



## SMA Reach-back Report

**Question:** *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

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.

### *Engaging Academia*

The SMA Reach Back effort has shown that the academic community is eager to contribute to national security challenges. CENTCOM can maximize the value of the nation's intellectual capital by sharing unclassified primary adversary data. This could foster a deep bench of accessible expertise built on empirical, academic studies. Additionally, individuals who straddle the operational/academic divide can be leverages to build an analytic framework that supports systemic evaluation in lieu of ad hoc analysis so often associated with crisis situations.

### *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 billion US aid package awarded by USG to Israel will no doubt further corrode America's credibility in the region.

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## Comments on Engagement

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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?

*ANSWER: a) Strong and effective counter-narrative that is seen as emerging indigenously; b) financial empowerment of progressive elements; c) nurturing arts and creativity through quality education; and MOST importantly capacity building of rule of law associated institutions – police, judiciary and rehabilitation/prison system.*

## Positioning the Coalition against a long term ISIL threat

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### Executive Summary

Nations will no doubt continue to experience terrorist violence as has been the case throughout history. The concern in today's global environment are that those who strive to commit violent acts against others can create global networks to facilitate and execute attacks on targets that are continents away. USG institutions, the Coalition and international community must be vigilant in order to identify, classify, and recognize potential threats. More importantly, stakeholders must organize, not only to focus on identifying threats, but also engage friendly and neutral parties that can be used to shape the operating environment (OE) by other than lethal means.

To do this, it is necessary to maintain strong relationship and communication networks between USG agencies, partners in the OE and host country colleagues. The USG, international community, and the Coalition are parties to long-term initiatives that position themselves against the ISIL as well as other terrorist threats.

Currently, many of the long-term cooperative efforts are funneled through the United Nations and are focused on intelligence monitoring, gathering, and sharing. Other mechanisms are also put in place to encourage internal actions of nationals to improve conditions on the ground through diplomatic efforts and tools in development are often dedicated to lengthy in country projects to improve civil society. However, when operating in areas that are so lethally volatile, diplomatic and development efforts cannot be properly supported nor can local implementation partners while combat remains high and safety is questionable.

Therefore, the campaign against ISIL and other terrorist groups lies primarily with military operations. To date coalition aircraft, U.S. fighters, bombers and drones have conducted some 15,000 airstrikes on related ISIL targets while approximately 6,000 US troops support Iraqi forces against ISIL strongholds. Additionally, regional partners are receiving US military training and tactical advice and assistance. This ad hoc process of eliminating the longer terrorism threat must be reorganized, inclusive and formalized for enduring impact.

Terrorist acts executed by ISIL and other non-state actors cannot be solved by military means alone. In fact, the continued bombardment seems to be the main factor ISIL is maintaining momentum in drawing recruits. In response the USG has an opportunity to solidify USG and coalition cooperation while implementing other efforts to stabilize and shape the region.

## **Recommendations**

Years of war in Iraq and Afghanistan, continued air operations in Libya, Syria, Lebanon, and Somalia, and other foreign military engagements are stressing this nation's ability to become proactive in long-term strategic planning for a durable US international security policy formulation and implementation. Therefore it is time to get ahead of the game and considering enforcing the following:

### ***Administer the Guidance in Joint Publication 3-57***

The recently published national defense strategic guidance states, "Whenever possible, we will develop innovative, low-cost, and small-footprint approaches to achieve our security objectives, relying on exercises, rotational presence, and advisory capabilities.<sup>1</sup> Although the military tends to focus on hard power, it is essential to utilize additional resources to fill gaps small teams cannot possibly address. With lean teams, political constraints and numerous participants in the coalition a necessary long-term ISIL strategy does not come easy. Engagement is essential. JP 3-57 outlines in detail specific guidance for Civil-Military Operations. Yet the planning and operationalization of civilian and military operations is lacking. Often, boxes are checked and commands move on. Historically, lack of a holistic Civil-Military operations (CMO) frustrates mission success. A well thought out CMO will "focus on larger and long-term issues that will be part of a Department of Defense (DoD) global campaign, or United States Government (USG) reconstruction, economic development initiatives, and stability operations in failing or recovering nations." The U.S. Army War College concluded after nine months of research on Gray Zone threats, "Without a coherent approach to reasserting U.S. leadership, the United States risks losing control over the security of its core interests and increasing constraints on its global freedom of action."

### ***Standardize civil military operations center (CMOC) as part of the CMO***

Each country's leadership looks at creating a CMOC differently, many see the value and have well-functioning CMOCs while others do not. A well run CMOC is the center of facilitation on the tactical level CMO among the military, the local populace, NGOs, and IGOs allowing greater access to what is happening in order to shape the human terrain.

### ***Bolster MISO IE fusion cells***

The information environment (IE) is central to the OE. Because of its central position within the OE, the IE also warrants new thinking about its relevance in shaping mission activities. To support these cells, the knowledge of central reach back centers and the establishment of a centralized data access facility to support network analysis and maneuvering in the narrative space can support

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<sup>1</sup> Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense, 3.

those small teams who lack skills or time to create timely and actionable information for better decision making. Information and data overload is not new, the IE is far larger than social media, and it will only become more complicated to analyze. Fusion cells must be a robust center integrating expert information and recommendations from the sociocultural, neurocognitive, and network analysis communities in a way that enables the Warfighter to shape the OE for mission success. The application to ISIL, and future operations in the Gray Zone, the IE is the key to overcoming the challenges of conducting successful operations. In order to shape the IE correctly, it is necessary to understand which sociocultural factors and aspects of cognition will affect human perceptions in ways that are likely to influence desired human behavior.

### ***It's all about relationships***

Former Chief of Staff of the Army, Raymond Odierno, never hesitated to remind forces that relationships are the key to mission success. Today's combat space is littered with players, State, non-state, and proxy participants. In Syria, the complications of operations are multi-fold due to the numerous players on land and sea as well as in the air. The Department of State lists 66 coalition partners. Each contributes military and/or non-military assistance in a manner commensurate with its national interests and comparative advantage.<sup>2</sup> The advantages must be aligned with CENTCOMs and leveraged. It is also important to understand who is contributing what where. The joint force is aware of much of the movement. There is no reason, however, that these reinforcing processes by which relationships are cultivated and nurtured cannot be further improved and official institutionalized. Strong relationships will entail less guess work about intentions and actions of other parties. Finally, assigning liaison officers or military civilians to maintain strong affiliations with these groups will show the USG is in support of the populations at risk and increase the ability to influence friendly and neutral parties.

### ***Streamline bureaucratic organizations, processes and implementation***

A June 2016 study written by a team of experts during nine months of research at the U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute recommends that because there is no reasonable expectation for the USG to provide either a grand strategy or a campaign-like charter guiding U.S. defense efforts against specific gray zone challenges, the DoD should "lead up" and develop actionable, classified strategic approaches to discrete challenges and challengers. According to CSA General Mark Milley, there will be "no clear front line, no secure supply lines, and no big bases" so forces will have to become less ridged and more apt at developing "networks with simultaneous, coordinated attacks against every possible weak point in all domains — land, sea, air, space, cyberspace, and the electromagnetic spectrum."<sup>3</sup> Meaning the force has to be quick, adaptable, and small teams may not have time to follow exact command chain in order to act quickly to prevent incident. It is time for forces to be lean and mean by streamlining outdated organizational structures, processes, and improving implementation success with expert information and talent—both civilian and military.

