

TOWARDS A FRAMEWORK FOR DEALING WITH POTENTIAL UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF INFLUENCE ACTIVITIES

Prepared for the Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) Office
In support of the Influencing Violent Extremist Organizations (I-VEO)
Project

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this project was to gain a better understanding of how United States Government (USG) actions influence violent extremist organizations (VEOs). It is important to understand how actions taken by the government to *suppress* a VEO might result in negative, unforeseen consequences such as making a VEO stronger or increasing its public support.

The work conducted by the project team, coordinated by Dr. Scott Helfstein at the Combatting Terrorism Center at West Point, is one component of a larger effort to better understand how VEOs are, or can be, influenced. The overall Influencing Violent Extremist Organizations (I-VEO) effort was conducted by the Strategic Multi-Layer Assessment (SMA) Office within the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD). The SMA Office provides planning support to Commands with complex operational imperatives requiring multi-agency, multi-disciplinary solutions that are not within core Service/Agency competency. Solutions and participants are sought across USG and beyond. SMA efforts are accepted and synchronized by Joint Staff (JS/J-3/DDGO) and executed by STRATCOM/J-9 and DDRE/ASD (R&E).

The project team included the following contributors.

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The objective of the I-VEO effort is to provide the Department of Defense (DoD) and its USG partners with a holistic understanding of intended and unintended effects of influencing violent extremist organizations that can be transferred to a usable analytic framework that inform decision-makers and planners. The resulting holistic analyses derived analytic confidence from the examination of sound theoretical knowledge, conceptual modeling, and testing in historical cases. The effort ran from February through October 2011.

The intended payoff of this project was a deeper, more reliable understanding of the secondary effects of U.S. government efforts to influence VEOs. The results of the I-VEO study will aid the Joint Staff and COCOMs at strategic and operational levels by providing a conceptual framework grounded in sound theoretical concepts and analyses (albeit, with large uncertainties). This report presents and integrates findings from portions of the overall project, namely: a review of theoretical hypotheses and the degree of empirical support that they enjoy; quantitative analysis of selected data relating to the hypotheses; new thinking on how to understand how influence works or fails to work; related models of human behavior; highlights from an integrative literature-based discussion of systemic theory; discussion of alternative approaches to both theory and empirical research; other sources of knowledge and insight; and implications for the body of knowledge.¹

For detailed information about any of the other core components, please contact Mr. Sam Rhem at Samuel.Rhem.ctr@js.pentagon.mil.

Conclusions

The results of this project do not produce an answer to the problem that the U.S. government and its allies face in incentivizing VEOs to abandon violence or punishing them for using violence and may be disappointing to some as a result. No amount of [research](#) or analysis can ensure that negative consequences will not arise from a given influence action. The costs and benefits of courses of action (COAs) must be weighed and this project hopefully provides some assistance to those responsible for assessing the range of consequences that arise from government action.

We hope that this project has made a useful contribution in compiling a list of (sometimes-contradictory) [rules of thumb](#) about how violent organizations act and react. The effort to synthesize and analyze data from a diverse set of fields that could pertain to violent actors helps identify different forces that might guide the response of influence targets, making it important to consider how different models of behavior could produce an array of outcomes. This may well be of use to the policymaking community tasked with assessing and making these difficult decisions. The military community already has a very sophisticated way to think through the utility of different actions, develop COAs, and adjudicate among them. This effort should fold into that process by raising questions about commonly held [assumptions](#) and providing rules of thumb for how violent actors behave.

In making decisions, the best one can expect is to 1) be informed about how similar actions have influenced similar groups, 2) be explicit about the how the actions actually trigger desired and undesired influence effects, and to 3) carefully think through how [USG actions](#) impact the target audience and other audiences. Ultimately, however, influencing

¹ The overall I-VEO effort had many components, including the ones covered here: a pilot mission-objectives effort focused on al Qaeda on the Arabian peninsula, a human-geography study, a preliminary case analysis of recent events such as the Arab Spring, a strategic communication initiative in coordination with the Department of State, a regional game on South Asia, a deterrence-surprise game, and a micro-finance effort.

VEOs is not a science. Actors and environments can be unpredictable. The most ideal course of action (COA) is one that produces the most good for the least negative consequences, recognizing that the cost-benefit is often a subjective assessment. No USG action will be free from negative consequences. The hope, however, is that those negative consequences will not be surprises, but rather events that are predicted, understood, and part of the planning assessment.

INTRODUCTION

This report is intended to summarize efforts in support of the Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) team's work on influencing violent extremist organizations (VEOs). In November 2010, the SMA office was asked to consider the different ways that the Department of Defense and the Combatant Commands (COCOMs) could assess influence outcomes and unintended consequences when planning action against VEOs. This report discusses the different constituent parts of that effort, which largely served to lay the groundwork for the creation of the influence framework. This document does not summarize that framework, but provides the background theoretical and empirical insights leveraged in the production. As such, this report provides a series of details on the different components.

This report begins by looking at current planning doctrine and the treatment of unintended consequences. Planners and analysts recognize the importance of anticipating unintended consequences, but few methods have been developed to assist planners in their assessment of risk.

The report evaluates a series of hypotheses on the effects and unintended consequences of influence actions targeting VEOs. This involves an assessment of substantial academic literature by identifying, synthesizing, and evaluating hypotheses to be found in the literature that bear on influence and then exploring influence activities across case studies. The analysis reveals that there are a great number of hypotheses applied to VEO influence, but many have limited empirical support (they may or may not be correct but validity has not been established), in part because of contradictory empirical conclusions. For example, militarily crushing VEOs does effectively reduce their capacity to operate, but using repressive measures in one month may—depending on details—increase the likelihood of attacks the following month. Unintended consequences can also arise from domestic political circumstances and negotiation.

The hypothesis review and case analysis is followed by an empirical extension of VEO literature that leverages two different data sources to explore the possible unintended consequences of influence actions. The analyses look at a group's propensity to rely on violent tactics over time, across the context of insurgencies and terrorist activities. For the data sets studied, state capacity is shown to have played a more important role in curtailing insurgent activities than regime type, and foreign nonmilitary intervention was often helpful in reducing violence levels. Violence levels also declined when the government relied on humanitarian assistance to aggrieved parties. Repressive measures aimed at crushing the VEO often increased the expected amount of time before government victory.

This section is followed by a discussion of how influence actions work, leveraging both the empirical assessments and the dominant models of human behavior in the social sciences. By understanding the different models that produce behavior, it may be possible to better understand the unintended consequences in the hope of mitigating them. Models of behavior are central to linking government actions to adversary outcomes. Some models of behavior might predict that a VEO lower their violence level in response to an influence action, while others might predict an increase. The section discusses four models common in the social sciences and provides examples how they might influence the activities of

VEOs. Incorporating these different models in the assessment process may be particularly important in identifying the unintended consequences of government action.

The next section takes a different approach to both theory and empiricism, drawing on a recent empirical assessment of a qualitative systemic theory. It addresses how influence actions can affect people other than the VEO organization itself, notably how it can affect public support for insurgency and terrorism.

This is followed by a section discussing conceptual differences in how different researchers approach both theory, evidence, and attempts to “validate” theory. These differences affect how one thinks about the body of knowledge available.

Finally, we end with a short section of conclusions.

PLANNING PROCESSES

The military has a well-established planning process. The U.S. Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 5 (MCDP 5) defines planning as “the art and science of envisioning a desired future and laying out effective ways of bringing it about.”² The planning discussed is a dynamic and self-critical *process*, not a formulaic march through straightforward steps, as it might be if adversary actions and circumstances could be predicted with confidence.

In the planning process, the military creates courses of action (COAs) that present different ways to accomplish a desired end state. This end state may be strategic, operational, or tactical, depending on the level at which the planning occurs. As part of the planning process, various COAs are evaluated based on expediency, efficacy, and supportability. Implicitly, some of the evaluation that goes on to determine which COA to pursue is based on the consequences of the actions that comprise each COA.

There has been much interest, government-wide, in trying to predict or prepare for the undesired consequences of any and all U.S. government actions. This has been especially true in the last decade’s efforts in counterterrorism and counterinsurgency. The tensions arising in such efforts have led to a deep examination of how U.S. foreign policy choices in the past may have radicalized or helped to empower the enemies of the U.S. today. Some have been skeptical of these prediction and modeling efforts, noting the complexity of violent extremism, but others stress their importance as a learning tool.

Our goal in this paper is a modest one. First, we recognize that the military has a well-developed planning process that includes attempting to deal with the potential unintended consequences of a given military action. Thus, we hope that this endeavor will help articulate a procedure (a list of questions) to help in that part of the planning process. Secondly, we hope that this endeavor will provide some interesting facts, based on empirical social science, about what we know and do not know regarding influence and consequences of particular actions, and interesting and useful suggestions from emerging theory that may be helpful in structuring discussion of factors and interactions, even if not predicting results (which are exceedingly context dependent).

² United States Marine Corps, *Doctrinal Publication 5* (Washington, D.C., 1997), 3, <http://www.mcu.usmc.mil/LLeadership/LLI%20Documnets/MCDP%205%20Planning%20Pub.pdf>

We hope our effort will also affect the civilian national security community. Civilian communities lack the robust planning process of the military. However, better planning tools for the State Department and USAID, for example, could prove useful. The actions of diplomacy and development should, like kinetic action, be guided and assessed by a rigorous process that is focused on achieving a desired end state while also mitigating potential consequences.

ASSESSING LITERATURE AND CASES ON UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

GOALS

As part of the study, the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) was tasked with providing support to current U.S. efforts to understand the levers of influence that governments can exert over violent extremist organizations (VEOs). START conducted two parallel projects: Task 1 involved synthesizing existing knowledge and evidence relevant to influencing VEOs; Task 2 examined the historical effectiveness and unexpected consequences of government operations meant to influence VEOs. Both tasks were used to help inform the conceptual model for planning influence operations.

TASK 1

In Task 1, the project team was tasked with identifying, collecting, and organizing all theoretical knowledge relevant to influencing VEOs as well as analyzing the degree to which such knowledge had received empirical support. The objective was to create a usable artifact that would inform the remainder of the I-VEO project components and to 1) avoid “reinventing the wheel” where a body of theory supported by evidence already existed, 2) decrease the possibility of untested assumptions being incorporated into the I-VEO framework as received wisdom, and 3) highlight areas where further empirical research was required in order to provide useful policy guidance.

The project team identified over 300 hypotheses from a wide range of social science disciplines. After vetting, these hypotheses were clustered into themes. The final set of 190 hypotheses represents a balance of comprehensiveness and tractability. From each themed set of hypotheses, a researcher assessed the relevant literature in order to produce a “micro literature review.” Each micro literature review was comprised of a general description, a summary of relevant empirical evidence, an empirical support score, an assessment of the applicability to influencing VEOs, an applicability score, optional general comments, and a bibliography. These micro literature reviews were utilized as the foundation for the I-VEO Knowledge Matrix.

The I-VEO Knowledge Matrix includes each hypothesis along with its Empirical Support Score and Applicability Score. The hypotheses are categorized according to several schemas 1) a VEO influence typology developed by Jeffrey Knopf (the default sorting presented), 2) designations of elements of national power (DIMEFIL), 3) Davis and Jenkins’ Influence Spectrum (Table 1), 4) the level of the VEO system to which the hypothesis is directed, and 5) the Levels of Strategic Influence developed by the I-VEO Framework Development Team in a parallel tasking. These categories allow a user to sort the

hypotheses according to a specific interest. In addition, the Knowledge Matrix provides analytical implications for each hypothesis. These implications are provided *assuming that the hypothesis was proved to be true* and, as such, are intended to extend our conceptual understanding of influence operations rather than providing specific policy guidance. Each hypothesis in the Knowledge Matrix is linked to its supporting micro literature review, providing analysts and policymakers with the ability to drill down into the supporting literature.

TASK 2

In Task 2, the project team was tasked with executing an empirical analysis of the historical record of influence operations directed at VEOs. Despite decades of development within the counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency fields, the empirical assessment of influence operations directed at VEOs is still fairly limited. The study aimed to provide insight into answering two primary questions:

- How effective are influence operations in achieving their stated aims?
- What unintended consequences result from influence operations?

The team identified 35 influence operation types along an influence spectrum from cooptation-coercion (see Table 1). Based on an iterative process, we identified cases that maximized a) the range of influence types, b) the variety of political and social contexts, and c) the range of types of VEOs. The final selection of 75 cases covered 26 types of influence operations, eight geographical regions, and a variety of VEO structures and ideologies.

Despite the large number of cases examined in the study, START adopted a qualitative approach. A quantitative analysis is inappropriate for a number of reasons including the fact that in attempting to maximize variation in terms of geography, influence type, and VEO type, the sample produced is far from representative of the entire population of influence operations. Moreover, a qualitative approach allows one to simultaneously assess multiple dependent variables and parse out endogeneity between causes and effects. The dependent variables for this study consist of the success of influence operations in both the short and long term and whether there were unintended side effects resulting from the operation.

Each case study included discussion of a) the antecedent factors (perception of government strength, occupation, VEOs' level of constituency support, presence of safe havens, VEO competition, use of suicide tactics), b) the general context and immediate drivers of the operation, c) the nature of the operation itself, d) initial and secondary effects following the operation, and e) the causal links between the operation and the observed effects.

