control of message content. However, once content is approved, a good argument can be made that dissemination of ISIL messages and even video production is localized and decentralized. The result is a complex and "robust cyber presence."

> **Breaking News**
> Web Monitoring Team at University of Nebraska Omaha (UNO) - Indication of Modification to ISIL Messaging Capability
>
> Last week (09/29/16) the UNO team discovered indication of ISIL moving to **ZeroNet** "in place of traditional platforms (e.g., Telegram) for peer-to-peer messaging that is robust to DDOS attack/other counter measures." Ansar Al-Khilafah announced its ZeroNet Edition as a "permanent backup and uncensorable version of this site … [which] cannot be deleted as it is hosted by everyone who visits it…" According to Dr. Gina Ligon (UNO), use of ZeroNet "solves a lot of problems for Da'esh."

Cyber platforms are critical but consider Twitter and YouTube as starting points

Although Twitter, and YouTube are still the most commonly used platforms, and especially Twitter can be used for specifically-targeted, micro audiences, Gina Ligon who leads a research team at the University of Nebraska Omaha cautions that ISIL's cyber footprint extends well beyond these "conventional" platforms which should be considered "mere starting points for its multi-faceted, complex cyber profile." (See the Ligon *et al* below for ranks of the top cyber domains ISIL used between August 2015 and August 2016.) Assem Nasr (Indiana-Purdue University) questions the effectiveness of cyber platforms in delivering propaganda in Syria and Iraq however. Based on fieldwork in Lebanon, Nasr finds that people have significant reservations about the credibility of any media messaging, and even about the personal security risks of using social media themselves. He argues that the communication challenges in the Arab world push people to tend to rely on networks of family, friends, neighbors, "trusted acquaintances in high places (army officers, deputies... etc.)" and word-of-mouth communication for information about local issues. These social networks are extremely important communication channels that may be augmented but are not superseded by social media platforms such as Twitter.

Static or moving images – key to evoking emotion -- characterize all forms of ISIL propaganda
The most distinctive characteristic of ISIL propaganda is its high quality visual content which are easier to distribute than large texts. It is also easier to evoke emotion with an image than with text. Arguably, the most prolific and widely-distributed propaganda are ISIL's colorful print and digital magazines (e.g., *Dabiq, Rumiyah* in English, *Constantinople* in Turkish *Fatihin* in Malay, etc.) It is well known that ISIL videos are extremely pervasive and an important form of ISIL messaging. However, multiple experts noted that the sophistication and production value of today's videos are a far cry from the 2014-era recordings of beheadings that horrified the world.

Not everything is digitized: solely local propaganda forms and mediums
Audiences both in and outside ISIL controlled areas and those outside the region receive ISIL propaganda products. However, there are some mediums and forms of propaganda which can only be delivered in areas in which ISIL maintains strict control of information and in which it can operate more overtly. For example, Zana Gulmohamad (Sheffield U., UK) and other experts note that ISIL has printed ISIL education materials and changed school curricula in its areas, it holds competitions and events to recruit young people, and polices strict adherence to shar'ia law (*hisba*). It is in this context that Alexis Everington (Madison-Springfield) argues, one of the most impactful forms of ISIL messaging remains its visible actions (of course, the perceived actions of Iraqi government forces, Assad forces, etc. and the US/West are likely equally, if indirectly, impactful). Second in importance are "media engagement centers such as screens depicting ISIL videos as well as mobile media trucks."   Outside ISIL controlled areas, NDU Professor of International Security Studies Hassan Abbas, cites "the word of mouth" including "gossip in traditional tea/food places" as still the primary means by which local audiences receive ISIL propaganda, and many experts agree that the content is "largely influenced by religious leadership."

What happens next?

Finally, Adam Azoff of Tesla Government offers a caution regarding what happens when ISIL-trained, foreign media operators are pushed out of all ISIL-held areas: as these fighters relocate we should be prepared for the possibility that they would "continue their 'cyber jihad' abroad and develop underground media cells to continue messaging their propaganda. Though it will be more difficult to send out as large a volume of high-quality releases, it is not likely that ISIL will return to the amateurish and locally-focused media operations of 2011."

Contributors: Gina Scott Ligon, Doug Derrick, Sam Church and Michael Logan (University of Nebraska Omaha), Jacob Olidort (The Washington Institute), Hassan Abbas (National Defense University), Alexis Everington (Madison-Springfield, Inc.), Cori E. Dauber and Mark D. Robinson (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), Neil Johnson (University of Miami), Chris Meserole (Brookings Institution), David B. Des Roches (NDU), Adam Azoff (Tesla Government), Zana Gulmohamad (Sheffield University, UK) Gary Warner (University of Alabama at Birmingham), Assem Nasr (Indiana U. Purdue U., Fort Wayne)

Editor: Allison Astorino-Courtois (NSI)

SMA Reach back QL 5 Summary: ISIL Propaganda Audiences, Forms and Mediums

Global

Audiences	Forms	Mediums
Kids (next-gen jihadis)	Magazines in multiple languages*	Cyber media (YouTube, Twitter, Telegram, Vkontakte) in multiple languages
Prospective recruits	Religious/jihadi manuals and commentaries*	Multi-lingual published monographs and pamphlets*
Current fighters	Multi-lingual published monographs and pamphlets*	Visible actions (e.g., executions)
Adherents	Visible actions (e.g., executions)	Available and ISIL-produced Smart-phone apps
Students	Videos*	
Universal youth culture	Non ISIL-produced indirect means (e.g., public perception of West's war on Sunni; media sensationalism)	

Local Non-ISIL Control

Audiences	Forms	Mediums
Kids (next-gen jihadis)	Magazines in multiple languages*	Cyber media (YouTube, Twitter, Telegram, Vkontakte) in multiple languages
Prospective recruits	Religious/jihadi manuals and commentaries*	Multi-lingual published monographs and pamphlets*
Adherents	Textbooks and recordings for kids and students	Visible actions (e.g., executions)
Non-ISIL controlled local population	Visible actions (e.g., executions)	Available and ISIL-produced Smartphone apps
Students	Videos*	Gossip and word-of-mouth
Youth culture	ISIL-produced smartphone apps*	
	Indirect means	

Local Under ISIL Control

Audiences	Forms	Mediums
Kids (next-gen jihadis)	Weekly newsletters*	ISIL controls social and e-media in controlled areas
Prospective recruits	Religious/jihadi manuals and commentaries*	Visible actions (e.g., executions)
Current Fighters	Textbooks and recordings for kids and students	Word-of-mouth
Adherents	Instructional pamphlets for fighters	Available and ISIL-produced Smartphone apps
ISIL controlled local population	Visible actions (e.g., executions)	Video screens at media engagement centers
Students	ISIL-produced smartphone apps*	Mobile media trucks
Youth culture	Competitions and Events	Indirect means
	Indirect means	

*also available online

Da'esh Cyber Domains from August 2015 – August 2016

Gina Scott Ligon, Ph.D., Doug Derrick, Ph.D., Sam Church, and Michael Logan, M.A.

University of Nebraska Omaha

Daesh is the most prolific violent extremist group on social media, but their cyber footprint is much more complex than researchers of solely mainstream services such as Twitter imply. Their cyber profile involves pushing content into open infrastructures to disseminate information, such as ideological messages, propaganda, and training instructions. To date, much of the research on Daesh communication has focused on what is publicly available through speeches and videos released by al Hayat Media and Daesh Twitter users (Ingram, 2014; Veilleuz-Lepage, 2014; Zelin, 2015). A notable exception is the important monograph from Saltman and Winter (2014), where the authors identified complex cyber capabilities such as 1) centralized propaganda, 2) global dissemination of threats, 3) custom app development, and 4) decentralized messaging. Given acknowledgement of Daesh's prolific use of a variety of Internet Communication Technology (ICT), it follows that each aspect they use plays a role in sharing the story Daesh wishes to convey.

An organization's online presence plays a significant role in communicating with a global audience (Ligon, Derrick, & Harms, 2015). In regards to Daesh and its messaging campaigns, popular platforms of more conventional ICT—like Twitter or Facebook—are mere starting points for its multi-faceted, complex cyber profile. Thus, the purpose of this effort is to better understand the nature of the cyber channels and domains most used in the messaging of Daesh, particularly as it manifests through social media connected transient web pages to an English-speaking audience. The organization's end goal vis-à-vis their online marketing campaign is complex and is used to "attract potential recruits, raise money, promote the image of the organization, or just spread fear among its enemies" (Barrett, 2014: 53). While there is some evidence that a centralized authority approves messaging prior to it being disseminated via more conventional channels (e.g., Dabiq, Al-Hayat Media), the cyber footprint of Daesh is more complex. This overall strategic effort is reportedly overseen by a skilled media council (Lister, 2014). However, the deployment and dissemination of Daesh messages is arguably decentralized once content is generated, resulting in a robust cyber presence.

While the Daesh strategic and tactical cyber profiles are unquestionably unprecedented (Zelin, 2015), questions remain as to what we can glean about the organization from its messaging. The dataset used for assessing Daesh's online presence was unique to this project and comprised of 4.5 million tweets and 16,000 attached transient webpage articles posted by Daesh followers, members, and sympathizers. The research methodology and subsequent data analysis provides insight into the messaging dynamics of Daesh. We conclude the study with a discussion of limitations of our method, implications of our findings, and recommendations for future research.

Method

We collected this data by developing a custom program that follows the method outlined in figure 1 (Derrick et al, 2016). First, our program utilized the Twitter API to follow and log tweets posted by the hacktivist group Anonymous. For the present effort we did not evaluate the "Tweets," but used them as launching points to the open architectures where richer content is housed. During much of this collection, Anonymous posted Daesh members' Twitter handles approximately one every two minutes since August 2014. As stated previously, the goal is to understand the strategic messaging from the deployment 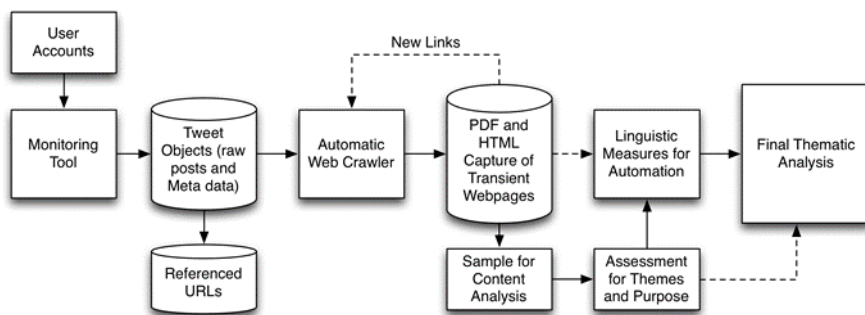of messages by large grassroots followers. Thus, our program compressed a list of Daesh-affiliated accounts identified in the posted content. From that list, our system utilized the Twitter API to download a sample of the latest tweets from each Daesh-affiliated account.

Figure 1. Method for Capturing Transient Webpages

Tweets were sorted into various components (e.g., web addresses and links, hashtags, mentions) to be analyzed. Our software searched for links within tweets referencing anonymous posting services for open content-publishing transient webpages (e.g., JustPaste.it, dump.to). Next, our software automatically crawled to the referenced webpage and captured both PDF and HTML versions of the actual transient webpages. From these pages, the program identified any links to other transient webpages/open architectures in the online posting. The software continued to download and analyze the content until all possible transient links had been found and captured. To date, this process has produced over 4,500,000 tweets, 1,589,623 URLs, and 16,000 transient web pages.[2]

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[2] This is the *Social Media for Influence and Radicalization (SMIR) Dataset* (Church, 2016).

Results

Top 25 Channels Utilized by Daesh between August 30, 2015 - August 30, 2016
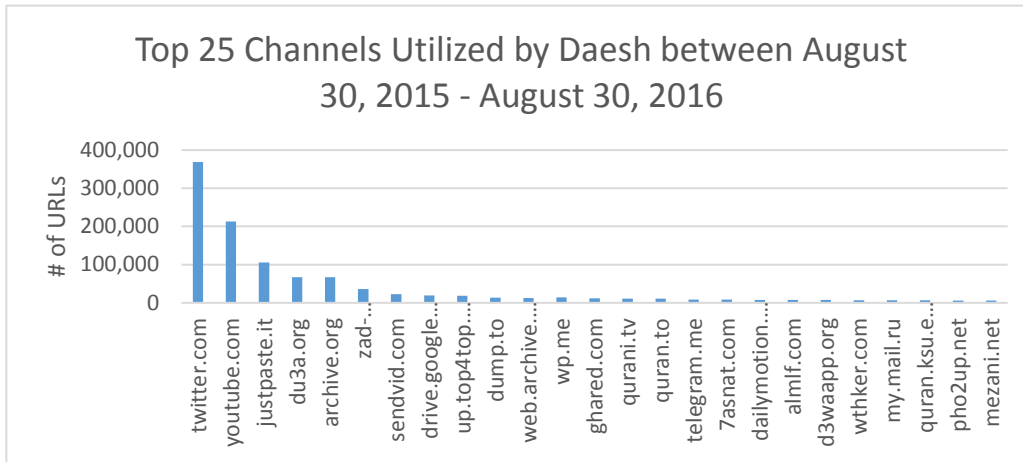
We ranked the top domains used by Daesh between August 2015 and September 2016. Results indicated that Twitter, identified as the "jumping off point" for much of the persuasive content we find on non-indexed, transient webpages, is the most oft used. However, a variety of other types of domains are also used by Daesh to disseminate messaging, as indicated in Tables 1 and 2.[3]

Table 1. Rank Order Daesh Communication Channels 2015-2016

Rank	Domain	*f*	%
1	twitter.com	368,652	23.19%
3	youtube.com	213,092	13.41%
2	justpaste.it	105,802	6.66%
4	du3a.org	67,380	4.24%
5	archive.org	67,298	4.23%
6	zad-muslim.com	36,519	2.30%
7	sendvid.com	22,776	1.43%
8	drive.google.com	19,143	1.20%
11	up.top4top.net	18,965	1.19%
9	dump.to	13,394	0.84%
10	web.archive.org	12,904	0.81%

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[3] A more detailed analysis of monthly usage could be conducted upon request.

21	wp.me	14,280	0.90%
12	ghared.com	11,496	0.72%
13	qurani.tv	10,811	0.68%
14	quran.to	10,638	0.67%
15	telegram.me	8,726	0.55%
16	7asnat.com	8,624	0.54%
17	dailymotion.com	7,970	0.50%
18	almlf.com	7,958	0.50%
19	d3waapp.org	7,774	0.49%
20	wthker.com	7,067	0.44%
22	my.mail.ru	6,850	0.43%
23	quran.ksu.edu.sa	6,774	0.43%
24	pho2up.net	6,000	0.38%
25	mezani.net	5,712	0.36%
		1,066,605	67.10%

Number of total URLs in SMIR: 1,589,623

How ISIL's Audiences Receive Propaganda

Jacob Olidort, Ph.D.

Soref Fellow, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

ISIL disseminates its propaganda to both large and more targeted audiences, tailoring content, language and even format to both the different audiences and its own priorities. The most widely known and broadest is its propaganda magazines, most famously the English-language *Dabiq* as well as the new magazine *Rumiyah*, and the less frequently published Russian-language *Istok*, French-language *Dar al-Islam*, Turkish language *Constantinople,* and Malay-language *al-Fatihin*. These magazines, along with videos in these and other languages (including Mandarin, German, Spanish and others), are the most widely distributed and commonly known of the group's propaganda materials, which are released through social media and Telegram. Typically, these publications are aimed at audiences who communicate in those languages, and would often tailor the messaging to fit where those audiences may be. So, for example, they are targeting mainstream American Muslim leaders in the English-language *Dabiq*, citing sexual promiscuity and homosexuality as debauchery in the French-language *Dar al-Islam*, and the like.

Beside this macro level, the group has various targeted types of propaganda and outreach to its prospective support base. For example, media reporting has revealed that ISIL operatives engage via Twitter directly with estranged individuals in the West, checking in on them regularly and moving them to gradually join ISIL's cause. The group also uses and develops mobile apps to disseminate its propaganda, such as its Arabic alphabet and Islamic chants apps for children.

Within ISIL's territory (and perhaps beyond, as these are also available online), the group releases a weekly newsletter reporting on its territorial progress, citing casualties and costs incurred on both ISIL's side and those of the counter-ISIL coalition, and featuring articles covering special interest topics (women who joined ISIL, obituaries of ideologies, etc.). This is also likely the area in which the aforementioned mobile phone apps are mostly used.

Finally, ISIL has a prolific publication industry – likely both circulated within ISIL controlled territory and online, as these have been digitized. While little information can be confirmed about ISIL's publishing house Maktabat al-Himma ("Zeal Press") based on open sources, my recent report – the first systematic review of the nearly 150 Arabic language books and pamphlets produced through this vehicle since June 2014[4]

> "ISIL's publishing house Maktabat al-Himma ("Zeal Press") ... possibly affiliated with ISIL's Research and Fatwa-Issuing Committee, has a number of sub-divisions: research and scholarly studies (for longer manuals of religious guidance and commentaries), "Whispers in the ear of the fighter" (pamphlets for its fighters), and its series of textbooks (released in October 2015)."

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[4] Jacob Olidort, *Inside the Caliphate's Classroom: Textbooks, Guidance Literature and Indoctrination Methods of the Islamic State* (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2016), http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/inside-the-caliphates-classroom ; See also idem, "The Islamic State's 'Homo Jihadus,'" *Lawfare*, 18 September 2016, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-islamic-states-homo-jihadus

– offers a number of observations about its operations and organizational structure, as well as conjecture about location. The publishing house, possibly affiliated with ISIL's Research and Fatwa-Issuing Committee, has a number of sub-divisions: research and scholarly studies (for longer manuals of religious guidance and commentaries), "Whispers in the ear of the fighter" (pamphlets for its fighters), and its series of textbooks (released in October 2015). Many of these publications bear the imprimatur of the publishing house and have introductory remarks from the editorial board, occasionally signed by the "head of the editorial board." Given the deep concern for controlling ideas, it is reasonable to suspect that this chain of command may report to senior levels of ISIL leadership. If accurate, based on this assumption one can also suspect that the publishing house – if it does exist as a physical entity – is based in or around Raqqa (if ISIL leadership is based there), or, at the very least, maintains direct and regular lines of communication with ISIL leadership.

In terms of content (discussed in depth in the aforementioned report), these publications vary widely and appear regularly. Over the last few months, as the group continued to face challenges on the battlefield it published about one commentary on theology per month. Their **commentaries** are largely editions of works by Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1792), the "founding father" of Saudi Arabia's religious tradition (Wahhabism), with the aim of validating ISIL's claim that Saudi Arabia has betrayed its Islamic roots. In addition, the group has published manuals on prayer, fasting, charity, slavery; shorter pamphlets on aspects of the group's jihadist priorities and its control of Islam (this includes topics such as men's beard length, martyrdom, loyalty to ISIL rather than to national identity, and the woman's head covering); and its textbooks. The latter include not only books on Salafi/Wahhabi principles of law and theology, but also textbooks on mathematics, geography, history, literature, computer programming and physical fitness – all of which interweave ISIL's violence and religious intolerance into the kind of basic knowledge and skills they instill in children. Examples of this include a recent 80-page book of exercises to teach children how to write the letters of the Arabic alphabet, which include images of the ISIL flag and guns in between chapters. Another example is physical fitness – which includes not only chapters on exercises and stretches, but also those on how to identify, load, assemble and fire various weapons. All told the book publishing industry – which continues as the group loses territory (suggesting ISIL leadership's continued investment in this area) – reflects the most coherent and systematic presentation of what it seeks to give over to what it calls "a new jihadi generation," that the group hopes will outlive its current territorial pursuits.

Recommendation

Once books are published it is of course difficult to stop their dissemination. However, the U.S. government can significantly disrupt these activities by going after the media (and the channels) rather than the message directly. This includes targeting the publishing house's base of operations, interdicting where its payload is distributed and how it is received, and helping fill infrastructure and education gaps within ISIL controlled territory as the group withdraws from its strongholds. Pending U.S. government resources, there may even be opportunities for sowing anxiety into the ideological message of the group by engaging in a coordinated and consistent counter-propaganda campaign in which imitation ISIL propaganda could be disseminated – further causing distrust both internally within the ranks of ISIL leadership as well as between it and prospective recruits.

Comments on How Audiences Receive ISIL propaganda

Hassan Abbas
Professor of International Security Studies and Chair of Regional and Analytical Studies
College of International Security Affairs, National Defense University

In the directly controlled ISIL areas, ISIL's propaganda machine influences all mediums of communication - social and electronic (where functioning) and especially through mosques. However, in the Sunni majority areas (not under ISIL control), ISIL propaganda happens primarily by word of mouth including gossip. To add, the international marketing of ISIL is largely being conducted via social media and ISIL magazine Dabiq. Within Iraq, however, my travels from Baghdad towards Samara (2015-2016) convinced me that local Sunnis had not even heard about Dabiq magazine. For them tribal and local networks are the source of all news - both political and ISIL related.

Comments on How Audiences Receive ISIL propaganda

Alexis Everington
Madison-Springfield, Inc.

It is important to note that propaganda does not cause extremism, it catalyzes already existing propensities. As such, it is the fuel added to the fire but not the fire itself. With this understanding the following brief observations can be made.

In-country audiences are most impacted by visible actions taken by ISIL (e.g. those in Raqqa see the executions that take place). In second place are media engagement centers such as screens depicting ISIL videos as well as mobile media trucks. In third place is religious messaging at mosques and other religious centers and events. Fourthly there are posters and leaflets that disseminate pro-ISIL messages. Finally, there are competitions and events held to recruit the youth.

Out-of-country audiences are largely reliant on face-to-face communication with an individual that introduces and/or grooms them, as well as supportive material (typically videos and chats online). In a few cases, individuals are also given reading material by the 'groomer'. Finally, it should be noted that some communication contributes to the pro-ISIL effort, even indirectly. For example, the perception that the international community was doing nothing to help Sunnis oppressed by the Assad regime, drew concerned foreign fighters to their ranks. Likewise, media sensationalist coverage of 'terrorism' can convince those seeking notoriety that joining ISIL is one way to achieve it.

Comments on Video Propaganda

Cori E. Dauber, Professor of Communication

Mark D. Robinson, Director, Multimedia Labs

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

The primary means by which propaganda is distributed, both inside and outside the CJOA, is visual, though distribution networks, obviously, are different. Most powerfully, and of most particular interest are the moving images (video) that are employed. Last year ISIL began representing its videos as being the products of a newly decentralized system, with multiple Wiliyats having their own production centers, but it should be noted that there is a centralized visual aesthetic. It is possible that there is centralized control and it is possible that this is an artifact of each of these centers having been started by members of a single original core team all of whom originally worked and were trained together, but either way there is a definite and identifiable "look" to these materials. Most obviously, line-up the opening graphics introducing each of the Wiliyats and [you will see that] there is no question this is the case.

There is a very conscious harnessing of technical, compositional elements of video production for rhetorical, persuasive purposes. To a trained eye this is done so consistently, and in such a sophisticated way, that there is no doubt it is being done with intent. Lighting, editing, camera angles, special effects, all are being incorporated in very savvy ways.

> "There is a very conscious harnessing of technical, compositional elements of video production for rhetorical, persuasive purposes. …ISIL videos do not just mimic First Person Shooter games, they copy specific scenes…"

Direct appeals are being made to a universal, trans-national youth culture. No matter what country they are from, young people today watch, to an extent, the same movies, and play the same video games. ISIL videos do not just mimic First Person Shooter games, they copy specific scenes with such accuracy that young people who play these games can immediately identify the specific scene from the specific game. Lining up the scene from the [ISIL] video against the scene from the game there can be no doubt of the intent to pull from the game. By the same token, they use memes associated with Marvel Superhero comics and movies and now, in fact, have in at least one case simply ripped a CGI image straight from one of these films. (In the video made to celebrate last November's Paris attacks, the central image, repeated several times, is a digital image of the Eiffel Tower, bombed, collapsing into the Seine. They did not render this themselves, they ripped it from *G.I. Joe, Rise of the Cobra*, which grossed more than $300 million worldwide.)

