Options to Facilitate Socio-Political Stability in Syria and Iraq

An SMA White Paper
November 2016

Contributing Authors: Dr. Victor Asal (SUNY Albany), Dr. Elizabeth Bodine-Baron (RAND), Dr. Sara Cobb (GMU), Dr. Bob Elder (GMU), Dr. Todd Helmus (RAND), Mr. Bob Jones (SOCOM), Dr. Larry Kuznar (NSI, Indiana - Purdue U Fort Wayne), Dr. Gina Ligon (Univ. of Nebraska Omaha), Dr. Jacob Olidort (Washington Institute for Near East Policy), Dr. Karl Rethemeyer (SUNY Albany), Dr. Jason Spitaletta (JHU/APL), Dr. Gwyneth Sutherlin (Geographic Services, Inc.), Dr. Joseph Young (American University)

Scientific Editors: Drs. Allison Astorino-Courtois (NSI) and Hriar "Doc" Cabayan (Joint Staff J-39)

Compiler: Mr. Sam Rhem (SRC)

Contents

Table of Figures

List of Tables

Preface

This White Paper presents the analytic results from Strategic Multi-layer Assessment (SMA) project touching on the Middle East and North Africa. The objective is to suggest options to manage conflict in the region and to facilitate socio-political stability in Iraq and Syria. Options that are discussed are intentionally "out-of-the-box", non-kinetic, and focused on potential Coalition efforts to:

1- Diminish the allure of the ideology that Da'esh presents to radicalized and potentially radicalized and other youth in the region; and

2- Shape the context to best support reduced regional turmoil and defeat of the Da'esh organization while minimizing the risk of further spread of the jihadist ideology.

The findings discussed below are the result of the SMA's standard multi-disciplinary approach and belief that no single discipline by itself can provide a comprehensive approach to this global and regional conundrum. The analyses were conducted unconstrained by policy, legal, and operational consideration and attempts were made to garner insights from historical precedent.

Following are brief summaries of the articles in this white paper.

In his opening article, Mr. Bob Jones (SOCOM) argues that we live in revolutionary times and ISIL leverages the energy in Sunni populations to their advantage. In revolutionary times, revisionist powers see and seize *opportunities*; while status quo powers tend to be defensive, reactive, and see agents of change as *"threats."* Iran saw an opportunity to expand its sovereign privilege across the region with the fall of Saddam Hussein. Al Qaeda saw opportunity to reduce foreign influence, remove corrupt autocrats, and restore dignity to the Ummah; Da'esh saw the opportunity to best AQ in Syria and Iraq by offering "Caliphate today" in lieu of AQ's more patient approach.

In his article entitled "*Managing the Strategic Context in the Middle East: A Preliminary Transitivity Analysis of the Middle Eastern Alliance Network and Its Operational Implications*", Dr. Larry Kuznar advances balance theory to gauge the overall stability of the conflict system that surrounds the battle against Da'esh in Syria and Iraq. This system is characterized by multiple simultaneous conflicts engaging numerous state and non-state groups in the region and from outside of the region. The analysis focuses on the relations between 24 of the key state and non-state actors in this system and indicates that the region is locked in a well-established system of conflict that is likely to persist given the high degree of transitivity in established relationships

In "*An Analysis of Violent Nonstate Actor Organizational Lethality and Network Co-Evolution in the Middle East and North Africa*", Drs. Victor Asal, Karl Rethemeyer (SUNY Albany) and Dr. Joseph Young (American University) use new data that spans the years 1998 to 2012 to model the behavior of violent non-state actors (VNSAs) in the Middle East. Using several statistical techniques, including network modeling, logit analysis, and hazard modeling, they show that governments can use strategies that influence a group's level of lethality, their relationships with other groups, and how long and whether these groups become especially lethal.

In his "*Countering the Islamic State's Ideological Appeal",* Dr. Jacob Olidort (Washington Institute) discusses an options-focused assessment for policy and practitioner communities in the United States government concerning the ideological threat posed by the Islamic State. The paper examines the possible

evolution of the Islamic State in the event that it loses its strongholds in Iraq and Syria, and the nature of the threat it could pose to Western targets and interests. The assessment is based on the recently-published Washington Institute report, Inside the Caliphate's Classroom, as well as the author's cumulative research on the texts and ideas of the Islamic State and other Salafi and Islamist groups.

In their paper entitled "*Framework for Influencing Extremist Ideology*", Drs. Bob Elder and Sara Cobb (GMU) discuss negotiation research, drawing on rational choice theory which provides a wealth of findings about how people negotiate successfully. They also describe some of the pitfalls that have been associated with negotiation failures. Building on narrative theory, they attempt to expand the theoretical base of negotiation in an effort to address the meaning making processes that structure negotiation as the basis of a framework for influencing extremist ideology.   This research is combined with decision-related research conducted in support of deterrence planning as a means to discover potential influence levers for possible use as a counter to extremist ideology. Recognizing that conflict resolution is complicated because it involves changing the story from within the interactional context from where it arises, the framework assumes a staged approach to address the narrative structure of the ideologically-based conflict which anchors the influence actions on the strategic positions and identities, embedded in the narrative logics of the key characters.

The focus of the article entitled "*Off-Ramps for Da'esh Leadership: Preventing Da'esh 2.0*", by Dr. Gina Ligon, University of Nebraska Omaha and Dr. Jason Spitaletta, The John Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory is two-fold. First, they discuss the underlying theory of TMT (Top Management Team) collaboration, and provide practitioners with some tactics to foment barriers and distrust to aid the operations meant to degrade the organization (e.g., retaking of Mosul). Second, given their analysis of what motivated each of these leaders to join and remain in Da'esh, they provide a set of tailored off-ramps to be considered to deter captured leaders from reconstituting Da'esh 2.0.

In their article entitled "*Comprehensive Communications Approach,*" (excerpted from their 2016 report, "Examining ISIS Support and Opposition Networks on Twitter," available at http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1328.html), Drs. Todd Helmus and Elizabeth Bodine-Baron (RAND) argue the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), like no other terrorist organization before, has used Twitter and other social media channels to broadcast its message, inspire followers, and recruit new fighters. Though much less heralded, ISIS opponents have also taken to Twitter to castigate the ISIS message. Their article draws on publicly available Twitter data to examine this ongoing debate about ISIS on Arabic Twitter and to better understand the networks of ISIS supporters and opponents on Twitter in order to craft more effective counter-messaging strategies.

Finally, in "*A Human Geography Approach to Degrading ISIL*" Dr. Gwyneth Sutherlin (Geographic Services Inc.) argues that stabilizing the region and degrading ISIL will be an international effort with geopolitical and large network engagements. Ultimately, the activities proposed will have an impact for families and their homes on the ground in Syria and Iraq; therefore, the perspectives and priorities of these populations should be foregrounded in any approach, including the involvement of key stakeholders from the earliest possible phase, to lay the groundwork and build partnerships for the long-term stabilization process.

Executive Summary

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois (NSI)

Key Observations

There was consensus among SMA researchers and observers that:

- Da'esh represents a compound threat: it is both the organization and the violent extremist idea it represents.
- Da'esh battlefield loss in Iraq/Syria theater will <u>not</u> bring about an end to the salience of the extremist ideology that it represents. Rather, the "ideological battle" is likely to continue over the coming years with potentially unacceptable tolls on Western societies.
- The effort to mitigate the threat should be compound and comprehensive: addressing the regional conflict as a whole, not Da'esh only, using targeted kinetic options along with complementary messaging and other non-kinetic options.

The observations, research findings and implications presented below summarize the contributions of the separate research efforts included in this paper. They represent a three-pronged approach for encouraging support for regional stability by:

- diminishing the global allure of the jihadist ideology that Da'esh presents;

- attending to the underlying and persistent drivers of regional conflict;

- shaping and influencing narratives to minimize Da'esh appeal.

