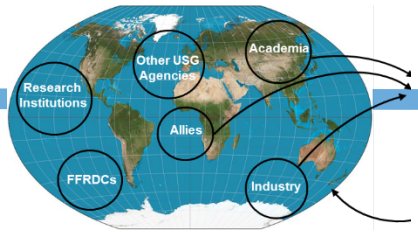
17 March 2017



SMA Reach-back Report

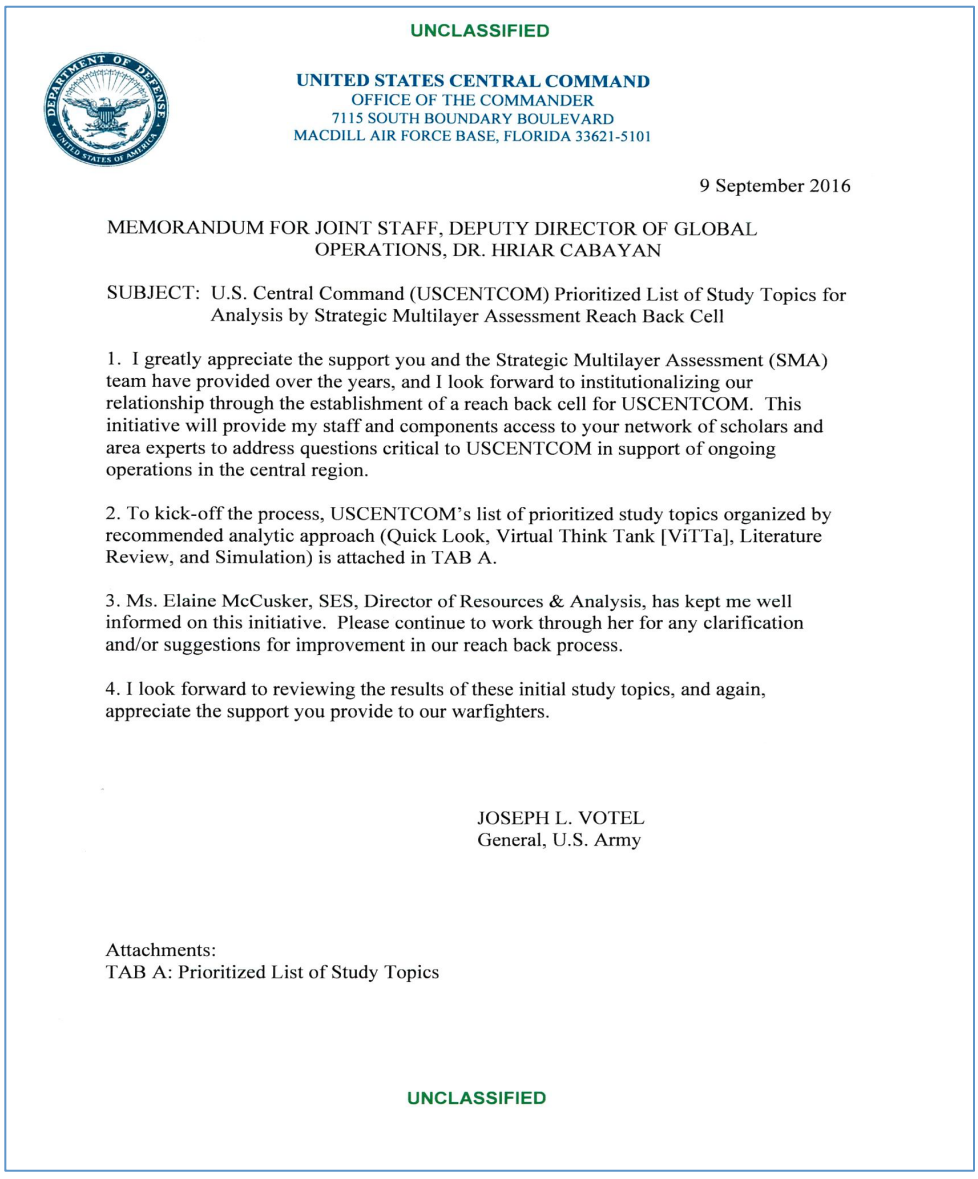
Highlights from CENTCOM Round 1, 2 and 3 questions with individually themed Executive Summaries appended

Contents

Charter

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

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



UNCLASSIFIED

UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND
OFFICE OF THE COMMANDER
7115 SOUTH BOUNDARY BOULEVARD
MACDILL AIR FORCE BASE, FLORIDA 33621-5101

9 September 2016

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

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

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

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

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

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

JOSEPH L. VOTEL
General, U.S. Army

Attachments:
TAB A: Prioritized List of Study Topics

UNCLASSIFIED

The Meaning of ISIS Defeat & Shaping Stability: Highlights from CENTCOM Round 1, 2 and 3 Reach-back Reports[1]

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI

No. Military defeat will not eliminate the threat: ISIS ideology will remain salient, lessons-learned will help refine activities of next-gen jihadis.

Conclusion

ISIS will be defeated militarily. However, whether it is ultimately overcome by containment or by deploying ground forces to apply overwhelming force, the path to mitigating violent extremism in the region is a generations-long one. Military options alone are insufficient to protect US interests and stabilize the region. It will require significant strengthening of State Department and non-DoD capacity to help build inclusive political institutions and processes in Syria and Iraq. Only if these flourish will ISIS -- the organization and the idea it represents -- have failed and the region been put on a sustainable path to stability.

Since September 2016 the Strategic Multi-layer Assessment (SMA)[2] team has pulsed its global network of academics, think tank scholars, former ambassadors, and experienced practitioners to respond to three rounds of questions by USCENTCOM.[3] We received responses from 164 experts from institutions in the US, Iraq, Spain, Israel, the UK, Lebanon, Canada, France and Qatar. [4] The result was 41 individual reach-back reports, each of which consists of an executive summary and the input received from the experts.

This report summarizes key points from the first three rounds of questions. It compiles what the experts had to say about three critical questions: 1) Will military defeat of ISIS in Syria and Iraq eliminate the threat it poses? 2) What are the implications of ISIS defeat for regional stability? and 3) What should the US/Coalition do to help stabilize the region?

Question #1: Will physical defeat of ISIS eliminate the threat?

[1] Citation: Astorino-Courtois, A. (2017). The Meaning of ISIS Defeat and Shaping Stability, Highlights from CENTCOM Round 1, 2 and 3 Reach-back Reports. Arlington, VA: Strategic Multi-layer Assessment (SMA) Reach-back Cell. Retrieved from http//nsiteam.com/sma-reachback-three-round-highlights

[2] Strategic Multi-Layer Assessment (SMA) provides planning support to Commands with complex operational imperatives requiring multi-agency, multi-disciplinary solutions that are NOT within core Service/Agency competency. Solutions and participants are sought across USG and beyond. SMA is accepted and synchronized by Joint Staff/J-39 DDGO and executed by ASD(R&E)/EC&P/RRTO.

[3] The complete list of expert contributors to Rounds 1-3 reports can be found at the end of this report.

[4] Each of these reports as well as compendia of reports organized by theme is available at: http://nsiteam.com/sma-reachback-cell.

The unequivocal response from over 60 experts who responded to relevant questions is, in a word, "No." While there is always a chance that loss of its territory would eliminate both the ISIS organization and ideology, the experts believe that the salience of ISIS's violent extremist ideology and teachings and, just as importantly, the example its successes offers to would-be extremists around the globe (e.g., its business-like and adaptable leadership structure, innovations in communicating messages locally and abroad, rapid mobilization and organization of fighters from around the globe)—will persist for some time. There are also lessons to be learned from ISIS failures that groups like Al Qaeda and future violent jihadists can use to refine their own strategies and tactics. In short, even if ISIS the organization seems to disappear, we should expect its ideas and practices to remain.

Specifically, two types of ISIS information can, and most likely will, continue to be transmitted following military defeat: *inspirational* information regarding the group's ideology and teachings, and *educational* information that conveys the innovations and lessons that others might take from ISIS's processes and tactics. The experts cited two main propagation vectors: human and cyber.

After the defeat of ISIS, fighters and supporters are likely to bring their radical extremist beliefs and training with them. ISIS and ISIS-inspired ideas are likely to find a home among aggrieved Sunni populations; in areas in which the population is already familiar with, or sympathetic to, Salafist beliefs; and where there is political unrest and weakened governance or policing and porous borders. Many ISIS fighters are local and likely would prefer to stay in Iraq, Syria, or close by in Jordan, Lebanon, or Turkey. This is especially the case because, as a number of experts believe, the majority is not necessarily ideologically or religiously motivated, but came to ISIS for security, financial support, and/or out of a sense of injustice, exclusion or marginalization. However, many SMA contributors expect ISIS's remaining fighters to attempt to flee Syria and Iraq—if they have not already, and disperse across a broad area in the Middle East, Germany, the UK, France, and locations in North Africa[5] where there is already a violent extremist presence. Still, if conditions at home have not changed, former ISIS fighters could return to pre-Caliphate insurgent tactics or form urban sleeper cells to await another regional crisis to exploit.

People will continue to circulate inspirational and educational ISIS information.

The target population for recruitment will still be young men across the Arab world and Europe. Sadly, researchers have uncovered evidence that this group is beginning to show increased complacence toward ISIS and ISIS-inspired ideas and in particular justifications of its inhumane and violent practices. Having lived most of their formative years witnessing (directly or from afar) civil wars and sectarian atrocities, it should not be surprising that the violence and dehumanizing beliefs that may have shocked their parents appear to these young men as less outrageous or even "normal." We should not forget that the group that is now ISIS has already reinvented itself twice before: first by joining with Al Qaeda in 2004 to become Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and second, although all

[5] Libya, Algeria, Yemen, the Sinai, and Tunisia were the most commonly mentioned areas in Northern Africa.

but defeated in that guise in 2010, by reemerging in Syria, splitting with Al Qaeda, and rebranding itself the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

ISIS information will be available in cyberspace for generations to come.

The second, more insidious conduit of ISIS extremist ideology and tactics is cyberspace, which will preserve information from and about ISIS in circulation well beyond its physical presence. There are an estimated 50 million servers in the world. ISIS's broad virtual presence—the vast corpus of materials: tweets, videos, e-magazines, instruction manuals, sermons, and speeches remaining on those servers and downloaded onto personal systems—experts believe, will be accessible on the web for decades to come. Even if these materials were found and removed, the communications specialists who created the slick look and feel and highly emotive content of its magazines and videos could easily apply these skills to recreate the same message production and distribution techniques from nearly any location on the globe.

Question #2: What are the implications of ISIS defeat for stability in the region?

The balance of expert responses that touched on this issue suggest that the impact of defeat of ISIS will at most result in a marginal reduction in regional conflict, but is more likely to prompt increased intra- and inter-sectarian warfare. This is because, despite what many in the US might like to believe, neither military defeat nor even delegitimization of ISIS's ideology would do anything to address the regional rivalries, territorial disputes, and sectarian hostility that generated the conditions within which ISIS emerged in Iraq and reemerged in Syria. ISIS was the beneficiary, not the cause, of civil conflict in Syria and Iraq. In both cases, the root causes were dysfunctional governance, a lack of economic opportunities, years of violent government repression, and political disenfranchisement of Sunnis and other minorities by non-Sunni governors. Neither physical nor ideological defeat of ISIS addresses any of these grievances. SMA experts argue that support for ISIS among Sunnis in Syria and Iraq was largely driven by these social and political grievances, not by religion or ideology. If nothing changes in the lives of these populations—if their security and economic opportunities do not improve and if the governments that replace ISIS in Mosul, Raqqah, and elsewhere are discriminatory toward them—we should expect sectarian violence to continue.

Best case: ISIS defeat creates a marginal reduction in regional conflict.

More likely: it opens the door to increased conflict in the region.

The fight against ISIS has shifted local and regional politics and power structures. In Syria, experts argue that sectarianism, the attractiveness of Salafism and Sunni-Shi'a animosity have surfaced where there had been little before. In Iraq, the relative prestige, influence, and wealth of certain families, clans, or militias has grown in many cases at the expense of traditional power brokers. If not managed carefully—for example, if mass civilian casualties are allowed in Mosul and Raqqah or sectarian forces commit atrocities against other groups, if minority voices or Islamists are excluded from post-conflict settlements, or if Syrians and Iraqis see little evidence that their governments will undertake meaningful reform—the military defeat of ISIS would have removed a common enemy and signaled to groups (e.g., various Kurdish factions or Shi'a militias in Iraq, Syria Democratic Forces in Syria) that US/Coalition

assistance may soon be in short supply and it is time to solidify control of territory gained (or regain areas lost) as a result of the counter-ISIS fight. The political battles to do so could easily lead to civil warfare in Iraq and escalation in Syria.

Similarly, the defeat of ISIS in and of itself will have done little to eliminate the reciprocal security threat perceptions and thus temper the behavior and persistent use of regional proxies by Iran and Saudi Arabia. Likewise, Pakistan's actions will remain primarily a reflection of the perceived threat from India, and despite changes in tactics, and the threat posed to Turkish security and sovereignty by Kurdish groups will remain its focus regardless of whether ISIS is defeated.

To be fair, multiple political reform and national reconciliation programs have been put forward in Iraq. However, none has yet produced signs of meaningful change and/or evidence to challenge the belief of many Iraqis that the government plans to revert to the "Shi'a first" status *quo ante bellum* following ISIS defeat. A number of factors serve as impediments to effective reconciliation efforts in Iraq including: weak support for President Abadi among hardline Shi'a who see little reason to share power with Sunni Iraqis, the lack of a dominant Sunni leadership or a common Sunni agenda, interference in Iraqi politics by regional actors (e.g., Saudi Arabia-Iran, Turkey-Kurds) who use Iraq to pursue their own agendas, and the Iraqi Government's sizeable budget deficit that leaves limited resources for reconciliation and reconstruction efforts.

Without a significant increase in non-kinetic efforts to help manage the other conflicts in and around Syria and Iraq, even removing ISIS would be insufficient to erase the attractiveness of the area as a weakly-governed, conflict-prone terrorist safe haven. Again, ISIS's defeat does little to address the core issues that caused civil conflicts in both Syria and Iraq. Without political and governance reforms we should expect elimination of ISIS to bring the serious political issues and long-standing rivalries in domestic Iraqi affairs into high relief. It is very possible that even if militarily necessary and ultimately successful, Iraqi Sunnis would perceive operations to defeat ISIS as yet another Western attack on Sunni Islam. Without prior credible political reforms to convince them to the contrary, the result could be to further alienate Sunni Arabs and undermine international efforts to help stabilize Iraq. If this is the case, the battle against ISIS fighters may have been won, but the war against political and sectarian violence in Iraq and Syria and extremism and regional instability would have been lost.

Without efforts to address underlying causes of conflict, Syria and Iraq remain weak, conflict-prone, and attractive terrorist havens—regardless of ISIS defeat.

Question #3: What should the US/Coalition do to help stabilize the region?

After decades of involvement in war from Kuwait to Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, it should not be surprising that many people in the region see the US as equally threatening to their security as ISIS. Tellingly, the experts report that the narrative that "the US/West is at war against Islam" remains very prominent and credible across Syria and Iraq, and the US is not even seen as a stable or consistent friend by the Kurdish or Sunni tribal groups it supports. In an

environment of mistrust and fear, actions are the most potent messages and no amount of "counter-messaging" will change an antagonistic local narrative that appears to be reinforced by US actions. What experts referred to as the US "say-do gap" diminishes US credibility in the region. Unfortunately, at this point, there may be little US military forces can do to change this. Three areas where USCENTCOM may help shape events to encourage stability are offered below.

1) Carefully manage Coalition partners, antagonists and rivals

SMA experts often observed that the ways in which affairs in post-liberation areas are handled will be as important as how the battle for liberation was fought. The US and Coalition partners appear to be doing a good job of managing the latter in Iraq, for example, by helping to keep Iraqi security forces at the front of the battle and otherwise managing which units are fighting in Mosul. Many experts feel that it is probably too late for the US to have much influence over the future of Syria; however, it should attempt to manage the same kinds of sensitivities (and encourage Russia and Turkey to do the same) in Raqqah. In both cases, it is imperative that the expectations of fighting forces and newly liberated populations are managed and anticipated jockeying for control of liberated territory is curtailed.

External rivalries and agendas are important sources of local actions in Syria and Iraq. In particular, the animosity between Saudi Arabia and Iran and the practice of interference in the security and political issue of other states (directly as in Yemen or via proxies as in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and elsewhere) is one of the surest ways to reignite regional conflict. Encouraging Saudi Arabia to work toward slightly warmer relations between itself and Iran may help to temper some of the competition, mutual mistrust, and perceived threat that has perpetuated regional conflict for years.

2) Provide and facilitate humanitarian and reconstruction aid

The experts tended to agree that providing assistance for basic human needs like shelter, food, water, and emergency healthcare must be an immediate priority following liberation of ISIS-controlled areas. However, quickly establishing mechanisms to deliver a more comprehensive range of social services (e.g., sanitation, rule of law, and justice) and facilitate reconstruction will be equally important to stabilize the locations and populations traumatized by ISIS and the warfare to defeat it. Given Iraq's budget deficit, huge amount of destruction and displacement much more aid than has been promised by the international community will be required. USCENTCOM may find some ways to assist in establishing immediate and longer-term social services while following two possibly illusive principles: provision of social services and reconstruction must be perceived locally as 1) equitable and not favoring one group over another and 2) free from corruption. It should be noted that encouraging humanitarian assistance and inclusive governance in and around Raqqah is equally important for long-term stability of the area as it is in Iraq. Given the need to coordinate with Russia, Iran and possibly the Assad regime in this case, however

influencing the humanitarian situation on the Syrian side of the border certainly will require more finesse.

3) Encourage local and decentralized post-ISIS governance

Again, experts generally were not optimistic about US ability to influence events in Syria. However, many felt that USCENTCOM and other US government entities have a role to play in encouraging post-liberation calm for example by helping to negotiate multi-group security arrangements, prohibit retribution, and help to determine and monitor procedures for return of displaced persons. A theme frequently repeated by experts was the hyper-locality of the roots of conflict in Syria and Iraq. Two of the endemic challenges to stability in the Near East and Gulf region are intra- and inter-sectarian and intra- and inter-ethnic antagonism and aggression, and we would be wise to appreciate that the relationships between kinship groups and civil society and opposition groups are more fluid and more fraught than we often think. The Sunni, the Kurds and Shi'a in Syria and Iraq are not unitary actors but subject to strong intra-group tensions. In fact, some experts argue that intra-group conflicts are the greater threat to regional stability than the more obvious between-groups rifts. Experts fear that Sunni leaders' efforts to consolidate political power could spark tribal conflict and competing perspectives on Iraqi governances could provoke violence between the Shi'a mainstream and hardliners.

There are many ways to reignite conflict in the region. One of the most effective: Iran-Saudi proxyism.

As a result, reformed governance structures must be equally local and empowered to address residents' grievances effectively. One of the greatest fears of Sunni Iraqis is that Shi'a militias will again be allowed to harass and abuse them. Care must be taken to insure that particularly in Iraq, the identities and agendas of all post-ISIS political groups are accounted for. One way to do this is to bring all actors to the table in any resolution or reconciliation talks. If their interests are not served, actors not at the table can easily play the spoiler role.

Paradoxically, decentralization is one of the most direct ways for the Iraqi central government to gain the legitimacy it needs to remain strong and stable. One of the main challenges here will be the disincentive to the Abadi Government—unless pushed by the threat of increased violence—of devolving sufficient power to Sunni and Kurdish areas to provide for acceptable local governance. Prime Minister Abadi or other "moderate" Shi'a leader in Iraq walks a thin line between the hardline elements within the Shi'a support base and international political pressure to decentralize power in Iraq to better represent Kurdish and Sunni voices. There may be little the US can do to encourage policies that are stabilizing, or even discourage those like legal inclusion of Shi'a militias in the Iraqi national security forces, that are less than optimal for stabilizing civil conflict in Iraq.

First step in social stability in Iraq: humanitarian aid.

Rounds 1-3 Expert Contributors

Dr. Hassan Abbas (NDU)

Hala Abdulla (USMC Center for Advanced Operational Culture)

Dr. Elie Abouaoun (USIP)

Dr. Wale Adeboye (Institute for Peace & Strategic Studies, University of Ibadan)

Dr. Nitin Agarwal (University of Arkansas at Little Rock)

MAJ Shane Aguero (DIA)

Hayder Al-Khoei (Centre for Shia Studies)

Dr. Ibrahim Al-Marashi (CSU San Marcos)

Dr. Harith Hasan Al-Qarawee (Brandeis University)

Omar Al-Shahery (Aktis Strategy)

Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi (Middle East Forum)

Dr. John Arquilla (Naval Postgraduate School)

Dr. Victor Asal (SUNY Albany)

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois (NSI)

Dr. Scott Atran (ARTIS)

Adam Azoff (Tesla Government)

Dr. Barak Barfi (New America Foundation)

Dr. Benedetta Berti (Institute for National Security Studies, Israel)

Dr. Mia Bloom (GSU)

Dr. John Bornmann (MITRE-RAND)

Dr. Anouar Boukhars (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace)

Dr. Hamit Bozarslan (Ecole des hautes estudes en sciences sociales)

Dr. Kurt Braddock (PSU)

Dr. Belinda Bragg (NSI)

Dr. Michael Brecher (McGill University)

General (Ret.) Shlomo Brom (Tel Aviv University Institute for National Security Studies)

Willow Brugh (Center for Civic Media, MIT Media Lab)

Dr. Rob Burks (Naval Postgraduate School)

Dr. Sonar Cagaptay (Washington Institute)

Ambassador John Campbell (Council on Foreign Relations)

Sarah Canna (NSI)

Bernard Carreau (NDU)

Mark Caudill (USMC Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning)

John Collison (USSOCOM)

LTC Xavier Colon (Joint Staff J39)

Barry Costa (MITRE-RAND)

Dr. Kim Cragin (NDU)

Dr. Munqith Dagher (IIACSS Research)

Dr. Cori E. Dauber (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill)

Dr. Rich Davis (Artis)

Jennifer DeCamp (MITRE-RAND)

Dr. Patricia DeGennaro (TRADOC G-27)

Dr. Ini Dele-Adedeji (School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London)

Dr. Doug Derrick (U. of Nebraska Omaha)

Prof. David B. DesRoches (NDU)

Jumanne Donahue (TRADOC G27 CTR, CGI)

Dr. Anoush Ehteshami (Durham University)

Michael Eisenstadt (The Washington Institute)

Dr. Robert Elder (George Mason)

Ruben Enikolopov (Barcelona Institute of Political Economy and Governance)

Alexis Everington (Madison-Springfield, Inc.)

Dr. Sean Everton (Naval Postgraduate School)

Dr. Christine Fair (Georgetown)

Dr. Sarah Feuer (Washington Institute for Near East Policy)

Dr. Rengin Bahar Firat (GSU)

Ambassador Robert S. Ford (Middle East Institute)

Dr. Daveed Gartenstein-Ross (Valens Global)

Dr. Justin Gengler (Qatar University)

Osama Gharizi (US Institute of Peace)

Dr. Ryan Gingeras (Naval Postgraduate School)

The Honorable David Gompert (US Naval Academy, Rand)

Dr. Rebecca Goolsby (Office of Naval Research)

Zana Gulmohamad (Sheffield University, UK)

Dr. Yoel Guzansky (Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Tel Aviv University)

Sarhang Hamasaeed (USIP)

Dr. Stig Hansen (Harvard University / NMBU – Norway)

Dr. Nader Hashemi (University of Denver)

Dr. Marc Hecker (Institut Français des Relations Internationales)

Sabina Henneberg (School for Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University)

Dr. Robert Hinck (TAMU)

Max Hoffman (Center for American Progress)

Robert Holliday (NDU)

Todd Huffman (IST Research)

Mohammed Hussein (Iraq Oil Report)

Dr. Hunter Hustus (HQ USAF)

Faysal Itani (Atlantic Council)

Dr. Amaney Jamal (Princeton University)

Buddhika B. Jayamaha (Northwestern University)

Larry Jeddeloh (The Institutional Strategist Group)

Dr. Neil Johnson (U. of Miami)

Dr.Murhaf Jouejati (Middle East Institute)

Dr. Karl Kaltenthaler (U. of Akron)

Dr. Hilal Khashan (American University of Beirut)

Dr. Ramazan Kilinc (U. of Nebraska Omaha)

Dr. Randy Kluver (Texas A&M University)

Dr. Michael Knights (The Washington Institute)

Lt Col Mel Korsmo (Air University)

Jimmy Krakar (TRADOC G-27)

Dr. Larry Kuznar (NSI, Inc. and Indiana University – Purdue University, Fort Wayne)

Dr. Josh Landis (U. of Oklahoma)

Dr. Vern Liebl (Prosol Associates)

Dr. Gina Scott Ligon (U. of Nebraska Omaha)

Charles Lister (Middle East Institute)

Michael Logan (U. of Nebraska Omaha)

Dr. Thomas Lynch (NDU)

Dr. Renad Mansour (Chatham House, UK)

Dr. Moshe Ma'oz (Hebrew University, Jerusalem)

SFC Matthew John Martin (USASOC)

Dr. Diane Maye (Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University)

David Mazaheri (IL Intellain);

Dr. Clark McCauley (Bryn Mawr College)

Dr. Ian McCulloh (JHU/APL)

Dr. Sarah O. Meadows (MITRE-RAND)

Paul Melly (Chatham House)

Dr. Spencer B. Meredith III (NDU)

Chris Meserole (Brookings)

Vera Mironova (Harvard)

Fred Morstatter (Arizona State)

Dr. Sophia Moskalenko (Bryn Mawr College)

Randy Munch (TRADOC G-27)

Alireza Nader (RAND)

Jala Naguib (TAMU)

Dr. Assem Nasr (Indiana U. Purdue U., Fort Wayne)

Dr. Denise Natali (NDU)

Shuja Nawaz (Atlantic Council South Asia Center)

CPT Christopher O'Brien (20th Special Forces Group (Airborne)

Jacob Olidort (The Washington Institute)

Mark Overton (MITRE-RAND)

Dr. Sabrina Pagano (NSI)

Dr. Jean Palmer-Moloney (Visual Teaching Technologies)

Raffaello Pantucci (Royal United Services Institute - UK)

Ryan Paterson (IST Research)

MAJ Robert Payne (USMTM)

Lt Col Kevin S. Petit (George Washington University)

George Popp (NSI)

Eric Perez (U. of Nebraska Omaha)

Marc Pierini (Carnegie Europe)

Dr. Kathleen Reedy (RAND)

Dr. Will S.K. Reno (Northwestern University)

Dr. R. Karl Rethemeyer (SUNY Albany)

Mara Revkin (Yale)

Dr. LTC Rafael Linera Rivera (USASOC)

Dr. Michael Robbins (Arab Barometer)

Dr. Glenn Robinson (Naval Postgraduate School)

Mark D. Robinson (UNC - Chapel Hill)

Spencer Robinson (U. of Nebraska Omaha)

Dr. Hy Rothstein (Naval Postgraduate School)

Eugene Rumer (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace)

Dr. Yezid Sayigh (Carnegie Middle East Center)

Dr. MAJ Gregory Seese (USASOC)

Dr. Daniel Serwer (Johns Hopkins)

Dr. Aron Shai (Tel Aviv University)

SGM Sohail Shaikh (AWG)

Mubin Shaikh (University of Liverpool)

Dr. Hammad Sheikh (ARTIS)

Dr. Joseph Siegle (National Defense University)

Dr. Randa Slim (Middle East Institute)

Dr. Jason Spitaletta (MAJ, USMCR; Johns Hopkins/APL)

LTC Brian Steed (CGSC)

Dr. Gwyneth Sutherlin (Geographic Services, Inc.)

Dr. Robert Toguchi (USASOC)

MAJ Patrick Taylor (7th Military Information Support, USASOC)

Dr. Shibley Telhami (U. of Maryland, Brookings Institution)

Dr. Élie Tenenbaum (Institut Français des Relations Internationales)

Dr. Mark Tessler (Arab Barometer)

Timothy Thomas (Foreign Military Studies Office, Ft. Leavenworth)

Christine M. van den Toorn (American University of Iraq Sulaimani)

Steffany Trofino (independent)

Dr. Alex Vatanka (Jamestown Foundation)

Todd Veazie (NCTC)

Dr. Shalini Venturelli (American University)

Dr. Bilal Wahab (Washington Institute)

Gary Warner (U. of Alabama at Birmingham)

Peter Welby (Centre on Religion & Geopolitics)

Jeff Weyers (iBrabo; University of Liverpool)

Nathan White (NDU)

Dr. Craig Whiteside (Naval Postgraduate School)

Dr. Jonathan Wilkenfeld (U. of Maryland)

Kayla M. Williams (MITRE-RAND)

Dr. Kevin Woods (IDA)

Mariah Yager (NSI)

Dr. Birol Yeşilada (Portland State)

Sheila Young (USAID)

Amy Zalman (SNI)

Dr. Jen Ziemke (John Carroll University)

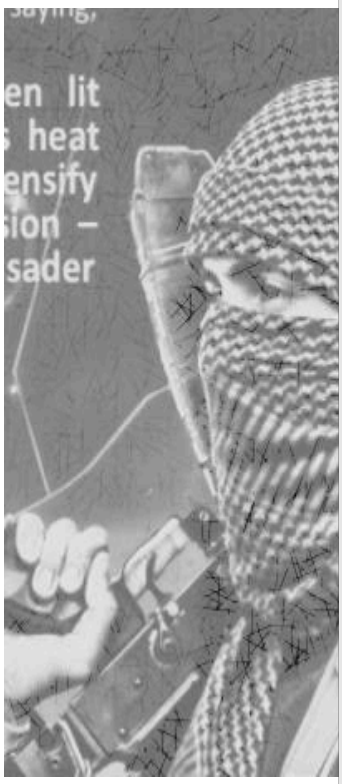
Biography

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois

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

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

Individual theme Executive Summaries



Part 1: Messaging

2: The fight against ISIL

3: Encouraging regional stability

4: Regional actor interests and motivations

5: Sources of extremism

6: ISIL support and recruitment

7: USG bureaucratic requirements

8: Post-ISIS Governance

9: Coalition Views

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

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

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

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

Chris Meserole a fellow at the Brookings Institution argues that ISIL communicators have benefitted from two particular capabilities that smart devices put in the hands of users: 1) easy access to impactful video and other visual content has enabled ISIL to transmit highly emotive and pertinent content in near real-time; and 2) users' ability to produce and distribute their own quality images has altered the processes of recruitment and identity formation by making them more interactive: group members who formerly would have been information consumers only, now can readily add their voices to the group narrative by serving as information producers as well.[6]

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

Although Twitter, and YouTube are still the most commonly used platforms, and especially Twitter can be used for specifically-targeted, micro audiences, Gina Ligon who leads a research team at the University of Nebraska Omaha cautions that ISIL's cyber footprint extends well beyond these "conventional" platforms which should be considered "mere starting points for its multi-faceted, complex cyber profile." (See the Ligon *et al* below for ranks of the top cyber

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

domains ISIL used between August 2015 and August 2016.) Assem Nasr (Indiana-Purdue University) questions the effectiveness of cyber platforms in delivering propaganda in Syria and Iraq however. Based on fieldwork in Lebanon, Nasr finds that people have significant reservations about the credibility of any media messaging, and even about the personal security risks of using social media themselves. He argues that the communication challenges in the Arab world push people to tend to rely on networks of family, friends, neighbors, "trusted acquaintances in high places (army officers, deputies... etc.)" and word-of-mouth communication for information about local issues. These social networks are extremely important communication channels that may be augmented but are not superseded by social media platforms such as Twitter.

Static or moving images – key to evoking emotion -- characterize all forms of ISIL propaganda

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

Not everything is digitized: solely local propaganda forms and mediums

Audiences both in and outside ISIL controlled areas and those outside the region receive ISIL propaganda products. However, there are some mediums and forms of propaganda which can only be delivered in areas in which ISIL maintains strict control of information and in which it can operate more overtly. For example, Zana Gulmohamad (Sheffield U., UK) and other experts note that ISIL has printed ISIL education materials and changed school curricula in its areas, it holds competitions and events to recruit young people, and polices strict adherence to shar'ia law (*hisba*). It is in this context that Alexis Everington (Madison-Springfield) argues, one of the most impactful forms of ISIL messaging remains its visible actions (of course, the perceived actions of Iraqi government forces, Assad forces, etc. and the US/West are likely equally, if indirectly, impactful). Second in importance are "media engagement centers such as screens depicting ISIL videos as well as mobile media trucks." Outside ISIL controlled areas, NDU Professor of International Security Studies Hassan Abbas, cites "the word of mouth" including "gossip in traditional tea/food places" as still the primary means by which local audiences receive ISIL propaganda, and many experts agree that the content is "largely influenced by religious leadership."

What happens next?

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

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

***Editor**: Allison Astorino-Courtois (NSI)*

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

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

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

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

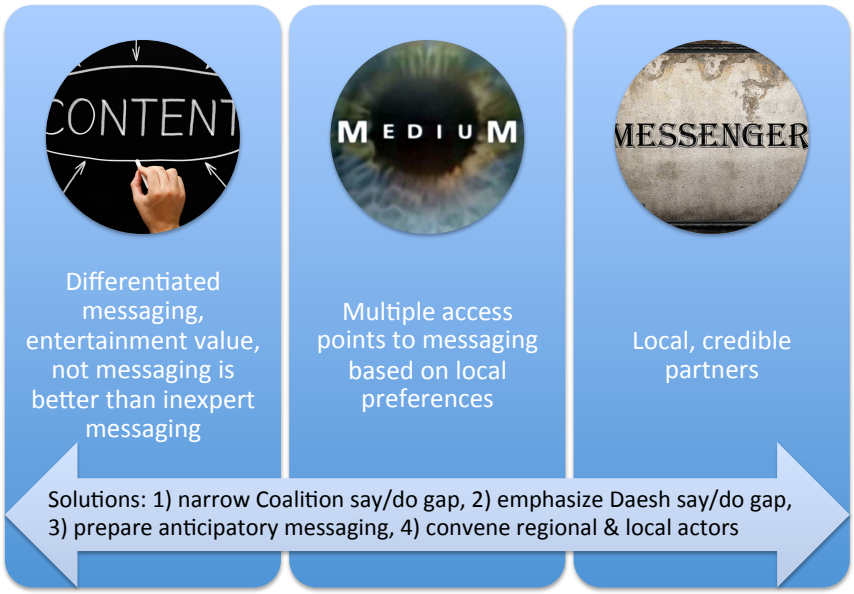


Figure 1. What is missing from CENTCOM counter-messaging efforts?

Content

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

Related to this, because existing rivalries, ethnic differences, and stereotypes are so difficult to unravel in MENA, extra caution should be employed not to inflame tensions during conditions requiring a fast response (Briant). Unsuccessful counter-sectarian messaging could exacerbate

or entrench divisions. Erring on the side of caution is better than attempting and failing counter-sectarian messaging.

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

Medium

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

Messenger

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

Strategies for Filling in the Gaps in Coalition Messaging

A team of experts from George Mason University, led by Dr. Sara Cobb, argued that engagement, rather than countermessaging, is the most effective shaping tool. Efforts to transform existing narratives through engagement would satisfy the same objectives often achieved through traditional messaging while still "disrupting" adversary conflict narratives and shaping conditions conducive to later stability and/or peace operations.

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

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

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

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

***Contributors**: Hassan Abbas (NDU), Hamilton Bean (University of Colorado Denver), Amanda Nell Edgar (University of Memphis), Alejandro Beutel (UMD START), Chris Blakely Jr. (George Mason University), John Bornmann (MITRE), Kurt Braddock (Penn State University), Emma Briant (George Washington University), Sara Cobb (George Mason University), Sara Beth Elson (MITRE), Alexis Everington (Madison Springfield Inc.), Sarah Geitz (MITRE), Eric Grenlin (George Mason University), Jessica M. Huckabey (IDA), Haroro Ingram (Australian National University), Lawrence Kuznar (NSI), Michael Lewis (George Mason University), Angie Mallory (Iowa State University), Angelica Martinez (George Mason University), Diane Maye (Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University), Mathew Parks (MITRE), P.M. "Pooch" Picucci (IDA), Scott Ruston (Arizona State University), Mubin Shaikh (University of Liverpool), Jason Spitaletta (JHU/APL), Patrick Taylor (USASOC), Peter Welby (Centre on Religion and Geopolitics), Amy Zalman (Strategic Narrative Institute)*

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

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? Executive Summary Part 1

Response POC: Dr. Jason Spitaletta (JHU/APL), Jason.Spitaletta@jhuapl.edu, Jason.A.Spitaletta@COE.IC.GOV)

Executive Summary – Part 1

The following set of responses to Question S3 represent an attempt to distill the input from individuals who have contributed to any number of OSD-SMA efforts in recent years. Giordano's Access, Assess, Engage (AAE) framework will be used to categories these recommendations. The recommendations are an attempt to distill the concepts proposed in a set of recent OSD-SMA publications[7]. CENTCOM may improve cognitive engagement by producing a broader, more expansive joint intelligence preparation of the operational environment (JIPOE). An expanded JIPOE (Joint Intelligence Preparation of the Operational Environment) could potentially identify the behaviors of target audiences necessary to achieve US objectives, to develop possible psychological effects and leverage operations as a cognitive scheme of maneuver that could lead to synchronizing actions and messages to achieve coalition objectives. (Contributing Authors: LTC Xavier Colon, Joint Staff J39, LTC Rafael 'Rafa' E. Linera Rivera, Ph. D, USASOC, SFC Matthew John Martin, USASOC, Dr. Ian Mcculloh, JHU/APL, CPT Christopher O'Brien, 20th Special Forces Group (Airborne), MAJ Robert Payne, CENTCOM, MAJ Gregory Seese, Ph.D, USASOC, SGM Sohail Shaikh, AWG, Dr. Jason Spitaletta, (Maj, USMCR), JHU/APL, LTC Brian Steed, CGSC, Dr. Gwyneth Sutherlin, Geographic Services, Inc., Dr. Robert Taguchi USASOC)

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? Executive Summary 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.*

Executive Summary

[7] Topics in the Neurobiology of Aggression: Implications to Deterrence (2013), Topics for Operational Considerations: Insights from Neurobiology & Neuropsychology on Influence and Extremism—An Operational Perspective (2013), White paper on Leveraging Neuroscientific and Neurotechnological (NeuroS&T) Developments with Focus on Influence and Deterrence in a Networked World (2014), White Paper on Social and Cognitive Neuroscience Underpinnings of ISIL Behavior and Implications for Strategic Communication, Messaging, and Influence (2015), White Paper on Assessing and Anticipating Threats to US Security Interests: A Bio-Psycho-Social Science Approach for Understanding the Emergence of and Mitigating Violence and Terrorism (2016), Counter-Da'esh Influence Operations: Cognitive Space Narrative Simulation Insights (2016), and-Bio-Psycho-Social Applications to Cognitive Engagement (2016)

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.