> "… in the visual realm a focus solely on ISIL products is a mistake, that despite the fact that ISIL was initially a generation ahead of other [terrorist] groups, several groups have been gaining ground almost by the month."

On a general note, we have been warning for some time that in the visual realm a focus solely on ISIL products is a mistake, that despite the fact that ISIL was initially a generation ahead of other [terrorist] groups, several have been gaining ground almost by the month. We believe there

are several who have now caught up, if inconsistently so. This is extremely dangerous for the United States and our allies.[5]

Comments on How Audiences Receive ISIL propaganda

Chris Meserole
Brookings Institution

I would define the smartphone as the primary means of global dissemination of propaganda, with the secondary means being content-specific apps such as Telegram (for operational or targeted information) or even Twitter (for general information, though less so now).

I would also push back a bit against the question. We continue to view propaganda as something that is "received." However, I would argue ISIL is to AQ what Snapchat is to CNN: they figured out that if the medium is the message, then the smartphone's "message" was as much about what you produced as what you consumed. I don't think it's a coincidence that AQ adopted a "whitelabeling" strategy at the same time that smartphones gained global adoption. Their brand and operational structure were built in and optimized for a global media environment that was push only, and thus had to de-emphasize the brand once it was clear they could not adapt to new patterns of propaganda consumption. By contrast, ISIL had the

> "…Without the video the attack was pointless; and without the smartphone, they could not easily make and disseminate the video. The point of the attacks was to participate in the propaganda even more than it was to achieve political ends.."

advantage of spinning up its media operations at the same time that the smartphone reached global scale. As a result they were able to optimize their message and strategy for global participation. Note that many of the attackers this summer produced smartphone videos beforehand. Without the video the attack was pointless; and without the smartphone, they could not easily make and disseminate the video. The point of the attacks was to participate in the propaganda even more than it was to achieve political ends. Obviously there are many other factors that have contributed to ISIL's success. But among analysts I think the form factor of the propaganda itself has gone underappreciated.

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[5] See for example "The Wind of Rage," from Harakat al Sham al Islamiyyah, http://jihadology.net/2016/09/10/new-video-message-from-%e1%b8%a5arakat-a%e1%b8%a5rar-al-sham-al-islamiyyah-the-wind-of-rage/ or "Story of the Life of Abu Basir al Hindi," from Jabhat al Nusrah, http://jihadology.net/2016/03/25/new-video-message-from-jabhat-al-nu%E1%B9%A3rah-story-of-the-life-of-abu-basir-al-hindi/

Comments on How Audiences Receive ISIL propaganda

Neil F. Johnson

Professor, Physics Department, University of Miami, FL

Our analysis of online media shows that the social media platform VKontakte (VK.com < Caution-http://vk.com >)[6] has been a predominant means by which propaganda in this region, and for this cause, has not only been shared, but most importantly also discussed and through which aggressive jihadi (and anti-U.S.) narratives develop. VKontakte online groups provide a much richer and more powerful environment for developing narratives and exchanging propaganda and operational details than other social media like Twitter, where individuals tend to be follow other individuals and the amount of text is limited. Members of these online VKontakte groups interchange ideas, propaganda, operational manuals, videos etc. and can do so even with a cellphone simply because VKontakte (like Facebook) has a mobile app, and so links to group updates can be shared through texts and Twitter through most phones. The groups can also pull in new members that way. The advantage pf these online groups for them is that, just as on Facebook, members of an online group can manipulate their footprint online, making themselves 'invisible' using the public/secret setting in the settings online, and also they can change their names, operate multiple languages, and also — if in danger of being shut down by moderators — they then can jump to other groups with different ID's, and they simply alert their members to this. So they remain essentially intact.

> "… online groups provide a much richer and more powerful environment for developing narratives and exchanging propaganda and operational details than other social media like Twitter …"

Over the 2015 period in which we studied them, we found approximately 200 of these online groups involving just over 100,000 members that were actively discussing and propagating pro-ISIS propaganda, including videos, PDF files etc. They range in size from 10 to several thousands. In 2016, this number has started falling slowly, but we are unsure if this is because they are becoming smarter in avoiding detection or because some are migrating to other media. For example, we have learned that on Telegram, they have started forming 'super-users' which are a kind of 'lite' equivalent of these VKontakte groups — but with the more limited tools that Telegram offers compared to VKnotakte. We believe Telegram is fully encrypted meaning that it is more secretive for them — but in the end they want to attract new members so it is in their interests to keep a presence on a platform like VKontakte.

VKontakte is a dominant social media platform in the area of and has more than 350 million users worldwide — though a majority are in the area of interest in the question and so the dominant languages in these groups tends to be Russian and Arabic. Its headquarters are in Russia and it is a company, like Facebook. Interestingly, we found that members of these online VKontakte groups sometimes denote themselves as 'fighters' (in Russian or Arabic) and they seem to attract a lot of people around them online when they do so. From what they post, there is reason to believe that they are telling the truth when they say they are fighters on the ground.

So VKontakte is an ideal site for them — it is multilingual, but predominantly Russian which targets students etc. and hence potential recruits in that entire area, and has the flexibility to be a virtual meeting place for exchanging and discussing ideas and potential events, in a way that something more 'lite' like

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[6] VKontakte is a copy of Facebook which is very popular in the geographical region of interest. Like Facebook, it allows 'communities/groups' to be set up by an administrator, and then pull in members online.

Twitter does not. Also given the penetration of the Internet and availability on smartphones, it is readily available. Our current research shows that, perhaps importantly, there are 2 broad classes of VKontakte groups — those that are stimulated primarily by news events and those that are (for want of a better word) spiritual. Some individuals online pass through many of these groups, as if they are looking for something, while others go in and sit more or less indefinitely in one (until it is shutdown which often happens, in which case they then jump to another). We are currently analyzing these individual user pathways in detail.

So in summary, whereas others have focused on Twitter, the important point we feel is that VKontakte (or something like it, akin to Facebook) provides a very flexible medium through which they can actually develop capability and intent, as opposed to simply reporting activity and exchanging short slogans and soundbites.

ISIL Propaganda

David B. Des Roches[7]

Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies (NESA), National Defense University

ISIL's reach and ability to attract recruits and inspire/direct action around the world is a disturbing development. It is not, however, unique. A major trait of ISIL's rise is its adroit use of new media – particularly internet based wide spread media sites and various instant messaging / communications platforms – to attract, inspire and direct recruits to its cause.

> "ISIL's ability to leverage new technology has caught the rest of the world flat-footed."

ISIL is not the first ideological movement to globally inspire decentralized and undirected acts of violence. The anarchist movement of the late 1800s –early 1900s claimed this distinction, together with the credit for the assassination of several European rulers and an American president. What sets ISIL apart is the use of social media to develop and spread its propaganda. As with any effective propaganda method, the diffusion of propaganda varies depending upon the audience. This paper will examine several ISIL audiences and discuss the propaganda methods used to identify, inspire and direct them.

Key Characteristics of ISIL Propaganda

ISIL's ability to leverage new technology has caught the rest of the world flat-footed. ISIL has proven to be a nimble organization which has adapted to and applied technology long before the governments who oppose it. The following are the major characteristics of ISIL propaganda's leveraging of new media.

1. Slick production values. ISIL publication and videos are produced using new, relatively cheap software which allows production values similar to large scale commercial magazines and network film production. One recent ISIL execution video feature multiple camera angles, smooth editing, professional sound, flawless lighting and a clearly edited sequencing which allowed for aesthetic

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[7] David Des Roches generally posts copies of both *Dabiq* and *Inspire* as they appear. His Twitter account is @dbdesroches

stage management. *Dabiq* is laid out and has the same graphic style as a commercial magazine popular among young men such as *Maxim*.
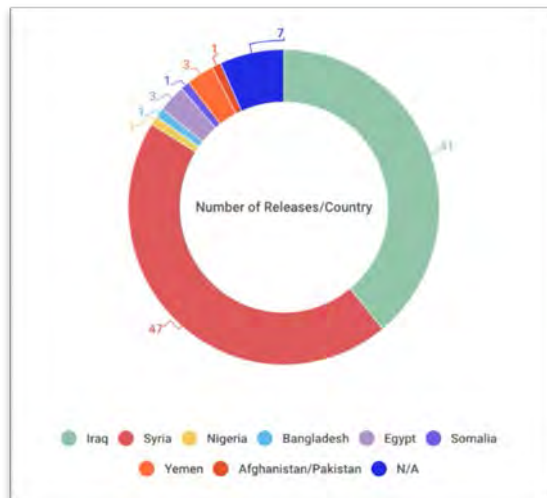
2. Relatively impressive Islamic scholarship. While Western media makes much of the lack of knowledge of individual ISIL fighters and recruits, the written product produced by ISIL is of high caliber and generally cites the most highly regarded hadith verses.

3. Use of targeted languages. When ISIL wants to reach people in France, they get a native French speaker, often with a recognizable accent. Same thing for other languages. Al-Qaeda often used ponderous translations: ISIL literally speaks to its audience in their own language with their own accent.

4. Rapid response. By using digital production for both videos and magazines, ISIL is able to rapidly respond to events and capitalize on them. Al-Qaeda would generally refer to events in taped messages released months or years after the event; ISIL will release videos or feature their "martyrs" in print within days or weeks.

5. Micro targeting. ISIL use of Twitter, Kik and other social media allows them to propagate messages and themes to discreet audiences – many of whom are self-identified – instantly and with tailored messages.

Socializing with the Enemy:
Insights into how ISIL targets their propaganda, at home and abroad

Adam Azoff

Tesla Government Inc.

This paper attempts to qualitatively and quantitatively assess how the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) targets its propaganda toward local and foreign audiences (outside of the Combined Joint Operations Area [Iraq and Syria]; or CJOA). It builds on past studies examining ISIL's propaganda, media strategy, and dissemination networks, as well as challenges facing counter-messaging efforts.[8]

Number of Releases/Country

Iraq ● Syria ● Nigeria ● Bangladesh ● Egypt ● Somalia
Yemen ● Afghanistan/Pakistan ● N/A

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[8] See Aaron Zelin (2015) *Picture Or It Didn't Happen: A Snapshot of the Islamic State's Official Media Output* and Charlie Winter (2015) *The Virtual 'Caliphate': Understanding Islamic State's Propaganda Strategy* for more comprehensive studies of ISIL propaganda output.

By examining two weeks (9/13/16 to 9/27/16) worth of ISIL media output, this report provides insight on the types of media, central themes, and target audiences of the group's propaganda.[9] Perhaps not surprisingly, this sample illustrates that ISIL is still capable of launching coordinated media campaigns and producing content that relates events on the ground. The group's propaganda continues to be grounded in the realities of developments on the battlefield, the territories they control, and in international politics.[10]

Over the course of the two week time period, 105 official media releases were collected, produced primarily by ISIL's "Waliyah" media offices. Like in past studies that examined ISIL's social media output, the group's offices in Iraq (41 media releases) and Syria (47 media releases) were able to publish many more posts than its affiliates combined (10 total outside of CJOA). The greater output from media offices in the CJOA, and the slightly higher rate in Syria, is understandable as the group enjoys more advanced content creation capabilities and likely a much higher flow of unedited footage and images sent to media offices from areas under its control.

In a way, all of ISIL's propaganda is utopian. In products depicting military operations, everything seems to be moving in a positive direction. Even after an intentional, "tactical" retreat from an area, it is not uncommon to see posts of positive developments on another front. Much literature on the topic to date notes that ISIL's media productions are more diverse than the violent videos that grabbed headlines in

2014. This sample reaffirms that much of the group's output was not primarily military (48 releases). In fact, 51% of the collected posts depicted less violent governance, Da'wa (Islamic education/teachings), Hisba (religious policing), Martyrdom (parsing recently killed fighters), or other general posts about life in the "Caliphate."

The types of content produced ranged from images to videos, newsletters, magazines, an audio file, and a children's book. The breadth of products the group disseminates through its global network of online supporters indicates ISIL continues to operate a sophisticated media apparatus. Most frequently, the group issues pictures or picture stories and videos, which

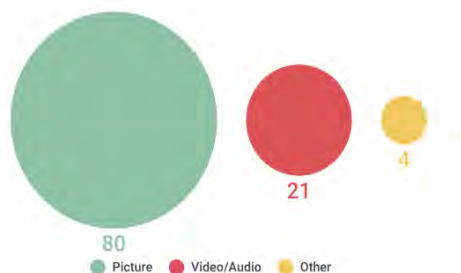Violent Versus Non-Violent Messaging

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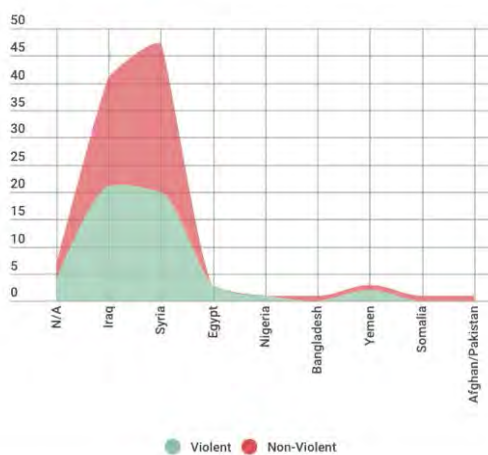
[9] This paper does not contend to have collected all of ISIL's media releases during this time span; however, by following an official account ("Abu-Muhammad", @abo_m) over the course of two weeks, it was possible to collect a sizable sample. This account is one of ISIL's official Twitter dissemination accounts, often taken down (sometimes within hours) and recreated at a slightly different handle (e.g., @abu_m_498 at the start of the study, @abo_m_544 by 9/27). The sample does not include non-visual posts, such as written statements, which are less common. It also does not include battlefield updates from the ISIL-affiliated A'maq News Agency, which is widely considered an unofficial distributor of propaganda related to developments on the ground. While in future studies it would be beneficial to follow multiple official ISIL accounts on Twitter, the sample presented below helps paint a picture of the breadth of content types, themes, and target audiences essential to its overall strategy.

[10] See MEMRI JTTM report Understanding The ISIS Media Apparatus: Distribution Networks and Practices, February 19, 2016

are easier to process and distribute than larger reports, newsletters, and books.[11]

ISIL Content by Type
80 Picture · 21 Video/Audio · 4 Other

Events occurring during this paper's time frame helped shape the sentiment of the posts that were collected. Early on in the collection period, there could have been an unusually high volume of positive, non-violent releases due to the proximity of Eid celebrations, where the group's various media offices clearly conducted a campaign depicting the "atmosphere" of areas under its control. As battles intensified in Shirqat there was an uptick of military-related releases highlighting attacks in the area. During this timeframe, there was also what appeared to be a continuation of the "caravan of martyrs" campaign—a series of pictures and captions praising recently killed ISIL fighters.

Primary vs. Secondary Means of Propaganda Distribution

Audiences both inside and outside of ISIL's areas of control receive ISIL media propaganda products, albeit through different distribution mechanisms. Within the CJOA, ISIL is able to conduct Hisba activities, broadcast local radio programs, provide Friday sermons, develop school curricula, and employ other measures to propagate their ideology to the populace under their control. ISIL's media products, which have been successful to some extent in radicalizing foreign recipients, are also put to use in the local context. While enacting limitations on access to outside information, including punishing even suspected users of social media, ISIL has set up viewing booths and distribution centers for populations under their control to view their media network's products.

Outside of Iraq and Syria, where ISIL must operate covertly, the group's *predominant* means of broadcasting its propaganda is online. Though ISIL has networks of supporters all over the world, these supporters must remain discreet, which limits in-person interaction. ISIL must thus rely on its online support base (known as "Knights of the Uploading") to spread its message to the 1.4 billion Muslims in the world.

Conclusions

Regardless of the language or target audience of a given media release, all official media is standardized and consistent to the central themes and quality of the group. ISIL does not concern itself like Al Qaeda, with the public opinion of the Muslim world at large, or, as William McCants of the Brookings Institution eloquently stated, "The Islamic State doesn't give a damn about building broad support among the Muslim masses." As ISIL is defeated militarily, its ability to produce a centralized message and high-quality product will be complicated. While much attention is given to the threat posed by ISIL fighters returning to countries outside of the CJOA, it is not clear what might become of ISIL's media apparatus if the group loses control of the self-proclaimed Caliphate's territories. Inevitably, as ISIL foreign fighters increasingly

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[11] See Charlie Winter, ISIS' offline propaganda strategy, March 31, 2016

attempt to return to their areas of origin, there is the potential that ISIL members that took part in media operations will continue their "cyber jihad" abroad and develop underground media cells to continue messaging their propaganda. Though it will be more difficult to send out as large a volume of high-quality releases, it is not likely that ISIL will return to the amateurish and locally-focused media operations of 2011. ISIL's propaganda represents a stark increase in quality and quantity from other extremist groups. Even the group's own output has increased in volume and quality over time, despite setbacks on the battlefield. This threat should thus not be underestimated.

Comments on ISIL propaganda

Zana K. Gulmohamad

PhD Candidate in the Politics Department at the University of Sheffield

There are various ways and methods that ISIL utilizes to spread their propaganda. Each method targets a segment of a society and/or person differently. The broad perceptions about the propaganda aims in Iraq are that spreading fear and domination/power/authority, demoralizes the anti-IS forces and distances the locals from the federal government in Baghdad as they show the Shias as apostates or renegades "Rawafidh" and this increases their recruit numbers.

> "...the personality, the background, environment, life condition, and ideology (e.g. Salafi Jihadism) are all factors that affect to what extent the propaganda is having an impact ..."

The extremely strict rules in ISIL held areas have deprived the communities of updated news and awareness of the developments. Therefore, the mainstream information and media is through ISIL's media channels including Radio (Al-Bayan). Although ISIL banned satellite television receivers some people secretly have them.[12] Internet is provided and possessed by ISIL and the locals are unable to access it. ISIL closed all cyber cafes.[13] ISIL banned the Internet for several reasons; one of those is stopping the anti-IS locals from contacting anti-IS coalition forces. However, some locals use covert ways to access it and expose ISIL's brutality.

Another means adopted to disseminate their propaganda and ideology is by changing the education system in IS held areas by printing new books and curriculums in schools and universities. In the universities they closed down many departments and faculties. Meanwhile, inside ISIL held areas, mosques and assembly areas that people are forced to attend are also a way to spread propaganda. Some mosques and Islamic schools are fertile grounds for recruiting more locals outside IS held areas in Iraq.

Their brainwashing and recruitment policy toward children (child solders) has been systematic. Besides printed leaflets, magazine and small books, using the internet has been one of the most active strategies of ISIL to lure teenagers.[14] This has had a great effect on recruitment across the globe.

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[12] Heavy. (2016). Retrieved from: http://heavy.com/news/2016/06/new-isis-islamic-state-daesh-news-pictures-videos-and-let-the-believers-be-cautious-regarding-the-prevention-of-the-satellite-dish-and-its-destruction-full-uncensored-youtube-video-mp4-download/

[13] Hawramy, F. (2016). Retrieved from:https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/09/life-under-isis-raqqa-mosul-giant-prison-syria-iraq

[14] Gulmohamad, Z. (2014). "The Islamic State most effective wars are waged online". *The National*. Retrieved from: http://www.thenational.ae/opinion/comment/the-islamic-states-most-effective-wars-are-waged-online

Those possessing a combination of the following factors have been targeted and have proved to be a fertile recruitment ground inside and outside IS held areas in Iraq: Former members of radical Sunni Islamic factions or militants, extremely conservative Muslims, those with no or very poor income, and those discontent with the Shia-led government in Baghdad. The aforementioned groups are more vulnerable and receptive to IS's propaganda machine. The author believes the personality, the background and environment, life condition, and ideology (e.g. Salafi Jihadism) are all factors that affect to what extent the propaganda is having an impact to be part of the ISIL or pledge allegiance (*baiya*).

Comments on ISIL propaganda

Gary Warner, Director
Center for Emerging Technology Investigations Forensics & Security
The University of Alabama at Birmingham

Most of the recruiting tactics of ISIL these days focus on quickly moving the person of interest into a more secure communications environment. "First touches" are still often on Twitter, Facebook, or (as the attached report shows) Google Plus, which is steadily gaining in popularity. But as soon as someone is considered to be "determined" they are approached and helped to discover the more secure methods of communicating. Often these will be some of the hundreds of Telegram channels being used, but just as often it will be via the installation of a custom app.

> "These sites actually use quite good op-sec when they are set up."

For propaganda distribution, the main sites are "Isdarat" and "Amaq Agency", however these sites find themselves under constant attack. For this reason, "bookmark" sites are established throughout the community that allow one to quickly reacquire the "site-of-the-day" location of these sites of fresh news and inspirational documents and videos. As an example, by visiting a bookmark site, such as "alahzabblog (dot) wordpress (dot) com", we find the following are "today's" locations for distribution: Isdarat is currently at "frjsz5489 (dot) ga."[15]

The site is mostly current, with yesterday's Al Hayat video at the top left, and the featured "selected 10" with hotlinks to each video showing in the main frame. However, the "Rumiyah" issue being displayed in the left sidescroll is still issue #1, so they don't have a link to the newest issue #2 here. The site is protected via Reverse proxy routed through CloudFlare. Isdarat also maintains links to all of the Amaq Agency news announcements - twenty pages worth going back to mid-2014. There have been possibly more than 100, isdarat websites. The URLs for most of the high-bandwidth videos are actually posted as unpublished "Google Drive" videos, so once the Google Drive location is known, this can also be used for re-acquisition. Isdarat also has the "Translation section" where English language media from Al-Battar Media Foundation, Al-Furqan, Al-Hayat, and specialty pubs such as Dabiq may be found. (The most recent English video is yesterday's video from Media Gezira State). The Isdarat archive is currently about 39,800 pieces of media.

The multilingual headlines with their distinctive blue layout are commonly shared on Twitter, but each of these is actually the still title frame of a video. While they can all be found on the Isdarat page, they are also available through the Amaq app, available for Android, Windows, or jail-broken iPhone. Once the

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[15] Amaq Agency news site is currently at "agnamaq (dot) ml" -- but this site isn't needed when you have the Amaq app installed on your phone or workstation.

app is installed, it "auto-magically" finds the current data source location to stream video to your phone. It also provides a convenient way to tweet the news headlines directly from the app.

The daily news podcast of Al-Bayan radio is currently at "al-bayan-radio (dot) co (dot) uk". This also changes regularly, but can be easily reacquired through the use of bookmark sites. Many jihadi forums have banner ads that have the ability to refresh to connect to the current location as well. Lastly, ISIS often uses "dark web" or TOR or .onion pages.   In order to know when the .onion page changes, they provide a "subscribe" feature which notifies by email of the new location. The current "dark web" propaganda site is: ou7zytv3h2yaosqq (dot) onion. The dot onion site changes whenever they feel compromised. It is usually slightly more current than the "isdarat" site. As with the Isdarat sites, such media is hosted externally. In the case of the .onion site, through a series of Cloud-flare reverse proxied sites. The current host being: ou7zytv3h2yaosq (dot) dabiqservehttpcom (dot) cf/32779. (Which is really in Belfast at IOMart Hosting through a reseller called ABPNI Computer Solutions.)

These sites actually use quite good op-sec when they are set up. The Bengali ISIL site, an example of a regional propaganda distribution website, (currently at attamkin dot co dot uk) was purchased via the Bullet Proof Hosting company "HostSailor". The last two al-Bayan radio station addresses were both on the same IP in Panama (though that was masked by CloudFlare). That box was purchased, likely with Bitcoin, from the site "offshoreracks dot com" which may be in Miami, Florida. The actual server is in Panama in an Offshoreracks data center.