### **Private Sector Partnering**

Law enforcement officials have historically engaged the private sector to counter money laundering, human trafficking, narcotics smuggling and the like. DoD also has a history of engaging the private sector in the technology industry. More recently, the Secretary of Defense, Ash Carter, has reached out directly to the private sector to create the Defense Innovation Unit Experimental (DIUx). DIUx is a bridge for the US military and companies operating at the cutting edge of

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<sup>2</sup> McInnis, Kathleen J., *Coalition Contributions to Countering the Islamic State*, Congressional Research Service, August 24, 2016

<sup>3</sup> <http://breakingdefense.com/2016/10/miserable-disobedient-victorious-gen-milleys-future-us-soldier/>

technology. DIUx aims to “identify, contract, and prototype novel innovations through sources traditionally not available to the Department of Defense, with the ultimate goal of accelerating technology into the hands of the men and women in uniform.”<sup>4</sup> This is not the first time DoD has used funding to help bring accelerated innovation into defense operations. In the case of further terrorist threats, one might consider some of the following efforts:

*Partner with Private Sector Elements to Financially Support Requirements*

A private equity investment firm in Britain helped to construct a National Firearms and Tactical Training Center with state of the art weapons ranges and live fire houses. These buildings can be converted for scenario training. The training includes realistic hostage, siege and terrorism exercises. The Center will increase the capacity for military, police officials and others to train due to increased demand due to global terrorist threats. This is one way that the private sector led a security requirement in order to support worldwide efforts to fight terrorism and other asymmetrical threats.

*Engage private sector associations working on security related issues*

The Canadian arm of The Conference Board (TCB) developed its own National Security and Public Safety initiative to address the increasingly globalized world. To quote TCB, “As our environment becomes more globalized and interconnected, individuals, organizations, and nation states are becoming more vulnerable. Dynamic risks and challenges place unprecedented demands on organizational decision-making and public policies affecting [Sovereign Nations], businesses, and its citizens.” With its vast executive network, TCB brings custom research services and *Strategic Foresight Training*<sup>5</sup> to identify issues like planning for catastrophic events, challenges in coordinating responders during terrorist attacks, projecting change global security landscape and other topics, all areas where public-private cooperation is paramount for the future. In essence, the private sector is perfecting what the military knows as a fusion cell in order “to clearly outline the need for horizon scanning or a foresight tool, to “stay ahead of new or changing threats and vulnerabilities.”<sup>6</sup> TCB and other private sector efforts directly compliment those of the USG and its partners in an uncertain world.

*Encourage Foreign Direct Investment with Corporations who value responsible public investment*

Aligning US interests and priorities to those of their private sector partners helps shape behavior by bringing economic investment aligned with population centric ventures with it will influence potential terrorist recruits. Knowing, for example, that there are alternatives and that there is a tangible USG effort to actually improve lively hoods and empower people goes a long way when trying to influence the human environment. It takes minimal effort to encourage nations to welcome companies that improve infrastructure, commit to clean environmental standards or couple an investment with a health care facility. All will provide firsthand experience for “the people” and reinforce that the USG is in fact concerned about them. Change starts at the human emotional level and positive reinforcement through civil society opportunity will act to mitigate and/or diminish the reasoning behind joining networks that promote terror.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.diux.mil/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.conferenceboard.ca/topics/security-safety/default.aspx>

<sup>6</sup> Also see United Kingdom’s 2011 Strategy for Countering Terrorism (CONTEST) and Shell Scenarios <http://www.shell.com/energy-and-innovation/the-energy-future/scenarios.html>

## Summary

Comprehensive cooperation on international policy and security has long been a problem for the USG stovepipe system that is heavily bureaucratic and prone to the dysfunctional use of resources. By default, much of policy, formulation, planning and implementation has fallen to the military. Noting that this is the case, it is imperative to build the foundation for long term actions and processes by guiding cooperation from all partners to address the a holistic approach to achieve US interests and encourage populations at home and abroad to curb the desire to join groups that are committed to globalized terror.

## Comments on Engagement

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1. The US government can no longer rely on attributable programming as it has lost the perception war. Anything labeled US will be seen as an attempt to cajole or manipulate locals to further US interests in the region, rather than for the benefit of locals. The only exception is tangible improvement of quality of life through the provision of basics – security, food, services etc. However even here, heavy local cynicism and distrust should be expected.
2. The US government can no longer rely on politics. Politics has become a byword for negotiation, which has become a byword for non-engagement, which has become a byword for ensuring division to exploit it for political interests. Action must be technocratic and focused on visible, tangible improvements
3. This does not mean that there is no room for countering VEO propaganda. To the contrary, this space must be filled to prevent VEOs from monopolizing the narratives. However, these efforts must be carried out by deployed teams of locals (to ensure local granularity and quickness in response) overseen by trained internationals (to ensure professional quality and correct message). Some private firms provide this although most are too consumed with MoP instead of MoE. Furthermore, USG continues not to understand the differences between these offerings often choosing to go with incumbents and/or cheaper options. As such, most of these efforts simply resound in the ‘echo chamber’, reaching anti-Isil activists who do not need persuading...instead of reaching fencesitters on the ground who do.

## Comments on Engagement

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ISIL is and will be defeated. Unfortunately, that won't end terrorism; it is an on-going world condition. I'd like to see more activity on the use of data in near real-time. In order to be effective both visual and non-visual data needs to elicit and emotional reaction leading to GIS and location based information. This has to relate to observable events on the ground and needs to be on-going.

Optics are important and our media specialties don't seem to realize how that matters or how to respond.

Private partnerships have promise. I'm speaking at a conference next week bringing together about 300 innovative visual media companies. I doubt VR has much to do with this effort but AR (real time) holds promise. Plus, there are a couple very interesting technologies enabling personal storytelling which, if used properly, can be very powerful and should be deployed before there is need to respond. Finally, in addition to neuro research, there are a couple small companies focused on sentiment analysis. This may be a massive breakthrough in visual predictive analysis and exactly how media such as ISIL recruiting videos impact their audience, who that audience is, and how they may or may not be motivated.

## Comments on Engagement

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-Working on formulating a coherent definition of VE that dissociates Islam from extremism in order to deny ISIL any religious legitimacy or ideological victory.

-Encouraging --rather than forcing-- Arab countries to develop educational systems that provide youth with the critical skills needed to better sift through and assess the information they come across both online and offline. Radical narratives should be challenged and deconstructed by acknowledged religious leaders, educated youth and legitimate policymakers.

-Helping local state institutions build trust with their citizens through accountability, rule of law, and the safeguarding of human rights. The fight against ISIL and its affiliates ought to be within the framework of law enforcement and criminal justice. This entails democratic governance of the security sector, shifting from state-security survival to citizen security and safety.

-Being realistic about the expectations of current Arab governments in identifying and alleviating the causes that gave birth to ISIL in the first place. It is beyond the existing regimes' capacities to address the socioeconomic and political conditions of their societies. To be sure, these regimes can no longer postpone tackling the roots of their citizens' grievances, which resulted in political choices pursued by these governments for decades.

It is difficult to see how the above recommendations might be implemented while the Middle East policy of the country supposed to help in their implementation (i.e., the United States) already lacks credibility and coherence. The \$37 billion US aid package awarded by the Obama administration to Israel will no doubt further corrode America's credibility in the region.



# “Building the Framework: Exploring the Connections between the Questions”

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*What long-term actions and processes should US government institutions, the Coalition, and the international community examine to position ourselves against a long term ISIL threat?  
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 US and Coalition interests?  
What are the factors that will influence the future of Syria and how can we best affect them?*

## Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to identify the areas of overlap between these related questions, and provide a framework to support the other ViTTa submissions. Accordingly, it aims to help build greater situational awareness of the complexities facing the region and US efforts there designed to shape outcomes desired by both external actors and the internal participants themselves. To do so, the arguments presented here rely on several core scholarly approaches, namely comparative politics and conflict resolution studies, as a kind of analytical “reconnaissance” of key scholarly approaches that can benefit practitioners and planners. Both academic disciplines focus on aspects of *structure and agency* – fundamental tools that shape our understanding of contexts, concepts, and categories of analysis.