Table 1. Influence Spectrum (Davis & Jenkins)

Davis Influence Spectrum	Policy
Co-opt	Incorporate leaders into government, e.g. power-sharing, conversion to political parties
Co-opt	Incorporate VEO into existing state structure, e.g. integrate VEO units into armed forces
Co-opt	Joint demobilization and creation of new forces
Co-opt	Co-opt community/supporters to be loyal to state
Co-opt	Provide VEOs with "spheres of influence," i.e. autonomous or semi-autonomous regions for which they are responsible politically and or militarily
Induce	Bribe VEO leaders
Induce	Bribe VEO middle-management
Induce	Bribe VEO foot soldiers, e.g. cash payments and job training for demobilizing
Induce	Concessions, Strategic Negotiations, & Grievance Alleviation
Induce	Prisoner Release
Induce	Amnesty programs/Sentence Reductions (conditional, unconditional)
Persuade	Public diplomacy (counter-narrative)
Dissuade	Public diplomacy (costs)
Dissuade	Asset Seizures/Destruction
Dissuade	Criminalization
Deter	Harassment of known members/sympathizers
Deter	Relocation
Deter	Passage of severe penalties in legal system
Raise risks and uncertainties	Encourage factionalization (psyops)
Raise risks and uncertainties	Censorship
Be seen as able to defend	Build dividing walls
Be seen as able to defend	Build community resiliency
Be seen as able to defend	Increase law enforcement presence
Be seen as able to defend	Arm militias
Deter next time by punishing now	Limited (relatively) military response
Deter next time by punishing now	Exclude VEOs' political allies until they renounce violence
Deter next time by punishing now	Costly signaling, e.g. giving up symbols or leaders rather than negotiate
Deter next time by punishing now	Sanctions
Deter next time by punishing now	Preemptive attacks
Deter next time by punishing now	Decapitate (arrest)
Deter next time by punishing now	Decapitate (assassinate)
Defeat	Overpower militarily
Defeat	Disproportionate/Overwhelming response to terrorist event
Destroy	Crush
Destroy	Genocide

LITERATURE REVIEW TO IDENTIFY HYPOTHESES

To guide the literature review and in order to provide as comprehensive a platform for analysis as possible within resource and time constraints, the project team attempted to chart the topic space through a structured brainstorming exercise. Project researchers were tasked with brainstorming as many hypotheses as possible that they believed might be relevant to influencing VEOs with an emphasis on hypotheses drawn from their fields of expertise. In addition, the project team systematically extracted hypotheses from several research surveys relating to influencing VEOs that have shaped the I-VEO effort. The resulting hypotheses originated in a wide range of social science traditions including anthropology, criminology, legal studies, political science, psychology, public policy, and sociology—and many were simultaneously drawn from several fields.

Works by Davis and Jenkins³, Knopf⁴, and Wilner⁵ critically informed these two tasks. In order to research the literature reviews for Task 1, researchers combed hundreds of academic and analysis sources directly or indirectly related to influencing VEOs. For the case studies in Task 2, researchers assessed dozens of primary and secondary sources in order to determine the success of and unintended consequences from influence operations. The team also reviewed twenty datasets related to influencing VEOs.

Extant Data Sources

START also identified the state of quantitative data on influence operations within the research literature on VEOs. After following a search methodology and selection criteria, 20 separate sets of quantitative data on influence operations against VEOs were identified. These sets range in the scope, size, and quality of data on influence operations and concern a variety of countries where terrorism has been especially prevalent. While the majority of datasets identified contain tens or hundreds of data points, four sets are more qualitative in nature, containing either a small list of influence operations or a single data point of operations.⁶ These sets were included given their relative importance within the literature of studies of influence operations on VEO activity. These cases include

³ Paul K. Davis and Brian M. Jenkins, *Deterrence & Influence in Counterterrorism: A Component in the War on al Qaeda* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2002). See also Paul K. Davis, *Simple Models To Explore Deterrence and More General Influence in the War with al Qaida* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2010).

⁴ Jeffrey Knopf, "The Fourth Wave in Deterrence Research," *Contemporary Security Policy* 31, no. 4 (2010): 1-33.

⁵ Alex S. Wilner, "Deterring the Undeterrable: Coercion, Denial, and Delegitimization in Counterterrorism," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 34, no. 1: 3-37.

⁶ Bryan Brophy-Baermann and John A.C. Conybeare, "Retaliating against Terrorism: Rational Expectations and the Optimality of Rules versus Discretion," *American Journal of Political Science* 38 (1994):196-210; Walter Anders and Todd Sandler, "The Effectiveness of Anti-Terrorism Policies: Vector- Autoregression-Intervention Analysis." *American Political Science Review* 87 (1993):829-44; and Gary Lafree, Laura Dugan, and Raven Korte, "The Impact of British Counterterrorist Strategies on Political Violence in Northern Ireland: Comparing Deterrence and Backlash Models," *Criminology* 47 (2009):17-45.

policy changes on the introduction of airport metal detectors,⁷ six interventions utilized by Israel against Palestinian VEOs from 1972-1988,⁸ and six military and criminal justice interventions by the United Kingdom within Northern Ireland between 1969 and 1992.⁹

The remaining 16 datasets of influence operations vary in their scope and level of detail. They range from a dataset containing sweep operations by Russian soldiers during the Second Chechen War¹⁰ to yearly arrests of terrorist suspects by the Pakistani National Police in Punjab¹¹ to individual influence operations by state authorities in Middle East and North African countries.¹² The unit of analysis ranges from macro-level counterterrorism operation expenditures¹³ to group-level targeting by states¹⁴ to individual influence actions.¹⁵ While there are a wide variety of operations available within these datasets, they tend to emphasize legal or repressive state actions including arrests,¹⁶ military actions,¹⁷ targeted assassinations,¹⁸ and government raids.¹⁹ Although the literature review mostly

⁷ Walter Enders and Todd Sandler, "Is Transnational Terrorism Becoming More Threatening?" *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 44 (2000):307-332.

⁸ Brophy-Baermann and Conybeare, 1994.

⁹ LaFree et al., 2009.

¹⁰ Jason Lyall, "Does Indiscriminate Violence Incite Insurgent Attacks? Evidence from Chechnya." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53 (2009):331-362.

¹¹ Syed Ejaz Hussain, "Terrorism in Pakistan: Incident Patterns, Terrorists' Characteristics, and the Impact of Terrorist Arrests on Terrorism" (dissertation, 2009).

¹² Laura Dugan and Erica Chenoweth, "The Electoral Determinants of Counterterrorism" (presented at the 2011 Annual Meeting of the International Studies Association, 2011).

¹³ Todd Sandler, Daniel Arce, and Walter Enders, "An Evaluation of Interpol's Cooperative-based Counterterrorism Linkages" (working paper, 2010), <http://peio.vweb10-test.gwdg.de/papers2010/Sandler,%20Arce,%20Enders%2027.12.09.pdf>.

¹⁴ Seth G. Jones and Martin C. Libicki, *How Terrorist Groups End* (RAND: Santa Monica, CA, 2008); Jenna Jordan, 2009; Victor R. Asal, Karl Rethemeyer, and Joseph, Young, "Battling Abroad: Why Some Organizations are Likely Targets of Foreign Counterterrorism" (presented at 2011 Annual Meeting of International Studies Association, 2011).

¹⁵ David Fielding and Anja Shortland, "'An Eye for an Eye, A Tooth for a Tooth': Political Violence and Counter-insurgency in Egypt," *Journal of Peace Research* 47 (2010):433; Lorraine Mazzerolle and Rebecca Denning, "Modelling the Effectiveness of Counter-terrorism Strategies in Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand" (paper presented at the 2010 Stockholm Criminology Symposium, 2010); and Laura Dugan and Erica Chenoweth, 2011.

¹⁶ Ejaz Syed Hussain, 2009.

¹⁷ Jason Lyall, 2009; and Jason Lyall, "Are Co-ethnics More Effective Counter-Insurgents? Evidence from the Second Chechen War," *American Political Science Review* 104 (2010):1-20.

¹⁸ Patrick B. Johnston. "Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Decapitation in Counterinsurgency Campaigns" (working Paper, 2010).

¹⁹ David Fielding and Anja Shortland, 2010, 433.

drew upon open media sources, including Reuters and country-specific newspapers, official data on police arrests of terrorism suspects were also used.²⁰

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

The 75 case studies demonstrate that influence operations at different parts of the coercion-co-optation spectrum can be highly successful. They also demonstrate that these operations often produce a host of unexpected side effects at various times, some of which are positive, but most are negative.

One particularly compelling example of this effect is the criminalization of paramilitaries in Northern Ireland. For the first several years of operation, it appeared to be working extremely well: the VEOs' constituent base did not seem to particularly care about the prison protests; indeed, large numbers even took part in protests against the paramilitaries. However, the Republicans' escalation to the Hunger Strike ended up revitalizing what had been a declining organization and enabled it to fight on for well over a decade more.

Although the Task 2 case studies do not provide a representative sample, it is nonetheless interesting that the majority of operations examined in this study were immediately successful in achieving the desired aims, and a strong plurality were also successful in the long-term. Almost exactly one-third of cases were entirely successful in both time frames, and over half were at least partially successful in both. Moreover, the fact that 14 percent of cases that were initial failures resulted in ultimate success and 22 percent of initial successes ended in failure indicates that unintended effects play a significant role in VEO influence operations.

This finding of unexpected results is not particularly surprising given the complex and interactive nature of the social world, which includes VEOs. However, as the global analysis shows, there are interesting relationships between the conditions in which the operation takes place and the outcomes.

Several of the micro literature reviews also inform the discussion of unexpected consequences. Based on the extensive range of topics covered, a brief summary of the unexpected consequences in the hypotheses is impractical; however, a subset of the relevant information is presented below. The Knowledge Matrix can be utilized for a more complete overview.

Continually crushing VEOs deters future VEO formation and activities. Using quantitative analysis and a quasi-experimental research design, Lyall finds that Russian indiscriminate attacks against restive Chechnyan villages led to a reduction in insurgent attacks from those villages relative to similar villages that were not subject to shelling in the 2000 to 2005 time period.²¹ Bar argues that the 2006 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, while poorly executed, deterred Hizballah from conducting subsequent attacks against Israel for fear of provoking a similar Israeli response. While this is a plausible interpretation of the relative calm experienced by Israel since 2006, Bar does not provide the type of evidence,

²⁰ Syed Ejaz Hussain, 2009.

²¹ Jason Lyall, 2009, 331-362.

such as statements from Hizballah's leadership, that would be necessary to fully support his claims.²² In a case study of Israel's response to Palestinian terrorism from 2000 to 2008, Bar shows that Israeli targeted killing of Palestinian terror leaders resulted in increased operational prudence within the terrorist organization and a temporary reduction in attacks.²³ However, performing statistical analysis of a comprehensive dataset of suicide bombings, Pape concludes that the perception of military occupation by a democratic state is a near-necessary condition for suicide bombing. His findings suggest that if "crushing" a VEO results in military occupation, it will result in an increase, not a decrease, in suicide attacks against the counterterrorist.²⁴

Policy deadlock can lead to increases in VEO attacks as actors go outside of institutional means to try to achieve their goals. Young and Dugan demonstrate that if we assume a VEO wants government policy to change, then an increase in veto players that would be indicative of policy gridlock will lead to more terror. They note that this focus is one of policy rather than regime type. There is moderate confidence that easing gridlock could influence VEO actions.

Repression last month increases the likelihood of terrorist attacks this month; conciliatory actions last month decrease the likelihood. Dugan and Chenoweth directly address the hypothesis by analyzing the relative effects of Israeli government actions towards Palestinians from 1987 to 2004. Their robust statistical analysis shows repression this month may increase terrorist attacks next month, while conciliatory attacks may decrease the number of terrorist attacks in the same time period. It is important to note that since the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a daily conflict in the study period, monthly effects are considered long-term while weekly effects are considered short-term.²⁵ Analysis and recommendations outside of this conflict may have to specify different long- and short-term definitions.

Repression last month increases the likelihood of terrorist attacks this month; conciliatory actions last month decrease the likelihood. Moreover, the correlation actually gets stronger when the actions in question are indiscriminate, for example, when they target a population rather than a person. Dugan and Chenoweth's analysis had stronger correlation when the strategies were used indiscriminately. Thus, indiscriminate repression is more likely to increase the long-term terrorist attacks than repression

²² Shmuel Bar, "Deterring Nonstate Terrorist Groups: The Case of Hizballah," *Comparative Strategy* 26, no. 5 (2007): 469-493.

²³ Shmuel Bar, "Deterrence of Palestinian Terrorism-the Israeli Experience: A Critical Assessment" (paper presented at the Eighth Herzliya Conference, Herzilya, Israel, January 22-23, 2008).

²⁴ Robert Pape, *Cutting the Fuse: The Explosion of Global Suicide Terrorism and How to Stop It* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2010).

²⁵ Erica Chenoweth and Laura Dugan, "Does Repression Decrease Terrorist Attacks? Evidence from Israel" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, Montreal, Quebec, March 15-19, 2011).

overall, but this should be mitigated by the above finding that crushing VEOs can be an effective way of deterring future activity.²⁶

Increased severity of punishment for attacks deters VEOs from carrying out those attacks. Rasler suggests that coercion can be useful in the short term but counterproductive in the long term. Since her study is only of Iran around the revolution, it is unclear if this applies to other states or time periods.²⁷ A study undertaken by Young of violence in Iraq supported Rasler's argument and found more militarized COIN operations lead to an immediate decline in violence but increases in the long run violence trend against U.S. soldiers.²⁸ Finally, LaFree, Dugan, and Korte find that most British counterterrorist interventions in Northern Ireland actually increased future terrorism.²⁹ Only one intervention, akin to a troop surge, had a pacifying effect on future violence.