Comments on ISIL propaganda

Dr. Assem Nasr
Department of Communication, Indiana University Purdue University Fort Wayne

In a recent study I am currently producing that tackles communication patterns in Arab (particularly Lebanese) societies, I have found that the media effects model is not necessarily what works given the cultural contexts. This model suggests that media content (news, reports, portrayals, propaganda machines) shape the way people think. While this may hold some truth, in an ethnographic study I conducted in Beirut a couple of years ago, informants have suggested the following:

> "…I believe that propaganda is not effective… The molding of individuals into violent individuals is more likely to occur via more intimate channels. The social media channels that disperse propaganda are more of a means of reinforcement of dogma and ideology. "

1. Informants expressed mistrust towards news sources - traditional or social media platforms - as they construe them as mouthpieces for the parties (individuals, institutions, or political organizations) that own or operate them. This is especially true as people are aware of the political agendas, political economies, and (what the informants' believe to be) transparent alliances that shape these sources' rhetoric.

2. Informants revealed that they rely on personal connections, family, neighbors, friends, acquaintances in high places (army officers, deputies... etc.), and people whom they consider reliable. For example, while there might be an incident unfolding on the news, say, the Nusrah Front abducting Lebanese soldiers in

the Bekaa, a neighbor whose uncle's client is a friend of a Customs officer on the border in a Bekaa region shares an insight to what's happening. As such, news travels fast by word of mouth. With a common cultural element in the Arab world of societies having been oral cultures for centuries, this supports the importance of these complex social networks that at many times are augmented by social media such as Twitter, What'sApp and others. (On a side note, one's level of knowledge of "inside information" reveals one's capability of acquiring this privileged intel but also the person who has this knowledge uses this it to leverage their own social capital.)

3. Informants use social media with extreme caution. Unofficial censorship is a daily reality where people have to "watch what they say" about politics or any other aspect challenging the status quo. This is especially true as people fear being stopped at a random checkpoint (police, army, and militia) where their phones are checked for content and messages. Pro-Hariri content caught in a Hezbollah area, for example, puts the phone owner in deep trouble. Interestingly, aside from deleting messages, one way of overcoming such obstacles is through humor. With a backdrop of overwhelming social despair and disenfranchisement, informants (whom I think are representatives of many of the Lebanese public) have no means of dealing with daily life issues except to poke fun at the conditions and be cynical about the system. I have found that much of the communication about these conditions, incidents, and other important issues emerges with humor and innuendoes specific to a small social group to communicate if using social media. While this does not quite answer the question of the so-called Islamic State and the means by which they target their audiences, I can only suggest that probably (and I have no direct knowledge as my research scope has not tackled such groups), at least in the Arab world, this is a more direct personal type of communication: a small network of individuals who share certain realities such as poverty, lack of prospects, and systematic marginalization that allow for radical measures to be perceived as solutions.

Reflecting on their means of communication, and based on my findings (at least in Lebanon), I believe that propaganda is not effective. While it may be available to people, my understanding of the challenges to communication flows in the Arab world pushes communicators to exchange messages through alternative subtle means outlined in the findings above. The molding of individuals into violent individuals is more likely to occur via more intimate channels. The social media channels that disperse propaganda are more of a means of reinforcement of dogma and ideology.

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.

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).

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

CONTENT

Differentiated messaging, entertainment value, not messaging is better than inexpert messaging

MEDIUM

Multiple access points to messaging based on local preferences

MESSENGER

Local, credible partners

Solutions: 1) narrow Coalition say/do gap, 2) emphasize Daesh say/do gap, 3) prepare anticipatory messaging, 4) convene regional & local actors

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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Comments on CENTCOM Messaging

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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

> "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."

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.

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.

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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

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

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.

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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In looking at Joint Publication 3-13: Information Operations, as well as the declassified information from press releases and other materials that describe the operations undertaken by the new Center for Global Engagement, it is clear that the USG is keenly aware of the need to be proactive in producing a narrative that (a) vilifies ISIL, and (b) paints the US in a more positive light. I am quite pleased to see this kind of effort, as I believe that this kind of influence is critical in the fight against ISIL and other, similar groups. However, there are three key areas that I do not believe are sufficiently emphasized.

1) The declassified information made available to me about Information Operations undertaken by coalition forces and to a lesser extent, the Center for Global Engagement, shows that USCENTCOM and the global counter-ISIL coalition is quite clear on the message that we want those at risk for radicalization by ISIL to assimilate. However, there is much less emphasis on *how* that message is disseminated to target audiences. While the declassified documents do allude to the need to engage with local partners and other allies "on the ground" in target areas, I worry that there is not sufficient attention being paid to how those local partners and allies can be leveraged to disseminate US-friendly information.

My concern in this area hinges on what is called psychological reactance. Psychological reactance is a reaction whereby an audience member does the *opposite* of what the persuader wants him/her to do because the audience member perceives that he/she is being persuaded. When an individual perceives that someone is trying to persuade them of something with which they had not previously been familiar, they are likely to re-assert their volitional freedom by engaging in the opposite behavior. This often happens if the persuader is perceived as different or untrustworthy. Given that US forces are likely to be perceived as less-than-trustworthy among individuals in target areas, it would be useful to mask the persuasive intent of counter-messaging efforts by having them delivered by local partners and allies that are familiar with those being targeted. Although I am sure that US forces already partner with local allies to gain an understanding of those whom they wish to persuade, great involvement of those local allies would go far in making the delivered messages more persuasive. Stated simply, US forces should have those who are culturally similar (and not official representatives of the US government) deliver messages intended to persuade them. This will reduce the likelihood of psychological reactance and increase the possibility of the message being delivered and assimilated.

2) There is a heavy emphasis on "defining the narrative," but less attention on how this is accomplished. In my experience, an overarching master narrative is largely defined by smaller stories and small-scale narratives that are passed among individuals in the target area. I believe that more attention needs to be paid to the development and dissemination of these individual stories. To develop these individual stories, there are a series of steps that USG forces should undertake to ensure that the themes intrinsic to the ISIL narrative(s) are being effectively targeted. These include comprehensive audience analysis, qualitative and quantitative theme analysis of the ISIL narratives, and effective composition of the counter-narratives. For a step-by-step guide on how to accomplish this, I would recommend reading a paper I wrote with Dr. John Horgan (Towards a Guide for Constructing and Disseminating Counternarratives to Reduce

Feedback to Hriar Cabayan and US Central Command Dr. Kurt Braddock, Ph.D in Communication Arts and Sciences, Penn State University kurtbraddock@psu.edu

Support for Terrorism: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1057610X.2015.1116277). I would be happy to provide more detail related to my research of this process, if needed.

3) There is an emphasis on the use of social media to spread factual information that counters disinformation disseminated by ISIL. Although social media can be a powerful tool to this effect, do not overestimate its utility. Just as audience members can perceive face-to-face message sources as untrustworthy, thus undermining the persuasiveness of their messages, the same can be true of online message sources. This is particularly true of online message sources spread by official government officials or offices. For example, the Department of State's Think Again Turn Away social media campaign was largely a disaster because the messages being disseminated, though factual in kind, were dismissed by target audiences because the source of the message was not masked in any fashion. Target audiences in ISIL-controlled territory (and other areas of the Middle East) are unlikely to be persuaded by social media from those they perceive to be agents of the United States government. Again, here, using local partners (or those perceived as authorities on Islam) would be particularly useful.

What actions and policies can regional and coalition nations employ to reduce recruitment of ISIL-inspired fighters?

Much of what I have said above applies to this question as well: using local partners, masking message sources when the source is likely to be perceived as untrustworthy, etc. However, I believe there is one area where regional and coalition nations can use the power of counter-narratives to great effect in reducing the recruitment of ISIL-inspired fighters.

Recall that I said that message sources perceived as trustworthy (or are otherwise authorities on ISIL-related experiences) are likely to be believed. Given this, I think there is a huge opportunity to recruit and utilize fighters who have defected from ISIL or have fled ISIL territory to tell stories about the group's crimes and lies, as well as the awful experiences they have had. To be sure, individuals who travel to ISIL territory to fight for the group should be punished accordingly. However, individuals who defect or leave the group voluntarily can make VERY persuasive sources of counter-narratives intended to undermine the dominant narratives that ISIL seeks to spread: Muslim utopia, fighters treated well, etc. These defecting fighters are likely to be perceived as authorities on the topic, and moreover, are likely to be culturally, racially, and religiously similar to those that the USG seeks to dissuade. This makes them powerful potential partners in counter-ISIL messaging efforts.

Given the generational nature of the threats we face, what changes in organization, legislation, authorities, resources, infrastructure, education, and other areas should the USG make to become as agile, resilient, survivable, sustainable, technologically and intellectually dominant as required to protect our constitutional system and prevail in any conflict from the present until 2050? Feedback to Hriar Cabayan and US Central Command Dr. Kurt Braddock, Ph.D in Communication Arts and Sciences, Penn State University kurtbraddock@psu.edu

Here, audience analysis is critical. In reading the materials related to US counter-messaging efforts against ISIL, it seems as though those perceived to be at risk for violent radicalization by ISIL are thought of as a monolithic group. This is hardly the case. As in Western cultures, children and adults tend to be persuaded

by different types of messages. More nuanced audience analysis of different segments of target populations is necessary to determine how best to create and disseminate counter-messages to these different segments. With a more nuanced approach to counter-radicalization for children in at-risk populations, CENTCOM may have more success in stemming violent radicalization among that age group, thereby mitigating the possibility of ISIL-type ideologies from taking root in the young.

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.
>
> 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).[16] 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 moral frameworks that authorize and legitimize a particular history and a given identity (Cobb, 2013). Conflicts are also a

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[16] 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).

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.[17] 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

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[17] 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.

collectivities and serves as the basis around which groups (enemy and friendly) assemble (Frank, 2010, pg. 15).

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).[18] 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

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[18] 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.

(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, 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.[19] 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.

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[19] 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.

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 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.

| Assessment | Engagement | Support Marginalized Narratives | Destabilize Dominant Narratives | Support 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[20] 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

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[20] 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).

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).
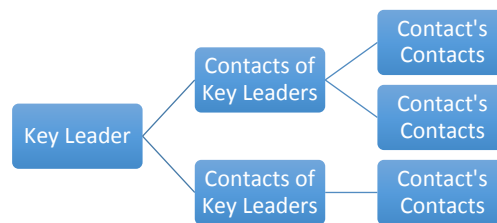

Figure 2

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[21] 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[22] 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

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

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 TOC	Understanding the NL increases capacity to create and assess strategies for intervention.	Learning how to position Self/Other within the NL builds relationships and leads to cultural competency.	Violent conflict is reduced when the NL is more complex.	Radicalization and violent conflict are decreased when dominant narratives are destabilized.	Violence is 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	Increased links between	New leaders emerging in NL;	Improved local decision-making and

		diversity and breadth	diverse social networks,	Public elaboration of problems/issues	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.[23] 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.[24]

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."[25] 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

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[23] 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?

[24] 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.

[25] 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."

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 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.[26]

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.[27] Caricatures aside, this is a tiny fraction of the worldwide Muslim population, roughly corresponding to a sub-component of those holding Salafi beliefs.[28] Salafi-Jihadists[29] (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.[30] 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

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[26] 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.

[27] 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.

[28] Even this distinction is not without academic controversy see Lauziere 2015 & 2016 and Griffel 2015.

[29] 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.

[30] 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.

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.[31] 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 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.[32] 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.[33] 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.

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[31] See Wiktorowicz (2006) for a more in depth discussion of Salafist beliefs and differences within the movement.

[32] 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.

[33] 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.

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 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.[34] 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-

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[34] 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)

> "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.'"

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))

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.[35] 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 disseminators of news and content.

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[35] 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.

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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What must the coalition do in the information environment to achieve its objectives in Iraq and Syria and how can it deny adversaries the ability to achieve theirs? Part 1

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Executive Summary – Part 1

The following set of responses to Question S3 represent an attempt to distill the input from individuals who have contributed to any number of OSD-SMA efforts in recent years. Giordano's Access, Assess, Engage (AAE) framework will be used to categories these recommendations. The recommendations are an attempt to distill the concepts proposed in a set of recent OSD-SMA publications[36]. CENTCOM may improve cognitive engagement by producing a broader, more expansive joint intelligence preparation of the operational environment (JIPOE). An expanded JIPOE (Joint Intelligence Preparation of the Operational Environment) could potentially identify the behaviors of target audiences necessary to achieve US objectives, to develop possible psychological effects and leverage operations as a cognitive scheme of maneuver that could lead to synchronizing actions and messages to achieve coalition objectives. (Contributing Authors: LTC Xavier Colon, Joint Staff J39, LTC Rafael 'Rafa' E. Linera Rivera, Ph. D, USASOC, SFC Matthew John Martin, USASOC, Dr. Ian Mcculloh, JHU/APL, CPT Christopher O'Brien, 20th Special Forces Group (Airborne), MAJ Robert Payne, CENTCOM, MAJ Gregory Seese, Ph.D, USASOC, SGM Sohail Shaikh, AWG, Dr. Jason Spitaletta, (Maj, USMCR), JHU/APL, LTC Brian Steed, CGSC, Dr. Gwyneth Sutherlin, Geographic Services, Inc., Dr. Robert Taguchi USASOC)

Access
Determining the accessibility of a target audience, the sixth step in the doctrinal target audience analysis process), identifies how a particular audience may be reached through various media.
- While social media can provide macro-level insights, the focus should be placed on the secure chat rooms where recruiters more readily interact with potential members.
  - Mining the Dark Web content and subjecting the information to Thematic Content Analysis (TCA), Integrative Complexity (IC), and/or Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA) amongst other techniques will provide more accurate insight than sentiment analysis derived from Twitter.
  - A priority of insurgent and revolutionary organizations is the establishment of legitimacy and the questioning of the State

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- Much has been made of Da'esh and their virtual caliphate but an outstanding research question and/or intelligence requirement remains whether a virtual caliphate is indeed legitimate in the minds of the Umma.
  - The perceived legitimacy of the virtual caliphate underlies the next stage of the conflict once Da'esh is militarily defeated in Iraq and Syria.
  - If the virtual caliphate is indeed legitimate in the minds of enough people, the next phase of this conflict may be entirely in the cognitive and information dimensions.
- Emphasize face-to-face methods of access and influence using Special Operations Forces (SOF).
  - Leverage USSOCOM's Transnational Coordinating Authority to extend these efforts into the areas of operation that produce the foreign fighters and conduct interviews, assessments, and/or asset validation activities in order to develop a physical connection to the target audiences of interest.
- Consider integrated reach-back to augment organic analytic capability.
  - Identify service members across the active and reserve components with the requisite operational and academic backgrounds and provide opportunities to deploy in order to facilitate research and/or guidance ISO operations.
  - Leverage Military Information Support Operations (MISO) capabilities in the Army and Air Force across the active and reserve components with the requisite operational and academic backgrounds in order to facilitate influence campaign assessments.
  - Leverage USSOCOM's Service like responsibility to submit a Joint Urgent Operational Needs Statement (JUONS) requesting an augmented data collection and analytic capability that includes the methods and skill-sets identified in the various OSD-SMA publications.
- Big data may be useful, but consider a more nuanced approach to analysis.
  - Understanding individual ethnicity, religion, language, tribal affiliation, social identity/ relationships), and political allegiance at a granular family-group level provides a deeper understanding of the locations (origins) of people and their socio-cultural identity (religion, ethnicity, language).
    - Localizing communications analysis around cultural variation in thinking may compensate for the more macroscopic approaches while also providing a geographic reference for forms of communication that require face to face interaction.

Assess

Employing the Strange Model of Centre of Gravity (COG) analysis to identify critical capabilities, critical requirements (CR) and associated critical vulnerabilities (CV) of the threat. This type of functional decomposition could identify cognitive aspects of the threat that are exploitable through the information dimension. Our working hypothesis is that the COG lies in the cognitive domain.

- Expand the Joint Intelligence Preparation of the Operational Environment (JIPOE) to further breakdown the Physical, Informational, and Cognitive Dimensions in which CENTCOM is conducting operations.
  - The JIPOE could produce significant characteristics of:
    - 1) Physical Dimension: Terrain, weather, geography, and infrastructure impacts on the dissemination audio, visual, and audio-visual products.
    - 2) Informational Dimension to describe Information and its quality, flow and distribution impacting the collection, processing and distribution of information.

- 3) Cognitive Dimension to identify and to map the significant characteristics of attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions that influence population group and adversarial decision making of the information environment.
  - From the JIPOE, CENTCOM should focus on the different interconnected relationships that may reflect current target audience behaviours.
    - Leverage current approved MISO programs in the AOR to direct actions and messages towards the desired target audiences.
    - Leverage the MISO Objectives (MO) within approved programs.
    - The purpose of MO is to state the desired behaviour changes in selected TA that best support the accomplishment of the CENTCOM Cdr's mission.
- Among the methods that have potential applicability are those that comprise human factors analysis; group and population analysis, social network analysis, and individual and leadership analysis.
  - Continue to collect data using as many methods as possible to include opinion polling via telephone, internet, and face-to-face methods;
  - When able, focus data collection on behavior vice attitudes as the former is a better predictor of future behaviors.
    - Catalysts or triggers (an event, individual, or threat that motivates a particular behavior) that precede behaviors of interest may correlate with key transition points between ideological and/or behavioral categories.
      - Triggers can be correlated with established risk factors for radicalization; as the set of risk factors increases (and/or intensifies), engagement tactics can adjust accordingly a well as serve as empirically derived assessment criteria and intelligence requirements, which are integrated into the intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance collection plan.
      - These triggers can also be integrated into the MISO program assessment plan.
- Two specific components of target audience analysis, vulnerability and susceptibility, can benefit from integrating bio-psycho-social perspectives into the command's targeting process.
  - Vulnerabilities are the needs, wants, or desires that arise from the conditions within the operational environment; vulnerabilities are traditionally social, but can be extended to include cognitive and neurobiological and can be exploited through both the message content as wells as the dissemination mechanism.
  - Susceptibility is the degree to which a particular message is likely to influence a target audience and are often identified through both primary and secondary methods in either background research and/or product testing.
    - These approaches can be augmented by neuroscience research methods to identify one's elaboration likelihood requirement or information display preference at a neuropsychological level to enable more precise susceptibility analysis.
    - Each line of persuasion can then be evaluated based on its ability to influence both the target audience's behavior and neural response.
- Segment audiences to the degree practicable but don't lose the nuance.
  - Many TA within the AOR are bi- or multi-lingual and as a result of this cognitive ability, individuals also must navigate conceptual differences and differences in cultural norms (such as politeness, intensity, gender, topic framing, communications modes such as when to use face to face and when to use social media and with whom.)

- This process requires reiteration for each audience segment.
- Visualization and communication of MISO-specific data and analysis should be simplified to the degree possible and communicated/depicted in a manner that maneuver commanders find intuitive.


Engage

CENTCOM should consider the combination of informational and physical powers in concert with members of the interagency to drive CENTCOM actions through an operational narrative. Leverage existing MISO programs Actions and messages are synchronized to generate the behaviors necessary to achieve coalition objectives.

- Actions and messages are synchronized to generate the behaviors necessary to achieve US objectives
  - Leverage current advice and assist authorities to integrate messages with actions.
- Integrate information power considerations in plans and policies
- Influencing the foreign fighter target audience is about an emotional decision; one cannot fight feelings with facts. Eschew rhetorical persuasion, and focus on the concomitant emotions of their decision to leave home, risk their lives, and/or continue to fight despite the Da'esh top management team fleeing. Make it personal.
  - Personalizing the engagement is more likely to resonate with impressionable and emotionally vulnerable military-aged males.
    - Personalized persuasion require themes, messages, and dissemination mechanisms specifically tailored to an individual's psychological vulnerabilities and/or susceptibilities and delivered to the device at the time when the effect will be greatest.
      - Exploit available data through open sources and intelligence methods to collect data on persons of interest.
      - Contemporary microtargetting incorporates open-source aggregation to develop demographic profiles, incorporate psychographic information to develop a more precise (or actor-specific) set of vulnerabilities and susceptibilities.
        - Susceptibility is a function of prediction error; the more novel an event, the more likely it is to resonate.
          - Vary influence means, methods, and themes to maximize novelty and avoid message habituation, unless, the goal is to reinforce learning through repetition.
    - Instead of negative tones and nebulous instructions, use positive recommendations encourage specific behaviors; avoid "don't do y" and instead use "do x".
      - Empathize with individuals; avoid labels and/or paternalistic approaches to "improving" them and/or their situation IOT better understand how a particular individual perceives consistency, specifically the violation of consistency with defection.
      - Focus on understanding perception of social identifies and developing identify-congruent options that meet US political and/or military objectives.
  - Emphasize face-to-face methods of influence using Special Operations Forces (SOF).
    - SOF, particularly Level III qualified personnel, are exceptionally well-equipped to understand and exploit emotional states and traits. Employ these personnel to develop influence agents within both Da'esh and the surrounding population.

- o Since human-to-human access to the target is mediated through a computer, methods developed in one domain must be applied to cyber operations.
  - ▪ In order to more effectively counter IS messaging CENTCOM employ Webops to:
    - Ridicule and Satire as weapons, particularly when providing MISO support to indigenous resistance organizations.
    - 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
- o Coordinate efforts with USSOCOM, to extend these efforts into the areas of operation that produce the foreign fighters.
  - ▪ Request USSOCOM to evaluate and operationalize existing and/or developing future capabilities.

  - ▪ These efforts already exist and should be coordinated through an external operations office or desk responsible at the Military Information Support Task Force-Central (MISTF-C).
    - Overarching narrative is supported and furthered by effective series and PSYACTs, actions taken to enhance psychological effect, developed at the local, tactical level.
    - 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.
- Leverage OSD ATL, CENTCOM S&T, as well as academic and industry partnerships to accelerate development.
- Operationalize the narrative: identify the story to be told and then allocate the political, economic, and military resources to support it.
  - o CENTCOM must execute a strategic mission narrative that synchronizes all JIM efforts across the AOR Coalition Forces operate in.
    - ▪ This will enable coalition forces in Iraq and Syria, Afghanistan, or elsewhere to execute a synchronized operational mission narrative at their echelons.
    - ▪ The operational mission narrative will allow tactical units to execute a synchronized mission narrative that is mutually supporting to one another, as our advisory does, and deny adversaries the ability to achieve their objectives through the narrative space.
      - Coalition forces must identify:
        - o Who is/are the most credible messengers of the strategic narrative;
        - o What is the most logical strategic narrative that resonates across the AOR within the local belief system;
        - o What master narrative residents across the AOR care enough about to translate into human behavior that achieves U.S. interests.