## Foundations of Change

To begin, we can apply these tools to the Gray Zone as both context for CENTCOM’s efforts, as well as a concept itself worthy of evaluation. Yet rather than rehearse the well-used definitions present in DOD and broader USG discussions, this paper focuses instead on the Gray Zone as *undefined borders of conflict*. These can certainly mean actions short of war, committed by both *state and non-state actors*. However, an additional framework that explores multiple transnational attributes gives traction to identify Gray Zone issues, actions, and responses to them, and to show their interrelations to each other. Key to this is the idea that all parties engaged in the Gray Zone have elements of transnationalism, whether through NATO coordination, ISIS propaganda via social messaging, or economic integration across borders.

In addition, state and non-state participants have broad reach, finding themselves affected by and affecting geo- and regional politics, in part because of the reliance on *proxies, partners, and puppets*. Defining these groupings, 1) proxies operate on behalf of an otherwise distant party, 2) partners share responsibilities and openly support the common cause, while 3) puppets claim autonomy but have little to no capacity of independent action, to say nothing of the intentions for carrying out their own autonomous outcomes. In particular, groups hostile to the US are also often bound together in the Gray Zone by the presence of an anti-status quo casus belli due to the **presence of actual grievances**. These can range from common forms of economic privation and political marginalization, to all sorts of disenfranchisement due to ethnic, religious, sectarian, and interpersonal experiences. The presence of these grievances matters greatly when considering the causes of conflict and ways to resolve them. Yet since these have often been around for considerable time in most places defined within the Gray Zone, in both a general sense of widespread suffering and in particular cases that matter to anti-status quo groups, an additional factor rests on the **perception of grievances**. This is often the tinder to the kindling of actual grievances.

Perceptions matter in that they serve to identify collective and individual problems, but equally they shape the boundaries for what is really “bad” and who is really “guilty”. This part of perceived grievances often addresses the sense of loss and powerlessness attributed to those who participate in anti-status quo behavior. This can apply equally to Kaiser Wilhelm II’s aggressive pursuit of “a place in the sun”, to Occupy Wall Street, to violent extremist organizations currently facing the US and its allies. However, perceived loss and powerlessness do not by themselves motivate aggressive action. That requires a second element of empowerment, namely that something can be done to right the wrongs. Underlying both is the persistent anger at those perceived to be responsible. The combination of anger and a sense that options exist to rectify injustice rests on beliefs of **efficacy** – the ability to impact one’s life positively through action. Efficacy applies generally, coming up across the spectrum of traditional discourse between great powers and local host nations, as much as in VEO recruitment narratives. As a result, efficacy becomes a powerful tool for analyzing perceived grievances, which need not correspond directly to actual problems as defined by the angered parties; they can have basis in reality to be sure, but the extent of the problems and their perpetrators can certainly drift from established fact based on perceptions.

Yet, as valuable as the presence and perception of grievance are in giving a basic understanding of the reasons for aggressive actions, something is missing even beyond the efficacy to do something about them. There remains the need for a spark to ignite the process. Building on root causes, these kinds of **proximate factors** can be seen clearly in those that set off the Arab Spring in Tunisia – lingering doubts about the legitimacy of the Ben Ali regime, the tragic public suicide of Mohamed Bouazizi, and ultimately the ease of information sharing to connect disparate people through social media. However, in important ways those factors still relied on the active non-violent participation of security forces supporting the protestors. This removal of capacity and explicit legitimacy from the government moved the process of revolution along apace. Additionally, to add to our understanding of the context that faces US and partner efforts in the region, the Arab Spring also shows other factors relevant to the initial CENTCOM questions in this paper. It addresses comparisons between countries whereby actions in Tunisia found ready fuel in growing anger over rising bread prices in Egypt, for example. In the latter case, efficacy for revolution, based on a general sense that change could happen, needed additional *casus belli* to set off Tahrir Square, both externally to the protestors and internally to their motivations. Externally, the loss of legitimacy in the Mubarak regime came to a head when it became clear the president would not allow open elections as promised, and instead planned to appoint his son as successor. This in itself need not have caused the effusion of discontent, as the regime suffered legitimacy problems for some time. However, in the context of rising food costs (kindling), the tinder of political betrayal created a scenario awaiting the right spark.

Internally, that spark came in Egypt, as with so many other instances of personal and collective anti-status quo actions, with a **cognitive opening**. In this case, it came through the **replication effect** of successful change in Tunisia – specifically due to military support for the protestors. More broadly, the Tunisian revolution was itself akin in process (if not in grievance) to Serbia’s Bulldozer Revolution, which could be argued followed from the post-communist Color Revolutions, following the democratic revolutions in Eastern Europe, building on the third wave of democratization in Latin America the decade prior, and so on. The broader point is that *cognitive openings build on previous phenomena, often found in catastrophe and epiphany* – some tragic event rocks the worldview and some opportunity presents itself for real change. In both cases, the spark enables mobilization by ready and able organizations, be they states or non-state actors. It is also important for all of these events to note the role of state forces supporting protestors, either implicitly by not implementing violent actions decreed by regime leaders, or explicitly by manning the barricades together. Of note in many of these cases though, was the division between internal security forces/police and military units. Often the decision of the military carried greater

weight, perhaps as symbols of national identity and preservation of the state against the government or even broader regime rules governing the country. This dynamic can play a pivotal role in the struggles in the Levant, not least because efforts to establish rule of law and external security remain so intangible in the current state of affairs, yet both offer the potential to build legitimacy for governance in both countries.

### Foundations of Governance

These processes and factors are certainly not new to the Gray Zone, and this gives hope for solid analysis regarding Iraq and Syria. The undefined borders of conflict there can find resonance with historic cases as variations on a theme in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century domestic and international politics. Internal pressures on and by states towards their societies, as well as on and by external actors operating in foreign countries, reinforce the transnational geographic nature of the persistent Gray Zone. Examples of transnational actions and issues can be seen in Western divide and rule imperialism couched as “civilizing”, as well as post-colonial cross border conflicts by revolutionary governments striving to maintain legitimacy while committing actions that undermined it. Additionally, Cold War spheres of influence that included proxies, partners, and puppets often employed justifications for transnational priorities with instrumental speech of liberty, while using others for “higher” purposes that made strange political bedfellows with dictators. Today, we can see similarly apparent paradoxes with the convergence of transnational criminal organizations and VEO’s, to say nothing of the use of universal regime narratives claiming democracy as the rule of the day, while pursuing wholly undemocratic practices in many parts of the world.

Therefore, knowing the shared historical precedents of the contextual complexities facing US and partner nation efforts, particularly the constraints inhibiting positive lasting influence, helps to establish firm analytical grounding for addressing those challenges. Specifically, analysis benefits from reliance on two fundamental categories found in comparative politics, namely *structure and agency*. **Structure** can be defined broadly as the setting and system that constrains or enables agents to act. **Agency** would then be the individuals and groups that actually do stuff. An example from the recent past best describes both and their interaction with each other. Looking at Gorbachev’s role in helping to end the Cold War, one can easily identify the structural element of hierarchical domestic power based on his position as the head of the Communist Party, and the international leverage granted that position that empowered Gorbachev to accomplish much internationally. Agency also played a role in that Gorbachev pursued policies from a clear ideological framework as a true believer in communism. Equally importantly was his norm-entrepreneurship – when the real world began not to look the way his belief system said it must, Gorbachev used his structural power to influence others to his “new thinking”. The same can be said for countless leaders in general, as well as for average citizens who join and participate in organizations bent on changing the status quo. The point is not to reinvent the analytical wheel here, but to show that these core concepts give solid footing for addressing some of the most difficult questions raised in the CENTCOM project.

That analytical role for structure and agency operates through the framework of the **state-society relationship**, where the *state* is that enduring entity that protects borders from internal and external threats. It does so according to Weber’s maxim that states control the monopoly on the use of legitimate coercive force, recognizing that that monopoly is rarely absolute for long, and that contestations to legitimacy invariably rise by internal challenges and external rivals. Despite these necessary caveats, the definition still provides enough grounding to draw vital distinctions between states and *regimes*, which define the rules of the games – both codified formal rules and informal day-to-day governance procedures. These two entities differ from *governments* made up of elites who rule and make policies according to the parameters of the state and regime. However, at times these three are odds with each other, or have some variation of conflict, as can be seen in quasi-

state entities like ISIS, and by extension the Assad regime today. These entities can function with a degree of internal sovereignty but without external recognition by the international community, and in the above cases, a much-deserved lack of recognition in their current forms.