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

Implications of Da'esh Move to ZeroNet Platform

Spencer Robinson, Eric Perez, Douglas C. Derrick, & Gina Scott Ligon

University of Nebraska Omaha

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

Implications. The use of this application is another instance of Da'esh as an early adopter of IT Innovation (Ligon, Derrick, Logan, Fuller, Church, Perez, & Robinson, 2016). ZeroNet is built for hosting all types of dynamic websites, and any type of file can be distributed on it (e.g., VCS repositories, databases, etc). Creating ZeroNet websites is facile and instructions can be located on a variety of open source websites[8] and easily installed. Implications we have identified are 1)

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

DDOS is no longer an option for technical interdiction unless all seed accounts can be hit at one time, 2) taking down a website that violates user terms (e.g., suspicious content, hate speech) is no longer an option, 3) social engineering will play a larger role to gain access to protected sites, and 4) cyber interdiction may need to focus on heavier preventative measures rather than post hoc take-downs/removal. However, one positive implication is that Blue could also use the seeding to find supporters of Da'esh in the following ways. First, by seeding real or other content, analysts can become part of the network that hosts these websites. This can allow them to monitor who seeds the content to identify other potential supporters. However, this technique is limited if the other seeders use an anonymizer, such as an anonymous VPN or tor. The ability to find other seeders will often (not always) be limited to the organizations ability to analyze the tor network. Finally, as with other Da'esh endorsed applications (e.g., Dawn of Glad Tidings), monitoring who downloads the ZeroNet application in months following its endorsement on Da'esh communication channels (circa October 2016 and weeks following), one could track IP addresses for those who do not use TOR to mask their identity (this instruction was not included on the initial post about downloading ZeroNet). Second, because the content is secured in same manner as bitcoin wallet, bitcoin hacking and identification techniques would also be effective on this application. Finally, an innovative way to take down content is to infiltrate creator accounts and make updates with blank content to disrupt files of seed accounts.

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

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

Executive Summary

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

Executive Summary

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

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

Twitter & Facebook?

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

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

Goolsby asserts that a goal of any VEO is to transform, create, and reframe a conversation by deploying "side-step logic", which amounts to: *If you truly believe X, then you must also believe and support Y.* The crafty use of this logical fallacy is what leads hyper-connected yet vulnerable audiences to leverage social media to recirculate and thus amplify the message. She says a VEO wants "to turn the conversation so that the audience believes if they support Healthy Kittens for America, then they must naturally support <INSERT agitation issue here>. And if you don't support <insert here>, how can you call yourself a Friend of All Kittens?"

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

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

Audiences as unwitting vectors of amplification

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

in one medium but are then massively disseminated across several other platforms: "Strategies such as thread jacking, smoke-screening, hashtag latching, etc. are used to multiply the messages."

Why share?

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

Content Consumption & Recirculation

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

Snapchat, Instagram & YouTube

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

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

It's so easy

However, it is the ease of sharing that sticks with one young student of Ziemke's, who relayed that what actually seems most important is simply how easy all of this is, which is independent of platform. Picking up his phone he noted that he could get access to anything he wanted in a moment through knowing just one contact. What stood out for him was the stupendous

simplicity and ease with which the exchange of information can happen, literally in just seconds, and on a phone that is already in your hand. [9]

The heart of the matter

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

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

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

Brugh elaborates: "Are we yet spending as much (hopefully far more) on youth opportunity and other vectors we know that decrease the likelihood of finding ISIL et al as undesirable? All the tools I know about from online harassment, escalated (aka "weaponized social") which monitor or nudge people's online communications are far more often used to quash meaningful dissent than to actually help anyone."

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

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

1: Messaging

Part 2: The fight against ISIS

3: Encouraging regional stability

4: Regional actor interests and motivations

5: Sources of extremism

6: ISIL support and recruitment

7: USG bureaucratic requirements

8: Post-ISIS Governance

9: Coalition Views

xx January 2017

What are the strategic and operational implications of the Turkish Army's recent intervention in northern Syria for the coalition campaign plan to defeat ISIL? What is the impact of this intervention on the viability of coalition vetted indigenous ground forces, Syrian Defense Forces and Jabhat Fatah al-Sham (formerly ANF)? Executive Summary

Executive Summary – Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI

There is general consensus among the expert contributors that the strategic and operational implications of the Turkish incursion are minimal: each sees the incursion as consistent with previous Turkish policy and long-standing interests. Turkey's activities should be viewed through the lens of its core strategic interest in removing the threat of Kurdish separatism, which at present has been exacerbated by renewed Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) insurgency inside Turkey, its influence in northern Iraq, and the expansion of Kurdish territories in Syria more generally. As one commented, "Turkey will prioritize itself. This means preventing the strengthening of Kurds at all costs (including indirect support to those fighting them). It also means patrolling borders, harsh treatment of those who try to get through and/or corrupt practices such as involvement in smuggling." One implication of note however is the increased risk of escalation between Turkey and Russia and Turkey and the US-backed Peoples Protection Units (YPG) that the incursion poses.

Establishing a Turkish zone of influence in northern Syria accommodates multiple Turkish interests simultaneously: from the point of view of the leadership, it should increase domestic support for President Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP); it should allow Turkey to gain control of costly and potentially disruptive refugee flows into Turkey and reduce the threat of ISIL or PKK activities in Turkey; it prohibits establishment of a unified Kurdish territory in northern Syria; and, it secures Turkey's seat at the table in any Syrian settlement. In addition, a Turkish-controlled zone could establish a staging area from which Syrian Opposition forces could check PYD expansionism, secure the Aleppo corridor and clear ISIL from Turkey's borders.

In terms of the impact of the intervention on the viability of coalition-vetted ground forces, Ramazan Kilinc (University of Nebraska Omaha) believes that while Turkey's activities in Syria will not necessarily undercut Jabhat Fatah al-Sham, they will strengthen coalition vetted indigenous groups with the exception of the YPG.

Alexis Everington (MSI) argues that in order for the campaign against ISIL to succeed in Syria two conditions must be met: 1) that opposition forces in Syria believe that the effort to defeat ISIL goes hand-in-hand with defeat of the Assad regime; and 2) that there are moderate, "victorious" local Sunni opposition fighters that mainstream society can support. If not, the general population is likely to support more extreme alternatives (like Jabhat Fatah al-Sham) simply for

lack of viable Sunni alternatives.[10] Hamit Bozarslan (EHESS) suggests that unfortunately the ship may have sailed on this condition. He argues that the Free Syrian Army of today, that Turkey backs, has little resemblance to the Free Syrian Army of 2011: many of its components hate the US, are close to radical jihadis and most importantly, in his view are a very weak fighting force. He explains that they succeeded recently in Jarablus because ISIL did not fight (organizing a suicide-attack and destroying four Turkish tanks, simply showed that ISIL could retaliate).

Finally, Bernard Carreau (NDU) argues that "the U.S. should welcome the Turkish incursion into northern Syria and could do so most effectively by reducing its support of the SDF and YPG." Doing so he believes could make Turkey "the most valuable U.S. ally in Syria and Iraq." Additionally, the experts suggest that it is important to remember that the Turkish leadership has seen and will continue to see the fight against ISIL through the lens of its impact on Kurdish separatism and terrorism inside Turkey including Kurdish consolidation of power along the Syrian border. The impact on Opposition forces depends on the degree to which they see that the Turkish moves, as well as the campaign against ISIL address their objective of toppling the Assad regime

***Contributors**: Denise Natali (National Defense U.). Sonar Cagaptay (Washington Institute), with additional comments from Alexis Everington (Madison-Springfield, Inc.), Bernard Carreau (NDU), and Hamit Bozarslan (Ecole des hautes estudes en sciences sociales), MAJ Shane Aguero, DIA, Max Hoffman (Center for American Progress), Yezid Sayigh (Carnegie Middle East Center), Zana Gulmohamad (University of Sheffield, UK), Ramazan Kilinc (University of Nebraska Omaha)*

***Editor**: Allison Astorino-Courtois (NSI)*

What is the strategic framework for undermining ISIL's "Virtual Caliphate?" Executive Summary

Co*ntributors: Hassan Abbas (National Defense University), Larry Kuznar (NSI, Inc. and Indiana University – Purdue University, Fort Wayne), MAJ Patrick Taylor (7th Military Information Support, USASOC)*

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

Executive Summary

[10] It is for this reason that Everington believes providing "international support to Kurdish fighting forces will only push local Sunni Syrians more into the arms of extremist groups. Supporting Kurdish armed groups to the detriment of support to local Sunni ones is one of the most significant errors of the conflict in the past year."

Shifting to a Virtual Caliphate

As ISIS loses ground in Syria and Iraq, the organization seems to be evolving to emphasize the information battlefront to both maintain and gain support from sympathetic Sunni Muslims across the globe and open a new front against its far enemies. Research conducted by Dr. Larry Kuznar, NSI, showed a marked shift in Abu Bakr al Baghdadi's and Abu Mohammed al Adnani's (before his death) speeches in 2016 indicating a shift towards the virtual caliphate. Adnani's speech first signaled a turn towards virtual caliphate in May 2016. Baghdadi, whose speeches have traditionally focused on the near enemy, signaled a turn toward the virtual caliphate in November 2016 as indicated by more frequent mentions of Libya and Tunisia, decreased mentions of an apocalyptic showdown in Dabiq, and the beginning of the expression of an alternative conceptualization of the caliphate.

Strategies to Undermine the Virtual Caliphate

ISIS has adeptly used social media, information operations, and propaganda to recruit foreign fighters, to encourage skilled individuals to migrate to ISIS-held Iraq and Syria, and to gain sympathy and support. But the Virtual Caliphate implies more than just an impressive command of cyber-based information tools—it sows the irretrievable ideas of violent jihad that will be accessible on the internet for generations, inspiring others long after ISIS has ceased to hold territory. Contributors to this write up suggested a number of ideas that do not easily combine into a seamless strategic framework for undermining the virtual caliphate, but present components for consideration.

Dr. Hassan Abbas, a professor at National Defense University, suggested that the most powerful thing the coalition can do is to support the development of a legitimate, credible Sunni Muslim voice—such as the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC)—to provide a counterweight to ISIS. "For many Muslims, especially those vulnerable to ISIL recruitment, lack of Muslim unity and weak 'Ummah' is seen as the biggest challenge," he argued. Furthermore, Muslim collaboration on a larger scale (e.g., economic, educational, etc.) is likely to be very well received globally, particularly by young Muslims. This would also help counter the narrative that Muslims are weak and have been humiliated by the West, which drives support for ISIS.

Dr. Kuznar suggested five lines of effort that focus on increasing pressure on ISIS as it transitions from the physical to virtual caliphate to reduce its chance of lasting success.

1. Continue to defeat ISIS militarily to discredit them and to force them to force a new narrative
2. Continue to target top ISIS leadership, especially ideologues who are responsible for narrative generation
3. Work with and enable credible alternative voices in Islamic world that can divert vulnerable recruits away from violent jihadist movements and inspiration

4. Beware of alternate jihadists capturing ISIS's market share of the virtual Caliphate as ISIS is further discredited

5. Plan for cooperation with DHS and allies to mitigate persistent effects of lingering ISIS messaging in cyberspace

MAJ Patrick Taylor, 7th Military Information Support Battalion, USASOC, suggested that a new framework for undermining ISIS's virtual caliphate is not needed. "[W]e do not require new doctrine or a new approach, we must simply apply current doctrine in creative ways as a framework for response. This is a return to first principles," MAJ Taylor concluded. He argued that Psychological Operations is uniquely positioned to operate in the virtual battlespace using Cyber Enabled Special Warfare (CE-SW). He suggested thinking of the virtual domain as contested borderland filled with neighboring states, tribes, and communities with various competing interests. Successful operations require developing relationships with online digital natives to enable the USG and its allies to compete for functional capability in the information environment. As in other domains, It is essential to understand the viewpoints of these online tribes and communities in order to understand and combat the interests the drive mobilization.

Conclusion

ISIS's shift from physical to virtual caliphate is extremely dangerous as it is a threat that will continue in perpetuity even after ISIS, the organization, is defeated. Violence seekers will be inspired by ISIS's hateful rhetoric, other insurgent groups can learn from ISIS's successes and failures, and the threat of homegrown violence may continue to rise. These conditions are unlikely to change, but we can perhaps limit the scope of the threat by considering some of the suggestions proposed here among others.

What long-term actions and processes should U.S. government (USG) institutions, the Coalition and the international community examine to position ourselves against a long term ISIL threat? How can the private sector be effectively engaged by government institutions to optimize the effects needed for success? Executive Summary

Executive Summary

Expert contributors agree that terrorism will remain a long-standing global threat. In addition, there is emphasis on the leadership of the USG as a whole of nation concept. The military alone cannot position parties against lasting terrorism threat but it certainly can shape and influence them through stability operations and other people centric maneuvering. It must work in close cooperation with other USG colleagues and coalition partners to do this while mitigating not only ISIL global impact, but other people and groups that strive to commit the devastating acts of violence. Further the USG should take deliberate measures to lessen underlying factors that

lead parties to terror responses. Some specific ideas from this group of contributors include:

As war perpetuates and airstrikes continue the USG and its partner's further loose legitimacy.

There already a strong narrative present in the region that the USG instigated the rise of ISIL in order to manipulate governments it did not support and, as necessary, depose them. The USG would be better suited to take its narrative and support it by action. Some examples may include bringing in foreign direct investment that will jump start reconstruction and economic prowess, stabilize Iraqi and Syrian government institutions, and supporting local initiatives that find creative ways to resettle, rebuild and resume ways of life.

Learn to maneuver in the narrative space

It is not a necessity to engage ISIL or other actors on in the social sphere. Simple counter messaging is not going to deter opponents in the battle space. However, it is essential to know what is being said in this space and understanding its impact. Learn the stories and acquire the knowledge about those stories in the historical, cultural, religious and lingual context of the people as a whole. The USG should not take sides, it must operate in site and transparent while working with the host countries to directly solve problems. If people do not feel empowered they will not take ownership, this is how ISIL and others grow. Keep in mind that the narrative space has its threats, but there are also friendly and neutral players that can help the USG show itself under its own narrative of a "moral and democratic" proponent.

Data is your friend

At the CENTCOM reach back center, experts can work with you to streamline real-time data for the warfighter and help enhance decision making and improve the visual battle ground. This is also an area where the military can cooperate directly with the private sector. TRADOC G-27 is increasing improving tools for advanced data and network analysis as it the private sector by researching and looking for partners in the private sector. IBM has introduced Watson, a computer that can complete immense amount of data and information for analysis, visualization, and decision making. Finally, in addition to companies conducting biological and neurological research, some small companies are focusing on sentiment analysis that can support the translation of motivations in populations. For example, one would be able to read popular emotions to see if people support or despise ISIL.

Everything is local

The ongoing conflict in the region has increased fragmentation in society. There are splits between families, tribes, and religions. Mitigation of ISIL must begin first and foremost at the local level empowering individuals to take charge of their own security and stability. In CENTCOM planning, it will be difficult to do much more than ensure wide area security so the Iraqi government can take the lead to incorporate wayward militias into the Iraqi forces, build

strong community policy enforcement, and create space for reconciliation and rebuilding of these fractured nations.

Summary

Taking a realistic view of the expectations of current Arab governments in identifying and alleviating the causes that gave birth to ISIL is essential. It is beyond the existing regimes' capacities to address the socioeconomic and political conditions of their societies, however, they must be strongly encouraged to do so. To be sure, these regimes can no longer postpone tackling the roots of their citizens' grievances, which resulted in political violence we see today. In addition, response to these grievances has been brutal leading to injury, jail and death. These collective choices by all governments, for what has been decades, in the region to marginalize or destroy those who do not directly conform or stay silent will plague USG and coalition forces in any long-term defeat of terrorism disseminating from the regions.

It is difficult to see how the above recommendations might be implemented while USG policy in the Middle East policy lacks clarity or cohesiveness. Further the West, most notably the USG, already lacks credibility and what is left continues to dwindle as military maneuvers continue in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. Finally, allowing Israel to also join in their own air campaign deteriorates what is left of USG credibility and the most recent $37 billon US aid package awarded by USG to Israel will no doubt further corrode America's credibility in the region.

***Contributors**: Hassan Abbas (NDU), Bernard Carreau (NDU), Patricia DeGennaro (TRADOC G-27), Michael Eisenstadt (The Washington Institute) Alexis Everington (IAS), Garry Hare (Fielding Institute), Michael Knights (The Washington Institute), Spencer Meredith (NDU), Randy Munch (TRADOC G-27), Christine M. van den Toorn (IRIS), Todd Veazie (NCTC), Kevin Woods (IDA), Amy Zalman (SNI)*

***Editor**: Patricia DeGennaro, TRADOC G-27*

What are the strategic and operational implications of the Iran nuclear deal on the US-led coalition's ability to prosecute the war against ISIL in Iraq and Syria and to create the conditions for political, humanitarian and security sector stability?
Executive Summary

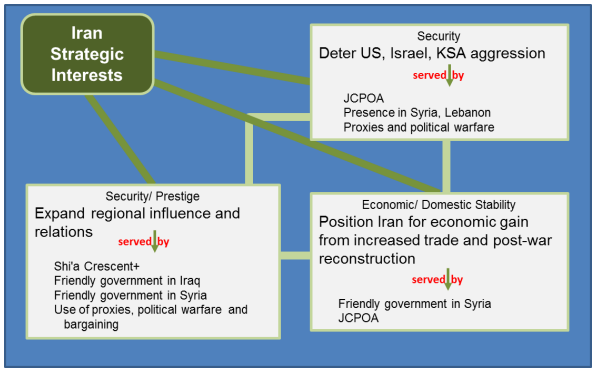
Executive Summary

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI

Prior to the signing of the Iran Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in July 2014, Iran watchers tended to anticipate one of two outcomes. One camp expected a reduction in US-Iran tensions and that the JCPOA might present an opening for improved regional cooperation between the US-led coalition and Iran. The other camp predicted that Iran would become more assertive in wielding its influence in the region once the agreement was reached.

Implications of JCPOA for the Near-term Battle: Marginal

Iran experts in the SMA network generally believe that JCPOA has had negligible, if any, impact on Iran's strategy and tactics in Syria and Iraq.[11] While Iran does appear to have adopted a more assertive regional policy since the agreement, the experts attribute this change to regional dynamics that are advantageous to Iran, and Iran having been on "good behavior during the negotiations" rather than to Iran having been emboldened by the JCPOA. Tricia Degennaro (TRADOC G27) goes a step further. In her view, the impact of the JCPOA on the battle against ISIL is not only insignificant, but concern about it is misdirected: "the JCPOA itself will not impede the Coalition's ability to prosecute the war … and create the conditions for political, humanitarian and security sector stability. Isolation of Iran will impede the coalition's mission."



Richard Davis of Artis International takes a different perspective on the strategic and operational implications of the JCPOA. He argues that Saudi, Israeli and Turkish leaders view the JCPOA together with US support for the Government of Iraq as evidence of a US-Iran rapprochement that will curb US enthusiasm for accommodating Saudi Arabia's and Turkey's own regional interests. Davis expects that this perception will "certainly manifest itself in the support for proxies in Syria, Iraq and Yemen. Specifically, it means that Saudi Arabia and Turkey will likely be more belligerent toward US policies and tactical interests in the fight to defeat ISIL."

[11] Alireza Nader (RAND) explains that the reason we are unlikely to see a "cooperation dividend" emerge from the agreement, and why Iran's regional strategy will not change even following the Spring 2017 election is that Rouhani and moderate voices are simply unable to overcome the power wielded by the Ayatollah Khamenei and the Revolutionary Guards and other "reactionary or conservative forces in Iran."

Implications of JCPOA for Post-ISIL Shaping: Considerable Potential

The SMA experts identified two ways in which the JCPOA could impact coalition efforts to stabilize the region in the mid- to longer-term: 1) if Iran were to use it as a means of generating friction in order to influence Coalition actions for example by convincing Coalition leaders that operations counter to Iranian interests (e.g., in Syria) could jeopardize the JCPOA; and, 2) indirectly, as having created the sanction relief that increases Iranian revenue and that can be used to fund proxy forces and other Iranian influence operations.

Provoking Friction as a Bargaining Chip. A classic rule of bargaining is that the party that is more indifferent to particular outcomes has a negotiating advantage. At least for the coming months, this may be Iran. According to the experts, Iran is likely to continue to use the JCPOA as a source of friction – real, or contrived – to gain leverage over the US and regional allies. The perception that the Obama Administration is set on retaining the agreement presents Tehran with a potent influence lever: provoking tensions around implementation or violations of JCPOA that look to put the deal in jeopardy, but that it can use to pressure the US and allies into negotiating further sanctions relief, or post-ISIL conditions in Syria and Iraq that are favorable to Iran. However, because defeat of ISIL and other groups that Iran sees as Saudi-funded Sunni extremists,[12] the experts feel that if Iran were to engage in physical or more serious response to perceived JPCOA violations, they would choose to strike out in areas in which they are already challenging the US and Coalition partners (e.g., at sea in the Persian Gulf and Red Sea; stepping up funding or arms deliveries to Shiite fighters militants in Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Yemen) rather than in ways that would actually impede ISIL's defeat.

Increased Proxy Funding. Iran has often demonstrated a strategic interest in maintaining its influence with Shi'a communities and political parties across the region, including of course, providing support to Shi'a militia groups (Bazoobandi, 2014).[13] Pre-JCPOA sanctions inhibited Iran's ability to provide "continuous robust financial, economic or militarily support to its allies" according to Tricia Degennaro (TRADOC G27). An obvious, albeit indirect implication of the JCPOA sanctions relief for security and political stability in Iraq in the longer term is the additional revenue available to Iran to fund proxies and conduct "political warfare" as it regains its position in international finance and trade.[14] It will take time for Iran to begin to benefit in a

[12] Nader clarifies that because of its ambitions for pan-Islamic leadership, Iran is careful to identify ISIL and like groups that they oppose as "takfiris" – Wahhabis that maintain that Shi'a are not true Muslims.

[13] Bazoobandi, S. (2014). Iran's Regional Policy: Interests, Challenges, and Ambitions (Analysis No. 275). ISPI. Retrieved from http://www.ispionline.it/sites/default/files/pubblicazioni/analysis_275__2014_0.pdf

[14] An expert in the Iranian business sector, reports that with the signing of the JCPOA "after years of sanctions and limitations on business interactions" the agreement has engendered "a

sustainable way from the JCPOA sanctions relief. As a result it is not as likely to be a factor in Coalition prosecution of the wars in Iraq and Syria, but later, in the resources Iran can afford to give to both political and militia proxies to shape the post-ISIL's region to its liking.

***Contributors**: Tricia Degennaro (Threat Tec, LLCI -TRADOC G27), Alireza Nader (RAND), Michael Eisenstadt and Michael Knights (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy), Alex Vatanka (Jamestown foundation)*

***Editor**: Allison Astorino-Courtois (NSI)*

new hope in Iran for a revival" of its pre-1979 economic vitality. Still, the economic situation in Iran has yet to improve as a result of JCPOA and "there's a lot of public dissatisfaction."

Have sentiments changed since the December 2014 polling? Have recent IO efforts in Mosul influenced these sentiments? What other means can we use to influence? Executive Summary

Contributors: *Dr. Munqith Dagher (IIACSS Research), Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi (Middle East Forum), Ms. Sheila Young (USAID), and Dr. Ian McCulloh (Johns Hopkins University).*

Editor: *Dr. Ian McCulloh, Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Lab.*

Executive Summary

Data suggests that sentiment toward DA'ESH[15] has changed since the December 2014 polling conducted by USCENTCOM. The SMA team cannot adequately assess recent IO efforts in Mosul due to lack of clarity on programs conducted, their specific objectives, and an understanding of the associated assessment plan. A limited assessment of DA'ESH online propaganda and impacts of US Government (USG) and coalition efforts to restrict this propaganda is provided. Insights for future influence operations are recommended.

USCENTCOM understanding of the population on the ground is significantly hampered by a lack of continued polling and survey research in critical areas of strategic significance. It is clearly possible to conduct this type of research throughout DA'ESH controlled territory as well as other non-permissive environments with proper risk mitigation measures in place. While polling in these environments is dangerous and should not be left to inexperienced staff officers to plan and manage, it provides critical insights for effective operations in the Gray Zone. The first and foremost recommendation in this report is for the Commander, USCENTCOM to personally intervene to obtain the necessary authorities and resources for on-the-ground polling in areas of strategic importance.

Dr. Munqith Dagher of IIACSS, a polling and research firm in the Middle East, has provided independently funded data collected in Mosul between the December 2014 poll and March 2016. These data show that general popular support for DA'ESH increased through December of 2015 and then dropped sharply. As of March 2016, popular support for DA'ESH in Mosul had nearly returned to pre-invasion levels. The SMA could not identify more recent data to support objective assessment.

[15] DA'ESH is also referred to as "The Islamic State", "Islamic State in the Levant", "Islamic State in Al-Sham", or by the acronyms IS, ISIL, ISIS. This organization will be referred to as DA'ESH throughout this report.

Atmospherics from IIACSS pollsters indicate that the decline in popular support to DA'ESH is primarily due to increased harsh treatment of the local population by DA'ESH in response to fears of locals providing active support to the Government of Iraq (GoI) and the coalition. They also cite deteriorating economic conditions as a result of low oil prices, closed borders, and economic sanctions against DA'ESH.

DA'ESH's internet presence has changed over the last year. Their focus has shifted from highlighting positive messages of "Life in the Caliphate" to messages of battle statistics and a narrative that losses on the ground do not translate into the elimination of the Caliphate. It is the opinion of the authors that this shift in narrative is less effective for DA'ESH securing popular support, but may be more effective at reducing military defection and maintaining a source of foreign fighters for their ground campaign.

The USG campaign to remove DA'ESH cyber personas from the internet (e.g. Twitter suppression) may make it more difficult for potential recruits to find, however, it makes it equally difficult to collect information on the DA'ESH narrative, priorities, objectives, and lines of persuasion. Given DA'ESH guidance to members to limit individual accounts suggests that they may be attempting to limit their online footprint as a matter of strategy and not in response to online information operations activities by the USG. Increased restrictions on the internet has resulted in on-the-ground distribution of offline media (CDs, DVDs, etc.). There is insufficient data to understand the nature or effectiveness of these materials. It is the opinion of this author that USCENTCOM should pursue a more sophisticated campaign of operational preparation of the environment (OPE) to support a wider range of options for military engagement and foreign policy.

An assessment of individuals who have joined, defected, or provide tacit support to DA'ESH reveal two major reasons for support: governance and ideology. People throughout Iraq seek economic prosperity free from sectarian prejudice. They seek an equitable distribution of government services. The coalition must be prepared to fill the governance vacuum with micro-economic development programs, restore oil revenues, and most importantly ensure that non-local sectarian militias do not take control of former DA'ESH occupied areas. Governance will be more successful if it is decentralized at the local level. As a matter of ideology, Iraqis culturally value dignity and family. Fears of reprisal, treatment of civilians, and the inappropriate use of Islam are cultural levers that can quickly turn the population away from reconstruction efforts. The coalition must prioritize efforts to create checks and balances that monitor and prevent corruption and reprisals.

Although not included in this report, Johns Hopkins University and University of California Los Angeles recently conducted social neuroscience experimentation in Amman, Jordan. One of the findings was that Jordanians and Iraqis in the study resented the use of Islam in persuasive messaging. They also found that the use of Islam provided a more effective influence channel. The coalition must be very careful in whether they use Islam and how they use Islam in any information operations activities. While Islam can provide an effective line of persuasion, it may

also develop resentment toward the messenger. It is the opinion of the authors that messaging involving Islam should be left to Muslim non-governmental organizations.

The remainder of this report is organized into four chapters. The first chapter provides on-the-ground data for popular sentiment in Mosul since 2014. The second chapter provides an assessment of DA'ESH propaganda online. The third chapter offers recommendations for future operations in Iraq. Biographies of contributors are provided. These authors can be contacted through the DDGO.

What are potential unanticipated complications or reactions (or "black swans") with respect to defeating ISIL in al-Raqqah? Executive Summary

Contributors: *Kathleen Reedy (RAND), Birol Yeşilada (Portland State University)*

Editor*: Kathleen Reedy, RAND*

Executive Summary

Predicting the unanticipated is always a challenge, but contributors have identified a couple of considerations for thinking about both potential complications involving external actors such as Turkey (Yeşilada) and what is likely to happen with the combatants themselves (Reedy).

External Factors and a Lack of Stability

One of the main complicating factors in Syria has been, from the outset, the wide variety of external influence on and support for the combatants and groups. Regional countries, world powers, and transnational organizations have all had a hand in shaping the conflict. Turkey in particular has been a volatile player, but has been consistent on its stance on the Syrian Kurds—Erdogan has strongly stated that he will not allow a single bridge of Kurds across the north of Syria. He has also promised, however, that it will be "his forces" and not the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Council/Forces (SDF) will be the ones to liberate Raqqah. It is unclear, though, whether he means the Free Syrian Army (FSA) or Turkish forces, though. In any case, apart from the FSA, there are no anti-Assad groups currently operating in Syria that could hold Raqqah even if they could clear it, because they would not have the organic support of the population there. It is possible, then, that if one of these groups is predominantly involved in removing ISIL from Raqqah, they will not have the ability to stabilize the region, and given the animosity between the Turkish forces and the Syrian Kurdish forces, it could lead to outright fighting in the area between them (Yeşilada).

ISIL Fighters and Leaders

The other potential black swan contributors note involves the fighters themselves. There are two broad options for ISIL fighters and leaders: to leave Syria or to stay. There have already been leaders who have fled the Levant when things began to look somewhat bleak for ISIL, primarily fleeing to North Africa. As they are slowly pushed out of Syria, more leaders and fighters may begin to follow them there. This creates follow-on problems in Africa, as increasing fighters and expertise arrive and challenge already fragile-situations there. However, the fight in North Africa is often more local than that in the Levant in its perspective, and fighters may be reluctant to commit to conflict there because of that and because the territory lacks the ideological impetus of the historical home of the Caliphate. Yemen might be another option to flee to, but given the current conflict and related factors such as food shortages there, that seems a less likely option (Reedy).

The other alternative is to stay in Syria. This may be a more viable option for rank-and-file fighters than leaving because they may not have the resources to flee safely and/or, since many of them are foreign fighters, they may be on watchlists that prohibit them from returning home. Leaders who stay are more likely to do so for ideological reasons. Within this option are two possibilities, which are by no means mutually exclusive. One is that some combatants are likely to either join other groups that continue to oppose the regime and go underground as part of a long-term insurgency scenario. The other scenario is that fighters, feeling backed into a corner, attempt to do as much damage to life and property as they can before they are killed or captured (Reedy).

What Can Coalition Partners Do?

Contributors outlined or implied a few actions that the US government and its coalition partners could do to address these black swans.

1. Keep a **tight rein on allies** within and outside Syria to ensure they do not fall to fighting among themselves (Yeşilada).
2. Ensure that the **clearing and holding of Raqqah are coordinated** and that no single force is primarily responsible for its liberation or stabilization (Yeşilada).
3. **Coordinate and communicate closely** between CENTCOM and AFRICOM to attempt to track, detain, and understand the capabilities of leaders and fighters fleeing from Syria and Iraq to North Africa (Reedy).
4. Prepare to deal with a long-running insurgency, for allies and international organizations involved in stabilizing Syria (Reedy).
5. To deal with levels of extreme violence, **more heavily secure civilian populations and key infrastructure** to protect them (Reedy).
6. Find methods and means to **repatriate foreign fighters** to remove them from the battlefield in Syria or elsewhere (Reedy).

Conclusion

Contributors note that unexpected results can involve both external actors and allies (Yeşilada) and the ISIL combatants themselves (Reedy). Ensuring that U.S. forces and partners are ready to address the wide variety of potential complications and are agile enough to adapt to the

unexpected rapidly will be essential to minimize the impacts from these types of concerns. Communication and the ability to rapidly react politically and militarily will be paramount.

How does Da'esh's transition to insurgency manifest itself, and what actions should the Coalition take to minimize their ability to maintain either military effectiveness or popular support? Executive Summary

***Contributors**: Elie Abouaoun, USIP; Scott Atran, ARTIS, Harith Hasan Al-Qarawee, Brandeis; Omar Al-Shahery, RAND; Patricia DeGennaro, TRADOC G-2; AMB Robert S. Ford, MEI; Sarhang Hamasaeed, USIP; Gina Ligon, University of Nebraska Omaha; Michael Logan, University of Nebraska Omaha ; Renad Mansour, Chatham House; Diane Maye, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University; Clark McCauley, Bryn Mawr College; Spencer Meredith, NDU; Vera Mironova, Harvard, Daniel Serwer, JHU, Randa Slim, MEI; Bilal Wahab, Washington Institute; Craig Whiteside, Naval Postgraduate School*

***Editor**: Patricia DeGennaro, TRADOC G-2/G-27*

Executive Summary

The self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) or Da'esh, as the group has become known, transition to insurgency is underway. They may not see it like this since Iraq and Syria are struggling with their own sovereignty and trying to restructure governance to support the basic necessities of the populations.

Daniel Serwer of Johns Hopkins University says we can already see this manifesting "in overt terrorist attacks, which are already frequent, as well as more covert intimidation." IS is conducting suicide, IED and infrastructure attacks daily. The group will continue to be active in organized crime activities -protection rackets, smuggling of oil and antiquities, kidnapping for ransom, and violent intimidation – against any effort to restore law and order. "Daesh will not fold its tent. It may even spawn a new organization to carry on its campaign for the caliphate and seek to embed with other less brutal Salafists," says Serwer.

In light of the possibility that U.S. backed Iraqi and Peshmerga forces are pushing IS out of its territory in Iraq and beginning to tackle some locations in Syria, Harith Al-Qarawee, professor at Brandeis University, says, "ISIS insurgents who will survive the Mosul battle will return to

underground insurgency and seek to secure safe passages between Iraq and Syria." He and other experts agree that there must be an effective intelligence effort in urban centers to keep abreast of any movements IS may make if another gap in security and governance should open up. Renad Mansour, an expert at Chatham House, reminds us they IS will continue, even underground to "make sure that Iraq's political elite are unable to come up with a political solution," so if a political solution is not found, IS will use this as a reason to resurface. Former Syrian Ambassador Robert Ford and Elie Abouaoun, at USIP, feel that in order to prevent this from happening, "a genuine and organic national reconciliation effort" must commence by investing in political reconciliation initiatives that combine both top-down and bottom-up approach and include a regional dialogue between Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia.

SMEs agree that IS will not disappear. They will most likely go into hiding with sleeper cells in Iraqi and Syrian cities. Many may also remain silent in other Western countries looking for future opportunities to act. Noted anthropologist Scott Atran believes IS "will retreat to its pre-Caliphate tactics, as they did during the Iraqi surge, when they lost 60-80% of their foot soldiers and more than a dozen high-value targets each month for 15 consecutive months, yet still survived with a strong enough organization to seize the initiative in the chaos of the Syrian Civil War and roar back along the old oil-for-smuggling routes that Sunni Arab tribesmen and Saddam loyalists." Randa Slim of the Middle East Institute states that, "there will be post-ISIS territorial and ideological challenges. On the territorial side of the equation, given the range of actors involved in the Mosul fight, there will be increasing stakes, post-liberation, of competing territorial claims between Baghdad and Erbil but also among different ethnic groups. She continues, "Kirkuk is likely to be a major point of competition in the future and will complicate the relationship between Erbil and Baghdad" and losing territory will undermine ISIS's caliphate narrative."

All agree that the Iraqi leadership must find a way to bring the Sunni population into the political decision making by cultivating local leaders who have legitimacy and credibility. Sunni groups, that are particularly fragmented, must contribute to reconstruction of liberated territories and participate in security, police and military, to ensure that their grievances are met. These grievances are rooted in divisions that are embedded by continued attacks on their communities by IS, who are dividing Sunnis as well as Sunnis and Shia populations, and Shia forces perceived to be targeting not only Iraqi Sunnis, but all Sunnis as a proxy for Iran.