- o Use scientific principles of storytelling and focus on the emotional aspects of the characters and their experience.
  - o Coordinate with EUCOM and AFRICOM to pool resources and coordinate engaging.
- Invest in computer-assisted persuasive technology (captology) and leverage DoD innovation efforts.
  - o Request USSOSOCOM task USASOC with evaluating and operationalizing existing and/or developing future capabilities.
  - o Leverage academic and industry partnerships to accelerate development.
- Message Characteristics for Da'esh ideologues who focus on ideological goals in decision making (e.g., return to past levels of greatness, use of negative mental models/past experiences with failure to inform on lessons learned and mistakes to avoid (thus, historical references valued), use of symbolic imagery and rituals in communications.
  - o Do: craft inspirational messages in ideal of Islam and purity. Focus on incongruence of decisions of other subgroups that are in conflict with historical vision of Caliphate.
  - o Don't: attack ideology, don't have incomplete or weak arguments based on misunderstanding of Islam. Don't use Apostates to deliver message.
  - o MOE:
    - ▪ Questioning pragmatic and violence goals/decisions
    - ▪ Increased Risk-Taking
    - ▪ Weakening loyalty to other leader subgroups
    - ▪ Greater attention to potential negative consequences of action.
    - ▪ Silo communication (lower communication, information sharing with other leaders)
- Message Characteristics for Da'esh pragmatics who focus on secular, tangible goals in decision making (e.g., control of government, critical resources, strategic revenue streams such as highly traveled roads); use data and facts to make decisions, rational and incremental progress toward long-term goals. Focus on solving day-to-day problems for organization and people.
  - o Do: craft rational messages based on data, facts, and logical arguments. Highlight how ideological goals and violent goals conflict with more data-driven, incremental approaches. Remind them of their education, training in academics. Praise their attention to detail and careful planning. Focus on the future.
  - o Don't: Use ideological or inspirational appeals to influence them. Avoid focusing on past Da'esh atrocities (if possible) as it might present perceived barrier to defection.
  - o MOEs:
    - ▪ Questioning ideological and violence goals/decisions
    - ▪ Slower decision making
    - ▪ Weakening loyalty to ISIL organization and other leader subgroups
    - ▪ Focus on day-to-day short term goals over long-term, strategic goals.
- Message Characteristics for Da'esh violence seekers who focus on adventure seeking, sensation seeking activities; short-term decision-making; escalation of violence and means to punish others.
  - o Do: craft messages about chance for violence; need to escalate (and other's slow decision making); do use forceful messengers who have expertise in fighting.
  - o Don't: Use ideological or rational appeals to influence them.
  - o MOE:
    - ▪ Questioning ideological and pragmatic goals/decisions
    - ▪ Impulsive decision making

- - Weakening loyalty to ISIL organization and other leader subgroups
  - Low information sharing and decrease in exchange.
- Online engagement is an area where many have criticized the US of failing short.
  - If CENTCOM is willing to compile a comprehensive dataset of what they've done, against whom, and the effect with appropriately cleared researchers a deeper understanding of the problem can potential solutions may be developed.
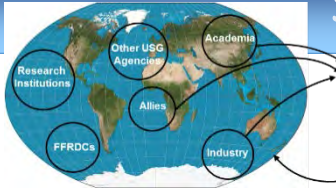
6 January 2017

Question What must the coalition do in the information environment to achieve its objectives in Iraq and Syria and how can it deny adversaries the ability to achieve theirs? – Part 2

Contributors: *David Gompert, RAND, Vern Liebl, Prosol Associates, MAJ Robert Payne, USMTM, SGM Sohail Shaikh, AWG, LTC Brian Steed, CGSC, Peter Welby, Centre on Religion & Geopolitics, Clark McCauley, PhD, Bryn Mawr College, Spencer B. Meredith III, PhD, NDU*

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Executive Summary

We have acknowledged that the enemy has been very agile in the information environment thus far. It has developed a clear message, understands the most affective narratives to reach audiences, and can shift tactics in messaging without shifting message. Our adversary has demonstrated this with propaganda and recruitment material in the information environment. Each contributor, directly or indirectly, identifies that coalition engagement in the information environment is not as robust because we lack the same cohesion of message, understanding of the appropriate narratives, understanding of audiences, and ability to shift tactics in the information space (such as move between dialects or languages) without losing fidelity to our core mission message. Each contributor offers recommendations, from the high-level objectives to on-the-ground implementation, on how we can begin to more successfully leverage the information environment in pursuit of overall coalition objectives.

Vernie Liebl advises that the US and allies must first define the 'coalition objectives' that will drive our engagement in the communication space. MAJ Robert Payne, LTC Brian Steed, and SGM Sohail Shaikh give this idea form with a plan to develop a Campaign Mission Narrative to articulate these objectives across the CENTCOM AOR. David Grompert expresses a clear and simple communication objective-- to concentrate on conveying to local audiences that the US and allies offer peace and stability, a chance to return to daily life without constant threat; this contrast to ISIL should be our messaging focus. Defining or agreeing on an objective for the information space is, as Liebl noted, not a straightforward exercise. The discussion from inaugural USASOC-LUCAS (Laboratory for Unconventional Conflict Analysis and Simulation) symposium entitled *After ISIL: Stability and Spillover* in December 2016 illustrates the ongoing challenge—a challenge which leads to an unclear mission narrative.

> *Assumptions of an inherent, universal appeal to US values of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" were countered by arguments that those ideals may exist broadly, but get*

interpreted and acted upon so differently in different contexts as to make comparisons non-actionable. (Spencer Meredith, ExecSum)

Payne, Steed and Shaikh describe the lack of mission narrative cohesion as a challenge to mission objectives. They outline a remedy to create and implement a Campaign (MSN) Mission Narrative for CENTCOM to include Strategic, Operational, and Tactical applications. The purpose is to overwhelm the adversary's narrative across the AOR and prevent fractures in mission narrative that can be exploited by the enemy.

A key stage in the development of their (MSN) is understanding the relevant narrative forms that will be affective to local audiences and also identifying viable partners to convey that message. Liebl contends it is essential to recognize there are multiple information environments in the region. He suggests the most pressing analytic challenge is to understand these various environments with their distinct socio-cultural factors including religion and ethnicity. Peter Welby provides a valuable resource with a comparative (English and Arabic) narrative analysis of ISIL and other jihadist propaganda. He examined how a group is able to, "tactically shift its narrative emphasis to suit its target audience." His research points towards how we can observe, learn, and adapt our own approach to audience engagement and narrative development for a multilingual information environment. *Clark McCauley presents another resource to help understand local narratives and audiences. He describes the role of emotion in conflict zones for motivation. He also unpacks identity narratives in conflict and argues that the Sunni/Shi'a divide is more of an ethnic conflict that a religious one.*

The contributors suggest continued analysis of information environment, audience, and narrative and a way forward to implement analytic findings for the purpose of making the information environment a means to support coalition objectives.

David Gompert, RAND

Ordinary people, of the sort caught in the conflicts in both Iraq and Syria -- whether Sunnis or not -- tend to want what ordinary people everywhere want: the opportunity to lead their lives, do their jobs, get to market, get medical care, educate their children, celebrate their faith, receive public services, and so on. Peace may not be a sufficient condition to achieve these qualities of human life, but it is a necessary one. Whereas war destabilizes the human condition, peace offers stability. In both countries, it is now abundantly clear to inhabitants that ISIL offers war, along with the oppression, dislocation and atrocities. It hardly seems necessary to spell out what ISIL offers. But I wonder if we have articulated in a compelling way what we and our indigenous allies offer: Peace. This single, simple notion can be readily supported by reminding the population what has happened when and where ISIL has been sent packing. A lot follows from the message that we offer peace: daily stability and safety, livelihood, markets, services, education, health, rule of law, etc.

This theme of choice between peace and war is easier to articulate and use in Iraq than in Syria, where there is not one but two alternatives to what we offer: ISIL and the regime itself. Yet, it should be possible to message that both ISIL and regime have nothing to offer but war, where as we and our local allies offer peace and all that can flow from it.

Vernie Liebl

Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning, Marine Corps University

BLUF: CENTCOM needs to have a realistic assessment of the Middle East done without the blinders of U.S. governmental/DoD lexicon and conceptual restrictions.

- What are Coalition objectives versus realistically achievable objectives?
- Realize that IO messages cover disparate regions/ethnicities/religious sects/tribal factors and is not Westphalian in concept.
- There are civilizational clashes ongoing.
- What are "Syraqi" Sunni potential options instead of Islamic State rule?

First, what are Coalition objectives in the Iraq AO, the Syria AO, the Iraq/Syria AO and the Middle East AO overall? All of these different 'areas of operation' have different informational environments, and that is not including the sub-regional AOs within Iraq and Syria respectively.

Example, the core Islamic State (IS) area in Syria is the Euphrates River region, as opposed to the Iraq region around Mosul, which is on the Tigris and fronts Kurdish and Shia areas along with other minority pockets. The Syrian IS region literally extends into vulnerable but largely empty desert to the south and only fronts Kurdish territory some distance to the north of the Euphrates river region. This region is

extremely different than the Aleppo region, the Damascus region or the Southern Front along the Jordanian/Israeli borders. This does not mean that IS in Syria is only restricted to the Euphrates River region, just that the information environment needs to be recognized as different. Thus, something that might be appropriate in addressing the IS elements in the Southern Front (that would be the *Liwa Shuhada al-Yarmouk* or the Yarmouk Martyrs Brigade [YMB]) would not be appropriate for the IS core around Raqqa.

To address the overall, regional and/or sub-regional information environments, coalition elements need to realize that there are several factors that they (coalition elements/entities) are not addressing, much less even paying attention to. First, coalition elements, primarily western in cultural orientation, are not "seeing" the environments in which they purportedly want to operate. King Abdullah II of Jordan, in a "60 Minute" interview on 25 September 2016, addressed the fact that the "West" does not really understand the environment of the Middle East (see endnote). Most if not all coalition analytical viewpoints of the Middle East are based on a Westphalian understanding, which means looking at the Islamic State through the lenses of an Iraq and Syria problem. This is not so, as there are many other elements involved and IS does not recognize any boundaries which are labelled "Iraq" or "Syria."

For a non-Westphalian view of the Syraq region, the below map (Figure 1) dating from July 2016 is illustrative. Within the recognized and "Western" assigned state boundaries of both Syria and Iraq, there are actually at least five differing entities which could be described in terms of 'states' as well as several sub-state organizational actors. The orange is the Baghdad-based government of Iraq, the dark blue is the Kurdistan Regional Government, an autonomous region of the Iraq government (but in many ways a precursor of a potentially independent Kurdistan), the light blue is the PYD (Democratic Union of Kurdistan) in northern Syria, the red is the Damascus-based government of Syria and the gray is the Islamic State. As well, there is dark green and light green, which represents many of the Syrian Islamic insurgent groups (to include the Free Syrian Army). Included in those are the Al Qaeda-linked (still) Jabhat Fateh al-Shem (Front for the Conquest of the Levant, formerly Jabhat al-Nusra), the Al Qaeda-linked Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya (Islamic Movement of the Free People of the Levant, called Ahrar al-Sham for short), and the Al Qaeda-linked Caucasus Emirate in Syria (both anti-IS and anti-Asad, affiliated with the AQ-linked Caucasus Emirate in the Northern Caucasus whose primary goal is to drive Russia out of the Transcaucasus). As can be seen, the information environment is complex and dense.
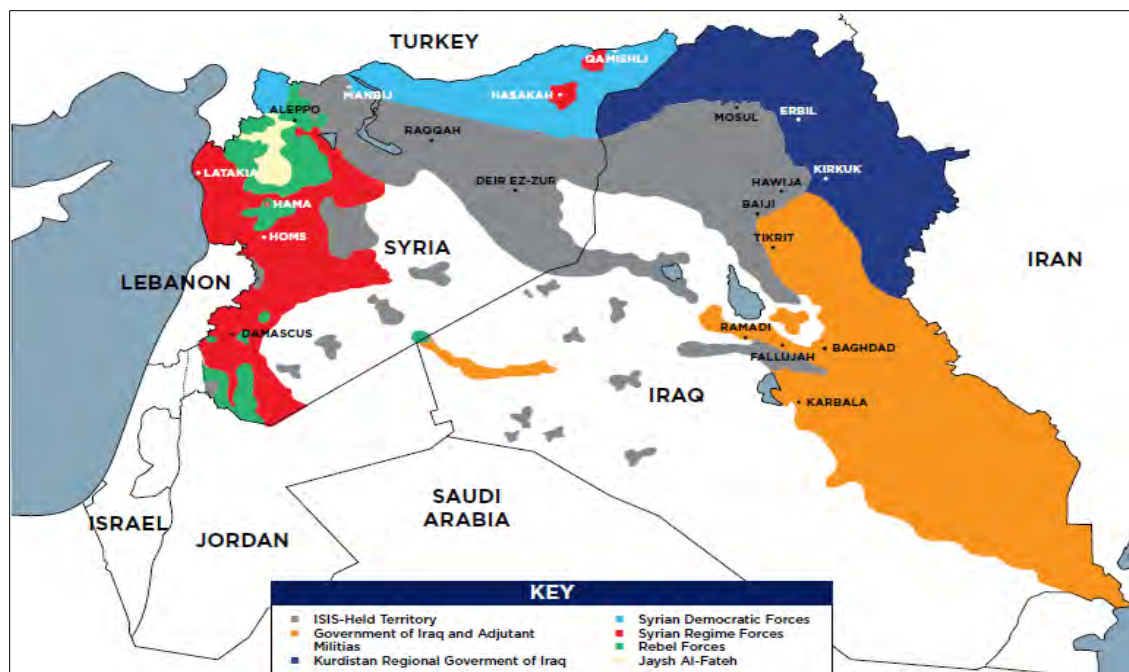
Figure 1.

In addition to the "political" divisions noted above, there are the ethnic and religious realities on the ground, realities that all too often coalition analysts either minimize or don't even acknowledge as real. The ethnic mosaic of the Syria/Iraq AO is broadly emphasized by the map but is much more complicated. For example, pre-2012 Mosul in Iraq had multiple ethnic/religious groups:

Arab Jaziran Sunni

Arab Mesopotamian Shia

Kurd Kurmanji Sunni

Kurd Kurmanji Yezidi (Yazdanism, or known as Cult of Angels)

Kurd Shabak Alevi (Yazdanism, or known as Cult of Angels)

Kurd Bajalan Yarsani (Yazdanism, or known as Cult of Angels)

Assyrian Nestorian Christian (Jacobites)

Assyrian Chaldean Christian

Turkoman Sunni

Turkoman Shia

Although it is now 2016 and the IS forces have caused many of the none-Sunni groups to flee in whole or part, have evicted others or killed them, there are still numerous ethnic groups still within or near Mosul. There are no PEW polls being conducted inside Mosul (or the IS, for that matter), so how the internal ethnic/religious population data has changed, with at least a million refugees fleeing the city since 2014, is completely unknown. Only a minute amount of anecdotal information is available, which without the ability to verify is practically useless.

To complicate it, lay the tribal element over it. There are hundreds of tribes, many of them related by blood but not by ethnicity. For example, the Shammar are a tribal confederacy composed of

approximately 12 million members. Around 6.5 million live in Saudi Arabia, another 3 million in Iraq, half a million in Syria and approximately 3 million spread among Kuwait, Jordan and Qatar. The tribal headquarters is normally in Mosul, and the tribe is divided in Iraq into two parts. The northern Shammar are called the Shammar al-Jarba and are mainly Sunni while the southern Iraqi Shammar are mainly Shia (converted in the 19th century, thus they are Akbari Shia vice the Persian Usuli Shia) and called the Shammar Toga.

Tossing into this already dense stew, which is constantly changing due to migration (mostly forced), war and huge income inequities, is the Sunni-Shia Proxy conflict. The main Sunni protagonist is Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is expending significant resources in Iraq and a lesser amount in Syria (there, the Gulf States pick up much of the slack for the Sunni elements, to include Al Qaeda), as well as areas outside of the immediate AO, such as Yemen and Bahrain. The main Shia protagonist is Iran, which is expending significant resources, and increasingly blood, in both Iraq and Syria, as well as Yemen and Bahrain. It is easy to ignore this but the Islamic State considers Shia as apostates, deserving of nothing but death. As a large number of coalition command and control personnel are from the secularized "West" it is very difficult to drive the point home that this is a confessional struggle.

Finally, in association with the previous paragraph, coalition analysts and leaders refuse to acknowledge that much of the struggle really is a "Clash of Civilizations." While it is easy at this point to say, "Bah, I don't want to hear this" as it is neither actionable intelligence nor the operationalizing of military/political effort, one must understand what civilizations are in conflict. Yes, there is a confrontation between Islam and all those not Muslim. An easy perusal of the Quran and supporting Ahadith would prove that, despite what coalition states do not want to acknowledge. But other civilizations are also involved. As noted above, Sunni civilization is in a 1,400 year long clash with Shia civilization. Centralizing "modern" urban culture/civilization (authoritarian?) is clashing with tribal cultures/civilization (decentralized). As well, the rapid spread of electronic social media with its undercutting of traditional informational flows and restrictions is creating huge upheavals in traditional control structures and the opening of new information vistas to the "common" individual.

So, I have posited a great number of barriers to achieving information operational success within Iraq and Syria. Let me elucidate an ICONS virtual exercise conducted in April 2016. The goal of the IO exercise was to, in essence, steal the Sunnis of Iraq from under the control of the Islamic State. So, it is necessary to examine the choices starkly presented to those Sunni Iraqis (note, there was no correlating effort towards Syrian Sunnis).

The following are factors militating continued Sunni support to the Islamic State. First, examining in a macro-manner, if a Sunni Syrian reverts from IS control to control by the Alawite-dominated and Iranian-influenced Damascus government, the outcome will likely be punitive for the Sunni, as the Damascus-oriented forces will want to both punish "the enemy" and then closely control them as well as extract resources from them to reconstruct Syria as well as enrich themselves as the "winners." If the Syrian Sunni chooses not to revert to the Damascus regime but instead places themselves under the control of various insurgent groups (such as Jabhat Fateh al-Sham or Ahrar al-Sham), there is no proven record of governance by any "in rebellion" insurgent entities. Thus, the Syrian Sunni placing his/her fate in the hands of such insurgent groups would likely live a life best exemplified as "nasty, short and brutish."

On the other hand, from an Iraqi Sunni currently living under an admittedly harsh IS regime, to revert to the control of a corrupt Shia-dominated and Iranian supported government dependent in large part on anti-Sunni ideological sectarian militia (PMUs) for security. Like on the Syrian side, prospects for a peaceful reintegration into a Shia-majority society without retribution and financial exploitation are likely small. Alternatively, Iraqi Sunnis could flee to Kurdish-controlled areas around Kirkuk, but such an action would mean placing themselves into the hands of Kurds who have been known to be conducting ethnic cleansing of Arabs. Finally, Iraqi Sunnis could, if possible, place themselves under the mercies of fellow tribes who are currently out of favor with the Baghdad government (although not actively hostile most of the time) but who are at present greatly supported by external entities like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, etc. Faced with such unreliable long-term support, these Iraqi Sunnis will at some point have to still deal with the Baghdad government.

Thus, from the perspective of many of the Sunnis living under the sway of the Islamic State, the "least" onerous choice might be to continue to live under the Islamic State. It is this fear of Shia retribution and long-term conflict which the Islamic State is greatly exploiting.

From a coalition perspective, what is required to achieve declared objectives by using the information environment is a cold hard examination of what is desired, what is possible and what is best for the United States of America, completely apart from what could be done in the Iraq/Syria AO. It has been, in the opinion of this SME, that short-term coalition objectives based on purely humanitarian (read "western") reasons which are completely acultural within the Middle East, a huge reason for continuing failure of what may loosely called "policy" in this region. If the desire is for a peaceful solution, it should be understood that this is impossible without a regional tyrant, as history shows. The use of unrealistic "soft power" tools whose ramifications are unknown, amongst populations who are historically inured to harsh, exploitative methods of control as well as a "zero-sum" culture, is not aided by an unwillingness to use hard coalition power, combined with thoughtful goals based on realistic national expectations.

The coalition can partially deny real or potential adversaries within the Iraq/Syria AO by access to the information environment by isolating the AO via electronic embargo (meaning offensive cyberwar). If combined with a real physical embargo as well as selective targeted kinetic "jamming," it would be possible to deny much of the IO environment to IS. Simultaneously, well thought out IW efforts aimed at destroying the religious legitimacy of the IS would go a long way to destroy the IS. One thread to denying adversarial ability to achieve their religiously-prompted intolerance would be to simply introduce doubt into their world view(s). There are various methods to do so on this theme but I will not share them in this forum.

However, for all such methods there would/will need to be a combined effort of Middle Eastern-based Muslim religious scholars and coalition SMEs in order to avoid the appearance of Islam versus the world views or for Sunni Muslims to fear a Shia Muslim conquest (or Shia fear of a Sunni conquest). To do so, though, the gross strait jacketing of coalition SMEs by the pernicious influence of Political Correctness, itself a product of the anti-Western political doctrine of Multi-Culturalism, would need to be removed. Without a free exploration and understanding of Islam as well as non-Islamic religions, goals and desires, real IW efforts in the information environment of the religiously fractured Middle East is not possible.

Endnotes

"The King" CBS '60 Minutes' Extract, Scott Pelley, 25 Sep 2016, http://www.cbsnews.com/news/60-minutes-king-abudallah-jordan-amid-crisis/.

King Abdullah II: I think the problem with the West is they see a border between Syria and Iraq. Daesh does not. And this has been a frustration, I think, for a few of us in this area with our Western coalition partners, for several years. You know, the lawyers get into the act and say, "But there's an international border." And we say, "For God's sake, ISIS doesn't work that way." So if you're looking at it and want to play the game by your rules, knowing that the enemy doesn't, we're not going to win this.

Scott Pelley: It seems like American presidents think they know this region better than you.

King Abdullah II: They seem to understand us better than we know each other. And as a result you can see the train on the track coming to the, and we do advise that, if we keep going that way, it's pretty obvious to some of us what's going to happen. And you know, you can only express your views as much and as emotionally as you can. The ethnic makeup of the region is pretty glaringly obvious for us that live in the region, that advisors and think tanks in the West seem to know us better than we supposedly know ourselves. I mean, Syria, when it started, everybody was saying six months. And I said, "Look, you know, if you're saying six months, I'm saying six years." We're in for the long haul, not only in Syria and Iraq, but for the whole region and for the world, unfortunately.

Scott Pelley: But isn't there gonna have to be a Western army of some kind on the ground in order to take the territory?

King Abdullah II: Enablers. Enablers. Because, at the end of the day, you can't have Western troops walking down the street of Syrian cities and villages. At the end of the day, you need the Syrians to be able to do that.

MAJ Robert Payne, USMTM, LTC Brian Steed (ME FAO) and SGM Sohail Shaikh (PSYOP)

What must the coalition do in the information environment to achieve its objectives in Iraq and Syria and how can it deny adversaries the ability to achieve theirs?

Theory: Coalition forces are struggling to achieve its objectives in Iraq and Syria because its efforts are being overwhelmed by adversarial narratives that provide maneuver space for the adversary to survive, operate, and execute attacks from.

Thesis: CENTCOM must execute a strategic mission narrative that synchronizes all JIM efforts across the AOR Coalition Forces operate in. This will enable coalition forces in Iraq and Syria, Afghanistan, or elsewhere to execute a synchronized operational mission narrative at their echelons. The operational mission narrative will allow tactical units to execute a synchronized mission narrative that is mutually supporting to one another, as our advisory does, and deny adversaries the ability to achieve their objectives through the narrative space.

Why: If tactical units, or even operational echelons fail to synchronize their mission narratives from the strategic echelon contradictions will emerge creating opportunities for exploitation by the enemy. Coalition forces operating in North Africa conduct an operation that results in "A" narratives propagated across the region while coalition forces in Afghanistan execute operations resulting in "Z" narratives propagated across region. This space, if not synchronized is easily open to manipulation by the adversary. However, if synchronized is becomes more difficult to manipulate thus limiting the narrative space the adversary operates in. It must begin with the strategic level.

How: Coalition forces must identify 1) Who is/are the most credible messengers of the strategic narrative; 2) What is the most logical strategic narrative that resonates across the AOR within the local belief system; 3) Identify what master narrative residents across the AOR care enough about to translate into human behavior that achieves U.S. interests.

Coalition forces must be open to the possibility that the United States may not be the most credible propagator of the strategic mission narrative, however by supporting it at the operational and tactical echelons U.S. interests can be accomplished.

Coalition forces have been producing study after study for several years. A favorite is the Decade of War Vol I study by JCOA from Jun 2012. It accurately identifies our current challenges. What is not happening, from our vantage point, is the challenges are not being effectively mitigated down to the tactical level. We believe this is because a lack of mission narrative remains the center of gravity for overcoming these challenges and coalition forces have yet to execute a synchronized mission narrative from the top down.

Some JCOA Points with personal observations demonstrating its continued relevance today:
• Understanding the Environment: Coalition forces don't understand the narrative environment, how it directly impacts the lethal and non-lethal fight
• Conventional warfare paradigm: Coalition forces cannot kill their way to victory. The ambivalent population that just wants to live a peaceful life directly impacts every decision coalition forces are faced with. When a child's body washes up on a European shore strategic policy is impacted. War has been democratized and that dead child impacts the votes of who fights, who flees, who commits resources to support refugees, who gives up, who casts blame.
• Battle for the narrative: Does what we say, how we say it, and how we show it (images) align with what we do, how we do it, and how we are seen doing it? This is the narrative space we must synchronize
• Transitions: What is being done to synchronize the friendly maneuver space among coalition units conducting RIP's? Do they know how to transition mission narratives – We lack knowledge of it if they do.
• Adaptation: Four years after the DoW study Mission Narrative lacks any DOTML-PF support that translates into a change in the way tactical echelons prepare for combat deployments.
• SOF-GPF Integration: They both operate in the same narrative space; do they integrate messaging? Additionally, US forces remain ignorant of the pre-existing (liminal) narrative of the host-nation populations with which we interact. There is little understanding of the identity, deep-seated humiliations and grievances that shape this liminal narrative. This results in US personnel regularly conducting themselves in ways that confirm the negative liminal narrative rather than providing an alternative, positive US promoting narrative.