On the other side in this relationship, the societal element often relies on an in-group/out-group dynamic defining how individuals and groups see themselves and others, as well as how they believe others see them. These identities follow processes of socialization among “believers”, whereby ideas and interest first get *articulated*, and individuals learn what matters to themselves and others. Next, these concepts can *aggregate* as groups form around commonalities, finally leading to the *articulation* of identities and interests to those in power. Social movement theory expands this greatly and offers valid insights in the mechanisms for social mobilization, while it too rests within the context of states and their relationships to societies as a whole. However, by no means do these processes occur along deterministic paths, as many ideas and interests fall by the wayside or get squashed at various stages by social or state rivals. Instead, the basic process helps to reveal common steps by which groups, including states, can come to develop self and other identities. This can in turn allow for analysis into the processes of mobilization, something that has great significance for both sides of the radicalization-deradicalization spectrum pertaining to questions posed at the outset of this paper.

That spectrum also shares three factors that help to define structure and agency in a given context, whether states or non-state organizations: capacity, autonomy, and legitimacy. **Capacity** refers to the ability to collect resources and use specific allocation mechanisms for distributing them effectively, according to whichever schema dominates the policy decision making process. These can be paternalistic, prestige-based, retributive, democratic, religious, or rely on a host of other *norms of appropriateness* defined by and defining the state-society relationship. In turn, **autonomy** deals with decision making and enforcing power without the presence of countermanding outsiders. This often gets labeled as sovereignty in interstate diplomacy, as well as between separatist movements and governments loathe to relinquish control over state territory. The recent Colombian government negotiations with the FARC highlight the centrality of autonomy discussions with anti-status quo non-state actors. This may hold promise for comparisons to Iraq and Syria if conditions follow similar paths, and agents with the requisite structural power can pursue them; two very large conditions, but ones worth watching for and seeking to support if they do arrive. Finally, **legitimacy** can be difficult to operationalize in a research sense – “how can we know that a group or government has it beforehand” is a much more difficult question than knowing when those actors have lost it. Accordingly, legitimacy can range from no overt opposition (tacit) to purposeful support (explicit). This captures a set of actions to indicate the presence of an otherwise difficult to ascertain belief.

In an attempt to show that these variables can provide real world measures of the state-society dynamic, the following two tables provide an example template for Iraq that includes structure and agency for both state and society. It can offer some steps to establishing the context for discussion of what victory would look like in Syria and Iraq, how to position the US and partners for engaging ISIS until the group loses traction in the “war of words” by losing on the battlefield, and ultimately what can be done to help establish stable governance that at the very least is not hostile to the US and its efforts in Syria.

Structure: strengths, vulnerabilities	State	Agency: strengths, vulnerabilities
S: international support, oil revenue V: weak infrastructure, uncertain tax base	Capacity	S: ethnic/religious ID ← → political patronage V: intra-elite competition
S: centralized d-m, fear based compliance V: international props required	Autonomy	S: personal connections, clientelism V: militias require goodies not just ideas
S: compelling narrative with external support V: hypocrisy apparent to those who know	Legitimacy	S: in-group protects its own V: corruption, backlash for retributive justice

Structure: strengths, vulnerabilities	Society	Agency: strengths, vulnerabilities
S: education, core beliefs @ place in region V: atomized by violence, ↓ \$ & opportunities	Capacity	S: survival motif – empowers to endure V: limited employment mobility, growth
S: religious norms shape politics V: low efficacy (political in particular)	Autonomy	S: live in spite of state not because of it V: little access to real change mechanisms
S: neighbors abroad reinforce in-group V: out-group equally potent and motivated	Legitimacy	S: beautiful suffering – justifies enduring V: no end to suffering leads to radicalization?

Employing this template allows for engagement with two additional core concepts, specifically *cultural empathy* and *conflict resolution* paradigms. These two related approaches can greatly aid planning and implementation of policies, in terms of defining “good” outcomes beforehand and working appropriately to enable them. Both also recognize the limitations inherent to the latter, in particular, in places suffering from catastrophic, persistent violence like Iraq and Syria.

### Foundations of “Victory”

**Cultural empathy** steps through the door of cultural knowledge to reach out figuratively and literally to the “other”. By that, it allows for practitioners to use several critical topics used often in the fight against ISIS – narratives, norms, and to a lesser degree in the public fora but equally importantly, nationality. Narratives remain central to a range of DOD functions, as well as more broadly by implication, political interactions between states and within them over resources, influence, and strategic victory. Narratives play that role because they accomplish several primary tasks. First, they help to explain why people do what they do, and the meaning of events that occur outside of direct human action. Second, they also serve as keepers of collective memory passed through generations, helping individuals and communities to know their place relative to outsiders, whether hostile, indifferent, or confederates working towards common goals. Finally, narratives are themselves acts of purposive language, providing tools for groups to achieve their goals by combining collaborative stories. Those stories build on each other through central themes that often include some form of trouble and a way out of it. Therefore, as more than simply rote memory of what happened, or even why it occurred and still matters, narratives also include elements of empathy to connect the story tellers and hearers with story characters, thus giving a sense of shared humanity across time and space. Those characters can motivate present day listeners towards greater pursuits of justice, reward and fulfillment, and as a result, offer states and non-state groups a broad spectrum of powerful analogies and archetypes for action.

Yet narratives are not in themselves rigid, immutable things. Elements of internal cohesion and adaptability show tensions that can exist between *master narratives* that persist through continued traction within a community based on their meaning and usage to explain things, and

*personal versions* of the story that circle the core tenets. Having room for individuation does not mean an ideational free-for-all though. Stories or meanings that move too far from the center, or peripheral ideas that seek to overcome the core beliefs are likely to draw attention, if not outright hostility. Examples from counter fatwas regarding ISIS, or the broader current meaning of the European Union highlight the contested nature of those deviations, or more aptly, their perception as deviations by those who hold to a more “traditional” meaning of the core. In significant ways then, for Europe, the most meaningful changes in the EU can be seen in its movement from economic unity to political coordination and finally social integration of values, rather than the more easily noted geographic enlargement into Eastern Europe. These comparisons have direct application to Iraq and Syria as both polities struggle to define the narratives that establish and build the capacity, autonomy and legitimacy discussed earlier.

To make those comparisons, it is necessary to ask why some narratives become the message for violent action, while others do not, as well as the mechanisms by which those processes take place. Determining that requires a focus on aspects of *integration, coherence and fidelity*. Each of these reveals connections between core beliefs and language, while tying in experiences before people join resistance movements, as well as what members do within them. Accordingly, dialogue between rank-and-file participants, and between them and the leadership reveals points of contact either to build up or diminish the legitimacy of resistance narratives.

In particular, identifying a disconnect between what messages actually say relative to common, long-standing meanings will require a depth of knowledge that is available in different academic disciplines. Tapping into that knowledge base allows for strategic messaging to attempt plugging holes in a supported information campaign, or conversely, efforts to open new gaps or exploit existing ones in countering adversary movements. This partly focuses on the ideational space, while trustworthiness deals with the actions of leaders as moral archetypes of those narratives. As such, engaging in a typical “smear campaign” to discredit opponents has its rewards, but opposition groups retain ways to justify what could otherwise be considered deviations of character in response. Recognizing that action-reaction dynamic remains a key feature of effecting positive change in the long-term fight against ISIS and the prospects for stabilization of Syria and Iraq.