Analytic Findings and Recommendations

Diminish Allure, Stem Spread of Ideology

OBSERVATION: There are at least eight inter-related militarized conflicts in the region. US focus on Da'esh in Iraq and Syria has weakened Da'esh but, by not addressing other regional conflicts, has allowed extremist ideology to become further entrenched.

OBSERVATION: Da'esh's caliphate-state concept, the appeal of jihadism, and terrorist tactics are unlikely to disappear in the near term. However, we may be able to impact their appeal to aggrieved populations and diminish their lethality.

RESEARCH FINDING: Violent and repressive counter VEO efforts increase the incidence and lethality of VEO responses; non-violent approaches appear to make groups less lethal (See Asal, Rethemeyer and Young, page 22).

IMPLICATIONS:

- Defeating Da'esh the <u>organization</u> with overt kinetic and violent means will at best diminish a portion of the threat and leave the region in persistent turmoil.

- Efforts to neutralize Da'esh should be done in a way that reduces the possibility of AQ resurgence or emergence of other VEOs, including:

- separating references to Islamist/ caliphist political thought in US narratives and strategic communications from the violent means associated with it;

- addressing and working to mitigate the negative psycho-social dynamics in Iraq and Syria that impact both civilians and combatants many of whom are living with severe post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD);

- building trust with elite/ leader networks in secret, over time, using rewards, and withholding punishments in order to accommodate acceptable elements of the larger movement of which Da'esh is part.

Underlying and Persistent Drivers: Shift Emphasis to Avoiding Civil War in Iraq

RESEARCH FINDING: Based on the range of interests (i.e., economic, social, domestic, etc.) of regional actors, Da'esh eventually will be defeated regardless of US efforts in Syria. The interests of regional actors that possess the relevant capabilities to impact the fight against Da'esh show high resolve for defeatist defeat in Syria and even more so for Da'esh defeat in Iraq[1].

RESEARCH FINDING: Whether Iraqi tribal elites and Sunni factions perceive that there range of interests are better served b the Government if Iraq (GoI) or living under Da'esh/ jihadist rule is determined by what they believe about the security conditions that each would bring.

RESEARCH FINDING: Given their range if interests, the benefit Kurdish groups derive from continued civil conflict in Syria and Iraq (e.g., wealth, prestige, territory) can be countered with economic arrangements, and enhanced international and domestic influence.

RESEARCH FINDING: GoI and Shi'a hardliners in Iraq have high resolve (political will) to avoid making substantive post-conflict political reforms that increase the stature of Sunni voices in the Iraqi government. Two conditions however change the decision calculus of each groups to preferring to make these reforms: 1) outbreak of full-scale civil warfare in Iraq; or 2) Iranian backing for such reforms.

IMPLICATIONS: Now is the opportune time to shift policy towards conflict transformation - avoiding civil war in Iraq; begin engaging all parties in publically visible dialogue regarding their views and requirements for post-Da'esh governance and security.

- Engage Sunni factions on security guarantees and requirements for political inclusion/power;
- Engage Kurds on economic and international and domestic political influence requirements;
- Incentivize Iran to back off on proxy funding, diminish stridency of Shi'a hardline easing way for GoI to make substantive overtures, open governance reform talks.

---

[1] Full analysis of the interactions of the interests and resolve of 23 regional actors including data available on request from the SMA office.

Underlying and Persistent Drivers: Restabilize Saudi-Iranian Competition for Dominance; Use of Proxy Forces

RESEARCH FINDING: The regional system will remain unstable; defeat of Da'esh decreases system conflict only marginally.

RESEARCH FINDING: Saudi, Iranian use of proxy forces can quickly reignite hostilities in the region. Although direct confrontation is very costly for each, the chances of unwanted escalation are high.

RESEARCH FINDING: Iran may be incentivized to limit proxy support by international efforts to 1) recognize Iran as a regional partner, 2) mitigate perceived threat from Saudi Arabia and Israel, and 3) expand trade relations with Europe.

RESEARCH FINDING: There are few potential levers incentivizing Saudi Arabia to limit proxyism, although it may respond to warning of restrictions on US support if not curtailed.

IMPLICATIONS: To be effective, efforts to address the underlying sources of regional instability should include a shift from a narrow focus on Da'esh toward the multiple active and latent conflicts in the region, most notably the Saudi-Iranian, Sunni-Shi'a rivalry. Activities should include open dialogue with Iran, Saudi Arabia and regional actors to quell the intensity of Saudi-Iran rivalry and mutual threat perceptions.

Underlying and Persistent Drivers: Address Disaffected Populations

OBSERVATION: The regional population is traumatized and wrought with PTSD. Both civilians and combatants are physically and psychologically wounded.

OBSERVATION: Regional actors are using the fight against Da'esh as an excuse to fight others with whom they have long-standing animosities.

OBSERVATION: As populations continue to be disaffected, Da'esh gains empathy, nation-states find avenues to either directly assault or use proxies to undermine adversaries, and US interests are curtailed.

IMPLICATIONS: Address population grievances, not jihadist ideology independent of context.
Sincerely addressing disaffection of regional populations – physical, social and political -- makes conditions unfavorable for both the Da'esh organization and the ideology. It also sets the context for diminishing the allure of violent extremist ideology, civil conflict, and ultimately regional stability. Activities should include instituting immediate humanitarian relief for disaffected population will help ease trauma and facilitate overdue care for those wounded by all warring parties in this conflict, and development of long-term plans for dealing with IDPs, refugees and returnees.

Diminishing Da'esh Appeal: Counter Da'esh Communications

RESEARCH FINDING: Members of Da'esh do not hold homogenous motives; they are driven by different mixes of ideological, pragmatic, and violent motivations

FINDING: Syrian Mujahedeen have potential to influence Da'esh supporters

FINDING: Da'esh opponents on Twitter outnumber supporters but lack cohesive messaging strategies and are fractured along sectarian and national lines.

IMPLICATIONS: Effective disengagement messaging to Da'esh members requires that individuals who are primarily pragmatically-motivated are targeted with different "off-ramp" communications than those who are ideologically-motivated. There is little value in messaging individuals who are primarily motivated by violence-seeking. Direct anti-Da'esh messaging to specific communities and address their local concerns. Activities might include social media training, of regional anti-Da'esh influencers and of Syrian Mujahedeen to build their capacity to engage and enhance the credibility and effectiveness of counter-messaging.

IMPLICATIONS: Tailor themes and messages to pragmatic attributes within individuals and/or target audiences. Focus on taking positive, pro-social action, toward the new Iraq/Syria instead of away from Da'esh. Highlight inconsistencies between ideology and behavior to reinforce the propriety of seeking an alternative.

IMPLICATIONS: Leverage the subjective experience of in-group members (defectors) to highlight Da'esh failures and GoI successes, particularly in addressing Sunni grievances. In addition, highlight discontent within Da'esh controlled lands using locally-generated content and provide proverbial "Golden Bridge" so that Da'esh members can preserve their identity while renouncing Da'esh and engaging in pro-social activities.

Analytic Road Map: Synthesizing Stabilization Efforts

Analyze Da'esh members within their Human Geography– a set of relationships including: ethnicity, religion, language, tribe, clan, family group, political or other network affiliations, and

Use these Iraqi and Syrian concepts across all Strategic Stabilization Options:

   a. Geopolitical options assessment based on local groups considerations of viability/options

   b. Network analysis of regional actors including tribal/clan footprint, allegiances, motivations, regional connections from family-group level

   c. Comprehensive communications: more effective persuasion techniques to confront ideology

   d. Selection of 'off-ramp' models based on cultural 'touchstones' for Da'esh members

A Regional Strategic Perspective: Mr Bob Jones, USSOCOM

This paper examines the strategic environment of this conflict, not just of Syria and Iraq, but the larger dynamics playing out globally and throughout the region those conflicts are occurring within. This is done in the context of the SOCOM Strategic Appreciation document, which was signed by General Votel in his role as the SOCOM Commander in December, 2015.