Recommendation: A unique short-duration study is executed to develop a coalition 1) strategic mission narrative, and 2) enable follow-on operational and tactical mission narratives to be developed and executed.

Task: Create the Campaign Mission (MSN) Narrative for CENTCOM to include Strategic, Operational, and Tactical for application in CENTCOM AOR.

Purpose: Enable CENTCOM to execute a synchronized MSN Narrative all all three levels of operation that overwhelms adversary narrative.

Mission: Narrative Development Team (I will explain later) develops a Campaign Strategy Mission Narrative through real-time AOR research in CENTCOM AOR from DTG-DTG (Jan - MAR) IOT provide a MSN Narrative for CENTCOM efforts.

Key Tasks:
    1. Get Partner Nation buy-in of CENTCOM MSN Narrative
    2. Define Strategic, Operational, and Tactical MSN Narrative for CENTCOM AOR

Endstate:
    CENTCOM has a MSN Narrative to execute at all three levels of operations that overwhelms advisory narrative across the AOR by mobilizing civilian support for US and Partner nations

Concept of Operation:
    A four-man "Narrative Development team" with reach back plus the best Arabic interpreter CENTCOM can buy travel to CENTCOM partner nations to develop a viable CENTCOM MSN Narrative that is supported (resources allocated is the metric) by partner nations, feasible for US interests, and executable by the JTF. Narrative Development team reports to CENTCOM J3 (or as delegated by J3). Estimated timeline is four months (two month prep with one month travel in region, one month narrative production).

This operation is a four-phase operation
    P1: Preparation including background research on who to speak with in each partner nation, getting appropriate visa's, and setting dates to meet with partner nations.
    P2: Travel to partner nations getting narrative input
    P3: CENTCOM MSN Narrative production
    P4: Partner nation buy-in of final CENTCOM MSN Narrative

Peter Welby, Centre on Religion & Geopolitics

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.

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.[37] 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 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.

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[37] 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.

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.

Spencer B. Meredith III, Ph.D., NDU
EXSUM: **After ISIL: Stability and Spillover**

On 2 December 2016, Duke University hosted the inaugural USASOC-LUCAS (Laboratory for Unconventional Conflict Analysis and Simulation) symposium entitled *After ISIL: Stability and Spillover.* The event was part of a growing effort to leverage practitioner and scholarly analysis on the complex challenges facing the United States and its allies. Designed to "widen the aperture" for senior DOD decision makers, the symposium initiative engages subject matter experts with some of the thornier questions facing operators in the Gray Zone. This first event capitalized on the current efforts against ISIL, as well as larger issues of post-conflict reconciliation and broader geopolitics affecting the Middle East.

Panels addressed post-ISIL peace and stability in Iraq and Syria, ISIL spillover into the Balkans, and counter-ISIL efforts as part of wider US-Russian relations. Presenters included professors with expertise in Islamic politics, democratic governance, communication and media analysis, and international relations. Additional members from the US military and former ambassadors with service in the Middle East and Eastern Europe contributed their experiential learning to give a US context to the panels. Finally, civil society activists from Syria and the Balkans brought local perspectives to supplement the analysis of regional and global factors. The event concluded with a keynote address by Valens Global CEO, Dr. Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

In order to maximize the conversation, each panel member spoke for approximately ten minutes, affording the audience members ample opportunity to engage the experts on a variety of topics. In attendance were faculty and students from Duke, UNC Chapel Hill, and the National Defense University Joint Special Operations Master of Arts program, as well as military personnel.

This executive summary will discuss the key takeaways from the symposium, and identify recommendations for decision makers taken from the event.

Key Takeaways:

- Identities factor heavily into radicalization processes, but they also form the basis for US interests and actions. This *common role for identities* gives analytical traction and supports strategic communication against ISIL so as to draw away its would-be supporters in the wider community of interest. Emphasizing identities brings into focus the role of beliefs that are both exploitable and rigid, but not always consistent. Narrative messaging in the region of conflict, as well as within post-conflict zones in the Balkans, shows the combination of superior advertising and idea re-branding by ISIL and others to address these recruitment and retention challenges. Messages are intended to sway identities towards anti-status quo views, while also empowering behavior beyond feelings of victimhood. This relies on "touchstones" that have personal appeal to the individual (images of protective fathers on the battlefield, as much as popular video game scenes). They also offer space for membership and meaning in the "in-group". *Both processes allow people to anchor into otherwise disparate events and connect with messages interpreting them.*
- Support for "more democracy" may not be the answer to this problem as debates about the role of external influence vs. internal responsibilities crossed the regional conversations. At stake is the role

of local grievances, and if their legitimacy extends beyond perceived failure of democratic governance to meet political aspirations, or if something fundamentally divides societies from the Western liberal ideal. *The possibility of unmet expectations, rather than any specific catalyzing events, needs further analysis*.

- Comparisons to the Cold War drew in more than international relations between the United States and Russia, extending into the use of influence operations to counter ISIL narratives. At its core, the discussion centered on essential methodological questions of comparing cases across time, geography, culture and history. *Assumptions of an inherent, universal appeal to US values of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" were countered by arguments that those ideals may exist broadly, but get interpreted and acted upon so differently in different contexts as to make comparisons non-actionable*. Bosnia served as an excellent case to test the debate, with <u>some panelists concluding that foreign support ran counter to local values and expectations, leading to a return of hostilities and openings for ISIL recruitment</u>. <u>Others remained optimistic that increased Western support would encourage the discontented to keep building democracy and pursue non-violent conflict resolution with ethnic "outsiders"</u>.
- Underlying much of the discussions was a central theme about the role of the United States in these areas of concern, but also more fundamentally in terms of US self-identity. "<u>With a more negotiable US role on the table", the symposium exposed many of the underlying assumptions about US power projection and the motivations behind it</u>. The event did not pursue those avenues fully given the intended focus on ISIL, but instead allowed for the topic to serve as an *open door for further conversations. This is one of the core tenets of the USASOC-LUCAS initiative*.

Recommendations from the Symposium:

- <u>Clear US strategic goals</u> are needed because lasting grievances are being formed in Iraq and Syria, in large part due to the weaknesses of government – destroyed infrastructure and economies are as damaging to Internally Displaced Persons returning to their lives, as are the failures of political reconciliation through one-sided governance.
- <u>Adaptability with the capabilities and mechanisms of US foreign policy</u> must be the hallmark for dealing with anti-status quo, violent extremist ideologies and organizations. This counters "legacy industry" thinking, where past successes become a disadvantage vis-à-vis nimble start-ups. The latter are "anti-fragile" and can more easily make small errors without failing.
- <u>Further analysis is needed to address the increasing likelihood of "marginalized, concealable identities"</u> that rely on freedom of movement across borders (both physical and cyber) to instigate "politics of division" in new areas.
- Defeating ISIL's effective use of terrorism, media messaging, and inspiration and cooptation of lone wolf attacks, requires using modular means of national power – influence operations across diplomatic, economic, and social settings. This requires <u>integrated, overlapping interagency working groups focused on core challenges and tasks in the Gray Zone</u>.

What Comes After ISIS? A Peace Proposal

Clark McCauley, Ph.D.

Abstract

This proposal develops the following points: (i) Emotions are an important part of mobilizing for violent conflict, especially ethnic conflict. (ii) Sunni versus Shi'a in Iraq and Syria is more an ethnic than a religious conflict. (iii) Sunni in Syria and Iraq join ISIS for a job and for defense against humiliation and domination by Shi'a; religious ideology has little to do with recruitment. (iv) Sykes-Picot is dead; peace in the Middle East depends on development of some degree of self-determination and security, not only for Sunni and Shi'a but for Kurds, Alawites, Christians, and Druze. (v) There is a pressing need for a vision of the Middle East after ISIS; I briefly describe one possibility that Western countries might wish to support.

Keywords: ISIS; Syria; Iraq; Sykes-Picot; peace; ethnic conflict

Introduction

ISIS is more than violence, it is a brand name. We need to fight the brand in a war of ideas that is just as important as the war on the ground in Syria and Iraq. In this text, I suggest a diplomatic initiative to describe the world we want to emerge in Syria and Iraq. I begin with a brief review of emotions in intergroup conflict, then assess the current situation, then describe a view of the future that the U.S. could offer for discussion, and end with some estimates of likely reactions to the initiative.

Emotions in Intergroup Conflict

Rational choice is not absent in intergroup conflict, especially in tactical choices, but emotions are important, especially for taking risks for a group or cause. Ethnic conflicts are fraught with emotions.

The idea of nationalism is that an ethnic group, a perceived descent group and its culture, should have a state. Nationalism was the most powerful source of political mobilization in the 20th century, despite punditry predicting that economic interest would supplant ethnicity. The weakness of economic interest and the power of ethnic nationalism was already apparent at the beginning of WWII, when the members of 'international' labour unions rallied vociferously for what union leaders denounced as a 'capitalist' war.

For ethnic majorities, domination by a minority is associated with the experience of humiliation. Here I understand humiliation to be a corrosive combination of anger in response to injustice and shame for not fighting injustice. Anger calls for revenge, not taking revenge because of fear is cause for shame, shame leads to additional anger at those who have shamed us—and the cycle continues. Shi'a in Iraq and Sunni in Syria experienced years of humiliation as majorities repressed by minorities.

Particularly humiliating is sudden reversal of status. In Iraq, the U.S. intervention against Saddam Hussein turned Sunni minority dominance into Sunni minority subjugation by Shi'a. In Syria, civil war turned large parts of the country from the original Alawite-Christian-Druze minority dominance of a Sunni majority to Alawite-Christian-Druze subjugation and ethnic cleansing by Sunni Muslims. In the incipient state of

Kurdistan, made possible by U.S. support, Sunni minority dominance has turned to Sunni subjugation by a Kurdish majority. Roger Petersen's book, Western Intervention in the Balkans: The Strategic Use of Emotion in Conflict, which traces the emotional consequences of status reversals in the Balkans [1] is a guide to the power of emotions that are also at play in the Middle East.

Viewing the Sunni - Shi'a Divide as Ethnic Conflict

Although often referred to as sectarian conflict, the conflict between Shi'a and Sunni in Iraq and Syria is not about religion. ISIS wraps itself in a particular fundamentalist form of Islam, but it is not the interpretation of the Koran that is at issue. ISIS wants political power, land, oil, money—wants to be the new Sunni caliphate, wants to be a state.

Sunni versus Shi'a in Iraq and Syria is no more a sectarian conflict than Loyalist vs. Republican in Northern Ireland was a sectarian conflict. The issue in Northern Ireland was not Catholic versus Protestant religious practice or doctrine, but two groups defined by perceived descent at war over land and political power.

Similarly the conflict between Jews and Palestinians is not a sectarian conflict, is not about Muslim versus Hebrew religious practice but about two perceived descent groups at war over land and political power.

Are Shi'a and Sunni ethnic groups? Are they defined by descent? Under Saddam Hussein's repression of Shi'a in Iraq, from 1979 to 2003, intermarriage between Shi'a and Sunni was not uncommon. Intermarriage as we know, means the dissolution of groups defined by descent. But after the U.S. deposed Saddam Hussein, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi began a campaign of attacking Shi'a in order to incite Shi'a revenge on Sunni, which would turn complacent Sunni into warriors bent on revenge against Shi'a. This campaign succeeded in its aims after Zarqawi blew up the Shi'a mosque in Samarra: Shi's and Sunni began a cycle of violence and counter-violence in which no one was safe. Militias arose on both sides to offer protection, and violence escalated. [2]

It is fair to say that Shi'a and Sunni were declining as ethnic groups in Iraq as perceived descent distinctions were blurred by intermarriage in the last decades of the 20th century. But violence and ethnic cleansing have strengthened group boundaries so that today intermarriage is rare and existing Shi'a-Sunni marriages are strained and breaking. [3] This is not a case of ethnicity causing war, this is a case of war building ethnicity.

The Roots of Violence in Syria and Iraq

ISIS is successful to the extent that the Sunni of Iraq and Syria see ISIS as their only effective defense against domination and humiliation by Shi'a. [4]. As Charlie Winter pointed out at a conference, ISIS communications in the territory they control emphasize the horrors of Shi'a retribution against Sunni if ISIS loses. For many in Iraq and Syria, ISIS is also the only source of jobs. [5].

But ISIS protection and ISIS jobs are currently welded together with an extremist form of Islam that many Sunni would rather do without. [6] To undermine Sunni support for ISIS, the U.S. must show Sunni in Syria and Iraq a path to security from Shi'a humiliation that does not depend on ISIS. Thus John Bolton, former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, has argued that the creation of a Sunni state is required to defeat ISIS. [7]

Similar issues of security and status exist for other ethnic groups in Iraq and Syria. Kurds are seeking security from subjugation and humiliation by both Arabs and Turks. Alawites and Christians seek security from revenge and humiliation by the Sunni majority they previously dominated. Russians seek to continue Mediterranean port and airbase facilities and the survival of their ally Bashar al-Assad. Turks want good relations with the Sunni majority in Syria and no Kurdish state on their border. Iran wants to extend its influence and protect Shi'a Arabs. Sunni tribes in both Syria and Iraq have been both perpetrators and victims of violence; tribal sheiks have both welcomed and fought ISIS.

Denise Natali (National Defense University), who has been studying ISIS and related security issues in Syria and Iraq, recognizes the complexities of local actors in her February 2016 report, Countering ISIS: One Year Later. The last section of her report, titled Post-Da'ish stabilization, is worth quoting here.

Even if the U.S. defeats Da'ish tomorrow, there will be a day-after problem in much of Iraq and Syria. U.S. aims to stabilize Iraq and Syria should address the larger problem of weakened states and the emergence of strong, violent non-state and sub-state actors. This effort will demand a stable set of political security arrangements that can avoid the emergence of another Da'ish in the future. It should also assure that liberated areas are successful and stable so that people can return. This effort should include providing massive refugee assistance, immediate resources and humanitarian aid, developing local power sharing and security agreements, building local institutions, and mitigating regional spillover. [8]

What comes after ISIS? What would it mean to develop "local power sharing and security agreements, building local institutions"? The U.S. needs a diplomatic initiative that can promise at least a degree of security and status to all the major actors. This initiative would describe a world the U.S. would like to see emerge from the current violence in Iraq and Syria, and include a statement of willingness to talk with anyone and everyone about how to reach this world or something like it.

A Future for Syria and Iraq

The U.S. goal should be recognition of political units providing security and status for the groups identified below. Security and status would be assured to the extent that each unit has its own police and court system and controls a population-proportionate share of oil revenues in Iraq and Syria. The units may initially be thought of as states in a federal government responsible for allocating water and oil resources, but other descriptions of the units are possible: provinces, departments, or cantons. The U.S. would talk with any group or power about how to get to these or similar units. The U.S. should try to enlist EU/NATO allies to support the initiative. There should be no pre-conditions for the discussion, all borders and conditions being up for negotiation.

In particular, the lines drawn by the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 are on the table for reconsideration. Giving up the Sykes-Picot division of Syria from Iraq will be necessary because Sunni fears will not countenance a continuing division of Sunni into a Syrian majority and an Iraqi minority.

The initiative would raise for discussion the following as possible federal states with local institutions of governance and security:

- IS territory becomes a state of Sunni who want ISIS governance. U.S. will cease attacks on ISIS and cease opposing foreign volunteers for ISIS, including volunteers from the U.S.
- Tribal state for Sunni who do not want ISIS governance.

- Alawite state on the Mediterranean north of Lebanon (~Latakia, French Mandate 1920-1936).
- Turkman areas near the Turkish border annexed to Turkey.
- Kurdish state around Erbil.
- Shi'a state around Baghdad and south of it.
- Druze state next to Jordan (~French Mandate 1920-1936).
- Damascus Federal District with police but no military.
- Christians who wish to emigrate will be accepted as refugees in Europe and the U.S.

Likely Reactions to such a Peace Initiative

- ISIS will oppose the initiative because it threatens ISIS's claims to represent an international caliphate. But if ISIS loses more territory it may become ready to negotiate to save the remaining caliphate. At a minimum such an initiative would generate conflict inside ISIS between power pragmatists (localists) and international Islamist radicals (globalists). [9] Such a conflict would weaken ISIS from the inside.
- Sunni who do and do not want ISIS will be in conflict. The Awakening of 2007 showed the potential power of this conflict; in 2016 it would weaken ISIS from the outside.
- Tehran would likely oppose the initiative because any movement toward a peaceful solution in the area would reduce Iran's influence in Iraq and Syria.
- Hizballah would likely oppose the initiative and follow Iran, its supporter.
- Some Baghdad Shi'a may welcome the initiative as a way to reduce threat from ISIS, even at the cost of more self-determination for Sunni areas of the old Iraq. Others in Baghdad would be against any initiative that does not continue their revenge posture against the Sunni who dominated Iraqi Shi'a for so long. This is a split already evident in reactions to Prime Minister al-Alabadi's efforts to represent Sunni more in Iraqi politics.
- Moscow should welcome saving Bashar and de facto Western recognition for its Mediterranean air and sea bases in the Alawite state. Russia might welcome a division of territorial influence that can limit potential conflict between Russian and NATO armed forces.
- Israel would be satisfied with a devolution movement of Syria and Iraq from strong centralized states into militarily weaker federal states.
- Kurds would welcome recognition of their statelet.
- Turkey would strongly oppose recognition of the present de facto autonomous Kurdish territory but would see some sweetener in transfer of Turkman areas along the Syria/Turkey border to Turkey.
- Druze would be pleased at the prospect of recognition and a degree of self-governance.
- Christians, who are by now too few for effective self-defense, would be glad for an escape hatch to immigrate to Christian-majority countries.
- The United States would get credit in the Muslim world for seeking peace without Western domination and for putting an end to the Sykes-Picot colonial boundaries.
- France and U.K. should not oppose the initiative; these countries lost the benefits of Sykes-Picot decades ago.
- Arab oil countries will likely oppose the initiative because it does not promise to crush ISIS; however, they might be glad to see limiting Iran's power in Syria.
- U.S. sympathizers with ISIS would more likely go to join ISIS than perform attacks on U.S. soil.
- Refugees from Syria are likely to welcome an initiative that might permit some of them to return.

Conclusion

The proposed initiative should, in public relation terms, be positive for the United States and help to reduce Sunni support for ISIS. It should shake up all sides by shifting the narrative from who is winning at the moment to a realistic vision of a future worth working for. Even opposition from Turkey, Iran, and the oil states might be tempered by a desire to avoid being seen putting self-interest above the welfare of millions who prefer peace. With such an initiative the U.S. government could seize the moral high ground that brings new friends and new opportunities.

What comes after ISIS? The old states of Syria and Iraq have dissolved in violence. The U.S. needs, and the people suffering civil war in these areas need even more, a vision of how peace can emerge from violence. Unfortunately there is currently no appetite in the U.S. for thinking beyond defeating ISIS. Similarly there was little thought for what would come after defeating Saddam Hussein. I have described one possible future in an effort to get the future in our sights. If this or a similar initiative were announced, and diplomatic efforts and material resources were committed to it, there is a chance of failure. However, if we do not think about what comes after ISIS, failure will be certain and new rounds of fighting will be all but certain–with no peace in sight.

About the Author: Clark McCauley is Research Professor of Psychology and co-director of the Solomon Asch Center for Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict at Bryn Mawr College. His research interests include the psychology of group identification, group dynamics and intergroup conflict, and the psychological foundations of ethnic conflict and genocide. He is founding editor emeritus of the journal 'Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict: Pathways toward Terrorism and Genocide'.

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Question Follow-up: The response to QL5 noted that ISIL is moving to ZeroNet platform for peer-to-peer messaging, which is extremely robust to distributed denial-of-service (DDOS) attack/other counter measures. What effect could this have on Intel efforts?

Implications of Da'esh Move to ZeroNet Platform

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Through our research into Da'esh cyber messaging (Derrick et al., in press), we have identified an emerging trend in Da'esh forum, propaganda, and fundraising websites: the use of the ZeroNet application. ZeroNet, a peer-to-peer application, uses the same technology as Bitcoin or other cryptocurrencies using shapeshift.io. As Da'esh users begin publishing their websites off servers using this ZeroNet application, visitors are then only able to visit that website (e.g., blogs, chat forums) using that ZeroNet application. This facilitates/mandates that visitors then seed that content to other viewers, as the website is distributed to and from many locations and from multiple small servers. When the website is updated, the update is pushed out to all seeders. Each website visited is also served/seeded by the visitors, thus creating a distributed publishing system that permeates more than just one physical site owner.

Implications. The use of this application is another instance of Da'esh as an early adopter of IT Innovation (Ligon, Derrick, Logan, Fuller, Church, Perez, & Robinson, 2016). ZeroNet is built for hosting all types of dynamic websites, and any type of file can be distributed on it (e.g., VCS repositories, databases, etc). Creating ZeroNet websites is facile and instructions can be located on a variety of open source websites[38] and easily installed. Implications we have identified are 1) DDOS is no longer an option for technical interdiction unless all seed accounts can be hit at one time, 2) taking down a website that violates user terms (e.g., suspicious content, hate speech) is no longer an option, 3) social engineering will play a larger role to gain access to protected sites, and 4) cyber interdiction may need to focus on heavier preventative measures rather than post hoc take-downs/removal. However, one positive implication is that Blue could also use the seeding to find supporters of Da'esh in the following ways. First, by seeding real or other content, analysts can become part of the network that hosts these websites. This can allow them to monitor who seeds the content to identify other potential supporters. However, this technique is limited if the other seeders use an anonymizer, such as an anonymous VPN or tor. The ability to find other seeders will often (not always) be limited to the organizations ability to analyze the tor network. Finally, as with other Da'esh endorsed applications (e.g., Dawn of Glad Tidings), monitoring who downloads the ZeroNet

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[38] Websites such as https://zeronet.readthedocs.io/en/latest/faq/ walk users through the pros and cons of ZeroNet and are available in at least 22 languages.

application in months following its endorsement on Da'esh communication channels (circa October 2016 and weeks following), one could track IP addresses for those who do not use TOR to mask their identity (this instruction was not included on the initial post about downloading ZeroNet). Second, because the content is secured in same manner as bitcoin wallet, bitcoin hacking and identification techniques would also be effective on this application. Finally, an innovative way to take down content is to infiltrate creator accounts and make updates with blank content to disrupt files of seed accounts.

Conclusions. Our assessment indicates that site destruction of user content employing ZeroNet will be more difficult due to its crowdsourced, distributed platform. However, collection of data may in fact be easier. Moreover, using the techniques we recommended and others developed to harvest data from bitcoin users, it may in fact be easier to identify other seeders and downloaders than it has been from 2014-present.

Question (QL5): *What are the predominant and secondary means by which both large (macro – globally outside of the CJOA, such as European, North African, and Arabian Peninsula) and more targeted (micro – such as DAESH-held Iraq) audiences receive propaganda?*

SME Input

Da'esh Cyber Domains from August 2015 – August 2016

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University of Nebraska Omaha

Related Publication: Ideological Rationality: The Cyber Profile of Daesh (available on request and in press at *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict Journal*)

Daesh is the most prolific violent extremist group on social media, but their cyber footprint is much more complex than researchers of solely mainstream services such as Twitter imply. Their cyber profile involves pushing content into open infrastructures to disseminate information, such as ideological messages, propaganda, and training instructions. To date, much of the research on Daesh communication has focused on what is publicly available through speeches and videos released by al Hayat Media and Daesh Twitter users (Ingram, 2014; Veilleuz-Lepage, 2014; Zelin, 2015). A notable exception is the important monograph from Saltman and Winter (2014), where the authors identified complex cyber capabilities such as 1) centralized propaganda, 2) global dissemination of threats, 3) custom app development, and 4) decentralized messaging. Given the acknowledgement of Daesh's prolific use of a variety of Internet Communication Technology (ICT), it follows that each aspect they use plays a role in sharing the story Daesh wishes to convey.