In a country/issue context with multiple VEOs, negotiating with one VEO may lead to increased bad behavior by VEOs left out of negotiations. Bloom, examining several cases in-depth, suggests that the presence of multiple VEO challengers will increase the likelihood of suicide terror.³⁰ Stedman, Kydd, and Walter show that "spoilers" will ramp up violence when more moderate groups negotiate with the state.³¹ Cunningham finds that civil wars will last longer when multiple groups are involved in negotiations using a time-series cross-sectional (TSCS) quantitative analysis.³² However, Nilsson, in another TSCS study, finds that parties that are negotiated with are likely to reduce their violence.³³

INFORMING ACADEMIA AND THE POLICY COMMUNITY

As part of a wider effort to assist planners in designing and implementing influence operations against VEOs, the literature reviews involved developing, researching, and analyzing a broad range of alternative hypotheses with potential relevance to a variety of audiences. START's expansive review of the literature was encapsulated in a functional

²⁶ Erica Chenoweth and Laura Dugan, 2011.

²⁷ Karen Rasler, "Concessions, Repression, and Political Protest in the Iranian Revolution," *American Sociological Review* 61 no. 1 (1996): 132-152.

²⁸ Joseph Young, "Repression, Dissent, and the Onset of Civil War: States, Dissidents and the Production of Violent Conflict" (PhD thesis, Florida State University, 2008).

²⁹ Gary LaFree et al., 2009, 17-45.

³⁰ Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2005).

³¹ Stephen J. Stedman, "Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes," *International Security* 22, no. 2 (1997): 5-53; and Andrew Kydd and Barbara Walter, "Sabotaging the Peace: The Politics of Extremist Violence," *International Organization* 56, no. 2 (2002): 263-296.

³² David Cunningham, "Veto Players and Civil War Duration," *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 4: 875-892 (2006).

³³ Desiree Nilsson, "Partial Peace: Rebel Groups Inside and Outside of Civil War Settlements," *Journal of Peace Research* 45, no. 4 (2008): 479-495.

form by creating a Knowledge Matrix related to the domain of influencing VEOs. The Matrix allows for deeper conceptual exploration, by providing expert commentary and a flexible gateway into various I-VEO subtopics, which provides the overall I-VEO effort with ready access to a broad base of theoretical alternatives and existing empirical evidentiary base upon which to build their concepts and doctrine. Perhaps most importantly, the Matrix is a tool that allows users to scrutinize the theoretical and empirical foundations of assumptions on influencing VEOs.

In addition, the case studies provide an empirical basis for discussion about the relative merits of different influence operations along the spectrum of cooption-coercion. Given the wide range of possible operation types, not to mention the large number of potential interactions with contextual features, the case study analysis is meant to be suggestive rather than to produce scientifically generalizable findings. The patterns and relationships identified may spark additional interest and insights. The rigorous and replicable methodology can be utilized to further develop a comprehensive understanding of states' ability to influence VEOs. The systematically generated set of empirical cases provides valid data for both quantitative and qualitative analysis by academics and the policy community.

ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT INFLUENCING VEOs

Since many of the hypotheses are also common assumptions about influencing VEOs, the micro literature reviews essentially provided the level of empirical support for frequent assumptions. The empirical support scores and applicability scores are detailed below.

Empirical Support Score: Researchers were tasked with selecting (from a predefined scale) a category that best described the amount of empirical support available in the open literature. The category scale is listed below:

- -1 = Clear empirical findings *against* the hypothesis
- 0 = No empirical support (for or against the hypothesis)
- 1 = Anecdotal support only for the hypothesis
- 2 = Multiple qualitative and/or quantitative studies with mixed results (e.g., some in favor, some against the hypothesis), but more negative than positive findings
- 3 = Multiple qualitative and/or quantitative studies with mixed results (e.g. some in favor, some against the hypothesis), but more positive than negative findings
- 4 = Single systematic case study supporting the hypothesis
- 5 = Multiple case studies supporting the hypothesis
- 6 = Comparative case study(ies) supporting the hypothesis
- 7 = Single, high-quality quantitative analysis supporting the hypothesis
- 8 = Multiple quantitative analyses supporting the hypothesis
- 9 = Multiple empirical analyses, including at least one qualitative and one quantitative study supporting the hypothesis

Applicability to Influencing VEOs Score: Since many of the hypotheses originated in other disciplines (besides traditional political science) and often in other contexts (such as interstate conflict or business strategy), the score rates the degree to which the empirical results apply to the general context of state attempts to influence VEOs. The applicability is assigned independent of the strength of support the hypothesis has received. The applicability to influencing VEOs was systematized as follows:

- *Not Applicable* – There is no empirical support in any context.
- *No Confidence* – Empirical results are derived from alternative contexts and the researcher is quite confident that the results *do not* apply to influencing VEOs.
- *Low Confidence* – Empirical results are derived from alternative contexts and the researcher does not believe that they will necessarily apply to the VEO context, but there might be *some possibility* that they do apply.
- *Moderate Confidence* – Empirical results are derived from alternative contexts, but the researcher has *some* degree of confidence that they apply similarly to the context of influencing VEOs.
- *High Confidence: Different Context* – Empirical results are derived from contexts involving quite different types of actors (e.g., states, firms, government agencies), but are sufficiently robust or broadly supported across actor types that the researcher has *high* confidence that they apply similarly to the context of VEOs.
- *High Confidence: Similar context* – Empirical results concern a sufficiently closely related context (e.g., transnational criminal organizations) that the researcher has *high* confidence that they will also hold in the context of influencing VEOs.
- *Direct* – At least some of the empirical results directly concern the context of influencing VEOs.

Based on these score breakdowns, the figures below (Figure 1 and Figure 2) illustrate the breakdown of empirical support and applicability within the micro literature reviews.

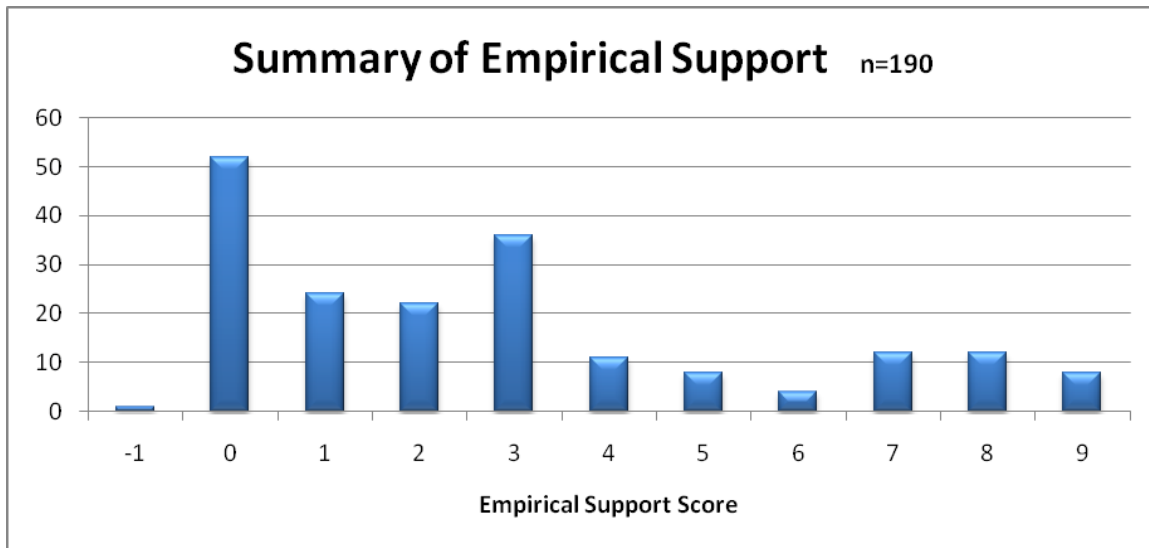


Figure 1. Summary of Empirical Support

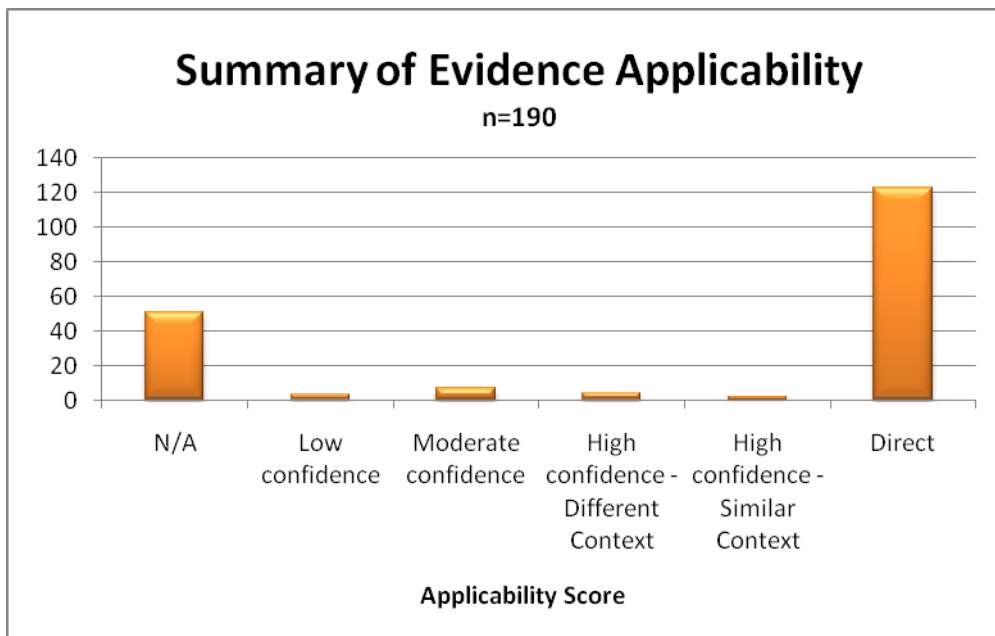


Figure 2. Summary of Evidence Applicability

Fifty-four of the 190 hypotheses did not have any relevant empirical evidence to either support or contradict the assertion. Fifty-nine of the hypotheses had multiple qualitative and/or quantitative studies with contradictory conclusions (represented by empirical support scores 2 and 3). The empirical evidence in the majority of hypotheses was directly relevant to the context of VEOs. It is important to note that hypotheses may be partially or completely contradictory with one another.

Six particular hypotheses were the most supported by empirical literature while also directly concerning the context of VEOs. Based on the relative scholarly consensus about these hypotheses, they may be of particular interest. These hypotheses are the assumptions with strongest support theoretically and empirically (see Table 2).

Table 2. Assumptions/Hypotheses with the Strongest Empirical Support

Assumptions/Hypotheses with Strongest Empirical Support
1. If the adversary sees that there are no benefits to restraint, it will work against the deterring party.
2. In a country/issue context with multiple VEOs, negotiating with one VEO may lead to increased bad behavior by VEOs left out of negotiations.
3. Metal detectors and increased law enforcement at airports decreases hijackings.
4. On the whole, positive inducements seem more effective than negative ones in deradicalizing/disengaging.
5. Political reforms can lower VEO activity.
6. VEO 'targeting errors' can lead to erosion of popular support for the group.

While the empirical scores are not exclusively ordinal, hypotheses with an empirical score of 8 or 9 have stronger empirical support than lower rated hypotheses. The hypotheses with moderate-high empirical support (those with comparative case study(ies) or a single, high-quality quantitative analysis supporting the hypothesis) are ripe for future research (see Table 3).

Table 3. Assumptions/Hypotheses with Moderate-High Empirical Support

Assumptions/Hypotheses with Moderate-High Empirical Support
1. Counterinsurgency approaches will lose effectiveness over time.
2. Long term attrition can wear down VEOs and lead to their failure.
3. State provision of social services where they have been lacking reduces recruitment.
4. Political competition in a regime decreases terrorist attacks.
5. Lack of strong institutions and control by government leads to more VEO activity.
6. International treaties do not decrease VEO activity.

As previously noted, many of the hypotheses did not have sufficient empirical support in the form of public-source quantitative data analysis to form conclusions. Table 4 shows several common assumptions that have not been substantiated through empirical evaluation at any level. It is important to note that a lack of empirical support does not necessarily reject the hypothesis; rather, it is only apparent that no empirically based assessment was found to provide evidence for or against the hypothesis.

Table 4. Subset of Assumptions/Hypotheses with Weakest Empirical Support

Subset of Assumptions/Hypotheses with Weakest Empirical Support
1. Removal of the leader of a VEO leads to fragmentation, outbidding, and escalation.
2. Threatening retaliation against third-party enablers can help prevent terrorist organizations from obtaining needed resources.
3. Reducing the anticipated benefits of an attack can help deter VEOs.
4. Retaliating (post-attack) against non-state supporters and enablers of terrorism may deter the future provision of support or facilitation of terrorist organizations by such actors.
5. Targeting and threatening local political goals of (potential) franchise VEOs can deter globally networked VEOs.
6. Media shaming of VEO activity can reduce VEO activity.
7. Breaking VEO networks and connections will reduce VEO activity in both the short and long term.
8. Blocking VEO financial transactions will curtail VEO activity.
9. VEO perception of targets' ability to attribute the attack in a timely manner with a high degree of certainty may deter VEO activity.

Only a single hypothesis had negative empirical evidence, i.e. that decentralization in decision-making can lead to a decrease in VEO activity.

While the tables provide an interesting subset of assumptions in light of empirical support (or lack thereof), users can use the Knowledge Matrix by sorting according to empirical score for a more thorough assessment.