Threats exist within the strategic environment, but threats don't define the strategic environment. In that context, ISIL is as much a symptom of deeper problems as they are a threat to any particular government. It is also important to appreciate that their success in attracting followers speaks to a perceived need for what they offer that goes far beyond their ideological rhetoric, or their culture of violence. We need to understand that need from the perspective of the populations it radiates from, and look beyond the troubling tactical criteria like ideology and violence, which draw our attention.

We can look to the Strategic Appreciation for a more fundamental perspective. As we looked at the global strategic environment at SOCOM, the thing that really stood out to us is that around the globe right now, there is rapidly shifting power between state actors, rapidly shifting power from states to populations, and rapidly shifting power into these new types of actors like al Qaeda. This shift power is fueling the revisionist forces at play, driving "gray zone" competitions *between* states; driving revolution *within* states; and facilitating a new breed of empowered non-sate actors able to conduct distributed and networked approaches to unconventional warfare that extends *across and among* states. We live in revolutionary times.

In conjunction with this rapidly shifting power, there is slowing adjusting sovereign privilege, and slowing adjusting policies and governance as well. These are the challenges of status quo powers. If you look at the chart in the Strategic Appreciation, we try to show that there is tremendous energy building up between state actors where these imbalances in power and sovereignty are beginning to merge. There is an even more significant exploitable energy within populations perceiving powerful grievance and where governments are lagging in their ability to keep up with evolving expectations. Even the most agile of governments with the most empowered populations are struggling to keep up. Where neither empowerment nor agility exist the situations are highly volatile, and very susceptible to exploitation by those who see opportunity in the resultant friction.

When this situation occurs, there is a potential energy that grows. If one is a revisionist power, one tends to see the opportunity in potential energy and are quick to leverage in the advancement of one's interests. If, however, one is a status quo power, one tends to lag, be defensive, be reactive, and see these agents of change as threats to be blamed for the conditions they exploit. This is not just a variation on well-founded theories of international relations, this is a reality playing out around the globe today. We have potential energy building between states and within populations. Where these conditions are not recognized, or not addressed, potential energy builds, and the revisionist exploiters of this energy gather. This is the primary driver of instability in so many places around the globe today.

This is certainly the strategic environment framing the dynamics playing out in Syria and Iraq. Iran saw the opportunity in the US invasion and subsequent transition policy for Iraq. US actions caused the Iranian-Saudi (and associated Shia/Sunni) line of competition, once stabilized along the Iran/Iraq border by Saddam, to drop down onto the borders of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and

Israel. US revisionist policy for Iraq opened up opportunities for the forces of the region, and Iran was but one of many who quickly seized that opportunity, expanding their sphere of influence from the Hindu Kush to the Mediterranean. Within this state on state competition for influence, there was population-based competition for influence playing out as well.

The post-Cold War era of globalization has enabled tremendous opportunities to leverage the rapidly growing and increasingly exploitable energy within disenfranchised Sunni populations across the greater Middle East. Organizations like al Qaeda and ISIL are conducting very sophisticated networked approaches to unconventional warfare (UW) to connect and leverage the energy within these distributed populations to advance the interests of their respective organizations. Al Qaeda was the early leader in that competition, with their primary advantage being the sanctuary borne of their non-state status. With no territory to hold, and no populations to govern, al Qaeda proved largely invulnerable to traditional tools of statecraft. ISIL, however, has abandoned that sanctuary to offer to the people of the region the tangible reality of a Sunni-led state they live in today. While the formation of a physical state makes many in the West nervous, the reality is that ISIL has made themselves incredibly vulnerable, and are by far the lesser threat to Western interests. But by characterizing these UW campaigns in symptomatic terms as "terrorism" we create obstacles to understanding them in ways that facilitate courses of action far more likely to attain our desired strategic goals than the counterterrorism framework employed to date.

We need to understand these UW campaigns for what they really are. Only then can we work to effectively counter UW campaigns, and not just react to the terrorist tactics they tend to employ. To characterize these organizations as "terrorist" and this dynamic as "terrorism" is both simplistic and inaccurate. When ISIL emerged from political chaos of Iraq they were able to out-compete AQ with these same populations by offering a physical Caliphate *today*. The urgency of the dangers for many of these people did not allow time for AQ's more patient approach of Caliphate *someday*. At-risk populations needed something tangible they could trust today. The status quo powers of the region and the globe continue to underestimate and underserve this demand. The result is that any defeat of ISIL will not solve the current problem, but will most likely validate and restore AQ's more patient, and dangerous, approach. A defeat of ISIL will also fracture the current state, and convert a civil war against a small weak state back into a powerful revolutionary conflict against a dozen actors, all competing violently to land on top once the dust finally settles.

Strategic success in these conditions demands that we consider first order factors as the symptoms they are, and in the context of the strategic dynamics they occur within. Otherwise we are merely targeting and suppressing symptoms, and quite likely making the fundamental problems worse in the process. To this end I pose some rhetorical questions: How do we help our partners to reduce the exploitable energy? How do we better deter revisionist states from seizing opportunities like this? How do we encourage and support partners more effectively who are struggling to evolve and are feeling threatened by this blend of internal and external, formal and informal, blends of revisionist actors? How do governments make these evolutionary changes in policy, strategy and tactics without appearing to be weak?

In this revolutionary era, the US is the ultimate guardian of the status quo. How do we regain the revolutionary spirit in our thinking and actions necessary to facilitate positive change? In many ways, we've become the modern Redcoats and are very anxious about the latest generation of rebels hiding in the woods and not following our rules or ideas of what is proper. One cannot rationalize population- based concerns, nor can one ignore or wish away the competition for

regional influence between Iran and KSA. The US acted to take out Saddam without fully appreciating how Iraq under his leadership served as a figurative keystone in an arch of these competing forces. Saddam kept those dynamic forces in an artificially stable state through the strength of his government; and when we destroyed that strength, we destroyed the stability as well. The well-intended vision of replacing that hard governance with something fuzzier, softer, proved far less capable of stabilizing these powerful forces. Ironic to our role as a status quo power, it was our own revisionist agenda that set these powerful forces into motion.

If one is going to get to stability in Syria and Iraq, one must first develop, communicate and put into place a viable plan to restabilize the competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Inextricably linked to the political competition between those states is the associated religious and cultural competition. The whole Iran-Shia and Saudi-Sunni linkages are an inescapable aspect of the problem, and must be central to any solution. To facilitate this as an outsider the US must take a more neutral stance. It does not help when the Western narrative overly fixates on foreign Sunnis drawn to this competition, while largely ignoring the fact that there are nearly as many foreign Shia drawn into the region as well. It does not help when much of the world views the US as faithless in our abandonment of the interests of our Saudi allies, and as de facto proxies of Iran's ambitions. We can't talk about just one side of the equation, nor can we jump sides in the equation. The US must seek to *balance* the equation.

Restabilizing this state/cultural competition is only the first step. It is probably not feasible in the near term to restore this competition back to the Iran-Iraq border. A new stability will probably emerge along Tigris or Euphrates, but some decision has to be made and broadly communicated by the proper stakeholders and placed into effect with an adequate, and appropriate security force dedicated to its enforcement. Until that key piece is realized, nothing else has much chance to take root. Only once the larger competition is restabilized one can shift to determining, communicating and working toward a more viable political alternative for the Sunni populations of the region that ISIL relies upon, and balancing those interests with those of the other powerful population-based groups in the region.

