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Question (Sim#3): 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

Editor: Gwyneth Sutherlin, PhD, Geographic Services Inc.

Compiler: Sam Rhem, SRC

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.
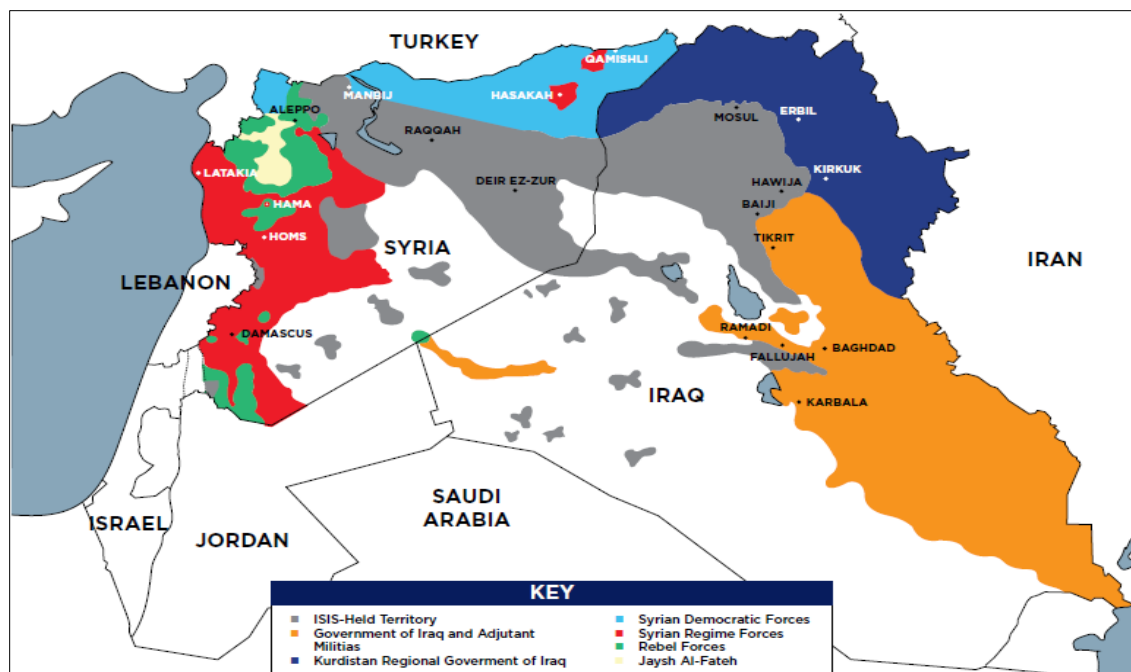
Figure 1.

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.[1] 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.

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

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[1] 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.

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]

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

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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 <u>beliefs that are both exploitable and rigid, but not always consistent</u>. 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 <u>"touchstones" that have personal appeal to the individual</u> (images of protective fathers on the battlefield, as much as popular video game scenes). They also offer <u>space for membership and meaning in the "in-group"</u>. *Both processes allow people to anchor into otherwise disparate events and connect with messages interpreting them.*

- <u>Support for "more democracy" may not be the answer to this problem</u> 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</u>", the symposium exposed many of the underlying assumptions about US power projection and the motivations behind it. 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.
(Perspectives on Terrorism is a journal of the Terrorism Research Initiative and the Center for Terrorism and Security Studies)

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 lslamist 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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Biographies

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.

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. 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. 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.

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.

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.

Brian L. Steed

LTC 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.

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.

Mr. Peter Welby

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.