FUTURE RESEARCH AND DATA LIMITATIONS

Considerable work remains to be done to explore the patterns of unexpected consequences given the paucity of empirical data with the granularity, focus, and generalizability necessary to assess the effects of antecedent conditions, much less determine which specific operation types are affected in what ways.

DATA LIMITATIONS

The nascent quantitative literature on the effects of influence operations demonstrates a substantial gap in our understanding of how VEOs respond to governmental efforts to disrupt their activities. A review of the quantitative literature for the past 30 years has identified 20 substantial or influential quantitative datasets on influence operations, a majority of which have emerged in the past 10 years. The available quantitative research on the effects of influence operations on VEO activity does suffer from several key limitations. First, for many of these studies, while the data were drawn from open sources, the individual datasets themselves are not publically available for

download and replication. Some are listed within the original article or book,³⁴ but were unavailable without transferring the material to an electronic media. There are also several key studies on influence operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, which were not included in this collection as they used data from the military that has not been publicly released including the Significant Action reports for both of these conflicts.³⁵

Second, many of the datasets are focused on repressive state actions including arrests and raids. Few of the datasets include policy actions³⁶ and even fewer contained information on conciliatory actions by state authorities.³⁷ Data on counter-propaganda efforts, intelligence gathering, opinion-shifting, financial interruptions, use of civilian militias, and other efforts to influence operations are limited in their availability, and efforts to gather and quantify this information are rare in the research literature. The available datasets have relied more heavily on the use of open media sources, which do not often detail these types of influence attempts.

Additionally, there are questions regarding the validity and comprehensive nature of using media sources to track governmental actions against VEOs. There are difficulties associated with the use of media sources to provide information on government operations, as many countries where terrorism is elevated may have severe limits on the freedom of the press or may not publicly announce their specific actions against VEOs. In addition, several of the datasets are single-source for their data collection, whether Reuters,³⁸ the New York Times,³⁹ or *Al-Ahram* newspaper in Egypt.⁴⁰ There are concerns that the actions identified through single sources suffer from any inherent biases within the source itself and its coverage of that particular region.

While the limitations for using these datasets are numerous, there are several promising efforts that can provide effective platforms for collecting data on the wide variety of influence operations and making them available to the larger research community. For example, the collection of a wide variety of individual influence actions within the "Dealing with the Devil" project provides a clear direction that more micro-level

³⁴ Seth Jones and Martin Libicki, 2008.

³⁵ Eli Berman, Jacob N. Shapiro, and Joseph Felter, "Can Hearts and Minds Be Bought? The Economics of Counterinsurgency in Iraq," *Journal of Political Economy*, (forthcoming); and Eli Berman, Michael Callen, Joseph Felter, and Jacob N. Shapiro. 2011. "Do Working Men Rebel? Insurgency and Unemployment in Afghanistan, Iraq and the Philippines," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 54 (2011).

³⁶ Gary LaFree et al., 2009; Walter Enders and Todd Sandler, 2000.

³⁷ Erica Chenoweth and Laura Dugan, *CounterMeasures against Extremism and Terrorism (CoMET) Database*. National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, (2011).

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ John A. Nevin, 2003, "Retaliating Against Terrorists." *Behavior and Social Issues* 12 (2003):109-128. Ragin, Charles C.

⁴⁰ David Fielding and Anja Shortland, 2010, 433.

data on unique operations are necessary.⁴¹ Additionally, projects that provide a multi-source approach to both operations and their surrounding context are important to decipher the effects of both the operation and its perception within the larger public on subsequent VEO activity. Among these is the CoMET project underway at START, which is focused on capturing the ecology of influence operations including the context in which operations were introduced, the actors involved in the operations, how the operations were implemented, how media covered (and did not cover) the operations, capturing potential shifts in operations over time, and distinguishing between operational discourse and operational actions.

BUILDING ON I-VEO

Task One provides detailed information about where the gaps are in our knowledge of influencing VEOs. These gaps, among other functions, provide guidance for future research. Task Two offers a methodology that can be refined and expanded upon to build a high quality, representative dataset of comparable influence operations and effects. Such data would greatly enhance our understanding of this complex phenomenon and ultimately lead to better decisions about whom to influence, when and how.

EMPIRICAL ASSESSMENT OF INFLUENCE AND UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

In order to understand how government actions impact VEOs or how political groups become VEOs, one would want a data set that is cross national, cross regional, and includes groups that are violent as well as nonviolent. The data set should also contain a large amount of variables coded about those groups' structure and behavior. Unfortunately, because of limited resources, there are not many data that fit this description. So, this must rely on existing datasets comprised of information about insurgent groups and other violent actors or on data that looks only at a segment of the world for a particular type of group. The two databases that we use here are the RAND COIN database created by Christopher Paul, Colin P. Clarke, and Beth Grill⁴² and the Minorities at Risk Organizational Database (MAROB) by Victor Asal, Amy Pate, and Jonathan Wilkenfeld.⁴³ These data sets serve as proxies to help us understand how violent extremist organizations have been defeated and the conditions under which they take up or disavow violence. This contribution to project uses quantitative analysis to identify key patterns in effectively countering VEOs and determining what contextual and policy factors motivate organizations to stop, start, or end the use of violence. This builds on the review

⁴¹ Erica Chenoweth and Laura Dugan, 2011.

⁴² C. Paul, C.P. Clarke, and B. Grill, *Victory Has a Thousand Fathers*. (Santa Monica, CA, 2010).

⁴³ Victor Asal, Amy Pate, and Jonathan Wilkenfeld, *Minorities at Risk Organizational Behavior Data and Codebook* Version 9/2008, <http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/mar/data.asp>. There are several other VEO databases, but they do not break down strategies in anywhere near the detail that the RAND data does or provide attributes of the organizations like MAROB. For an overview of these different datasets, see the START literature review. See I. Arreguin-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict." *International Security* 26, no. 1 (2001): 93-128.

and case studies while addressing some of the limitations referenced above, but still leaving many outstanding. As such, this analysis is aimed at incrementally improving our understanding of influence and unintended consequences from a quantitative empirical assessment. In addition, this section explores the RAND data from an alternative analytical lens of quantitative analysis.

RAND'S COIN DATABASE: RESEARCH QUESTION, LIMITATIONS, AND FINDINGS

Research Question

The RAND dataset poses the question, “Why do some insurgencies succeed while others fail?” In order to answer this question, authors of the RAND study explored, qualitatively, 30 of the most recently resolved insurgencies that ended between 1978 and 2008. Then, they divided each insurgency into “phases” of varied length. The phases allowed the RAND analysts to examine how different COIN approaches had an impact without subsuming them all under one time frame of the entire conflict. This is one of the most comprehensive datasets covering a variety of COIN operations as well as a wide range of COIN policies.

Limitations

The RAND data do have limitations: the data are not measured yearly, the key variables are often outcomes of discrete processes that are not always policy options but outcomes of success themselves, variables central to the authors’ argument about government success in defeating an insurgency are based on expert judgments that are not easy to confirm, the dataset lacks control variables, and the variables are highly correlated. We will elaborate on a few of these issues.

Because the data are not measured yearly, it limits our ability to draw reliable inferences; we cannot control for factors that take time to develop or control for processes that depend on one another (what statisticians would call “simultaneity”). Additionally, many of the variables for which there is evidence of a relationship to government success either (1) require polling data, (2) must be assessed post-hoc, (3) require longitudinal data since they are comparative over time, or (4) are variants of the dependent variable, making them inappropriate as predictors.⁴⁴ The dataset also does not contain control variables, so country-level factors like regime type (democracy vs. autocracy) or wealth are not controlled for, and thus their effects are not taken into account in these models. In other words, there may be structural country-level factors causing outcomes of interest rather than policies. Additionally, several variables are highly correlated, which makes distinguishing the relative contribution of the highly correlated pairs more difficult without additional data.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Regarding item (4), the issue is that some variables are really a different way of describing whether the government beat the insurgency or not. Statistically speaking, one cannot predict government success or failure with another variable that is an indicator of success or failure; the results would be a logical loop—success predicts success.

⁴⁵ If two variables tend to increase or decrease together, it can be hard to tell which matters most. For instance, a person’s age and level of job experience tend to move together, most often with an 18-year difference. Each year of age usually corresponds to a year of job experience. When one

Findings

RAND presents their findings in terms of approaches to waging counterinsurgency that are classified as effective (13 strategies), possibly effective (2 strategies), and counter-productive (3 strategies). According to RAND, effective strategies—strategies that in most cases lead to defeat of an insurgency—include

1. development (providing support for social and economic development—a classic “hearts and minds” approach),
2. pacification (development plus a focus on local security),
3. development of a legitimate government,
4. manipulating the costs and benefits of insurgent activity,
5. establishing effective control of borders,
6. strategic communications (efforts to affect insurgencies through persuasion and influence campaigns),
7. implementation of the FM 3-24 principles,
8. adequate troop presence in communities,
9. adequate ratios of troops to either insurgents or population,
10. adequate efforts to cut off support from communities,
11. adequately investing in intelligence,
12. establishing and then expanding secure areas, and
13. disrupting insurgent command and control.

Two strategies that might be effective (here meaning that in a preponderance of historical cases this strategy is successful) include (1) assuring counter-insurgency forces use violence in a legitimate way, and (2) the government fighting the insurgency is institutionally and functionally a democracy. RAND found three counter-productive strategies, including (1) resettlement, (2) strong repression, and (3) “insurgent support strategies”—that is, counter-insurgency activities that lead to delegitimization of COIN forces and establishment of insurgents as sources of social services. (To learn more about these strategies, see Chapter 3 of the RAND report by Paul, Clarke, and Grill.)

TESTING THE RAND DATA QUANTITATIVELY FOR IVEO

In order to test the RAND results quantitatively, we began by working with the seventy-five “factors” that RAND coded. Each of the “grand strategies” noted above is actually a composite of multiple underlying factors. For instance, the “insurgent support strategies” grand strategy was composed of these discrete factors.

wants to understand whether, say, salary is due to age or experience, it is hard to tell because an additional year of age also means (in most cases) an additional year of experience—which causes a salary change? One cannot tell. The same is true of any pair of variables whose values tend to “co-vary”—that is, they increase or decrease at roughly the same rate.

1. The insurgents demonstrated potency through attacks.
2. The insurgents discredited or delegitimized the COIN force or the government battling the insurgency.
3. The insurgents provided or ensured the provision of basic services in areas that they controlled or claimed to control.

RAND's database includes information on (1) whether the government or insurgents won a given phase in a conflict and (2) 75 separate factors related to counterinsurgency for each phase in the conflicts they studied. We connected this information to a set of data about the countries in which these conflicts occurred so that we could also control for country-level factors (like wealth, military expenditures, government form, etc.) that may influence whether a given factor or set of factors bundled together as a "grand strategy" is useful in promoting government success over an insurgency.

Logit Analysis

We then employed logit analysis to determine whether the strategies RAND identified are statistically related to the probability of COIN forces winning. Logit analysis provides a method for assessing whether a given factor helps to predict government success or failure against an insurgency when the outcome variable is dichotomous—in this case, a "1" for government success and a "0" otherwise. We found that nine of RAND's strategies⁴⁶ were statistically significant and were a key contributor to government success over the insurgents. That is, these nine strategies co-occurred with government success more often than random chance would support, and while there are many factors that help to explain government success (including random chance and other aspects of the context like the wealth of the country or political system), these strategies were important enough to be a big factor in most cases. Of these nine, two strategies predicted success or failure perfectly⁴⁷ and pacification (development plus a focus on local security) explained the most variation. That is, pacification is more likely to be the critical factor in explaining why the government prevailed in those conflicts where the pacification strategy was attempted.

As noted before, the grand strategies are really sets of activities or outcomes that are usually tried together. We tested whether using more of the factors included in a given grand strategy increased the probability that a strategy would lead to government success over the insurgency. In other words, do you have to use most of all of the components of a strategy to be successful? Our results suggest that success does increase as the grand strategies are more fully implemented. However, our results also suggested that there are usually one to three factors in a given grand strategy that are most important. We labeled these "tent poles"—the central factors that make a strategy succeed. So grand strategies

⁴⁶ The nine strategies are Pacification, Government legitimacy, Cost-benefit, Amnesty/reward, Strategic communication, FM 3-24, Tangible support reduction, Criticality of intelligence, and Flexibility/adaptability. See Chapter 3 of the RAND report.

⁴⁷ In brief, this means that for every instance that these variables were present, failure either always occurred or never occurred. Manipulating the costs and benefits of insurgent activity predicts success perfectly and flexibility/adaptability predicts failure perfectly.

are successful only if the “tent pole” factors are pursued, and grand strategies are more likely to be successful as more of the factors inherent in the strategy are pursued together.

In addition to employing logit analysis, we also use event history modeling. Biomedical researchers have used this method to understand why some patients survived longer after receiving certain drug treatments over others. The dependent variable in medical research is often time to failure (i.e., death of the patient). This time period is conditional upon the amount of time the patient has been observed and has been under treatment. In short, the purpose of these models is to understand the timing of a change in state. Again, in biomedical research, this change is often death. In social research, the event might include the timing of a change in which party controls the legislature or the timing of the shift from war to peace, for example. The bottom line is that event history or hazard models model the time until an outcome or event—be it the death of a patient or a government victory over insurgents. In other words, this analysis tells us if and when something is likely to happen under a given set of circumstances.