Status quo powers are often at a disadvantage in these types of conflicts. Revisionist powers typically work outside the law, so are free of that constraint. Revisionists are also perceived more by the promises they make, and not judged by the promises they fail to keep. Status quo powers must work within the law, and actually act on the commitments they make. Even our definitions of common terms, like "legitimacy" or "terrorist" or "population" tend to hinder success - particularly when a word can have many different meanings. For example, while it is true that there is a nationalist population living within any state. Today, however, when one thinks about the disaffected one needs to think about the distributed populations across many states that form around specific identities and shared grievance.

Overly focusing on why any particular individual becomes a revisionist generates unnecessary complexity and also serves to inflate the role of superficial factors like ideology, or unemployment. It is more helpful to shift focus to those revisionist identities attracting large numbers of supporters. These are the identities rising to a level that one is willing to kill or die for if necessary. These are identities that are also perceived to be at risk under existing systems of governance. These are the populations one must focus upon. The critical tasks are to understand who these populations are, what the nature of their core grievances are, and how to work with these populations to get to trust. Critical to this effort is an appreciation that being illegal does not make

one inherently "wrong," nor does being legal make one inherently "right." Governments lacking the flexibility to evolve in their positions, or to reconcile with revisionists, may ultimately apply enough state power to suppress the symptoms of conflict, but are unlikely to find the durable stability they seek.

There are Sunni Arab populations who quite reasonably do not trust or see a future with the existing governments affecting their lives. This is the population-based center of the ISIL protostate waging civil war against the governments of Syrian and Iraq. This is also the population-based center of many of the revolutionary groups. To fix the political disaffection in the Sunni Arabs demands offering them something they can trust, and trust is an early casualty in these types of conflict. Too often grievance are framed in symptomatic terms; against the subtext of unemployment, youth bulges, food prices, etc. While these factors are important and ultimately must be addressed, the critical questions we need to ask are 'how does this population feel' about these grievances, and 'who do they blame'? If people feel this grievance is based in governance perceived as illegitimate, or any sort of disrespect or injustice enabled or conducted through governance, one has a powerful driver of revolutionary energy that must be addressed.

The big question ultimately becomes '*what is the viable, political alternatives for these disaffected populations*'? It cannot be simply a restoration the status quo of governance, as those are the conditions the produced the revolutionary energy to begin with. And in the case of Syria and Iraq, it cannot be sustaining the government of Iraq while encouraging breaking down the government in Syria. It has got to be something else. We have got to identify what that viable 'something else' is and it needs to be clearly communicated to the affected populations in advance of military operations. As Ho Chi Minh wisely pointed out, "Military action without politics is like a tree without root." So far our military actions against ISIL in Syria and Iraq have lacked the "root" necessary to stabilize the situation.

Managing the Strategic Context in the Middle East: A Preliminary Transitivity Analysis of the Middle Eastern Alliance Network and Its Operational Implications, Dr. Lawrence A. Kuznar, NSI, Inc. and Indiana University – Purdue University, Fort Wayne

lkuznar@nsiteam.com

Abstract

Balance theory provides metrics for measuring the stability, or instability, of a social network. We applied balance theory to gauge the overall stability of the conflict system that surrounds the battle against Da'esh in Syria and Iraq. This system is characterized by multiple simultaneous conflicts engaging numerous state and non-state groups in the region and from outside of the region (Astorino-Courtois, 2015). Our analysis focused on the relations between 24 of the key state and non-state actors in this system.

The basic findings include:

- The system of regional conflict is largely stable and the conflicts between actors are likely to continue, despite major actions or policy shifts by the US or anyone else.
- The conflict system has great potential to shift in any direction (stasis, greater stability, increased instability) due to the number of relations between actors that are fundamentally ambiguous, either because the actors have not yet worked out their relationships or because actors hold competing interests with one another.
- Da'esh exhibits a unique ability to foment conflict between its enemies, and to maintain conflict with its enemies, unusual for any social system.
- Major policy shifts for individual organizations create ripple effects throughout the system and can create much instability and ambiguity concerning that specific organization, while not necessarily changing the overall level of conflict in the system. The case of Jabhat al Nusra's breaking its alliance with al Qaeda places the organization's (now known as Jabhat Fateh al Sham) regional position in political flux.
- The Assad regime is firmly entrenched in a system of alliances focused on fighting its enemies, and these alliances form very stable triads. There is little to indicate that the current Assad regime's position in the region will shift.
- Our analysis identifies specific, unstable triads that could be influenced to alter a specific alliance network and thus present opportunities for influencing the larger regional conflict system. The overall robustness of the regional conflict system however suggests that the most likely effects will be local.

Balance Theory and Transitivity Basics

Transitivity is the glue that holds human societies together. Dyadic relations (relations between two parties) are important, but a collection of dyads, unconnected to any others, does not make a society. It is only when the circle is closed on those dyads that a society exists. The most fundamental circle is a triad, or a network of three connected dyads. Once dyads connect to other dyads, triads are formed and a society is created (**Error! Reference source not found.Error! Reference source not found.**).

Figure 1: Dyadic vs. Triadic Relationships

A society can have many triads.[2] However, not every potential triad must be made to form a society.

Triads come in five basic different forms (Figure 2):

- FFF: A Circle of Friends in which every dyadic connection is positive (friendship, alliance);
- EEF: Enemy of My Enemy is My Friend in which two parties are friends because of an enmity toward the third;
- EEF: The Awkward situation in which an individual is a friend to two enemies;
- EEE: A Circle of Hate in which all parties are in conflict with one another;
- Ambiguous Triads (Not Friends Not Enemies): It is important to recognize that not being friends is not the same as being enemies. This condition generates a problematic category of triad in which three parties are connected, but the nature of the relationship between any two parties is ambiguous. These triads are inherently unstable since the parties do not know what dyadic alliances would be in their best interests.

---

[2] If every party is connected to every other party in a network, the number of triads is: $\frac{N(N-1)(N-2)}{6}$

Figure 2. Example Triad Types from Syria Iraq Conflict surrounding Da'esh.

An underlying mathematical logic measures the stability of these different triads, and by extension, the stability of a society (Cartwright & Harary, 1956). Stability of a single triad is measured by the sign of the product of the relations between the dyads in a triad. Circles of Friends (FFF, +×+×+=+) and Enemy of My Enemy is My Friend (EEF, −×−×+=+) both yield positive products, and in fact, represent empirically stable relationships that theoretically can continue in perpetuity (Heider, 1946). In contrast, Awkward (EEF, −×+×+=−) and Circle of Hate (EEE, −×−×−=−) triads yield negative products, and in fact empirically represent unstable relationships that tend to resolve to a transitive state.

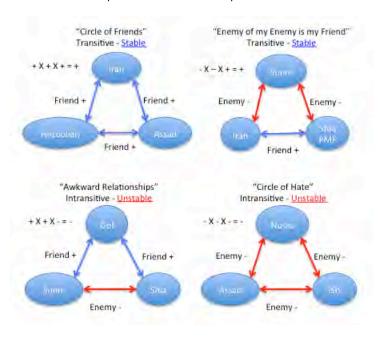Awkward relationships force a party to choose sides, resolving the triad to EEF, and in a Circle of Hate, usually, two parties will realize they mutually hate a third more, resolving to a transitive EEF relationship. However, Circle of Hate triads may be maintained in a network if they are involved in a network with more than two factions (Davis, 1967). In any real social network, ambiguous triads are practically inevitable; the actors themselves simply cannot decide what their connections to other actors are. In our analysis, we assign a value of zero to ambiguous dyads, which yields a product of zero for the triad, or in other words, an unsigned triad.

Our analysis considers all five types of triads. Stable social systems are defined as social systems that can exist in a stable state, and will have a strong majority of transitive triads. Unstable social systems will have at least a strong minority of intransitive and/or ambiguous (unsigned) triads.

