



SMA Reach-back Report

Discussion Session with Naval Postgraduate School 18 January 2017

Speakers: John Arquilla, Ryan Gingeras, Glenn Robinson, Hy Rothstein, Naval Postgraduate School¹

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[START OF TRANSCRIPT]

Glenn Robinson: Let me go over the agenda very briefly. As I mentioned yesterday Doc, unfortunately Craig Whiteside has come down with a very nasty stomach virus so unfortunately will not be joining us today.

We'll start with Ryan Gingeras, who is a Turkey expert at the Naval Postgraduate School, and then I will follow Ryan. Then let's have a discussion at that point, some Q&A.

At which point John Arquilla and Hy Rothstein will be able to join us, and they will each speak, John on strategic narrative, development, and information operations more generally and Hy Rothstein on some of the lessons learned in Iraq when it comes to influence operations.

After those two sets of comments, we can again open up discussion and Q&A. Does that sound reasonable to everyone?

Doc Cabayan: Sounds good. Adam, okay with you?

Glenn Robinson: Have we lost CENTCOM?

Adam Gable: No. Hey Doc, sorry, pressed the wrong button. That sounds good, Doc.

Doc Cabayan: Okay, perfect.

¹ Biographies available in Appendix A

Glenn Robinson: All right, very good. We'll start with Dr. Ryan Gingeras on some thoughts on Turkey's role in response to your questions.

Ryan Gingeras: Okay, I'd personally just like to thank Glenn for the opportunity to talk and share my thoughts today on Turkish interest and policymaking in northern Iraq and Syria.

I'd like to start with an apology that I'm afraid I can't really speak too authoritatively about the tactical or technical nature of Turkey's recent action in the region. For that, I'd recommend one looks at the work of individuals such as Aaron Stein at the Atlantic Council, who has really written here and there about the capabilities, as well as limitations, of the Turkish Armed Forces in the region.

For the sake of time, I'd like to simply leave everyone here with three core points regarding Turkey's interests and intentions in northern Iraq and Syria. I'll be happy to expand on these points or on other issues during Q&A.

Firstly, I'd like to say that Turkey's incursion into northern Syria I think should come as no surprise. It's fundamentally driven by domestic concerns. As I'm sure you're all aware, Ankara considered the PYD one and the same as the PKK and not from Ankara's perspective, it's a part of the greater effort, or the incursion at least is a part of the greater, I'm sorry, the PYD is a part of a greater effort to partition Kurdish land in Turkey.

While one could debate the semantics of how close the PYD and the PKK actually are, the true extent to which these two groups, as well as groups like Kosh [the primarily Kurdish HDP party in Turkey], coordinate is not 100% clear. It is clear that nationalist Kurds in Turkey have followed events in Rojava very closely, and let me say, from a Turkish nationalist perspective, a Kurdish nationalist perspective I should say, it is the most important and the most successful turn of events in the history of Kurds.

Even if one considers the autonomy and influence, Barzani and the KRG regime influences and enjoys today, the PYG's gain in Rojava more genuinely embodies the nationalist and ideological aspirations found among Kurds in Turkey today. Ankara knows this and therefore seems quite intent upon snuffing the PYD out.

The second point I'd like to leave you all with is I think it's hard to know what Turkey's long-term intentions are in Syria, let alone northern Iraq. With respect to Ankara's perspective on Assad, it would seem that Turkish Syria policy is becoming maybe a bit more fluid, or perhaps maybe a better term would be a bit more muddled.

Regarding combating the PYD, I think it's abundantly clear that Ankara has no real exit strategy. What had begun as an effort ostensibly spearheaded by Ankara's allies in the SSA, has increasingly become an effort both managed and executed by the Turkish Armed Forces.

The Sultan al-Bab suggests that the Turkish Armed Forces is clearly having trouble on both of these counts, both in terms of managing the SSA as well as executing anything like a sustained and successful campaign. While taking al-Bab and perhaps Manbij in the future, it's clearly foreseen as essential to blocking the PYD from linking to other Kurdish groups in northern Syria, especially in Afrin. I have trouble guessing what comes after that. Even if they are successful.

The same can be said for Turkish plans in northern Iraq. The base in Bashiqa appears to be going nowhere despite recent talks between Ankara and Baghdad. Strategically it's really isolated and remote in relationship to declared areas of interest in northern Iraq, at least from Turkey's perspective.

It is possible, although not very likely, that Ankara foresees a long-term military occupation of the region much like what we see in Northern Cyprus. But at this point, I have to say I'm only speculating.

The third and last point I'd like to leave you with is this. I don't think it can be emphasized enough that Turkey risks grave amounts of self-harm in this operation, regardless of the outcome. Ankara is gambling mainly on the prospect that the Turkish Armed Forces can suppress the PYD and that the ISIS threat, more than anything, will simply go away. When I say go away, I mean solved largely exclusive of Ankara's own action.

Should the PFK or the Turkish Armed Forces on both counts fail, one can only imagine that the rate of terrorist violence in Turkey will escalate dramatically. One can only imagine that the Turkish Armed Forces' failure would already worsen the already depleted state of the army's morale, which may in turn directly undermine the stability of Erdogan's regime.

But even if Turkey is somehow successful, and the PYD can be turned back from Manbij and al-Bab, and Raqqa falls, with or without the help of the PYD, the Turkish Armed Forces still face a lengthy stay in northern Syria. I find it difficult to imagine a scenario in which Turkey completely returns the PYD genie back into its bottle.

The minefield that awaits Ankara in northern Iraq is arguably fraught with even greater uncertainty. There appears to be no clear strategy for dealing with the growing pro-PKK sympathies found among Yazidis and the Kurds in the Sinjar mountain region, no plan for re-incorporating the region of Tal Afar with the KRG, let alone dealing with the long-term sectarian divide that will emerge after ISIS leaves Tal Afar, and no clear trajectory for the base in Bashiqa. All these factors point to a deepening Turkish quagmire abroad and greater instability at home. Thank you.

Glenn Robinson: Thank you very much, Ryan. Any quick questions or clarification? I know we'll have a broader discussion in a few minutes, but any clarification questions for Ryan before I go on?

Lt. Col. Karavorian: Lieutenant Colonel Karavorian here. You mentioned that you saw Turkish morale potentially suffering if they aren't able to successfully end the Syrian conflict or help get rid of ISIS. What do you see as potential follow-on to that decrease in Turkish military forces' morale? Is it likely to step up into a popular overthrow? Is it just going to collapse the economy? Where do you think that goes?

Ryan Gingeras: I think, again, this is over speculative, but if one considers the fact that already the officer corps at various ranks have been depleted really mightily, and those who are replacing them are either deemed politically reliable, or some of whom are returning officers who were persecuted under the Sledgehammer trial of a few years back, I think you have a really combustible atmosphere in which you could have one of two scenarios.

One, another coup or open conflict within the armed Forces. I mean those are the worst-case scenarios. I think the most likely scenario is that it will cease to be able to hold onto, not simply territory within Syria, but also perhaps these larger amounts of territory to the PKK in Turkey.

It's really unknown at present what the play is in southeastern Turkey because there's very little press coverage. It's very clear that the Turkish government is trying to keep affairs in Eastern Turkey out of the news. But that may become more difficult if, for example, there are more terrorist attacks or if there are high rates of casualties in eastern Antalya.

Either way, it flows back within the government, it also is in society. But I think this is why one should have some cause for concern regarding Turkey's plans in Syria and Iraq.

Lt. Col. Karavorian: Thank you.

Glenn Robinson: All right, let me make a set of remarks as well, then we'll again open it up before Professors Arquilla and Rothstein arrive. What I'd like to do is make four sets of comments that are, I hope, germane to the questions that were asked.