Many "IS members are Iraqis," says Bilal Wahab of the Washington Institute, who were brutally coerced to join IS or had little economic choice, they too should be a focus for immediate reintegration into society to help quell animosities perpetuated in this conflict. Remember, says Atran, "many of the leaders of the Sunni Arab militia in Mosul supported IS at the outset (as "The Revolution" - al Thawra - to win back Iraq from Shia control) and turned against IS when they encourage Sunni to go against Sunni. "Military action and humanitarian assistance are critical, but they are mostly addressing the symptoms, and need to be supplemented by civilian initiatives" says United States Institute of Peace expert Sarhang Hamasaeed. In Diane Maye's words, "An important element of denying regrowth is to use targeting in conjunction with a

broader movement to engage the population against the terrorist network." In other words, take advantage of an IS retreat by rebuilding and improving the livelihoods of people. That is the main IS deterrent.

Bilal Wahab, Washington Institute, encourages coalition members to take into account several lessons from the past when planning next steps. First, "If grievances continue—mass arrests, kidnappings and economic sidelining, insurgency will remain legitimate in the eyes of the population" and second, "cash speaks louder than ideology, be it foreign funds pouring into Iraq, or Sunni politicians funneling money into violent groups to gain leverage in Baghdad. Finally, "in addition to sectarianism, a chronic malaise of Iraq's security forces is corruption and has impunity." This must be addressed immediately. Trust in security forces is the only way populations will support and report ongoing IS activities.

Mosul Coalition Fragmentation: Causes and Effects[16]

Authors: Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI and Jimmy Krakar, TRADOC G-27

Executive Summary

This paper assesses the potential causes and effects of fragmentation on the Counter-ISIL coalition. This coalition consists of three distinct but interrelated subsets: 1) the CJTF-OIR coalition; 2) the regional coalition, *de facto* allies of convenience, who may provide any combination of money, forces or proxies; and, 3) the tactical coalition, the plethora of disparate groups fighting on the ground. The study team assessed how a change in either the CJTF-OIR coalition or regional coalition could influence the tactical coalition post Mosul and the subsequent effect of these potential fragmentations on the GoI's ability to control Iraq. The study team established six potential post-Mosul future scenarios. One future consisted of the tactical coalition remaining intact and the other five consisted of different permutations of the tactical coalition fragmenting. The study team then modeled these six futures with the Athena Simulation and quantified their effects on both Mosul and Iraq *writ large*.[17]

During simulation these six fragmentation scenarios collapsed into two distinct outcomes: one in which GoI controlled Mosul and one in which local Sunni leadership controlled

[16] This white paper does not represent official USG policy or position.

[17] The Athena Simulation is a decision support tool designed to increase decision-makers' understanding of the effects of PMESII-PT variables on operations in a given area over time. It was developed by NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in conjunction with the US Army TRADOC G-27 Models and Simulations Branch.

Mosul. The variable that determined the outcome was the involvement of the Sunnis in the post-Mosul coalition—if the local Sunni leadership remained aligned with the GoI, the GoI remained in control of Mosul. If the local Sunni leadership withdrew from the coalition the GoI lost control of Mosul and the local Sunni leadership assumed control of Mosul—regardless of whether any other groups left the coalition. Irrespective of the local Sunni leadership's involvement in the coalition the GoI was able to maintain control of everything but Mosul and the KRG controlled areas of Iraq.

1: Messaging

2: The fight against ISIL

Part 3: Encouraging regional stability

4: Regional actor interests and motivations

5: Sources of extremism

6: ISIL support and recruitment

7: USG bureaucratic requirements

8: Post-ISIS Governance

9: Coalition Views

What are the factors that could potentially cause behavior changes in Pakistan and how can the US and coalition countries influence those factors? Executive Summary

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI

The experts who contributed to this Quick Look agree on an essential point: Pakistan's beliefs regarding the threat posed by India are so well-entrenched that they not only serve as the foundation for Pakistan's foreign policy and security behavior, but represent a substantial barrier to changing it behavior. Christine Fair a Pakistan scholar from Georgetown University is specific as to the target of any influence efforts – difficult as they may be: "the object of influence is not "Pakistan;" rather the Pakistan army" and so security behavior change if possible requires change in the Army's cost-benefit calculus.

The essential components of Pakistan's security beliefs are first that India is an existential threat to the state; and second that Pakistan is at a tremendous military and economic disadvantage to its stronger neighbor. Tom Lynch of the National Defense University adds a third: Pakistan's national self-identity as an "oppositional state, created to counter India."[18] The nature of behavior change is relative and can occur in (at least) two directions: one aligning with the observer's interests (for the sake of brevity referred to here as "positive change"), and one in conflict with those interests ("negative change"). Encouraging positive change in Pakistani security behavior was seen by each of the experts as an extremely difficult challenge, and one that would likely require dramatic change in Pakistan's current internal and external security conditions. The experts also generally agreed that negative change in Pakistani behavior is easily generated with no need for dramatic changes in circumstance.

Negative Change: Easy to Do

According to long-time Pakistan scholar and Atlantic Council Distinguished Fellow Shuja Nawaz, Pakistan's current state is to "to view its regional interests and strategies at a variance from the views of the US and its coalition partners." Moreover, Pakistan's willingness to cooperate with US/Western regional objectives can deteriorate rapidly if the Pakistani security establishment believes those states have dismissed as invalid, or take actions that exacerbate their concerns. Specifically, actions that reinforce the perceived threat from India (e.g., Indian military build-up, interest in Afghanistan) or Pakistan's inferior position relative to India (e.g., US strengthening military and economic ties with India; Indian economic growth) stimulate negative change. Importantly, because the starting point is already "negative" relative to US interests, these changes can take the form of incremental deterioration in relations, rather than obvious and

[18] These generate what Christine Fair (Georgetown) sees as three enduring security goals: resisting Indian regional hegemony, developing "strategic depth" sufficient to deny India another base from which to threaten Pakistan; and gaining Indian-administered Kashmir.

dramatic shifts in behavior. Examples may include increased emphasis on components of Pakistan's existing nuclear weapons program, amplified use of proxy forces already in Afghanistan, or improved economic relations with Russia.

Levers Encouraging Positive Change: A difficult Challenge

While the experts agreed that Pakistan's deep-rooted, security-related anxieties inhibit changes in behavior toward greater alignment with coalition objectives, they clearly diverge on what, if anything might be done to encourage positive change. Two schools of thought emerged: what we might (cheekily) refer to as a *been there* perspective; and a longer-term, *cumulative influence* view.

"Been there" School of Thought

Tom Lynch (NDU) argues that the security perceptions of Pakistan's critical military-intelligence leaders have been robustly resistant to both pol-mil and economic incentives for change[19] as well as to more punitive measures (e.g., sanctions, embargos, international isolation) taken to influence Pakistan's security choices over the course of six decades. Neither approach fundamentally altered security perceptions. Worse yet, punitive efforts not only failed to elicit positive change in Pakistan's security framework but ended up reducing US influence by motivating Pakistan to strengthen relations with China, North Korea and Iran. As a consequence of past failure of both carrot and stick approaches, both Lynch and Christine Fair (Georgetown) argue that motivating change in Pakistani security behavior requires "a coercive campaign" to up the costs to Pakistan of its proxy militant strategy (e.g., in Afghanistan by striking proxy group leaders; targeted cross-border operations)[20]. Moreover, Lynch feels that positive behavior change ultimately requires a new leadership. Raising the costs would set "the conditions for the rise of a fundamentally new national leadership in Pakistan" and be the first step in inducing positive behavior change. Lynch believes these costs can be raised while at the same time US engagement continues with Pakistan – in a transactional way with Pakistan's military-intelligence leadership and in a more open way through civilian engagement and connective projects with the people of Pakistan. However, Christine Fair points to US domestic challenges that mitigate against the success of even these efforts given what she argues is a lack of political will "in key parts of the US government which continue to nurse the fantasy that Pakistan may be more cooperative with the right mix of allurements."

Cumulative Influence School of Thought

Other contributors however believe are not ready to abandon the possibility of incentivizing positive change in Pakistan's foreign policy and security behavior. They argue that there are still actions that the US and coalition countries could take to reduce Pakistani security concerns and

[19] Lynch cites the promoting Pakistan as an ally in the War on Terror, delivery of preferential military equipment and operational arrangements, and global debt relief among other efforts.
[20] See additional options as outlined in the material submitted by Dr.'s Fair and Lynch below.

encourage positive change. Admittedly, the suggested measures are not as direct as those suggested by a *been there, done that* approach and assume a significantly broader time horizon:

- Do not by-pass civilian authority. Equalize the balance of US exchanges with Pakistani military and civilian leaders rather than depending largely on military-to-military contact. Governing authority and legitimacy remain divided in Pakistan, and while dealing directly with the military may be expedient, analysis shows that by-passing civilian leadership and continuing to the treat the military as a political actor inhibits development of civilian governing legitimacy, strengthens the relative political weight of the military, and will in the longer term foster internal instability in Pakistan and stymie development of the civil security, political and economic institutions necessary for building a stronger, less threatened state.[21] In this case the short-term quiet that the military can enforce, is off-set by increased instability down the road.
- Reduce the threat. A direct means of reducing the threat perceptions that drive Pakistani actions unfavorable to coalition interests is to actually alter the threat environment. One option suggested for doing this is to use US and ally influence in India to encourage that country to redirect some of the forces aimed at Pakistan. A second option is to develop a long-term Pakistan strategy ("not see it as a spin-off or subset of our Afghanistan or India strategies") was seen as a way to signal the importance to the US of an enduring the US-Pakistan relationship.
- Remember that allies got game. Invite allies to use their own influence in Pakistan rather than taking the lead on pushing for change in Pakistan's behavior. According to Shuja Nawaz, "…the Pakistanis listen on some issues more to the British and the Germans and Turks. The NATO office in Islamabad populated by the Turks has been one of the best-kept secrets in Pakistan!"

  Enlist Pakistan's diplomatic assistance. Finally, Raffaello Pantucci of the Royal United Services Institute (UK) suggests enlisting Pakistan to serve as an important conduit in the dispute that could most rapidly ignite region-wide warfare: that between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Pakistan has sectarian-based ties with Saudi Arabia as well as significant commercial ties with Iran. Although as MAJ Shane Aguero points out increased Saudi-Iranian hostilities could put Pakistan in an awkward position, Pantucci believes that the US and allies could leverage these relations to open an additional line of communications between the rivals. Importantly, doing so would also important signal US recognition of Pakistan's critical role in the region, which would enhance "Pakistani sense of prestige which may in turn produce benefits on broader US and allied concerns in the country."

***Contributors**: Shuja Nawaz (Atlantic Council South Asia Center), Hassan Abbas (National Defense University), Thomas Lynch (Institute of National Strategic Studies - National Defense University),*

[21] See Astorino-Courtois, Allison, Belinda Bragg, Danette Brickman, George Popp, Alex Stephenson and Richard Williams. *PAKStaM: Drivers and Buffers of Instability in Pakistan*, Strategic Multi-Layer Analysis for USSOCCENT, 2013. Full report available from Allison Astorino-Courtois at aastorino@NSIteam.com, or the SMA office.

MAJ Shane Aguero (US Army), Shalini Venturelli (American University), Raffaello Pantucci (Royal United Services Institute - UK), Christine Fair (Georgetown University)

***Editor**: Allison Astorino-Courtois (NSI)*

What are the most likely post-lSIL Iraq scenarios with regards to Political, Military, Economic, Social, Information, Infrastructure, Physical Environment, and Time (PMESII-PT)? Where are the main PMESII-PT friction points, which are most acute, and how are they best exploited to accomplish a stable end state favorable to U.S. and coalition interests? Executive Summary

> "The biggest danger is to assume we know the answer." Alexis Everington, Madison Springfield Inc.
>
> "The unpredictable nature of the country's social sentiment, lessons from history, the culture, regional influencers, the corrupt political elite with their sectarian-based agendas, and lack of statesmanship and political and strategic prowess are among the factors that suggest that even the most seasoned expert on Iraq might be misled in his or her attempt to predict the next phase." Hala Abdulla, Marine Corps University

Seventeen experts contributed their thoughts about the future of Iraq and Syria in a post-ISIL environment. Summarizing their insights, warnings, and predictions in under five pages runs the risk of over simplifying and incredibly complex challenge, which is why this summary is heavily cited to encourage the reader to seek further details in the texts provided.

This summary is divided into three parts: 1) a table that describes the PMESII-PT elements essential to understand the current and future trajectory of Iraq and Syria, 2) a brief description of various friction points, the resolution of which may influence the future of the region, and 3) suggested elements that may encourage the transition to stability.

The table below lists the major PMESII-PT element critical to understanding the current and future trajectory of Iraq and Syria. Where possible, outcomes of ignoring or addressing these elements is listed in the "Potential Outcome" column. The analysis is heavily weighted toward the government of Iraq, which several experts believe to be the most critical element in re-establishing regional stability.

PMESII-PT	Iraq	Syria	Potential Outcome
Political	• Failure of political reintegration (Van den Toorn, Trofino, Sayigh) • Power blocs with no party able to get majority in Iraq (Trofino) • Deep corruption (Sayigh; Liebl) • Failure to provide essential services (Sayigh) • Lack of unified Sunni voice (Maye; Abdulla) • Kurdish expectations of autonomy and/or independence (Meredith)	• Disenfranchisement of Sunnis (Van den Toorn, Trofino)	Sunnis in Iraq and Syria will wonder why they should buy into a new government if there is no belief that real representation will happen (Sayigh) Lack of unified Sunni voice will almost surely result in continued political marginalization and the failure of the Iraqi government in a post-Daesh environment (Sayigh) Iraqi government likely to be under Iranian influence for a long time (Maye). There is too much momentum in this direction to apply the brakes now. After contributing greatly to the defeat of ISIL, Iraqi Kurds will not accept anything less than autonomy and perhaps independence (Meredith).
Military	• Tacit approval of Shia militias (Trofino) • PMF atrocities (Meredith) • Non-government sanctioned forces (Iranian militias, Kurdish forces) liberating Sunni populations. • Iraqi Special Forces (ISOF) a well-regard, integrated unit that could provide a model for all Iraqi forces (Abdulla)		PMF atrocities, especially in Mosul, could lead to another major Sunni uprising (Meredith) Shia and Kurdish groups will not easily turn over Sunni territory where they have spilled their blood to liberate from ISIL (Abouaoun; Abdulla)
Economic	• Lack of employment opportunities		Baghdad is already seeing mob violence

	• Cost of rebuilding an economic burden (Trofino) • Continued economic depression (Meredith) • Reliance on oil (Abdulla)		attributed to young men with no economic opportunities (Meredith) The reconstruction of Iraq will be severely hampered by low oil prices (al-Marashi)
Social	• Social, ethnic discord (Trofino) • Weak sense of nationality (Trofino) • Shia-Shia competition (Sayigh)		Shia-Shia competition for influence over the Iraqi state could lead to bloodshed (Sayigh) Tensions between ethnic groups, particularly following the battle for Mosul, could instigates waves of bloodshed and revenge for perceived and actual wrongs committed (Abdulla)
Information	• Media inflaming divided community in Iraq (Trofino) • Twitter Awakening (Abdulla)		
Infrastructure	• Iraq's infrastructure is very poor		
Physical Environment	• Scarce, shared water resources with Syria and Turkey (Palmer Moloney, Meredith; Abdulla)	• Scarce, shared water resources with Iraq and Turkey (Palmer Moloney, Meredith)	
Time	• The longer it takes to institute meaningful government reform, the greater the chance for the re-emergence of extremism (Abdulla; Astorino-Courtois)		

Friction Points (Including Most Acute)

If the number of grievances listed in the table above are not addressed after the fall of ISIL, th
that the region will descend once again into a number of conflicts, including continued extremi
den Toorn). This section lists friction points identified by the contributors as fulcrums in the f
Iraq and Syria that could tip the scales toward stability or violence.

The Battle for Mosul

> "A victory over ISIL will not be the end of Iraq's problems, rather the beginning of an
> political battle over territory," according to CSU professor Ibrahim al-Marashi.

The way the battle for Mosul is conducted, as well as its outcome, may be the greatest determ
the future of the Middle East (Dagher; Abdulla). If it is done wrong, it could lay the groundwork
re-emergence of ISIL or a successor group. If it is done right, it could provide a model for inte
governance, and recovery for the region (Dagher). In a comparative study of Mosul vs. Falluja
Gulmohamad listed three major contributors to successful operations: effective coordination
forces, coalition airpower, and intelligence from Sunni tribes and townspeople—even in the
unauthorized incursions by Shi'a militias.

But there are many dangers along this path. First, one of the greatest fears of the Sunni popu
that Shia militias will once again be allowed to dominate Sunni populations under the guise of lib
(Dagher). Second, the new governance structure in Mosul must address political grievances of
population groups in Mosul. The government must draw its leadership from a new political elit
of and from Mosul. The existing sources of political power in Ninewah represent the nexus b
Islamist extremists and the organized businesses that thrived during ISIL's occupation of Mo
should not be allowed to dominate the regional government. Likewise, the new government sho
close attention to minority groups, to pose a model for integration and representation in the
and the region (Dagher, al-Marashi).

Finally, the battle for Mosul poses risks to the cohesion of the Coalition itself. There are any nu
occurrences, described in a report by Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI, that could cause partial o
fracture before, during, or after the battle. The longer cohesion is required, the likelihood of a
event increases. Zana Gulmohamad notes that unless conflicting agenda among regional powers
resolved, any victory in securing the city could be fleeting.

Transformation of ISIL from Proto-state to Insurgent Group

The battle for Mosul may effectively push ISIL out of Iraq and into Syria (Abouaoun). This will likely be the turning point of ISIL from a proto-state to an insurgency group (al Marashi; Abouaoun) with the intent to encourage violence on near and far enemies, especially through the encouragement of lone wolf terrorism. This pressure could also result in jihadists leaving ISIL for other groups or inspire some to create new ones (Abouaoun). The bottom line is that ISIL will decline, but the ideology will not.

Even after ISIL's defeat, individuals, groups and networks of fighters and terrorists will be motivated to continue violent jihad, whether against local regimes, the West, Shiites, or apostate Sunnis. In a post-Caliphate ISIL, threats will take two main forms, according to David Gompert, a national security expert at the US Naval Academy and RAND: 1)R remnants of fanatical forces in the region, including in Iraq, Syria, and Libya and 2) radicalized individuals in or returning to the West. This former group could lead to increase terrorism in the West.

Federalization of Iraq

There were two major schools of thought regarding the idea that the federalization of Iraq is one way to address popular grievances, governance issues, and mistrust of the central government. Several experts suggested that a federalization model based on Kurdish semi-autonomy might provide a stable way ahead (Maye, McCauley). The arguments in favor of this stance include self-determination, freedom from domination by other ethnic groups, and potential for buy in from Iraqi Sunnis, Shia, and Kurds (McCauley). The primary US role in this effort would be to bring the parties to the table to negotiate and enforce an agreement (McCauley)

However, another cohort of experts argued that constitutional autonomy will not work in Iraq—particular in traditionally Sunni-held areas (Dagher; Abdulla). The people of Iraq all want unity except for the Kurds (Abdulla). Furthermore, Sunni territories in western Iraq are not economically viable (Abdulla). As people tire of sectarian conflict, one way forward may be to support a secular, technocratic party (Maye). However, the success of this kind of party would undermine all existing political actors and is likely to be undermined unless it receives strong international support.

Power Sharing in Syria

The issue is not how Assad should share power in a post-ISIL world, but the fact that he cannot share power without unraveling the entire government (Sayigh). Assad's goal in Syria is not total victory (because that only allows him to become the king of ashes); his goal is to regain access to capital and

markets and get sanctions lifted (Sayigh) (Sayigh). Assad cannot do this with diplomacy, so he is using the conflict to coerce the US, EU, GCC, and Turkey to make economic concessions. Russia and China will endorse this demand as will Lebanon and Jordan in order to ease pressure on their domestic concerns.

Settlement of Intra-group Tensions

The greatest threat to long-term stability in Iraq is not tensions between Sunnis, Shias, and Kurds, but intra-Sunni, intra-Shia, and intra-Kurdish tensions (Abdulla; Liebl). Sunnis lack any kind of unified political voice and efforts to consolidate power may lead to tribal conflict. While the Kurdish government faces significant rivalry between its two main political parties, the KDP and the PUK, for power (Abdulla). However, the real determinant of stability in Iraq hinges on the settlement of Shia-Shia tensions in the country (Sayigh; Abdulla). Although Iraqi Shia present a united façade, there are serious divisions among its main blocs, leaders, and elites (Abdulla). Shia-Shia competition for influence over the Iraqi state could lead to bloodshed (Sayigh).

Environment

Long-standing tensions are often inflamed by disagreement over scarce water resources (Palmer Moloney). This is particularly true in the Tigris-Euphrates Watershed, which is shared by Turkey, Syria, and Iraq and largely controlled by Turkey (Palmer Moloney, Meredith).

Achieving a Stable End State Favorable to US and Coalition Interests

This section briefly lays out suggested actions and conditions to promote a stable end state in Iraq and Syria favorable to US interests in the days after Daesh.

New Regional Framework

The most important action the USG and the Coalition can take to promote stability in the region is to bring all actors to the table to agree on a new regional framework (van den Toorn, Trofino, Abouaoun; Meredith). Iran, Saudi, and neighboring Sunnis states must be encouraged to form a new regional framework. Real stability in the region cannot be accomplished without bringing these actors in general agreement (van den Toorn).

Economic Revitalization of Iraq & Syria

Funds for the reconstruction of Iraq and Syria are essential not only to prevent humanitarian crisis, but to shore up the economic stability of the region. How reconstruction funds are handled could either

serve as a foundation for a new transparent and accountable economy system or entrench the population's perception of government corruption and negligence (van den Toorn).

Focus on Capacity, Autonomy, and Legitimacy

No matter what kind of states emerge from the post-ISIL environment—be they unified states of Iraq and Syria or federalized zone within each country—they all require three things: capacity, autonomy, and legitimacy. The Coalition can take action to support these three elements in a number of ways outlined in Spencer Meredith's contribution including the encouragement of nationalism and ensuring the reduction of violence.

Be Ready to Take Advantage of Cognitive Openings

Even if groups fight efforts to establish good governance or to lay down arms, there is often a few windows of opportunity to encourage these groups to join the fold (Meredith). These cognitive openings do occur. The USG has to be ready to take advantage of them. The Coalition should be looking for indicators of cognitive opening by conflicting parties through 1) moderated speech, 2) evidence of factional divisions within a group, and 3) failure to claim ownership for violence.

Increased Faith in Iraqi Special Forces

The fight against ISIL has proved that Iraq has at least one reliable force: the US-trained Iraqi Special Forces (ISOF) and Counter Terrorism Forces (ICTF), which includes Iraqis from all ethnic and religious backgrounds (Abdulla). The danger is that a prolonged infantry war for a unit designed for short, special operations might soon experience significant fatigue. But this unit provides a model and hope for what Iraqi forces could look like in an integrated Iraq.

US-bilateral Soft Power Engagement

The USG has soft power tools at its disposal to conduct symbolically meaningful engagement with the populations in Iraq and Syria. These tools "carry major weight in the MENA," according to van den Toorn. The USG could promote education exchanges, business opportunities, and cultural exchanges.

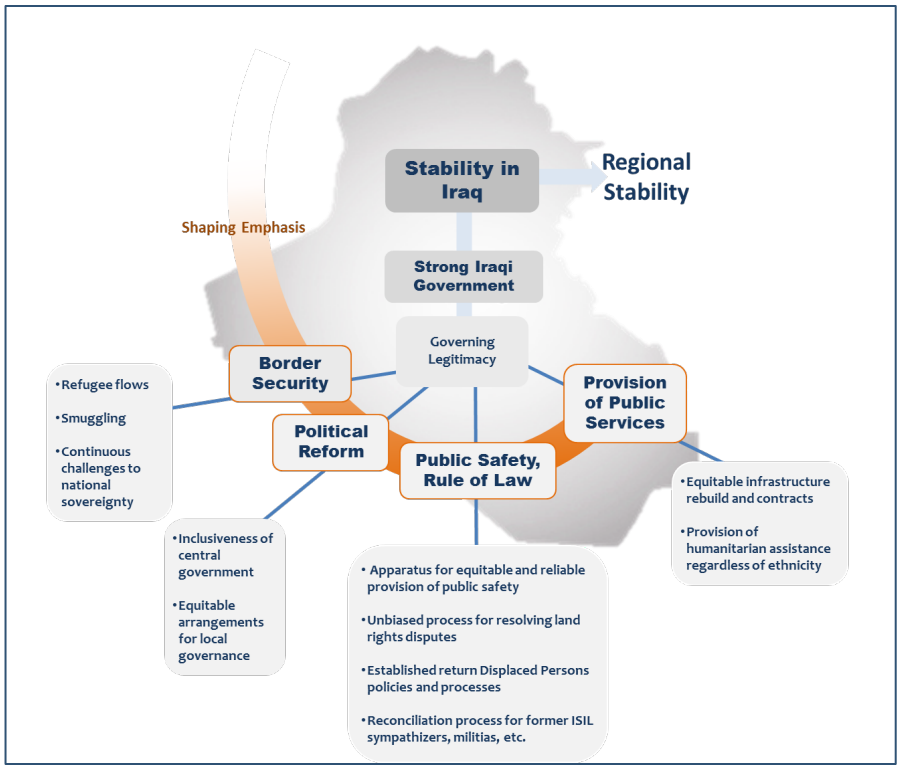
***Contributors**: Hassan Abbas (NDU), Hala Abdulla (USMC Center for Advanced Operational Culture), Elie Abouaoun (USIP), Ibrahim Al-Marashi (CSU San Marcos), Allison Astorino-Courtois (NSI), Munqith Dagher (IIACSS), Alexis Everington (MSI), Daveed Gartenstein-Ross (Valens Global), David Gompert (US Naval Academy, RAND), Zana Gulmohamad (University of Sheffield), Vern Liebl (CAOCL), Clark McCauley (Bryn Mawr College), Spencer Meredith III (NDU), Jean Palmer-Moloney (Visual Teaching Technologies), Diane Maye (Embry Riddle Aeronautical University), Yezid Sayigh (Carnegie Middle East Center), Steffany Trofino (US Army), Christine van den Toorn (American University of Iraq Sulaimani)*

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

What opportunities are there for USCENTCOM to shape a post-ISIL Iraq and regional security environment promoting greater stability? Executive Summary

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI

The expert contributors to this paper agree on the relationship between regional security and stability in Iraq: A strong and stable Iraqi government is a fundamental component of regional stability. The key to stability in Iraq is the popular legitimacy of central and local governance. Rather than operationally specific proposals, the experts suggest "shaping objectives" that USCENTCOM can use to prioritize and guide planning of shaping and engagement activities in four areas most critical for enhancing stability in Iraq: Political Reform, Border Security, Public Safety/Rule of Law, and Provision of Public Services. While USCENTCOM may take the lead in assisting Iraqis with issues such as border security and public safety, it likely would play a supporting role on the political and rule of law issues discussed below.



The Meaning of "Post-ISIL"

First, a point of clarification. "Post-ISIL" may be a misleading term. John Collison of USSOCOM and David Gompert of RAND caution US and Coalition planners to avoid the trap of assuming that a "post-ISIL" Iraq or Syria means that no ISIL elements are present. Rather, what might more accurately be called the "post-Caliphate" phase in Iraq should be understood as one in which ISIL no longer holds significant territory, but "remnants" of the group remain in control of some small towns and villages.

Shaping Opportunities for a more Secure Environment

There is (uncharacteristic) agreement among international relations scholars on the factors that determine the stability of a state: 1) the extent to which it is seen as a legitimate governing authority by

its population; 2) the degree to which the state has a monopoly on the use of force within its borders (i.e., internal sovereignty); and 3) the state's ability to secure those borders (a component of external sovereignty).

Shaping Objective: Enhance GoI Governing Legitimacy among all Factions

Means: Support political reform, confederal system that decentralizes governance and political power while retaining the state

Drs. Belinda Bragg and Sabrina Pagano of NSI use causal loops to illustrate the stability dynamics in Iraq and why it is impossible to ameliorate security concerns without also addressing the political and social factors that determine how people view the government. They write that in Iraq, "security is intrinsically linked to perceptions of governing legitimacy and the dynamics of ethno-sectarian relations." As a consequence, political reform that forges reconciliation between Shi'a and Sunni, and accommodates Kurdish and Arab desires for greater autonomy is an unavoidable prerequisite for a stable and legitimate Iraqi state. Similarly, Dr. Dianne Maye (Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University) argues that encouraging local autonomy, decentralizing power out of Baghdad, and structuring the government to avoid "concentration of power in any one ethnic, political, or religious group" are prerequisites for stability in Iraq. She recommends that the USCENTCOM should support work to shape the political environment in ways that promote "strong, yet dispersed, self-governance in a confederal system" in Iraq that balances central government decision-making with the desire for increased autonomy in the provinces.

Shaping Objective: Enhance GoI Internal Sovereignty

Means: Increase the capacity of, and popular trust in, the Iraqi Security Forces, e.g., by:

- **putting Iraqi forces in front only when able to provide effective, impartial service**
- **including Sunni Arabs at highest ranks of ISF**
- **encouraging consolidation of security authority while allowing for local preferences**

Security forces and police are often the most visible reflections of the domestic intentions and capability of the state. This is especially the case in a highly volatile security environment. In Iraq, it is likely that a potent, locally-appropriate but nationally-coordinated security apparatus will be essential for implementing and assuring stability-enhancing political reforms. USCENTCOM activities that encourage the capacity of, and help develop popular trust in, the state's security forces, regardless of ethnic or sectarian divisions, will be very important. The goal should be to shape Iraqi security activities to demonstrate the professionalism, impartiality, and capacity of the security apparatus. The raison d'etre of a government is to provide service to its citizens. When it is unable or unwilling to do so, it loses the trust of its constituents. Whenever possible and whenever it can be done fairly and impartially, the Government of Iraq, rather than sectarian security forces, Coalition forces, or even NGOs, should provide citizens with services such as public safety and policing, justice and reconciliation, humanitarian

assistance, and border control. Doing so not only improves internal security and public safety but enhances the legitimacy of the government as well. While allowing non-GoI entities to provide local services may be expedient, it erodes trust in the government, and thus in its longer-term ability to govern. When security forces are not seen as impartial and dependable protectors of all segments of society, more credible alternative sources of security will be found. This is precisely the context that facilitated ISIL's rapid rise in Iraq.

Bragg and Pagano (NSI) recommend two ways in which USCENTCOM might help shape the situation. First, they suggest that USCENTCOM encourage consolidation of Iraqi security forces. This does not necessarily mean forging a single, central government tightly controlled national security organization, but instead that there is a single authority that sets the standards for national and regionally appropriate security forces. Second, encouraging recruitment of experienced Sunni officers—many of whom will be former Ba'athists—into the highest ranks of the Iraqi Security Forces and local police may help "alleviate fears that the process of removing ISIL forces will be used as cover for reprisals against Sunni populations … and as a means of bolstering Shia political and military dominance." Failure to incorporate Sunni in leadership roles "increases the probability that Sunni tribal elders will look to provide their own security in the future," which will expand the number of sectarian militia and the number of security forces laying claims to authority.

Shaping Objective: Enhance GoI External Sovereignty
Means: Build Iraqi capacity to secure and control its borders

Dr. Diane Maye (Embry-Riddle) discusses another prerequisite of stability in Iraq: the Government's ability to secure its borders, a key component of external sovereignty. Here again, the capacity to secure its own borders is not solely a security issue but a political one as well: it is a visible means of demonstrating and enhancing the credibility of the Baghdad government as a capable and legitimate political authority to domestic constituents as well as foreign interventionists. As a result, Maye recommends that US and Coalition forces work to ensure that Iraq's security apparatus is able to secure its international borders. Without secure borders, Maye predicts that Iranian smugglers will continue to "freely traffic narcotics, arms, organs, and other illegal merchandise across the region. Furthermore, the Jordanians, Lebanese, and Europeans will be host to ever-increasing numbers of refugees. Nefarious organizations will achieve their aims as they obtain more and more political, economic, and military power."

Mosul as a Template for Shaping Operations in other areas

Shaping Objective: Demonstrate Success in post-battle Environment

Means: Encourage post-liberation calm in Mosul, e.g., by:

- **helping negotiate multi-group security arrangements**
- **prohibiting retribution**
- **helping to forge policies for Displaced Persons' return; reconciliation**

Finally, John Collison of USSOCOM offers suggestions for promoting security prior to, and following, the liberation of Mosul from ISIL. These efforts not only would help stabilize the volatile environment around Mosul, but could serve as a template or set of precedents for post-battle shaping in other areas of Iraq. In coordination with USG and Coalition partners, USCENTCOM can engage with key military and militia leaders to help manage post-liberation expectations and quell jockeying for political position, resources, and territory among the groups operating in and around Mosul. Collison (USSOCOM) highlights two issues that demand particular and immediate attention: 1) the need to establish common understanding of the policies and procedures that will be used to return displaced persons to their homes in a reasonable and equitable manner; and 2) articulation of reconciliation policies and procedures that will be used for those accused as ISIL sympathizers or having committed sectarian violence (e.g., screening process, arrest criteria, who would stand trial, etc.)

Immediately following liberation of Mosul, USCENTCOM can use its access to the leaders of multiple security forces to shape an environment conducive to stability by ensuring that: 1) Iraqi Security Forces allow humanitarian assistance to reach all displaced persons (DP) regardless of ethnicity; 2) post-conflict security arrangements are seen as equitable and at least minimally acceptable by all of the various security forces around the city; 3) Iraqi Forces establish security buffers to prohibit violent retribution against vulnerable ethnic populations and those accused as ISIL sympathizers; and 4) public services (e.g., water, food, justice/police, fire, medical) are rebuilt and/or provided to Iraqis regardless of ethnicity. This may require oversight of which Iraqi groups stand to benefit from what are likely to be very lucrative reconstruction contracts post-conflict.

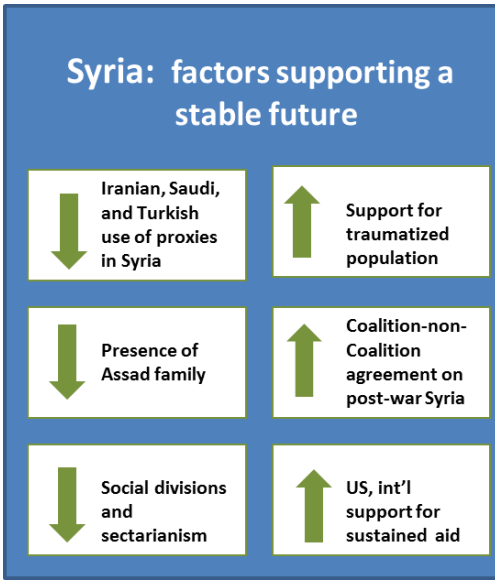
***Contributors**: Dr. Belinda Bragg and Dr. Sabrina Pagano (NSI); David C. Gompert (RAND); John Collison (USSOCOM); Dr. Diane Maye (Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University)*

***Editor**: Allison Astorino-Courtois (NSI)*

What are the factors that will influence the future of Syria and how can we best affect them? Executive Summary

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI

Experts varied from pessimistic (chronic warfare) to cautiously optimistic regarding their expectations for the future of Syria, yet mentioned many of the same factors that they felt would influence Syria's future path. Most of these key factors – ranging from external geopolitical rivalries to the health and welfare of individual Syrians – were outside what typical military operations might affect. Instead they center on political and humanitarian recovery, healing of social divisions and the solid backing of international actors that agree on what that recovery will entail. The six factors are described below.



External Factor: the use of Iranian, Saudi proxies in Syria

Iranian and Saudi use of proxy forces is one of the wild-cards in the future of Syria and is probably quickest way to reignite violence in the wake of any cease-fire or negotiated settlement. In fact, the intensity of the Iran-Saudi regional power struggle and how this might play out in Syria was the factor most mentioned by the SMA experts.

Encouraging the conditions necessary for stability in Syria requires discouraging Iran-Saudi rivalry in Syria. This can be done in a number of ways including offering for security guarantees or other inducements to limit proxyism in Syria (e.g., for Iran promise of infrastructure reconstruction contracts). Unfortunately, Iran stands to have greater leverage in Syria following the war, regardless of whether Assad stays or goes. If Assad or loyalist governors remain in Syria they will be dependent on Iran (and Russia) for financial and military support. As Yezid Sayigh (Carnegie Middle East Center) writes, "even total victory leaves the regime in command of a devastated economy and under continuing sanctions." Still, if Assad is ousted and Iranian political influence in the country wanes, its economic influence in Syria should remain strong. Since at least 2014 Iran, the region's largest concrete producer has been positioning itself to lucrative gain post-war infrastructure construction contracts giving it significant influence over which areas of Syria are rebuilt and which groups would benefit from the rebuild. Under these conditions, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and/or Turkey could ramp up their efforts to contain Iranian influence by once again supporting aggrieved Sunni extremists. This would be all the more likely, if as Josh Landis predicts, "Assad, with the help of the Russians, Chinese, Iraqis and Hezbollah, will take back most rebel held territory in the next five years."

External Factor: the degree of Coalition-non Coalition agreement on the governance and security conditions of post-war Syria

Lt Col Mel Korsmo an expert in civil war termination from Air University concludes that a negotiated settlement is the best path to political transition and resolution of the civil conflict in Syria. Others felt that any resolution of the Syrian civil conflict would depend on broad-based regional plus critically, US and Russian (and perhaps Chinese) agreement on the conditions of that resolution. The first question is whether there remain any elements of 2012 Geneva Communiqué or UN Security Council resolution 2254 which endorsed a roadmap for peace in Syria that might be salvaged. Lacking agreement among the major state actors, the authors expected that proxy warfare would continue in Syria. Moshe Ma'oz (Hebrew University) and others however argued that it may be too late for the US to wield much influence over the future path of Syria; it has already ceded any leverage to Russia and Iran. Others argue that the way the US might regain some leverage is by committing to the battle against Assad with the same effort given to defeating ISIL. Nevertheless, there is general agreement that it is imperative to attempt now to forge agreement on the clearly-stated steps to implementing a recovery plan for Syria.