A Brief History of Balance Theory and Transitivity Analysis

Balance theory and the importance of transitivity was first formulated in social psychology to gain insight into interpersonal relationships (Heider, 1946). Mathematicians formalized Heider's insights and provided a logical proof that balanced graphs (either complete circles of friends or two fundamentally opposed alliances) were possible, and also generalized balance theory to social

situations beyond interpersonal relations (Cartwright & Harary, 1956). Balance theory has been successfully scaled up to relations between polities and nation-states (Antal, Krapinsky, & Redner, 2006; Healy & Stein, 1973; Khanafiah & Situngkir, 2004). Simulations have demonstrated its applicability in complex systems (Khanafiah & Situngkir, 2004) and balance theory has been extended to explain non-human animal behavior in an evolutionary context (Ilany, Barocas, Koren, Kam, & Geffen, 2013). (Doreian, Kapuscinski, Krackhardt, & Szczypula, 1996) provide a review.

Measuring Transitivity

The most straightforward way to measure the transitivity of a network is simply to inventory the different types of triads that exist in the system. Empirical studies of social systems indicate that relatively stable social systems (i.e. social systems that can continue to exist as they are without collapsing or radically changing their nature) exist if a majority (generally over 67%) of the triads is transitive. However, analysis is complicated by the consideration of ambiguous triads; and there are no clear guidelines as to what percentage of ambiguous triads a stable system can endure without becoming ambiguous or unstable. The following analyses will provide inventories of all signed (positive and negative) triads and all existing triads (positive and negative as well as ambiguous triads).

Application of Balance Theory to the Network of Actor Relations in Syria and Iraq

Caveats: Bounding the Problem

Social network analysis is notoriously sensitive to how a social network is bounded (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). In order to make this study feasible we limit our analysis to the current turmoil in the region of Syria and Iraq. Another bound on analysis is the degree to which one has confidence in one's empirical data. This analysis is part of an ongoing data collection and analysis effort. However, we have sufficient confidence in our empirical input that the preliminary conclusions we offer here, while not precise, are broadly accurate portrayals of the network involved in conflict against Da'esh (ISIL) in Syria and Iraq.

Our Units of Analysis

We include 24 key actors in the current conflict centered on Da'esh in Syria and Iraq (

Table 1). Other conflicts are concurrent (Saudi Arabia vs. Iran, Turkey vs. PKK, Israel vs. Palestine) and should be similarly studied. Actors in this study included Da'esh, and local jihadist organizations such as Ahrar al Sham and Fateh al Sham, Assad's Syrian regime and the Abadi-led Government of Iraq. Neighboring states actively involved in the conflict were also included: Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, and other Arab states. Key states from outside of the region, such as the US and Russia were included. Finally, a number of non-state factions were part of the network, including the various Kurdish factions (YPG, PKK, KDP, PUK), Shia militias, Hezbollah and Iraqi Sunni tribes.

Table 1. Actors in Syria Iraq Conflict with Da'esh.

Type of Actor	Actors
Global Jihadists	Da'esh
Local Jihadists	Ahrar al Sham, Fateh al Sham, Jaish
States in Turmoil	Syrian Assad Regime, Government of Iraq
Proxy Organizations	Hezbollah
Neighboring States	Turkey, Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Iran
Extra-Regional States	US, Russia
Factions	Kurds (YPG, PKK, KDP, PUK), Sunni tribes allied with Da'esh, Sahwah Sunni fighting Da'esh, Iraqi Shia PMFs, ex-Baathists,

Rating System

Our methodology involves rating the quality of the dyadic relationships between actors in a network. This is measured on a -4 to +4 scale (Table 2).

Table 2. Political Rating System for Characterizing Dyadic Relations in a Network.

Score	Relationship
-4	Absolute enemies
-3	Enemies most of the time
-2	Enemies, but can depend on context
-1	Adversaries, but not necessarily engaged in opposing one another
0	Ambiguous relationship
1	Potential allies
2	Allies, but can depend on context
3	Allies most of the time
4	Strong allies

The analyses in this report do not leverage the magnitude of the dyadic relationships (± 0 – 4), but rather focus simply on the sign of the product of the relationships in a triad. Future analyses will utilize the quantitative values, which measure the strength of the transitivity of the triads.

Characterization of the System of Conflict in Syria and Iraq

There are two ways of analyzing the inventory of triads: all connections (+/-, 0) can be examined, or one could focus only the connections with known signs (+/-). Different insights are gained from each approach and we will use both.

The inventory of triads with known signed relationships (+/-) for the entire network analyzed in this preliminary study demonstrates that the majority of triads (63.8%) are transitive FFF or EEF triads. The strong majority of transitive triads indicates that the regional system is relatively stable with respect to well-established relationships (Table 3). However, of the transitive triads, the strong majority of are EEF (Enemy of My Enemy is My Friend) relationships (83.3%), indicating that what is stable in the regional system is conflict, not peace.

Table 3. Inventory of Triads with Known Sign for Syria Iraq Da'esh Conflict.

Triad Type	n	Percentage
FFF	54	10.7%
EEF	269	53.1%
EEF	35	6.9%
EEE	149	29.4%
Total	507	100.0%

Focusing on all known triads (+/-,0), however, reveals an additional 505 ambiguous triads in the regional system, which represents 49.9% of all triads in the system. These represent triads with undetermined sign that could flip to stable, transitive, or unstable intransitive relations. The important point is that they increase the ambiguity of the system and therefore increase the range of possible states, stable or unstable, it could take in the future.

The high percentage of transitive triads with known signs indicates that most actors in the region are fairly entrenched in the relationships that have formed. However, there are many groups interacting that we do not think have worked out their relationships with one another, and therefore the regional system has great potential to shift in many directions.

A closer examination of a few key groups will emphasize the operational significance of the transitivity and ambiguity we have measured in the region.

Some Insights on Specific Groups in Syria and Iraq

Examining the inventory of triads for a particular actor provides a measure of how entrenched that actor is in its network, and identifies ambiguous relationships that might be influenced. We examine six actors in the conflict with Da'esh in Syria and Iraq to illustrate how transitivity analysis could be used operationally.

Da'esh

The inventory of triads involving Da'esh is unique in the region and indicates the polarizing effect that Da'esh has had on regional relations (Table 4). In terms of triads with known signs, only 40.7% are transitive and they are all EEF relationships. The rest of Da'esh's signed triads are intransitive and are all EEE, or Circle of Hate relationships. Da'esh uniquely foments conflict, not only between itself and others, but has the singular talent for generating conflict among its enemies. Previous work has established that the sowing of chaos is a fundamental strategic goal, if not ultimate motivating goal, for the organization (Kuznar & Moon, 2014). From the perspective of balance theory (Davis, 1967), a key reason that Da'esh has been able to maintain so many EEE relationships may be because Da'esh serves as a connector to many different factional conflicts that are simultaneously raging in the region, such as the Turkish/Kurd, Saudi/Iranian, Iraqi Sunni/Shia, Islamists/Assad conflicts to mention a few(Astorino-Courtois, 2015).

Table 4. Inventory of Triads Connected to Da'esh.

Triad Type	n	Percent
FFF	0	0.0%
EEF	55	40.7%
EFF	1	0.7%
EEE	79	58.5%

Da'esh also has the fewest unsigned, ambiguous triads of any group in this sudy (197 of the total triads, or 31.1%). Therefore, there is little potential for Da'esh's structural position in the regional conflict to change.