The first set of comments is on issues of local governance. Second set of comments on issues about the style of the political institutions. A third set of comments about, and this goes back a little bit to our last conversation about after the caliphate, what happens when that territorial state is ultimately defeated.

Then a final set of comments on the Shia-Sunni issues that you raised and how that links more broadly into the Westphalian or the state system and the revival of the state system in the Middle East.

All right, so let me begin with local governance. This basically goes to questions about what happens in Raqqa, in Deir ez-Zor, and the Euphrates River Valley more generally in Syria, what happens in Mosul and the area after the territorial state of ISIS is defeated, what sort of political arrangements can be made afterwards.

Let me start with a set of general comments and then bore down a bit. In my judgment, the absence of real local governance has been one of the most important political problems, not just in Syria and Iraq, but frankly throughout the Arab world and in much of the Third World more generally.

Because what you saw in these regimes that came to power, this is true as well with the Baathist regimes that came to power in Syria in 1963, Iraq in 1968, but again, more broadly, in the '50s and '60s, is of regimes that frankly had uncertain relations with their own societies.

These were new states, new boundaries that had been created in the decades previous, not a lot of history in most cases to these new states. You have regimes come to power that really wanted to hoard power to the epicenter. They jealously guarded that power and resources at the center and have denied any significant local autonomy, local governance, local decision-making.

When I talk about meaningful autonomy, I'm talking about the combination of resources and authority. That you actually have resources – taxes and other revenues -- that local governments control, and they have the authority to make decisions on local issues without having to get permission from the center.

Now, there's been a lot of pressure from the US and other actors for a number of years on these highly centralized regimes to decentralize power, to push resources and decision-making authority down to local levels. What has generally been the response by most regimes in the region is not to decentralize authority, but to deconcentrate authority.

That is, create systems where local decision-makers - mayors, governors, typically- are not representatives of the local level that speak up for the local level to the central authority, but instead representatives, and in fact appointed by the central authority, to represent central authority interests at the local level. To speak down, as it were, as opposed to speak up.

This has been a huge problem throughout the region where there are very few resources at the local level, no real ability at the local level to make decisions, no ability to plan for their future. It basically creates an absence of representative local governance.

That's a broader problem that you see throughout the Arab world and throughout much of the Third World as well. Now, in the case of Iraq and Syria, I think you have this problem on steroids. Currently Baghdad does not trust the population of Mosul and most of the Sunni Arab population in northwest Iraq.

Equally so, Damascus does not trust the population of Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor and other areas that are overwhelmingly Sunni Arab.

In both cases, you have a strong resistance by the central authority in Baghdad and Damascus to truly accept decentralized local government in the aftermath of the liberation of these areas. But that is absolutely the key in terms of stability and cooperation with the local population: decentralization where resources and decision-making authority can be found at the local level for local level problems.

Now the US obviously has a lot more leverage in Baghdad with the central government than it does in Damascus with the central government there. But in both cases, in both Iraq and Syria, post-liberation success is going to largely depend on how the center-periphery dynamic plays out between central authority and local populations.

Cooperation and stability are going to depend largely on the ability of local actors to actually have authority and have resources to make decisions on local matters. Obviously, security arrangements are going to be very important and sensitive as well.

So, just a final comment on local governance. In both the Mosul area and the Euphrates River Valley area, keeping existing institutional boundaries and arrangements, existing boundaries for cities and provinces, for example, even tribal areas, that's perfectly fine. I don't think there's any reason to reinvent the wheel as far as that goes.

But the key is going to be to infuse them, or making sure they are infused, with real decision-making authority and real resources at that local level. Then I think you'll find a much higher level of cooperation and stability in those areas.

As opposed to them essentially either being completely ignored, but without resources by the central government, or the central government comes in and tries to essentially dictate terms to the local areas, which is a recipe for disaster in my judgment.

Next, a few remarks on Salafi political institutions. This is Islam's version of the conservative populism that you see in so many places around the world. From Brexit to Marine Le Pen to Mr. Trump to lots of other folks. This is kind of the Islamic version of that, the Salafi trend in recent years.

There is a broader cultural political Salafism, which is more cultural than political historically, but we, I think, are more interested today in what's often called Salafi jihadism. The person who coined that term has also offered, I think, the best critique of the Salafi jihadi movement, was Abu Musab al-Suri, who I'm sure you're all familiar with.

His basic critique of Salafi jihadism was that they were too puritanical to be able to make strategic alliances with like-minded but slightly different jihadi groups. This was in his judgment an enormous problem in Afghanistan, for example, where the Salafi jihadis, again, the Arab Salafi jihadis, tended to not work with the Taliban because they viewed the Taliban as not pure Muslims, pure Salafi. There were differences that they did not accept as legitimate.

So, they have a difficulty in creating durable workable alliances with groups that are similar but not exactly the same. It's the Stalinists and the Leninists, and they don't agree with each other. They make the other out to be evil.

Now, how does this impact what we are seeing in the region today? I think the Salafi overreach, from the stories that we've gotten in recent weeks, was evident in Eastern Aleppo and actually helped weaken the grip of groups in Eastern Aleppo. Obviously, Russian and Syrian pounding of that region was the most important thing in the fall of Eastern Aleppo.

But it's fairly clear that the Salafi groups that were running things there had over time lost the support of the local population in large measure. Support that they used to have when they were seen as organic groups that grew out of the realities, needs, and experiences of the local population. They were of them.

But over time they grew more puritanical, more Salafi and created wider and wider gaps with the population that they at least said that they represented. It was very clear to me by the time Eastern Aleppo fell that there were some pretty wide gaps between the people and the Salafis that were in charge of the area.

More broadly, hardline Salafi institutions, even taking away the Jihadi part, just hardline Salafi institutions, have a fairly limited appeal throughout the Muslim world, including the Arab world. It does appeal to a segment of the population, but a fairly small segment. Typically, it will appeal to somewhere between 5 and 20% of the population of any Muslim majority country. Now, 20% can be significant, but that's at the high end.

But typically, the hardline Salafi interpretation of Islam is simply not very popular with the general Muslim population. We see that in public opinion polling. We see that in elections, local and national elections in various countries, that it is a pretty self-limiting interpretation of Islam.

So, that self-limiting aspect, I think, also applies to Ahrar al-Sham if they have the chance to more or less freely control parts of Idlib and Aleppo provinces in the next few years. I think it unlikely that Ahrar al-Sham will have that opportunity, but if they do, they will face that same legitimacy problem. In other words, the more hardline, more Salafi they go, the less support they will have from the broader population. The more that they rule and deal with problems in a sort of organic, representative way, the better off they will be.

Now we know from the ISIS experience that terror and coercion can work for at least a while. That doesn't garner you a lot of popular support but it can keep you in office, at least for a period of time. But the broader point here is as these groups, again, in particular, if they are allowed to rule and deepen their rule over a period of peace and stability in that part of, again, mostly Idlib and Aleppo regions, the more Salafi they go, the less popular they will be. That is the general rule that we see throughout the Muslim world.

The third set of comments I want to make, and this overlaps a little bit with what we talked about last time, is what happens after the caliphate. What happens to Daesh or ISIS and the other folks. So a few comments on that.

First, once Daesh or ISIS, ISIL, whatever you want to call them, once they lose their territorial state, which is, I think, coming rather soon, frankly it will be just another Jihadi group. We've got lots of Jihadi groups out there. It will have its own kind of brand, its own history, so it will have some distinction. But frankly, it won't be anything particularly special once it has lost its territoriality.

I do expect that it will pop up from time to time in various towns and villages. Plenty of ungoverned spaces in the Muslim world. From time to time, you'll have some local group grab power and declare themselves a new emirate of the caliphate. I suspect that's almost certainly going to happen. But as a coherent organization, losing its territorial state will make ISIS simply another Jihadi group in my judgment.