The outcome of the analysis is a probability that the duration of, for example, peace, war, or the cancer treatment under study, has not “failed” or ended up to a particular point. The occurrence of an event is the instant the item under study changes states (e.g., when a war ends or when a person becomes married). Finally, the hazard rate is the risk that a unit under study will fail/end. The higher the hazard rate, the higher the risk that the duration of time will end. The analysis also tells what factors make it more or less likely that we will see a failure or an end of what is being observed and studied. So is the patient likely to die or continue life past the study? In our terms—is a group that is currently fighting likely to continue to fight or stop during the time period under observation or the reverse—is a group that is not fighting likely to not fight during the time period under observation? In survival modeling, we want to estimate the hazard rate so that we can assess the risk that any of our units have of failing or ending.

When there are multiple ways that an individual can fail or an event can end, we need to use a modeling approach that takes into account that time to the different outcomes might differ. Put another way, wars can end in many ways (a negotiated settlement, a government victory, etc.) and the way these wars end may be associated with the duration of time it takes for them to conclude. Also, independent variables may hasten time to some outcomes (like a settlement) and increase time to others (like a rebel victory) because these factors are having different impacts on different behaviors.

Competing risk hazard models allow us to determine whether a given independent variable has an impact on the duration of multiple failure types or multiple ways that a war can end. In this sense, competing risk analysis is about identifying different types of failure and times to these ends. In hazard models, the dependent variable is time until a certain outcome. Sometimes an event is at ‘risk’ of more than one outcome. For example, insurgencies can be “at risk” of ending through government victory, rebel victory, or mixed outcome. In the COIN context, if we are interested in the time it takes government to win, we can think of an insurgent victory as a competing event. This method takes into account that there are multiple outcomes that “compete.” In sum, we are able to allow for multiple ways for wars to end and to model the different impacts of key predictor variables on these types of endings.

FINDINGS FROM OUR ANALYSIS OF THE RAND COIN DATASET

The logit analysis we perform extends the RAND analysis by applying different methods. Our findings support many of the conclusions arrived at by the original RAND report, but do challenge others. First, several strategies⁴⁸ that RAND found to promote a government win do not predict this outcome in our study. In fact, our analysis suggests that some of these strategies have never been fully tested “in the field.” That is, the factors that RAND identified as making up some of these strategies have never been used together consistently during the conflicts they studied. Second, state capabilities influence the success of several strategies. State capability is measured by an index that incorporates energy consumption, iron & steel production, military expenditures & personnel, and total & urban population from the Correlates of War dataset. However, many other state characteristics (including regime type) do not affect government’s probability of victory. RAND did not test the influence of either state capability or state characteristics.

Third, most of the 75 factors RAND identifies do not affect the probability of government victory. Instead, as noted above, a sub-set of factors or what we have termed tent-poles in each strategy are central to each strategy’s success in promoting government victory. Finally, a sparse set of factors (five from RAND’s set) and the country capabilities score can explain almost 45% of the variation in probability of government success. These factors include

1. Intelligence adequate to allow COIN force to disrupt insurgent processes or operations,
2. COIN force established and then expanded secure areas,
3. COIN force effectively disrupted insurgent command and control,
4. Insurgents' ability to replenish resources significantly diminished,
5. Insurgent force individually superior to COIN force by being more professional or better motivated (reduces chances of government victory), and
6. Country capabilities score.

RAND does not model duration of insurgency, so using their dataset we are able to present somewhat novel event history findings. If a government does not win quickly (within two years) the probability of the insurgency ending in a stalemate (no government victory and no insurgency victory) goes up precipitously, and the probability of ending with insurgent victory stays higher than that of government victory. Government tenure in office also matters: governments that have been in place longer are able to defeat insurgencies more rapidly. Use of “insurgent support strategies” increases time to government victory. Aggressive strategies that use high levels of violence and repression increase time to government victory as well. These findings are only indirectly comparable to the RAND findings because RAND did not conduct event history models. Our findings do overlap in that most of the more circumspect strategies RAND identifies (e.g., legitimate use of force) as being successful also decrease time to government win and increase time to insurgent

⁴⁸ The strategies that RAND found to be effective but that we could not confirm were effective include Development, Legitimate Use of Force, Democracy, Border Control, Beat Cop, Boots on the Ground, and Continuation and Contestation – see the Executive Summary of the RAND report.

win. Level of democracy has no significant impact. Amnesty increases time to insurgent victory.

MINORITIES AT RISK ORGANIZATIONAL DATABASE

Research Question

The MAROB data consist of annual organizational characteristics and behavior as well as government behavior. To be included, an organization needs to have the following characteristics: be in existence for three years, not be an umbrella organization, be political in its goals, and be a regional actor that was not created by the government. Organizations included in this database are from the Middle East and are ethnopolitical in nature; each organization coded for each country it is located in. An important advantage of the dataset is that it has organizations that are both violent and nonviolent. This allows us to examine the factors that make some groups turn to violence while others resist.

Limitations

A notable limitation of the dataset is that it examines only minority ethno-political organizations in the Middle East. To the extent that these groups and states systematically differ from other regions of the world, our inferences are limited.

Findings

The dataset was created by the START Center and the analysis below is an extension of ongoing research investigating various aspects of political violence within an ethnopolitical context in the Middle East. We find that the following variables increase the likelihood that violence will begin:⁴⁹ state repression, more groups competing for the support of the target population, and more groups using violence. In contrast, the following factors make it less likely that violence will break out: commitment to agreement by government, negotiations with groups, and foreign humanitarian support.⁵⁰

In addition to findings about the onset of violence, we have findings about the cessation of violence. Factors that make it more likely that violence will stop include the government being challenged, negotiates, and provides concessions; the government tolerates the illegal group; there is competition from other groups using violence; and the group receives foreign nonviolent military support.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Violence is defined as the use of violence by the organization for political purposes during the year in question.

⁵⁰ These variables stand for: commitment to agreement by government means the government has made an agreement with the organization and has promised implementation but has not necessarily implemented the agreement; negotiations with groups means the government is actually negotiating with the group but has not necessarily come to an agreement with the group; and foreign humanitarian support means the group has received foreign aid of a humanitarian nature (not military but food or other kinds of humanitarian support) from a foreign actor.

⁵¹ Similarly: negotiating and providing concessions (see above); the Government tolerating the illegal group means the group is illegal but the government does not try to repress the group or arrest group members; competition from other groups using violence means there are other groups using violence who are claiming to represent the same ethnic group the group receiving foreign

Factors that make it less likely that violence will stop include the illegal status of the group and the government consistently repressing it, the group receiving violent foreign military support (inclusive of rescue missions, active combat units, or cross-border raids), the group receiving foreign political support, and the group receiving foreign humanitarian support.

We use survival modeling to evaluate how state behavior and organizational characteristics influence violence and peace. In this part of the analysis, we want to model both peace spells and violence spells. Peace spells are the time periods when an organization is peaceful in its interactions with the state. We define peace as the absence of violence from the organization in a given country-year. Peace spells are the contiguous organizational-years during which a group abstains from violence. For example, if Fatah does not use violence against Israel in 2006, 2007, or 2008 but attacks in 2009, then the peace spell is 2006-2008. In contrast, violence spells are contiguous organizational years where a group uses violence against the state. Returning to the Fatah example, a violence spell begins in 2009. If violence occurs in 2010 and 2011, then the violence spell lasts from 2009-2011. Our goal was to model these spells of peace and violence and examine the variables or factors that increase or decrease the duration of these spells. In sum, the following factors decrease the likelihood that peace would end (or violence would break out): a commitment to agreements by the government, negotiations with the group, and humanitarian support for the VEO by a foreign state. Two factors increased the likelihood that peace would end (or violence would break out) include repression by the government and the presence of many other VEOs in the country.

NEXT STEPS IN RESEARCH PROGRAM

The analysis shows that government policies matter a great deal in an organization's choices about violence. Competition from other groups makes it more likely that groups will change their strategy. Policies of home government or external governments can have different impacts if a group is already using violence than if it has not used violence. For future analysis, more extensive coverage of different regions and types of political groups would be useful, especially if combined with more extensive coding of specific counter-VEO activities by governments.

UNDERSTANDING HOW INFLUENCE WORKS

This project focuses on the effects, broadly construed, of U.S. actions intended to impact the behavior of violent extremist organizations. The primary goal is to better understand the unintended consequences of these actions. Much of the emphasis of this report is on empirical assessment of influence actions, but it is equally important to understand *how* U.S. actions generate the effects we observe on the violent extremist organization and other actors. This will help in designing strategies and tactics most likely to achieve the outcomes we desire. This section of the report focuses on three things: 1) bringing insights from social science about how human beings are influenced and make

nonviolent military support means if foreign state provides funds for military supplies, sanctuaries or safe havens for armed fighters, military training in exile, or advisory military personnel for organization.

decisions, 2) conceptualizing whom U.S. actions touch, directly and indirectly, and 3) thinking through how U.S. actions may influence different actors.

INFLUENCE ACTIONS, PATHWAYS, AND OUTCOMES

Influence activities, broadly defined, are an important part of the security and diplomacy toolbox. These activities can range across kinetic strikes, financial seizures, and information campaigns, but it is equally fair to say that any foreign policy action taken by the U.S. government is intended to influence. The policy suite of available actions that aggregates these different alternatives, however, is defined by the desired effect rather than the actual action or the method by which it generates the outcome. Kinetic strikes, for example, are considered an influence action aimed at impairing operational capability and deterring future attacks. As the review and empirical analyses show, kinetic strikes commonly fail to achieve these desired influence outcomes. The kinetic strikes are defined as influence actions by the intention. This runs the risk of assuming that the kinetic strike actually does influence the enemy in some specific way, rather than emphasizing how the action achieves the actual effect. It is possible that the strike has no impact on enemy strategic calculus or behavior, meaning it is better defined as a failed influence action than an influence action.

Rather than define the array of activities based on the desired influence outcome, it is important to understand how and why U.S. government actions bring about the effects they do. By understanding the causal mechanisms that generate the effect, decision-makers are in a better position to evaluate alternatives along with the potential intended and unintended effects of action. For example, consider again the action of a targeted kinetic strike. If the purpose of the strike is to remove a central logistical hub with the intention of denying an enemy the coordination capacity, the strike serves an instrumental role in disrupting the process. This is often the primary goal of kinetic activities in the context of ongoing counterinsurgency, but such strikes have also been historically used as a deterrent and signaling tool as in the case of the cruise missile strikes against al-Qa'ida camps in 1998.⁵² The desired influence in the former instance was constraining coordination, and the strike effectively accomplishes that goal. In the later scenario, a similar targeted kinetic strike may be aimed at deterring members of the VEO from further attacks. The strike, in this case, is a means to trigger strategic recalculation or psychological effects such as fear. The strike is intended to influence through a communicative approach. A central question, often overlooked in efforts to influence VEO through strategic and tactical measures, is how these actions actually influence the intended targets.

The ways in which intended influence actions actually exert influence on relevant constituents are causal pathways to influence, or pathways, for short. The pathways are the different methods by which actions exert effect. A targeted kinetic strike aimed at deterring VEO members serves as an example. A kinetic influence action based on a rational deterrence model driven by cost-benefit calculations, seeks to manipulate the VEO members' expected value to fighting. An alternative frame based on psychological and rule-based decision-making might try to generate a sense of insecurity or defeatism. The same

⁵² Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (Knopf: New York, NY, 2006).

action generated the same effect, but it did so in very different ways and invoked very different notions of adversary decision-making. Beyond the kinetic realm, these types of distinctions can also play a significant role in negotiations. It is common to offer financial compensation to settle a dispute over territory or to alter the behavior of another actor. This type of compensation seems perfectly reasonable in the context of the rational cost-benefit tradeoff, but may be insulting to someone with firmly held beliefs. The simple act of making the offer may actually stoke the emotional commitment that the compensation is aimed to allay.⁵³ In this instance, the same action generated contradictory effects by invoking different notion of adversary decision-making.

Understanding how actions are supposed to generate desired outcomes provides a sense of rigor that can help limit circular logic. Causal pathways will undoubtedly help when planning for intended outcomes, but play a particularly critical role when trying to identify unintended consequences. Unintended consequences of influence actions are often fueled by misunderstanding of the causal pathways, misspecification of the target audience, or a combination of the two. If actions intended to increase costs and rebalance the strategic cost-balance calculus of VEO members actually generate feelings of anger and resentment, the influence action might provoke a response rather than deter one. Conversely, an action aimed deterring an enemy through psychological means of increasing insecurity and generating a sense of fear may inadvertently alter the strategic calculus such that the adversary feels as though inaction would lead to certain demise. In either case, different causal pathways foster outcomes that contravene initial intentions.

SOCIAL SCIENCE MODELS OF HUMAN BEHAVIOR

One method of disaggregating the cause from effect in influence operations involves developing conceptual clarity on the method by which the effect triggers an outcome and the different components of the influence process. Social science offers different conceptions of how humans take in information and are motivated to act. These represent a way of thinking about the underlying proximate cause, which conditions the specific drivers that influences action and generates an effect. These direct drivers are things such as enemy calculations of costs to capabilities or psychological reactions like insecurity or revenge. The models of human behavior presented here are not mutually exclusive. All four are likely to be involved in shaping the intended and unintended influence effects, thereby determining how actors perceive U.S. actions and respond to them. The combination of these various drivers acts as the causal pathway referenced above.

There are many audiences that might feel the effects of U.S. influence actions, and their responses may be motivated by very different underlying paradigms. Human thoughts and feelings are shaped by a number of factors. The four identified here are based on classic approaches in the social and behavioral sciences, with each reflecting a characteristic approach within one or more of the main disciplines in the social sciences.