Fateh al Sham

The case of Jabhat Fateh al Sham illustrates the political instability of a group's position in a larger system, once that group has made a major policy shift. Fateh al Sham is the former al Nusra Front, which was allied to al Qaeda and therefore part of a global jihadist network during the time of their alliance. However, in 28 July, 2016, the group's leader, Abu Mohammed al Julani, announced a formal break with al Qaeda, with al Qaeda's blessing, and with that adopted a formal shift in policy from global jihad to a jihad strictly against the Assad regime. This could shift some of the organization's relationships with others in the region, in turn, altering relations throughout the region.

In fact, our estimation is that only 27.3% of Fatah al Sham's signed triads are transitive, and they are now connected to an overwhelming proportion (72.7%) of intransitive signed triads, all Circle of Hate types (Table 5). Furthermore, the strong majority of triads to which they are connected (72.7% of all triads) are unsigned, ambiguous triads. By every measure, Fateh al Sham's political position in the region is evolving and one would expect many of the groups with which it cooperates to shift, and in turn effect the alliances of the groups with whom they are connected.

Table 5. Inventory of Triads Connected to Fatah al Sham.

Triad Type	n	Percent
FFF	0	0.0%
EEF	9	27.3%
EFF	0	0.0%
EEE	24	72.7%

Assad

In contrast to the instability (measured by intransitive and ambiguous triads) demonstrated with Da'esh and Fateh al Sham, the Assad regime exhibits a high degree of stability. Almost all of the signed triads (69.8%) to which the Assad regime is connected are transitive; almost all of these (95.6%) are Enemy of My Enemy is My Friend triads, reflecting that the regime is entrenched in alliances for conflict (Table 6). Of all triads, only 20.7% (121) are unsigned, ambiguous triads,

indicating that there are relatively few opportunities for relationships with the regime to alter its basic character and political position in the region.

Table 6. Inventory of Triads Connected to Assad Regime.

Triad Type	n	Percent
FFF	3	3.1%
EEF	64	66.7%
EFF	0	0.0%
EEE	29	30.2%

Conclusions

Balance theory provides a potentially powerful tool for characterizing a social network and evaluating its stability. Also, once specific triads are identified and their transitivity measured, their potential for being altered and the consequences of altering them can be predicted. We think that this has practical significance at the strategic and operational levels.

This paper demonstrates the strategic use of balance theory to characterize a social system that impacts US national security, in this case the regional conflict with Da'esh in Syria and Iraq. Our analysis indicates that the region is locked in a well-established system of conflict that is likely to persist given the high degree of transitivity in established relationships.

Understanding the relative transitivity or intransitivity of a single actor's network of triads can provide insight into the likelihood that an actor's allegiance might be up for grabs, and if so in what directions. For instance, Fateh al Sham appears to be connected to a particularly high proportion of ambiguous triads, and therefore one could expect shifts in their alliances, but in what direction? They are sworn against Assad and Da'esh, but certainly not necessarily against other local jihadist groups such as Ahrar al Sham and Jaish. Further analysis of on the ground data may indicate interesting possibilities between Fateh al Sham and Turkey and/or Kurdish YPG. Analysis of triads provides a guide to questions one may not think to ask, and a window into new insights regarding when alliances fluctuate.

The analysis of transitivity could be used to explore the implications of strategic policy directions and ask key questions including: What is the effect of Da'esh's defeat on the regional system of conflict? What if the Assad regime were to step down? What is the effect of Russia on the overall system of conflict?

At the operational level, intransitive and ambiguous triads represent opportunities for influence, whereas transitive triads are probably impervious to influencing operations. Triad inventories can be used to identify opportunities for change or wastes of time. Furthermore, course of action analysis is possible by measuring the effect of altering a specific alliance in the network.

References Cited

Antal, T., Krapinsky, P. L., & Redner, S. (2006). Social Balance on Networks: The Dynamics of Friendship and Enmity. *Physica D, 224* 130–136.

Astorino-Courtois, A. (2015). Framework. In H. Cabayan & S. Canna (Eds.), *White Paper on SMA Support to SOCCENT* (pp. 3-5). Arlington, VA: Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) Periodic Publication, OSD/ASD (R&E)/RSD/RRTO.

Cartwright, D., & Harary, F. (1956). Structural Balance: A Generalization of Heider's Theory. *Psychological Review, 63*(4), 277-293.

Davis, J. A. (1967). Clustering and Structural Balance in Graphs. *Human Relations, 20*, 181-187.

Doreian, P., Kapuscinski, R., Krackhardt, D., & Szczypula, J. (1996). A Brief History of Balance through Time. *Journal of Manthematical Sociology, 21*(1-2), 113-131.

Healy, B., & Stein, A. (1973). The Balance of Power in International History; Theory and Reality. *Journal of Conflict Resolution, 17*(1), 33-61.

Heider, F. (1946). Attitudes and Cognitive Organization. *Journal of Psychology, 21*, 107-112.

Ilany, A., Barocas, A., Koren, L., Kam, M., & Geffen, E. (2013). Structural balance in the social networks of a wild mammal. *Animal Behaviour, 85*, 1397-1405.

Khanafiah, D., & Situngkir, H. (2004). *Social Balance Theory: Revisiting Heider's Balance Theory for many agents.*

Kuznar, L. A., & Moon, W. H. (2014). Thematic Analysis of ISIL Messaging. In H. Cabayan & S. Canna (Eds.), *Multi-Method Assessment of ISIL* (pp. 47-54). Arlington, VA: Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) Periodic Publication, OSD/ASD (R&E)/RSD/RRTO

Wasserman, S., & Faust, K. (1994). *Social Network Analysis: Methods and Applications.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

An Analysis of Violent Nonstate Actor Organizational Lethality and Network Co-Evolution in the Middle East and North Africa: Drs. Victor Asal, Karl Rethemeyer, SUNY Albany & Dr. Joseph Young, American University

Victor Asal

University at Albany, SUNY and The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START)

Vasal@albany.edu

R. Karl Rethemeyer

University at Albany, SUNY and The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START)

kretheme@albany.edu

Joseph Young

American University and The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START)

jyoung@american.edu

Abstract

Using new data that spans the years 1998 to 2012 we model the behavior of violent nonstate actors (VNSAs) in the Middle East. Using several statistical techniques, including network modeling, logit analysis, and hazard modeling, we show that governments can use strategies that influence a group's level of lethality, their relationships with other groups, and how long and if these groups become especially lethal.   When modeling why some groups become highly lethal (which we define as having killed more than 100 civilians in terrorist attacks in any year or causing more than 100 battle deaths in any year), we find that:

- VNSAs are more likely to kill many civilians in one year when they control territory and when governments use violence, or what we call a *stick* strategy, against them;
- VNSAs are most likely to kill many civilians in one year when governments use a *mixed* strategy – that is, a combination of violence (*stick*) and negotiation (what we term a *carrot* strategy) as opposed to either stick or carrot alone;
- VNSAs are most likely to inflict more than 100 battle deaths in one year when they control territory, are highly connected to other VNSAs, and are large (though there is a strong relationship between size and controlling territory);
- VNSAs are less likely to inflict more than 100 battle deaths in one year when they have a formal political party.

We also independently modeled the *co-evolution* of network structure and VNSA killing through terrorism. That is, the way in which network structure affects lethality and the way lethality affects alliance choices. This approach unearthed several complementary findings:

- VNSAs that are socially isolated – that is, have no alliance connections – tend to be less lethal and tend to stay relatively less lethal;
- Social isolation is a relatively stable state; however, there are factors that help to drive organization alliance formation like shared location, ideology, and preference for closed relationship – a friend of friend tends also to be a friend;
- Once an organization generates alliance connections, a feedback loop drives lethality up;
- Maintaining organizational isolation appears to be a useful strategy for dampening organizational lethality

Introduction

Previous research focusing on violent nonstate actors (VNSAs) has examined the determinants of terrorist lethality (Asal and Rethemeyer 2008) and terrorist network formation (Asal, Park, Rethemeyer and Ackerman 2015). However, these studies (1) relied on cross-sectional data (2) that covered a compressed period (1998-2005). While there have been numerous studies of terrorist organizations in the Middle East (including one study by two of the co-authors on pursuit and use of CBRN capabilities by organizations in the Middle East (Asal and Rethemeyer 2009)), few of these studies have (1) been both quantitative and longitudinal or (2) examined both insurgent and terrorist organizations (though we note that some organizations can be both).