External Factor: US and Coalition public support for sustained political, security and humanitarian aid for Syria

Another condition that must be met if the US and Coalition countries are to have impact on political and social stability in Syria is popular support for providing significant aid to Syria over an extended period of time. This may be a tall order, particularly in the US where the public has long thought of Syria as an enemy of Israel and the US in the Levant. Compounding this, the experts argue that when warfare comes to an end in Syria the regime will be so dependent on Russia (and Iranian) aid, that the Syrian government will lose its autonomy of action. While encouraging Americans to donate to charitable organizations aiding Syrian families may not be too difficult, gaining support for sustained US government assistance in the amounts and over the length of time required is likely to be a significant challenge. It is also one that could be quickly undermined by terror attacks emanating from the region.

Internal Factor: the role of Assad family

Osama Gharizi of the United States Institute of Peace[22] points to the current "strength and cohesion" of the Syrian opposition and argues that a "disjointed, weakened, and ineffectual opposition is likely to engender [an outcome] in which the Syrian regime is able to dictate the terms of peace" –a situation which would inevitably leave members of the family or close friends of the regime in positions of power. Unfortunately, many of the experts believe that while there may be fatigue-induced pauses in fighting, as long as the Assad family remains in power in any portion of Syria civil warfare would continue.

[22] The opinion and analysis expressed is solely that of the author and does not necessarily represent USIP's position.

Furthermore separating Syria into areas essentially along present lines of control would leave Assad loyalists and their Iranian and Russian patrons in control of Damascus and the cities along the Mediterranean coast with much of the Sunni population relegated to landlocked tribal areas to the east. Such a situation would further complicate the significant challenge of repatriating millions of internally displaced persons (IDPs), many of whom lived in the coastal cities.

Acceding to Assad family leadership over all or even a portion of Syria is unlikely to offer a viable longer-term solution, unless two highly intractable issues could be resolved: 1) the initial grievances against the brutal minority regime had been successfully addressed; and 2) the Assad regimes' (father and son) long history of responding to public protest by mass murder of its own people had somehow been erased. The key question is how to remove the specter of those associated with Assad or his family who would invariably be included in a negotiated transition government. Nader Hashemi of the University of Denver suggests that US leadership in the context of the war in Bosnia is a good model: "the United States effectively laid out a political strategy, mobilized the international community, used its military to sort of assure that the different parties were in compliance with the contact group plan … it presided over a war crimes tribunal ..." In his view, prosecuting Assad for war crimes is an important step.

Internal Factor: What is done to repair social divisions and sectarianism in Syria

Nader Hashemi (University of Denver) and Murhaf Jouejati (Middle East Institute) observe that the open ethnic and sectarian conflict that we see in Syria today has emerged there only recently – the result of over five years of warfare, war crimes committed by the Alawite-led government, subsequent Sunni reprisals, the rise of ISIL and international meddling. As a result, there is now firmly-rooted sectarian mistrust and conflict in Syria where little had existed before. Other than pushing for inclusive political processes and rapid and equitable humanitarian relief, there is little that the US or Coalition partners will be able do about this in the short to mid-term. As Hashemi says, healing these rifts will be "an immense challenge; it will be a generational challenge; it will take several generations." On the brighter side, he also allows that in his experience most Syrians "are still proud to be Syrians. They still want to see a cohesive and united country." While separation into fully autonomous polities is untenable, reconfiguring internal administrative borders to allow for "localized representation" and semi-autonomy among different groups may be a way to manage social divisions peacefully.

Internal Factor: Demographics and a traumatized population

There is a youth bulge in the Syrian population. Add to this that there is a large segment of young, particularly Sunni Syrians who have grown up with traumatic stress, have missed years of schooling so are deficient in basic skills, have only known displacement and many of whom have lost one or both parents in the fighting. There is hardly a more ideal population for extremist recruiters. Murhaf Jouejati (Middle East Institute) calls this "a social recipe for disaster" that he believes in the near future will be

manifest in increased crime and terrorist activity. As a consequence, it is important for the future of Syria and the region to assure that children receive education, sustained counseling and mental health services and permanent homes for families and children.

***Contributors**: Yezid Sayigh (Carnegie Middle East Center), Murhaf Jouejati (Middle East Institute), Moshe Ma'oz (Hebrew University, Jerusalem), Nader Hashemi (Center for Middle East Studies, Josef Korbel School of International Studies, University of Denver), Josh Landis (University of Oklahoma), Lt Col Mel Korsmo (Lemay Doctrine Center, Air University), Osama Gharizi (U.S. Institute of Peace)*

***Editor**: Allison Astorino-Courtois (NSI*

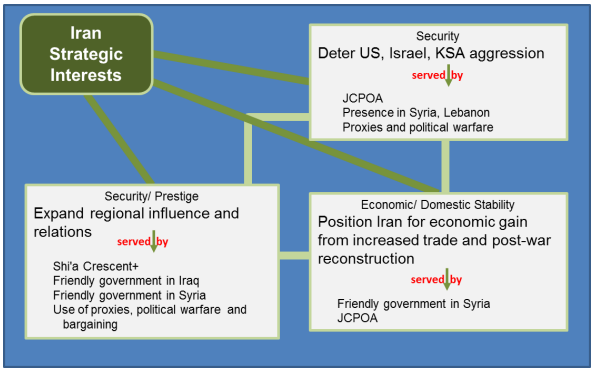
What are the strategic and operational implications of the Iran nuclear deal on the US-led coalition's ability to prosecute the war against ISIL in Iraq and Syria and to create the conditions for political, humanitarian and security sector stability? Executive Summary

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI

Prior to the signing of the Iran Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in July 2014, Iran watchers tended to anticipate one of two outcomes. One camp expected a reduction in US-Iran tensions and that the JCPOA might present an opening for improved regional cooperation between the US-led coalition and Iran. The other camp predicted that Iran would become more assertive in wielding its influence in the region once the agreement was reached.

Implications of JCPOA for the Near-term Battle: Marginal

Iran experts in the SMA network generally believe that JCPOA has had negligible, if any, impact on Iran's strategy and tactics in Syria and Iraq.[23] While Iran does appear to have adopted a more assertive regional policy since the agreement, the experts attribute this change to regional dynamics that are advantageous to Iran, and Iran having been on "good behavior during the negotiations" rather than to Iran having been emboldened by the JCPOA. Tricia Degennaro (TRADOC G27) goes a step further. In her view, the impact of the JCPOA on the battle against ISIL is not only insignificant, but concern about it is misdirected: "the JCPOA will not impede the Coalition's ability to prosecute the war … and create the conditions for political, humanitarian and security sector stability. Isolation of Iran will impede the coalition's mission."



itself

Richard Davis of Artis International takes a different perspective on the strategic and operational implications of the JCPOA. He argues that Saudi, Israeli and Turkish leaders view the JCPOA together with US support for the Government of Iraq as evidence of a US-Iran rapprochement that will curb US enthusiasm for accommodating Saudi Arabia's and Turkey's own regional interests. Davis expects that this perception will "certainly manifest itself in the support for proxies in Syria, Iraq and Yemen.

[23] Alireza Nader (RAND) explains that the reason we are unlikely to see a "cooperation dividend" emerge from the agreement, and why Iran's regional strategy will not change even following the Spring 2017 election is that Rouhani and moderate voices are simply unable to overcome the power wielded by the Ayatollah Khamenei and the Revolutionary Guards and other "reactionary or conservative forces in Iran."

Specifically, it means that Saudi Arabia and Turkey will likely be more belligerent toward US policies and tactical interests in the fight to defeat ISIL."

Implications of JCPOA for Post-ISIL Shaping: Considerable Potential

The SMA experts identified two ways in which the JCPOA could impact coalition efforts to stabilize the region in the mid- to longer-term: 1) if Iran were to use it as a means of generating friction in order to influence Coalition actions for example by convincing Coalition leaders that operations counter to Iranian interests (e.g., in Syria) could jeopardize the JCPOA; and, 2) indirectly, as having created the sanction relief that increases Iranian revenue and that can be used to fund proxy forces and other Iranian influence operations.

Provoking Friction as a Bargaining Chip. A classic rule of bargaining is that the party that is more indifferent to particular outcomes has a negotiating advantage. At least for the coming months, this may be Iran. According to the experts, Iran is likely to continue to use the JCPOA as a source of friction – real, or contrived – to gain leverage over the US and regional allies. The perception that the Obama Administration is set on retaining the agreement presents Tehran with a potent influence lever: provoking tensions around implementation or violations of JCPOA that look to put the deal in jeopardy, but that it can use to pressure the US and allies into negotiating further sanctions relief, or post-ISIL conditions in Syria and Iraq that are favorable to Iran. However, because defeat of ISIL and other groups that Iran sees as Saudi-funded Sunni extremists,[24] the experts feel that if Iran were to engage in physical or more serious response to perceived JPCOA violations, they would choose to strike out in areas in which they are already challenging the US and Coalition partners (e.g., at sea in the Persian Gulf and Red Sea; stepping up funding or arms deliveries to Shiite fighters militants in Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Yemen) rather than in ways that would actually impede ISIL's defeat.

Increased Proxy Funding. Iran has often demonstrated a strategic interest in maintaining its influence with Shi'a communities and political parties across the region, including of course, providing support to Shi'a militia groups (Bazoobandi, 2014).[25] Pre-JCPOA sanctions inhibited Iran's ability to provide "continuous robust financial, economic or militarily support to its allies" according to Tricia Degennaro (TRADOC G27). An obvious, albeit indirect implication of the JCPOA sanctions relief for security and political stability in Iraq in the longer term is the additional revenue available to Iran to fund proxies and conduct "political warfare" as it regains its position in international finance and trade.[26] It will take time

[24] Nader clarifies that because of its ambitions for pan-Islamic leadership, Iran is careful to identify ISIL and like groups that they oppose as "takfiris" – Wahhabis that maintain that Shi'a are not true Muslims.

[25] Bazoobandi, S. (2014). Iran's Regional Policy: Interests, Challenges, and Ambitions (Analysis No. 275). ISPI. Retrieved from http://www.ispionline.it/sites/default/files/pubblicazioni/analysis_275__2014_0.pdf

[26] An expert in the Iranian business sector, reports that with the signing of the JCPOA "after years of sanctions and limitations on business interactions" the agreement has engendered "a new hope in Iran for a revival" of its pre-1979 economic vitality. Still, the economic situation in Iran has yet to improve as a result of JCPOA and "there's a lot of public dissatisfaction."

for Iran to begin to benefit in a sustainable way from the JCPOA sanctions relief. As a result it is not as likely to be a factor in Coalition prosecution of the wars in Iraq and Syria, but later, in the resources Iran can afford to give to both political and militia proxies to shape the post-ISIL's region to its liking.

***Contributors**: Tricia Degennaro (Threat Tec, LLCI -TRADOC G27), Alireza Nader (RAND), Michael Eisenstadt and Michael Knights (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy), Alex Vantaka (Jamestown foundation)*

***Editor**: Allison Astorino-Courtois (NSI)*

What will be Iran's strategic calculus regarding Iraq and the region post-ISIL? How will JCPOA impact the calculus? What opportunities exist for the US/Coalition to shape the environment favorable to our interests? Executive Summary

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI

Iran's Approach in Iraq

A number of the Iran SMEs who contributed to this Quick Look characterized Iran's approach in Iraq as "flexible" and "opportunistic," rather than determined by a strict set of guidelines or strategies. Michael Eisenstadt and Michael Knights of the Washington Institute find Iran's "strategic style" in Iraq to be "subtle and thrifty," for example, in pursuit of what Alex Vatanka, an Iran scholar from the Middle East Institute, highlights as its ultimate security objective. That is, to prevent Iraq ever becoming a state that could threaten Iran as was done during the Iran-Iraq War—a time that remains in recent memory for many Iranians. This does not mean a failed state in Iraq, but does imply a militarily weak Iraq. In this regard, Iran could see US and Coalition efforts to build the Iraqi security forces into an inclusive and strong national force as a direct threat to its security.

Iran's Post-ISIL Strategic Calculus

Cognitive decision researcher, Allison Astorino-Courtois (NSI), points out that an actor's strategic calculus is context-dependent, and implies that a choice of behaviors is under consideration. There is therefore not a single strategic calculus that would explain the range of Iranian foreign policy choices and behaviors that US analysts and planners are likely to encounter. The good news is that while Iran's tactics may change slightly, there is little to suggest that Iran's key strategic interests will change with ISIL defeat: Iran saw what is perceived as Saudi-backed Sunni extremism as a significant threat before the emergence of ISIL, and surely will be prepared for the emergence of similar groups in the future.

The contributors to this Quick Look identified the following enduring strategic interests that should be expected to feature in almost any current Iranian calculus, as well as after the immediate threat of ISIL violence has weakened considerably. These are:

Safeguarding Iran's national security *by:*

- Ensuring Iranian influence in the future Iraqi government, Syria, and the region as a whole to maintain the leverage to defeat threats to Iran posed by a pro-US and/or Sunni-inclusive Iraqi government
- Mitigating the security threat from Saudi Arabia and Gulf states, and decreasing Saudi influence throughout the region
- Eliminating the existential threat to Iran and the region's Shi'a or Iran-friendly minorities from Sunni extremism, violent Wahhabism, and the re-emergence of ISIL-like groups

- Retaining and growing its influence in Lebanon and Gaza as leverage against Israel
- Combatting US regional influence in general

Defending Iran's internal sovereignty *by:*

- Managing public dissatisfaction within Iran; quelling unrest
- Securing Iran's borders and seacoast

Relieving economic stress and associated public discontent *by:*

- Defending Iranian economic assets and investments in Syria and gaining a foothold in the post-conflict economies (e.g., via construction contracts) in Syria and Iraq
- Working with other suppliers to increase global oil prices
- If and when Reformists are given leeway by the clergy and conservative forces in the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), opening economic relations with the EU[27]

Defending the Islamic identity and leadership of the regime *by:*

- Clergy and Supreme Leader balancing the independent political influence of the IRGC against popular and reformist views in the government

Impact of JCPOA

Although as reported in SMA Reachback V6, other experts disagree on this point, Eisenstadt and Knights (The Washington Institute) believe that an unintended consequence of the JCPOA has been greater Iranian assertiveness in the region, and that "the more the US steps back in Iraq, the more Iran will step forward." As a result, they argue, deterioration in US-Iran relations—perhaps as the result of a JCPOA-related crisis—could prompt an increase in Iranian challenges to US vessels in the region and arming of proxies. The implication is that the JCPOA may have increased the IRGC's ability to argue for a more assertive regional policy, and that a new nuclear crisis could further strengthen their hand in this regard.

A political football? The success or perceived failure of the JCPOA may have important domestic political implications in the run-up to Iran's May 2017 presidential election. Specifically, the perceived failure of the Agreement to produce widely anticipated improvements in the Iranian economy is a point on which President Rouhani and other reform-minded thinkers will be particularly vulnerable. [28] In fact, Gallagher

[27] Even Iranian officials perceived as more moderate, such as Abbas Araghi, a senior nuclear negotiator, have consistently stressed that "enmity between . . . [Iran] and America is still in place. . . . America from our view is still the Great Satan and nothing has changed." From: http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/05/22/elusive-equilibrium-america-iran-and-saudi-arabia-in-changing-middle-east-pub-55641

[28] When it was first concluded, the JCPOA was a domestic win for Rouhani and Reformist voices in Iran, and Rouhani saw a large spike in already high public approval, while approval of conservative politicians declined (Gallagher et al. 2015). At the time, polls indicated that the Agreement was overwhelmingly popular with Iranians, many of whom anticipated rapid improvements in their quality of life as a direct result. By summer 2016, however, support had fallen but remained greater than 50% of those polled. Gallagher et al. (2016) surmise that this drop-off occurred because a majority had not seen expected improvements in their standards of living.

et al. (2016) reported this summer that while Rouhani was still the front runner, his lead over former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had dropped to a narrow margin largely on account of Rouhani's perceived failure to improve the economy—a significant basis of the popular support for the JCPOA including that of supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. This fall, apparently at the express request of Khamenei, Ahmadinejad announced that he would not run in May 2107 citing a meeting he had had with the supreme leader in which he was told that his candidacy would not serve the interests of the country. (Quds Force commander Major General Qasem Soleimani who also had been mentioned in the press as a potential candidate has similarly announced that he does not intend to run.) Speculation is that the Khamenei is determined to both avoid a repeat of the 2009 popular protests following Ahmadinejad's divisive "stolen election", and to put up attractive conservative candidates to challenge the relatively moderate Rouhani. However, there is also conjecture that Khamenei, who has been a vocal opponent of the JCPOA and a number of Rouhani's other policies may not approve Rouhani's run for re-election either. The official, vetted candidate list will be announced in April 2017.

Finally, Eisenstadt and Knights (The Washington Institute) argue that to compensate the IRGC for acquiescing in the JCPOA, it has been given greater latitude to "(flex) its muscles abroad to demonstrate that it remains in control of Iran's regional policies."

Shaping Opportunities

The SMEs offer a number of suggestions for opportunities to:

Counter Iranian influence in Iraq

- Ensure long-term, multi-national commitment and funding to security in Iraq lasting beyond the war against ISIL (Michael Eisenstadt and Michael Knights, Washington Institute)
- Help the Iraqi Government resist Iranian pressure to institutionalize the PMUs as a military force independent of the Iraqi Security Forces (Eisenstadt and Knights, Washington Institute)
- Encourage Arab states to view the current Iraqi Government and press for influence on the basis of their common Arab identity, rather than continue to see the government as Shi'a first, and thus an inevitable ally of Iran (Alex Vantaka, Middle East Institute)

Increase stability in the region

- Provide Iran incentives for "positive behaviors" that reinforce its perception that it is succeeding in "re-creat[ing] the international order" (Bob Elder, GMU and Hunter Hustus, HQ USAF)
- Recognize that Iran views the Syrian War as "an existential matter for the Alawites in Syria and Shiites in neighboring states" and adjust US and partner activities to allay Iranian perceptions of sectarian threats (Bob Elder, GMU and Hunter Hustus, HQ USAF)
- Coordinate with Iran on pursuing the US shared interest in shoring up the stability and legitimacy of the Abadi government among Sunni Iraqis to reduce the appeal of violent jihadism among disaffected Sunni Iraqis (Bob Elder, GMU and Hunter Hustus, HQ USAF)
- Provide security/prestige guarantees to Iran in exchange for its encouraging sincere efforts at sectarian power-sharing by the Abadi government in Iraq (Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI)

***Contributors**: Michael Eisenstadt and Michael Knights (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy); Alex Vatanka (Middle East Institute; Jamestown Foundation); Allison Astorino-Courtois (NSI); Robert Elder (George Mason University) and Hunter Hustus (HQ USAF); Alireza Nader (RAND)*

***Editor**: Allison Astorino-Courtois (NSI)*

What significance will small military groups, particularly in Northern Syria, have in a post-ISIL Levant? How should CENTCOM best shape or influence these groups? Executive Summary

Dr. Kathleen Reedy, RAND Corporation

The primary theme that all of the experts touched upon is that there will be no single unified situation regarding either the military groups or status of northern Syria in a post-ISIL environment. The current fractured nature of the resistance groups in the area will continue, with different sub-regions experiencing different likely outcomes with different actors. Dr. Craig Whiteside (Naval War College) also includes the important caveats that a) post-ISIL means after ISIL loses its ability to control extended territory, as it will likely continue to hold control of villages across Syria and Iraq for some time to come; and b) this question is predicated on continued U.S. strategic interest in engaging in Syria in the near- and medium-term future. A third assumption is that these militant groups continue to operate. If a political solution can ever be reached, some of these militias will likely sign on to the agreement and may disarm or be incorporated into regime security forces, meaning many of them may be removed from consideration.

Assuming that the U.S. will continue some level of involvement in Syria, the wide variety of actors and situations on the ground will necessitate taking a broad variety of tactics, as each organization and population will require different approaches. In some instances, this may mean acknowledging that CENTCOM will be unlikely to be able to engage in effective ways and even where it can, as Mr. Vern Liebl (Marine Corps University) notes, may have to be resigned to only having limited and short-term influence.

Wide Variation by Region and Actors

The experts agree that there will be a wide degree of variation in what happens with the military groups after ISIL loses control over the extended territory of the caliphate. Faysal Itani (Atlantic Council) and Liebl both suggest that the vacuum left by ISIL will be filled by the Syrian regime, Kurdish forces, and the broad spectrum of Syrian opposition groups. Whiteside considers the remainder of the ISIL forces and those they manage to recruit part of this milieu as well.

Itani and Liebl offer that the Kurdish population will be one of the dominant players in northern Syria after the fall of ISIL, with the PYD continuing to serve as the political arm and the YPG as the militant one. The Kurdish groups are likely to hold their current territory along the northern border of the country as well as contest areas in the northeast. Their ability to hold ground much in more ethnically

diverse territories may be less effective, but as a militia and a political force, they are likely to remain a key player. Itani notes that some of the Kurdish power in the northeast will be contested by various Arab militias, some of which participated as part of Euphrates Shield. Liebl describes the wide variety of militias that are likely to compete for power, each of which has their own agenda. Jabhat Fateh al Sham (JFS, formerly al-Nusra) may attempt to gain some control here as well, but is likely to be poorly received by the local population and may instead be coopted by ISIL.

Northwest of Aleppo and into Idlib Province, where ISIL has had no real influence, are likely to continue to see the influence of JFS and the only somewhat more moderate Salafi Ahrar al-Sham. The only major contender for control against them in the region will be the regime coming from the south and Aleppo, but it may take extended periods of counterinsurgency efforts to fully eliminate them (unless they can be brought into a political solution, which JFS has shown no interest in and Ahrar al-Sham seems to be divided on), meaning they are likely to remain active and violent, if underground.

Whiteside focuses on the Salafi groups, particularly on what the remnants of ISIL will likely do in the wake of such an event. Under different names, he argues, the Islamic State has been in a similar position twice before, which will likely serve as an indicator of how they may react in the future. A defeated ISIL would find core areas in Iraq and Syria where the reach of the government is limited, which would include dozens of places in Iraq (particularly in Anbar, the Jazira desert, and Diyala and Salahuddin provinces) and even more in Syria. In these locations, they would try to keep the flames of resistance alive while waiting for opportunities to take advantage of the environment (such as poor governance or sectarian behavior). They would likely not only do so using their own forces, but would attempt to recruit and coopt other Salafi groups and fighters into an umbrella movement, as they did (as Tawhid wal Jihad and later AQI) in Iraq in 2003-2006, using financial and political rewards as a recruiting incentive.

In addition, there are a number of other, more pro-regime militant organizations that will be vying for control, including the regime itself and Hezbollah (as well as the Syrian-based Shi'a militias backed by Iran). These groups will be attempting to solidify the regime's control, but what and how they do so, and how they interact with other extant militias, is highly uncertain at this point.

CENTCOM Engagement Will Have to Be Tailored

All of the experts agree that future engagement from CENTCOM will have to be tailored to the specific group they are attempting to influence and much of it will depend on how the political situation unfolds. Itani notes that relationships do exist between the US and some groups, but were mainly forged in the covert operations rooms set up in Jordan and Turkey rather than via CENTCOM, and have been strained by local perceptions that the United States is no longer concerned with the war and focuses exclusively on ISIL and, increasingly, JFS. Repairing these relations and re-establishing credibility will be a challenge, but important if CENTCOM wishes to exert lasting influence rather than just transactional engagements.

Below are examples provided by the experts of particular militant groups and advice on how to engage them.

- **PYD/YPG:** Liebl describes the history of U.S. engagement with the Kurdish forces. In essence, the U.S. has been inconsistent with its support, supplying more and less of it at various points since 2013. While the Kurds have generally been happy to work with U.S. forces and will undoubtedly continue to do so, they may not see the U.S. as a "stable" ally, especially when Turkey and Russia are involved. Maintaining credible and consistent relations with them will be an essential part of CENTCOM's approach, though the Kurds may always hedge.
- **Anti-Regime Militias:** This umbrella consists of a wide and diverse range of militant groups, each with very different relations toward the U.S. and very different agendas. Some will be more accessible to CENTCOM influence, but some may be out of reach. Liebl cautions that the U.S. will need to be realistic about how much influence it can actually wield with these groups. He provides examples , including
    - The Syriac Military Council, allied to the PYD, but with little connection to the U.S., meaning the U.S. will likely have little ability to influence it
    - The Turkmen Sultan Murid Division, which is anti-PYD and neo-Ottoman, affiliated with the FSA and closely coordinates with the Turkish Army may be another group the U.S. may not be able to influence
    - The Turkmen Seljuk Brigade, which is pro-Kurdish now, may be more amenable to U.S. support in terms of training and financing.
    - The Sunni Arab Hamza Division, associated with the FSA, and Jbhat Thuwar al-Raqqa were both part of the U.S. train and equip program are likely to continue to be amenable to U.S. support and leveage.
    - The al-Mu'tasim Brigade, also with the FSA has received support from the U.S., but is more closely allied with Turkey, so should be treated with caution.
    - The Jaysh al-Thuwar are largely independent in their anti-ISIL fight, and having not yet accepted U.S. aid, are unlikely to do so.
- **Pro-Regime Militias**: There are a number of these of different ethnic and religious backgrounds that the U.S. is unlikely to ever be able to influence, given the political differences between the regime and the U.S., including, the regime itself, Hezbollah, and smaller regional groups like the Assyrian Gozarto Protection Force and Sootoro.
- **Hardline Salafi Groups:** The remnants of ISIL and JSF will continue to be a combative one.
- **Ahrar al-Sham:** Itani notes that engaging this group will be somewhat more complex than the other Salafi organizations, because while it has often worked closely with JFS, it does not aspire to a transnational jihad. This group is internally divided between those who are pushing for outreach to the U.S., and others who are committed to a more hostile form of Salafism. This is a powerful group and an important one. The U.S.' best bet is to try to separate the reconcilables from the hostiles, by offering a choice between US support (including against ISIL and the regime) and conflict.

Contributors: Mr. Vern Liebl (Marine Corps University); Mr. Faysal Itani (Atlantic Council); Dr. Craig Whiteside (Naval War College)

Executive Summary

Dr. Kathleen Reedy, RAND Corporation

How does the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict influence, affect, and relate to current conflicts in the region? Executive Summary

Dr. Jonathan Wilkenfeld, University of Maryland

The Israel-Palestine conflict has been a constant presence in the Middle East since Israel's independence in 1948. But even earlier in the 20th century, Arabs and Jews were in conflict over competing claims to the same territory. The Balfour Declaration of 1917, which provided a home for the Jewish people in parts of Palestine, along with the Sikes-Picot Agreement of 1916 which divided up the territories formerly ruled by the Ottoman Empire, remain a continuing thorn in the side for Arab states in general, and for Palestinians in particular. It is also true that the rise of Arab nationalism, coupled with the centuries-old Sunni-Shi'a divide, have shaped the perceptions and destinies of Arab leaders and populations.

The critical question is the extent to which these seemingly separate conflicts overlap such that developments in one impact the others. In particular, under what circumstances does the status of the Israel-Palestine conflict today impact the larger conflict dynamics at play in the region? Is Israel-Palestine at the heart of all conflicts in the region, or is it merely a convenient whipping boy and perhaps even a singular unifying factor for populations and states riven by seemingly unrelated competitions for power?

Not surprisingly, then, the subject matter experts we have consulted on this question have expressed a considerable diversity of opinion. Nevertheless, one critical theme has gained traction. For the most part, the SMEs argue that Israel-Palestine has little to do with the broader conflict dynamics that characterize the region today. The quest for greater participatory democracy that typified the Arab Spring movements in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Yemen would seem to be unrelated to developments in Israel-Palestine. Similarly, the overarching competition for power in the region between Shi'a and Sunnis, as reflected in the intense competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia, has on the surface little to do with Israel-Palestine. But as all the SMEs observe, Israel-Palestine is invoked at the level of a "sacred value," in this case a deep-rooted feeling of shame and helplessness that periodically rises to the surface and is invoked either as a scapegoat by failing governments or as an unfulfilled quest by their restless populations. And so even as all dismiss the notion that the Israel-Palestine conflict is the primary driver of all conflict in the region, its invocation as a continuing grievance and as a motivating force must be factored into our own perceptions of these other conflicts and their underlying causes.

And thus, the answer to the Command's seemingly straightforward question is complex. The circumstances under which Israel-Palestine becomes a central narrative for Arab leaders and their populations with quite diverse local conditions and goals can include these and other factors:

- National leaders seek to divert attention from internal divisions and their inability to address local grievances – economic, social, and political

- Local populations express anger with the US and the West for their historical support for authoritarian regimes through criticism of their role in perpetuating the Israel-Palestine conflict
- Islamist revolutionary movements seek a unifying theme to garner support from local populations through championing the Palestinian narrative

In the following passages, we summarize the key points made by the group of SMEs consulted on this issue. This is followed by their full input, and biographical sketches.

Professor Michael Brecher (Angus Professor of Political Science at McGill University) takes the position that to view the Israel-Palestine conflict as a central driver of all conflict in the Middle East is to ignore dynamic forces of change in the region, particularly increasingly positive relations between Israel and several of its Arab neighbors. This latter trend has the effect of blunting the impact of Israel-Palestine tensions. Even though the relations between these former inter-state adversaries could not move beyond a Cold Peace, their bilateral conflicts and the Arab/Israel Conflict as a whole had begun the process of accommodation and conciliation. The extent of change became clear at the turn of the century (2000), when the Arab states adopted the Arab Peace Initiative, which offered Israel recognition and normal relations with all members of the Arab League, in exchange for Israel's withdrawal from its occupation of Arab territories in 1967 and acceptance of the Palestinians Right of Return, in accordance with the UN 1949 Resolution. Israel did not accept those conditions and the conflict continued. Nonetheless, Israel's right-wing Prime Minister publicly accepted the 'two state' solution to the Israel/Palestine conflict in 2009. Moreover, the Arab League renewed its 'Peace initiative' in 2007 and 2014.

General (Ret.) Shlomo Brom (Senior Research Associate at the Tel Aviv University Institute for National Security Studies) argues that while neither the Arab Spring uprisings nor the current Sunni-Sh'ia divide have anything to do with Israel-Palestine, sometimes Israel serves as a convenient card played by these regional powers in their struggles. For example, Iran is using its hostility to Israel as a way to buy influence in Sunni Arab societies. Nevertheless, Arab societies' frustrations that led to the present chaos in countries like Libya, Yemen, and Syria were fed also by feelings that they were wronged by the Western powers and Israel and the perceived injustice done to the Palestinians are part of these wrongs in the Arab psyche. One can also argue that the Arab authoritarian regimes that are another cause for the present situation fed on the Arab-Israeli conflict and used it to justify their rule and the huge expenditure on security and the armed forces that were the base of their rule.

Professor Aron Shai (Eisenberg Professor for East Asian Affairs Departments of History and East Asian Studies, Tel Aviv University) posits that it is easy to dismiss Israel's culpability in the larger regional, ideological, and religious conflicts sweeping the region today. But for Israel's current right wing government, the mere fact that Arab states and extremist movements invoke Israel-Palestine as a basis for struggle, is used as justification for not seriously initiating sincere steps towards peace. Arab and Palestinian views tends to magnify the impact of the conflict and in fact internationalize it. This serves Israel's interests quite well.

Professor Shibley Telhami (Sadat Chair for Peace and Development, University of Maryland, and Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution) offers the following listing of instances where the Israel-Palestine conflict has been a factor in seemingly unrelated conflicts.

- The social media groups that were critical for the Arab uprisings in 2010 were initially mobilized over the 2008-9 Gaza war between Israel and Hamas

- Opposition groups, including militant Islamists, continue to invoke Palestine centrally in their mobilization efforts

- The verdict is still out on how much stability will come to both Egypt and Jordan, with the opposition in both continuing to invoke Palestine/Israel

- Despite the Arab media focus on the Arab uprisings, especially Syria, once war flared in Gaza again in 2014, Palestine overtook all other stories including Syria

- Despite stable peace agreements between Israel on the one hand and Egypt and Jordan on the other hand, Egyptians and Jordanians continue to reject Israel over its occupation

- While some Arab states in the GCC would like to cooperate even more with Israel over some issues like Iran, they fear a domestic backlash (as happened recently over Saudis who made contacts with Israelis). And the take has been that Israel would make it harder for the Saudis to ask other Muslim nations to take its side against Iran if Israel is seen to be on the Saudis side.

- The Jerusalem issue remains one that resonates across the Muslim world. Crises could bring this to the top.

Contributors: *Professor Michael Brecher (Angus Professor of Political Science at McGill University), General (Ret.) Shlomo Brom (Senior Research Associate at the Tel Aviv University Institute for National Security Studies), Professor Aron Shai (Eisenberg Professor for East Asian Affairs, Departments of History and East Asian Studies, Tel Aviv University), Professor Shibley Telhami (Sadat Chair for Peace and Development, University of Maryland, and Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution), Dr. Jonathan Wilkenfeld (University of Maryland)*

Editor: *Dr. Jon Wilkenfeld*

What are the key factors or elements within the Government of Iraq that influence overall stability in Syria and Iraq? What are the tipping points for each? Executive Summary:

Mr. Jimmy Krakar, TRADOC G27 (CTR, IDSI)

Athena Simulation Modeler: Jumanne Donahue, TRADOC G27 (CTR, CGI)

The TRADOC G27 team assessed that the key factors within the Government of Iraq (GoI) that will influence overall stability in Iraq and Syria are directly related to reconciliation between the GoI and the Sunni population of Iraq.

Previous SMA/CENTCOM research identified the importance of reconciliation and posited four critical factors for Iraqi reconciliation to occur. Two of these factors—limited Shia support for PM al-Abadi and Intra-Sunni competition—are directly related to dynamics internal to GoI. After assessing the range of potential futures, the study team established that the range of futures ultimately reduces to two potential futures with the tipping point for each directly related to reconciliation between the GoI and the Sunnis. The first post ISIL future is the GoI attempts to directly control the territory liberated from ISIL; the second is the GoI devolves political control to a Sunni intermediary body which controls the area and is loyal to GoI.

The study team used the Athena Simulation to model both futures and determine their respective effects on stability in both Iraq and Syria over a one year period, following the military defeat of ISIL.[29] Figures 1 and 2 show how each Athena run resulted in a distinct outcome in regards to Iraqi stability. When the GoI attempted to directly control the newly freed territory it resulted in the GoI unable to establish effective control over large parts of Sunni Iraq. When the GoI used a Sunni intermediary to administer the newly liberated territory, the intermediary was able to control most of the liberated Sunni territory; however, this trend towards devolution of control resulted in the KRG controlling Kirkuk. In both futures neither the GoI nor the Sunni intermediary was able to exercise full control of Salah ad Din.[30] Neither Iraqi future affected stability in Syria

***Contributors**: Dr. Randa Slim, (Middle East Institute); Dr. Harith Hasan al-Qarawee (Crown Center for Middle East Studies, Brandeis University); Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, (NSI)*

[29] The Athena Simulation is a decision support tool designed to increase decision-makers' understanding of the effects of PMESII-PT variables on operations in a given area over time. It was developed by NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in conjunction with the US Army TRADOC G-27 Models and Simulations Branch.

[30] For simulation purposes the study team modeled the Sunni intermediary as a Sunni Council which was subordinate to GoI.

Executive Summary: Jimmy Krakar, TRADOC G27 (CTR, IDSI)

Athena Simulation Modeler: Jumanne Donahue, TRADOC G27 (CTR, CGI)

1: Messaging

2: The fight against ISIL

3: Encouraging Regional Stability

Part 4: Regional actor interests and motivations

5: Sources of extremism

6: ISIL support and recruitment

7: USG bureaucratic requirements

8: Post-ISIS Governance

9: Coalition Views

Regional Actor Interests and Motivations Executive Summaries

What are the strategic objectives and motivations of indigenous state and non-state partners in the counter-ISIL fight? Executive Summary[31]

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI

The following are high-level results of a study assessing Middle East regional dynamics based on the alignments and conflicts among three critical drivers: actor interests, resources and resolve. Expected outcomes are based on the strategic interests of regional actors.

ISIL will be defeated in Syria and Iraq

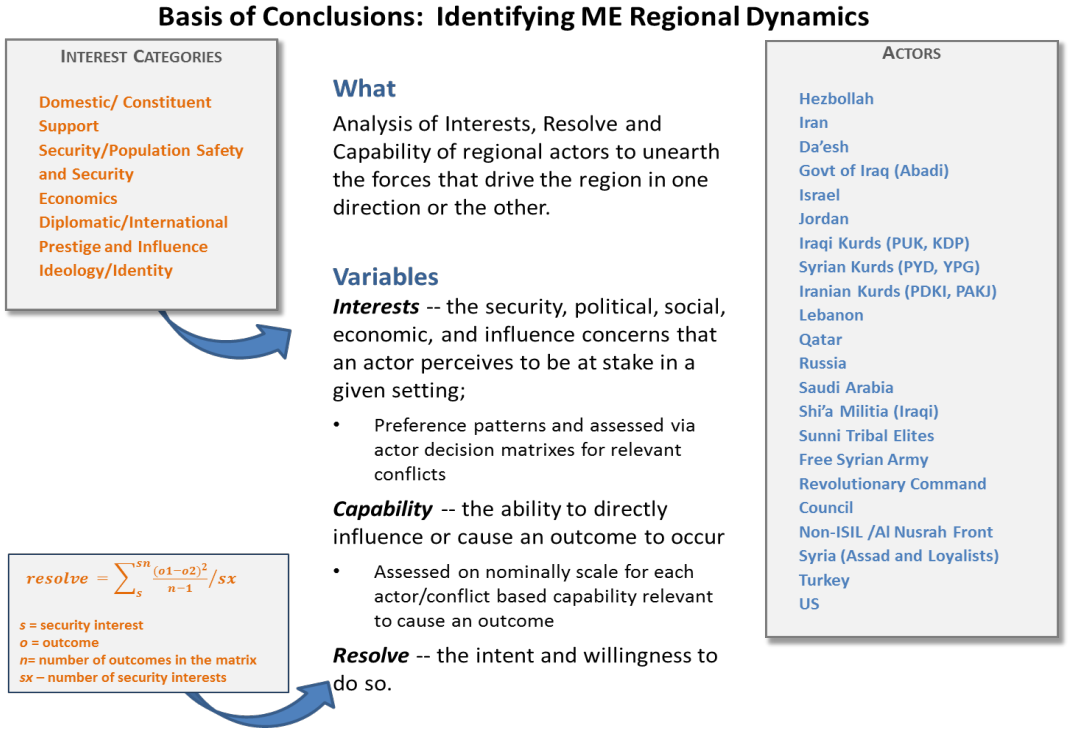
Based on the balance of actor interests, resolve and capability, the defeat of Islamic State organization seems highly likely (defeat of the ideology is another matter). Specifically, the push for ISIL defeat in Syria is led by Iran and the Assad regime, both of which have high potential capacity and high resolve relative to ISIL defeat. Only ISIL has high resolve toward ISIL expansion in Syria. Iran, Jordan,Iraqi Kurds, Saudi Arabia, and Shi'a Hardline & Militia, show highest resolve for ISIL defeat in Iraq.