Going back to Abu Musab al-Suri's criticism, again, Salafi jihadis have a history of having a hard time forming meaningful and durable alliances because of this very puritanical streak that they have. That suggests to me at least that you will continue to see terrorism and violence from time to time under their banner. But it's, again, very self-limiting; there will be no contagion of the spread of ISIS.

Now, what happens to the fighters of the caliphate as Mosul and Raqqa fall? They will continue, or at least many of them will continue to aspire to the global jihad and the creation of the new caliphate somewhere else. Which is why, I don't need to tell you guys this, but it's really rather important to capture or kill as many of the fighters as possible as Mosul and Raqqa falls.

Because frankly I don't think we want them popping up in the Balkans or in Europe or elsewhere anytime soon. This of course was an enormous problem after the success of the Afghan jihad in the 1980s. As a lot of these jihadis went back home, the so-called Arab Afghans, for example, and created a lot of problems in the Arab world in the 1990s and beyond.

The fall of the caliphate is not going to do anything to change the basic persistence of Sunni Arab grievances against Baghdad and Damascus. Only policy changes from Baghdad and Damascus will do that. Given that US influence is much more significant in Baghdad than it is in Damascus, one can

imagine that it's possible that the central government in Baghdad can adopt policies that are more welcoming of the Sunni Arab population in Iraq.

There's going to be enormous resistance to doing that, as everybody on this phone call knows. But again, it's terribly important for those steps to be taken because without that, it might not be an ISIS, but they'll be other forms of Sunni Arab grievance-making against the central government in Baghdad because of this feeling of alienation and lack of representation in the Iraqi state.

So again, strong decentralized local government can help. It's not Nirvana but again, it's incumbent upon Baghdad to make those policy changes so that you don't get some newest iteration of ISIS or something else, but basically, it's Sunni Arab grievances alienation against the central government popping up again in the future.

The last point on after the caliphate is, and it's a point I made last time but I do want to reemphasize it, and that is you cannot un-ring the bell of the caliphate. That this is going to be, in my judgment, the one enduring victory of ISIS. That is, it has captured the imagination of many Muslims. Not ISIS in particular and all the violence and really sort of grotesque activity, but the notion of reestablishing a caliphate in the Muslim world that Atatürk got rid of in the mid-1920s. That has captured the imagination of a lot of Muslims, although not in the ISIS form.

I have no idea if some sort of more legitimate caliphate is going to be established in the years or decades ahead. There's probably good reason to believe that it won't be. But I think it's an issue that's now on the table in the Muslim world. It is critical, in my judgment, for the United States to make that distinction between ISIS as a terror group and the notion of a caliphate in Islam, which is essentially not our business. That's an issue for Muslims to debate and decide.

So, it's important that we guard against the degradation of the word "caliphate" in the same way that we saw the degradation of the word "jihad" in English, where jihad in English has become a synonym for terror. That's not its meaning in Arabic, and it's rather a sort of insulting interpretation that the West makes. But that has happened for particular reasons.

We need to guard against that same degradation of the word caliphate. The idea of a caliphate itself is neither good nor bad. I think we need to be relatively indifferent about it. But it should not become another synonym for terror and ISIS brutality in the way that we use it.

Let me turn to a fourth and last set of comments, this time on the Shia/Sunni divide and the state system, reviving the state system in the Arab world. Just very briefly, the collapse of the state system in the Arab world, since late 2010-early 2011, has made fighting terror groups so much harder. Frankly, the United

States, I think, does have, and ought to have, a bias towards stable states in the region.

A functioning Westphalian state system in the region remains terribly important in order to diminish the impact of terror and instability in the region, again, mostly towards its own people but as well towards the US and our allies elsewhere.

There is no intrinsic difference in my mind between Shia and Sunni extremism. There's nothing in the history and literature of Shiism or Sunnism that make it more or less likely to have extremism, to have terrorism, to have violence. But it does happen from time to time in each tradition. It's all about the circumstances of the context, what's happening in the world at the time, that you see extremism predominate in one or the other, or in some cases both, traditions.

Here I'll take a moment to just kind of poke fun a little bit. My former professor, the late Fouad Ajami made a distinction years ago, perhaps in jest, that violence in the Sunni world tends to be homicidal and violence in the Shia world tends to be suicidal. It was a silly distinction to make and doesn't have any real truth to it.

Ajami's distinction happened to reflect what was happening at the moment in the 1980s in the region, but again, there's no intrinsic difference in terms of extremism. You have many, many examples of extremism in both of those traditions and many examples of peaceful coexistence in both of those traditions as well.

What is the context today? Today, Shia groups, and here I'm thinking of Hezbollah, the various Iraqi militia, to some degree the Houthis in Yemen, although that's a little bit more marginal, all have links to Iran. Therefore, they have links to a pretty stable, functioning state in the region and so, by comparison, they tend to reflect state interests and tend to be a force for "state-ness" in the region.

Hezbollah is busy fighting and dying in Syria, but they are fighting and dying in Syria to try and protect the Syrian state and the regime of president Assad within that Syrian state. Same thing with the Iraqi militia that are there fighting and dying to defend the Iraqi state and particularly the Shia regime, the Shia privileges within the Iraqi state. So, they tend to be a force for state-ness in today's context.

Sunni extremist groups by comparison today, generally are not closely tied to a state, although some clearly get resources from various states. But they are not an organic outgrowth of the state. They tend to, in today's context, tend to be more disruptive toward the state system in the region. Again, this is not something that is intrinsic or will historically be the case in 100 years, but just in today's context that's just the way it is.

This creates a conundrum for the United States, it seems to me, that we need to work through in a more coherent way than we have up to this point. That is, we want to strengthen the state system in general for the sake of stability and security. We don't like ungoverned spaces and state breakdown because it creates room for terror groups and criminal groups to thrive, and that's simply not a good development.

But in order to support the state system and to support functioning states, to do so coherently, in my judgment, requires a fresh approach towards Iran. Iran is a country that is one of the most functioning and stable states in the region. Right now, we have, it seems to me, a fairly incoherent approach. When it comes to Iran, on the one hand it's still considered the biggest regional enemy in some regards of the United States.

On the other hand, we are in implicit alliance with Iran when it comes to a lot of our activities in Iraq. There's a bit of an incoherence there that I think needs to be thought through in a broader, more conceptual way about how we approach states, stable states, and non-state actors in the region. On that point, I will end. Let's just open it up for questions and comments from you folks. Over.

Male Speaker 1:

Yeah, so starting back with local governance. You mentioned Iraq and distrust of the population in Mosul in Syria and distrust in Deir ez-Zor and that being a necessity to address by pushing down or distributing power to local governance. What's the impetus for that to occur when the broad population is not distrusted in the rest of the regime territory? That they should change their design for these outliers?

Glenn Robinson:

The US has so little leverage in Damascus to begin with that pressure for decentralization or federalism becomes a much, much more difficult thing to implement. But what is predictable is if that doesn't happen, there will be more instability and violence. That will happen in the future if Damascus attempts to re-centralize power that has effectively been decentralized simply because it's been taken over by both Kurds and Sunni Arabs in the eastern two thirds of the country. So Damascus has to think about the long-term solution to its domestic stability problems, which will inevitably involve a federal approach to the state – which Damascus will likely resist.

Again, meaningful decentralization and federalism are not Nirvana, it's not a silver bullet. But to get Damascus and Baghdad to think through that having a more federal system where you have significant autonomy -- not independence but autonomy -- at the local levels, that is a stabilizing influence. This is something that will help the regime stay in power for the long-term.

Getting them to accept that I think is going to be extremely difficult and particularly, essentially impossible for the United States to do in Syria. In Iraq, I think there's a lot more that can be done by the United States in that regard. I know Ryan wants to get in on this too. Go ahead.