An organization's online presence plays a significant role in communicating with a global audience (Ligon, Derrick, & Harms, 2015). In regards to Daesh and its messaging campaigns, popular platforms of more conventional ICT—like Twitter or Facebook—are mere starting points for its multi-faceted, complex cyber profile. Thus, the purpose of this effort is to better understand the nature of the cyber channels and domains most used in the messaging of Daesh, particularly as it manifests through social media connected transient web pages to an English-speaking audience. The organization's end goal vis-à-vis their online marketing campaign is complex and is used to "attract potential recruits, raise money, promote the image of the organization, or just spread fear among its enemies" (Barrett, 2014: 53). While there is some evidence that a centralized authority approves messaging prior to it being disseminated via more conventional channels (e.g., Dabiq, Al-Hayat Media), the cyber footprint of Daesh is more complex. This overall strategic effort is reportedly overseen by a skilled media council (Lister, 2014). However, the deployment and dissemination of Daesh messages is arguably decentralized once content is generated, resulting in a robust cyber presence.

While the Daesh strategic and tactical cyber profiles are unquestionably unprecedented (Zelin, 2015), questions remain as to what we can glean about the organization from its messaging. The dataset used for assessing Daesh's online presence was unique to this project and comprised of 4.5 million tweets and 16,000 attached transient webpage articles posted by Daesh followers, members, and sympathizers. The research methodology and subsequent data analysis provides insight into the messaging dynamics of Daesh. We conclude the study with a discussion of limitations of our method, implications of our findings, and recommendations for future research.

Method

We collected this data by developing a custom program that follows the method outlined in figure 1 (Derrick et al., 2016). First, our program utilized the Twitter API to follow and log tweets posted by the hacktivist group Anonymous. For the present effort we did not evaluate the "Tweets," but used them as launching points to the open architectures where richer content is housed. During much of this collection, Anonymous posted Daesh members' Twitter handles approximately one every two minutes since August 2014. As stated previously, the goal is to understand the strategic messaging from the deployment of messages by large grassroots followers. Thus, our program c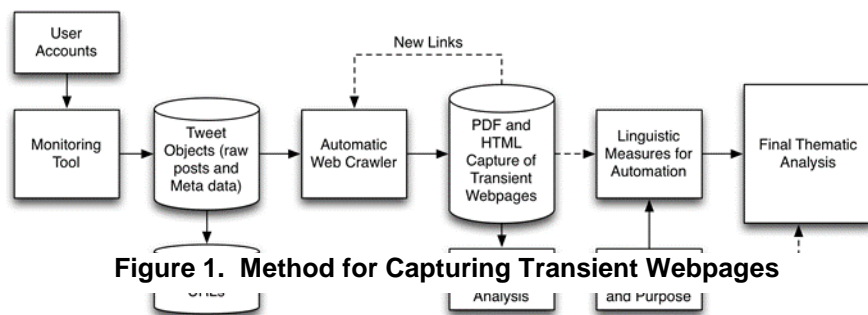ompressed a list of Daesh-affiliated accounts identified in the posted content. From that list, our system utilized the Twitter API to download a sample of the latest tweets from each Daesh-affiliated account.

Figure 1. Method for Capturing Transient Webpages

After logged into our database, the tweets were sorted into various components (e.g., web addresses and links, hashtags, mentions) to be analyzed. Our software searched for links within tweets referencing anonymous posting services for open content-publishing transient webpages (e.g., JustPaste.it, dump.to). Next, our software automatically crawled to the referenced webpage and captured both PDF and HTML versions of the actual transient webpages and stored them our database. From these pages, the program identified any links to other transient webpages/open architectures in the online posting. In a recursive manner, the software continued to download and analyze the content until all possible transient links had been found and captured. To date, this process has produced over 4,500,000 tweets, 1,589,623 URLs, and 16,000 transient web pages, and we have labeled this effort the *Social Media for Influence and Radicalization (SMIR) Dataset* (Church, 2016).

Results

For the present QL5, we rank ordered the top domains used by Daesh between the dates of August 2015 to September 2016 in our SMIR dataset. A more detailed analysis of monthly usage could be conducted upon request. Results indicated that Twitter, identified as the "jumping off point" for much of the persuasive content we find on non-indexed, transient webpages, is the most oft used. However, a variety of other types of domains are also used by Daesh to disseminate messaging, as indicated in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Rank Order Daesh Communication Channels 2015-2016

Rank	Domain	*f*	*%*
1	twitter.com	368,652	23.19%
3	youtube.com	213,092	13.41%
2	justpaste.it	105,802	6.66%
4	du3a.org	67,380	4.24%
5	archive.org	67,298	4.23%
6	zad-muslim.com	36,519	2.30%
7	sendvid.com	22,776	1.43%
8	drive.google.com	19,143	1.20%
11	up.top4top.net	18,965	1.19%
9	dump.to	13,394	0.84%
10	web.archive.org	12,904	0.81%
21	wp.me	14,280	0.90%
12	ghared.com	11,496	0.72%
13	qurani.tv	10,811	0.68%
14	quran.to	10,638	0.67%
15	telegram.me	8,726	0.55%
16	7asnat.com	8,624	0.54%
17	dailymotion.com	7,970	0.50%
18	almlf.com	7,958	0.50%
19	d3waapp.org	7,774	0.49%
20	wthker.com	7,067	0.44%
22	my.mail.ru	6,850	0.43%
23	quran.ksu.edu.sa	6,774	0.43%
24	pho2up.net	6,000	0.38%

25	mezani.net	5,712	0.36%
		1,066,605	67.10%

Number of total URLs in SMIR: 1,589,623

Top 25 Channels Utilized by Daesh between August 30, 2015 - August 30, 2016

# of URLs

400,000
350,000
300,000
250,000
200,000
150,000
100,000
50,000
0

twitter.com, youtube.com, justpaste.it, du3a.org, archive.org, zad-muslim.com, sendvid.com, drive.google.com, up.top4top.net, dump.to, web.archive.org, wp.me, ghared.com, qurani.tv, quran.to, telegram.me, 7asnat.com, dailymotion.com, almlf.com, d3waapp.org, wthker.com, my.mail.ru, quran.ksu.edu.sa, pho2up.net, mezani.net

Table 2. Graph of Daesh Domains 2015-2016
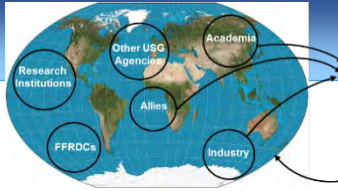
6 January 2017

Question: *The wide-spread, public access to smartphones has been a game-changer for the distribution and production of propaganda. Is there more data available about the types of apps (e.g., WhatsApp, Facebook, Telegram, Viber) used on smartphones to distribute propaganda, and the methods through which this is accomplished?*

Contributors: *Rebecca Goolsby (Office of Naval Research), Nitin Agarwal (University of Arkansas at Little Rock), Fred Morstatter (Arizona State University), Randy Kluver (Texas A&M University), Willow Brugh, (Center For Civic Media, MIT Media Lab), Todd Huffman & Ryan Paterson (IST Research)*

Executive Summary

Dr. Jen Ziemke, John Carroll University (in collaboration with the rest of the team).

The responses below attempt to summarize a conversation among contributors that began over email.

Twitter & Facebook?

Todd Huffman and Ryan Paterson shared their analysis of the top fifty applications and services used over the last three months to spread VEO propaganda. Top on the list are applications for Twitter, Facebook, and WordPress, among others as shown in the Appendix**.** Our contributors also highlighted others: Fred Morstatter (ASU) flagged Telegram, as well as custom-made apps, while Randy Kluver (TAMU) remarks that alternative platforms tacitly supported by foreign governments (such as Wechat or VKontakte) "re-create the geographical and political divisions that most assumed were ending with the rise of a globalized world." However, many authors argue that the issue is truly platform neutral, and that message circulation is just as effective in any number of other platforms. Rebecca Goolsby (ONR) additionally surmised that the way in which the question was asked explains the "Twitter and Facebook" answer received. Contributors felt that gaining traction on this issue first requires understanding how VEO's leverage social media and vulnerable audiences to attain their goals. We turn to Rebecca Goolsby to elaborate on this issue.

"Anyone that is a true believer in X must also believe Y"

Goolsby asserts that a goal of any VEO is to transform, create, and reframe a conversation by deploying "side-step logic", which amounts to: *If you truly believe X, then you must also believe and support Y.* The crafty use of this logical fallacy is what leads hyper-connected yet vulnerable audiences to leverage social media to recirculate and thus amplify the message. She says a VEO wants "to turn the conversation so that the audience believes if they support Healthy Kittens for America, then they must naturally support

<INSERT agitation issue here>. And if you don't support <insert here>, how can you call yourself a Friend of All Kittens?"

Since the narrative is pitched to the target audiences' deep biases, values, and worldview, the audience does not engage in critical thinking about the information. Because the audience emotionally 'knows' that X is true (and right) in its emotional mind, then it accepts the parasite narrative without thorough consideration of its origins, implications, or agenda. And since the audience finds that more and more of its trusted peers are echoing this information, critical evaluation is further suppressed.

At the same time, the VEO insinuates itself into the information networks of the target audience in a way that displays this vulnerability, repeating and amplifying the motifs and sub-narratives that reflect its agenda, until it is hard to find where the host narrative and the parasite narrative are differentiated. The target audience is then repeatedly exposed to the parasite narrative through covert means, using computerized amplification methods (e.g. botnets, fake news).

Audiences as unwitting vectors of amplification

How do the VEO's reframe the conversation that makes this 'logical' side-step possible? By manipulating vulnerable audiences into recirculating this information for them. Messages are amplified by vulnerable audiences and paid intermediaries who recirculate these messages, drowning other views. Goolsby asserts that "the reason phones are a game changer is that it is the easiest and cheapest access to the Internet available to most of the world. Newer users--the newbies-- are not especially sophisticated in their understanding of news and fake information, but everyone has cognitive vulnerabilities--hot button issues--that can be exploited." Nitin Agarwal (U. of Arkansas) elaborates on message amplification by noting that messages emerge in one medium but are then massively disseminated across several other platforms: "Strategies such as thread jacking, smoke-screening, hashtag latching, etc. are used to multiply the messages."

Why share?

Youth in particular share or create these messages for a variety of different reasons. As digital natives, they want to be seen sharing insider information as a way to boast about privileged access to content from the frontlines. Youth compete to post information that shows just how enlightened they are about an issue relative to their peers, and to do so faster than anyone else. Jen Ziemke's (John Carroll University) young students remark that when their friends spread information and pictures of weaponry and battlefield activity they do so "to make themselves look good amongst their friends who do not have such access to such exclusive content." Still others share in order to feel like they belong to something, or to "feel cool," or even to feel "morally superior to have shared something that helps craft one's identity around an issue."

Content Consumption & Recirculation

Many who end up sharing content start out by passively looking through media on their phone (their 'feed'), mostly out of boredom, curiosity, or force of habit. For many, it is an obsession born out of an addiction to their phones. Their ritual includes checking several different feeds, nearly all of the time. They often do not start out with the intent to circulate something in particular, rather, they share based on the serendipity of their feed.

Snapchat, Instagram & YouTube

Ziemke's interviewees report that youth generally prefer receiving messages via pictures and video rather than words, which is another reason they increasingly turn to platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, and Youtube. "Pictures make you feel like a part of the battlespace" and powerful imagery "gets stuck in your head" in ways that narratives without visuals do not. Nitin Agarwal likewise finds that millennials are particularly vulnerable to YouTube messaging. Agarwal calls YouTube "*the* platform for crafting the narrative and setting the agenda."

Another reason youth are moving toward other channels seems to be due to differences in the design and user experience across the platforms. Millennials report being *tired of "all of this scrolling"* and thus are likely to continue to move away from the Facebook and Twitter environment and towards Instagram, YouTube & Snapchat. Others remarked that Twitter and Facebook are quickly gaining negative reputations as increasingly full of garbage, spam and propaganda, and that many are drifting away from it, and turning to Snapchat and Instagram as platforms which have less "noise" in their feeds compared with the conventional channels.

It's so easy

However, it is the ease of sharing that sticks with one young student of Ziemke's, who relayed that what actually seems most important is simply how easy all of this is, which is independent of platform. Picking up his phone he noted that he could get access to anything he wanted in a moment through knowing just one contact. What stood out for him was the stupendous simplicity and ease with which the exchange of information can happen, literally in just seconds, and on a phone that is already in your hand. [39]

The heart of the matter

What are the relevant important next steps one might suggest in light of these trends?

Willow Brugh of the Center for Civic Media cautions that simply shutting down the same tools that populations use when infrastructure collapses seems like a terrible idea. After all, these are the same tools that help vulnerable populations self-organize when living under repressive regimes.

Clearly there is an urgent need to solve the *structural problems* that contribute to what makes a VEO's narrative attractive in the first place. Randy Kluver remarks that alternative platforms "re-create the geographical and political divisions that most assumed were ending with the rise of a globalized world. Political, social, and cultural discussions that could happen on globally accessible platforms are moving into different platforms, where there is less ability for US citizens to interact, and thus the technological platforms re-embody the geographical differences."

Brugh elaborates: "Are we yet spending as much (hopefully far more) on youth opportunity and other vectors we know that decrease the likelihood of finding ISIL et al as undesirable? All the tools I know about

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[39]Several of my current students have been working on this problem with me for the past three semesters. Ranging in age from 18-25, one told me a story that illustrates this dynamic. While attending one of the most prestigious international schools in Lebanon, he met the son of an alleged weapons supplier to various Christian militias in Lebanon and Syria. How would this individual have any access to VEO propaganda and/or distribute it to a wide audience? Well, the Christian militias in Syria that his father allegedly supplies are closely allied with Hezbollah. As a result, his contact constantly receives "inside footage" specifically addressed to him, which he then boastingly posts on social media pages such as Instagram and Snapchat, for thousands to see. Furthermore, whenever Hezbollah and the Christian militias triumph in Syria, a victory song plays on his snapchat story for 10 seconds, accompanied by a yellow heart. This means he gets real-time updates, pictures, and videos from the battlefield on his phone.

from online harassment, escalated (aka "weaponized social") which monitor or nudge people's online communications are far more often used to quash meaningful dissent than to actually help anyone."

In conclusion, while we may have taken some limited steps toward answering one question, we know that the question itself is really the core of the matter, and are therefore grateful for this and any future opportunities to engage.

SME Input

Hosts and Parasites:

the spread of propaganda in the new information environment

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The spread of propaganda on the Internet is a dark art. It involved botnets, blogsites, and "grey" social media platforms you may never have heard of (Gab, Zello and others) to coordinate and orchestrate the media campaign. It involves paid actors, botnet operators, advertising companies, and the willing, vulnerable audiences who are easily targeted. As I've argued elsewhere, most human beings (perhaps all human beings) are vulnerable to propaganda when it gets under the defenses of their logical, rational minds and directly impacts their cognitive vulnerabilities--their sacred values, emotional, personal experiences, beliefs and understandings with high emotional appeal. Rand Waltzmann has termed these as "cognitive vulnerabilities," topics and beliefs that are so close to emotional space that analytical thinking is difficult to engage.

Mark Goulston has described the impact of a discourse that hits one of the discussants in their deep emotional spaces as "amygdala hijack." The emotional brain, surrounding the amygdala and its emotions-processing centers, is willing to accept some narratives without engaging higher thinking. Sometimes, such as when a person is afraid or angry, the brain stem's 'fight or flight' mechanisms become engaged--and the cerebral cortex, the analytical, logical mind, becomes disengaged. The person who is in hijack will fight rather than change his stance. Indeed, people in amygdala hijack often pick a fight, putting the other person in discourse into the same, angry, unreasoning frame of mind that perpetuates the argument. This is certainly what we are seeing around us on the Internet today.

Ben Nimmo's description of distort, distract, dismiss and dismay as the four key tactics of Russian disinformation point to this strategy: discover vulnerable narratives, distort those narratives, distract the audience with increasingly outrageous and inflammatory information, and dismiss any suggestion that the West understands the situation. The "distort, distract and dismay" elements have been packaged and injected into vulnerable audiences to inflame and upset them, and to make them see that this distorted truth is legitimate and real information by seeding the information environment and hijacking their social

networks with fake news and thousands, likely millions, of fake users, bots, and cyborg accounts--bot accounts that also have human users.

To create a campaign on any network, platform or app you need four things.

1) a target audience susceptible to messaging whose members are willing to distribute the propaganda far and wide to others. Anyone can be used, but the Russians have used as their ideal target audiences those with narratives consonant with their strategy, including many who are in "chronic" amygdala hijack--those anxious, angry individuals who messages constantly and has many contacts in other networks. UFO believers, paranormal and astrology buffs, conspiracy theorists, white supremecists, and anyone angry, afraid, or latched tightly to some ideal are heavily messaged with propaganda--because it helps if the audience is a bit irrational (to very irrational). Irrational people message heavily and are easily taken in if the message is consonant with their beliefs. But everyone has their hot button topics--everyone can be a bit irrational when their deeply held beliefs are brought into the narrative.

2) an intermediary network of allies who will insert the propaganda into the message streams that the target audience will eagerly consume, without questioning it very much. Paid troll farms work well. Paid propagandists who can easily and cheaply code "puppet" accounts so that one person looks like he's ten thousand people are quite successful. Size matters, since one must envelope the target population with propaganda coming at them from all sides.

The goal here is to saturate the target audience's message stream and network and gain their trust and buy-in, by associating the propaganda with topics and issues they care about. The goal is gain their trust and buy-in to the source of the messaging, in order to lace the messages that they care about with propaganda and finally turn the conversation so that the audience believes if they support Healthy Kittens for America, then they must naturally support <INSERT agitation issue here>. And if you don't support <insert here>, how can you call yourself a Friend of All Kittens?

3) the classic tactics of distort, dismiss, dismay and distract that can be used to inject new information--the parasite discussion--into the host narrative.

4) Untrammeled access to the target audience so that will not receive any indication that the propaganda is not real or, if such a message is received, that the target is so emotionally tangled up that they reject any messages that are counter to the propaganda.

You can do this anywhere on any platform. In S. Korea, a youth protest march began with side discussions on a boy-band fan site.

The reason phones are a game changer is that phones are the easiest and cheapest access to the Internet available to most of the world. New users (the "newbies") are often not especially sophisticated in their understanding of news and fake information or familiar with the social dynamics in cyberspace. They form a great target audience for crowd manipulation and social hysteria propagation. The Russians have been engaged in crowd manipulation and social hysteria propagation on the Internet on a grand scale since at least 2014, with evidence of earlier experiments. The app doesn't matter. If those four conditions are met, any platform CAN be used, but there has to be a sufficiently large target population--or any influential audience that can reach others effectively-- to make it worth the propagandist's while. WhatsApp, Snapchat and the like do not make that as easy as Facebook and Twitter because it is somewhat more difficult to obfuscate identity to the platform and technically more challenging to build the amplifier

technology similar to the Twitter botnets. Newer platforms tend to be on the lookout for this kind of technology and try to head it off early, as it creates unacceptable problems for them technically.

If ANY app allows for anonymous accounts (needed by the troll farms to amplify their signal), if it allows messaging to go freely about in groups and through social networks easily and without cost, it is a POSSIBLE vector. It is not a LIKELY vector if the propagandists cannot form an anonymous, automated mob of automated and semi-automated accounts to boost their signal sufficiently to create an echo chamber around the target audience.

Cross-Channel Social Media-Facilitated Disinformation Campaigns

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Dr. Goolsby's response is spot-on with respect to what we have observed in several studies of disinformation campaigns. These studies shed light on coordination among information actors (including bloggers, trolls, YouTube-rs, botnets) observed during disinformation campaigns, such as the anti-NATO propaganda campaigns conducted by pro-Russian media and ISIS-led propaganda campaigns for radicalization, recruitment, and raising funds. This involves a well-crafted strategy using (1) cross-channel communication, and (2) deploying strategic information maneuvers to amplify the spread. More specifically, propaganda emerges on one medium, say blogs or YouTube, and is then massively disseminated on Twitter and the likes. Strategies such as, thread jacking, smoke-screening, hashtag latching, etc. are used to multiply the messages. YouTube is emerging to be *the* platform for crafting the narrative and setting agenda. The demographics on YouTube is also most vulnerable to these tactics - they are highly impressionable and naturally inclined towards getting information from social media or alternate media (e.g., binge-watching propaganda channels).

Additional channels that warrant exploration vis-a-vis disinformation campaigns include Reddit and Discord (can be considered as "Slack" for gamers). The demographic on these channels primarily consist of millenniums. Both these channels were heavily used during the recent US

Presidential elections to propagate 'fake news':
(https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/nov/22/moderators-trump-reddit-group-fake-news-crackdown).

Mobile Applications for Disseminating Propaganda

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It is important to consider that some propaganda is distributed through custom apps made by the people and organizations whose goal is to distribute the propaganda. For example, ISIS made their own app to distribute propaganda to their followers [1].

Dr. Goolsby and Dr. Agarwal identified the major distribution approaches in their write-ups. Two studies have looked into how ISIS used Telegram to distribute propaganda [2] [3].

Further, it is important to note that many of these organizations, such as ISIS, do not wish to have their true identities known. Thus, they use mobile apps that allow for increased security to prevent leaking their personal information. The Electronic Frontier Foundation has created a survey of mobile applications based on their security [4]. This could be useful for identifying trends in mobile app usage among these groups.

[1]http://www.ibtimes.com/isis-android-app-islamic-state-develops-smartphone-app-propaganda-messaging-2211847

[2]http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/welcome-bizarre-frightening-world-islamic-state-channels-telegram-1561186

[3]http://www.forbes.com/sites/parmyolson/2015/11/19/telegram-isis-propaganda-channels/#50a55ca86f88

[4]https://www.eff.org/node/82654

Platform Gaps: New media platforms and geopolitics

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One of the major problems with analyzing the use of social media platforms (or apps) and in political or social activism (change) is that the technology changes more rapidly than our ability to adequately digest how the apps are being used, the particular affordances of any particular app or platform, and the ways in which users will soon find new ways to use the technology. New apps are being developed all the time, and although at this point there are a few dominant global platforms (such as Facebook and Twitter), soon that dominance is likely to end in favor of new apps. Any app will do, as so many new apps provide opportunities for all kinds of messaging. One of the important assumptions in our discussion needs to be the distinction between apps that are accessible to and used by a broad public (such as Facebook), or those that are used selectively by much more limited groups (such as Snapchat), or those that exist on the dark web.

At Texas A&M, we monitor activity on Twitter, as it is a major platform for tracking political discussions in the Arabic world, but we are also tracking the development and growth of *Weixin* (wechat) in China and *Vkontakte* in Russia as alternative platforms that embody different political and social affordances than Twitter and Facebook. Our goal is to capture broad public sentiment, not private messaging, and Facebook and Twitter remain prominent public apps in the middle east, and are the primary mechanisms to reach broad audiences.

One of the many issues associated with these alternative platforms (or what we call the platform gap) is that they re-create the geographical and political divisions that most assumed were ending with the rise of a globalized world. Political, social, and cultural discussions that could happen on globally accessible platforms are moving into different platforms, where there is less ability for US citizens to interact, and thus the technological platforms re-embody the geographical differences. In addition, these platforms constrain the types of activities that can easily occur. Weixin, for example, limits "public" postings to a small segment of "verified" users, and does not allow for the creation and marketing of public events, such as are chronicled in Wael Ghonem's book Revolution 2.0, which demonstrates the role of Facebook in creating public events that led to the downfall of the Mubarak government in Egypt. Thus, Weixin, which in many ways is a far superior app to Facebook, such as its utility as a mobile commerce platform, embodies far fewer political affordances than Facebook.