⁵³ Jeremy Ginges and Scott Atran, "Humiliation and the Inertia Effect: Implications for Understanding Violence and Compromise in Intractable Intergroup Conflicts." *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 8, No. 3-4 (2008): 281-294; and Dehghani et al., "Emerging Sacred Values: Iran's Nuclear Program." *Judgment and Decision Making* 4, No. 7 (2009): 930-933.

Humans as Rational Actors

The paradigm invoked most often in security studies, often implicitly and unconsciously, is that of the rational action. Drawn from economics, this model assumes humans carefully consider the options, rank them in order preference, and select the one that offers the greatest utility.⁵⁴ It is based on the idea people seek to maximize gains and minimize losses. Humans, this model of behavior suggests, make cost-benefit calculations as best they can on the basis of available information. They are forward looking and try to anticipate the consequences of their actions in order to maximize their utility. U.S. statements or actions aimed at changing the costs and/or benefits associated with alternative courses of action implicitly fall under the rational actor umbrella. Both the classic approach to deterrence that involves making threats of costly retaliation in response to certain adversary acts and the strategy of offering positive incentives to alter existing behavior are based on rational self-interest.

Humans as Cultural Actors

A second paradigm that helps to explain why humans act as they do relies on cultural frames or norms of behavior.⁵⁵ Frames offer a construct or way of assembling and thinking about aspects of the surrounding environment, and cultural frames focus on the way that human terrain impacts the way that people think or makes decisions. This model largely comes from anthropology and sociology and assumes humans have worldviews that are shaped by the cultural and social context in which they live. Culture impacts how people interpret United States Government (USG) actions and what people can envision as being in the acceptable or even thinkable range of options for responding. In this paradigm, issues of identity, norms, and core values drive behavior.⁵⁶ Identity refers to the way that people describe themselves and often involves social and cultural aspects. Norms refer to standards of behavior often derived from societal interaction. U.S. statements or actions may influence targets by triggering a particular cultural frame given the surrounding environment is interpreted. The cultural interpretation of the U.S. government action or statement predisposes targets to respond according to prevailing norms or core values. For example, U.S. treatment of holy sites, like mosques, is likely to trigger responses based on the cultural importance of those sites rather than notional values of territory or buildings.

Humans as Political Actors

The third model emphasizes institutional design or internal politics and assumes that behavior is driven by the collective that actors belong to, be they groups, organizations, or states. All of these bodies have internal politics that can motivate

⁵⁴ See, for example, Graham Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston, MA: Longman, 1971); and Duncan Snidal 1985. "The Game Theory of International Politics." *World Politics* 38, No. 1 (1985): 25-57.

⁵⁵ Icak Ajzen, 1991. "The Theory of Planned Behavior," *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 50, no. 2 (1991): 179-211.

⁵⁶ Michael J. Mazarr, "Culture and international relations: A review essay." *The Washington Quarterly* 19, No. 2 (1996): 174-197.

behavior given the array of incentives, power distributions, and institutional arrangement.⁵⁷ Drawn from political science, these governing structures can involve divides between leaders and followers, fissures among leaders based on their positions, internal power struggles, and debates between leaders and followers regarding what actions to take. According to this model, the U.S. can exert influence when statements or actions have an impact on internal political dynamics of a VEO. For example, the U.S. government targeted the Afghan drug trade and other sources of licit and illicit Taliban funding. Following that operational focus, Mullah Omar released the Taliban code of conduct. While many viewed the document as a parallel to NATO's rules of engagement, essentially establishing a social contract between the Taliban and community, a more subtle and perhaps important aspect was an attempt to centralize resource provision and allocation. The goal was to limit the autonomy of local warlords that might take actions inimical to the overall goals of the Taliban. There are also examples of information campaigns that appear to have triggered internal debates on al-Qa'ida's violence against the Muslim populace, perhaps the most visible of example being Ayman al-Zawahiri's letter Ab-Musab al-Zarqawi calling on him to stop targeting Muslims. Generally, internal politics is likely to drive different factions to lobby for different responses. U.S. restraint, for instance, might be seized on by moderates within a VEO as a reason to open negotiations, but simultaneously interpreted by hardliners as a sign of weaknesses to be exploited. The ultimate outcome or effect of the influence on VEO action is driven by the internal byplay of these competing factions rather than any unitary operating principle.

Human Psychology and Action

Finally, the psychological model of behavior stresses internal workings of the human brain in explaining why humans act as they do. Research on cognition and emotion, including findings from the field of neuroscience, offer insights into different ways in which the "human psyche" impacts how humans see the world and decide to act. Humans rely on a number of cognitive heuristics, or decision-making rules, rather than engage in constant cost-benefit calculations.⁵⁸ They are also prone to subjective assessment based on emotional states.⁵⁹ The traditional distinction between rationality and emotions is breaking down, as it has become apparent that our feelings are part of what enables us to assign values to objects and outcomes. U.S. statements and actions may influence targets by activating a particular cognitive schema, which will affect how U.S. behavior is interpreted. Alternatively, U.S. actions may trigger particular emotions. If U.S. actions provoke feelings of anger, for example, the other side is more likely to respond rashly, accepting greater risk and ignoring the potential long-term costs of their actions.

⁵⁷ Graham Allison, 1971.

⁵⁸ William D. Crano, and Radmila Prislin, "Attitudes and Persuasion," *The Annual Review of Psychology* (2006): 345-374.

⁵⁹ Leandre R. Fabrigar and Richard E. Petty, "The Role of the Affective and Cognitive Bases of Attitudes in Susceptibility to Affectively and Cognitively Based Persuasion," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* (1999): 363-381.

Conclusion

These four models of behavior are not mutually exclusive. Unintended consequences may arise, because problems are approached with the assumption of mutual exclusivity. All four are likely to be involved in shaping influence effects. In addition, they may interact with each other in unexpected and even scientifically undocumented ways in the operational context. This document distinguishes these four models because they can lead to different predictions about potential unintended consequences given a single action. Deterrence efforts are one of many examples. A deterrent threat that should succeed if the other side makes rational cost-benefit calculations might fail if it leads people on the other side to rally behind a hard-line leader, offends the other side's notions of honor or beliefs about morality, or is simply misperceived due to cognitive constraints on rationality or emotional considerations of fairness. Hence, it is useful to leverage each of these models when forecasting the expected outcomes of actions in an attempted to identify and mitigate unintended consequences.

INFLUENCE TARGETS AND MODELS OF BEHAVIOR

The influence framework created for the I-VEO effort was designed to help planners consider the range of actors the U.S. government impacts, the models of human behavior that are most likely to apply, and ways to think about these complex processes. While there is no way to determine with certainty which model will most likely determine how a U.S. government action is interpreted, it is important to explicitly draw out the possible causal relationships while presenting a range of possibilities for contemplation. Conceptual models that emphasize certain characteristics of the VEO members and target audiences offer clues to help limit the unintended consequences. We begin with a canonical example from social science and then develop some guides tailored to the application of VEOs.

There are a range of factors that might condition the expected responses of VEO members and other actors. The commitment of VEO members to the group is likely to impact their behavior as individuals, and the framework team distinguished between leaders, loyalists, active followers, ideological influences, material supporters, and the broader audience. Leaders are the senior-most operational and ideological figures in the VEO. Loyalists are those with strong ideological and social ties to leaders, whereby active followers are the operational cadre with group ties. Outside of the operational construct of the VEO, three groups also play a significant role. The ideological influences are individuals unifying and mobilizing, and material supporters provide resources necessary to sustain the VEO. Finally, the broader audience involves the population without direct ties to the VEO that may serve as a pool of ready recruits, provide resources, or offer sanctuary. Most assuredly, VEOs could be further disaggregated, but it is difficult to find empirical research that gives reason to think that leaders and loyalists would act differently in similar circumstances. Theoretical assessments of VEO management rely on principal-agent constructs to conclude that leaders have different incentives from active followers.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Scott Helfstein, "Governance of Terror: New Institutionalism and the Evolution of Terrorist Organizations," *Public Administration Review*, 69 (2009): 727-739; and Jacob Shapiro,

Principal-agent problems represent those where the principal wants to maximize a certain outcome, but agents have divergent incentives that compel them to deliver less than expected. While many believe this to be true, the empirical research has not reached a sufficient micro-level analysis to affirm that conclusively. If it is difficult to confirm intuition at this level, drawing further distinctions will encounter similar impediments.

Alternative ways of thinking about VEO members and other audiences might emphasize the importance of ideological affinity and material support. Ideological affinity is the degree to which the external actor finds agreement with motivations, goals, and methods of the VEO. Actors can be generally sympathetic or unsympathetic to the group and their motivations. Within the VEO, the central distinction of ideological commitment might emphasize whether individuals view the goals as secular (ones they weigh relative to other costs and benefits) or sacred (ones that they are unwilling to trade for any value). Outside of VEOs, the distinction between secular and sacred may continue to play a role, but there may be many actors that reject the goals and methods irrespective of the values at play. Outside audiences may act differently if they have resource commitments to a VEO. External actors with resources committed to VEOs, such as Iran with Hezbollah or Pakistan with Lashkar-e-Tayibah, may act to protect their investments. Together, ideological predisposition and material support provide ways of the approaching the commitment that members and outside participants have toward the VEO. Understanding the commitment spectrum and relative positions of these different groups will play an important role in predicting the response to influence actions.

EFFECTS OF INFLUENCE OPERATIONS ON OTHER AUDIENCES AND PROCESSES

THE SCOPE OF INFLUENCE AND UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

Influence operations may be directed narrowly at a VEO or on parts of the system in which it operates. Actions intended to influence the VEO or its system might also have indirect effects on states, non-state organizations, and processes. These may or may not be favorable. Figure 3 illustrates this by showing three factions A, B, and C vying for power with the government in a given states. Each faction can be seen at different levels of detail (e.g., leadership, active participants, and facilitators). One of these factions may be the VEO of particular interest while the others are competitors (violent or nonviolent). These factions affect one another and all operate in a system that includes political, security, economic, and social *processes* of the country in question. The external environment includes other countries and non-state organizations, as well as international political, security, economic, and social processes. Figure 3 is only one of many possible depictions suggesting the complexity of the system within which an influence action may be operating, but it is sufficient to make some distinctions worth pursuing.

“Heterogeneous Motivations, Discipline, and the Management of Terrorist Organizations,” *World Politics* (2012).

A, B, C: factions with different levels of organization

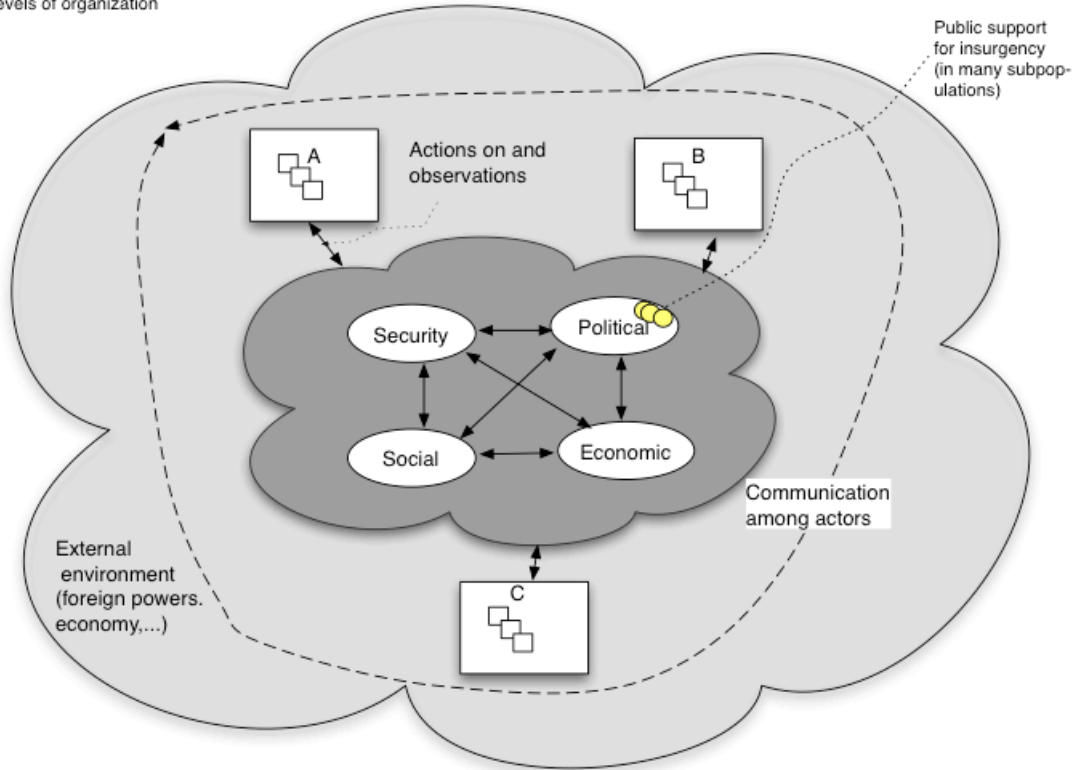
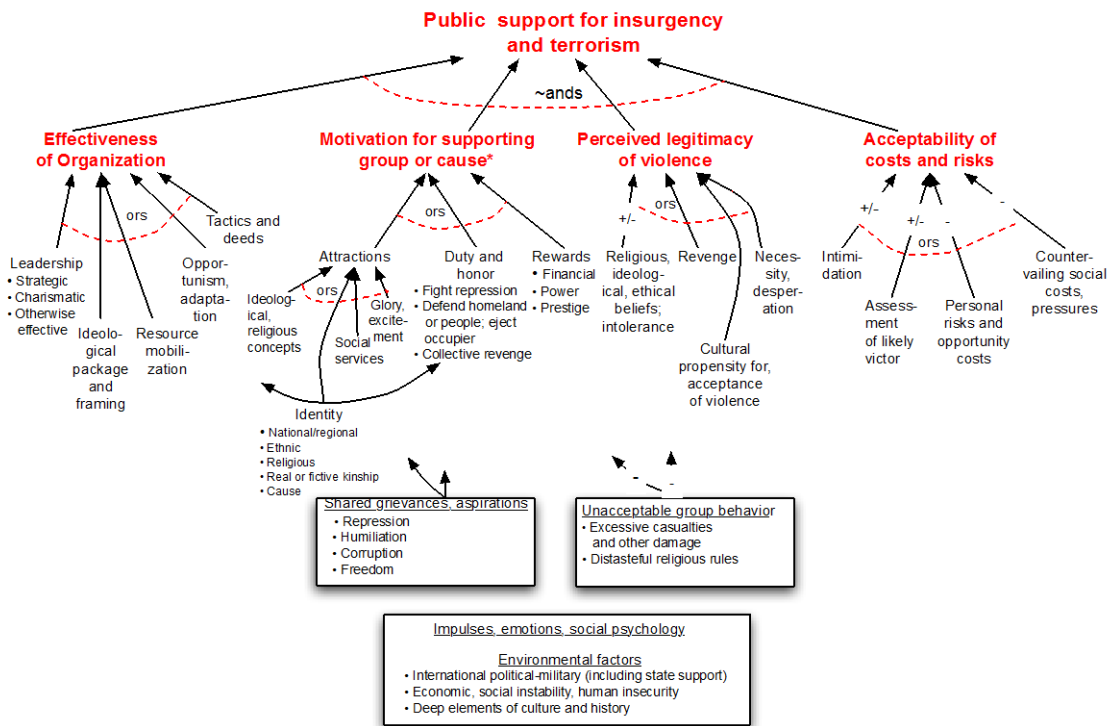