Ryan Gingeras:

Just really quickly, I think that in the case of Syria, Damascus may not have much of a choice if it considers that part of its future will rest on what it does about the PYD. The path of least resistance is, at least for the time being, to put off the question of trying to destroy or incorporate the PYD directly.

It may simply try, it may opt for some sort of limited federal arrangements just so it doesn't have to deal with the PYD directly right this minute. Why create more enemies now when the state play is still pretty precarious? Over.

Male Speaker 1:

While we are playing with this, do you see possibly, if they do take the steps for self-preservation, is that also being the first step to fragmentation? If you start giving these places autonomy and then these autonomous places actually having a sort of relationship with each other that they don't then say, "Well, why do we need to be autonomous under three different governments? Why not be autonomous under one of our own?"

Glenn Robinson:

Right, exactly. This is exactly the argument the central states make. That if we move towards a more federal system away from a highly-centralized system, this is going to inevitably lead to demands for independence from various regions that have different tribal, ethnic, religious, or other cleavages. I think in some countries that fear is probably justified.

But it's also the best way to prevent actual demands for independence. If people are satisfied and happy that most of their day-to-day decisions in life get handled at a local level by themselves, the people that are accountable to them, that they know, that they go knock on their door etc., that tends to deradicalize regions.

Stability is more threatened when all complaints can be laid at the doorstep of the centralized government. So, anything that goes wrong, I mean problems with your water system, with your electricity, with sewage disposal, garbage pickup, etc. all get blamed on the central government. If every single thing can be laid at the doorstep of Baghdad or Damascus, then you're just inviting trouble, and you're inviting demands for actual independence. If those kinds of problems can be handled at the local level, I mean, you're always going to have some true believers out there trying to stir up trouble. That's just the nature of life.

But it's going to have far less, and then we just see this in so many places, far less ability to influence broader populations in that regard. So, the decentralization, this has been a cornerstone of US policy, certainly through the State Department, USAID, not just for years but for decades, to try and get meaningful decentralization in a lot of these countries for exactly these reasons.

Because it does provide long-term stability much better, this has been shown again and again, much better than these highly centralized systems. So, it has been a cornerstone of US policy. It's a matter of how do we now push it and try

to get the Iraqi, and to whatever degree we can, the Syrian state to actually adopt this. I think it's a wicked problem. It's a very tricky thing to do. Ryan?

Ryan Gingeras:

One thing I think people are learning in the greater Middle East is that achieving autonomy does not necessarily lead to independence. Because from a global leadership standpoint, you see this in the case of somebody like Barzani, you have greater likelihood of having your cake and eat it too while being autonomous as opposed to being independent.

If one looks at the case of the KRG, independence removes a really valuable negotiating tool that Barzani has because it forces the KRG to be entirely self-sufficient and have to solely depend upon the kindness of its neighbors, and thus the United States.

At this point, the KRG can still rely upon certain elements about Baghdad. Draw upon certain support from Turkey and the United States all at the same time while not having to go through very serious informal negotiations, particularly with other local political competitors, namely in this case, PUK.

The same may be also said for PYD. If the PYD becomes independent, they are going to have to essentially come to terms with the PKK, not as equals but as competitors as well. In the long term, that's not to say that the original argument being made is incorrect, but I think there are countervailing factors. The immediate one, a local leader that would make them a little bit more hesitant to think about a process leading them towards independence irrevocably.

Glenn Robinson:

One other comment just to throw in there is an example from Iraq itself. Inside Iraq when did the Kurdish troubles, rebellion, push for not just autonomy but independence, when did that begin? Well, it began in the early 1960s and it began, why, because in response to the Iraqi revolution of 1958, the Iraqi state in Baghdad decided it wanted to centralize authority in all of the territory of this new country of Iraq and push exactly that, centralized decision-making and resources in Baghdad from all areas of the country, including the Kurdish north.

It was in response to that that the Kurds then started to agitate and take up arms against the central government. Prior to that, they had essentially been left alone to handle local decisions locally, and things were essentially much more quiet. It's not the same situation today as it was in the early 1960s but that kind of dynamic between center and periphery, I think, remains largely the same.

Allison Astorino-Courtois:

This is Allison Astorino-Courtois, may I throw in a couple questions here?

Glenn Robinson:

Go ahead please.

Allison Astorino-

Courtois:

Okay. With regards to this last discussion, I have a comment and a question. I'm having a hard time seeing a condition under which it would make sense for the central Syrian government to give a good deal of federal autonomy to the PYD. If only because of the regional implications, and this was the start of the issue with Turkey in the first place, right? Wasn't that basically allowing the PYD to sort of move out on its own?

I mean I suppose if they don't fear that there will be a backlash from Turkey, then maybe that sounds like a good idea. But I can't imagine that the rest of the alliance would think that that's something that the alliance would support, and maybe I have that wrong.

But then also I have to play devil's advocate on this important discussion and the criticality of local governance, both in Syria and Iraq. In many areas, as you know, there aren't necessarily local governors with the legitimacy or the span of constituent support to serve as credible, likely effective, global administrators currently, at least to directly understand local views.

So, in that case, I'm wondering what you would advise the US and the coalition to do. I mean no one's going to argue that ideally down the road local governance, awesome. But how do we get there other than have patience while the current governing structures basically evolve organically?

Glenn Robinson:

You want to start?

Ryan Gingeras:

Okay, I'll go first. I don't want to be mistaken, but your point is really well taken. I don't think Damascus in the long term as it's constituted now is willing to live with a federalized Syria. In the long term, I think you're correct. Confrontation is inevitable. Especially given what Turkey's policy is now towards the PYD.

My point was more in terms of in the short term, what is Damascus's option? I'm not entirely sure but I think that confrontation between the PYD and Damascus in the short term is irreversible. I think that it really depends on factors other than just Damascus's own interests and policies, and also the degree to which Assad proves to be flexible. It would just be speculative.

Regarding Turkey's own interests, my original point was that I'm not 100% sure if Ankara has a fully thought out game plan with respect to Syria. I don't know if they actually have a strategy beyond simply blocking Rojava from Afrin and then see what happens from there. I'm really not sure.

I will say though that there are people who do speculate that once the presidency is firmly in Erdogan's hands and the presidential system is fully in his hands, we may see a radical change of policy. That may be the case, I'm not sure. But there are those who speculate that there may be something over what he, that Erdogan may tack back somewhat on his positions regarding Kurdish nationalism or even a resumption of some kind of peace talk.

Glenn Robinson:

To add to what Ryan said, in my judgment, the problem set that is facing both Iraq and Syria on the issue of local governance is pretty much identical. But the prospects for reform in that case, to move towards serious local government, in both cases it's hard, and there's resistance, as I said up front. There's going to be strong resistance from both Baghdad and Damascus.

But here I'd like to split off Syria from Iraq because even though the problem set is extremely similar, and I think the long-term solution is extremely similar, I think the chances of getting there are radically different in both cases.

In the case of Syria, again particularly given the recent advances by the regime, the regime is showing absolutely no incentive whatsoever to have some sort of grand bargain to reform the system to create a more representative and federalized system. It is strongly arguing against all that and the US has very little leverage to help change his mind.

Now, I do think in the case of Syria, it's frankly highly unlikely that the regime will be able to assert territorial control in the Kurdish areas of the northeast. I think autonomy, if not recognized in a legal way, is a de facto reality. My guess is it will remain a de facto reality for many, many years to come.

I just don't think the regime has the wherewithal to, and presumably assuming that the Americans stand firm with the Kurdish allies in that area, I just don't think that's a practical matter that's going to be the reassertion of the risk of governance by Damascus in the Kurdish areas in the northeast. So, de facto I suspect is going to stay more or less the same.