A final app that needs to be considered is Firechat, which allows the development of mesh networks using Bluetooth, so that data transfer is possible even when there is no actual phone network available. It has become famous for its role in keeping communication networks alive even when there is an actual network shutdown due to natural disaster or other destabilizing events, and could indeed be a game changer in conditions of political upheaval, when governments decide to shut down data networks in order to prevent political collusion.

Comments on Media Platforms

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Are we yet spending as much (hopefully far more) on youth opportunity and other vectors we know that decrease the likelihood of finding ISIL et al as undesirable? All the tools I know about from online harassment, escalated (aka "weaponized social") which monitor or nudge people's online communications are far more often used to quash meaningful dissent than to actually help anyone. Another way to say what I'm trying to get across is: an easy solution to these issues would to be fixing the social and technical vulnerabilities, i.e., making sure *everyone* can use encryption, think critically, etc. Instead, the US is trying to exploit vulnerabilities just like those you're up against are doing, which means you're in an arms race where people are your weapons. And that's appalling and un-winnable.

Goolsby response: I have great respect for Brugh's position. The US response needs to be in the direction of developing a program of responsible global engagement and the promotion of research to develop the new field of cyber-diplomacy. This will involve the study of the crowd manipulation, social hysteria propagation, and disinformation with the aim of improving the resilience of targeted populations against influence and manipulation. The effective programs of this kind will have a "ground game" – such as the activities of public affairs and civil affairs in Phase 0 operations—and a "cyber game" that coordinates with the messaging of the "ground game." Social trust is developed most effectively in people-to-people, face-to-face contexts. Social trust developed from real-world events will be more lasting than pure cyber-campaigns and can mitigate the crowd manipulation that comes from cyberspace.

An appropriate and effective response will be this sort of two-tiered set of activities that seek to bring target audiences back in balance with rational thinking and critical engagement in the world around them. It will involve whole-of-government and also the coordination of activities with non-government organizations and non-profits. We can develop good strategies for this and effective approaches. Much depends on their being effective leadership willing and interested in engaging in this fight.

Top 50 applications and services used over the last 90 days to spread VEO ideology and propaganda

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Todd and Ryan attached a work product they just completed, 'ISIS Automation and Propaganda Analysis', in which they tracked the top 50 applications and services used over the last 90 days to spread VEO ideology and propaganda. Ryan later articulated, "to be clear, the top 50 we are showing here are the apps that provide bot control for tweets. This was quick analysis this morning looking at what automation platforms are being used to control tweets only."

Author Biographies

Hassan Abbas

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 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).

Nitin Agarwal

Nitin Agarwal is the Jerry L. Maulden-Entergy Endowed Chair and Distinguished Professor of Information Science and director of the Center of Social Media and Online Behavioral Studies (COSMOS) at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

Dr. Agarwal obtained Ph.D. in Computer Science from Arizona State University with outstanding dissertation recognition in 2009. He has a Bachelors of Technology in Information Technology from the Indian Institute of Information Technology, India. In 2012, he was recognized as one of "The New Influentials: 20 In Their 20s" by Arkansas Business for being among creative and talented individuals who have found not only early success in their profession but also show future potential to step up as a leader in business or politics to highlight their accomplishments within their businesses, organizations or community. He was recognized with the University-wide Faculty Excellence Award in Research and Creative Endeavors in 2015. Dr. Agarwal received the Social Media 2015 Educator of the Year Award at the 21st International Education and Technology Conference, Cyberport, Hong Kong SAR, China, 10-12 April 2015. The Educator of the Year award recognizes Springer authors/educators who have made or are making a difference in the ICT Education/Research.

Dr. Agarwal's research interests include social computing, knowledge extraction in social media, (deviant) behavioral modeling, group dynamics, influence, trust, collective action, social-cyber forensics, health informatics, data mining, and privacy. From Saudi Arabian women's right to drive cyber campaigns to Autism awareness campaigns to ISIS' and anti-West/anti-NATO propaganda campaigns, at COSMOS, he is directing several projects with multi-million dollar funding from the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF), U.S. Office of Naval Research (ONR), U.S. Air Force Research Lab (AFRL), and U.S. Army Research Office (ARO). Dr. Agarwal's research has made foundational contributions to computational social network analysis to study digital/cyber campaign coordination, identify powerful actors and groups, study propaganda dissemination, and monitor cyber threats through social media. The applicational contributions of his research include, but not limited to, digital campaign coordination, propaganda dissemination analysis, event analysis, monitoring cyberthreats through social media, social-cyberforensics, smart health and wellbeing, social media in learning environments, network and communication, and socially aware mobile networks. Dr. Agarwal's research efforts bring together researchers from various disciplines such as information science, social science, economics, political science, communication and organization science, and computer and mobile networks and practitioners including defense analysts from NATO, U.S. Naval Research Lab, Dillards, Acxiom, @WalmartLabs, and other organizations. The research has resulted in 5 books and over 100 peer-reviewed publications at various prestigious forums including journal articles, book chapters/encyclopedia entries, and conference proceeding papers. The research studies have resulted in Best Information System Publication of 2012 Award recognized by the AIS Senior Scholar Consortium, a few Best Paper Awards including two at IARIA's SOTICS 2015 and SOTICS 2016, and several best paper nominees.

U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) and U.S. Army Research Office (ARO) awarded Dr. Agarwal multiple grants to extend outreach efforts to increase diversity and minority participation in emerging and interdisciplinary areas (such as, social computing) under Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) disciplines. Organizing the International Conference on Social Computing, Behavioral-Cultural Modeling, and Prediction (SBP), is one effort in this direction. To foster an interdisciplinary collaboration and a synergistic environment, Dr. Agarwal has edited several books and

journal special issues for IEEE, Elsevier, Springer, and Oxford. Dr. Agarwal currently serves as program chair and program committee member of several prestigious conferences and journals. He has served on the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) review panels and external reviewer for the U.S. Army Research Office (ARO), U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH), Canadian Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC), Saudi Arabia's King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology (KACST), and Hong Kong's Research Grants Council (RGC) review panels.

For more details please visit, http://ualr.edu/nxagarwal/.

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois is Executive Vice President at NSI, Inc. She has also served as co-chair of a National Academy of Sciences study on Strategic Deterrence Military Capabilities in the 21st Century, and as a primary author on a study of the Defense and Protection of US Space Assets. Dr. Astorino-Courtois has served as technical lead on a variety of rapid turn-around, Joint Staff-directed Strategic Multi-layer Assessment (SMA) projects in support of US forces and Combatant Commands. These include assessments of key drivers of political, economic and social instability and areas of resilience in South Asia; development of a methodology for conducting provincial assessments for the ISAF Joint Command; production of a "rich contextual understanding" (RCU) to supplement intelligence reporting for the ISAF J2 and Commander; and projects for USSTRATCOM on deterrence assessment methods.

Previously, Dr. Astorino-Courtois was a Senior Analyst at SAIC (2004-2007) where she served as a STRATCOM liaison to U.S. and international academic and business communities. Prior to SAIC, Dr. Astorino-Courtois was a tenured Associate Professor of International Relations at Texas A&M University in College Station, TX (1994-2003) where her research focused on the cognitive aspects of foreign policy decision making. She has received a number of academic grants and awards and has published articles in multiple peer-reviewed journals. She has also taught at Creighton University and as a visiting instructor at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Dr. Astorino-Courtois earned her Ph.D. in International Relations and MA in and Research Methods from New York University. Her BA is in political science from Boston College. Finally, Dr. Astorino-Courtois also has the distinction of having been awarded both a US Navy Meritorious Service Award and a US Army Commander's Award.

Adam Azoff

Adam Azoff is an international security specialist with over six years of academic and work experience in the Middle East. As a Team Lead at Tesla Government, Inc., Adam manages a USG platform that supports the informational requirements of USG personnel in the CENTCOM area of responsibility. Since 2014, he has responded to over 200 RFIs, providing tailored research focused on the Iraq problem-set. Adam has an M.A. in International Security and Diplomacy Studies from Tel Aviv University and B.A. in Socio-Cultural Anthropology from the University of Arizona.

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.

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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 courses at the MITRE Institute on designing, conducting, and analyzing qualitative and mixed methods research.

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*.

Emma L Briant

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.

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.

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 development, and practice enables Dr. Cobb to bridge the gap between scholarship and practice as she works to create practical understanding and generate effective interventions in protracted conflicts.

LTC Xavier Colon
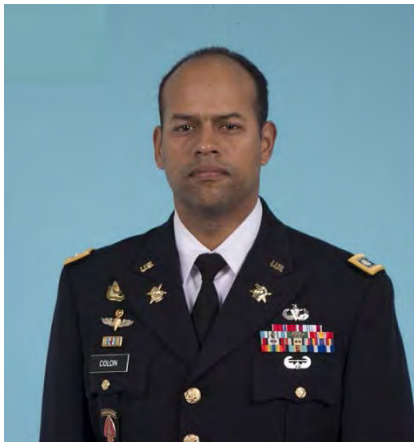
Lieutenant Colonel Xavier "X" Colón currently serves as the Chief, MISO Branch in The Joint Staff, Deputy Directorate for Global Operations (J39). He earned a Master of Arts Degree in National Security Studies from the American Military University. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree in General Sciences from the Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico and was commissioned as a 2LT in the US Army through the Reserve Officer Training Corps on 28 January 1999.

His most recent assignments include, Chief, PSYOP Division (J39), Special Operations Command South, Operations Officer (J3) Military Information Support Task Force, Afghanistan, Company Commander, 1st Military Information Support Battalion (A), 8th MISG (A), Chief of Training Branch, PSYOP Training and Doctrine Division, US Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, Detachment Commander, A Co. 1st PSYOP Battalion, 4th PSYOP Group (A), Company Commander, Service Battery, 3rd Battalion (Airborne) 4th Air Defense Artillery Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division; Corps Maintenance officer, 18th Airborne Corps, Mortuary Affairs Officer, Multinational Corps Iraq.

LTC Colón is graduate of the Joint Information Operations Planners Course, Military Deception Planners Course, Joint Professional Military Education Phase II, Command and General Staff College at the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation,

Latin America Regional Studies, Psychological Operations Officer Qualification Course, Combined Arms Services Staff School, Combined Logistics Captains Career Course, Ordnance Transition Course, and the Infantry Officer Basic Course.

Awards and decorations include, Joint Meritorious Unit Award (one Oak Leaf Cluster), The Bronze Medal, The Defense Meritorious Service Medal, The Joint Service Commendation Medal (one Oak Leaf Cluster), The Army Commendation Medal (four Oak Leaf Cluster), National Defense Service Medal, The Iraqi Campaign Medal (two star device), The Afghan Campaign Medal (two star device), Overseas Ribbon (3 Device), NATO Medal, Senior Parachutist, Air Assault Badges, and the Joint Staff Identification Badge. His foreign awards include The Honduran Army Distinguished Medal Second Class and parachutist badges from Bolivia, Chile, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Mexico.

David Des Roches

David B. Des Roches is Associate Professor at the Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies (NESA) at National Defense University, where he specializes in countries of the Arabian Peninsula, Gulf Cooperation Council Regional Security, Border Security, Weapons Transfers, Missile Defense, Counterinsurgency, terrorism and emerging trends.

He joined NESA in 2011 after serving the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Policy in numerous positions, including as Director of the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula, the DoD liaison to the Department of Homeland Security, the Senior Country Director for Pakistan, the NATO Operations Director, the Deputy Director for Peacekeeping, and the spokesman for the Defense Security Cooperation Agency.   Prior to that, he served in the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy as an International Law Enforcement Analyst and Special Assistant for Strategy.

He retired as a Colonel from a 30 year career in the active and reserve Army, serving on the Joint Staff, US Special Operations Command staff, and in conventional and special operations troop units deployed throughout the Middle East, Europe and in Afghanistan. He is a Ranger and a master parachutist with over 100 jumps. He also holds the parachutist badges of Canada, the United Kingdom and Germany. His final post was as the Deputy Commander of the US Army Center of Military History.

Professor Des Roches is the author of numerous articles on Gulf security, is the editor of *The Arms Trade, Military Services and the Security Market in the Gulf: Trends and Implications* (Berlin: Gerlach, 2016) , the theme editor of Oxford Journal of Gulf Studies Spring 2016 special issue on security (http://www.nesa-center.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/gulf_affairs_spring_2016_full_issue.pdf   ), and the author of the chapter on the Gulf weapons market in the 2016 Gulf Yearbook, the definitive Arabic language resource on Gulf studies (http://grc.net/data/contents/uploads/infopdf/Gulf-Year_3291.pdf) .

Professor Des Roches holds advanced degrees from the University of London School of Oriental and African Studies and Kings College London, which he attended as a British Marshall Scholar. He also holds an advanced degree from the U.S. Army War College, and a bachelor of science degree from the United States Military Academy, West Point.

Professor Des Roches is a regular commentator on regional affairs on various Arabic language television networks including al-Hurra, RT Arabic, and al-Mayadeen, and on radio networks such as the Voice of America.

Dr. Cori E. Dauber

Dr. Cori E. Dauber is Professor of Communication at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she is also a Research Fellow at the Triangle Institute for Security Studies (TISS.) She is co-editor of *Visual Propaganda and Extremism in the Online Environment*, (US Army War College Press, 2014) and the author of *You Tube War*: *Fighting in a World of Cameras in Every Cell Phone, Photoshop on Every Computer*, (US Army War College Press, 2010.) She has been the Visiting Research Professor at the Strategic Studies Institute of the US Army War College. Her research focus is the communication strategies of terrorist groups, with a particular focus on their use of visual imagery. Her work has been published in journals such as *Military Review*, *Small Wars Journal*, and *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, and she has presented her research to the Canadian Forces College, the John Kennedy School for Special Warfare, the Foreign Policy Research Institute, and the Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies of the National Defense University among others. Dr. Dauber holds a PhD and BS from Northwestern University, and an MA from Chapel Hill, all in Communication Studies.

Dr. Douglas C. Derrick

Douglas C. Derrick is an Associate Professor of IT Innovation, Director of the Applied Innovations Lab, and Co-Director of the Center for Collaboration Science at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Doug received his PhD in Management Information Systems from the University of Arizona. He holds a Masters degree in Computer Science from Texas A&M University and a Masters degree in Business of Administration from San Jose State University. He is a Distinguished Graduate of the United States Air Force Academy. His research interests include human-agent interactions, intelligent agents, collaboration technologies, decision support systems, persuasive technology and computer-mediated influence. Prior to joining UNO, Dr. Derrick worked as a Program Manager at MacAulay-Brown, Inc. and also served as an Air Force officer. He has extensive experience working with the Department of Defense. As a contractor and academic, he has been awarded contracts and grants totaling $41.14 Million over the last 12 years (principle investigator awards total $17.47 Million). Doug has published over 40 peer-reviewed journal articles and conference proceedings.

Amanda Nell Edgar

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.*

Alexis Everington

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.

David C. Gompert

The Honorable David C. Gompert is currently Distinguished Visiting Professor at the United States Naval Academy, Senior Fellow of the RAND Corporation, and member of several boards of directors.

Mr. Gompert was Principal Deputy Director of National Intelligence from 2009 to 2010. During 2010, he served as Acting Director of National Intelligence, in which capacity he provided strategic oversight of the U.S. Intelligence Community and acted as the President's chief intelligence advisor.

Prior to service as Principal Deputy Director of National Intelligence, Mr. Gompert was a Senior Fellow at the RAND Corporation, from 2004 to 2009. Before that he was Distinguished Research Professor at the Center for Technology and National Security Policy, National Defense University. From 2003 to 2004, Mr. Gompert served as the Senior Advisor for National Security and Defense, Coalition Provisional Authority, Iraq. He has been on the faculty of the RAND Pardee Graduate School, the United States Naval Academy, the National Defense University, and Virginia Commonwealth University.

Mr. Gompert served as President of RAND Europe from 2000 to 2003, during which period he was on the RAND Europe Executive Board and Chairman of RAND Europe-UK. He was Vice President of RAND and Director of the National Defense Research Institute from 1993 to 2000.

From 1990 to 1993, Mr. Gompert served as Special Assistant to President George H. W. Bush and Senior Director for Europe and Eurasia on the National Security Council staff. He has held a number of positions at the State Department, including Deputy to the Under Secretary for Political Affairs (1982-83), Deputy Assistant Secretary for European Affairs (1981-82), Deputy Director of the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (1977-81), and Special Assistant to Secretary of State Henry Kissinger (1973-75).

Mr. Gompert worked in the private sector from 1983-1990. At Unisys (1989-90), he was President of the Systems Management Group and Vice President for Strategic Planning and Corporate Development. At AT&T (1983-89), he was Vice President, Civil Sales and Programs, and Director of International Market Planning.

Mr. Gompert has published extensively on international affairs, national security, and information technology. His books (authored or co-authored) include *Blinders, Blunders, and Wars: What America and China Can Learn; Sea Power and American Interests in the Western Pacific; The Paradox of Power: Sino-American Strategic Restraint in an Age of Vulnerability; Underkill: Capabilities for Military Operations amid Populations; War by Other Means: Building Complete and Balanced Capabilities for Counterinsurgency; BattleWise: Achieving Time-Information Superiority in Networked Warfare; Nuclear Weapons and World Politics (ed.); America and Europe: A Partnership for a new Era (ed.); Right Makes Might: Freedom and Power in the Information Age; Mind the Gap: A Transatlantic Revolution in Military Affairs*.

Mr. Gompert is a member of the American Academy of Diplomacy and the Council on Foreign Relations, a trustee of Hopkins House Academy, chairman of the board of Global Integrated Security (USA), Inc., a director of Global National Defense and Security Systems, Inc., a director of Bristow Group, Inc., a member of the Advisory Board of the Naval Academy Center for Cyber Security Studies, and chairman of the Advisory Board of the Institute for the Study of Early Childhood Education. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Engineering from the U. S. Naval Academy and a Master of Public Affairs degree from the Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University. He and his wife, Cynthia, live in Virginia and Maine.

Rebecca Goolsby, PhD

Dr. Goolsby holds a doctorate in anthropology from the University of Washington in Seattle. She is a former Fulbright Scholar, a scholar and writer in the fields of computational social science and cyberanthropology. She currently serves as a program officer at the Office of Naval Research. She leads a NATO Research Technology Group on Information Technology and Crisis and is an advisor to the recently formed NATO Digital Working Group under the NATO Public Diplomacy Division at NATO SHAPE headquarters in Brussels. She resides in Virginia.
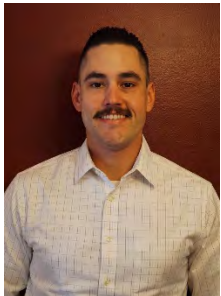
Staff Sergeant (ret.) Eric Grenlin is a M.S. student at the George Mason University School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (S-CAR). Eric was a US Army Military Police Soldier from 2007-2016. He served in Iraq and Afghanistan before being medically retired following a motorcycle accident. Eric's 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.

Zana K. Gulmohamad

Zana Gulmohamad is a PhD Candidate in Politics at the University of Sheffield. Research title "Iraq's foreign policy post-Saddam". Research Fellow at the Center of Peace and Human Security at the American University of Kurdistan. Former senior security analyst for the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq for six years. Graduate Teaching Assistant for Introduction to Security Studies & Comparing Modern Polities in the Politics Department at the University of Sheffield, the UK. Pieces of Zana's research have been published in various platforms such as the Jamestown Foundation, the National, Middle East Online, Open Democracy, Global Security Studies, and Your Middle East.

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).

Todd Huffman

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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

Neil Johnson

Neil Johnson heads up a new inter-disciplinary research group in Complexity at University of Miami (Physics Dept.) looking at collective behavior and emergent properties in a wide range of real-world Complex Systems: from physical, biological and medical domains through to social and financial domains. The common feature which makes Complex Systems so hard to understand, and yet so fascinating to study, is that they all contain many interacting objects, with strong feedback from both inside and outside the system, and are typically far from equilibrium and exhibit extreme behaviors. Neil's research group is involved with interdisciplinary projects across multiple other departments and schools within the University of Miami, and other institutions both within U.S. and globally, e.g. Universidad de Los Andes in Bogota, Colombia.

Prior to coming to UM in 2007, Neil was Professor of Physics at Oxford University, having joined the faculty in 1992. He did his BA/MA at Cambridge University and his PhD at Harvard University as a Kennedy Scholar. He has published more than 200 research articles in international journals, and has published two books: "Financial Market Complexity" (Oxford University Press, 2003) and "Simply Complexity: A Clear Guide to Complexity Theory" (Oneworld Publishing, 2009). He also wrote and presented the Royal Institution Lectures in 1999 on BBC television, comprising five 1-hour lectures on "Arrows of Time".

He is joint Series Editor for the book series "Complex Systems and Inter- disciplinary Science" by World Scientific Press, and is the Physics Section Editor for the journal "Advances in Complex Systems". He is Associate Editor for "Journal of Economic Interaction and Coordination", and is an Editorial Board member of "Journal of Computational Science". He previously served as an editor of "International Journal of Theoretical and Applied Finance". He co-founded and co-directed CABDyN (Complex Agent-Based Dynamical Systems) which is Oxford University's interdisciplinary research center in Complexity Science, until leaving for Miami. He also co-directed Oxford University's interdisciplinary research center in financial complexity (OCCF).

Randy Kluver

Randy Kluver is Professor of Communication at Texas A&M University, where he conducts theoretically driven research on political communication (including rhetorical and new media approaches), and global and new media. His work explores the role of political culture on political communication, and the ways in which cultural expectations, values, and habits condition political messaging practices and reception in a variety of contexts. Recently, Dr. Kluver has been exploring the role of communication and geopolitics, and developing research agenda that articulates 'media-centric' views of geopolitics. Currently, he is leading a research group focused on media and geopolitics, utilizing the Media Monitoring System, a real time international broadcast transcription and translation system, and is developing research protocols and agendas using this pioneering technology. Dr. Kluver was the founder and Executive Director of the Singapore Internet Research Centre, and one of the principal investigators of the international "Internet and Elections" project, a groundbreaking international analysis of the use of the Internet in the elections. Prior to coming to Texas A&M, Dr. Kluver taught at Oklahoma City University, Jiangxi Normal University, the National University of Singapore, and Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. He serves on the editorial boards of the Journal of Communication, the Journal of Computer-mediated Communication, the Asian Journal of Communication, New Media and Society, China Media Research, and the Western Journal of Communication

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.

Vernie Liebl

Vernie Liebl is an analyst currently sitting as the Middle East Desk Officer in the Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning (CAOCL). Mr Liebl retired from the Marine Corps and has a background in intelligence, specifically focused on the Middle East and South Asia.

Prior to joining CAOCL, Mr. Liebl worked with the Joint Improvised Explosives Device Defeat Organization as a Cultural SME, and before that with Booz Allen Hamilton as a Strategic Islamic Narrative Analyst. He has also published extensively on topics ranging from the Caliphate to Vichy French campaigns in WW2.

Mr Liebl has a Bachelors degree in political science from University of Oregon, a Masters degree in Islamic History from the University of Utah, and a second Masters degree in National Security and Strategic Studies from the Naval War College (where he graduated with "Highest Distinction" and focused on Islamic Economics).

Dr. Gina Ligon is an Associate Professor of Management and Collaboration Science at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. She received her PhD in Industrial and Organizational Psychology with a Minor in Measurement and Statistics from the University of Oklahoma. She is a member of the National Consortium of Studies of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). Since arriving at UNO, she has been awarded over $2,000,000 in security-related grants and contracts. She currently is the Principal Investigator on a grant from Department of Homeland Security (DHS) examining the leadership and performance of transnational Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs,) and is the originator of the *Leadership of the Extreme and Dangerous for Innovative Results* (LEADIR) database. Her research interests include violent ideological groups, expertise and leadership development, and collaboration management. Dr. Ligon has worked with DoD agencies on markers of violent ideological groups, leadership assessment, organizational innovation, and succession planning for scientific positions. Prior to joining UNO, she was a faculty member at Villanova University in the Department of Psychology. She also worked in St. Louis as a management consultant with the firm Psychological Associates. She has published over 50 peer-reviewed publications in the areas of leadership, innovation, and violent groups.