Conflict will continue in Syria following ISIL defeat; will escalate significantly with threat of Assad defeat

Whether Syrian civil conflict will cease in the context of an ISIL defeat is too close to call. Assad, Russia and Iran have strong untapped capability to drive an Assad victory against the remaining Opposition although none show high resolve (i.e., the security value gained by an Assad victory versus continued fighting in Syria is not widely different. This reflects the Assad regime's competing security interests (i.e., one interest is better satisfied by continued conflict, another by Assad victory). Even when we assume the defeat of ISIL in Syria as a precondition, unless actor interests change dramatically, the number of interests served by continued conflict and the generally low resolve on both sides suggests that we should be skeptical of current agreements regarding the Syrian Civil War. Moreover, resolve scores rise sharply when continued conflict is replaced by the possibility of Assad defeat. Together these results suggest that unless Assad's, Iran's and Russia's perceived security concerns are altered significantly, these actors have both the capacity and will to engage strongly to avoid an impending defeat. The high

[31] This white paper does not represent official USG policy or position.

resolve of the three actors to avoid defeat should be taken as a warning of their high tolerance for escalation in the civil conflict.



Implication: Tolerating Russian-Iranian military activities in Syria and redirecting US resources to humanitarian assistance of refugees in and around Syria has greater value across the range of US interests and aligns more fully with the balance of US security interests in the region.

GoI lacks resolve to make concessions to garner support from Sunni Tribes

While the majority of regional actors favor the Government of Iraq (GoI) making concessions to Sunni and Kurdish groups following defeat of ISIL, only the Government of Iraq, Shi'a Hardline and Militia, Sunni Tribes and Iraqi Kurds have significant capability to cause this to happen or not. Unfortunately, the GoI and Shi'a have high resolve to avoid reforms substantive enough to alter Sunni factions' indifference between GoI and separate Sunni and/or Islamist governance. More unfortunately, when they believe the GoI will not make concessions, Sunni Tribes are indifferent between ISIL governance and the current Government controlling Iraq. That is, they have no current interest served by taking security risks associated with opposing ISIL. However, the outbreak of civil warfare in Iraq does incentivize GoI to make concessions. Iranian backing of substantial GoI reforms changes the GoI preference from minimum to substantive reforms without the necessity of civil warfare.

Implications: Now is the opportune time to engage all parties in publically visible dialogue regarding their views and requirements for post-ISIL governance and security. Engaging Sunni factions on security guarantees and requirements for political inclusion/power is most likely to be effective; Engaging Kurds on economic requirements and enhancing KRG international and domestic political influence encourage cooperation with GoI. Finally, incentivize Iran to help limit stridency of Shi'a hardline in Iraq eases the way for the Abadi government to make substantive overtures and open governance reform talks.

Saudi Arabia-Iran Proxy funding continues; easily reignites conflict

Use of proxy forces by Saudi Arabia and Iran is one of the quickest ways to reignite hostilities in the region, and even though direct confrontation between state forces is the worst outcome for both, the chances of miscalculation leading to unwanted escalation are very high. Both Saudi Arabia and Iran have high resolve to continue supporting regional proxies up to the point that proxy funding or interference prompts direct confrontation between state forces. This is driven by mutual threat perception and interest in regional influence. This leaves open the specter that any conflict resolution in the region could be reignited rapidly if the incentives and interests of the actors involved are not changed.

Implications: International efforts to recognize Iran as a partner, mitigate perceived threat from Saudi Arabia and Israel, and expand trade relations with Europe are potential levers for incentivizing Iran to limit support of proxies. Saudi Arabia may respond to warning of restrictions on US support if proxyism is not curtailed.

***Actor Interest Contributors**: Tom Lynch (National Defense University), Dr. Benedetta Berti (Fellow, Institute for National Security Studies, Tel Aviv; Fellow, Foreign Policy Research Institute), Jeff Weyers (iBrabo; University of LIverpool); Dr. Justin Gengler (Qatar University); Marc Hecker and Dr. Élie Tenenbaum (Institut Français des Relations Internationales); Hassan Hassan (Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy); Brig. Gen. (ret.) Shlomo Brom (Fellow, Center for American Progress); Alex Vatanka (Middle East Institute, The Jamestown Foundation); Dr. Hilal Khashan (American University of Beirut), Timothy Thomas (Foreign Military Studies Office, Ft. Leavenworth); Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, Dr. Belinda Bragg, Dr. Larry Kuznar, Mariah Yager, George Popp, Sarah Canna (NSI); Eugene Rumer (Russia and Eurasia Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace).*

***Editor**: Allison Astorino-Courtois (NSI)*

In light of their divergent goals and interests, what are the necessary factors that would permit the U.S.-led Coalition, regional stakeholders (including Israel, Russia, and Iran), or jihadist groups to achieve their aims in Iraq? Where do disparate groups' interests align and where do they diverge? What can the U.S. coalition do to deny adversaries the ability to achieve their goals? Executive Summary

Diane L. Maye, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University

Considering their divergent goals and interests, experts assessed the necessary factors that would permit the U.S.-led Coalition, Israel, Russia, France, Bahrain, Iraq, Turkey, the Kurds, the Assad regime, Iran, and jihadist groups to achieve their aims. They assessed where several disparate groups' interests align and where they diverge. When looking at the broad range of actors, a few patterns emerged. The first is in terms of where national security goals and interests were in alignment. Unsurprisingly, perennial allies such as the U.S., Israel and France had several specific points of convergence, as did Russia and Syria. The second is in areas of divergence. As expected, nefarious actors such as the jihadist groups were completely divergent from the interests of the other actors. When assessed at the macro-level three major generalities surfaced.

Aims – Alignment

Promoting Strong and Stable States. The first overarching theme was the goal of promoting strong and stable nation states. While not all the actors agreed on which nation states should be promoted, nearly each actor in the assessment had at least one state that was a priority. Both Bahrain (Gengler) and Russia seek their own regime's survival (Thomas). Both the U.S. and France see the value of strong Iraqi state (Maye, Tenebaum). France also seeks to limit instability across the Middle East, avoid destabilization in Lebanon, and promote non-hostile state in Syria (Tenebaum).

Relationship Building and Cooperation. A second major generality that emerged was in relationship-building and cooperation. Each of the actors that the experts assessed is prioritizing their relationships or ability to cooperate with strategic partners. For instance, the Israelis are seeking to expand relations with European powers and Arab states, maintain their strategic alliance with the U.S., and develop relationships with rising Asian powers like India and China (Brom). For military reasons, Bahrain needs to maintain its ties to the British and the Americans (Gengler). France seeks to strengthen strategic partnerships with Gulf monarchies (Tenebaum). Strategic cooperation with China and the BRICS is a key tenet of Russian foreign policy (Thomas), yet the Russians are also open to areas of cooperation with the U.S. and NATO on Syria (Thomas). Even the Islamist groups, who are non-state actors, must maintain relationships with wealthy Gulf states like Qatar and Saudi Arabia (Hassan).

Aims – Divergence

Pressure Other States. The third major pattern emerged is where national security goals and interests diverged. Each of the actors in this study seeks to limit the expansion, interference, or hegemonic aspirations of another state. From the Russian perspective, NATO seeks to contain Russia (Thomas). Israel and Bahrain seek to break/slow Iran from regional hegemony or acquiring nuclear weapons (Brom, Gengler). Russia seeks to put pressure on European Union (Thomas). Assad wants to stop the

Gulf States from pursuing regime change in Syria (Hassan). Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran would prefer to see less U.S. support for the Kurds (Carreau).

U.S./ Coalition Partners - Recommended Actions

Due to the complex nature of each actor's goals and interests, it will be very difficult for the U.S. and Coalition partners to create win-sets that will appease each group, yet nearly each actor (aside from the non-state actors and jihadist groups) would agree to the following generalized courses of action:

1. Develop a front to contain international jihadism (Tennebaum, Carreau)
2. Promote strong, yet sovereign, nation-states (Maye)
3. Uphold formally agreed upon spheres of influence (Carreau)

Points of Divergence / Negotiation

The central points of negotiation for the U.S. and Coalition partners is likely fall into the following three areas:

1. *Sovereignty* – While promoting strong and sovereign nation states is a goal, the issues of a two-state solution for Israel/Palestine; the independence of Kurdistan; and dispersed security/governance for Sunni Arabs in Syria and Iraq are going to be key points of negotiation.
2. *Regime leadership in Syria* –Each of the major players in this study would prefer to see stability in the Middle East, especially in Syria. The issue that U.S. policy-makers will face is compromising with Russia and Iran on who exactly will be the face of the regime in Syria; the Russians and the Iranians see value in the Assad regime, but a point of compromise may be in removing Assad yet keeping the regime Alawite (Carreau).
3. *Spheres of Influence* – It will be in the best interest of the major players to craft a reasonable "spheres of influence" strategy for the region (namely between Turkey, Russia, Iran, the GCC and the Western powers) while still upholding major tenets of the JCPOA, ensuring Israel's security, and not alienating the Sunni populations of Iraq and Syria (Carreau).

The table below shows a generalized composite summary of the interests/goals of the U.S., France, Israel, Russia, Iran, Bahrain, the Iraqi government, Iraq's Sunni factions, the Kurds, Turkey, the Assad regime, Syrian rebels and Jabhat Fateh al Sham, taken from the experts.

INTEREST/GOAL	U.S.	FR	IS	RU	IRAN	BA	IQ-Gov	IQ Sunni	KURDS	TURK	ASSAD	SY REBS	JFAS
Support Kurdish factions fighting ISIL	✓				-		-	-	✓	-	-	-	-
Promote a strong Iraqi state	✓	✓			-		✓	✓					
Defeat/degrade ISIL	✓												
Expand peaceful relationships with Arab states	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓				

Expanding relationships with the rising Asian powers: China and India	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓								
Limit instability throughout the Middle East	✓	✓	✓	✓									-
Contain international jihadism	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓		-
Promote the establishment of a stable and non-hostile state in Syria	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓		
Avoid further destabilization in Lebanon	✓	✓	✓										
Resisting the acceptance of Gulf-friendly Islamists	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓		
Prevent Russia from taking step harmful to Israel in the Middle East	✓		✓	-									
Prevent direct Iranian material support for domestic Shia groups	✓		✓		-	✓							
PREVENT IRAN FROM ACQUIRING MILITARY NUCLEAR CAPABILITIES	✓		✓		-								
Prevent Iran from using proxies against Israel	✓		✓		-								
Prevent Palestinian terror attacks in the West Bank and Israel	✓		✓										
Keep relations and cooperation with the European powers	✓		✓										
Contain Russia via political, economic, military and information pressure	✓	✓		-									
Mobilize a large coalition to help stabilize the region	✓	✓											
Limit the flow of refugees	✓	✓								✓			
Promote a cohesive and representative government in Iraq	✓	✓						✓					
Move Iran towards a greater opening and a more constructive foreign policy	✓	✓											
Maintain the diplomatic support and physical military presence of key international allies (the U.S. and the Britain)	✓					✓							
Stop the Gulf states from pursuit of regime change in Syria	✓										✓		
Exert pressure on the European Union	-	-		✓									
Keep the United States from exerting too much influence over the region	-			✓									
Strengthen Russian defense	-			✓									
Restore Russian influence in the Middle East	-			✓							✓	-	-
Provide support to Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad	-		-	✓	✓						✓	-	-

Curtail outside support of Kurds	-								-	✓			
Provide monetary and political support to Iraqi Shi'ia groups					✓	-	✓	-				✓	
Push an Iranian soft power strategy in Iraq					✓	-	✓	-			-		
Two-state solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict		✓	-										
Keep strategic alliance with the US		✓	✓										
Prevent or slow the normalization of Western relations with Iran			✓		-	✓							
Prevent and defend against Hezbollah attacks			✓										
Prevent and defend against Hamas attacks			✓										
Break Iran's led axis			✓		-								
Prevent Jihadist Salafist attacks against Israel			✓										
Strengthening strategic partnerships with Gulf monarchies		✓				✓							
Make sure Turkey remains a stable and reliable ally		✓											
Guarantee Russian regime survival				✓									
Return Russia to great power status				✓									
Implement Russian military policy through strategic deterrence				✓									
Deflect attention away from Russian activities in Crimea, Ukraine				✓									
Conduct integrated operations with Iranian, Hezbollah, and Syrian forces				✓	✓						✓		
Ensure (Bahrain's) regime security					-	✓							
Preserve the support of Sunni citizens via sectarian appeals						✓		-					
Gain more political support from Gulf States											-		
Gain more monetary support from Gulf States												✓	
Maintain an Alawite-led Government in Syria				✓	✓								
Maintain control over Iranian Kurds					✓				-				
Degrade the PKK									-	✓			
Maintenance of Territorial gains in Central Syria											-		✓

Strengthening the expansion of Salafi Jihadist movement in Syria.											-		✓
Rebranding Jabhat Fateh al-Sham											-		✓
Upholding JCPOA					✓								
Moderating Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (Jabhat al Nusra)											-		✓
Increase Jabhat Fateh al-Sham relevance and operational capability in Syria.											-		✓

INTEREST/GOAL	U.S.	FR	IS	RU	IRAN	BA	IQ-Gov	IQ Sunni	KURDS	TURK	ASSAD	SY REBS	JFAS
Support Kurdish factions fighting ISIL	✓				-		-	-	✓	-	-	-	-
Promote a strong Iraqi state	✓	✓			-		✓	✓					
Defeat/degrade ISIL	✓												
Expand peaceful relationships with Arab states	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓				
Expanding relationships with the rising Asian powers: China and India	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓								
Limit instability throughout the Middle East	✓	✓	✓	✓									-
Contain international jihadism	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓		-
Promote the establishment of a stable and non-hostile state in Syria	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓		
Avoid further destabilization in Lebanon	✓	✓	✓										
Resisting the acceptance of Gulf-friendly Islamists	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓		
Prevent Russia from taking step harmful to Israel in the Middle East	✓		✓	-									
Prevent direct Iranian material support for domestic Shia groups	✓		✓		-	✓							
PREVENT IRAN FROM ACQUIRING MILITARY NUCLEAR CAPABILITIES	✓		✓		-								
Prevent Iran from using proxies against Israel	✓		✓		-								
Prevent Palestinian terror attacks in the West Bank and Israel	✓		✓										
Keep relations and cooperation with the European powers	✓		✓										

Contain Russia via political, economic, military and information pressure	✓	✓		-									
Mobilize a large coalition to help stabilize the region	✓	✓											
Limit the flow of refugees	✓	✓								✓			
Promote a cohesive and representative government in Iraq	✓	✓						✓					
Move Iran towards a greater opening and a more constructive foreign policy	✓	✓											
Maintain the diplomatic support and physical military presence of key international allies (the U.S. and the Britain)	✓					✓							
Stop the Gulf states from pursuit of regime change in Syria	✓										✓		
Exert pressure on the European Union	-	-		✓									
Keep the United States from exerting too much influence over the region	-			✓									
Strengthen Russian defense	-			✓									
Restore Russian influence in the Middle East	-			✓							✓	-	-
Provide support to Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad	-		-	✓	✓						✓	-	-
Curtail outside support of Kurds	-								-	✓			
Provide monetary and political support to Iraqi Shi'ia groups					✓	-	✓	-				✓	
Push an Iranian soft power strategy in Iraq					✓	-	✓	-			-		
Two-state solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict		✓	-										
Keep strategic alliance with the US		✓	✓										
Prevent or slow the normalization of Western relations with Iran			✓		-	✓							
Prevent and defend against Hezbollah attacks			✓										
Prevent and defend against Hamas attacks			✓										
Break Iran's led axis			✓		-								
Prevent Jihadist Salafist attacks against Israel			✓										
Strengthening strategic partnerships with Gulf monarchies		✓				✓							
Make sure Turkey remains a stable and reliable ally		✓											

Guarantee Russian regime survival				✓									
Return Russia to great power status				✓									
Implement Russian military policy through strategic deterrence				✓									
Deflect attention away from Russian activities in Crimea, Ukraine				✓									
Conduct integrated operations with Iranian, Hezbollah, and Syrian forces				✓	✓						✓		
Ensure (Bahrain's) regime security					-	✓							
Preserve the support of Sunni citizens via sectarian appeals						✓		-					
Gain more political support from Gulf States											-		
Gain more monetary support from Gulf States												✓	
Maintain an Alawite-led Government in Syria				✓	✓								
Maintain control over Iranian Kurds					✓				-				
Degrade the PKK									-	✓			
Maintenance of Territorial gains in Central Syria											-		✓
Strengthening the expansion of Salafi Jihadist movement in Syria.											-		✓
Rebranding Jabhat Fateh al-Sham											-		✓
Upholding JCPOA					✓								
Moderating Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (Jabhat al Nusra)											-		✓
Increase Jabhat Fateh al-Sham relevance and operational capability in Syria.											-		✓

Contributors:

Shlomo Brom, INSS, Bernard Carreau, NDU, Justin Gengler, Umich, Hassan Hassan, TIMEP, Diane Maye, Embry Riddle, Eugene Rumer, CEIP, Élie Tenenbaum, IFRI, Tim Thomas, TRADOC, Jeff Weyers, Brabo Inc

What are near and long term Turkish interests and intentions in Syria and Iraq? What are Turkish interests and intentions with respect to al-Bab? Executive Summary

Contributors: *Dr. Birol Yeşilada (Portland State University); Dr. Benedetta Berti (Institute for National Security Studies, Israel); The Honorable David Gompert (US Naval Academy, Rand)*

Citation: Astorino-Courtois, A. (Ed.). (2017). *Turkish long-term interests and intentions in al-Bab.* Arlington, VA: Strategic Multi-layer Assessment (SMA) Reach-back Cell. Retrieved from http://nsiteam.com/sma-reachback-R2QL6-Turkish-interests-and-alBab/

Executive Summary

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI

Despite policy shifts Turkey's key interests remain the same

The SME contributors to this SMA Reach-back write-up argue that the recent changes in Turkish security policy (e.g., pursuit of ISIL along with the PKK; relaxing of demands for Assad's removal; warming relations with Russia, etc.) do not necessarily indicate that Turkey's key interests and intentions have changed.[32] Rather, the shifts should be seen as changes in objectives or tactics that are still thoroughly consistent with Turkey's fundamental and enduring security interests: 1) containing and ultimately eliminating Kurdish or other threats to Turkey's internal stability; and, 2) foiling Kurdish (or others') ambitions that threaten the integrity of Turkey's borders. Former Principal Deputy Director of National Intelligence David Gompert (USNA, Rand) explains that recognizing Turkey's dire concern with territorial integrity goes a long way in clarifying what may at first blush appear to be inconsistent policies regarding Assad, Syria, ISIL and even its "traditional enmity" toward Russia. Gompert expresses the message clearly: "…we can count on the Turks to do whatever it takes to prevent Kurdish states on their southern border."

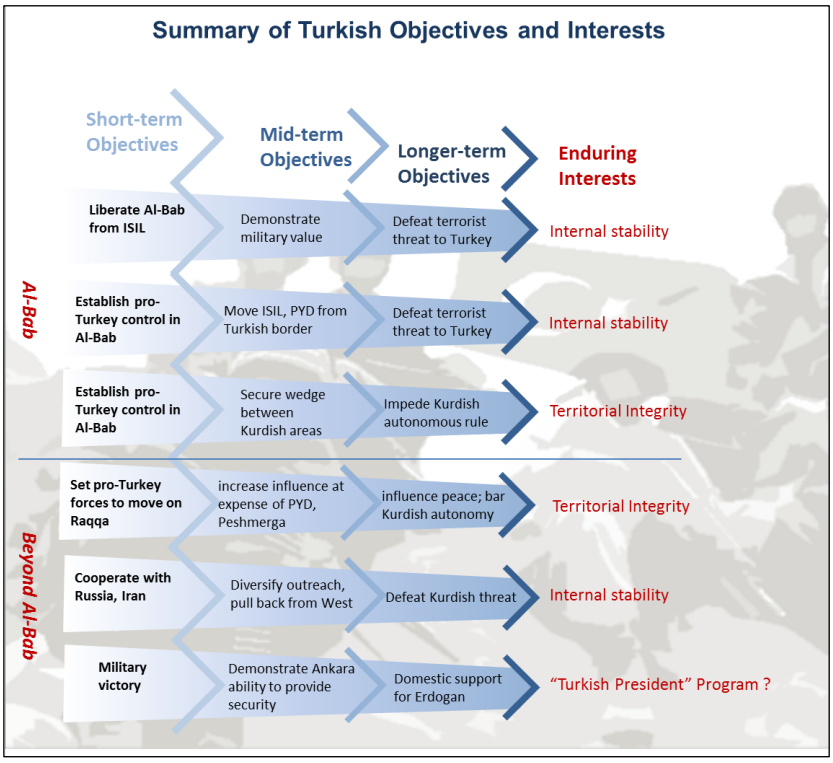
Erdogan's political ambition: a third fundamental interest?

While most SMEs focused on Turkish threat perceptions and the Turkey—Kurd/PKK conflict as a key motivator of Turkey's actions in Syria and Iraq, Portland State University Turkey scholar Dr. Birol Yesilada argues that Turkey's security policy and actions cannot be fully understood without including President Erdogan's personal political ambitions and domestic political considerations as critical motivators of state behavior. According to Yesilada, President Erdogan is using operations

[32] The SME's arguments mirror those from previous SMA Reach-back reports (e.g., see QL2, updated 10/26/2016). The V7 Reach-back report summary table of Turkey's key interests relative to the regional conflict is reprinted at the end of this section.

in Iraq and Syria to demonstrate his government's strength and ability to provide security to Turks in order to advance his domestic political agenda. Erdogan's ultimate goal is to gain the backing to change Turkey's constitution to support establishment of his "Turkish-style Presidency" – a highly centralized, some say oligarchic or dictatorial, Islamist regime. (It is interesting to note that to date, Erdogan's movements and plans for his "Turkish-style" leadership mirror those Vladimir Putin followed to centralize political power in Russia into his hands.)

Key objectives underlying Turkey's actions



The SME contributors to this write-up provided a number of truly expert and comprehensive essays on Turkey's short and longer-term objectives in northern Syria and Iraq. Although not always mentioned in this context, as shown in the summary graphic, each objective has a clear and direct link to the two fundamental security interests (i.e., internal stability and territorial integrity) and/or Erdogan's domestic political interest.

1) Defeating Terrorism. Defeating terrorism against the Turkish state has generally meant the PKK in Turkey and Iraq and PYD/YPG[33] in Syria, although once ISIL fighters brought the fight into Turkey, Ankara has expanded the focus of its efforts to include the Islamic State. The question of the impact on Turkey's security policy of Erdogan's bid ultimately to change Turkey's Constitution is a compelling and difficult to isolate. However, Professor Yesilada (Portland State) cites polls that show the political benefit Erdogan gains from these efforts: "91% of Turks support Erdogan's anti-terror campaign inside the country and 78% support his military intervention in Syria and Iraq (esp. re Mosul) and 88% view his security policies favorably."

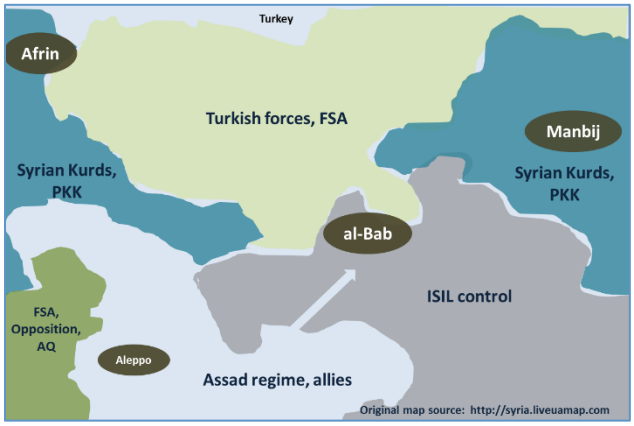
[33] The People's Protection Units (YPG) is the military arm of the Kurdish Federation of Northern Syria (Rojava). The Democratic Union Party (PYD) is the largest group in the Federation and make up a good percentage of the YPG. To the US and Coalition the YPG have been some of the most effective fighters in northern Syria, have removed ISIL from major areas and are fighting in Raqqah as part of Euphrates Wrath. Turkey however sees the PYD as a terrorist organization given its alliance to the Kurdish Worker's Party (PKK) in Turkey and Iraq.

2) Impeding Kurdish political and territorial gain. Containing Kurdish political and territorial gains and obstructing activities that might by design or inadvertently lead to an autonomous Kurdish entity on Turkey's border, are critical Turkish objectives in northern Syria. Many experts see Turkey's pursuit of Operation Euphrates Shield as motivated by the desire to carve out a buffer zone in northern Syria and drive a solid wedge between Kurdish-controlled territory to the east and west to thwart emergence of a contiguous Kurdish region in northern Syria, that from its perspective would threaten both Turkey's internal stability and potentially control over its own territory.

3) Increasing Turkey's regional role and influence. A number of experts noted Turkey's push to distance itself from EU and NATO. With respect to its recently thawed relations with Russia a number of the SMEs expect that Turkey will move cautiously in its relations with Russia as it seeks to as Gompert tags it, engage in "diversified outreach" to expand its list of international partners and carve out a more independent regional role for itself. They argue that Turkey has little to gain from upsetting the US to the degree that it loses US backing.

4) Assuring domestic support. Finally, as suggested by the opinion poll results cited above, at present President Erdogan enjoys extremely high public approval for his security policy – especially along Turkey's border. Continuing to demonstrate the government's ability to provide security for Turks will be a key facet of Erdogan's overall popularity and ability to push through his preferred changes to Turkey's democratic system.

Opening al-Bab: Turkey's Intentions



Operation Euphrates Shield began with the liberation of Jarabulus in August 2016. In November Turkish forces and allied rebel groups launched the assault to remove ISIL from al-Bab and have been bogged down there since.

Most contributors to this report see Turkey's mid-range intentions in al-Bab as two-fold: to defeat ISIL and push it away from the Turkish border, and to drive a pro-Turkey wedge between Kurdish-controlled areas in northern Syria containing the PKK and PYD and strengthening Turkey's buffer zone in north Syria. A number of the SMEs make the case that one of Turkey's mid-term objectives in conducting Euphrates Shield is to diminish the prestige the YPG has gained as the US/Coalition's "go-to" fighters in the area. Specifically, Turkey gains both domestically and internationally if its own Syrian rebel proxies can liberate al-Bab – the last ISIL stronghold in northern Syria -- and perhaps help in Raqqah rather than cede those opportunities to the YPG. Benedetta Berti (Institute for National Security Studies, Israel) suggests that Turkey's objective here is to guarantee itself influence regarding the details of any post-conflict resolution arrangements in particular what happens with regards to Syria's Kurdish population.

What next?

News reporters, commentators and the SMA SMEs continue to speculate on Turkey's next move after liberation of al-Bab. Some experts believe that once al-Bab is liberated Turkey-backed rebels will attempt to take the city of Manbij 50 km up the M4 from the YPG forces that helped liberate that city and establish a strong buffer from Jarabulus to al-Bab to Manbij. In fact, in a January 4, speech delivered two months into the battle for al-Bab President Erdogan assured Turks that al-Bab would be retaken from ISIL shortly and after that, that Turkey was "committed to clearing other areas where the terror organizations are nesting, especially Manbij."[34] However, on 27 January Erdogan appeared to recant, stating that Turkey would "finish the job" in al-Bab, but not necessarily move beyond al-Bab to other areas of Syria.[35] There is a domestic and a regional concern here: Turkey has taken most of its Euphrates Shield casualties in the fight for al-Bab. Erdogan pronouncement also comes at a time when Syrian government forces are moving toward al-Bab from Aleppo and the southwest. The softening of Erdogan's rhetoric likely reflects Russian influence as the forces of its two allies – themselves long-time adversaries, could come up against each other in al-Bab.[36] One alternative is posed by Woodrow Wilson Center expert Amberin Zaman[37] who is cited in news reports as doubtful that Turkish forces or Turkey-backed rebels would move on Manbij in part because of the Coalition Special Forces that he believes remain there following liberation of the city. Instead Zaman suggests that the next move in Turkey's battle against the YPG will be against Afrin which is also in Kurdish-controlled territory, but which is less populated than Manbij or al-Bab and so should prove less difficult to secure.

[34] President Erdogan speech 4 January 2017; http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-turkey-idUSKBN14O0ZT

[35] Ozerkan, Fulya. January 27, 2017, "Turkey's Syria offensive stalls at flashpoint town," Your Middle East. http://www.yourmiddleeast.com/news/turkeys-syria-offensive-stalls-at-flashpoint-town_45135

[36] Some news analysts speculate that the Syrian Army push northeast from Aleppo toward al-Bab is not so much an offensive against ISIL forces in that city as it is the result of Syrian concern about Turkey's designs on al Bab as a key link in establishing its safe zone in northern Syria. See http://aranews.net/2017/01/syrian-regime-allied-militias-join-battle-for-al-bab-to-impede-turkish-progress/

[37] http://aranews.net/2016/09/turkeys-next-move-syria/

What internal factors would influence Iran's decision to interfere with the free flow of commerce in the Strait of Hormuz or the Bab el Mandeb? Executive Summary

***Contributors**: Anoush Ehteshami (Durham University); Yoel Guzansky (Hoover Institution, Stanford University, and Institute for National Security Studies, Tel Aviv University); Belinda Bragg and Sabrina Pagano (NSI); Alex Vatanka (Middle East Institute; Jamestown Foundation)*

***Editors:** Belinda Bragg and Sabrina Pagano (NSI)*

Executive Summary

Dr. Belinda Bragg and Dr. Sabrina Pagano, NSI

Iran's Strategic Interests

All of the SMEs either directly or indirectly referenced Iran's strategic interests, and how these are informed by its overarching goal of regional hegemony. Dr. Belinda Bragg and Dr. Sabrina Pagano from NSI characterize these interests into three categories; prestige, economic; and security, all of which are moderated by domestic political constraints and pressures. Iran's prestige interests center around ensuring that it does not lose face in its interactions with the US, and can increase its regional influence. Its economic interests focus on increasing Iran's economic influence and security. Iran's security interests include reducing threats from the US, Israel, and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, reducing the threat from ISIL, and broadcasting strength and challenging US influence and position in the region. Its domestic constraints and pressures include resisting cultural infiltration from the west, delivering economic improvement, and broadcasting strength. Together, these interests, and Iran's overarching regional hegemony goal (Guzansky; Bragg & Pagano), ultimately shape the strategies that Iran pursues, including its decisions regarding the Strait of Hormuz or the Bab el Mandeb.

Iranian naval capabilities and desire for regional hegemony

Dr. Yoel Guzansky, of the Hoover Institution at Stanford University and the Institute for National Security Studies at Tel Aviv University, discusses how Iranian strategic thinking on the sea is no longer limited to the Persian Gulf, but instead extends to intended naval bases in Syria and Yemen, as well as influence in the Red Sea or even the Atlantic—ultimately "making every effort to demonstrate that its naval power is not limited to the Gulf alone." Guzansky further indicates that these are more than just aspirational statements; the Iranian Navy has already extended its reach to the Red Sea and Bab el Mandeb, as well as Pakistan, China, and South Africa. These developments are consistent with Bragg and Pagano's assessment that developing and demonstrating military capability is a key security strategy for Iran, as

well as being seen, by hardliners and conservatives in particular, as an integral part of their regional hegemony goal. Guzansky draws a similar conclusion, adding that greater naval power will also increase Iran's ability to help its regional allies. However, he also notes that "[t]o do so, Iran will need vast resources it doesn't yet have."

Guzansky indicates that, historically, Iran has prioritized the development of asymmetric capabilities (including anti-ship missiles, mines, and small vessel swarms), to enable it to better confront the U.S. Navy in the Gulf. Iran can leverage these same capabilities, and others, to interfere with the flow of commerce in the Strait of Hormuz, and to a lesser extent, the Bab el Mandeb.

Internal factors influencing Iranian interference in the Strait or Bab el Mandeb

The contributors identified the following internal factors as potentially influencing Iranian actions in the Strait of Hormuz or Bab el Mandeb:

Iran's revolutionary doctrine:

Frames Iran as involved in an existential fight against US imperialism

Makes it critical for Iran's leaders, particularly conservatives and hardliners, to demonstrate to the Iranian people that they will not be bullied by the US

Supports and informs Iran's goal of regional hegemony

Domestic political competition

The role of factions—conservative / hardliner; moderate/pragmatist—in the prioritization of Iranian interests and the preferred strategies for achieving these interests

With an election coming up in May, conservatives have incentive to switch the domestic political focus from cooperation with the US toward confrontation, to both appease their base and put greater pressure on Rouhani

Economic conditions

Slow pace of improvement following JCPOA leaves moderates such as Rouhani politically vulnerable, and creates the belief that their promised benefits of greater openness and cooperation were unrealistic

As the salience of economic concerns wanes relative to prestige and security concerns for the Iranian public, there is a greater likelihood that leaders (both conservative and moderate) will employ more bellicose rhetoric with regard to the Strait of Hormuz

Closing the Straits will have significant short-term negative economic consequences for Iran, and depending on international and US response, may have longer-term consequences for Iran such as the re-imposition of sanctions and loss of trade and foreign investment

Given Iran's current economic situation and growing dependence on oil exports, it is unlikely to take action to close the Strait or Bab el Mandeb, as doing so would harm their economic interest further and thus be self-defeating

Popular perception that the US is not living up to terms of JCPOA

Plays into hardline and conservative narratives emphasizing Western (especially US) hostility and untrustworthiness, giving credence to their own economic strategy, which seeks to limit openness to the West

Increases the likelihood that the balance between the economic costs of interfering with commerce in either the Strait of Hormuz or the Bab el Mandeb, and the perceived benefit of demonstrating Iranian power and status, may swing in favor of the latter

External factors influencing Iranian interference in the Strait or Bab el Mandeb

The contributors argue that external factors also play a role in Iran's decision-making with respect to its activities at sea.

Competition with Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia's opening of naval bases in Djibouti and Eritrea affords it an advantage in the Red Sea area

Iran may wish to do "more to limit the Saudis by pushing harder on the question of access/use of both straits" (Vatanka)

Retaliation for Saudi's restricting Iranian access to the SUMED pipeline and selectively blocking Iranian ships in the Bab el Mandeb, which has stifled Iran's establishment of trade with Europe

Iran has potential to weaken Saudi government domestically by disrupting oil revenues and thus creating the conditions for greater internal unrest and instability

Iran's support of the Houthis, including provision of supplies to which the Houthis already have access, may actually serve to signal to and threaten Saudi Arabia and demonstrate Iran's reach

Use of proxies

The "effective blockade on Yemen," which Iran's current naval capabilities cannot challenge, creates a barrier to Iran helping the Houthis

The Houthis may not be particularly dependent on Iran, given that they already have many of the supplies it provides, and Iran is unlikely to provide additional forms of support

Ultimately, "I don't think the Houthis want their tail in the trap of the Iran-Saudi conflict anyways" (Ehteshami)

Yemen imports 90% of its food, much of this using foreign shipping. Further reduction in security in the Bab el Mandeb would threaten this supply, and therefore is not in the interests of the Houthis.

US actions and rhetoric

Reinforce the perception that the US acted dishonestly with regard to JCPOA, seeking to thwart Iran's efforts to increase trade and foreign investment

Given the current domestic political climate, both conservatives and hardliners, as well as moderates, have greater incentive to frame any US action relative to Iran as threatening and conflictual, rather than cooperative

Iran's strategic calculus with respect to interference in the Strait of Hormuz

Alex Vatanka, an Iran scholar from the Middle East Institute, and Bragg and Pagano of NSI indicate that closing the Strait may in fact work against Iran's own interests, since it is as dependent on oil moving through the Strait as are its rivals. In this way, Iran may gain more value from threatening to close the Strait, which may increase oil prices, than from actually closing the Strait, which is sure to result in retributive actions, most likely from the US. As Vatanka indicates, a continued US presence in the Strait all but guarantees that Iran will use this strategic lever sparingly, if at all. Both Guzansky and Pagano and Bragg suggest that factors enhancing Iran's likelihood of plausible deniability (use of asymmetric methods or proxies), by reducing the expected costs of such action, may, if other interests are met, instead increase the likelihood that Iran will choose to interfere.