Figure 3. VEO Influence Chart

Figure 4 identifies the top-level factors underlying public support and, thus, identifies potential foci for influence actions.



2.17.11

Figure 4. A Conceptual Model (Qualitative Systemic Theory) of Public Support for Insurgency and Terrorists

Table 5 suggests some of the unintended consequences that might be caused for audiences other than the VEO itself. It focuses on negative consequences, but similar depictions can highlight positive but unexpected opportunities that sometimes arise.

Table 5. Illustrative Influence Actions and Possible Unintended Influences

<i>Attack VEO's Public Support</i>	<i>Class of Influence Action</i>	<i>Potential In-Country Unintended Influences</i>	<i>International</i>	<i>Domestic U.S.</i>
Attack VEO's organizational strength	Assassinate leaders	Public anger because of popular respect for leader and issues of sovereignty (as when Israel killed Hezbollah leader)	Reaction toward U.S. unrestrained "bullying" and interference with "cowardly" means of attacks (drones)	Reactions if U.S. political figures become targets of assassination efforts
	Disrupt or close down propaganda organization	Public and government anger because of sovereignty and free-speech issues	Reactions by international organizations being used (wittingly or not) for VEO propaganda	
Undercut motivation for supporting the VEO and legitimacy of violence	Counter-narrative messaging	Repudiation of previously respected figures or themes if tainted by U.S. connections	Repudiation of previously respected figures or themes if tainted by U.S. connections	
		Advertising for the VEO, enhancing its perceived significance	Advertising for the VEO, enhancing its perceived significance	Potential problems if IO actions mislead Congress or seem un American
		Enhancing influence of a similarly deplorable faction or ideology	Inflaming international passions, possibly leading to war (e.g., between India and Pakistan)	
Undercut acceptability of costs and risks	Economic Sanctions	Anger due to effects on innocent population (as with UN sanctions on Iraq during the 1990s)	Anger due to ill effects and unfairness	
	Improved security measures (train, equip government)	Fear of omnipresent government ad repression	Criticism if U.S. training and systems are used to support government repression	Criticism if U.S. training and systems are used to support government repression

AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO INQUIRY: QUALITATIVE SYSTEMIC KNOWLEDGE

The early sections of this report summarized recent efforts within the SMA program on violent extremist organizations (VEOs) to pull together a good deal of knowledge about VEOs, what can affect them, and what unintended consequences may be of efforts to influence them.⁶¹ The thrust of these efforts was to identify discrete hypotheses to be found in the literature and to assess the degree of empirical support they do or do not enjoy. This section is complementary, pointing toward recent literature taking a different tack to both theory and empirical validation. It then addresses the issue mentioned above, influencing audiences other than the VEO itself, notably the public that may support insurgency and terrorism. First, however, it is useful to discuss some terms and distinctions.

DEFINING SOME TROUBLESOME TERMS

It is common to distinguish between “theoretical” and “empirical” knowledge, but the terms have drastically different connotations depending on context. To refer to a theory may be to refer to a mere notion, speculation, or parochial explanation. Alternatively, it can refer to a settled body of systemic knowledge on which we can rely. Reference to empirical knowledge is also ambiguous. It may refer to results of statistical analysis of available quantitative data, insights gained from qualitative research such as comparative case studies, an anthropologist’s observational field research, a military officer’s operational experience, or an intelligence officer’s skillful use of what others might see as anecdotal information.

Another confusing point is that many people assume that a good theory should be predictive and that such a theory can be empirically tested by observing actual results and comparing to predictions. Knowledge, however, is not always of that variety. When considering social systems, for example, it may be more useful to focus on understanding the factors and processes at work, and on developing a rough sense for interactions, than on attempting reliable prediction.⁶² Perhaps we know the primary factors, but not their current values or precisely how they interact, or perhaps we know that unknowable factors add a random element to events. In such cases, it is a time-honored strategy to proceed along an *informed* path and monitor developments and adapt one’s actions intelligently as necessary. Understanding the factors and qualitative influences may greatly improve the ability to do so. Military officers learn such skills to deal with the fog and surprises of war. This includes becoming good at current situation assessment rather than just relying upon what was expected in preliminary planning. The structure in which

⁶¹ Gary A. Ackerman and Lauren E. Pinson. *I-VEO Empirical Assessment Project: Literature Review and Knowledge Matrix* (College Park, Maryland: START, 2011); John P. Sawyer and Amy Pate, "I-VEO Empirical Assessment Project: Case Studies of Historical Efforts to Influence Violent Extremist Organizations," 2011; and Victor R. Asal, Karl Rethemeyer, and Joseph Young, "Quantitative Analysis of VEO Influence and Effects," (unpublished briefing, 2011).

⁶² This is true also of many physical systems. For example, theory may tell us that a particular aircraft will become unstable beyond some combination of speed, altitude, orientation, and acceleration. Predicting precisely what will happen in an unstable region may be beyond the corresponding model’s ability, but knowing what regimes to avoid is valuable, as is knowing that certain actions will probably exacerbate the instability, while other adaptive actions will probably (but with complications along the way) lead back to stability.

situation assessment is framed can be seen as a conceptual model or theory, but one that is not—in itself—reliably predictive.

To express this differently, a theory and corresponding model may help understand, explain, and even inform actions without being able to predict the course of events. Lest this seem abstract, consider chess. Understanding the theory (the rules, moves, gambits, and how to do situation assessment) can greatly improve prospects. However, success will depend on skillful and adaptive play along the way.

SOME DIFFERENT CONCEPTUAL MODELS

With this background, what follows describes some recent work that has emphasized synthesis, integration, and a systemic perspective, rather than an attempt to find predictive formulas. The research has been referred to as providing conceptual models, but it should be understood as moving toward *systemic theory* with an emphasis on qualitative variables, being descriptive rather than prescriptive, and focusing on structural aspects at different levels of detail (multiresolution modeling).

A recent book reviewed the social science literature relating to terrorism.⁶³ It provided critical review of literature bearing on (1) root causes of terrorism,⁶⁴ (2) why individuals become terrorists,⁶⁵ (3) public support of terrorism,⁶⁶ (4) how terrorist organizations make decisions,⁶⁷ (5) how terrorism ends,⁶⁸ and (6) terrorism as viewed through the lens of economics and rational-actor theory⁶⁹. It also included chapters on special topics such as strategic communications,⁷⁰ competing epistemologies and analytic methods for systemic understanding,⁷¹ disengagement from terrorism,⁷² and crosscutting observations^{73,74}

⁶³ Paul K. Davis and Kim Cragin (eds.), *Social Science for Counterterrorism: Putting the Pieces Together* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2009).

⁶⁴ Darcy M.E. Noricks, "Disengagement and Deradicalization: Processes and Programs," in Davis and Cragin, 2009: 299-322.

⁶⁵ Todd C. Helmus, "Why and How Some People Become Terrorists," in Davis and Cragin, 2009: 71-112.

⁶⁶ Christopher Paul, "How Do Terrorists Generate and Maintain Support," in Davis and Cragin, 2009: 113-209.

⁶⁷ Brian A. Jackson, "Organizational Decisionmaking By Terrorist Groups," in Davis and Cragin, 2009: 209-56.

⁶⁸ Gaga Gvineria, "How Does Terrorism End?" in Davis and Cragin, 2009: 257-98.

⁶⁹ Claude Berrebi, *The Economics of Terrorism and Counterterrorism: What Matters and is Rational-Choice Theory Helpful?* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2009).

⁷⁰ Michael Egner, "Social-Science Foundations for Strategic Communications In the Global War on Terrorism," in Davis and Cragin, 2009,

⁷¹ Paul K. Davis, 2009.

⁷² Darcy Noricks, 2009.

⁷³ Kim Cragin, "Cross-Cutting Observations and Some Implications for Policymakers," in Davis and Cragin, 2009: 367-400.

Beyond its literature-review function, the book's most original and significant contribution was synthesis accomplished with the introduction of "factor-tree models" summarized by simple diagrams that put the pieces together, rather than describing the myriad of factors separately. That is, such models moved discussion toward systemic theory.⁷⁵ To put the matter differently, it sought to change discussion from competing claims about the cause of terrorism to recognition that different pathways to terrorism exist, triggered, or enabled by different factors. Thus, *sometimes* radical Islamic ideology has been an important factor and other times not. *Sometimes*, economic factors play a role, but other times they do not. Sometimes, the objectives are ultimately political, but other times not (unless the definition of "political" is defined so broadly as to make the argument circular). Further, terrorism depends on an interaction of multiple factors with several of them being more or less *necessary* (as represented in factor trees by connectors with "ands").⁷⁶

EMPIRICAL TESTING AND REFINEMENT IN THE QUALITATIVE SYSTEMIC APPROACH

Several subsequent studies have tested the initial conceptual models with empirical information. The first of these studies in 2010 were classified,⁷⁷ but a more recent study examines how to understand and influence public support for insurgency and terrorism⁷⁸, a subject closely related to the current SMA study. It drew upon empirical information for insurgency and terrorism in four cases: Al-Qaeda central, the Taliban in Afghanistan, the PKK in Turkey, and the Nepalese Maoists. The data was largely new in that it had not been used in the research that spawned the 2009 book. Thus, it was useful for testing.

Before testing, the study team rethought and enhanced the original model by combining elements of the earlier work and drawing heavily on insights from social movement theory, which explains (and predicts) what an insurgent or terrorist organization will do to promote its effort and thus identifies factors that should be in the conceptual model.

The Approach. The study took an exploratory approach and used data of several different types including both quantitative and qualitative content analysis, survey results, and careful reading of materials from al Qaeda-related thought leaders. This heterogeneity implied less

⁷⁴ The review drew on original work described in hundreds of scholarly articles and books. See also the compilation of short papers in Laurie Fenstermacher, Larry Kuznar, Tom Rieger, and Anne Speckhard (eds.), *Protecting the Homeland From International and Domestic Terrorism Threats: Current Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives on Root Causes, the Role of Ideology, and Programs for Counter-Radicalization and Disengagement* (Washington, D.C.: OSD (DR&E), 2009).

⁷⁵ See also Paul K. Davis, "Primer for Building Factor Trees to Represent Social-Science Knowledge," *Proceedings of the 2011 Winter Simulation Conference*, edited by S. Jain, R.R., Creasey, J. Himmelspach, K.P. White, and M. Fu, 2011.

⁷⁶ If this were not true, there would be a great deal more terrorism in the world. Grievances, perceived relative deprivation, a supply of hotheaded young males eager for action, social causes, and other individual factors are ubiquitous in most societies. Extremely few individuals, however, become terrorists. The conceptual model, however, implies a product rule in which *all* of the top-level factors must be present (to some threshold extent).

⁷⁷ The studies have been led by Kim Cragin, Brian Jackson, and Todd Helmus.

⁷⁸ Paul K. Davis, Eric Larson, Zacharay Haldeman, Mustafa Oguz, and Yashodhara Rana, *Understanding and Influencing Public Support for Insurgency and Terrorism* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, forthcoming).

“control,” but improved insights. It proved valuable because each class of data had its own slants and comparing across data sources sometimes revealed them.

Although some of the content analysis was quantitative and led to interesting tables and charts, that aspect of the research was ultimately underplayed because of being potentially misleading in comparison with the qualitative findings about what factors were at work. Thus, this empirical work experimented with, but deemphasized, what some might have seen as more rigorous because of its quantification.

The Concept for Testing. The concept of empirical testing was rather unique. In this study, the intent was to see whether the factors of the conceptual model were complete (i.e., did other factors pop up in the new case work?), whether the model’s relationship of the factors to each other reflected the “story” that seemed most coherent in the cases, whether the model helped in understanding those cases, and whether—as predicted by the underlying theory—the relative significance of the factors varied significantly with context. That is, did the emerging qualitative theory help in diagnosis and could it be useful for prescription in specific cases?