So how then can practitioners take this into practical data collection and messaging? Analysis into multiple layers of meaning gives a framework for evaluating a spectrum of issues and how people handle them cognitively, but at the same time, it also recognizes the limitations posed by *incomplete, inaccurate, and instrumental* information – people may not know, may remember or understand incorrectly, or may seek to skew the presentation of information in favor of things other than full truth claims. Accordingly, research needs realistic boundaries for what it can do in this central area of narrative analysis. Of particular note is the way individual cognition coalesces into larger group dynamics since group think can override personal decision making. Examples include things like *bandwagoning* – siding with the dominant view to ensure personal rewards; *peer pressure* – overriding emotional attachments and cost/benefit calculations to “fit in”; and *threat perceptions* – engaging in fight and flight mechanisms.

Tied to these considerations are norms of appropriateness, specifically the practical use of beliefs within society that reinforce personal and group senses of place and purpose, as well as remonstrations and reprimands for deviating away from the norms. In particular, we want to know what those norms are for Iraq and Syria, but first, can we even homogenize those two countries into single normative units of analysis? Deeper analysis into subgroups based on *objective* norms (those that exist regardless of who the “other” is or what they do), as well as *subjective* ones focusing on intergroup dynamics, can identify the friction points within the states as they currently exist, and areas of overlap in the potential future. Even more so, these norms have undergone stress from the near constant violence plaguing both countries, but at the same time, belief systems have also adapted, whether by highlighting virtues of fighting or fleeing to protect what matters most. Those

valued things span a range from life, family, ethnic identity, and to ideational notions of nationality, all of which are relatable points of empathetic connection for practitioners engaging with vulnerable populations in the region.

Specifically, nationalism offers more than just a reference point for conversations in-country between locals. It also pertains to aspirations of self-government through a sovereign state, and thus gives much more in terms of the broader concept of cultural empathy for outsider interveners. Both Iraq and Syria are deeply broken in fundamental ways. Economic disruptions, demographic dislocations, political alienation, and the ensuing violence over these and deeper ethnic and religious identity conflicts reveal a broad landscape of complex, overlapping problems. In many ways, they are similar to the Gray Zone itself with undefined borders of conflict. As such, one way to bind the brokenness is nationalism, an identity marker that can cross cultural and economic cleavages through a political framework. Citizenship allows for opportunities to give allegiance to broader entities, while not inherently threatening and diminishing more local identities. In return, states provide rights and “goodies.”

However, even a cursory glance at the struggles facing Afghanistan calls into the question the rose-colored glasses one could assume of building nationalism. This relates back to the troika of analytical categories – *capacity, autonomy and legitimacy* – for even in places with two out of three, the absence of one may undo, or at the very least undermine nation building; Turkmenbashi remained an elusive goal despite the profusion of golden statues. What value then can nationalism bring to the discussion at hand? In one critical aspect, it provides a way forward, but as with all other aspects of this analytical foundation argument, considerations of feasibility matter as much as the efforts and paradigm undergirding nationalism.

Accordingly, **conflict resolution** strategies offer practical guidelines for setting the steps for long-term efforts that have potential to lead to successful outcomes in the region. In many ways, the tools for conflict resolution already exist across a host of USG and partner nation capacities. These include historic examples of multilateral peacekeeping, prevention efforts through negotiated settlements at all levels of governance from the local to international venues, all the way to reconciliation mechanisms found in truth commissions and microfinance. What binds these actions together is their *modularity*, their flexibility of application across issues and geographic spaces. In significant ways, conflict resolution shares similarities to the Gray Zone as a concept and in practice, making transnational actions feasible in both areas.

Specifically, reductions in violence, establishment of peace zones, and ultimately the development and embedding of non-violent resolution mechanisms in the structures and agents of the state-society relationship remain the gold standard for lasting peace. To do so obviously requires addressing the underlying causes, which the aforementioned analytical tools can provide, to say nothing of actually ending the violence itself, clearly no easy task. The relevant actions often lie across a spectrum of contexts and goals ranging from negative peace (the absence of overt violence) to positive peace (reconciliation so fighting no longer becomes a desired option). Conflict mapping of the origins and processes of dispute lays a similar analytical foundation as structure and agency do for the state-society relationship, offering both snapshots at any given moment, as well as trend analysis for deeper analysis into causality. When combined with research into grievances, cognitive openings can emerge into view, and not just after the fact. This is partly due to a reliance on *organizational lifecycles*, a related field in business, sociology, and other related scholarly disciplines.

Recognizing that organizations progress through stages of development in similar ways to individual decisions to join and participate in those organizations, it is possible to identify markers of capacity, autonomy and legitimacy for both states and non-state groups. In particular for anti-status quo VEOs, one can examine initial incubation when narratives and norms advance into new areas of application and draw new adherents to the belief system. Strategic violence can result from those processes, in part due to rivalries within the emerging organization for power over more than

just resources, to include the core identity markers of the narrative. It can also result from actions by external enemies or a lack of acceptance, or even notice, by the targeted population perceived by the organization as vulnerable and capable of mobilization by the group; violence in either case lashes out as a demand for attention and recognition. This stage also often includes expansion of logistics while seeking to avoid the threshold of decisive action by the targeted adversary. The third stage of political violence develops out of the group's efforts to usurp legitimacy from the dominant power base, often through the provision of state privileges and public goods. ISIS's current efforts in those areas have in part relied on replication effects based on successful transitions by the Iranian revolution, Hezbollah, and Fatah, despite their apparent sectarian and geographic differences.

Many revolutionary movements remain at this stage, whether through the continuation of counterrevolutionary narratives and actions as in Cuba and parts of sub-Saharan Africa, or because of de facto stalemates between themselves and their opponents. Neither of these outcomes holds much appeal for US interests in Iraq and Syria, begging the question of what can be done to prevent, if possible, enduring quagmires of political instability. Above all, conflict resolution strategies mandate **pragmatism** overlaid on solid analytical frameworks to see what is feasible. Not all conflicts are ripe for resolution, sometimes requiring *decisive victory*, despite the incumbent costs to human rights that often result. Another option with promise can be seen in Colombia with the *hurting stalemate* that incentivized conciliatory trust-building efforts that have produced a potential peace after decades of war. Obviously the same remains difficult in the case of the United States in Iraq and Syria, not least because of broader constraints facing interagency and international efforts within a deeply polarized American political process. However, certain observable reference points and steps can guide a pragmatic approach, even if it must be over the long-term.

First, organizations, including states and non-state actors in conflict, as well as individuals within them, will face cognitive openings. While difficult to predict, indicators of something moving that way can include 1) moderated speech acts – even if only inklings of conciliation, 2) factional divisions – even if these may be instrumental speech designed for effect on external adversaries rather than a realistic picture of internal dynamics, and 3) failures to claim ownership of violence – even if the same actions had previously received the group's sanction and support. These are a few of the possible indicators of openings, but they offer potential for engagement, which raises the second issue of front vs. back channel negotiations. How, when, where, and by whom those negotiations take place have numerous historical and contemporary examples of success and failure, such that obvious pros and cons exist for both. However, outlining beforehand the second and third order effects for each remains a necessary planning step. Thus, when used together with the foundations of change and governance listed above, these approaches help to build a framework for engaging the relevant questions posed by this CENTCOM SMA, one that can support systemic evaluation in lieu of ad hoc analyses so often tied to the exigencies of urgent crises.

## Conclusion

This brief review of scholarly contributions has sought to engage the connections between the questions rather than delve into specific names, dates, and places for action, as other elements of this ViTTa will likely have contributed. Those certainly carry great weight in addressing the questions raised, as does knowing the players, their histories, and relationships to the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. These can all assist in identifying motivations and hopefully, opportunities for US and partner efforts. In that light, this paper offers reference points that are more than pre-mission checklists, while still providing tangible guidelines for establishing strategic analysis into core concepts that have application at the operational and tactical levels as well. However, the concepts presented here are neither exhaustive, nor the sole paradigm through which to see opportunities and constraints in Iraq and Syria. Instead, they give decision makers another vantage point for



working to continue the progress made in Iraq, and to develop standards of capacity, autonomy, and legitimacy for a post-ISIS Syria. This can assist with the thornier issues of whether Assad should stay, and to what degree the current Iraqi government can build greater governance as it reclaims deeply broken areas of its country. As such, the framework shows sturdy stepping stones on which the US can stand as it wades deeper into the torrents facing the region.