Iran's strategic calculus with respect to interference in the Bab el Mandeb

The strategic calculus for Bab el Mandeb may be different, as Bragg and Pagano note. There are two issues to consider with respect to potential Iranian interference in the Bab el Mandeb. These relate to both its capability to interfere and its motivation to do so. At present, Iran's degree of control over the Houthis is unclear, and thus its ability to exact precise control over their activities may be limited. However, if Iran's continued support of the Houthis gains them greater influence, then we can expect that the present Houthi control over Yemen's ports might translate into greater Iranian interference in the Bab el Mandeb, assuming appropriate motivation.

This is where the Iranian calculus for the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab el Mandeb may come to differ. If Iran continues to pivot its trade toward greater interaction with China, India, and Southeast Asia, it will become less dependent on commerce in the Bab el Mandeb. Ehteshami also indirectly provides some support for this conclusion, indicating that the Bab el Mandeb represents more of a security rather than economic interest to Iran. As Bragg and Pagano indicate, this trade pivot means that the Bab el Mandeb becomes less strategically important to Iran as a source of economic power, but more strategically useful to Iran as a source of economic and other manipulation of its perceived rivals, such as Saudi Arabia. Moreover, this is accomplished while making Iran less vulnerable to economic and other

manipulation from its rivals through selective blocking of its own ships' passage. Iran does not have the same alternatives in the Strait of Hormuz, and cannot decrease its dependence on an open Strait for sea transportation, critical to its economic well-being. In these ways, the strategic calculus in favor of Iranian interference in the Bab el Mandeb, but not the Strait of Hormuz, may come to evolve over time in favor of increasing interference or escalation. For the time being, however, as Guzansky notes, this may be a more distant reality, given some of the present limits of Iran's naval force, including the effective blockade on Yemen that prevents Iran from accessing Yemen's shores.

Despite these challenges, Iran's focus on achieving and maintaining regional hegemony, and its naval and other actions toward this goal, should not be ignored. Iran is increasingly likely to pursue strategies such as new trade partnerships that minimize the harm that its rivals can inflict, as well as those that enable it to increasingly project power, whether through the use of proxies of otherwise. As Guzansky notes, "unless improved Iranian naval capabilities receive a proper response, Iran in the future will be able to threaten crucial shipping lanes, impose naval blockades, and land special forces on distant shores should it deem it necessary."

What major economic, political and security (military) activities does KSA and Iran currently conduct in Bahrain, Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen to gain influence? What are KSA and Iran's ultimate goals behind these activities? What motivates KSA and Iran towards these goals? What future activities might KSA and Iran conduct in Bahrain, Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen? Executive Summary

***Editor**: Patricia DeGennaro, TRADOC G-2/G-27*

Summary

The geopolitical landscape in this region is vast and complex. History, lands, family, culture and economic resources are closely intertwined. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and Iran in particular are opposing influencers in these neighboring countries and populations. KSA sees itself as the Sunni protector and the legitimate rulers of the Arabian Peninsula while Iran takes the position of Shite protector. Religion is often used to veil outright economic and military operations by both countries quite often through group proxies. Both Iran and KSA have vast oil and gas resources with extreme and autocratic rulers that work tirelessly to shape, influence and dominate the region thereby ensuring primacy, longevity and wealth.

There are distinct differences between the nations. Iran' has a rich history from the time of the Persian Empire while the Saud family came from a waring tribe in the desert cleverly undermining Western colonizers who aligned with its rival ruling family. Both countries have a population with high literacy, but minimal freedoms, Iran's being a more progressive population with a larger middle class.

To date, each government continues to try project influence internationally, regionally, and locally through statecraft and, sometimes lethally, through proxy actors within and between states.In the body of the paper are SMA contributions that identify ways in which KSA and Iran influence Yemen, Bahrain, Lebanon, Iraq and Syria in the cognitive, economic, political and security realms. Each has a dedicated narrative giving reason to justify influence although, it is important to note that the receiving countries and non-state actors are not so easily manipulated. Although they may not have similar political powers, they are by no means without their own abilities and interests.

***Contributors**: Patricia DeGennaro (TRADOC G-2/27), Larry Jeddeloh (The Institutional Strategist Group), David Mazaheri (IL Intellaine); Gwyneth Sutherlin (Graphic Services); Zana Gulmohamad University of Sheffield).*

What are the indicators of changes in Russian strategic interests in Syria? Executive Summary

Executive Summary

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI

Russia's strategic interests in Syria are fairly stable

Timothy Thomas, a Russia expert from the Foreign Military Studies Office and former US Army Foreign Area Officer (FAO) believes that a fair articulation of Russia's long-term strategic interests is right where they should be: in the country's 2015 National Security Strategy (NSS).[38] The only "changes" that Thomas expects will be the result of the "gradual accomplishment" of several interests. First among these is strengthening Russian national defense, which in Syria has meant Russian forces taking the opportunity to test new weapons systems and command procedures while working to keep ISIL and Islamic extremists from Russia's southern borders. Second, Thomas reports that "consolidating the Russian Federation's status as a leading world power" in a multipolar international system has been accomplished by Russian actions in Syria and Ukraine "in the eyes of many nations."

What could change? How Russia prioritizes its interests

Thomas points to optimistic versus pessimistic Russian views on how the recent US election will impact US policy in Syria. Optimistically, some feel that the election of Donald Trump may diminish the US security threat, offer Russia new opportunities in the region, and thus allow Russia to prioritize other interests than it has been. This logic is based in the belief that the new US Administration will be willing to tolerate Assad in order to work in concert with Russia to defeat terrorist threat from ISIL and other groups. Russians taking a more pessimistic view however argue that forging a US-Russia partnership in the region will not be as simple as a change of Administration.

What might signal a change?

[38] Allison Astorino-Courtois and NSI Team constructed a matrix of Russian strategic interests considering input from Timothy Thomas (Foreign Military Studies Office, Ft. Leavenworth) and Eugene Rumer (Carnegie Endowment) that was previously reported in SMA Reachback V7. It is reprinted in the SME Input section below for convenience.

Dr. Tricia Degennaro (Threat Tec, LLCI -TRADOC G27) believes that "the key to understanding signals for change include Russian rhetoric and key troop maneuvers. The Russian President's messaging is the signal to change." Dr. Larry Kuznar (Indiana-Purdue; NSI) reports empirical analysis of President Putin's language use and whether Putin's language patterns might be used as indicators of Russian change of strategy in Syria. Dr. Kuznar uncovers a "blip" then "brag" pattern in Putin's public discourse that may be used as an indicator. Specifically, Kuznar finds that prior to a major event (like invading Ukraine) Putin begins mentioning a few key *emotional themes* (e.g., pride, protection, unity, strength and Russian superiority) and *political themes* (e.g., Russian security, Russia's adversaries, Russian energy), a "blip," then goes silent presumably during the planning and execution phase. Once the activity or goal is complete however, Kuznar finds that "Putin is characteristically tight-lipped about his interests and intentions, but tends to brag after he achieves a victory." He habitually "relaxes his restraint and releases a rhetorical flourish of concerns and emotional language", i.e., some major bragging.

In short, Dr. Kuznar (Indiana-Purdue) finds an empirical basis to suggest that specific linguistic themes such as p*ride*, *Russian superiority* and *France*[39]) as well as more general emotional and political themes "may serve as early indicators and warnings of Putin's intent." Currently Putin's mention of pragmatic themes in relation to Russian energy resources and his recent concern with Turkey, and emotive themes, such as the threat of Nazism, may serve as indicators of his activities if his past patterns are retained. And as such, "may have direct implications for his intentions in Syria."

***Contributors**: Dr. Larry Kuznar (NSI; Indiana University – Purdue University, Fort Wayne); Timothy Thomas (*Foreign Military Studies Office, TRADOC*); Dr. Tricia Degennaro (Threat Tec, LLCI -TRADOC G27); Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois and NSI team (NSI).*

***Editor**: Allison Astorino-Courtois (NSI)*

[39] France, Germany and UK come up in Putin's discourse as perceived adversaries in "gray zone" activities such as various operations in Ukraine.

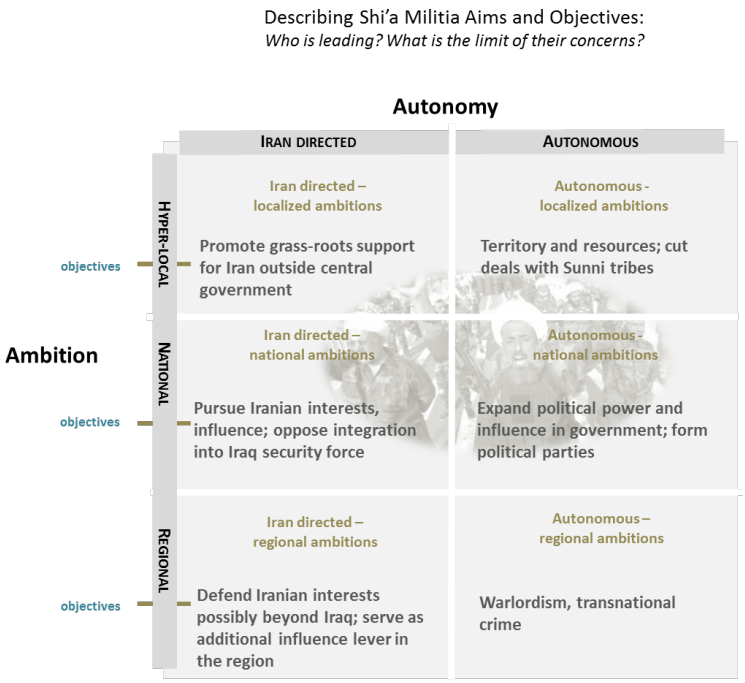
What are the aims and objectives of the Shia Militia Groups following the effective military defeat of Da'esh? Executive Summary

Executive Summary

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI

Characterizing "the" Shi'a Militias

Referring to the Shi'a Militias as a unitary or homogenous entity masks the reality that what are now dozens of groups in Iraq were established at different times and for different reasons, and thus have different allegiances and goals. [40] Dr. Daniel Serwer of Johns Hopkins SAIS puts it succinctly, "Not all 'Shi'a militia groups' are created equal."



An actor's defining characteristics have a significant impact on the objectives it pursues. The contributors highlight two expert factors we might use to differentiate the many Shi'a militia groups in Iraq, their aims, objectives and likely post-ISIS actions. These are: 1) the extent to which the group is led by and owes allegiance to Iran; and 2) the span of its concerns and interests. How groups rate on these two factors will tell us a lot about what we should expect of them following the effective defeat of ISIS (see graphic).

Autonomy. Contributors to this Quick Look tended to differ on where the balance of control over the Shi'a militias rests. Some see the Shi'a PMF groups as primarily under the control of Iran, and thus motivated or directed largely by Iranian interests (i.e., they have very little autonomy.) If this is the case,

[40] Dr.'s Karl Kaltenthaler (University of Akron) and Monqith Dagher (IIACSS) very helpfully identify three reasons Shi'a militia groups formed – only one of which has to do with ISIS: 1) in response to the 2003 US invasion of Iraq; 2) as armed wings of Shi'a political parties; and 3) following Ayatollah Sistani's fatwa to combat ISIS.

knowing the interests of the leaders of these groups will tell us little about their actions). Other experts view the militias as more autonomous and self-directed albeit with interests in common with Iran in which case their interests are relevant to understanding their objectives. In reality, there are groups that swear allegiance to the Supreme Leader in Iran, those that follow Ayatollah al Sistani, and still other groups that respond only to their commanders. In an interview with the SMA Reachback team, Dr. Anoush Ehteshami a well-known Iran scholar from Durham University (UK) points out that Iran has "shamelessly" worked with groups it controls as well as those that it does not because it sees each variety as a "node of influence" into Iraqi society. As in previous Reachback Quick Looks[41], a number of the SMEs note that Iran is best served by taking a low-key approach in Iraq. Ehteshami argues that ultimately Iran has little interest in appearing to control the Shi'a militias: "the last thing that they want is to be seen as a frontline against Daesh" as this would reinforce the Sunni versus Shi'a sectarian, Saudi-Iranian rivalry undercurrents of the conflict against ISIS. In fact he argues that Iran prefers to work with the militias rather than the central government – which is susceptible to political pressure that Iran cannot control in order to "maintain grass root presence and influence … of the vast areas of Iraq which are now Shia dominated."

Ambition. A second factor that distinguishes some militia groups is the span of their key objectives and ambition. In discussing militia objectives, some SMEs referenced groups with highly localized interests, for example groups that were established more recently and primarily for the purpose of protecting family or neighborhood. Others mentioned (generally pro-Iran) groups with cross-border ambitions. However, the major part of the discussion of militia objectives centered on more-established and powerful groups with national-level concerns.

Key Objectives

Most experts mentioned one or all of the following as key objectives of the Shi'a militia, at present and in post-ISIS Iraq. Importantly, many indicate that activities in pursuit of these objectives <u>are occurring now</u> – the militias have not waited for the military defeat of ISIS.

Controlling territory and resources

For groups with very localized concerns this objective may take the form of securing the bounds of an area, or access to water in order to protect family members or neighborhoods. For groups with broader ambitions, American University of Iraq Professor Christine van den Toorn argues that controlling territory and resources is a means to these militias' larger political goals. As in the past, this may entail occupying or conducting ethnic cleansing of areas of economic, religious and political significance (e.g., Samarrah, Tel Afar, former Sunni areas of Salahuldeen Province near Balad.) Here too Anoush Ehteshami

[41] This point is discussed in more depth in a previous SMA Reachback report: LR2 which is available from the SMA office. The question for that report was: *What will be Iran's strategic calculus regarding Iraq and the region post-ISIL? How will JCPOA impact the calculus? What opportunities exist for the US/Coalition to shape the environment favorable to our interests?*

suggests that different militia groups have different allegiances and motives: some are "keen to come flying a Shia flag into Sunni heartlands and are determined to take control of those areas." A number of authors indicate that a specific project of Iran-backed militias possibly with cross-border ambitions would be to secure Shi'a groups' passage between Iraq and Syria (van den Toorn suspects this would be north or south of Sinjar adding that Kurds would prefer that the route "go to the south, through Baaj/ southern Sinjar and not through Rabiaa, which they want to claim.")

Consolidating political power and influence

Anoush Ehteshami believes that the Shi'a militia groups are keen to gain as much "control of government as possible, as quickly as possible." These groups are actually new to Iraqi politics and realize that once the war is over their influence and role in the political order may end. Many of the experts identified the primary objective of militia groups with broader local or national ambitions as increasing their independence from, and power relative to Iraqi state forces. Christine van den Toorn relates an interesting way that some Shi'a militias are working to expand their influence: by forging alliances with "good Sunnis" or "obedient Sunnis." In fact, she reports that the deals now being made between some Sunni leaders and Shia militia/PMF are in essence "laying the foundation of warlordism" in Iraq and potentially cross-nationally. Many experts singled out the law legalizing the militias as making it "a shadow state force" or an Iraq version of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (RGC) - a clear victory for those seeking to institutionalize the political wealth, and likely economic wealth of the militias.

Dr. Harith Hasan al-Qarawee of Brandeis University agrees that the primary goal of the militia groups with national or cross-national ambitions is to gain political influence in Iraq in order to: "to improve their chances in the power equation and have a sustained access to state patronage." As a result, he anticipates that they will continue to work to weaken the professional, non-sectarian elements of the Iraqi Security Forces, and would accept reintegration into the Iraqi military only if it affords them the same or greater opportunity to influence the Iraqi state than what they currently possess. Finally, a number of the experts including Dr. Randa Slim of the Middle East Institute, mention that an RGC-like, parallel security structure in Iraq will also serve Iran as a second "franchisee" along with Hezbollah in Lebanon, and allow export of "military skillsets/expertise/knowhow, which can be shared with fellow Shia groups in the Gulf region."

Eliminating internal opposition from Sunni and Kurds

Omar Al-Shahery, a former deputy director in the Iraqi Defense Ministry, along with a number of other SME contributors believe that after the Sunni Arabs are "taken out of the equation" the Kurds are the militias' "next target." Dr. Daniel Serwer (Johns Hopkins SAIS) expects that Shi'a forces will remain in provinces that border Kurdistan, if not at the behest of Iran, then certainly in line with Iran's interest in avoiding an expanded and independent Kurdistan in Iraq. Al Shahery (Carnegie Mellon) points to this as the impetus for militias pushing the Peshmerga out of Tuzkurmato south of Kirkuk. Similarly, Shi'a concern with Saudi support reaching Sunni groups opposed to the expansion of Shi'a influence in Iraq

was motivation for occupying Nukhaib (south Anbar) and cutting Sunni forces off from a conduit to aid. Finally, Al-Shahery raises the possibility that the ultimate goal of the most ambitious militia groups is in fact to form an "integrated strike force" that can operate cross-nationally. This is evidenced he argues, by the centralization of the command structure of the forces operating in Syria.

What to Expect after Mosul

The following are some of the experts' expectations about what to expect from the Shi'a militias in the short to mid-term. See the author's complete submission in SME input for justification and reasoning.

Following ISIS defeat in Iraq …

Re-positioning. Iran will encourage some militia forces to relocate to Syria to help defend the regime. However, Iran also will make sure that the "Shia militias which have been mobilized, are going to stay mobilized" as a "pillar of Iran's own influence in Iraq" (Dr. Anoush Ehteshami, Durham University, UK)

Inter and intra- sectarian conflict. The PMFs will play a "very destabilizing" role in Iraq if not disbanded or successfully integrated into a non-sectarian force. The present set-up will result in renewed Sunni-Shia tensions, Sunni extremism (Dr. Monqith Dagher, IIACSS and Dr. Karl Kaltenthaler, University of Akron); Shi'a-Shi'a violence (Dr. Sarhang Hamasaeed, USIP); and/or violent conflict with the Kurds (Dr. Daniel Serwer, Johns Hopkins SAIS; Omar Al-Shahery, Carnegie Mellon)

New political actors. Select militia commanders will leave the PMF to run for political office, accept ministerial posts (Dr. Daniel Serwer, Johns Hopkins SAIS) and/or "major political players in Baghdad" will attempt to place them in important positions in the police or Iraqi security force positions. (Dr. Diane Maye, Embry-Riddle)

Contributors: Ambassador Robert S. Ford (former US Ambassador to Syria, Middle East Institute); Dr. Randa Slim, (Middle East Institute); Dr. Elie Abouaoun (US Institute of Peace); Dr. Harith Hasan al-Qarawee (Crown Center for Middle East Studies, Brandeis University); Omar Al-Shahery (Carnegie Mellon); Dr. Scott Atran (ARTIS); Dr. Monqith Dagher (IIACSS); Mr. Zana Gulmohamad, Univ of Sheffield, Dr. Anoush Ehteshami (Durham University, UK); Dr. Karl Kaltenthaler (University of Akron); Dr. Renad Mansour (Chatham House, UK); Sarhang Hamasaeed (US Institute of Peace); Dr. Diane Maye (Embry Riddle University); Alireza Nader (RAND); Dr. Daniel Serwer (Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies); Steffany Trofino (TRADOC); Christine van den Toorn (American University of Iraq, Sulaimani); Dr. Bilal Wahab (Washington Institute).

What are the critical elements of a continued Coalition presence, following the effective military defeat of Da'esh [in Iraq] that Iran may view as beneficial? Executive Summary

***Contributors**: Dr. Omar Al-Shahery (RAND); Ambassador Robert S. Ford (Middle East Institute); Sarhang Hamasaeed (US Institute of Peace); Dr. Renad Mansour (Chatham House, UK); Dr. Diane Maye (Embry Riddle University); Alireza Nader (RAND); Christine van den Toorn (American University of Iraq, Sulaimani); Dr. Bilal Wahab (Washington Institute); Dr. Spencer Meredith (National Defense University); Alex Vatanka (Middle East Institute); Dr. Anoush Ehteshami (Durham University, UK); Dr. Daniel Serwer (Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies).*

Executive Summary

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI

Dr. Omar Al-Shahery of Carnegie Mellon University offers a critical caveat in considering the question posed for this Quick Look. While Iran may see certain "advantages" of the presence of Coalition forces, Iran's perspective is both relative to the nature of the context and thus transitory as "such benefits might not necessarily outweigh the disadvantages from the Iranian point of view." If our starting point is that Iran is not happy to have US/ Coalition military forces in the region, then what we are looking for are those Coalition activities that might be seen as minimally acceptable, or "less unacceptable".

The expert contributors were somewhat divided on whether they believed there were *any* Coalition elements or activities that they thought Iran might find beneficial. Some believe that there are Coalition activities, primarily related to defeating ISIS, that Iran would find beneficial. Others however do not believe that there is any US military presence in Iraq that would be seen by Iran as sufficiently beneficial to counter the threat that that presence represents. Dr. Anoush Ehteshami, an Iran expert from Durham University, UK, argues that both sides are correct; the difference is whether we are looking at what the majority of experts agree is Iran's preference, or at Iran's (present) reality. In other words, it is the ideal versus the real.

However, simply recognizing the ideal versus the real is not sufficient to address the question posed. When the question is essentially what determines the limits of Iran's tolerance for Coalition activities in Iraq. Context matters. This is because Iran's perception of political and security threat perception is not based solely on the actions of the West/US, but is the result of (at least) three additional contextual factors: 1) the immediacy of the threat from ISIS or Sunni extremism; 2) the intensity of regional

conflict, particularly with Saudi Arabia, Iran's closest major rival; and, 3) as discussed in SMA Reachback LR2 three-way domestic political maneuvering between Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the Rouhani government. This should not be discounted as a key factor in Iran's tolerance for Coalition presence in the region. The Context can push the fulcrum point such that Coalition activities tolerable under one set of circumstances are not acceptable under others.

Iran's Concerns in Iraq

The contributors to SMA Reachback LR2[42] identified the following enduring strategic interests that should be expected to feature in almost any Iranian calculus in the near to mid-term. Relevant to this question these are: 1) expanding Iranian influence in Iraq, Syria, and the region to defeat threats from a pro-US Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, Israel and the US; and 2) eliminating the existential threat to Iran and the region's Shi'a from Sunni extremism.

The Ideal

In general, the experts suggest that from its perspective, Iran's ideal situation in Iraq would include the following: ISIS is defeated and Sunni extremism is otherwise under control. Iraq is stable and unified with political and security establishments within which Iran has significant, yet understated influence. The ISF are strong enough to maintain internal calm in Iraq, but too weak to pose a military threat to Iran. The strongest Shi'a militia elements are developing into a single Revolutionary Guard Corps type force that is stronger than the ISF. Finally, the major security threats from Israel and Saudi Arabia are minimal and there is no US military presence in Iraq and it is very limited in the rest of the region. This is the scenario that sets the Iranian reference point. All else is a deviation from this.

In Reality

Iran needs the Coalition for one thing: security. This is security sufficient to defeat ISIS and to stabilize Iraq without posing a threat to Iranian influence. Of course, ISIS, and Sunni extremism more generally has not yet been defeated in Iraq. Iraq is not secure and the Coalition forces have a different perspective on the requirements for a viable Iraqi state (e.g., an inclusive government, a single, unified and non-

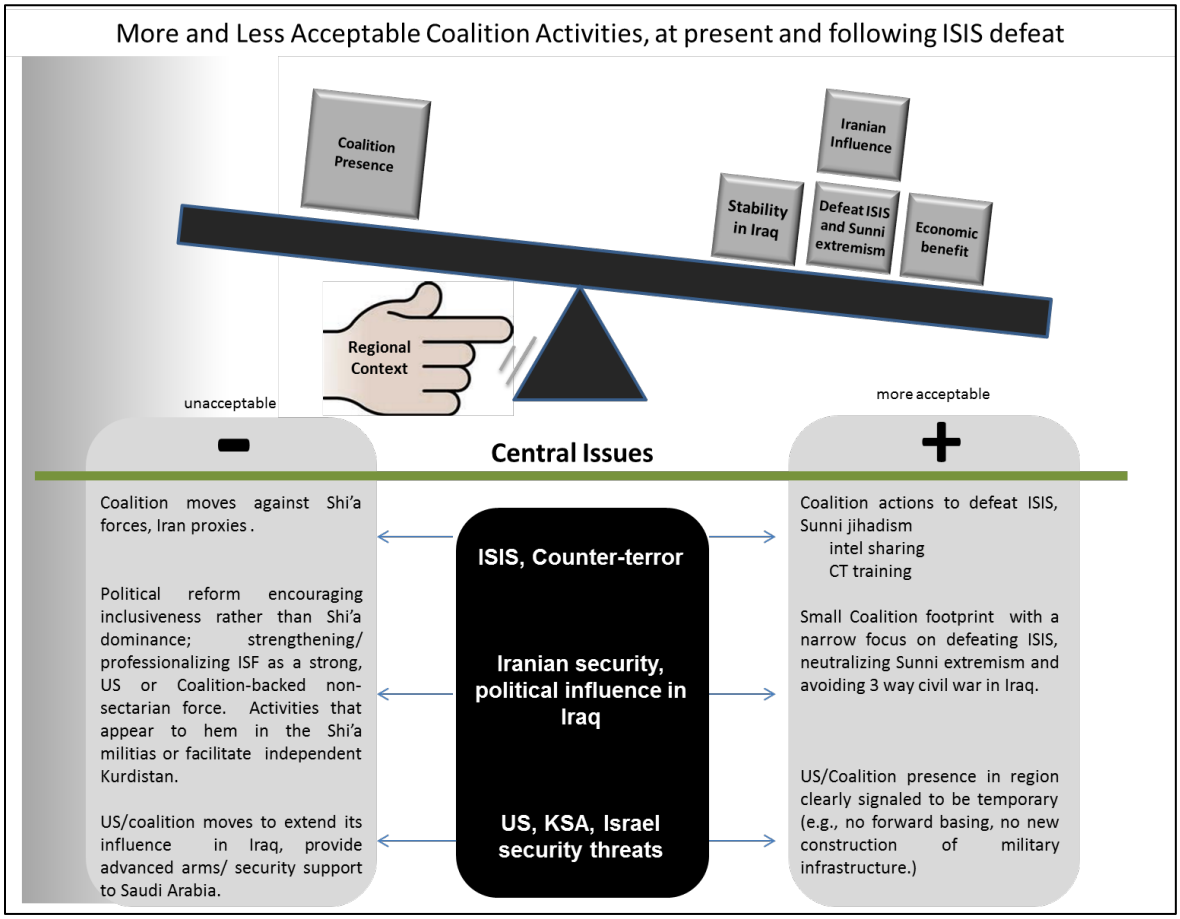
[42] The LR2 question was: *What will be Iran's strategic calculus regarding Iraq and the region post-ISIL? How will JCPOA impact the calculus? What opportunities exist for the US/Coalition to shape the environment favorable to our interests?* The report is available from the SMA office.

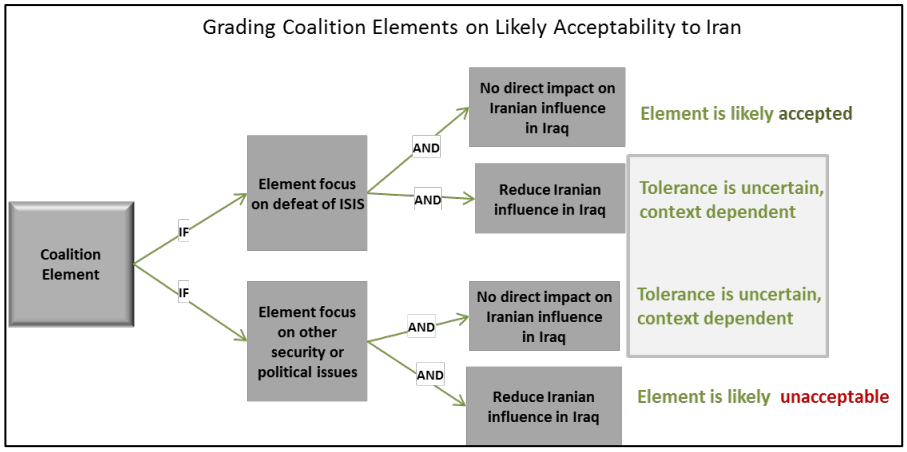
sectarian security force). The Saudis are irritated, the US remains present in the region, and who knows what Israel is apt to do. According to Iran scholar Dr. Anoush Ehteshami (Durham University, UK), Iranian leaders recognize that they lack the capacity now to defeat ISIS and bring sufficient stability to Iraq to allow for reconstruction. As a result, Iran appears willing to suffer Coalition presence in order to gain ISIS defeat and neutralize Sunni extremism in Iraq – arguably Iran's most immediate threat. As Dr. Daniel Serwer observes, "for Iran, the Coalition is a good thing so long as it keeps its focus on repressing Da'esh and preventing its resurgence." Once ISIS is repressed and resurgence checked, the immediate threat recedes (i.e., the context changes) and Iran's tolerance for Coalition presence and policies in Iraq will likely shift as other interests (e.g., regional influence) become more prominent. The critical question is where the fulcrum point rests, in other words, where is the tipping point at which Coalition presence in Iraq becomes intolerable enough to stimulate Iranian action.

In a nutshell, Iran is most likely to find Coalition elements acceptable if they allow Iran to simultaneously 1) eliminate what is sees as an existential security threat from ISIS and Sunni extremism, and 2) expand its influence in Iraq and the region which is a the pillar of its national security approach. Any Coalition element that fails on one of these is unlikely to be tolerated. Put another way, Coalition elements that defeat ISIS but derail Iran's influence in Iraq will not likely be seen as beneficial. Likewise, as multiple experts point out, Iran is aware that it cannot stabilize Iraq on its own regardless of how much influence it has there.

Summary

The two graphics below summarize the points made by the expert contributors to this Quick Look. The first lists three central Iranian concerns and Coalition activities that likely to be more acceptable to Iran versus those likely to be seen as unacceptable, and which under certain circumstances, might motivate Iran to act out against Coalition forces. The second image presents a process chart analysts and planners might use for a quick assessment of whether any given Coalition element might be seen as more or less acceptable to Iran, or whether context will be a particular factor in Iran's tolerance.


More and Less Acceptable Coalition Activities, at present and following ISIS defeat
Coalition Presence
Iranian Influence
Stability in Iraq
Defeat ISIS and Sunni extremism
Economic benefit
Regional Context
unacceptable
more acceptable
Central Issues
Coalition moves against Shi'a forces, Iran proxies .
Political reform encouraging inclusiveness rather than Shi'a dominance; strengthening/ professionalizing ISF as a strong, US or Coalition-backed non-sectarian force. Activities that appear to hem in the Shi'a militias or facilitate independent Kurdistan.
US/coalition moves to extend its influence in Iraq, provide advanced arms/ security support to Saudi Arabia.
ISIS, Counter-terror
Iranian security, political influence in Iraq
US, KSA, Israel security threats
Coalition actions to defeat ISIS, Sunni jihadism
intel sharing
CT training
Small Coalition footprint with a narrow focus on defeating ISIS, neutralizing Sunni extremism and avoiding 3 way civil war in Iraq.
US/Coalition presence in region clearly signaled to be temporary (e.g., no forward basing, no new construction of military infrastructure.)


Grading Coalition Elements on Likely Acceptability to Iran
Coalition Element
IF
IF
Element focus on defeat of ISIS
Element focus on other security or political issues
AND
AND
AND
AND
No direct impact on Iranian influence in Iraq
Reduce Iranian influence in Iraq
No direct impact on Iranian influence in Iraq
Reduce Iranian influence in Iraq
Element is likely accepted
Tolerance is uncertain, context dependent
Tolerance is uncertain, context dependent
Element is likely unacceptable

1: Messaging

2: The fight against ISIL

3: Encouraging Regional Stability

4: Regional actor interests and motivations

Part 5: Sources of Extremism

6: ISIL support and recruitment

7: USG bureaucratic requirements

8: Post-ISIS Governance

9: Coalition Views

What are the key factors that would impact the wave of violent extremism and ideological radicalism that affect the Sunni community? Executive Summary.

***Contributors**: Hassan Abbas (NDU), Bernard Carreau (NDU), Alexis Everington (MSI), Vern Liebl (USMC CAOCL), Jacob Olidort (Washington Institute for Near East Policy), Mubin Shaikh (University of Liverpool), Hammad Sheik (ARTIS)*

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

Executive Summary

The Sunni community is not homogenous, and contributors expressed their discomfort making broad generalizations for a number of reasons. Most Sunni Arabs still consider themselves first a citizen of their respective countries with the exception of populations in the midst of conflict like Iraq, Syria, and Yemen Local customs and histories result in a different experience for Sunnis in, for example, France versus Chechnya (Olidort). Furthermore, there is no single Sunni leader (like the Pope or the Ayatollah or even a senior theologian) with religious legitimacy to assert leadership over the Sunni community (Shaikh).

However, experts attempted to broadly categorize risk factors—especially as they pertain to Sunnis inside and outside Combined Joint Operations Area (CJOA). Unfortunately, the factors most likely to impact waves of violent extremism and ideological radicalization are already well known to the DoD community.

Conditions that Are Conducive to Radicalism and Extremism

Failure of the Social Contract

While particularly true in Iraq and Syria, it is nonetheless applicable across the all societies that when a government breaks its social contract with its people—through exclusion from government, disenfranchisement, failure to provide equitable essential services, justice, or security—unrest often follows (Abbas, Everington, Sheikh). ISIL and other extremist groups thrive in these conditions as people who are left with little-to-no legal recourse choose violence. Filling these voids or assisting governments to address these legitimate grievances may reduce underlying root causes of extremism (Olidort).

Failure to Defeat ISIL

Hammad Sheikh, visiting scholar at the Centre on the Resolution of Intractable Conflicts at Oxford University, stated "only when ISIL is defeated in the field unambiguously will the allure of Jihadi ideology be affected." Establishing a territorial caliphate is at the heart of ISIL's legitimacy, so striking at that erodes the appeal and credibility of ISIL. This must be done largely by Sunni Arab forces. Atrocities by

any other group will incite tribalism and feed into the narrative of jihadi groups, increasing radicalization of the wider Sunni Arab population (Sheikh).

Lack of Resolution in Syria

Atrocities committed against Sunnis in Syria struck a flint to simmering unrest in the region, allowing for the rapid rise of ISIL. The lack of resolution in Syria remains an open wound that continues to attract foreign fighters from across the globe (Olidort). "A complete resolution designed and carried out with the participation of local moderate actors would have the effect of downgrading the allure of foreign fighters and others to migrate to Syria," Jacob Olidort, an expert on Islamist groups at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy suggested. However, as we have already begun to see, the territorial defeat of ISIL will likely force the organization to change its tactics, encouraging sympathizers overseas to conduct lone wolfs against the far enemy.

Lack of Unified Sunni Political Voice

To combat extremism in CJOA, the USG could facilitate a Sunni Empowerment Campaign (Carreau). This kind of strategy would "create the strongest and most effective antidote to ISIL's magnetism (including for local recruits and foreign fighters) and worldwide expansion (including lone wolf attacks in the west) because it will finally provide an outlet for Sunni grievances and a viable alternative to violent jihadism as protection against various forms of Shi'a oppression," according to Bernard Carreau, Deputy Director of the Center for Complex Operations at NDU. This strategy would help build Sunni political voice in Iraq and Syria to help answer the question of who/what should file the void caused by the defeat of ISIL (Carreau).[43]

Perception of Expanded Shia Influence in Sunni Areas

There is widespread belief that the USG is in alignment with Iran to expand Shia influence from Tehran to Damascus. There is certainly mistrust in the ability of the world community to use diplomacy to reach a resolution (Shaikh). While this does not fuel radicalization directly, it influences the decision calculus of Sunnis to build what they see as pragmatic alliances with Sunni jihadi groups who they believe to—at the very least—have Sunnis' best interests and welfare in mind (Olidort).

This is good news for the Coalition as Sunnis in CJOA may be convinced to turn against ISIL and other extremist groups by appealing to the other "hats" local Sunni leaders wear, such as tribal responsibilities, members of political or commercial elite, the old guard, and other kinds of networks (Olidort, Shaikh). This opens the door to other means of engagement and trust building aside from traditional counter-messaging. In fact, resolutions to challenges facing the Sunni community must remain locally generated to have any real, lasting impact (Shaikh)

Personal Motivations

[43] The response to Virtual Think Tank 1 question also suggests that the US could play an important role in bringing actors together to help unify Sunni political voice in Iraq in additional to bringing actors to the table to discuss a political resolution to the conflict.

Finally, Sunnis—particularly outside CJOA—turn towards ISIL and other extremist groups for a number of personal reasons (Everington). Theses range from lack of employment opportunities to discrimination to search for personal meaning (Olidort, Everington, Shaikh). These motivations vary widely from person to person even within the same geographic community and are difficult to address.

What are the correlations between the US/coalition operational and tactical actions in theater effecting terrorist activity throughout the world (i.e., external events). For example, does the loss of ISIL controlled territory or kill/capture of an ISIL high value target lead to an increase/decrease in terrorist attacks in other areas of the world? Can location, intensity, duration or timing of attacks be predicted from a model? Executive Summary

Co*ntributors: Victor Asal, SUNY Albany, Rich Davis, Artis, Neil Johnson, University of Miami, R. Karl Rethemeyer, SUNY Albany, Jen Ziemke, John Carroll University*

***Editor:** Jen Ziemke, John Carroll University*

Executive Summary

The contributors weigh in on this question, doing their best to read the tea leaves. If Mosul should fall, what's next? Where, when, and why?