To adopt briefly philosophy-of-science language:

- The conceptual model (qualitative systemic theory) is *falsifiable*.⁷⁹ It might be that empirical research would reveal that major factors affecting public support of insurgency and terrorism are absent from the model. Given enough cases, the model might also be falsified by discovering that certain factors identified in the model are fact unimportant in *any* of the cases.⁸⁰ In fact, the study concluded that all of the factors of the model were sometimes important; it found no evidence of factors that had been omitted.
- Analysis with the conceptual model is *reproducible*: others could evaluate the model with separate data and assess for themselves whether the model’s factors are complete and appropriate.
- At this stage of research, a major purpose in empirical work is less to test in a yes/no fashion than to look for omissions, more coherent explanations, and so on, and to then iterate. That is, *a major purpose is theory building*⁸¹ with recognition that much remains to be done. It follows that there is no shame in finding a flaw; rather, doing so is an opportunity to iterate and improve. And, in fact, that is what occurred. Figure 4 is the final conceptual model from the study. It is improved significantly but very much built on the earlier work.⁸²

⁷⁹ The key criterion of falsifiability was identified by Karl Popper (Karl R. Popper, "The Logic of Scientific Discovery," books.google.com, 2002.), who was motivated in part by challenges dating back to David Hume.

⁸⁰ As an example, some earlier contributions to terrorism theory emphasized psychiatric factors, even to include Freudian concepts, and sought to define the “profile” of a terrorist. The hypotheses on such matters have been disconfirmed..(Berrebi, 2009).. For a brief review, see Anthony F. Lemieux, "Psychological Factors, Individual Factors, and Triggers," in Fenstermacher et al., 2010. See also a paper derived from survey research, which identifies classes of radicals that can be used for certain types of prediction, Thomas Rieger, *Afghanistan Rich Contextual Understanding of 16 Districts Overview of Results from Gallup Efforts* (Washington, D.C.: Gallup Consulting, 2010)..

⁸¹ See Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005).

⁸² Christopher Paul, 2009; Paul Davis, 2009.

Against this background, Figure 4 summarizes the study's final conceptual model.

THE THEORY'S NARRATIVE

Top-Level Factors. The narrative that goes with Figure 4 is that public support for insurgency and terrorism depends on four top-level factors, read from left to right. These are all seen as relatively necessary, and are thus connected by "ands." In this formulation, it makes little sense to identify the top-level factors as four discrete hypotheses; rather, the hypothesis of the theory is that all must be present.⁸³ In contrast, factors lower in the tree are typically connected by "ors," which means that the higher-level effect may be achieved by many different combinations, with some of the factors being entirely substitutable for one another. For example, in the branch for motivations, religious ideology might be important, but the motivation might instead be a matter of duty and honor, as in defending one's homeland or tribe.

Effectiveness of the Organization. Public support for an insurgent or terrorist organization requires that the organization exist and have some level of effectiveness. Grievances, identity, and many other individual-level factors are ubiquitous; only sometimes, however, does public support for insurgency build to significant levels. The insurgent organizations' effectiveness, then, is crucial and may be seen as the result of leadership, ideological package and related framing, the mobilization of resources, opportunism and adaptation to circumstances, and tactics and deeds.

Motivation. Most people who support insurgency and terrorism believe that they are doing something positive such as contributing to a worthy cause, fulfilling a duty, or maintaining honor. Some attractions are rooted in religion or other ideology, a sense of identity, appreciation of social services provided by the violent organization, the glory and excitement of the cause or activity, or some combination. Referring again to the issue of identity, people may feel a sense of duty or honor to support the insurgency because of nationalism (e.g., when dealing with an occupier) or their connection with a particular ethnic group, tribe, religion, or cause. Other motivations may involve financial payments or gaining power or prestige.

Sense of Legitimacy. Violence may be perceived as legitimate for any, or a combination of many, reasons. The reasons may be religious, otherwise ideological, or ethical; they may be due to intolerance rooted in unthinking ethnic prejudices and ignorance that denigrate "others"; they may be the sense of legitimate personal revenge or, in a culture with endemic violence, a belief that legitimacy is a non-issue. Moreover, even if violence is seen as deplorable, it may be seen as necessary. It should also be remembered that "good" revolutionaries are often insurgents, and that only sometimes do they have the luxury of taking a peaceful approach as in Gandhi's India or in the Egypt of 2011's Arab Spring. A public may deplore or come to deplore terrorism, but may approve other forms of violence as necessary for the cause.

Acceptability of Costs and Risks. The fourth branch is expressed as acceptability of costs and risks (given motivations) because the behaviors in question are often not the result solely of sober cost-benefit calculations, but also of emotions such as the excitement of revolution or the horror of having witnessed slaughter. Responding to intimidation is less a matter of calculations than of being frightened by the government, insurgent group, or both. For those cross-pressured by both, a calculation may indeed occur: who will be the likely victor and, thus, with whom is it most important to cooperate? There may also be personal-level risks and opportunities to consider as well as a variety of countervailing social and culture pressures against support.

⁸³ There are many subtleties, such as the threshold levels at which one would regard the factor as "present" in a binary discussion. Generalizations are possible and are underway.

All of the top-level factors affect the others over time. Additional crosscutting factors are indicated at the bottom of Figure 4. These include grievances and aspirations, unacceptable behavior by the insurgent organization (which can undercut public support), various psychological and emotional factors, and such environmental factors as international relations, economics, instability, and culture.

OTHER SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE AND INSIGHT

This report has touched upon many sources of knowledge and insight, but some others should be noted. These include red teaming; modeling and simulation; human gaming; and sources sometimes given short shrift in scholarly work, sources such as personal accounts, movies and books, and scholarly work from other fields such as sociology. Let us touch briefly on only those “other” sources here, since the others are more familiar.

Personal Accounts. First-person accounts have much to tell us, despite having numerous shortcomings with which social scientists are familiar.⁸⁴ Although the late Osama bin Laden apparently did not write an autobiography, Ayman al-Zawahiri has written extensively.⁸⁵ The book provides considerable insight, not only about Zawahiri, but also about how the ideas he argues for could be appealing to youthful readers.

Some respected individuals have also written autobiographical accounts of how, in their early years, they were temporarily influenced by activities, peer pressures, and ideas that might have led them down a more radical path. One such account is included in Dipak Gupta’s life-cycle discussion of terrorism,⁸⁶ which begins with Gupta as a college-age student in India participating in social activism. Moving to the Middle East, Tawfik Hamid describes growing up in Egypt and coming under the influence of idealistic but potentially violent Islamist movements.⁸⁷ Hamid discusses in detail ways in which Koranic teachings can and are both misunderstood and distorted, and should be interpreted in more modern ways. He writes as someone with deep roots in the relevant culture.

An account by Moroccan-background Omar Nasiri⁸⁸ is quite different. It describes a life that included street crime and “hustling,” being recruited by his more idealistic brother into violent Islamist activities, training in Afghani Jihadi camps in the 1990s, and reporting to western intelligence—while simultaneously having strong emotional links to many aspects of the Jihadi message. Although the book should be viewed with skepticism given its uncertain provenance and the narcissistic nature of the author, retired CIA analyst Michael Scheuer (previously head of the al Qaeda unit) describes the account as having “no peer in the publications of the American

⁸⁴ The shortcomings include idiosyncratic perspectives, embellishing of history (often to the benefit of the writer’s reputation), and distinct propagandistic aspects when the account is intended to influence followers of a movement.

⁸⁵ Ayman al-Zawahiri, Ayman, *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner* (London: FBIS-NES-2002-0108, 2001).

⁸⁶ Dipak K. Gupta, *Understanding Terrorism and Political Violence: The Life Cycle of Birth, Growth, Transformation, and Demise* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

⁸⁷ Tawfik Hamid, *Inside Jihad: Understanding and Confronting Radical Islam* (Abdelhamid, 2008). Both Gupta and Hamid have participated in some of the SMA activities.

⁸⁸ Omar Nasiri, *Inside the Jihad: My Life With Al Qaeda* (New York: Basic Books, 2006).

intelligence community.” As a last example, Janja Lalic⁸⁹ has described in depth her personal experiences (and lessons learned) from involvement in a 1970s American leftist cult. Some features of this experience (e.g., the role of charismatic leadership and organizational doctrine) are highly relevant to understanding counterterrorism.

Movies and Books. Many of us discover over the years that we learn more in some respects from movies and books, including fiction, than from more traditional scholarly mechanisms. Sometimes this is because we need the drama or detail of a story to allow us to internalize some of what we know intellectually. Sometimes it is because they help us relate better to the thinking and culture of others. Instead of seeing the others as irrational or foolish, we can come to comprehend their perspectives. Although seldom listed in a scholarly bibliography for obvious reasons, such sources can be quite valuable. A classic example is the movie *Battle for Algiers*, but movies or documentaries exist on the Mumbai attacks, the allure of extremist Jihadis to members of middle class families in Pakistan, and the Red Army Faction among others. There are almost invariably foreign films, but so much the better for Americans seeking to understand undercurrents and ideas in other cultures. One of the more recent, produced by the BBC, is *My Brother the Islamist*, which deals with a British version of homegrown extremism.

The Social Science Literature on Urban Gangs. Despite major differences between VEOs and urban gangs, there are similarities that are well worth understanding, especially in efforts to operate “left of the boom” with social interventions. The relevant literature is sizable and includes examples of considerable success in reducing violence.⁹⁰ Such issues were discussed in a recent National Academies conference⁹¹ sponsored by the Office of Naval Research.

The Sociology Literature on Intervention. More generally, in contemplating possibilities for influence by intervention, there exists a rich sociology literature on when interventions have been successful or unsuccessful on many other subjects such as violence, intolerance, and alienation. The literature includes successes, but is generally sobering because it is quite difficult in practice to achieve and sustain successful interventions. Doing so requires not just good intentions and some good ideas, but also a highly organized and well-managed approach.

Many other examples exist, but these suffice to suggest that diverse approaches are desirable and feasible in developing knowledge and insight. Some are underdeveloped.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

One implication of the work discussed in this section is to dramatize the difference between seeing “theory” as a collection of discrete and disconnected hypotheses and seeing it as systemic knowledge. In the latter view, an entire theory is a hypothesis to be tested and it makes little sense to test individual fragments because the interactions are strong and fundamental. Another way to put this is that when social scientists avoid answering simple questions by saying, “well, it depends,” they are reflecting the fact that whether a given factor (the subject of one discrete

⁸⁹ Janja A. Lalic, *Bounded Choice: True Believers and Charismatic Cults* (University of California Press, 2004).

⁹⁰ David M. Kennedy, Anthony A. Braga, and Anne M. Piehl, *Reducing Gun Violence: the Boston Gun Project's Operation Ceasefire* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, NCJ 188741, 2001).

⁹¹ Planning Committee on Unifying Social Frameworks, *Sociocultural Data to Accomplish Department of Defense Missions: Toward a Unified Social Framework* (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2011): 28.

hypothesis) will have a given influence depends on the values of a number of other factors. This means that specifications for statistical analysis should be correspondingly nonlinear.

Another implication is that empirical knowledge confirms that many of the factors at work are inherently qualitative and not readily measurable by conveniently published aggregate data. Even where data seems to exist (e.g., survey results), interpretation may be difficult without a richer level of interview information than is often available.

Clearly, the various classes of theory and empirical analysis contribute differently to knowledge, complementing each other. It should not be surprising that case history and observational information are often more useful in understanding phenomena through the lens of systemic theory than are the results from ordinary statistical analysis of aggregate data, especially sparse, aggregate historical data. However, that statistical analysis may be highly valuable for other reasons such as posting cautionaries or in demonstrating that—despite the complexity of a theoretical model that might seem to rule out “simple models”—results on the ground appear to be dominated by one or a very few crude factors. In some cases, such models can even be predictive (until they are not).

CONCLUSION

The results of this project do not produce an answer to the problem that the U.S. government and its allies face in incentivizing VEOs to abandon violence or punishing them for using violence and may be disappointing to some as a result. No amount of [research](#) or analysis can ensure that negative consequences will not arise from a given influence action. The costs and benefits of courses of action (COAs) must be weighed and this project hopefully provides some assistance to those responsible for assessing the range of consequences that arise from government action.

We hope that this project has made a useful contribution in identifying and compiling a list of (sometimes-contradictory) [rules of thumb](#) about how violent organizations act and react. The effort to synthesize and analyze data from a diverse set of fields that could pertain to violent actors helps identify different forces that might guide the response of influence targets, making it important to consider how different models of behavior could produce an array of outcomes. This may well be of use to the policymaking community tasked with assessing and making these difficult decisions. The military community already has a very sophisticated way to think through the utility of different actions, develop COAs, and adjudicate among them. This effort should fold into that process by raising questions about commonly held [assumptions](#) and providing rules of thumb for how violent actors behave.

In making decisions, the best one can expect is to 1) be informed about how similar actions have influenced similar groups, 2) be explicit about the how the actions actually trigger desired and undesired influence effects, and to 3) carefully think through how [USG actions](#) impact the target audience and other audiences. Ultimately, however, influencing VEOs is not a science. Actors and environments can be unpredictable. The most ideal course of action (COA) is one that produces the most good for the least negative consequences, recognizing that the cost-benefit is often a subjective assessment. No USG action will be free from negative consequences. The hope, however, is that those negative consequences will not be surprises, but rather events that are predicted, understood, and part of the planning assessment.