## Comments on Engagement

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### Economy/ Education (Iraq/ MENA)

The USG (and the international community) should ramp up its diplomatic, economic and cultural engagement in Iraq and the region. USG soft power tools carry major weight in the MENA. Iraqis, for example, care about education and have a strong work ethic and are anxious to engage in business opportunities and educational programs with the United States. This is important to defeating a long term ISIL threat because the corrupt political economy (contracts, patronage, marginalization) of Iraq is one main reason for the rise of ISIL and other such extremist forces. The USG can capitalize on Iraqi interest in education and business through existing programs and engaging with the private sector (PPPs). For example, USG could re-initiate trade delegations like those which existed pre-2014 through Department of Treasury and Department of Commerce. As part of this there was a US-Iraq Business Dialogue run by former Commerce General Counsel John Sullivan which was composed of the 10 largest U.S. companies operating in Iraq and the 10 largest Iraqi companies. Similarly, the USG can initiate and expand educational/ business oriented programs like Commerce's "Commercial Law Development Program." Similar work can be done with elementary, secondary and tertiary teacher trainings in-country or in the U.S. The USG should also increase the number of Iraqis who come to the U.S. (e.g. the Fulbright program) to study for their BA, MA and PhD degrees, who will return to Iraq to develop the education system and private sector economy. Iraq is starved for good teachers, professors and business people to lead these sectors.

### Diplomacy/ Policy (Iraq/ MENA)

In terms of Iraq, at the end of the day, ISIL was formed and fueled by political, social, economic, and security marginalization, mainly of the Sunni Arab community. So in addition to initiatives targeting economic and educational development, in terms of diplomacy and policy, in a nutshell, the US must use its leverage to promote accommodations and inclusive policies among national leadership in Iraq (and countries of the MENA region). Yes, squabbling and sectarian Iraqi actors and parties led to the rise of ISIL, but we may have been able to use our leverage (as we finally did to remove Maliki from power) to prevent or at least lessen the impact and breadth of the attack.

### Regional Geopolitics (Iraq/ MENA)

Iran and Saudi and neighborhood Sunni states must be brought into a new regional framework. A good, working relationship between U.S. and Iran will have positive effects on Iraq – Iraqis consistently mention stability in Iraq will not come without a U.S. Iranian deal. But real stability will

not be achieved without bringing Sunni powers, Saudi and other Gulf, and populations, to the table and into the fold.

## Comments on Engagement

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Top of mind when I think of this question (really a dream list):

- The USG is structurally organized to defeat the Soviet Union. The US Patriot Act and IRTPA did nothing to change this. Until we can admit this and institute necessary change, we will continue to struggle in the 21st Century strategic ecosystem of interacting and overlapping Complex Adaptive Systems. The implications here are huge and include Congressional oversight structural reform in the legislature and similar executive overhauls that begin with actively working to delegate and divest decisions downward from the NSC and thus unburdening it from tactical noise, allowing it think and act strategically again.
- Consistent with my first bullet, we need to seriously consider a "theory of change" that encompasses the tectonic global shifts that are rewriting the old rule sets and most importantly our place as a principal actor...if we even know what being a Great Power means anymore. This would provide the strategic framing and anchors that prevent untethered "random acts of strategy" and the never-ending procession of Type I errors of commission.
- We need to take some time to thoughtfully consider all of the ways (flawed intellectual framing, anachronistic OAAs, overinflating the threat, etc.) that we and our allies are actively making things worse and actually strengthening ISIL not diminishing it.
- Other national governments and their citizens are mostly unwilling partners and have grown tired of our indecisiveness, unreliability, and singular focus, and don't respect our leadership. [Todd] This is particularly true in the MENA. Instead they have a choosing to just "play us." The real and untapped opportunity, as I see it, is with non-state actors and civil society with supranational reach and impact. This is a reflection of the changing nature of power and our actual versus perceived ability to affect the system..
- Properly resource prevention activities like seriously tackling climate change, governance (both local, national and global), relative deprivation, infrastructure, etc. This is Moon Shot, Manhattan Project level thinking and RESOURCING.

# Understanding ISIL Using Captured Records

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## Abstract

The U.S. government (USG) can take proactive steps now to leverage the private sector (specifically the academic community) in two areas. First, by making primary adversary materials (specially, but not limited to, captured records) available to the current generation of scholars, the USG can maximize the value the nation's intellectual capital in a way that is both cost effective and impactful. More importantly making these materials available builds on and incentivizes that intellectual capital for the long term. It would foster the development of a deep bench of talent that, much like investments in the 1950s to build expertise in Soviet studies, provides the expertise necessary inside and outside the USG for this struggle. A proven model for such a program exists but was shuttered in 2014 due to budget cuts and a reorganization. Recommend USCENTCOM support the rejuvenation of the Conflict Records Research Center by having it restored and transferred to a non-government institution to ensure academic access.

## Key Points

- The USG holds a large collection of unclassified captured records from ISIL, related groups, and governments.
- These records should be made available to scholars in the interest of developing new insights and building the intellectual capital necessary for success over the long term.
- A USG program to accomplish the above operated very successfully for almost four years but closed due to a lack of sponsorship.
- USCENTCOM should engage OSD to reopen the CRRC project and seek to move the existing records/database to an appropriate civilian institution as soon as possible.

## Understanding the Threat

Positioning the U.S. government and other institutions for the future requires, first and foremost, a clear-eyed understanding of the environment and threats. However, understanding the threat environment and shaping the response to it has been a challenge for the USG since the early days of post 9-11 wars. The problem is not a lack of subject matter experts or even a lack of data – i.e., primary source material about an adversary such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

The major challenge is structural. Scholarship blooms where evidence and data are readily available. As terrorism scholar Marc Sageman noted in 2014:

*A serious impediment to scholars, whether fully dedicated to terrorism studies or only occasionally participating in such a study, is the lack of the availability of comprehensive and reliable data. The U.S. government has neither released relevant data about terrorist plots nor funded the methodological accumulation of detailed and comprehensive data that might shed some light on the question of the turn to political violence (Sageman, 2014, p. 570).*

There are two groups of subject matter experts that policy makers can call upon to develop insights into the threat group dynamics of a region - the intelligence community or the academic community. Each has its own well-known advantages and disadvantages in terms of expertise, standards, responsiveness, and biases. As Sageman noted, one of the biggest differences (and

obstacles to overcome) is access to primary materials. Yet this is a divide that, with some exceptions, can be bridged.

#### Bridging the Divide with Captured Records

Building the intellectual capital to address national security threats requires the investment of resources and the fostering of relationships. The USG can maximize the value of the nation's intellectual capital in a way that is both cost effective and useful. Making primary source material available would foster the development of a deep bench of talent that, much like investments in the 1950s to build expertise in Soviet studies, provides the expertise necessary inside and outside the USG for this long-term struggle.

Captured enemy records (e.g. Iraqi regime, Taliban, al-Qaeda, al-Qaeda in Iraq, ISIL) have been scanned and stored in an Intelligence Community (IC) database from the earliest days of the post 9-11 wars. The IC program, known as *Harmony*, stores millions of pages of text and images files as well as digital audio and video records accessible through classified networks. Most of these records (well over 90%) are default marked UNCLASSIFIED/For Official Use Only. Moreover, these records have been triaged, categorized, and indexed for easy search and retrieval. Making this primary source material -- that includes everything from administrivia of government, planning documents, logistics, theology, and propaganda -- available to academics is the essential step.

Before dismissing this notion as impracticable for security, cost, or other reasons - consider that a small program to make such records available to scholars, without onerous restrictions, operated at the National Defense University (NDU) for almost four years. Unfortunately this program, despite its early success, was closed as part of an NDU reorganization and cost-cutting effort.