Getting to the Where: Location

Jen Ziemke (John Carroll University) suspects that, in Iraq, as the primary focus otherwise shifts westward as the main front retreats toward Syria, it would be very prudent to continue to **protect the rear from attacks on cities like Kirkuk**. Regionally, continuing signs of instability in **Saudi Arabia** might place sites there at greater risk vis-a-viz some others. Due to their relative proximity to the battlefield, **Beirut, Istanbul, or Amman** continue to be at risk**. Cafes, nightclubs, & bars** in these locations are more imaginable choices than many other alternatives **because such targets would serve to both maximize casualties and send a culturally-relevant message**. Further afield, given the state of aggrieved populations in certain European suburbs, we suspect locations in Italy, France, and symbolic targets like the London Eye to continue to be at risk.

What about American targets? Victor Asal & Karl Rethemeyer (University of Albany SUNY) find that, despite the fact that "anti-Americanism is probably the most universal and widespread of attitudes," **the relative risk to American targets is low**. However, the authors find that **VEO's are more likely to attack countries with American military bases**, and that the **risk of targeting is particularly acute when a significant number of American troops are stationed inside non-democratic countries,** suggesting that their presence "may be generating a great deal of resentment. In addition to creating a motivation, **the stationing of US troops abroad provides convenient military and civilian targets that can be killed without travelling to America**."

Timing is Everything: Battlefield Rhythms & Op-Tempo

Drawing from the literature on Complex Systems, Neil Johnson (University of Miami) argues that the ***timing*** of attacks follows reasonably well the "progress curve" (known from organizational development and learning literature)**.** Similarly informed by a complex systems perspective, Ziemke asserts that converting conflict data into sonic landscapes for pattern analysis allows us to *hear* the battlefield rhythm and op-tempo of the conflict.

When micro-level event data (battles, massacres, ceasefires, etc.) on the 41 year long Angolan war are played over time, we learn just how *slow*ly these campaigns tend to begin. Like drops of water slowly coming out of a faucet, each individual event stands out because of the silence between events. From such analysis and observation, Ziemke asserts that losing groups do not go down quietly, nor without a fight, and what begins as individual events eventually turns into a firestorm of violence. But then, and even more rapidly, the fire dies, the losing side scatters, and the storm subsides. A few chirps amidst the silence mark the end, *and the war dies in much the same way it starts, as an inverse refrain on how it began, little by little, punctuated by silences: an event here, an event there*. Adagio crescendos to an absurdist cacophony, but just as quickly, it reverts to the same Adagio in the end**. Thus, the start of the war helps to inform how it ends; it is actually the same melody, played again,** but this time in reverse.

Severity

Neil Johnson (University of Miami) notes that the ***severity*** of any given attack "always seems to follow a so-called power-law distribution", an occurrence repeatedly noted in the literature on conflicts and a feature of complex systems. This means that in every war, there are many events with relatively few casualties, but only very few events that are utterly catastrophic. Since extreme events and black swans are of heightened interest, *when* would we expect the risk of experiencing a catastrophe to be the highest?

Ziemke finds from her analysis of the Angolan war that when UNITA began to *lose*, they lashed out against civilians, and both the pace and severity of each event vastly increased. *Losing* is what accelerated the war into a new period, and a veritable cacophony of incredibly destructive events followed. It was as if an aggregation of losses on the battlefield ushered in a kind of phase transition in the war where extreme, rare events became more likely.

While in some ways ISIL strategy markedly differs from other violent groups, its tendency to lash out against civilians nevertheless may end up mirroring other quite different rebellions and insurgent organizations in history in terms of *pattern, tempo, and timing*. Consider, for example, the behavior of the RUF in Sierra Leone during their reign of terror under *Operation No Living Thing*, or UNITA's appalling treatment of civilians during the latter half of the second Angolan war (1991-2002), or the surge in civilian deaths in Sri Lanka just before the LTTE was defeated in Sri Lanka in early 2009. Despite how different these organizations may be from one another, they share a common battlefield rhythm: when they began to *lose* the war, lose territory, and lose fighters, each group escalated their campaign to deliberately target civilians, and in increasingly grotesque ways, and even more than before.

Taken together, one might expect that if ISIL finds itself facing an imminent, existential threat to its survival, **they might commit an unimaginable mass atrocity in whatever city they are entrenched, even if this behavior risks destroying a large number of their own fighters along with everyone else. As coalition forces continue to advance, one could imagine a David Koresh-style cult-like suicidal response**, as many in their ranks might actually prefer this horrific outcome to defeat by another hand.

In the short term, as coalition forces render ever more devastating blows to ISIL, we fear that civilians in the area of operation may face even worse fortunes. However, **when we begin to see ISIL commit massive atrocities on a previously unseen scale, the horrific events themselves likely are signals of their imminent defeat**. The war (at least in the kinetic space, and in the near-term) will be nearing an end.

So what can be done to hasten ISIL's demise?

Is targeted killing effective?

Rich Davis applies these questions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He asks whether Israel's targeted killing and apprehension program reduced the ability for ***Palestinian*** militants to project violence back into Israel. He finds that **targeting Hamas' militant network was effective and indeed led to a significant decline in both the number and lethality of suicide attacks by Palestinians inside Israel**. The "further up the production line" the Israeli's were able to penetrate, the better. As **new militants who lacked experience replaced** their deceased and/or imprisoned predecessors, less attacks occurred in general, and **the attacks that did occur were less lethal**. Additionally, as more and more of the network began to disintegrate, Hamas tended to allocate more resources "toward self-preservation, and less towards suicide attacks."

Implications of Davis' work applied to the Counter-ISIL campaign seem to suggest that missions targeting ISIL leadership might in the long-run lead to a decline in the ability of ISIS to project power and terrorize elsewhere, and that "the further up the production line" one was able to target, the better.
Somewhat in line with what Davis suggests, Johnston and Sarbahi also find that "**drone strikes *decrease* the number and lethality of terrorist attacks**," at least in the short run. Taken together, the moral seems to be: "targeting works". However, As Victor Asal and Karl Rethemeyer point out, research on the effectiveness of leadership decapitation, in particular, is mixed. Bryan Price suggests that **leadership decapitation is only effective when applied to young groups**. As groups mature, the effectiveness of leadership decapitation diminishes altogether. So if decapitation stands a chance of influencing outcomes with respect to the VEO under consideration here, the sooner, the better, and focus on the violence production line.

However, Victor Asal and Karl Rethemeyer suggest the reduction in violence might **actually be due to the reconciliation efforts instead**, and not the targeted killings. To conclude, one should ask: Historically, how effective has the use of violence been in terms of counteracting violence? Is using violence to counteract violence better than any of the alternatives?

1: Messaging

2: The fight against ISIL

3: Encouraging Regional Stability

4: Regional actor interests and motivations

5: Sources of extremism

Part 6: ISIL Support and recruitment

7: USG bureaucratic requirements

8: Post-ISIS Governance

9: Coalition Views

What does primary source opinion research tell us about population support for ISIL in ISIL-held Iraq and globally outside the Combined Joint Operation Area (CJOA) (Syria and Iraq)? Executive Summary

Opinion polls conducted by independent outfits in 2015 and 2016 derive the same result: the vast majority of Muslims in the region—both inside and outside of the CJOA—do not support ISIL.[44] In fact, ISIL enjoys very low support as a percent of the population across all countries covered by the surveys included in this compilation. Syria showed the highest level of support (20%) while most Muslim-majority countries fall in the single digits (Mauro, 2015). These low numbers recede further when "support" is defined as providing active or material support rather than sympathy for the cause (Burson-Marsteller, 2016).

Among those who do support ISIL, the reported reason has less to do with religion or ideology than with social, economic, and governance grievances.[45] However, experts interviewed identified two populations of concern: young men across the Arab world who they believe are showing growing complaisance toward ISIL and the radicalized population in Northern Africa. According to Mark Tessler, survey data suggests that North Africans who support ISIL are more severe in their adherence to ISIL's extremist ideology and espousal of violence support for ISIL is very low. In the five countries surveyed by the Arab Barometer in spring 2016, it is less than 2% in Jordan, less than 3% in Jordan and Morocco, and slightly higher, in the 8-9% range in Algeria and the Palestinian territories. This is the case both for overall populations and for poorly educated younger men, the primary target of ISIL messaging. (see also, Marcellino *et al*).

It should be noted however, that being widely seen unfavorably does not mean that ISIL is therefore considered the sole enemy. For example, an IIACS poll conducted in Mosul in December 2015 indicated that 46% of the population believed that coalition airstrikes were the biggest threat to the security of their families compared to 38% who said that ISIL was the greatest threat to their family. The poll suggests that US government is just as unwelcome in CJOA as ISIL.

Support for ISIL Outside of CJOA

[44] For example, see polls from the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies (ACRPS, 2015); the Pew Research Center, 2015; ORB International Syria poll, 2015; ORB International Iraq poll, 2015; Brookings, 2015; Mauro, 2015; Withnall, 2015.
[45] See Burson-Marsteller Arab Youth Survey 2016; Afrobarometer, 2015-2016; ACRPS, 2015.

Evaluating military-aged males (MAMs), the primary audience for ISIL messaging, Mark Tessler and Maj Shane Aguero found that, even among its core demographic, support for ISIL's goals, its use of violence, and its perceived compatibility with Islam is still low across the countries surveyed[46] with possible exception of those in Northern Africa (Burson-Marsteller, 2016; Marcellino *et al*). For example, Tessler finds that nearly twice as many poorly educated younger male Tunisian respondents (14.9%) believe that ISIL's tactics are compatible with Islam compared to the general population (8.6%), which already had one of the higher overall levels of popular support for ISIL. However, it is important to note that approval for ISIL's ideology is not the same thing as willingness to provide active or material support. But this belief could help explain why a large number of Tunisians have left the country to fight with ISIL in Syria and Iraq.

A different kind of concern about MAMs is emerging in countries like Egypt where there is only a 2% approval rating of ISIL, but where 22% of youth interviewed are not concerned about the rise of ISIL. While this does not indicate support, it suggests that tolerance for ISIL in the burgeoning youth population in MENA could be significantly higher than the general population (Aguero). Additionally, a 2014 study of Twitter feeds in Egypt showed that while overall levels of support for ISIL in Egypt remain low, ISIL's appeal has increased in Upper Egypt and the Sinai region and that those who support ISIL do so intensely (Cragin).

Drivers of sympathy or support for ISIL outside of CJOA support the conclusion that individuals support ISIL not because of religion or ideology but for a number of other reasons including cultural isolation, poverty, presence of Western forces in Iraq and Syria, and lack of education and economic opportunity (Aguero, Firat). However, radicalization (active support versus sympathy) is a highly individualized process and often involves some kind of psychological, emotional, spiritual, or social catalyst (Aguero).

Support for ISIL in CJOA

Primary source research provided conflicting conclusions regarding the population's support for ISIL in Syria and Iraq. It seems to suggest that Syrians and Iraqis, as a whole, are opposed to ISIL but that Sunnis in ISIL-held territory do not see a better alternative and are increasingly complaisant about ISIL's governance.

Countrywide surveys in Iraq and Syria find that the population is largely opposed to ISIL (Everington, Firat). By one account, 93 percent of respondents from Iraq reported that they hold a negative view of

[46] Countries surveyed: Syria, Nigeria, Tunisia, Senegal, Malaysia, and 15 others (Benmelech & Klor, 2016) and an additional Tunisia survey (Arab Barometer, ND).

ISIL. Only about 2 percent of the Iraqi respondents reported a positive view of ISIL (Firat). Meanwhile 76 percent of Syria respondents reported that ISIL had a negative influence on matters in Syria (Firat).

However, when you look at ISIL-controlled territories—particularly the Iraqi cities of Mosul and Raqqah where polling has been conducted—surveys find growing tolerance for ISIL (Dagher). This is due to a number of reasons:

- Populations under ISIL control have no viable alternative to turn to and hold a strong aversion to the Iraqi state (Dagher).
- Residents are opposed to non-Sunni Arab forces retaking their cities including the Iraqi army, Coalition forces, and Kurdish forces—not to mention Syrian, Iranian, or Russian forces (Dagher, Firat).
- Anti-Shia and anti-Western sentiment is increasingly influencing public opinion in ISIL-controlled regions (Abbas).
- In areas where ISIL has infrastructure and is able to provide essential services (like Raqqah), covert resistance is significantly lower than in areas like Deir Ezzor (Revkin).
- In Syria, local support for ISIL is higher in areas where ISIL has made efforts to promote Syrian recruits within its leadership structure (Revkin).

This does not mean the residents of ISIL-controlled territory want ISIL to govern indefinitely, but they do not want to return to the pre-ISIL status quo. Similar to areas outside of CJOA, support for ISIL in Syria and Iraq is largely driven by social, economic, and governmental grievances, not by religion or ideology (Dagher, Firat).

Public Opinion in the Face of the Battle for Mosul

As the Coalition prepares for the Battle for Mosul, three newly submitted updates agree on one thing: the government that replaces ISIL in Mosul and other liberated areas must be as good or better than what ISIL provided. Let us start with an analysis of why so many Sunni Iraqis welcomed ISIL in the first place:[47] they provided security and justice (Enikolopov, Mironova, & Hussein). What is interesting is that these are two of the elements that seem to be aiding the group's decline in ISIL-held territory, according to a series of interview conducted by Zana Gulmohamad with Arab Sunni and Shia tribal leaders. In Mosul and other areas where ISIL is being challenged, ISIL seems to be giving security and combatant roles to foreign fighters, which is increasing tensions with local populations. Furthermore, ISIL is increasingly harsh to defectors and those who express dissent, yet there is evidence that revolt movement and local counter-ISIL networks are strengthening in Mosul and other areas (Gulmohamad).

[47] Based on interviews with 200 Sunni Muslims in Qara Tapah and Jalawla—two sub-districts in the north Diyala governorate, which partially fell under ISIL control in 2014 (Enikolopov, Mironova, & Hussein).

Mirroring these findings, a study conducted by the Global Media Research Lab at Texas A&M found that ISIL's support within the Arabic Twittersphere continues to erode and its ability to control the narrative appear significantly weakened (Hinck, Naguib, and Kluver). Discourse is changing from the efficacy of the Caliphate to setbacks in Iraq and Syria. What these three studies suggest is that support for ISIL is declining among Sunni populations in ISIL-held Iraq. But the authors cautioned that the government that replaces ISIL must do at least as well as ISIL in providing justice, security, economic stability, and essential services while providing reasonably dealing with competing sectarian and political agendas.

***Contributors**: Hassan Abbas (NDU), Shane Aguero (US Army), Kim Cragin (NDU), Munqith Dagher (IACSS), Ruben Enikolopov (Barcelona Institute of Political Economy and Governance), Alexis Everington (MSI), Rengin Bahar Firat (GSU), Zana Gulmohamad (University of Sheffield), Robert Hinck (TAMU), Mohammed Hussein (Iraq Oil Report), Amaney Jamal (Arab Barometer), Karl Kaltenthaler (University of Akron and Case Western Reserve University), Randolph Kluver (TAMU), Clark McCauley (Bryn Mawr College), Ian McCulloh (JHU/APL), Vera Mironova, (Harvard Kennedy School), Sophia Moskalenko (Bryn Mawr College), Jala Naguib (TAMU), Mara Revkin (Yale), Michael Robbins (Arab Barometer), Mark Tessler (Arab Barometer), Steffany Trofino (US Army)*

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

Works Cited

ACRPS. 2015. "The 2015 Arab Opinion Index: Results in Brief." *Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies.*

Afrobarometer Round 6, 2015-2016. Data retrieved from: http://www.afrobarometer.org/data

Arab Barometer. (not dated). Retrieved from: http://www.arabbarometer.org/

ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller. (2016). Inside the Hearts and Minds of Arab Youth: 8th Annual ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller Arab Youth Survey [survey]. Retrieved from http://www.arabyouthsurvey.com/en/about

Benmelech, Efraim, and Esteban F Klor. 2016. "What Explains the Flow of Foreign Fighters to ISIS?" NBER Working Paper 22190.

Brookings Institution. (January 2015). American Public Attitudes Toward ISIS and Syria. Retrieved from https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/isis_report.pdf

Galka, M. (December 1, 2015). Support for ISIS in the Muslim World—Perceptions vs Reality. Retrieved from http://metrocosm.com/support-isis-muslim-world-perceptions-vs-reality

IIACSS. (2015). Poll in Mosul.

Mauro, R. (June 28, 2015). ISIS Has Up To 42 Million Supporters in the Arab World. [article] Retrieved from http://www.clarionproject.org/analysis/isis-has-least-42-million-supporters-arab-world#

ORB International – Iraq Public Opinion. http://www.orb-international.com/perch/iraqdata.pdf

ORB International – Syria Public Opinion. http://www.orb-international.com/perch/resources/syriadata.pdf

Pew Global Attitudes Spring 2014. Data downloaded from http://www.pewglobal.org/category/datasets

Pew Research Center. 2015. "In nations with significant Muslim populations, much disdainment for ISIS." *Pew Research Center.*

Rasmussen, N. (February 11, 2015). Hearing before the House Committee on Homeland Security "Countering Violent Islamist Extremism: The Urgent Threat of Foreign Fighters and Homegrown Terror" [testimony]. Washington D.C: US House of Representatives.

Vindino, L. and Hughes, S. (December 2015). ISIS in America, From Retweets to Raqqa. Washington D.C.: George Washington University.

William M. Marcellino, Kim Cragin, Joshua Mendelsohn, Andrew Michael Cady, Madeline Magnuson, and Kathleen Reedy, "Measuring the Popular Resonance of Daesh's Propaganda," *Strategic Forum,* forthcoming.

Withnall, A. (December 8, 2015). One chart that shows what people in the Muslim world really think about Isis. [article]. Retrieved from http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/politics/donald-trump-muslims-isis-one-chart-shows-what-people-really-think-about-a6765241.html

To what extent do populations maintain positive views of ISIL or ISIL's ideology, particularly in European, N. African, and Arabian Peninsula countries most associated with foreign fighter flows into Syria and Iraq? Executive Summary

What are the general perceptions associated with ISIL endorsed themes, to include:

1) *desire for re-establishing the Caliphate;*
2) *imposition of Shariah law;*
3) *belief that the Ummah/Islam is under attack from the West;*
4) *low tolerance for non-Sunni Muslim ethno-religious groups; and*
5) *negative disposition towards gender equality?*

Executive Summary

There is ample evidence that by and large Muslim populations in the MENA region and Europe do not view ISIL favorably (see previous response). However, there are many similarities and a few significant differences among these populations regarding the credibility and salience of many of the messaging themes that ISIL espouses.

Arabian Peninsula

In Syria and Iraq, one of the largest groups of foreign fighters come from Saudi Arabia, raising questions about the overall level of support for ISIL among the general population. Generally, Sunnis in the Arabian Peninsula support Salafist and Islamist political agendas but reject ISIL's claims to political and religious legitimacy (Lynch; Aguero). According to Tom Lynch, Distinguished Research Fellow at National Defense University, political Islam, which seeks to introduce conservative Islamic practices into the political sphere, is far more popular than the implementation of ultra-conservative Salafism as espoused by ISIL.

Most Sunni Muslims in the Arabian Peninsula do not believe a caliphate is necessary to implement conservative Muslim political and social thought (Aguero). However, they share some of the same grievances about government that gave rise to ISIL in Iraq and Syria. a source who wishes to remain anonymous argues that the Arab Spring showed that populations in the Arab world are rejecting what they see as a dysfunctional system of governance across the region. There is a demand for greater participatory governance, social justice, and better economic opportunities. At the same time, however, they are supportive of the implementation of Sharia law, including low tolerance for gender equality and non-believers (Aguero). But it is important to keep in mind, particular in Muslim-majority countries, that Sharia is considered to be a way of life, not merely a legal code (Aguero). According to a 2014 Pew poll,[48] making Sharia the law of the land has 74 percent support in the MENA region.

[48] Lugo, L. (April 30, 2013). The World's Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society. [survey]. Washington, D.C.: Pew Research. Retrieved from http://www.pewforum.org/2013/04/30/the-worlds-muslims-religion-politics-society-overview/

Populations in the Arabian Peninsula strongly oppose westernization and modernization, seeing it as an attack on Sunni Muslim unity and heritage. Lynch argues that these populations can be animated towards short-term support for violent causes when they perceive non-Sunnis or non-Muslims to be attacking fellow Sunni Muslims. This helps explain why groups like ISIL can gain meaningful, short-term support in moments of perceived danger for Sunni Muslims. For example, 83% of Saudis consider Western cultural invasion to be a very important or important problem (Moaddel, 2013; Aguero). Furthermore, 84% of Saudis also ascribe to the belief that the Ummah and/or Islam is under attack by the West.

In the past, Salafists from the Arabian Peninsula have provided material and financial support to Salafist jihadi groups opposing Bashar al Assad in Syria, according to Lynch. This anti-Assad support has also aided the rise of ISIL both directly and indirectly. Most Salafist support for ISIL has withered but some support still finds its way to ISIL.

Mia Bloom, an expert on the nexus between women and terror, noted that ISIL is careful to shape its messaging in ways that resonate best with various female population groups. English messaging focuses on giving women in the West a frontline role in the combat, such as the Al-Khansaa Brigade. Meanwhile, Arabic messaging offers women more socially acceptable roles as wives and mothers. This is particularly the case in messaging to women in Tunisia where women are seeking romance and adventure (at a time when marriages are delayed due to poor economic conditions). In Saudi Arabia, the messaging is more about empowering women by showing women in ISIL-controlled territories (in full niqab) driving cars.

Dr. Lynch concludes that the bottom line is that the depth and durability of conservative Islam in the Arabian Peninsula means that even if ISIL is degraded or defeated, the preconditions for another Salafi jihadist group to rise in its place will remain present for the foreseeable future.

Europe

Muslim populations in Europe overwhelmingly reject ISL's ideology and violent tactics (see Quick Look 3). However, a small percentage of Muslims—particularly youths—actively or passively support ISIL's ideology and political objectives according to Marc Pierini, a visiting scholar at Carnegie Europe and former career EU diplomat.

What we know about support for ISIL in Europe is that most supporters are relatively young (between 18-30 years of age), have experienced an identity crisis, are disconnected from their communities, and are marginalized within their own European societies, which have failed to integrate their cultural preferences into the European social fabric. In Britain, sympathizers tend to be highly educated while sympathizers in France and Belgium are often school dropouts, delinquents, have family problems, and face social exclusion and isolation, according to Pierini. What is also common among supporters of ISIL in Europe is that many of them have a superficial understanding of Islam, and are perceived by ISIL recruiters to be easy to co-opt and indoctrinate according to Pierini.

Many Muslim families in Europe still hold traditional values even decades after living in Western Europe—according to Pierini and Mark Caudill of the USMC Center for Advanced Operational Culture

Learning—including negative disposition towards gender equality and belief that Muslims are under attack from the West. What is clear, though, is that there is a generational divide where youth have a greater sense of frustration with their place in society compared to their parents. This is due, in part, to record high youth unemployment in Europe.

Among disaffected youth in Europe, the Caliphate has appeal, according to Pierini and Raffaello Pantucci of RUSI. The Caliphate provides disaffected youth with a purpose, a sense of belonging, and an outlet for their frustrations, outlined Pierini. Recruitment of young Europeans by jihadist movements abroad is not new (e.g., Afghanistan), but the scale is unprecedented due in large part to ISIL's massive and modern propaganda campaign layered upon economic and social frustrations of Europe's Muslim youth.

The appeal has waned in some degree as ISIL loses territory, Pantucci wrote. Its visible loss has led to a gradual loss of appeal and is one of the reasons for the reduction of foreign fighters from Europe.

What is dangerous is that ISIL is intentionally seeking to exacerbate tensions between mainstream and Muslim communities in Europe, according to Pierini. They do this through recruitment of European youths as foreign fighters, facilitate attacks that exacerbate anti-Muslim sentiment, and actively nurture sectarian divides between these two communities. This inculcates a growing sense of uncertainty and powerlessness in the face of repeated ISIL-supported attacks and is shifting a segment of society towards extreme right/xenophobic political parties and movements. The migration/refugee crisis out of Syria exacerbates these tensions, Pierini argues.

Africa

Like most of the Muslim world, support for ISIL in Northern Africa is quite low (Feuer). In 2014, an International Republican Institute poll found that only one percent of respondents believe that Tunisians should be joining Daesh. However, aspects of ISIL's ideology finds broader support in Tunisia, especially when expressed in generic terms, including the incorporation of Sharia law, a nostalgic approval of the idea of a Caliphate—even though there is little support for the erosion of the nation state, and a belief that Islam is under attack from the West.

Similarly, there is very little support for ISIL in the Sahel, but other Islamist extremist groups do operate in the area, according to Paul Melly, a Sahel expert at Chatham House. In general, popular support for extremists groups in the region is strongly driven by local conditions and politics rather than ideology. Another characteristic of extremist groups in the Sahel is their more extensive ties and crossover between extremist groups and criminal organizations. The largest transnational group in Mali is al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), but it is largely considered a foreign organization that does not match well with the local population's Sufism. Other groups operating in the area, who draw support based on ethnic or familial ties, is Haut conseil pour l'unité de l'Azawad (HCUA) and Mouvement pour l'unicité et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest (MUJAO). Aside from familial or ethnic ties, other reasons that individuals join these groups include poor economic opportunities, anti-state ideas, and the breakdown of traditional society.

***Contributors**: Hassan Abbas (NDU), Shane Aguero, (US Army), Mia Bloom (GSU), Mark Caudill (USMC Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning), Alexis Everington (MSI), Sarah Feuer (Washington Institute for Near East Policy), Tom Lynch (NDU), Paul Melly (Chatham House), Raffaello Pantucci (RUSI), Marc Pierini (Carnegie Europe)*

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

What actions and polices can regional and coalition nations employ to reduce recruitment of ISIL inspired fighters? Executive Summary.

Reducing ISIL Recruitment

Dr. R. Kim Cragin
National Defense University

This paper addresses the issue of ISIL recruitment from Literature Review Question #3. To do this, it utilizes a "quick look" format and focuses on two non-standard ideas approaches to challenge of terrorist recruitment. For readers interested in source materials on this subject, this paper also incorporates a bibliography at the end of the document.

Minimize the impact of existing foreign fighters and returnees[49]

The single most significant policy that nations could employ to reduce recruitment of ISIL fighters in the future is to minimize the influence of returnees. Historically, most foreign fighters have returned home from conflicts overseas to recruit and build local networks. Take, for example, the case of Afghanistan in the 1980s and 1990s. Approximately 80 per cent of the 20,000 foreign fighters returned home and recidivism rates ranged from 40 per cent (Indonesia) to 90 per cent (Algeria). Moreover, even in the case of Indonesia, which had the lowest rate of recidivism, returnees recruited and expanded local terrorist networks. In fact, recent interviews in Indonesia with Afghan veterans revealed that foreign fighters were instructed to recruit 10 new operatives each, once they got home.

A similar pattern exists with foreign fighters today. Between June 2014 and May 2016 there were 54 directed and "inspired" plots or attacks associated with ISIL in Europe. Foreign fighter returnees were involved in 65 per cent of the directed and 40 per cent of the entirety of the plots. In many of the plots, returnees recruited others to assist in the operation. The November 2015 Paris attacks illustrate this phenomenon. The core group of operatives was comprised of nine individuals under the leadership of Abdelhamid Abaaoud. Seven of the operatives were foreign fighters and returned home specifically to conduct an attack in Europe. Two of the operatives were Iraqi nationals who were sent to Europe by ISIL leaders to participate in the attacks. But an additional 21 individuals have been arrested by security officials for providing logistical or other support to these attackers. Of these additional 21 recruits, only seven had previously fought in Syria or Iraq. The rest were recruited locally.

This means that regional and coalition nations should put policies and programs into place now to mitigate the impact of returnees on future recruits. These programs should include the following elements. First, nations should make it illegal – through penal codes or otherwise – to travel overseas to fight as part of an insurgency. The United Nations has already begun to work with countries on their legal frameworks, but this framework is essential for countries to be able to act, and assist each other, in mitigating the impact of returnees. Second, countries should provide "off-ramps" or de-radicalization programs to individuals who travelled to Syria in support of ISIL, but

[49] Findings in this section draw on a forthcoming article in a special edition of the *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* on the topic of countering violent extremism, entitled, "The Challenge of Foreign Fighter Returnees."

did not engage in violence. Third, returnees who engaged in violent acts should be imprisoned – per a countries' relevant penal code – but, in the prison, they should likewise be placed into a de-radicalization program. If they refuse to participate, they should be isolated from other prisoners to minimize the potential recruitment of other prisoners.

Emphasize programs that reinforce non-radicalization[50]

Another policy that nations could employ to reduce recruitment of ISIL fighters in the future is to implement programs that reinforce non-radicalization. Generally speaking, radicalization can be understood as a process whereby individuals are persuaded that violent activity is justified in pursuit of some political aim, and then they decide to become involved in that violence. However, many of the factors that push or pull individuals toward radicalization are in dispute within the expert community. Much of the problem is that the factors identified by experts as contributing to radicalization apply to many more people than those who eventually become involved in political violence. Such limitations are more than academic, because they make it difficult for policymakers to design interventions. These limitations lead to programs aimed at manipulating broad structural actors—for example, education—so that they affect small subsets of populations of people who might or might not decide to become terrorists. One alternative is to instead focus policies on encouraging individuals to reject violent extremism.

To explore this possibility, we conducted a series of subject matter interviews, focus groups, and surveys in the Palestinian West Bank (2012) and Yemen (2016) on why individuals eschew violent extremism. Findings revealed the following:

- Rejecting violent extremism is a progress with multiple stages and choices within each stage
- Choosing not to engage in violence is distinct from opposing political violence in theory
- Nonviolent political activism does not contribute to non-radicalization
- Family plays a greater role than friends in shaping attitudes towards nonviolence in the Palestinian West Bank, and
- Urban centers in Yemen represent key populations for strengthening non-radicalization.

These findings suggest that policies to reduce the recruitment of ISIL inspired fighters must go beyond de-radicalization and counter messaging programs. In fact, from a policy perspective it is equally or more important to strengthen the factors that inhibit radicalization. And, importantly, these factors are *not* merely the absence of radicalization factors. Thus regional and coalition nations should attempt to understand why most do not engage in violence in their countries and they attempt to design programs to reinforce these factors.

[50] Findings in this section draw on three publications on the topic of non-radicalization, including the results from a forthcoming study on Yemen. References can be found in the Bibliography.

1: Messaging

2: The fight against ISIL

3: Encouraging Regional Stability

4: Regional actor interests and motivations

5: Sources of extremism

6: ISIL support and recruitment

Part 7: USG bureaucratic requirements

8: Post-ISIS Governance

9: Coalition Views

10 January 2017

Given the generational nature of the threats we face, what changes in organization, legislation, authorities, resources, infrastructure, education, and other areas should the USG make to become as agile, resilient, survivable, sustainable, technologically and intellectually dominant as required to protect our constitutional system and prevail in any conflict from the present until 2050? Executive Summary

Contributors: *Kurt Braddock, PSU, John Bornmann, MITRE-RAND, John Collison, SOCOM, Barry Costa, MITRE-RAND, Jennifer DeCamp, MITRE-RAND, Robert Holliday, NDU, Sarah O. Meadows, MITRE-RAND, Spencer B. Meredith, NDU, Mark Overton, MITRE-RAND, Nathan White, NDU Kayla M. Williams, MITRE-RAND*

Editor: *Robert Holliday, NDU*

Executive Summary

The contributors to question LR 5 diverge widely on their recommendations for ensuring that the USG prevails in future conflicts, while also preserving the US constitutional system. The divergence is attributable to the breadth of the question, as well as the diversity of the contributors' backgrounds.

The most common areas for improvement that arose from the contributions are:

- Refinement of the USG and military strategy making processes
- Emphasis on strategic communication to multiple audiences and through multiple channels
- Improvement of civilian and military operations prior to and during conflict
- Enhancement of capabilities for understanding varied operational environments
- Creation of new authorities and organizations to deal with fluid events as they develop
- Development of resource channels and education opportunities that empower decentralized action

The contributors' recommendations are arranged in this report based on the original question's categories of inquiry, which were: changes in organization, legislation, authorities, resources, infrastructure, and education; with the addition of two categories, risk calculation and strategy formation.

Due to the broad scope of the question, multiple contributors also encourage further exploration of the topics through deliberate networking and research in order to develop additional solutions.

The Projected Future Operational Environment

Among the contributors there is a general expectation that future military operations will increase in complexity, with a commiserate increase in requirements for information on the environment. Among the risks seen are the impacts of climate change, which as one contributor states, "will present more, more frequent, and more severe instances for the US to respond (or NOT). " [51] "These events will include humanitarian responses to severe weather events, as well as global crisis and conflicts…spawned by the effects of this change and variability." [52]

The assumed result by commentators is that the Joint Force will increasingly be required to engage globally. One concern raised with the expansion of DoDs requirements is that a, "corresponding 'militarization' of foreign policy through the dominance of the military instrument of national power to address increasingly complex issues/problems/challenges, supplants the other departments/agencies constitutional and legal (i.e. FAA) roles and responsibilities."[53]

One contributor assumed that the creation of additional requirements is also likely to accompany an increase in the force being used to fill, "'non-traditional' roles due to our capacity and capabilities." [54] Another contributor believed that, "the increasing number of countries, cultures, and languages of interest," in which DoD will be employed, will require the force to "focus on producing agile cultural generalists rather than stable long-term specialists.[55]

Another contributor stated that the Joint Force will face resource limitations that impact its capacity to respond to events.[56] This limitation was assumed to be partially offset by an increase in the US's utilization of coalitions to achieve its desired end states for a range of different contingency scenarios.[57]

One planning model was recommended in order to address these new challenges. The model states that future planning and engagement may be more fruitful if it is divided into Short, Medium, and Long-Term challenges. Short-term challenges consist of those that can be addressed between 2017 and 2021 under the current POM. Medium-term challenges consist of those between 2022 and 2030, which can be extrapolated based on current and newly identified trends. Long-term challenges are those between 2030 and 2050, which cannot be extrapolated based on current trends.[58] This model was not incorporated into the current report, but may be useful as a stepping off point for future inquiries.

Contributors Recommendations

The contributors made several recommendations for improving the force's ability to address the various aspects of Question LR 5.

[51] John Collison
[52] John Collison
[53] John Collison
[54] John Collison
[55] DeCamp, et. al.
[56] John Collison
[57] Nathan White
[58] John Collison

Organization

One group of contributors asserted that increases in the complexity of problem sets, as well as greater demand for specialized subject matter expertise, can be partially mitigated by the creation of, "Standing Civilian-military teams or increased civilian-military teaming." [59] Among the examples provided by the contributor was, "Provincial Reconstruction Teams (Afghan & Iraq); USSOF 'teamed' with FBI for sensitive site exploitation efforts; USSOF 'teamed' with USAID development representatives to assess local vulnerabilities and development (Afghanistan/Iraq); Conventional Force and Reserve elements 'teamed' with FBI and ISCTAP elements to support building partner law enforcement capabilities; and Conventional Force and Reserve elements 'teamed' with USDA elements to build agricultural capabilities in Afghanistan."[60]

Two other contributor strongly cautioned however that the future civilian-military teams must not be created from previous templates, without incorporating lessons learned from their past performance. Critiques on some of the above listed examples can be obtained through the Center for Complex Operations at the National Defense University.[61]

Legislation

One contributors stated that, "alignment of DoD and DoS regional boundaries," will also, "support agility and sustainability in 'competition', crisis, and conflict."[62] Their recommendation was, "aligning DoS Bureaus and desk areas of responsibility and GCC AORs to facilitate better opportunities to coordinate, align, synchronize and integrate programs, initiatives, activities, actions and operations in support of US interests, and discrete foreign policy objectives."[63]

The contributor went on to argue that interdepartmental conflicts may also be offset by the creation of, "Civilian-led JIATF (i.e. USAMB, POTUS Special Representative, other; ISO 'competition short of armed conflict') in order to support agility in engagement options." In the contributors own words, the recommendation has not been, "fully analyzed and developed in terms of providing civilian leaders with traditional 'command authority' over military assets to address complex, multi-agency, and essentially non-military challenges, issues or threats over an extended period of time approximating an 'integrated campaign' effort."[64]

Authorities

One contributor's recommendation is to develop, "a shared DoS and DoD authority to proactively build resilience and resistance with threatened partners." Their assertion is that such an authority will enable the, "integration of instruments of national power earlier and more proactively." [65] Once implemented,

[59] John Collison
[60] John Collison
[61] Nathan White
[62] John Collison
[63] John Collison
[64] John Collison
[65] John Collison

the authority would, "support broader USG engagement with partners to build resilience and resistance capabilities and capacity to overt or clandestine threats from another state actor, proxy, or non-state actor," as well as "identify opportunities, threats and challenges early."[66]

Resources

The resource issues identified by contributors focused on the impact that centrally controlled resource distributions strategies have on developing agile organizations. One author contended that a, "deliberate efforts need to be made to empower leaders and soldiers in edge organizations that can obtain the most rapid feedback from the operating environment." [67] It was also recommended that senior leaders ensure junior leaders have access to the resources and time necessary to pursue self-initiated projects.[68]

The same contributor stated that, "improvements in collection, processing, and dissemination of intelligence on sub-national and low-collection priority areas prior to conflict," needs to take place.[69] They also stated that based on current capabilities, new tradecraft must be developed that, "enable rapid in-depth understanding of populations, mobilization, and other human factors, using advanced analytic and data analysis methods."[70]

Infrastructure

One contributor argued that new organizational infrastructures must be developed with two goals in mind. First, "ensuring that whole-of-government and coalition participation supports a strategy as opposed to institutional equities and advancement within functional stovepipes," and second, "managing continuity of effort over time."[71]

Another group of contributors recommended creating opportunities and incentives that are structured for specialists to, "develop and build long-term relationships with people in power, people coming into power, people who influence them, and people who may be able to advise and support the development of recommendations and Courses of Action (e.g., foreign partners, members of NGOs, etc.)."[72] The contributor believe that these specialists should be developed to augment the current generalist mentality within DoD.