This study provides an analysis of VNSA lethality as well as the "co-evolution" of VNSA lethality and alliance formation using the Big Allied and Dangerous Version 2 (BAAD2) dataset – a newly created dataset that covers both terrorist and insurgent organizations. We begin this study by presenting an overview of BAAD2 and then present two analyses: one focused just on lethality and another focused on lethality and alliance formation co-evolution. It is very important to note that this analysis is only for organizations in the wider MENA region and only for organizations that meet a certain cut off level of success. A wider analysis including a significant proportion of weaker groups or in different regions or worldwide may very well produce different results.

Data Overview

The Big Allied and Dangerous (BAAD) Data Project, directed by Victor H. Asal and R. Karl Rethemeyer through the University at Albany – SUNY's Project on Violent Conflict (PVC), focuses on the creation and maintenance of a comprehensive database of terrorist organizational characteristics that may be linked to prominent event, insurgency, and country-level characteristics datasets. This project was founded in order to fill a major gap in the field's "dataverse." While there are several datasets that record terrorist events (including the International Terrorism Attributes of Terrorist Events (ITERATE) and Global Terrorism Database (GTD) datasets) and one that examines insurgent organizations during periods of conflict (the Non-State Actor Dataset developed by Cunningham, Gleditsch and Salehayan), there is no dataset available to unclassified researchers that comprehensively characterizes the nature of VNSA organizations on a yearly basis. The BAAD project is an effort to provide yearly VNSA data worldwide on insurgent and terrorist organizations.

The data for this analysis was extracted from BAAD2. The extract contains 203 VNSAs that conducted 10 or more attacks or killed 25 or more people in battle between 1998 and 2012. We should note that, on average, the majority of VNSAs do not reach either of these marks, so this data extract is restricted to relatively large and well-organized entities whose organizational features suggest that they pose a substantial threat. As requested, we restricted our analysis to organizations "home based" in the Middle East. To define the Middle East, we relied on the list of 28 countries created by the G8 (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greater_Middle_East). Our data included 72 organizations from 15 countries, including Afghanistan, Algeria, Djibouti, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, Palestinian Territories, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Turkey, and Yemen. The list of organizations may be found in Appendix A. The data is organized as an unbalanced panel – that is, organizations may enter the sample after the first year and/or depart the sample before the last year. The sample includes 697 organization-years.

Findings using Logistic Regression and Hazard Modeling

When modeling why some groups become highly lethal (which we define as having killed more than 100 civilians in terrorist attacks in any year or causing more than 100 battle deaths in any year), we used a logistic regression analysis and hazard modeling. We could not model the impact of carrot approaches because there were no cases in our sample where a government uses *Carrot* and a group exceeds 100 terrorism fatalities. Turning first to the terrorism results, when a S*tick* strategy is used, the probability that a group is highly lethal increases to 7% . This is a 106% increase in the probability or a 3.6 percentage point increase over baseline. When a *Mixed* strategy is used the probability that a group is highly lethal increases to 34%. *Territorial Control* also has a large effect on the probability that a group will kill prolifically through terrorism. When a VNSA controls territory, the probability that a group is highly deadly increases to 20%.   By contrast, religious ideology has a smaller effect. Religiously-inspired organizations have a 5% probability of reaching 100 terrorism kills, which is a 47% increase in the probability over baseline. Turning next to the battle death results, *Alliance and Rivalry connections* increase the number of battle deaths that the group produces. When a group has many alliance connections , this leads to a 36.3 percentage point increase in the probably that a VNSA will cross the 100 battle death threshold. When a group has many rivals , this leads to an 11.3 percentage point increase in the probably that a VNSA will cross the 100 battle death threshold.   *Size* has a small positive effect, while having a political party reduces the expected insurgent violence.

The hazard models use the same variables as the logit models to predict when groups produce high lethality. In general, the results are consistent with the previous models. *Carrot* perfectly predicts the time until a group exceeds 100 terrorism fatalities and thus is dropped from the model.[3] *Mixed* and *Stick* decrease the time until a group will be highly lethal. Similarly, holding territory decreases the time until a group is highly lethal. One important difference is *Religion* decreases the time until a group is lethal but is not related to whether a group becomes highly lethal or not. In other words, among the VNSAs who become lethal, religion seems to speed up their use of violence but not whether or not they actually become excessively deadly. Connectedness, like in the previous models, speeds up the time to becoming highly lethal among both terrorists and insurgents.

The hazard models use the same variables as the logit models to predict when groups produce high lethality. In general, the results are consistent with the previous models. *Mixed* and *Stick* decrease

---

[3] A positive coefficient here means that the variable increases the likelihood of failure (exceeding 100 battle deaths and 100 terrorism fatalities). Another way to say it is that a positive coefficient decreases the time to failure.

the time until a group will be highly lethal. Similarly, holding territory decreases the time until a group is highly lethal. One important difference is *Religion* decreases the time until a group is lethal but is not related to whether a group becomes highly lethal or not. In other words, among the VNSAs who become lethal, religion seems to speed up their use of violence but not whether or not they actually become excessively deadly. Connectedness, like in the previous models, speeds up the time to becoming highly lethal among both terrorists and insurgents.

Findings using Network Analysis

Social network analysts have long realized that network formation and behavior are deeply intertwined with one another. However, most analysts have attacked only one side of this feedback loop at a time. Quantitative models of VNSA (primarily terrorist organizations) behavior sometimes include summary measures of network structure – for instance, measures of network centrality – but usually examine only the "influence" channel. That is, these models assume that network position influences behavior. Another group of analysts have sought to understand formation of terrorist networks, their structure, and their evolution. This modeling attacks the "selection" channel, seeking to explain how behavior helps to structure partner selection in networks. Both literatures have created important insights into the behavior of terrorist organizations. However, it is also possible that a simultaneous model may reveal new insights. Additionally, stochastic co-evolution models provide a more rigorous methodological foundation for studying these questions (assuming, of course, that both influence and selection operate) as the well-known issues of simultaneity and observational dependence that may bias other methods are explicitly modeled in this approach.

Our modeling finds three strong bases for connections: shared ethnonationalist ideology, shared religious ideology, and shared "home base" country (see, respectively, *Same ethnonationalist ideology, Same religious ideology,* and *Same country* in Table D1), though organizations that espouse the compound ideology "ethnonationalist-religious" were no more likely to connect than those with other ideological commitments (leftist, rightist, etc.). Also as expected, territorial control is an important factor, though the t-statistic falls just below the 2.00 cutoff. Because our data is not directional we cannot say whether those that control territory become more popular and thus garner more connection, or that territory holders become more outgoing (possibly because they can more securely make connections knowing their main base of operations is safe even if the connection proves to be hostile).

As expected, we also found a clear behavioral dynamic in network formation: the count of fatalities from terrorist attacks is a highly significant predictor of network activity. Like with territorial control, we cannot say for certain whether this is due to popularity (killing attracts peers that seek a partner, trainer, mentor, or supplier) or "outgoingness" (killing requires more supplies and help that may be secured from peers).

Turning now to the behavioral dynamics, the behavioral component of co-evolution models are similar to multinomial logit models where changes from one level to another are modeled. For this reason the dependent variable, fatalities, was divided into nine categories ranging from 0 fatalities to 500 or more.