The Conflict Records Research Center (CRRC) was chartered by the Department of Defense (OSD (Policy), 2009) with the mission to "...facilitate research and analysis of records captured from countries, organizations, and individuals, now or once hostile to the United States. In addition, the CRRC conducts research and analysis to increase the understanding of factors related to international relations, counterterrorism, and conventional and unconventional warfare." The center owes its origins to Secretary Robert Gates' efforts in 2008 to expand the department's tools for a "long-war," which included the establishment of the Minerva Initiative. The original intent was to make materials available (after a common-sense screening process) to scholars without restriction, caveat, or "pre-publication" review. This, as the Secretary understood, was necessary to develop an honest, productive, and long-term relationship with the academy (Gates, 2014).<sup>7</sup>

The CRRC model was very simple. Cleared researchers (originally from the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA) and later government staff at NDU) screened captured records in the Harmony database for potential inclusion in the CRRC (or open) database. The criteria for screening followed an Office of the Secretary of Defense (Policy) (OSD(P)) and IC approved standard operating procedure. Using the approved procedures, the CRRC screening staff determined that more than ninety percent of records screened are deemed eligible for the open database.

One final comment on the public use of captured records is worth noting. Given the complex regional and social context documented by these records, the issue of the privacy and security of innocent persons is a valid concern. To minimize this risk, the CRRC employed the standard USG

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<sup>7</sup> As noted in his speech, the USG needed to be proactive in this regard since "Too many mistakes have been made over the years because our government and military did not understand—or even seek to understand—the countries or cultures we were dealing with."

and academic protocols for safeguarding personally identifiable information (PII). During the years the CRRC was open, this requirement was not seen as burdensome because it is a widely accepted academic and archival practice.

There have been other efforts by the USG to foster or leverage contributions from scholars with regard to captured records. In addition to the now closed CRRC, the Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) at West Point has made tremendous contributions to the field of terrorism study based on captured records. The CTC model leveraged selected collections of records placed into the hands of contracted scholars. In many cases their records underpinning various monographs are made available on the CTC website for others to use. The limitation of the CTC model is that it is a somewhat closed model where both the scholars and the material are “selected” by the government.

A similar model has been the ability of Federally Funded Research and Development Centers (FFRDCs) to use their direct access to the Harmony dataset to produce directed classified or unclassified studies of interest. Two examples are early work in this area by IDA and RAND on the former Iraqi regime and terrorism. While these kinds of studies are useful in augmenting or expanding the work of government analysts, they actually do little to develop the capacity to tackle these kinds of issues over the long term. Although the work itself is of high quality, the inherent biases of scholars working in national security think-tanks deprives the USG of the full perspective of the academy. Some examples of these studies are provided at the end of this submission.

#### Recommendation

In 2014, after having developed and operated the CRRC, OSD(P) asked IDA to develop a set of recommendations for how the shuttered CRRC and existing database might be opened (under the same general operating conditions it had at NDU) and resurrected at a private, non-government institution. In August 2015, IDA identified a prioritized list of potential candidate institutions who expressed an interest in hosting the records. A lengthy legal and policy review of the recommendations in OSD followed but, as of this date, no action has been taken and the CRRC collection remains inaccessible to scholars in the private sector.

The CRRC model (as described above) requires, over the long-term, the restoration of the full program – the accessibility of the records and the review and screening data already in the Harmony Database. This full program would allow new records to be added to the collection as combat operations progress over time. The screening process for new records would be subject to the same (or new) requirements as before, but the objective should remain the same – if there is not security reason to withhold the material every effort should be made to get the records into the hands of scholars.<sup>8</sup>

Returning to the larger question of how can the US and its partners position themselves for the “long term ISIL threat,” one answer would be to leverage best practices when it comes to taking on long-term national security challenges, such as the forces of extremism and authoritarianism that will continue to shape the region for the foreseeable future. A recognition of the complexity, depth, and dynamic nature of this challenge requires more than hiring the “best and brightest” from the academy. Without some effort on the part of the USG to make the unique material captured from its adversaries available to the scholarly community, external scholarship may be hamstrung and of limited value.

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<sup>8</sup> For a reference point – the process of screening and translating records is human capital intensive. For a point of reference, during the last year that IDA managed this process under OSD(P) contract the cost was just under \$1 million/year.

Recommendation: USCENTCOM should engage OSD to review the status of the CRRC project and seek to move the existing records/database to an appropriate civilian institution as soon as possible. Furthermore, USCENTCOM should work to restart the captured records review and translation process put in place to support the CRRC.<sup>9</sup> This will ensure that the current collection will both continue to grow and remain current with the changes in the operational environment.

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<sup>9</sup> The review process can operate as a part of an existing USG activity or (as was the case prior to 2011) it can be executed as a part of a research contract with an FFRDC.

## Comments on Engagement

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I have taken a few days to think about this and in brief, I think my own response to the query is that it is not appropriate for a two page response. Unlike some of the other questions (which are challenging enough!), this query asks the broadest possible question about U.S. strategy and Coalition strategy. It is widely recognized that the longer term ISIL threat lies outside the scope of communications alone to address, and in the most difficult of all realms, the quiet activity at community and regional levels of building more resilient communities, workplaces, schools and opportunities. Yet it is difficult to fund those efforts, and relatively more simple to generate resources for military activities. Meaningful changes of this sort would have to engage Congress.

As for engaging the private sector, again, what are we really talking about? If it is social media engagement of the sort recently reported in the press, then there is possibly not much that an external observer could add that is not already known, although it remains to be seen how and in what circumstances messaging is a useful tactic. A broader effort to engage the whole of society to defend against ISIL (as per the question, rather than defeating it), is probably best answered in terms of resilience, both of spirit and infrastructure, as well as continued efforts on issues like information sharing across borders and international cooperation.

You probably did not want to invite this kind of response, but I feel the real answer must start with a discussion about what CENTCOM is really seeking. If you would like me to expand any of this, I'd be pleased to, but you might be seeking a really different kind of response.

## Author Biographies

### Hassan Abbas

**College of International Security Affairs**  
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**Hassan Abbas, Ph.D.**  
Professor of International Security Studies  
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#### Education

- MALD and Ph.D. from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University
- LL.M. in International Law from Nottingham University, United Kingdom, as a Britannia Chevening Scholar
- Master's in Political Science from Punjab University (Pakistan)

#### Research Interests

- Politics, Security and Religion in South Asia
- Politics, Islam, and U.S. Relations with Muslim States
- Law Enforcement and Police Reforms in Developing States

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

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

A detailed list of his publications is [available here](#).





**Bernard Carreau** is the Deputy Director of the Center for Complex Operations (CCO) at the National Defense University. He established and currently supervises a lessons learned program focusing on the operational and strategic effectiveness of the military and interagency teams in overseas contingency operations. He has led numerous collection and analysis teams to Afghanistan and Iraq. Mr. Carreau is the author or supervisor of recent reports related to the strategic effectiveness of special operations forces, stability operations, transitional public security, civilian stabilization capabilities, and socio-cultural intelligence analysis. He is currently completing a study on behalf of the Joint Staff/J7 on the question of whether the national security decision-making and strategic planning processes were effective in achieving U.S. national objectives in Syria. Mr. Carreau was an advisor to the Coalition Provisional Authority in Washington and Baghdad on private sector development and an advisor to the Iraqi Minister of Trade. He has a Master's degree from Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS).