Now, in the case of Iraq: One of the reasons I'm raising this issue and pushing on it is because I think it is part of the overall solution to long-term stability and sovereignty in both of these countries. In Iraq, you may actually have the opportunity to get it done there, in part because the US has a lot more influence and leverage in Iraq than we do in Syria.

Again, the regime in Baghdad is not supportive, and there is going to be push back from them going in this direction. But the reason I think there is at least a little bit more reason to be optimistic in the case of Iraq is the liberation of Mosul and the reassertion of Iraqi sovereignty over all of its territory will create an opportunity to renew a grand bargain in the Iraqi state which has not been done since the Americans went in 2003.

It will present an opportunity. One of those rare opportunities for significant change and kind of political renewal. It has to be seized. It's not going to happen by itself. If things just drift along, then you're going to once again get the reinsertion of centralized authority by Baghdad.

So, it does create an opportunity but it's a matter of the actors seizing hard on that opportunity to create a grand bargain that includes, again, a more federal

system and significant local governance authority and not just the Sunni Arab areas but the Kurdish areas and elsewhere.

Allison Astorino-Courtois:

So, what would you need to incentivize the current central government in Baghdad to devolve, I mean to seriously devolve power, as opposed to being some sort of lip service to this idea?

Glenn Robinson:

I think that's a great question and it gets really to the heart of the matter. I think that is kind of worth a separate discussion on its own about what are the kinds of steps that the Americans can take. What can we expect from the Kurdish regional government and Kurdish actors as well? What can we expect from non-state actors within the Shia world in Iraq?

I mean there are a number of things that I think can be done to incentivize that transition. As I said, I think that's worth a long and really focused discussion on its own.

Allison Astorino-Courtois:

I agree with you there. Thank you.

Glenn Robinson:

Hy Rothstein has joined us and is prepared to say a few remarks on the kind of lessons learned from Iraqi information operations to the present day, unless there are further questions for either Ryan or myself.

Male Speaker 2:

One more question. Or actually, one short one tangentially tying the two together regarding the Iranian US policy coherence in the region that needs to be addressed and whether or not that may leverage an example of a country that has a centralized government with some autonomous regions demonstrating stability. What do you think on that?

Glenn Robinson:

Absolutely true.

Male Speaker 2:

Okay, thanks.

Ryan Gingeras:

I hesitate to compare Iran to any other countries in the Middle East because, I mean if we are going to sort of wade into the weeds of history and the way it reverberates in contemporary politics, Iran has successfully been able to pivot towards a more centralized government because over the course of the last 200 years, there's been an implicit agreement among many elite and among large sections of the population that the Iranian Empire became the Iranian nation state by consensus.

I think that if there's one thing that Iranians of various stripes appear to agree on, it's that the borders of Iran are legitimate. That the integrity of the state, of the lands that are encompassed around these borders, is legitimate and that there is a common shared heritage.

If one compares that to Iraq or Syria, let alone even a country like Turkey, these kinds of points of consensus do not exist, at least they do not exist among significant chunks of the population. This can work in a couple of different ways. I think, just to leave you with this point, I think this can also work in irredentist ways.

I think one thing that we've discovered in the last few years is that there's a very strong irredentist streak in Turkey. Whether or not that actually manifests itself as policy remains to be seen. It may be very unlikely, but given the amount of noise that has been made over the last two years, one can see a push within governments, it wouldn't be completely unexpected given the amount of noise. But a push within the Ankara government towards revising the borders of the contemporary Middle East.

As far as how that works out vis-à-vis local government, I agree with everything Glenn just said. I agree that it's an important solution. It's an important solution to the long-term health of the region, but I think the question is who would take up the mantle of the local governments? I think that's a vacuum, and unfortunately, in many countries, the most likely and maybe the people who are best qualified to do that, they are either not trusted by the central government or they've left those countries altogether as refugees or exiles.

Glenn Robinson:

Let me just add a couple of points to that. I largely agree with Ryan. First, on the coherence of the Iranian state, I often tell my students to think of the Middle East as book ends with Iran on one side and Egypt on the other. Iran and Egypt have long histories. They have coherence. They have national identities that are strong. They have generally just much more coherent body politics.

But everything in between is not. Everything in between is essentially a made-up structure over the last century or so and it does not have the history, the coherence, the sense of national identity, etc. It's a much tougher issue, and I absolutely agree that it becomes tougher in between those bookends than it does in the book ends itself.

Iran does have a, I mean it's not a truly federal system, but it does have fairly significant provisional autonomy in Tabriz, the Northwest, or Lorestan or elsewhere. There's a fair amount of autonomy that's granted to the local governors and to cities in Iran, and that does create a stability, a political stability, or it helps in that regard quite a bit in the case of Iran, even with that added advantage of being a coherent body politic already.

The final point, you know, you look at South Africa. I mean it has gone, since 1994, gone through an enormous transition. Would the place stay together? Would it fall apart? There are lots of problems, of course. One of the things that the South Africans did in the 1990s as it transitioned to this new world was to create a federal system.

The provinces in South Africa and the cities have significant autonomy to undertake and handle their own problems, to raise revenues, to the authority to make decisions. I would argue that that has been, again, I don't want to make this out to be nirvana here, the silver bullet that cures everything. But I would argue that the decision to federalize the post-apartheid state in South Africa helped create a much higher level of stability in South Africa as it underwent this enormous transition.

Again, Iraq and Syria and elsewhere are likewise undergoing an enormous transition, and I think having legitimate decentralization of authority and resources must be part of the answer for the sake of stability, as it has been in Iran and South Africa. Alright, Hy Rothstein has joined us, so let me turn over the floor to him for a few minutes and hear what he has to say. Hy?

Hy Rothstein:

Good afternoon I guess at your end. I'm not sure exactly what transpired during the first parts of this discussion, so if I walk on some of the ideas that somebody else talked about, just let me know, and I'll move on. I'm going to talk a little bit about ideas in the narrative but then I'm going to move into something more concrete, and that's actions and give you an example of what we should not do again. I'm really talking about Iraq.

The first thing we need to consider is where does a good narrative come from? And second, when does a good narrative gain traction? Or alternatively, when does it collapse?

Winning wars requires a combination of the right deeds. You are doing the right things, as well as the right words. Both are a necessary condition for what some people refer to as successful strategic communications.

ISIS looks like it's on the ropes and will be defeated but then what? Will another apocalyptic Islamist group rise in ISIS's ashes? Possibly. If it does, we risk another botched job in Iraq.

So, what is the purpose of an information strategy or a narrative? The purpose is very simple. It's really to explain, promote, and defend principles. By principles I mean the justice of a cause. He who wins the argument about justice wins the war of ideas.

If you think about it, power without an expressed higher purpose does not earn or deserve the trust of others. If the exercise of power is not set in the context of a just cause, it will be seen for what it probably is and that's an expression of raw self-interest. So understand the justice of the cause, explain it, and act accordingly.

So, with that I'm going to talk a little bit about some of the lessons of reconstructing security forces in Iraq. Let me just start with interventions may again create insurgencies. You can even argue that the larger and more intrusive the intervention, the greater the attraction for forces opposed to that action.

However, experience in Iraq has shown that there is a high cost of defeating a well-established counter state that is grounded in an idea. We would be much better at preventing these counter states from rising in the first place.

Let me talk again specifically about the Iraqi security forces. In 2007, retired Marine Corps General Jones led an independent evaluation of the state of Iraqi security forces. The commission reported that the Iraqi army in particular was doing quite well. That they were increasing their effectiveness and that they were about ready to assume responsibility for Iraq's security.

At the same time, another assessment was done by a guy named Anthony Cordesman, and what he said I think is very interesting, very telling and actually more revealing when you look back. He said that the report that Jones did, did not address the degree to which the elements of the Iraqi security forces from the Prime Minister's office down had links to Shiite efforts to retain and expand power. This is an indication of anything but a just cause.