LTC Rafael 'Rafa' E. Linera Rivera, Ph. D
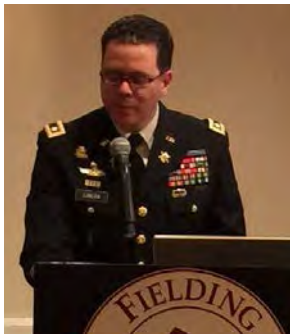
Lieutenant Colonel Rafael 'Rafa' E. Linera Rivera, Ph. D., Rafael E. Linera Rivera (or 'Rafa') was commissioned in 1997 as a Second Lieutenant in the Infantry Branch. Rafa has served several assignments both domestically and abroad, including South Korea, Iraq, Mexico, Ecuador, and Afghanistan. Rafael is currently serving as the USASOC G39, Cyberspace Electromagnetic Activities & Influence Operations Chief. He has earned numerous awards and decorations – the Bronze Star, Defense Meritorious Service Medal, the Army Meritorious Service Medal with two Oak Leaf Clusters, the Major General Robert A. McClure Bronze Medal, among others. He holds a Ph.D. and M.A. in Psychology from the Fielding Graduate University Media Psychology Program, a M.A. in Finance from Webster University, and a B.B.A. in Accounting from the University of Puerto Rico.

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.

SFC Matthew John Martin
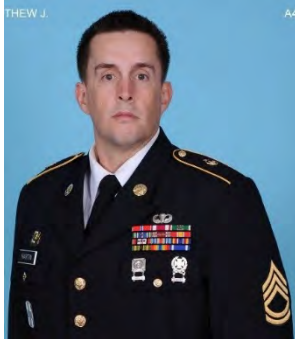
SFC Matthew Martin joined the Active Army as a Chaplain Assistant (56M) on 20 March 2002. After two tours as a Chaplain Assistant, SFC Martin re-enlisted and joined the Psychological Operations (37F) career field. SFC Martin received his Bachelors of Science degree in Psychology from Excelsior College in 2009. He received a Masters of Arts degree in Industrial and Organizational Psychology in 2014 from The Chicago School of Professional Psychology and was awarded a graduate certificate for Media Psychology with a focus in Neuromarketing from Fielding Graduate University in 2016. He is published in both academic and professional periodicals. SFC Martin has served in Kuwait, Thailand, and Afghanistan and has considerable experience teaching and training both US and foreign service members. He is currently assigned to the US Army John F Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School as the US Army Reserves Psychological Operations Advanced Individual Training Course Manager. He resides in Whispering Pines, NC with his wife, Denise, two daughters, Maryann and Natalie, and two cats.

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.

Dr. Clark McCauley

Clark McCauley (B.S. Biology, Providence College, 1965; Ph.D. Social Psychology, University of Pennsylvania, 1970) is a Professor of Psychology and co-director of the Solomon Asch Center for Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict at Bryn Mawr College. His research interests include the psychology of group identification, group dynamics and intergroup conflict, and the psychological foundations of ethnic conflict and genocide. He is founding editor of the journal Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict: Pathways toward Terrorism and Genocide.

Dr. Ian Mcculloh

Ian McCulloh is a senior scientist in the Asymmetric Operations Department of the John's Hopkins University Applied Physics Lab. His current research is focused on strategic influence in online networks and data-driven influence operations and assessment. He is the author of "Social Network Analysis with Applications" (Wiley: 2013), "Networks Over Time" (Oxford: forthcoming) and has published 38 peer-reviewed papers, primarily in the area of social network analysis. He retired as a Lieutenant Colonel from the US Army after 20 years of service in special operations, counter-improvised explosive device (C-IED) forensics and targeting, and weapons of mass destruction (WMD) defense.

He founded the West Point Network Science Center and created the Army's Advanced Network Analysis and Targeting (ANAT) program. In his most recent military assignments as a strategist, he led interdisciplinary PhD teams at Special Operations Command Central (SOCCENT) and Central Command (CENTCOM) to conduct social science research in 15 countries across the Middle East and Central Asia to included denied areas, which he used to inform data-driven strategy for countering extremism and irregular warfare, as well as empirically assess the effectiveness of military operations. He holds a Ph.D. and M.S from Carnegie Mellon University's School of Computer Science, an M.S. in Industrial Engineering, and M.S. in Applied Statistics from the Florida State University, and a B.S. in Industrial Engineering from the University of Washington. He is married with four children and a granddaughter.

Dr. Spencer B. Meredith III

Dr. Spencer B. Meredith III, PhD, is an Associate Professor in the Joint Special Operations Master of Arts program for the College of International Security Affairs at the National Defense University. After completing his doctorate in Government and Foreign Affairs at the University of Virginia in 2003, he served as a Fulbright Scholar in the Caucasus in 2007 working on conflict resolution, and has focused on related issues in Eastern Ukraine for several years. He has also served as a subject matter expert for several DOS public diplomacy programs in South and East Asia dealing with the role of religion and democracy in US foreign policy.

His areas of expertise include democratization and conflict resolution in Russian, Eastern European and Middle Eastern politics. Most recently, he has been working with USASOC on several projects related to comprehensive deterrence, narratives and resistance typologies, and non-violent UW in the Gray Zone. His publications include research on democratic development and international nuclear safety agreements (*Nuclear Energy and International Cooperation: Closing the World's Most Dangerous Reactors*), as well as articles in scholarly journals ranging from *Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, *Peace and Conflict Studies*, to *Central European Political Science Review*. He has also published in professional journals related to UW, SOF more broadly, and the future operating environment, with articles in *InterAgency Journal*, *Special Warfare*, *Foreign Policy Journal*, and the peer-reviewed *Special Operations Journal*. He is currently participating in SOCOM SMAs on Intellectual Motivators of Insurgency and a Russian ICONS simulation.

Chris Meserole

Chris Meserole researches modern religious conflict and is a pre-doctoral fellow in Foreign Policy at the Brookings Institution. Chris graduated from Harvard with highest honors and has an M.Div. from Yale Divinity School, where he also completed Yale's Middle Eastern Studies program. He has traveled extensively throughout the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa, and contributed to the Huffington Post since its launch. Chris is currently completing a PhD in political science at the University of Maryland

Fred Morstatter

Fred Morstatter is a PhD student in computer science at Arizona State University in Tempe, Arizona. Fred won the Dean's Fellowship for outstanding leadership and scholarship during his time at ASU. He is a 2016 Faculty Emeriti Fellow, and has won the 2016 University Graduate Fellowship. Fred's research focuses on finding and removing biases that impinge social media research. Among his publications is an ICWSM paper that investigates the representativeness of Twitter's Streaming API, a WWW Web Science paper that seek to find periods of bias automatically in streaming Twitter data, 2 KDD demo papers, an article in IEEE Intelligent Systems, and a book: Twitter Data Analytics. He won the World Wide Web conference's Best Poster Award in 2016. He has served as a PC member of ICWSM 2014, 2016, and 2017, the IEEE/CIC ICCC 2014 Symposium on Social Networks and Big Data, and has been a co-chair of the Social Computing, Behavioral-Cultural Modeling and Prediction Conference's Grand Challenge organizing committee in 2014, 2015, and 2016. He has been a Visiting Scholar at Carnegie Mellon University as well as a Research Intern at Microsoft Research. He is the Principal Architect for TweetXplorer, an advanced visual analytic system for Twitter data. A full list of publications can be found at http://www.public.asu.edu/~fmorstat. Contact him at fred.morstatter@asu.edu.

CPT Christopher O'Brien

CPT Christopher O'Brien is a Media, PA native and a graduate of The Citadel. CPT O'Brien graduated with a bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice and was commissioned as an Ensign in the United States Navy through a three year NROTC scholarship.

Following graduation, CPT O'Brien served as a BUD/S student and the NSWCEN Legal Officer in Coronado, CA. After an inter-service transfer, CPT O'Brien was assigned to 2-502D IN REG at Fort Campbell, KY. While assigned to the 101st Airborne Division, CPT O'Brien served as an Infantry Platoon Leader, SFAAT Executive Officer, SFAAT Team Commander, Infantry Company Commander, Infantry Company Executive Officer, and an Infantry Battalion Plans Officer. CPT O'Brien is currently assigned to the 20th Special Forces Group (Airborne) serving as the Detachment Commander for Operational Detachment Alpha 2314.

CPT O'Brien has deployed twice to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. While serving as a Company Commander, CPT O'Brien implemented FORSCOM's first practical gunnery application for the TOW ITAS. CPT O'Brien also competed in the 2013 Best Ranger Competition and will be published in the OSD-SMA White Paper *Bio-Psycho-Social Applications to Cognitive Engagement* in September 2016.

CPT O'Brien is a graduate of the Special Operations Forces Surveillance Operators Course, Special Forces Military Free Fall School, Special Forces Qualification Course, Sabalauski Air Assault School, Basic Airborne School, US Army Ranger Course, Infantry Basic Officer Leader Course, Basic Officer Leader Course II, Direct Commission Basic Officer Leader Course, and Combative Course Levels I and II. His awards and decorations include the Army Commendation Medal with four oak leaves, the Army Achievement Medal with oak leaf, the Navy Achievement Medal, the Afghanistan Campaign Ribbon with two campaign stars, the Combat Infantryman's Badge, and the Expert Infantryman's Badge.

CPT O'Brien has been married five years to Kristin O'Brien. They have a three year old daughter named Macie, a ten month old son named Henry. CPT O'Brien and his family currently reside at Sumter, SC.
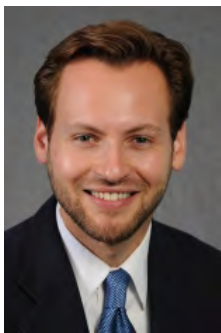
Jacob Olidort

Dr. Jacob Olidort is a Soref Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, where he focuses on Salafism and Islamist groups in the Middle East, and is an adjunct professor at the Elliott School of International Affairs at George Washington University. He received his BA in Middle Eastern Studies from Brandeis University, his AM in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations from Harvard University, and his MA and Ph.D. in Near Eastern Studies from Princeton University, where his work focused on the intersection between Islamic law, theology and modern politics. Dr. Olidort has spent nearly two years inthe Middle East, including a Fulbright Scholarship in the UAE and field work on Salafism in Jordan. He has given presentations and has consulted on Salafism and on countering violent extremism to audiences in academia, government and policy. His writings have appeared in Foreign Affairs, the Washington Post, Lawfare, and War on the Rocks.

Ryan Paterson

http://istresearch.com

MAJ Robert D. Payne III

MAJ Robert D. Payne III is a Field Artillery officer serving with the United States Military Training Mission in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. He received his commission from

the Army ROTC program at Boise State University in 2005 with a Bachelor of Arts in U.S. History. He completed his first Masters Degree in Military Arts and Science at the Army

Command and General Staff College Ft. Leavenworth, KS in June 2016 and is currently earning a second Masters Degree from George Washington University in Political Science.

After the Army's Field Artillery Officer Basic Course Robert was assigned to 2-7 Infantry Battalion, 1st Brigade, 3 Infantry Division and deployed with 2-7 INF as part of the "Surge" for a fifteen month tour in Al Anbar province, Iraq. After completing the Army's Field Artillery Captain's Career Course Robert was assigned to 210th Fires Brigade, Camp Casey Korea where he completed his battery command time.

After a brief time with First Army East preparing National Guard and Reserve forces for deployments Robert was selected and joined the Army's Asymmetric Warfare Group. Robert was then selected to attend the resident Command and General Staff College Officer Course where he served until joining USMTM in Riyadh.

Robert's co-authored paper, *Narrative in the Operations Process,* was presented at the fifth annual Computational Models of Narrative Workshop in 2014 and formed the foundation of his Master's Thesis, *The Military Application of Narrative: Solving Army Warfighting Challenge #2.* In addition to being a Field Artillery Officer, Robert is a trained/certified Army Strategist, Information Operations Officer, Joint Capabilities Integration and Development System Officer, Security Cooperation Officer, and Operational Advisor Support Officer.

Eric Perez

Eric Perez is an undergraduate student in Computer Science and a research associate in the Center of Collaboration Science at the University of Nebraska, Omaha. His primary research interests include internet based data mining and collaborative computer systems.

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.

Mark Robinson

Mark Robinson is the Director of the Multimedia Laboratory of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He holds an MA in Communication Studies, with a focus on media and internet technologies, and a BFA in Studio Art, both from Chapel Hill. He has developed and taught a number of courses on media and media technology, which engage with audio and visual communication and their consumption and processing, thus integrating cultural, technical and psychological systems analysis in order to understand the relationship of meaning within culture. As a maker of multimedia: software, hardware, video, audio, robotics, electronic interface, web application and delivery, he has employed technology and research in order to understand the technical aspects of what is seen and heard as well as the artistic and scientific approaches to ascertain the potential of such media including, message, effectiveness, strategy and tactical use.

Spencer Robinson

Spencer Robinson is an undergraduate student in IT Innovations with a focus in Computer Science and Entrepreneurship and a research associate in the Center of Collaboration Science at the University of Nebraska, Omaha. His primary research interests include web development and holographic technology innovation.

Scott W. Ruston (Ph.D., Critical Studies, University of Southern California) is currently an Assistant Research Professor with Arizona State University'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*.

Major Gregory Seese, Ph.D

Major Gregory Seese, Ph.D. is a US Army Psychological Operations Officer (PSYOP) currently serving as the PSYOP Division Chief in the United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) G39. He was previously assigned to the Office of Security Cooperation – Iraq (OSC-I) in support of Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) as the Chief of Behavioral Sciences in the Tribal Engagement Coordination Cell (TECC). Prior to that, Major Seese was a Regional PSYOP Company Commander in the 6th PSYOP Battalion at Fort Bragg, and the J5 Director of Plans at the Joint Information Support Task Force – Special Operations (JISTF-SO) in the Persian Gulf. While assigned to the Unites States Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School (USAJFKSWCS), Major Seese held a variety of positions to include standing up the newly formed PSYOP Advanced Skills Detachment where he is credited with developing the Special Operation Forces Military Deception Planners Course, and the Advanced Target Audience Analysis Course. He also commanded the PSYOP Advanced Individual Training (AIT) Company, and was the PSYOP Officer Qualification Course Manager. He also held several positions in the Directorate of Training and Doctrine (DOTD) to include both Chief of the PSYOP Training Branch, and Chief of the PSYOP Doctrine Branch. Major Seese served in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom with the 3rd and 19th Special Forces Groups. His research interests include attitude and behavior change, motivation, deception, behavioral prediction/modeling, and bio & neurofeedback/qEEG.

Major Seese is a licensed psychologist and has a Bachelor of Arts, Master of Science, and Doctorate in Psychology. He also earned a graduate certificate in Stability, Security, and Development in Complex Operations (SSDCO) from the Naval Post Graduate School. Relevant publications include: Countering Violent Extremism and Terrorism - Targeting Active Support Networks (Seese, G., 2016) In-press; Winning The Battle In Narrative Space Using Applied Neuroscience - Enhancing and Modernizing The PSYOP Process (Seese, G., Linera, R., Stangle, S., Otwell, R., & Martin, M., 2016); The Neuroscience of Influential Strategic Narratives and Storylines (Seese G., & Haven K., (2015); Comprehensive PSYOP Assessment and Evaluation in Counterterrorism Efforts (Seese, G., 2014); Deconstructing Narratives: Using Primal Branding To Design Oppositional Narratives (Hanlon, P., & Seese, G., 2013); Measuring

Psychological Operations (PSYOP): It's all about the SPO (Seese, G., 2009); Measuring Psychological Operations (PSYOP) Effectiveness (Seese, G., & Smith, P., 2008).

Mubin Shaikh

Born and raised in Canada, Mubin Shaikh grew up with two conflicting and competing cultures. At the age of 19, he went to India and Pakistan where he had a chance encounter with the Taliban 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*.

SGM Sohail A. Shaikh
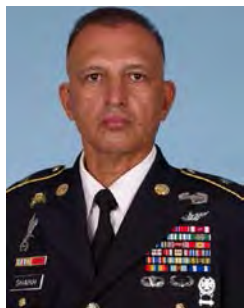
SGM Shaikh serves as NCOIC in Analysis and Production Cell in the Asymmetric Warfare Group, Fort. Meade, MD.

His recent deployments were in support of USSOCOM elements in Iraq followed by an IO assessment for SOJTF-A in Afghanistan. He holds a Master of Public Administration from The Troy State University, AL; and a Bachelor of Arts in Political and Military Science from San Jose State University, CA. He was recently awarded an Honorary Diploma by the Information Operations Proponent for his continuous contribution to the Information Operations Qualification Course (FA30) qualifying him as the only NCO in the Army to achieve this honor.

His key assignments include: Linguist Cell NCOIC, Guantanamo Bay Cuba; Detachment Sergeant, 8th Psychological Operations Battalion, (Airborne), Fort Bragg, NC; Military Information Support Team Sergeant, Kabul, Afghanistan, Field Support Division, Team Sergeant, 1st Information Operations Command, Ft. Belvoir, VA; Information Operations Planner, 1st Special Forces Group; OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM, Iraq, Psychological Operations Planner, 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team, OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM, Afghanistan.

Personal awards and decorations include the Bronze Star Medal, Meritorious Service Medal (2nd Award), Joint Service Commendation Medal, , Combat Action Badge, Parachutist Badge, Sr. Aviation Crew Member Badge, Air Assault Badge, Italian and Polish Parachutist Badges, and various other unit and service awards.

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.

LTC Brian Steed

Brian L. Steed is currently a Military History instructor at the US Army Command and General Staff College and a Middle East Foreign Area Officer. He served eight and a half consecutive years in the Middle East including assignments in the Levant, Mesopotamia, and the Arabian Peninsula. He served briefly in Iraq in 2005, a full year in 2010-2011, and again December.

2014-February 2015. He was a Jordanian Army Officer as part of the Military Personnel Exchange Program for two and a half years giving him an immersed perspective in Arab culture and a liaison to the IDF providing another immersed experience from a different regional perspective. He has written numerous

books on military theory and military history and cultural awareness. His most recent book is Bees and Spiders: Applied Cultural Awareness and the Art of Cross-Cultural Influence about using cultural awareness to develop empathy and ultimately influence.

Dr. Gwyneth Sutherlin

Dr. Sutherlin is the Director of Human Geography and Analytics Research at Geographic Services, Inc. She provides analytic expertise in socio-cultural dynamics, geospatial technology, cognitive linguistics, and emerging conflict. She is uniquely qualified to provide analysis on complex risk environments drawing from 10+ years of project and field experience. Her publications including 'digital battlefield' and 'lines in the cybersand' have emerged on the cutting edge for multilingual data modelling for security contexts. Always with an eye toward innovation, she applies Human Geography research to improving collection/analysis granularity, security (targeting), cyber security (software development), and geospatial communications intelligence (GEOINT and COMINT). Before completing a Ph.D. with fieldwork in East Africa, her expertise facilitating intercultural dialogue garnered UN recognition, in particular, in the MENA and Sub-Saharan regions of Africa.

Dr. Robert Taguchi
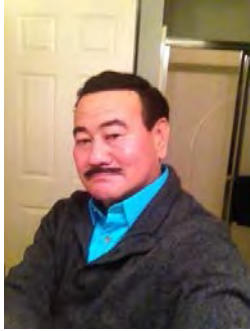
Dr. Robert M. Toguchi is currently serving as the Chief, Concepts Division, G9 Directorate, in the U.S. Army Special Operations Command at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. He has spent over 30 years on active military duty while serving as a Functional Area 59 strategist for the U.S. Army. His past assignments included a tour as the Senior Concept Developer and Chief of the Initiatives Group, U.S. Army Capabilities Integration Center, TRADOC. In the Pacific region, he spent a tour with the U.S. Pacific Command while serving as the Deputy Director, J8; and the Chief of Strategic Plans, J5 Directorate, USPACOM. Dr. Toguchi was also assigned to Africa in 2005 while serving as the senior U.S. military observer to the U.N. Mission in Liberia. Previously, he served on the faculty and taught military strategy at the U.S. National War College, National Defense University. Additionally, in the Washington D.C. area, Dr. Toguchi gained valuable experiences within the halls of the Pentagon while serving as a strategist in the DAMO-SSP, Strategy and Policy Division, Army G3/5/7; and as a war planner in DAMO-SSW, War Plans Division, Army G3/5/7, 1996-1999. Dr. Toguchi received a B.S. degree concentrating in Engineering, from the U.S. Military Academy in 1980; and received a PhD in History from Duke University in 1994.

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.

Gary Warner

Gary Warner is the Director of Research in Computer Forensics at UAB. Since arriving at UAB in 2007, Warner has created and taught a variety of classes in Computer Science and Justice Sciences related to Cyber Security and Computer Forensics. More than 150 students have worked as employees or volunteers in the UAB Computer Forensics Research Lab, which was established in March of 2010, serving the community by assisting in investigations for many companies and law enforcement agencies. In 2012, inventions and patents from the lab were licensed to create Malcovery Security, a local cyber intelligence company with more than 20 employees. Malcovery was acquired in October 2015 by PhishMe where Warner now serves as Chief Threat Scientist. In 2013, the UAB lab doubled in size with the creation of the Facebook Suite, largely funded by a generous contribution from Facebook in response to our assistance in fighting cybercrime.

Warner has been recognized for his efforts with many rewards, including the MAAWG J.D. Falk Award in 2013, the NCFTA Cybercrime Fighter Award, the IC3.gov Partnership Award, and has received the Microsoft MVP in Enterprise Security six times. Involved in cyber security since 1989, he began his career helping large organizations connect securely to the Internet for the first time. He has worked as an IT Director for a local publicly-traded utility, and has served as a Task Force Officer for the FBI Cybercrimes Task Force. With regards to Critical Infrastructure Protection, he founded the Birmingham InfraGard chapter, and has served on the national boards of the FBI's InfraGard program and DHS's Energy ISAC.

 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.

Dr. Jen Ziemke

Jen Ziemke, (Ph.D., Political Science, University of Wisconsin-Madison), engages national and international institutions on ideation for a diverse set of hard problems, such as how citizen reporting from live conflict events shapes the nature of the battle space in real time. She is currently exploring how multimodal data perceptualization (visual & audio) can be leveraged to help understand and peripherally monitor temporal datastreams.

Jen served as Co-Founder & Co-Director of the International Network of Crisis Mappers, an international community of experts, practitioners, policymakers, technologists, researchers, journalists, scholars, hackers and skilled volunteers engaged at the intersection between humanitarian crises, technology and rapid mapping. **Reuters AlertNet** named Crisis Mapping one of its **Top 20 Big Ideas** in 2011. She also managed an international conference event, the ICCM, held in Manila (2016), New York (2014), Nairobi (2013), the World Bank (2012), Geneva (2011), Harvard (2010), and Cleveland (2009).

Jen has consulted with, briefed, or engaged programs within the DoD, ONR, DARPA, DIA/MINERVA, National Intelligence Council, NDU, the United Nations Office of the Secretary General, UN-OCHA, UN-SPIDER, the World Bank, US Department of State, Rockefeller Foundation, Woodrow Wilson Center, Yale, Carnegie Mellon, Rochester Institute of Technology, Notre Dame, & TED. Her projects have been covered in several national and international outlets, including the Voice of America, Reuters, NPR, CNN, Huffington Post, Wired, The Chronicle of Higher Education, among others.

In her role as Associate Professor of International Relations at John Carroll University she teaches courses at the intersection of research methodology, international security, international relations, and conflict processes. She serves on the Board of Directors for the Open Geospatial Consortium(OGC) & the MapStory Foundation, & is principal consultant at Endogeneity, LLC.

Jen received her Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin-Madison (Political Science) and undergraduate degree from the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor. She also served as a Crisis Mapping and Early Warning Fellow at the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (HHI) and was named a 2013 recipient of the University of Michigan's LSA Humanitarian Service Award, presented annually by the Dean to 3 living alumni in recognition of their work. Jen was a Peace Corps volunteer on the Namibian side of the Angolan border from 1997-1999. She has hitchhiked 20,000 miles in over a dozen African countries and has a set of very cursory experiences drawn from short stints in several different warzones around the world.