**Patricia (Tricia) DeGennaro** is a Senior Geopolitical Risk Analyst for Threat Tec., LLC. She currently supports the US Army TRADOC G27 as an analyst in the Advanced Network Analysis/Attack the Network Directorate. DeGennaro has lectured at West Point and New York University on International Security Policy and Civilian and Military Affairs. She was selected as a Subject Matter Expert (SME) on the Middle East, Iraq, and Afghanistan for various projects under the TRADOC G2, the commander of the Multi-National Forces in Iraq, commander of the Special Operations Command Central, and the US Department of Defense Strategic Multilayer Assessment program. In 2013, she was accepted into the US Department of State Franklin Fellows program where she served in USAID's Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance - Office of Civilian and Military Cooperation (DCHA/CMC) as a Senior Policy Advisor to support the Office and an Agency-wide Civilian-Military Cooperation Steering Committee in an extensive revision to the Agency's Civilian-Military Cooperation Policy. DeGennaro capitalizes on over twenty years of experience as an academic, author and consultant in international security. Much of her work focuses on stabilization in the Middle East and surrounding region, countering violent extremism, and transitioning nations from war.



During her tenure, she has also consulted with the Asia Foundation, Director of National Intelligence Office, Department of Homeland Security, The Conference Board, World Bank, Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee chaired by Senator Edward M. Kennedy, and several organizations that support the Middle East Peace Process. She also spent four years in Albania as a Small and Medium Enterprise volunteer with the Peace Corps and, later, as a contractor with US Agency for International Development. Regionally, DeGennaro continues to focus on the Balkans, the Middle East and South Asia where she travels often.

DeGennaro has published several articles on US foreign policy and national security topics. Her focus is to encourage an integrated international policy that looks beyond war and the use of force. She is often an expert commentator for CNN, MSNBC, Al Jazeera, Fox News, BBC and various nationally and internationally syndicated radio programs.

DeGennaro holds an MBA in International Trade and Finance from George Washington University and an MPA in International Security and Conflict Resolution from Harvard University. She speaks fluent Albanian and has a basic knowledge of Italian, Arabic and Dari.



**Alexis Everington** is the Director of Research for Madison Springfield, Inc. His qualifications include 15 years program management experience leading large scale, cross-functional, multi-national research & analytical programs in challenging environments including Iraq, Libya, Mexico, Syria and Yemen. Alexis advised both the Libyan opposition government during the Libyan revolution of 2011 and its immediate aftermath and most recently, the Syrian opposition military. He has also helped train several other foreign militaries and has taught at the NATO School. In addition, Alexis developed the Target Audience Analysis

methodology that is currently employed across the US national security community and has been applied most recently in Afghanistan, Jordan, and Lebanon. His educational credentials include a Master of Arts from Oxford University in European and Middle Eastern Studies and his language skills include a fluency in Arabic, Spanish, French and Italian as well as a proficiency in Mandarin. Alexis is currently leading large-scale qualitative and quantitative primary research studies in Libya, Pakistan, Syria and Yemen.

**Dr. Garry Hare.** Garry teaches *Political Psychology* on the doctoral faculty at Fielding Graduate University's Media Psychology PhD Program and is Director of the *Social Impact of Immersive Technology and Real Time Media* doctoral concentration. He focuses on the junction where cognitive science, information design and immersive technologies impact persuasive media. He advises selected companies, foundations and public agencies on strategy and the creative use and impact of immersive media, mobile augmented reality and the disruptive impact of real time media on social problems. His current focus is on the rapid prototyping of real time solutions to complex problems, particularly environmental and social issues.



### Background

Over two decades, Garry has founded and/or held senior management positions with companies creating rich media content and enabling technologies. These solutions usher in new forms of entertainment, mobile communications and social impact. He was President and CEO of Amiga, Inc., Executive Vice President of Into Networks with worldwide responsibility for Broadband Media, President and COO of OZ.com, the creators of Helsinki 2000 (the first virtual world) and the Intel virtual museum project. Garry was founder and CEO of the award winning digital publisher, Fathom Pictures Inc., specializing in sports and education simulations. He was founding Managing Director and CEO of Philips Media Europe on behalf of Philips N.V. As head of this European digital publishing company he built management and creative teams to support the creation and distribution of digital products throughout Europe. He has created digital products and/or advised companies such as LucasFilm, the Griffin Group, Philips N.V., Ericsson, ABC Sports, the PGA, and Apple Computer, among many others, on new media content creation and strategy. Garry has held faculty positions at INCAE (an international campus of The Harvard Business School and The Harvard Institute of International Development), The University of Washington Graduate School of Public Policy and The University of Southern California Graduate School of Public Administration. He began his career at the Walt Disney Company and holds a Ph.D. in the Applied Behavioral Sciences from the University of Southern California.

**Noureddine Jebnoun** teaches at Georgetown University's Center for Contemporary Arab Studies-Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service. He has previously served as a professor of strategy and geopolitics at the National War College, the Command and Staff College, and the National Defense Institute (1998-2004) in Tunisia. He is co-editor and contributor to *Modern Middle East Authoritarianism: Roots, Ramifications, and Crisis* (London; New York: Routledge, 2013 & 2015), author of *L'espace méditerranéen: les enjeux de la coopération et de la sécurité entre les rives nord et sud à l'aube du XXIème siècle [The Mediterranean Region: the Implications of Security and Cooperation between the Northern and Southern Shores at the Dawn of the Twenty First Century]* (Rome: NATO Defense College, 2003) and author of the upcoming *Tunisia's National Intelligence: Why Do the 'Rogue Elephants' Lag Behind Reform?* (Washington, D.C.: New Academia Publishing). His works have appeared in *The Journal of North African Studies*, *Center for Contemporary Arab Studies' Occasional Papers Series*, *Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding Occasional Papers*, as well as in many book chapters among the most recent is "State and Religion in the Aftermath of the Arab Uprisings," in Rainer Grote and Tilmann J. Röder (eds.), *Constitutionalism, Human Rights, and Islam after the Arab Spring* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press 2016). He holds a PhD in Political Science from the University of Paris I-Pantheon Sorbonne (1996).



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

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

**Christine van den Toorn** is the Director of IRIS. She has over 10 years of academic and professional experience in the Middle East, 6 of which have been spent in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). She has conducted fieldwork all over the KRI, with a particular focus on disputed territories in Ninewa, Diyala and Salahddin, and has published articles and reports in leading publications like Iraq Oil Report, Inside Iraqi Politics, Daily Beast and Niqash as well as delivered talks on her research. Ms. van den Toorn has also conducted baseline reports and social impact assessments for international oil companies operating in the KRI and disputed territories, working with teams of student researchers from AUIS. She served in the United States Peace Corps in

Morocco and holds an MA in Middle East History from the University of Virginia, and taught the subject at AUIS for 4 years. Ms. van den Toorn speaks Arabic, which she studied at Middlebury College, Georgetown University, the University of Damascus in Syria and the French Institute for Near East Studies in Damascus.

**Todd Veazie**, Chief, Programs, Resources and Assessments Group, Directorate for Strategic Operational Planning (DSOP), National Counterterrorism Center

### **Kevin M. Woods**

Kevin M. Woods is the Deputy Director of the Joint Advanced Warfighting Division at the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA). As a defense analyst and historian he has led numerous multi-disciplinary research projects looking at subjects ranging from military concept development and experimentation, capability analyses of recent conflicts, and red team studies of defense policy and strategy.



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For over a decade, Dr. Woods has led a major research project designed to understand the former regime of Saddam Hussein through the analysis of captured records and interviews with former senior Iraqi officials. This research spawned numerous studies as well as the establishment of the Conflict Records Research Center (CRRC) – a public repository of records for future research.

Prior to joining IDA, Dr. Woods was an officer in the US Army and served for more than 21 years in a variety of operational Army aviation and staff assignments. A graduate of Auburn University, he also holds a Masters Degree in National Security and Strategic Studies from the Naval War College. In 2011 he earned PhD in History from the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom where his dissertation focused on institutional changes in the US Army during the early Cold War.

Dr. Woods is the lead author of several books including: *The Iraqi Perspectives Report: Saddam's Senior Leadership on Operation Iraqi Freedom* (2006); *The Mother of all Battles: Saddam Hussein's Strategic Plan for the Persian Gulf War* (2008); *The Saddam Tapes: The Inner Workings of a Tyrant's Regime 1978-2001* (2011); and *The Iran-Iraq War: A Military and Strategic History* (2014).



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

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

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