So, Cordesman's assessment really helps explain why our investment in security forces - recruiting, training, advising, and assisting the Iraqi army failed and resulted in the Islamic state. Unless we find a way to mitigate some of these sectarian divisions, our plans may only delay the rise of the son of ISIS.

Again, conventional wisdom with regard to developing security forces, again, conventional wisdom from the United States' standpoint, holds that the formation of a capable Iraqi army will ensure security. By late 2005, coalition efforts to build a capable Iraqi army did seem to be paying off.

By early 2006, there were three Iraqi brigades conducting operations independently. The Iraqis were demonstrating a strong combat proficiency, and the insurgents were never able to really rally the Iraqi army. Now, never, you didn't see this at all. But what was interesting, increased army Iraqi competence correlated with increased insurgent acts.

Unfortunately, strong combat performance by the Iraqi army had little to do with insurgent activity. In fact, insurgent attacks increased while the Iraqis were capably executing counterinsurgency operations. Now, you would think that the best performing Iraqi units would actually face fewer attacks within the areas that they were operating in, but this was just not the case.

What's the reason for this? I think back to Cordesman's assessment. The reason the competent Iraqi Army continued to suffer insurgent attacks was that the population did sympathize with the insurgents and rejected the Iraqi army. They viewed it as a mostly Shia militia and a symbol of what was going on in Baghdad. So, the insurgents continued to have an intelligence advantage over the Army.

Now, if this Shia identity of the Iraqi army was an impediment to reducing levels of violence, you might expect that a Sunni-dominated unit operating locally would have more success. This was in fact what happened in one brigade that

had a substantial number of Sunnis in its ranks. It was the third brigade in the seventh Iraqi division that occupied Al-Qa'im in early 2006.

The brigade faced fewer insurgent attacks despite being severely undermanned. In fact, the casualty rate of this brigade was 75% less than that suffered in Falluja, a town of similar size, population, and geography. Most interesting is the presence of this uncertified, undertrained, and undermanned brigade resulted in significantly reduced insurgent attacks.

This fact undermines the notion that increased training and numbers are critical to the Iraqi army's ability to defeat the insurgents. The success of the third and seventh Iraqi brigade was directly related to the Albu Mahal tribe, the most powerful tribe in the area. As many as 40% of the brigade's men came from that tribe.

They disliked the heavy-handed tactics of Al Qaeda at the time, and they disliked the type of control measures that Al Qaeda was putting on the population. So, after the 37th brigade moved into the area, the tribe readily provided their fellow tribesmen with information on Al Qaeda's operations, safe houses, ammunition caches, and bombmaking facilities.

What we saw happening was the notion that the population viewed this brigade as being part of a just cause. This brigade was now using information that was provided to them by the population, and their just cause was generated information that provided security in the area.

So just in conclusion, these deeds are why this is part of the important narrative. This case offers insights to what might be relevant about minimizing the likelihood of some sort of son of ISIS coming to fruition. So, Washington and Baghdad, I think, need to support more local single identity security forces to maintain the local order or risk continued sectarian violence down the road.

The Iraqi government will probably gain better control over Iraq by supporting the existence of permanent levels of Sunni security forces. This does match words and deed and does really reinforce the idea of a just cause, and this is a necessary element of any narrative that will result in a more secure and peaceful nation.

Glenn Robinson: Thank you Hy. John Arquilla has joined us as well. He'll also be speaking on strategic narrative information operations as well, but I think it would be best if I just turn the floor over to him, and he can make a few remarks. Then we will open it up once again for discussion. Thank you.

John Arquilla: Thank you Glenn. My apologies if I say anything that's repetitive of what you've heard earlier. I'm just coming from another meeting. I'm not going to stay in the lane of strategic communications and influence. I caught the last part of Hy's remarks and can only say that I want to associate myself very closely with them.

As both Glenn and Hy will remember, back in 2004, I began writing and speaking and getting in a lot of hot water for saying we needed to start talking with the Anbaris as a way to drive a wedge between them and Al Qaeda in Iraq.

I hope this is consistent with Hy's recommendation. I think we can drive that wedge once again between ISIS and most Iraqi Sunnis who of course were sympathetic to the rise of ISIS in 2014 precisely because of what they thought were the unjust policies and practices of the Maliki government.

What I did want to address in this kind of influence and information dimension is the question of how what we are doing today, what is happening today, will influence what in the list of questions I saw is referred to as the post-ISIS Iraq. I think the character and shape of relations in that period are going to be profoundly influenced by the manner in which the campaigns to extirpate ISIS in Iraq is conducted.

I have great concerns about this. I have great concerns that so far, we have seen a lot of little Stalingrads unfolding. The liberation of cities has been accompanied by their destruction in too many cases, not only of larger cities like Falluja but in smaller towns as well. The sheer levels of destruction are inconsistent with a conciliatory message about one Iraq and bringing the Sunnis back into governance and respect as a people, as tribes.

I think this problem is only magnified by this larger scale of Stalingrad that is unfolding. The last time we had a teleconference like this, I believe I was recommending against the slow steady approach to going at Mosul, that it would go on for month after month after month. It would lead to more humanitarian outrages.

I don't simply refer here to the killing of noncombatants, but I think as I view the camps that are unfolding right now among so-called liberated people of Mosul, it's very troubling to see how families are being torn apart, how Shia militia are in fact acting sometimes in fairly heavy-handed ways.

There are better practices here that need to be put in place immediately among those liberated. The sons of so many families should be reunited with them. They are in the camp, after all. We have the ability to do vetting without the kind of sequestration and incarceration of so many which only will create resentment and allow ISIS to rebuild an insurgency once this battle for Mosul is over.

Now, Hy made a great point about linking deeds to our words, to our narrative. I want to suggest that it's not too late to think differently about Mosul. We are at a natural inflection point in the campaign there as the eastern part of the city has largely been cleared, and the question now of moving across the Tigris into western Mosul comes up.

This is an area, of course, where there are vastly more civilians and where frankly the indigenous support for ISIS is far, far greater or at least quite strong still. I think a concern about avoiding a humanitarian catastrophe remains a very, very high priority. Again, if one wants to think about rebuilding a peaceful and secure Iraq.

It is, just as a footnote, kind of interesting that Haider Al-Abadi chose today to ask for a formal American apology for having invaded Iraq. As an early opponent, even before Donald Trump was against invading Iraq, I was. So, to Prime Minister Al-Abadi, I say, "I'm sorry. I tried to stop the invasion, but I'm too small and obscure a professor to have been able to do it." [Laughter]

But it's not only something for which we should apologize but should realize that we have fundamentally disturbed the balance of power in the Middle East- socially, politically, strategically- in ways that will take many decades to rectify, if at all.

So, the question now is when you're in a deep hole, as Hy Rothstein likes to say, "The first step is to stop digging." I would say in this battle of Mosul right now we could stop digging by doing one of a couple of different things.

You may recall from the last teleconference, those who were on that, I suggested options to the slow, steady advance into Mosul which was going to maximize suffering, I believe, all around. Maximize Iraqi military casualties, maximize civilian suffering, and maximize the opportunity for ISIS to portray this in their narrative as a kind of Arab Alamo.

So, what would these options be? From the last time, I suggested a kind of T.E. Lawrence option, which is don't go straight at the city. Lawrence left somewhere between 35 to 40,000 Turkish troops in Medina until the end of the war. He made it all the way to Damascus without ever going after Medina.

Mosul may be ISIS's Medina. That's one way to look at this, and so to knock away the props of destroying that other area. Perhaps even, again, this is a grand strategy question, whether to go straight for Raqqa first. That I think would be an interesting option, and it would put the Sunnis in Mosul who are sympathetic to ISIS in an interesting position if everything else about ISIS had been dealt with prior to an assault on the city. So, the Lawrence model would be number one.