Education

One group of contributors stated that, "Defeating ISIL's effective use of terrorism, media messaging, and inspiration and cooptation of lone wolf attacks, requires using modular means of national power –

[66] John Collison
[67] Robert Holliday
[68] Robert Holliday
[69] Robert Holliday
[70] Robert Holliday
[71] Nathan White
[72] DeCamp, et. al.

influence operations across diplomatic, economic, and social settings." [73] Their recommended solution was the creation of "integrated, overlapping interagency working groups focused on core challenges and tasks in the Gray Zone."[74]

Another contributor recommended an alternate solution to terrorism messaging. Their assertion was that, "more nuanced audience analysis of different segments of target populations is necessary to determine how best to create and disseminate counter-messages to these different segments." [75] This approach would allow for messaging to, "children in at-risk populations," with the assumption that, "CENTCOM may have more success in stemming violent radicalization among that age group, thereby mitigating the possibility of ISIL-type ideologies from taking root in the young."[76]

Finally one contributor recommended that, "training and encouragement within the Joint Force to establish social networks prior to identification of tasks or missions, along with opportunities to mobilize social networks to achieve self-directed results," will be important to developing a more agile force.[77]

Other (Strategy)

One contributor recommended, "Improvements in the communication of strategic intent from principle level decision makers, to the Joint Force and interagency as a whole, in order to better empower subordinate organizations to plan and act in support of national objectives."[78]

Another contributor made specific recommendations on achieving that end state, stating the Joint Force needs to, "properly conceptualizing the nature of strategy," "articulating a theory of change to guide strategy execution," "developing a campaign specific strategy management office," "clearly articulated goals and strategy that are agreed upon and understood by coalition partners."[79]

A final contributor stated that improving US strategy formation and communication needed to include: "increased coordination of mission specific pre-conflict authorities and authority requirements between the COCOMs, SECDEF, and the NSC; including identification, analysis, definition, and preparation for action along multiple contingencies."[80]

Other (Risk)

One contributor asserted that the Joint Force should, "realign its risk tolerances (balance of likelihood of failure, cost of failure, and benefits of success), in order to provide opportunities for breakthrough successes, at the cost more numerous failures."[81] The recommended approach was based on lessons

[73] After ISIL Conference
[74] After ISIL Conference
[75] Kurt Braddock
[76] Kurt Braddock
[77] Robert Holliday
[78] Robert Holliday
[79] Nathan White
[80] Robert Holliday
[81] Robert Holliday

learned in leadership from Silicon Valley. A group of contributors also recommended that, "anti-fragile" approaches can be used as alternative approaches to leadership, in order to encourage situation in which and people, "can more easily make small errors without failing."[82]

[82] After ISIL Conference

1: Messaging

2: The fight against ISIL

3: Encouraging Regional Stability

4: Regional actor interests and motivations

5: Sources of extremism

6: ISIL support and recruitment

7: USG bureaucratic requirements

Part 8: Post ISIL Governance

9: Coalition Views

Are Government of Iraq initiatives for political reconciliation between the sectarian divide moving in step with military progress against Da'esh, and what conditions need to be met in order to accommodate the needs of the Sunni population? Executive Summary

***Editor**: Sarah Canna, NSI*

Winning the War, but Losing the Peace[83]

> *"With every step of the military operation, the gap is widening between Shia and Sunnis." – Scott Atran, ARTIS*

The general consensus among contributors to this essay is that not only is political reconciliation lagging behind military progress, but that the gap is widening every day (Atran, Dagher & Kaltenthaler, Hamasaeed, Mansour). The government is not focused on reconciliation, it is focused on the anti-ISIL fight, budgetary issues, and Shia in-fighting (Slim). Furthermore, among the Shia population, there is a general sense that Sunnis lost twice already and that there is little need for reconciliation with them (Slim).

So why are national reconciliation efforts failing? It is not due to lack of initiatives; in fact, there are so many that they are perceived to be more like pronouncements rather than planned, meaningful efforts (Abouaoun, Al-Qarawee, Ford, Wahab). Furthermore, many of these initiatives are being led by international organizations (Liebl). Lack of meaningful national reconciliation efforts have convinced some Sunni Arabs that the Iraqi government intends to revert to the political status-quo ante after ISIS is defeated militarily (Dagher & Kaltenthaler).

The "Historical Settlement" initiative announced at the end of October seemed to hold promise of a post-ISIS reconciliation until parliament passed a law in November legalizing and recognizing Shia Popular Mobilization

: "*The Iraqi government, army, police, and to lose the peace.*"

licy or position.

The Myth of the Iraqi State

The successful containment of ISIS will erode the single unifying incentive holding the diverse domestic and regional actors in Iraq together. The idea of a territorial sovereign state in Iraq is an illusion. Iraq is divided along ethnic and sectarian lines. It's economy is fragmented and reliant on personalist patronage networks that emerged from and reinforce clan, tribal, sectarian and ethnic loyalties. It goes without saying that the Iraqi government is fractured, but even within the Shia, Sunni, and Kurdish factions, competing forces (and militias) are dividing internal loyalties and interests. Regional countries also have competing interests while USG goals have not been clearly stated. Without a common enemy, it is unlikely that there will again be a confluence of interests to bring these actors together as (reluctant) allies. The risk is that Iraq descends into a failed states, which is particularly concerning as neighbors are

Forces (PMF), which Sunnis find an abhorrent form of government-sanctioned sectarian violence (Atran, Hamasaeed). Other unhelpful actions have included the failure to pass the National Guard Law and stripping the amnesty law of important content, according to Hamasaeed. Because of this, other GoI "initiatives" have largely been perceived as lip service to vague promises of reconciliation. These kinds of efforts will not address Sunni Arab or Kurdish grievances (Abouaoun).

One expert pointed out that reconciliation cannot just take place at the national level, it must also occur locally (Hamasaeed). Local efforts will be needed to remediate revenge violence among tribes as well as prepare for the return of over three million displaced people that could undermine military gains (Hamasaeed, Natali, Yahya). "Tribal and other forms of local violence could become a game changer" and should not be ignored, according to Hamasaeed.

However, other experts noted—without discounting the daunting challenges of reconciliation—that there are a few positive signs. First, there is a group of advisors around Prime Minister Abadi who believe that a new compact must be struck with the Sunnis, but this group is not powerful enough to effect change by itself (Slim). Second, two experts noted that in speaking with people on the ground that there is a general sense that reconciliation efforts have proceeded better than expected (Natali, Serwer). Third, in general, Sunni Arabs continue to largely see themselves as Iraqi nationalists and are committed to Iraq's territorial integrity (Natali). Finally, while Sunnis are completely opposed to the presence of Iranian-backed PMFs in their communities, many expressed a willingness to cooperate with Iraqi Security Forces (Natali).

Experts mentioned five underlying barriers to effective reconciliation.

- PM Abadi **lacks the support of his Shia alliance**, which he has not been able to secure due to intra-Shia rivalries (Abouaoun, Al-Qarawee, Ford, Liebl, Natali, Serwer). It is not clear that Shia hardliners will ever agree to reconcile or share power with the Sunni population (Hamasaeed).
- **Intra-Sunni competition** means that Sunnis are not united behind a single, clear agenda and likely will not be until free elections can be held (Al-Qarawee, Al-Shahery, Liebl, Maye, Natali, Wahab, Serwer).
- **Regional powers** are taking advantage of the power vacuum to promote their own agendas under the guise of protecting the Sunni population (Al-Qarawee).
- **Budget:** Iraq has an 18 billion dollar budge deficit (Yahya). Iraq's huge financial outlay combined with an inadequate inflow of funds means the Iraqi government cannot afford reconciliation initiatives (Liebl).

Conditions for Reconciliation

Sunnis do not speak with a single voice and do not have a unitary agenda, but the list below comprises some of the most frequently mentioned grievances. Experts noted that these grievances are not sectarian in nature—like most populations, they desire elements of basic good governance: security, justice, jobs, and equality under the law (Natali, Liebl). Furthermore, the Sunni population has to *feel* that they have a secure, just, and prosperous future in the country (Dagher & Kaltenthaler, McCauley, Natali, Serwer). The failure to deliver these demands may lead to further instability and unrest.

The list below touches on the most frequently noted demands from the Sunni population. For more detail, please refer to the cited contributions.

1. **Security.** Perhaps the most frequently mentioned issue is security (Serwer, Van Den Toorn). This encompasses many elements: freedom from tribal-based revenge and retribution for offenses committed during ISIS's rule (Serwer, Van Den Toorn) and removal and disempowerment of Iranian-backed militias, which Sunnis consider to be a bigger threat than ISIS (Abouaoun, Al-Shahery, Atran, Liebl, Nader, Natali, Yahya).
2. **Justice.** Reconciliation efforts must address forms of structural discrimination against Sunnis (Al-Shahery, Meredith). This broad category emphases many complaints: 1) need to moderate retributive justice (Meredith), 2) national policies that discriminate against Sunnis in government and military positions (Al-Shahery), 3) due process for those accused of supporting ISIS (Al-Shahery, Slim, Yahya), equal treatment under the law (Natali, Yahya), and 4) insistence on public accountability for those guilty of government abuses and corruption (Ford).
3. **Self Determination.** Local reconciliation efforts are just as important as national ones (Hamasaeed). Sunnis want more control over their lives (Maye, Wahab). Sunnis desire the authority to control their own territory and resources, determine local power sharing arrangements, provide security through local police force, hire for local government positions, and have meaningful participation in decision-making (Al-Shahery, Hamasaeed, Ford, Maye, McCauley, Natali, Serwer, Van Den Toorn)
4. **Humanitarian Assistance.** Experts agreed that humanitarian assistance must be an immediate priority following the liberation of ISIS-controlled territory (Al-Shahery, McCauley, Natali, Slim). Assistance will be needed far beyond what has already been promised by the international community.
5. **Reconstruction Aid**. It is clear that areas liberated from ISIS control will need massive and immediate reconstruction aid; however, there is deep skepticism about the political will to provide this assistance (Al-Shahery, Ford, Maye, Serwer, Yahya). There was a plan to rebuild Fallujah, but no progress has been seen on the ground yet (Al-Shahery, Natali).

The failure of the GoI to seriously address the grievances of the Sunni community could lead to a three-fold threat of destabilizing outcomes: a power vacuum where regional powers and their proxies escalate the fight (Mansour); a failed state where warlords, extremist groups, and transnational criminals thrive (Buddhika, Petit, Reno); or the rise of a ISIS 2.0 (Dagher & Kaltenthaler, Natali, Yahya). Hamasaeed underscored the severity of the political climate in Iraq by stating that "today Iraq has more ingredients for violence than before Da'esh took over one-third of the country."

What Can Coalition Partners Do?

Contributors outlined a few actions that the US government and its coalition partners could do to facilitation reconciliation.

7. Do not approach reconciliation through an **ethno-sectarian lens**—it not only ignores complex political realities on the ground, but it threatens to reverse important political and societal shifts that have happened in the last two years (Natali).
8. Demonstrate **genuine and firm support for PM Abadi** if he adopts an effective and detailed plan for re-integrating Sunni communities. If he fails to do so, threaten the withdrawal of this support. However, this must be communicated in a way that recognizes the pressure he is facing from Shia hardliners (Al-Qarawee).
9. The USG and its partners can allow Sunni areas the **protected breathing space to reorganization** themselves and hold election of new, local leaders (Dagher & Kaltenthaler, Meredith, Serwer). This also includes acting as a neutral intermediary to bring together international, regional, national, and local leaders to facilitation communication and reconciliation (Hamasaeed, Meredith, Van Den Toorn).
10. Reinforce Iraqi state capabilities and **sovereignty** by preventing regional powers from impeding the stable future of Mosul and other Sunni-majority areas (Dagher & Kaltenthaler, Natali).

Conclusion

Contributors noted that reconciliation efforts need to begin now while there is still military cooperation against a common enemy (Mansour, Yahya). As ISIS is defeated, local and regional actors may devolve into violence if a political vacuum emerges. One danger is that if legitimate Sunni grievances are not acknowledged and addressed, the emotions that gave rise to nationalism may once again become a powerful source of political mobilization in Iraq (McCauley). The intractable nature of the challenges listed in this essay led at least one contributor to conclude that there is little-to-no chance for reconciliation in Iraq at this time (Liebl). We may be in a situation where many of the actors' interests are better served by continued conflict than resolution (Liebl, Astorino-Courtois).

Contributors: Elie Abouaoun (USIP), Harith Al-Qarawee (Brandeis University), Omar Al-Shahery (Atkis Strategy), Scott Atran (ARTIS), Munqith Dagher (IIACSS), Amb. Robert S. Ford (MEI), Sarhang Hamasaeed (USIP), Buddhika B. Jayamaha (Northwestern University), Karl Kaltenthaler (University of Akron), Vern Liebl (CAOCL), Renad Mansour (Chatham House), Diane Maye (Embry Riddle University), Clark McCauley (Bryn Mawr College), Spencer Meredith (NDU), Alireza Nader (RAND), Denise Natali (NDU), Lt Col Kevin S. Petit (George Washington University), Will S.K. Reno (Northwestern University), Daniel Serwer (Johns Hopkins University), Randa Slim (Middle East Institute), Christine Van Den Toorn (American University of Iraq Sulaimani), Bilal Wahab (Washington Institute), Maha Yahya (Carnegie Endowment)

Following the clearance of Da'esh from both Mosul and Raqqah, and beyond that any remaining substantive elements in the Euphrates River Valley, what governing structure is most likely to be effective, and acceptable to the predominant tribes? Executive Summary

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI

Acceptable Governance

A governing system or structure is essentially a fixed distribution of power. At its core, governance is about the span of authority and who distributes public goods, and stable governance is not so much a function of which groups benefit from a system as of the tolerance of those who believe they do not.

Vern Liebl of the Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning (CAOCL) has made the argument elsewhere[84] that there really is no such thing as an "ungoverned space." The implication is that whether or not it is contested, power is distributed in some way and there is some authority in charge if only over a small area within a larger region. Everyone, in other words is subject to at least one – sometimes more than one -- governing authority. The point is that some form of governing is happening across Syria whether this is the formal governance of the Assad regime, fighter group control, kinship-based groups or local committees and councils working to distribute relief aid and provide security.

Any "acceptable" form of governance has a cultural element reflecting what constituents perceive as the appropriate relationship between the individual or group and authority, and a more pragmatic element which has to do with the value to the group or individual of the "goods" a governing authority provides. The relationship between the cultural and pragmatic factors is not static; in some instances or for some periods value on one can compensate for deficits on the other (e.g., a culturally relevant structure such as a *shura* can be acceptable even if it is not able to produce significant security or employment; a newer system like a federation may be seen as acceptable if it can deliver meaningful security and employment benefits.)

The Question

[84] See SMA Reach-back report R3 QL 7: *How does Da'esh's transition to insurgency manifest itself in Syria; which other jihadist groups might offer the potential for merger and which areas of ungoverned space are most likely to offer conditions conducive for Da'esh to maintain some form of organizational structure and military effectiveness?*

The question posed for this Reach-back report appears to be premature considering the rapidly evolving conflict environment in Syria. To answer it satisfactorily we need to know who are the important leaders in the area currently, and whether there are others who would lay claim to the area once the ISIL threat has been controlled. We need to recognize the current power brokers – what is there now – what is incentivizing their actions now and what they hope to gain or regain in the future. Consider that what might be a widely acceptable (and thus more likely durable) governing structure to replace what is currently present could decrease the power currently held by some leaders. Very few leaders respond well to arrangements that curtail their power or authority. Even fair division of assets like territory, political power, oil revenue, etc. among groups represents a loss for those who currently control them. Finally, situations in which political actors willingly give up power to a higher authority demand a significant amount of trust that others will not use this to their disadvantage but will abide by similar rules. At present this level of trust appears to exist only within relatively small groups in Syria and Iraq.

Nevertheless, the expert contributors to this report do suggest dynamics that may serve as guideposts in future analyses of the most likely paths to stable and legitimate governance in Syria and Iraq.

1) The tribe may not be the most important political influence group

While there are many areas of agreement among the contributors, a list of "prominent tribes" is not one of them. The authors list different tribes and clans as power brokers in Eastern Syria and Iraq and it is not necessarily the case that tribes whose names have historical prestige have political power today. Tribes are neither monolithic nor homogenous. It has not been uncommon for clans within tribes to take opposing sides in the various civil and counter-ISIL fights going on in Syria. When it comes to what might be acceptable governing structures, a number of the experts suggest that the tribe is not the most appropriate level of control in all locations, and thus not the most appropriate target of efforts to identify the requisites for post-ISIL governance. Siree Allers of the State Department Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations explains that the tribe is "an unreliable unit for understanding allegiances" both in Dayr az Zawr and Raqqah where "clan and sub-clan loyalties are more likely to shape local conflict dynamics." Similarly Lund (2015)[85] argues that tribal groups are not "functioning social units" and that affiliations are more local along "family, sub-clan and village lines" than tribal. In short kinship ties remain important links in influence networks it is just that the most crucial may be at the tribe, clan or relatively small family units.

2) Relationships between and within groups are fluid; impacted by material concerns

[85] Lund, Aron. What's Behind the Kurdish-Arab Clashes in East Syria? Carnegie Middle East Center, 23 January 2015; http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/58814.

As has historically been the case in the tribal areas of Syria and Iraq, intra and inter-family, clan and tribal conflict is endemic. Josh Landis among others notes that many of the relationships among kinship groups and civil society and opposition groups are fluid, citing as a recent example local leaders who have retreated from overt opposition to the regime or re-sworn allegiance in order to hedge their bets on the likelihood that the Assad regime will return to their areas with the defeat of ISIL. In addition to the pragmatic desire to align with what is perceived as the stronger side, Lund (2015) [86] observes two reasons for "side-switching": a desire for better defense, and a desire for better pay. In fact, these have been consistent issues throughout the conflict in Syria and give us a clue as to what may inform public perceptions of future governors. Namely, at least in the short run, to be seen as effective (and retain public support), a governing body must provide at least two types of goods to constituents: security and employment.

3) To date there is no common vision of post-Assad Syria

Factionalism among Sunni populations in the tribal areas precludes a near-term "fix" to governance – regardless of what structure or process is chosen – because there is no clear vision among kinship and/or other groups of Syria following the defeat of Assad. Moreover, groups with stable leader-constituent relationships (i.e., groups that see a leader as a legitimate protector of their interests and thus will adhere to his authority) are likely smaller in size and number than would be needed to govern apolitical unit like a city. The implication for political transformation and stabilization: start small and with narrow expectations. Here Syria expert Lina Khatib of Chatham House (the Royal Institute of International Affairs) offers sage advice: barring full regional independence, "we shouldn't forget that decentralization is still based on the existence of a credible center."

4) "Acceptability" changes with location

Related to the points above, many of the expert contributors were careful to note that the relative influence of a tribe, clan, family or civil society leader differs according to the experiences in different locations *and at different times*. For example, while leaders of the *Al Waldah* clan played a significant role in expelling the regime and administered Raqqa after 2013, many fled to Turkey when ISIL moved in. Others (e.g., *Al Afadlah*) stayed in the area if not in the fight. Once ISIL is removed, it is not clear that former governors who sat out in Turkey will return with the same political authority and legitimacy that they had when they left. Similarly, Sirree Allers (DoS) posits that kinship ties are more important to political outcomes in Raqqa than in (more cosmopolitan) Mosul and surrounding areas in Ninewah

[86] Lund, Aron. What's Behind the Kurdish-Arab Clashes in East Syria? Carnegie Middle East Center, 23 January 2015; http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/58814.

which she believes are "likely to accept the local council structure that existed before."[87] Like Kathleen Reedy (Rand), Lina Khatib (Chatham House) argues further that the basic roles of tribes in Syria and Iraq are where the latter are, "political entities that play a role beyond their own regions, but tribes in Syria have never played a political role and it seems that this role is being parachuted on them in the fight against Da'esh."

5) Include (nearly) all local voices

Finally, a couple of the expert contributors intimate that the formal and informal governing processes that have emerged in Syria and Iraq (whether traditional or civil) may be the best bet for effectiveness and what will be seen as "acceptable."[88] If for no other reason than that many of these local committees and councils emerged more or less organically from necessity or tradition and the time and financial costs of replacing them whole cloth will be significant. As a result, Allers cautions that clans who remained – especially those newly empowered or enriched by affiliation with ISIL should not be excluded from future governance. There are two reasons for this. First, as Kathleen Reedy of Rand and previous SMA Reach-back reports like V7 note, the willingness of locals to work with ISIL in many cases has been the result of pragmatic choice rather than sympathetic beliefs or ideology. Second, newly empowered groups could play the role of spoilers if they are excluded from new-found gains and/or authority. We should not be too quick to eliminate current power-brokers or workers who administered social service or government departments for ISIL.

Contributors: Dr. Kathleen Reedy (RAND); Siree D. Allers (Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations, Department of State); Murhaf Jouejati (National Defense University); Lina Khatib (Chatham House, UK); Amjed Rasheed (Durham University, UK); Mubin Shaikh (University of Liverpool; independent consultant); Dr. Gwyneth Sutherlin (Geographic Services, Inc.); Bilal Wahab (The Washington Institute); Dr. Joshua Landis (University of Oklahoma).

---

[87] Allers argument is that the reason Mosul governance failed in the past was not because of the structure – which was designed to be inclusive of Sunni voices, but because both the Malaki and Abadi governments were unwilling to devolve authority beyond Baghdad. In SMA Reach-back reports V7 Allison Astorino-Courtois (NSI) found that given its span of domestic and regional political, economic and security interests, the Abadi government lacks necessary incentive to concede power to local leaders unless and until all-out civil war breaks out in Iraq.

[88] Interestingly, Allers (DoS) notes that ISIL's habit of installing foreign fighters atop governing bureaucracies in the Euphrates Valley and elsewhere may have provided an unexpected service to those attempting to stabilize local governance in the wake of ISIL defeat in the villages and main cities of the Euphrates River Valley (e.g., Dayr az Zawr, Al Mayadin, Abu Kamal). She suggests that replacing these "foreign" governors with local leaders while retaining the lower-level bureaucrats that have been running service provision and administrative offices is a way to simultaneously encourage local buy-in to the new government and maintain the expertise and continuity required to continue to provide (and expand) services in the immediate post-ISIL period.

How will the population in northwest Syria react to future Salafist political institutions? Executive Summary

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI

Similar to points made by other contributors to this SMA Reach-back report, Dr. Kathleen Reedy of Rand includes a caveat in her response to the CENTCOM question. Given international pressure to avoid Salafi expansion in Syria, it is doubtful she argues, that Salafist policies or leaders would be allowed to become dominant over sizeable areas of northwest Syria. Nonetheless, contributors' input on the likely response to future Salafist political institutions in northwest Syria tends to align with one of two viewpoints: 1) Syrians will reject Salafi efforts to establish political institutions (i.e., to govern); or 2) Salafi governance will be accepted under certain circumstances.

In addition, the experts offer a range of key factors to support either the "reject" or "accept with conditions" conclusions. These factors suggest four areas of inquiry: 1) the cultural salience of Salafism in Syria; 2) the degree to which people differentiate among political groups; 3) popular views of, and experience with political groups; and 4) the relative importance of ideology versus provision of public services.[89]

Questions #1 and #2: The Cultural Acceptability of Salafism & Ideological Differentiation

Professor Murhaf Jouejati of the National Defense University contends that Syrian culture is a more apt foundation for moderate than for extremist Islamic practices. Salafism, which represents the culture of the Arabian Peninsula, is foreign to Levantine culture and as a result Syrians are most likely to reject Salafist institutions or reforms. Jouejati recalls that in the past Syrians living in areas controlled by radical extremists engaged in civil disobedience and demonstrations and sees little reason that these types of activities would not occur in areas taken or retaken by ISIL, Al Qaeda or Jabat Fatah al Sham (JFS) .[90] Charles Lister, a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute, adds that even within the opposition there is a preference for the Syrian national movement "initiated by peaceful protesters advocating for moderate ideals, rather than the transnational jihadis like Al-Qaeda."[91] He warns though that "that dynamic is not necessarily immovable."

Mubin Shaik of the University of Liverpool provides a variation on this argument. He maintains that in fact Syrians differentiate between Salafists and "Saudi style Wahhabists" so would not necessarily reject

[89] Note that while some of the contributors explicitly considered political institutions (i.e., Salafi governors) others tended to focus on the relevance and/or legitimacy of Salafi groups or members of Salafi groups in Syria.
[90] In this paper we well refer to Jabat al Nusrah as Jabat Fatah al Sham for the purpose of simplicity although we recognize that some references to the group are applicable to the period before its re-branding.
[91] Lister does cite variations in past popular acceptance of Salafi governance in Idlib governorate. Al Nusrah/JFS have faced less resistance in Jisr al-Shughour, Darkush, Salqin, Sarmadeh, Al-Dana and Darat Izzeh then in areas such as Idlib city, Al-Atareb, Saraqeb, Khan Sheikhoun, Marat al-Numan and Kafranabel) in which Salafi attempts to impose control have faced stiffer resistance.

all Salafist governors or political institutions.[92] It is the particular Wahhabism of the Islamic State that is countercultural in this area. Finally, Dr. Joshua Landis (University of Oklahoma) warns that the issue of the cultural salience of Salafism in Syria may be becoming moot. While he concedes that many Syrians are "fed up with fundamentalism" because of the harsh treatment they received at the hands of JFS and then ISIL, he argues that over the past six years of conflict the Syrian population has been radicalized as, consciously or not, Salafi ideas and practices have been accepted into their psyches and aspects of their daily lives where they were not necessarily present before.

Question #3: Popular Experience with Salafi Groups

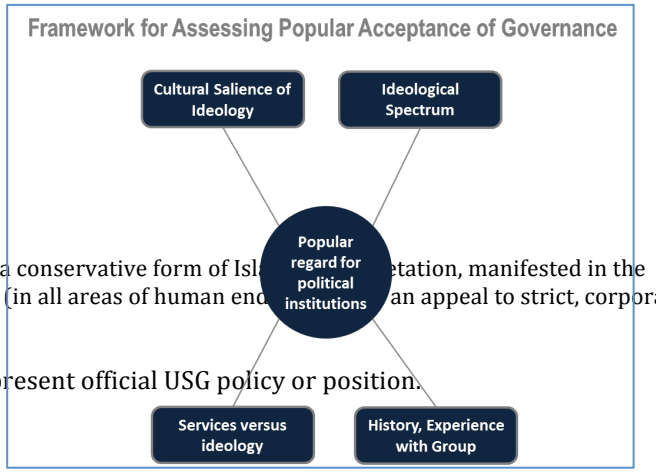
Charles Lister (MEI) argues that the fall of Aleppo, the moderate opposition's key safe haven in Syria, had the effect of diminishing popular confidence in moderate civil society. However, because in his view JFS failed to demonstrate its military value to the Syrian revolution it is now seen as "impotent" by local populations and enjoys "only minimal respect" in civil affairs. Mubin Shaik (University of Liverpool) on the other hand, believes that Salafist groups like Al Qaeda and Jabat Fatah al Sham have succeeded in building the foundation for public support of their leadership by encouraging locals to see them as defenders of the interests of the Syria people as opposed to other groups who they peg as the flunkies of the regime or of the West. As a result, Shaik expects that Salafist groups will be accepted by local populations as long as they continue their gradualist approach to instituting socially conservative (Salafist) practices.

Question #4: The Relative Importance of Goods versus Ideology

Finally, in line with the conclusions of other SMA Reach-back write-ups (e.g., see R3 QL5, V7), Joshua Landis (University of Oklahoma) argues that local support for one governing structure over another will not be a function of ideology or religious preference as others intimate, but a function of which government can provide goods and services to its constituents. Landis notes that people in northwest Syria are, and will remain, in dire need of employment, security and education and the government that best provides these goods will receive their allegiance. In a specific instance of this argument Lister (MEI) forecasts that continued civil conflict in Syria will eventually bring the people of the Idlib and Hama governates into the regime's sights and in urgent need of defense. Lister warns that if the Coalition were to discontinue support for moderate forces, local populations may again see no option but to align with Salafi groups for their defense.

The Result

As is clear from the review of their arguments, there is no clear consensus on the prospects for Syrian acquiescence to Salafi authority and/or attempts to govern in the



[92] Shaik provides a useful definition of Salafism as "a conservative form of Isl etation, manifested in the deliberate display of religious identity and practice (in all areas of human end an appeal to strict, corporal punishments in law."

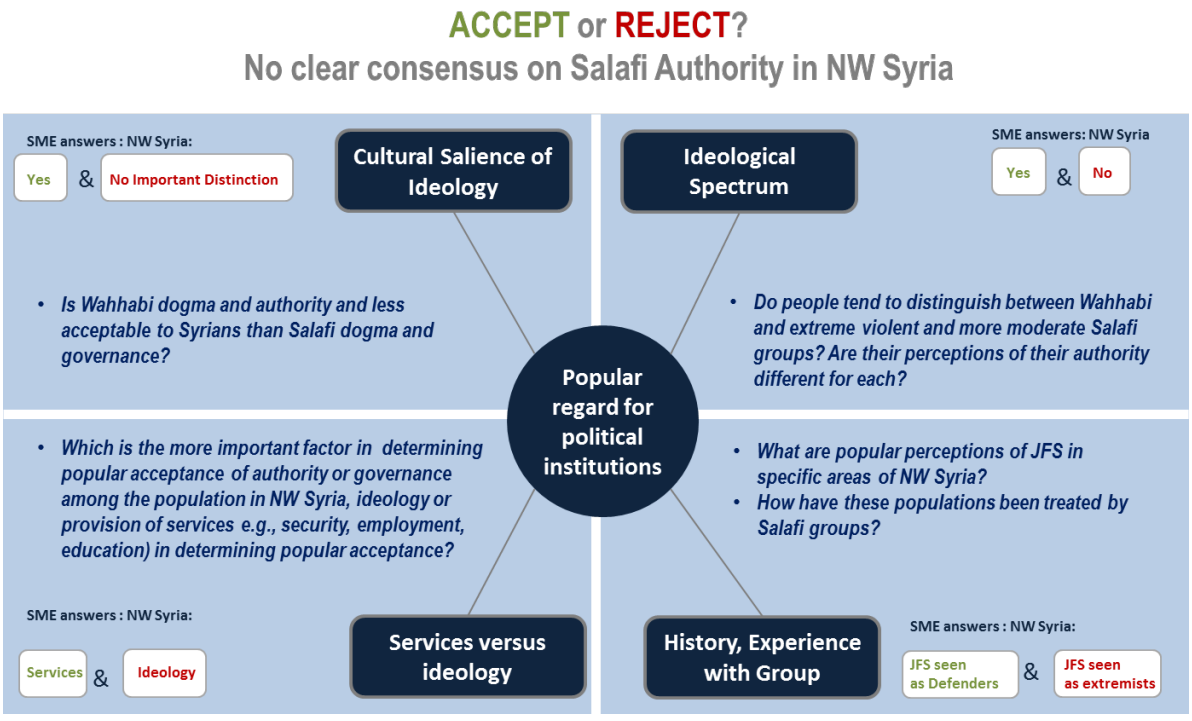
northwest of the country. It is also unclear which factors would be the most important determinants of popular support or rejection of Salafi control. Producing a more definitive answer to the CENTCOM question requires further study and data collection on the ground. In short, in both cases – expectations and critical variables – the jury is still out.

What the experts' input does suggest however, is arguably more useful than a single, consensus answer to (any) question of popular desire or preference in such a volatile environment. Taken together the experts' contributions to this report imply a series of important questions that provide a template for assessing or engaging with local preferences for governing structures (e.g., Salafi, Assad regime, or moderate Islamist, etc.) in both Syria and Iraq. Specifically, analysts and planners should tailor and seek to answer the following questions relative to their areas of interest:

1. Is the prospective government or governing system salient to, and consistent with local culture?

2. Do opponents/supporters of the prospective government or system differentiate among proposed leaders, or are all elements or factions of the proposed governing authority seen as unacceptable/acceptable?

3. What history or past experiences do local constituents have with the prospective government?



4. What is the relative importance of religious and/or ideological beliefs and government provision of goods and services (e.g., security, employment, etc.) in determining popular acceptance of a governing authority?

The Accept-Reject figure above shows these generic questions tailored for the question of popular support for Salafi political institutions in NW Syria, and provides a useful roadmap for further study and on-the-ground data collection.

Contributors: *Dr. Kathleen Reedy (RAND); Dr. Murhaf Jouejati (National Defense University); Dr. Amjed Rasheed (Durham University, UK); Mubin Shaikh (University of Liverpool; independent consultant); Dr. Joshua Landis (University of Oklahoma); Charles Lister (Middle East Institute).*

1: Messaging

2: The fight against ISIL

3: Encouraging Regional Stability

4: Regional actor interests and motivations

5: Sources of extremism

6: ISIL support and recruitment

7: USG bureaucratic requirements

8: Post ISIL Governance

Part 9: Coalition Views

Coalition Views Executive Summary

How does the U.S./Coalition view Shia extremism? Different from Sunni extremism? How do Sunni communities, Shia communities, MENA countries, and media perceive the U.S./Coalition position on combatting extremists? Executive Summary.

Contributors: *Munqith Dagher (IIACSS); Karl Kaltenthaler (University of Akron/Case Western Reserve University); Hayder al-Khoei (Centre for Shia Studies), Alex Vatanka (Middle East Institute)*

Editor: *Sarah Canna (NSI)*

Citation: Canna, S. (Ed.) (2017). Views of Sunni and Shia extremism. Arlington, VA: Strategic Multi-layer Assessment (SMA) Reach-back Cell. Retrieved from http://nsiteam.com/sma-reachback-views-of-sunni-and-shia-extremism/

Executive Summary

How does the U.S./Coalition view Shia extremism? How does the U.S./Coalition view Sunni extremism? [93]

Experts who volunteered to respond to this set of questions did not directly answer how the US and its Coalition partners view Shia and Sunni extremism. However, there was an implicit assumption that the populations of these countries see Sunni extremism as a greater—or at least more visible—threat. However, Alex Vatanka of the Middle East Institute argued that they *should* both be viewed as equally threatening to US and Coalition interests at home and in the Middle East. Vatanka noted that these two forms of extremism differ in degree of threat and sophistication. While the US has been confronted with Sunni extremism in the form of violent caliphate-seeking groups who also espouse attacks against the far enemy in the West, Shia extremism is an equally pervasive—and perhaps less well understood--threat. It is "tantamount to a totalitarian ideology that will pose a threat to both US interests and those of allies in the region" over time. Vatanka pointed out that the Shia/Sunni split is roughly equivalent in the Middle East, and Shia extremists (back by a powerful, ambitious state, Iran), have the numbers to change the geopolitical landscape in the Middle East.

[93] We were not able to get any experts to opine on how the US/Coalition views Shia and Sunni extremism. We suspect that is because most experts outside of the US Government feel that can only be answered from within the USG or the Coalition. If this is aspect of the question remains vital, we can attempt to elicit responses from within the USG and its Coalition partners.

They have arguably already been quite successful in doing so through the use of proxy nations and Shia militias.

Hayder al-Khoei of the Centre for Shia Studies warned against drawing a false equivalency between Shia and Sunni extremism. He noted that these two phenomena differ remarkably in terms of beliefs, range of targets, and methods. High profile terrorist attacks that have been carried out in Europe and the United States were not conducted by Shia extremists. He noted that "there is a religious hierarchy that exists in Shia Islam which has no equivalence in Sunni Islam, this makes the latter more decentralised, fractured and is what enables groups like ISIS to portray themselves as authentic and legitimate representations of Islam."

How do Sunni communities, Shia communities, MENA countries, and media perceive the U.S./Coalition position on combatting extremists?

According to Hayder al-Khoei of the Center for Shia Studies, Shia communities across the Middle East find the US and Coalition efforts to fight extremism "at best half-hearted and at worst complicit." There is a fundamental and entrenched belief in the Middle East that the US directly aids and abets ISIS (see also Kaltenthaler & Dagher). Shia communities point to a number of reasons for this belief. Shia politicians in Iraq cite the slow response to the looming threat from ISIS as they bore down on Mosul and other cities in June 2014 as evidence of US collusion. While Shias in Iraq accuse the US of standing by while the threat from ISIS grew, in Syria, Shia observed the US actively funding and arming rebel groups who fluidly shared weapons, funds, and allegiance with al-Qaeda affiliated groups as well as ISIS. Furthermore, Syrian Shia question whether Turkey, a NATO ally, intentionally allowed jihadists into Syria as a way to siphon off troublemakers from European societies. Finally, the United States' strong relationship with Saudi Arabia—whose promotion of Wahhabism is considered by some as the ideological root of today's jihadism—is cited as further evidence of US tacit approval and support for Sunni extremism.

Karl Kaltenthaler, University of Akron and Case Western Reserve University, and Munqith Dagher, IIACS, in their work surveying populations in Iraq suggested that Sunnis place a greater amount of trust in the US relationship and its countering violent extremism efforts than Shia communities. Iraqi Kurds, who are largely Sunni, also generally have a positive view of the US, but there is a "significant minority of Kurds who have strong Islamist proclivities and show some sympathy toward ISIL and thus animosity toward the US."

This polarization was clearly illustrated by a summer of 2016 survey in Iraq conducted by IIACS (Kaltenthaler & Dagher). When asked whether the US/Coalition was in Iraq to defeat ISIS, 82% of Sunni Arab Iraqi respondents agreed while only 32% of Iraqi Shia believed this to be the case. Iraqi Shia attribute US/Coalition action, particularly air strikes, in the region to an anti-Shia campaign. This demonstrates a massive trust deficit between the Shia community in Iraq and the US/Coalition.