A second option would be what I call the open city model and suggested last time. It's something that I know General Rouleau, head of Canadian Special Forces Command, as well as Haider al-Abadi, supported. While there is still an escape route, and there still is, encourage ISIS fighters to leave under some kind of truce, and let them get across the border.

This second option strategically breaks the ISIS problem in two, into a problem in Iraq and a problem in Syria. It could be a very neat solution here. ISIS fighters

are encouraged to leave. If they do, go across the border, then the campaign against ISIS is basically buttoned up in Iraq, and we leave Syria to Assad and the Russians and, perhaps to some extent, the Turks.

That's not a particularly pleasant solution for Syria, but it does restore order in Iraq, and frankly the American game in Syria is already lost with Putin's intervention, the revival of the Assad regime, and the Turkish position that has come around and been more regime-aligned. That's a kind of cut your losses with Syria to solve the Iraq problem.

The wild card there is whether ISIS fighters would leave. Now, we know that insurgents left Aleppo when given the chance to do so and continued the fight from elsewhere. I think that's another strategic option that should be considered. It would probably have the most beneficial effect in terms of post-ISIS Iraq. Again, it would allow even for the kind of awakening or reawakening movement that Hy, I think, was implying in some of his remarks.

What's the third option? The third option is that the campaign to take Mosul is going to continue. I would only suggest here, and I know this is probably what's going to happen, just as months ago, I said, "Well, I think you are probably going to attack Mosul anyway. Please don't, but you are going to."

Now, we are there, and there's probably a lot of inertia aimed at finishing the campaign for the city, which again, I think, is only going to give ISIS an Arab Alamo and create massive humanitarian problems if we go step-by-step from east to west, west Mosul.

The third option here is what I described last time as a swarm attack. I think it is possible, particularly with the kind of incorporation of tribal-based units that Hy has been talking about. A different concept of operations that would see us moving into the city rapidly.

I think if this happened, the American rules of engagement would have to be relaxed to allow the leavening provided by American forces to enable an operation of this sort. But a kind of mini thunder run that gets all through Mosul, links up with resistance units and basically throws the entire ISIS defensive structure out of balance by coming at it from unexpected directions. Right now, they are well-prepared for what comes next and will provide their strongest resistance.

Those are the three options. There is a Lawrence option, sort of let ISIS wither on the vine in Mosul while we do other things. There's the open city option, which is a kind of a negotiated withdrawal of those fighters onto Syrian territory and an end of the ISIS campaign in Iraq.

And this third one, if we insist on taking the city, let's do it in a more creative way. Iraqi forces have been taking far too heavy casualties so far in this fighting.

This is a way to really unbalance the defenders. They are not prepared for an omnidirectional simultaneous assault.

Again, in order of preference, I'd probably prefer them one, two, three as I presented them here. Although I'd probably add, one and two are close. I do like the open city or the Aleppo model, if you will. I've gone about 10 minutes or so here, and I know we want to keep to that so as to allow maximum time for questions and discussion. Glenn, I'll hand it back over to you.

Glenn Robinson: Thank you very much, John. Let's open it up for any sort of questions or discussion. Over

Male Speaker 3: Interesting proposals. As you summarized at the end, option one, the wither. How long do you think that would take for them to wither, and what suffering are we ignoring during that period?

John Arquilla: Well, I think we don't allow suffering and do allow humanitarian aid. The Aleppo model certainly allows for that. Even on a wither on the vine, Lawrence didn't cut off Medina. What he did was he made it a little more difficult for those troops and the people to be supplied. It creates a great burden on the enemy.

I think the timeline is one that, again, would depend on higher policy and a willingness to work with others. We have a president coming into office on Friday that said he wants to work with Russia to destroy ISIS. Well, if that actually were to come to pass, I think a Russo-American, Turkish, and Syrian regime collaboration on taking down Raqqa and the rest of ISIS would happen very, very quickly, much more quickly than the fighting has gone on in Mosul already, certainly well within a couple of months' period.

I don't see time as the big problem. I'm sensitive to the humanitarian issue, as you are and think that we would have to make provisions to allow humanitarian aid. That is, not to bomb the convoys bringing humanitarian aid. Because ISIS has been continuing to supply even during these few months, we probably want to make it a little more difficult for them, but allow that to happen.

We have to be ready to provide, even as it withers on the vine to provide for the people of Mosul. It's a very, very large number and again, our number one aim should be to avoid a massive humanitarian catastrophe there because that will sully relations for the foreseeable future in Iraq if we allow that to unfold in Mosul. Great question.

Male Speaker 3: A couple of follow-ups again. On that, do you think they will allow that humanitarian aid? Not use that as a control mechanism? Then jumping to your third one for multi-access. You know, do more quickly multi-access. You're talking significant US and other coalition forces?

John Arquilla: Yes, absolutely. They need to be involved. Look, this is a campaign we're fighting. We say ISIS is a great enemy, not only to ourselves and our allies but to

the world. Is it not worth fighting for? Are the innocent people under ISIS rule not worth fighting for?

I am frankly appalled at how restrictive the rules of engagement have been, and what we know is with a very small leavening of advanced forces, allied forces, indigenous troops can do a lot better. When the Taliban were toppled in the fall of 2001, that was with about 200 sets of boots on the ground, 11 Special Forces aid teams. We are at our best and nimblest when we work, and I think Lawrence himself said, "The smaller the unit, the greater its effectiveness."

As far as ISIS trying to impede humanitarian aid, I think that, first of all, is a great propaganda win for the people bringing the aid, but it also forces them to expose themselves and so the aid convoys themselves could be traps set for ISIS that gets them out of their prepared fighting position. So, there's, I think, a tactical way to, and again, a strategic information advantage out of the use of humanitarian aid.

I note that there's no question about the open city, option two. I would just hope that some in the high councils of CENTCOM and in Doc Cabayan's office will think about this open city possibility. It is the most unusual of the three options, but I think the most intriguing, and I hope that you all give it a close and hard think because there might be something there.

Male Speaker 3: Well, I do have one on that, to continue. I guess that we draw the Shia out of Syria and get them in control as opposed to the world wide spread where it's a worldwide concern.

John Arquilla: Yeah, that's the whole point of the open city model, right? When they left Aleppo, they were bussed over to Idlib. Same sort of thing. You know, we'll give you safe conduct out but you can't then get into the bloodstream of Iraqi society by filtering everywhere. It is a way to avoid the problem that a chaotic fall of Mosul might result in the scattered seeds of ISIS flowing all over Iraq. That's a nice point. I think our ability to control the dispersion of ISIS around Iraq is perhaps best served by an open city policy.

Male Speaker 4: Hey, one question for Dr. Rothstein. You talked about the two different studies regarding the police and the proportional demographics of the army and the different brigades. From experience working with DOJ, the police tended to have a better result of that kind of integration and involvement of the tribal local governance, as our prior discussion talking about local governance being a role, does the army necessarily play as important a role as potentially focusing on the police?

Because none of these discussions occur if we don't get ISIL out of there. Then considering what shifts people from a local organic cell of the government or whatever you have there, and putting police mechanisms, which are much less

oppositionally viewed by local populations than an army. Can you expound on that?

Hy Rothstein:

No, you're right. What I talked about long-term does not predicate the ability to push an entrenched organization like ISIS out of these areas. What John presented has to precede what I talked about.

In terms of local security forces, yeah, police might be fine if you get to a point where the population is actively involved in providing their own security and actively involved in providing information to police forces if there are still remnants of an insurgent organization that's powerful enough to do some damage.

Now, you may need some sort of local militia force in conjunction with the police force. In a perfect situation, a competent police force made up of locals to maintain security and keep crime from creating a problem, know that would be sufficient. But I think to start with you are going to need more than just police. You can eventually move in that direction.

My point is, whatever the security forces are after ISIS is pretty much removed need to be mostly local people. Coming from the tribes that are indigenous to those towns, villages and regions. That will actually create, again, more stability and more control from Baghdad. Giving up some direct authority I think will result in more control from the center. I hope that answers the question.

Male Speaker 4:

Yeah.

Glenn Robinson:

Any other questions or comments?

Lincoln Mullgray:

All those things we are talking about in my mind, examples of counterproductive behavior from local levels, tribal levels, senior leaders. Fundamentally, does anyone see a condition for a bit with the leadership skills in the following?

You know, if you take that step backwards, you get a step ahead across the board. All these countries pride themselves on their tribalism, happily that is, but it's also in my mind incredibly self-destructive. It just breeds greed and parochialism. Just some of those examples, we talk about local militias or local groups exerting a bit of authority.

Over time we have lots and lots of examples where that just grows into vandal warlords and just coalesce into bigger warlords, bigger expands to control and then with their own self-interest. Does anyone see any positive or anyone see a way of reshaping that behavior?

Hy Rothstein:

No. I mean, it depends on what you're trying to do. If you're just trying to create a stable area or country that doesn't produce violence that undermines US interests and the interests of our allies, then it's a more minimalist approach. What goes on at a local level can, you know, it's not our business.

If you are really trying to change the Middle East like we've attempted to do, you get the push back that we've gotten over the last dozen years. It's probably not doable anyway. I think we should go take an appetite suppressant and not worry about what goes on at a local level. If things are going to change at a local level, it has to be organic and not pushed from the outside. So, is tribal conduct contrary to the way you and I think about what a proper existence is? Probably, but I don't care.

Lincoln Mullgray: I guess we spoke before though about the support that they feel. That support comes with money, arms, training, all the rest of it.

Hy Rothstein: It doesn't have to. That's the thing. That's what we think it has to come with, but as I mentioned in the case of the 37th brigade, they were undermanned. They didn't get any US training. They didn't get any equipment. They were not certified as the other brigades were, and they were much more effective.

The idea that training, equipping, and US advisors are key to making a difference, it's just not true. Now, I think US advisors can make a difference as long as they don't try to create brigades that look like US brigades and operate like US brigades.

Glenn Robinson: Just to make sure some of my earlier comments on local governance are clear, when it comes to Iraq, I mean, I'm going to agree with Hy here, the United States cannot set up the system. We are not the ones to set it up and provide all the resources and what have you. The issue is to get central government in Baghdad to recognize the necessity of a federalized, decentralized system, a truly decentralized system, for its own long-term stability and quality of life for the people in the country.

The role that the United States can play in the larger strategic narrative is to use the influence and leverage that we have with the centralized authority to move in that direction. That's not something that we can just go and create on our own in Mosul or anywhere else.

Hy Rothstein: At a broader level, I think what we've seen over the past 13 years is the failure of an effort to reroute the currents of culture and history by armed force. These tribal societies are not going to be wished away with even the most advanced arms or the ablest advisors. It seems to me that to some extent President Obama has begun to realize this by accepting, for example, the military coup in Egypt by the realization that we are not going to try to change Saudi Arabia, another important ally.

Clearly, I'm in the camp that wants to apologize to Haider al-Abadi for the invasion. We had a system that was stable in Iraq, and in our interest, the idea that somehow trying to transform this society into something that looked like a modern representative democracy was well-ahead. We got way out in front of

our headlights on that. The culture and history of this country suggested that they weren't ready for it.

I would also say, just in passing, that sometimes a tribal society can be incredibly stable. The world was in flames between 1933 and 1973, the years of the reign of Zahir Shah in Afghanistan who wielded not too much more central authority than about the size of the room the three of us are sitting in at the moment right now, yet he was respected. They had almost nothing in terms of a national military, but crime was low.

I know my old hippie friends all said Afghanistan was the place to go for the best dope, and you didn't have to worry about being attacked or robbed or anything like that. Afghanistan was the key place on the hippie trail. That was a place with very little central power of government but a high degree of legitimacy.

Again, I think there are different models that the cultures and histories of different peoples have. Iraq is a particularly thorny problem because of the ethnic differences in the country. It seems to me that the kind of authoritarian rule they had, or at least authoritarian rule of a kind, was much more logical from the perspective of those looking on the outside in and saying, "What is in our best interest?"

We pulled the cork out of that bottle, and now we are trying to put something back in, and I think Hy's points and Glenn's points about decentralization and the respect for whatever is centralized for the decentralized elements in the society are probably the best we can hope for at this point.

But it's a knotty problem that we have created and will take a very, very long time to resolve. I think the particular efforts underway now, again, if they are undertaken in a wise way that minimizes the alienation of the large Sunni minority within the country at least gives us a chance for a federated but still decentralized society to have a reasonable level of security. Over.

John Arquilla: I talked about justice during my few minutes, and this is justice as viewed by the people who live in the area, not by what we consider just. We think democracy is justice.

Hy Rothstein: A lot of Americans would dispute that.

John Arquilla: That's right, Americans might dispute that now too, but in a lot of these countries being elected is not what's considered legitimate. Religious and dynastic sources are what creates legitimacy, and that's fine. So, justice based on the eyes of the people who live in those areas, that's what we need to make part of the narrative and part of action that we undertake. Anything other than that will be associated with an unjust cause, and we'll see, again, a botched, another botched job in Iraq or wherever else we go.

Glenn Robinson: Doc, is there anything else on your end?

Doc Cabayan: No, we're good. I want to thank everybody. Glenn for organizing this, Hy, John and Ryan. Like we did last time, we'll go ahead and, this has been recorded. You'll get the edited minutes, you'll review them, and then we'll hopefully forward them to CENTCOM. I want to thank you all.

Glenn Robinson: Thanks very much. We look forward to getting the edited transcript, and we'll be very prompt in turning that around and getting it back to you.

Doc Cabayan: Thank you.

Hy Rothstein: Good talking to you again, Doc.

John Arquilla: Yeah, always a pleasure Doc. Thank you so much for involving us in this.

Doc Cabayan: Oh, absolutely. Thank you. CENTCOM over to you. Adam, anybody else from your end? Any final comments?

Male Speaker 4: From CENTCOM, thanks very much. That was obviously a lot of good expertise around the microphones and a lot of good points. This is a great forum and a great use of the reachback cell. Thanks. Adam, you got any endpoints for any other?

Adam Gable: Nothing else to add sir, thank you.

Male Speaker 4: Well, thank you all.

Male Speaker 5: Look forward to the next one.

Glenn Robinson: Very good. Thank you all very much.

[Other callers say goodbye; call over]

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]

Biographies

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NPS EXPERIENCE:

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- 1991 - present - Research Associate, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Univ of California, Berkeley.
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TEACHING INTERESTS:

- Middle Eastern Area Studies
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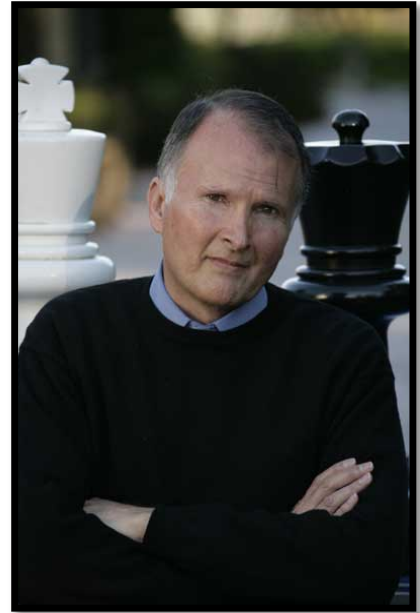
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- Information-Age Conflict
- Irregular Warfare

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