Our findings indicate that, on average, most organizations do not kill very much Indeed, most terrorist organizations never kill. However, the significant quadratic term suggests that once

organizations start killing, they tend to move to higher and higher levels of killing. In co-evolutionary models a positive coefficient on the quadratic term is usually indicative of an "addictive" behavior that feeds on itself. Our analysis of *Territory control* and *Regime type, home base country* confirms our previous findings that organizations that control territory and operate from more democratic countries tend to kill more. The *CT strategy: violent or violent & nonviolent* variable Our work here also confirms a finding from other work in this study: "mixed" counter-terrorism strategies elicit increased violence.

We should note again that this is a first cut at this analysis that focuses specifically on the MENA region. We are not modeling smaller organizations, nor do we model connections outside of MENA. In the future we also plan to examine how government strategies over the long run may impact the termination or survival of such organizations and the end of conflicts.

Citations

Asal, V., & Rethemeyer, R. K. (2008). The nature of the beast: Organizational structures and the lethality of terrorist attacks. *The Journal of Politics*, *70*(02), 437-449.

Asal, V. H., Park, H. H., Rethemeyer, R. K., & Ackerman, G. (2016). With Friends Like These... Why Terrorist Organizations Ally. *International Public Management Journal*, *19*(1), 1-30.

Asal, V. H. and R. K. Rethemeyer. "Islamist Use and Pursuit of CBRN Terrorism." (2009) in G. Ackerman and J. Tamsett, eds., Jihadists & Weapons of Mass Destruction: A Growing Threat, Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.

Countering the Islamic State's Ideological Appeal, Dr. Jacob Olidort, Washington Institute
Options for Stakeholders in the U.S. Government

Jacob Olidort, Ph.D.

Soref Fellow, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy
http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/experts/view/jacob-olidort
jolidort@washingtoninstitute.org

November 2016

This paper is an options-focused assessment for policy and practitioner communities in the United States government concerning the ideological threat posed by the Islamic State. The paper examines the possible evolution of the Islamic State in the event that it loses its strongholds in Iraq and Syria, and the nature of the threat it could pose to Western targets and interests in the region and overseas. The assessment is based on the recently-published Washington Institute report, Inside the Caliphate's Classroom, *as well as the author's cumulative research on the texts and ideas of the Islamic State and other Salafi and Islamist groups.*

Introduction

Two years after the Islamic State (IS) announced its caliphate in June 2014 it remains a top national security threat for the United States and its allies around the world, especially in Europe and the Middle East. It is also a threat unprecedented in its scale, agility and resilience. Aside from seizing and controlling territory in the Middle East – both its core in the Iraq-Syria theater and in its "provinces" in Libya and Sinai – the group directs and "inspires" attacks around the world. Moreover, the group's directed and inspired attacks seem to increase in proportion to the territory it loses, evinced by the group's "Ramadan attacks" over the summer, which resulted in 5,200 deaths or injuries.[4] During the same period, U.S. officials cited significant losses of IS core in Iraq, with 47 percent reduction of its territory and a reduction of fighters from 33,000 in 2014 to an estimated 18,000 to 22,000.[5]

These trends suggest that IS-linked terrorism becomes a more immediate threat to the U.S. and Europe as the group suffers defeats in Iraq and Syria, and that the group's ideological appeal among "lone wolf" terrorists remains strong despite territorial setbacks. FBI Director James Comey suggested as much recently when he predicted that "there is going to be a terrorist diaspora out of Syria like we've never seen before" and that IS will produced ten times as many terrorists as did the Afghanistan conflict in the 1980s.[6]

---

[4] "ISIS boasts of violent Ramadan with claim it killed or wounded 5,200 people," *The Independent*, 13 July 2016, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-ramadan-islamic-state-is-Da'esh-orlando-attack-syria-terrorism-a7133941.html, accessed 26 July 2016.
[5] John Hudson, "Top U.S. Official: Islamic State has Lost 47 Percent of Its Territory in Iraq," *Foreign Policy,* 28 June 2016, http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/06/28/top-u-s-official-islamic-state-has-lost-47-percent-of-its-territory-in-iraq/, Accessed 26 July 2016.
[6] Steve Visser, "FBI Chief: Success against ISIS means more terror," *CNN,* 29 July 2016, http://www.cnn.com/2016/07/28/politics/isis-goes-west/index.html, accessed 29 July 2016.

This policy paper offers recommendations to stakeholders in the United States government on how to counter IS's ideological appeal, especially as the group loses territory in Iraq and Syria. The paper addresses the following questions: what distinguishes the Islamic State's ideology from that of other jihadi groups? What are the unique ideological motives that cause individuals to migrate to IS-controlled territory, to fight on its behalf, and to conduct inspired terrorist attacks in its name, and how similar/different are these? How can the United States stop the group's inspiration of terrorist attacks by "lone wolf" perpetrators? Does the Islamic State have ideological vulnerabilities that the United States and its partners can exploit, and what are the most effective approaches to doing so? To what extent can the Islamic State "survive" its ideological vulnerabilities, and how could it adapt?

The study, based on the author's original research (which includes the first systematic overview of the Islamic State's Arabic language publications),[7] will begin with a set of assumptions about the nature of the threat from IS and similar entities. The paper will then identify the unique features of IS's ideology and will then look more closely at the distinct kinds of "pull" factors the group offers to potential recruits. Based on these preliminary sections, the paper will next identify ideological vulnerabilities and will outline strategic options for how these might be exploited by the United States government. The paper will close with presenting two possible day-after scenarios the U.S. government can anticipate from IS and similar entities (Nusra Front, al-Qaeda, etc.) going forward.

Assumptions

A number of assumptions about the appeal of the Islamic State, as well as jihadism and terrorism more generally, inform this study:

- Terrorist acts and jihadi ideas predate the emergence of IS, will outlive it and, indeed, cannot be definitively stopped.[8]

- The inspired terrorist threats posed by the Islamic State to the United States and Europe are directly linked to events in the Middle East and how these are perceived.[9]

---

[7] Jacob Olidort, "Inside the Caliphate's Classroom: Textbooks, Guidance Literature and Indoctrination Methods of the Islamic State," *Policy Focus,* The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, August 2016, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/inside-the-caliphates-classroom, Accessed 17 August 2016. See also the author's presentation of his findings at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy here: http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/teaching-terror-the-islamic-states-textbooks-guidance-literature-and-indoct
For the author's other work on this topic, see: http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/experts/view/jacob-olidort
[8] For a longer discussion of this, see Jacob Olidort, "After ISIS: A Smarter Way to Fight Radicalization," *The National Interest,* 21 June 2016, http://nationalinterest.org/feature/after-isis-smarter-way-fight-radicalization-16673, Accessed 26 July 2016.
[9] For my thoughts on how events in Iraq affect IS-inspired terrorism abroad, see Jacob Olidort, "The Game Theory of Terrorism: How ISIS Radicalizes Others," *Foreign Affairs,* 10 December 2015, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2015-12-10/game-theory-terrorism, accessed 26 July 2016.

- The Islamic State's ideological appeal and access are facilitated by a number of unprecedented physical, political and technological circumstances, including: regional instability in the Middle East, actions of Middle East actors with sectarian overtones (including Bashar al-Assad's actions in Syria, Shiiite militias and PM Nouri Kamal al-Maliki's legacy in Iraq, perceived Iranian hegemony in the region), and social media platforms and mobile applications.

- The Islamic State remains technologically, rhetorically and tactically agile, will adapt its narrative following territorial losses and will continue to inspire even without territory.

- The Islamic State is an effect, rather than a cause, of territorial opportunities and political instability in the Middle East. Indeed, territorial control has become a mainstay among the most potent jihadi groups today, evinced by Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and, most recently, Nusra Front, which has recently rebranded itself as distinct from al-Qaeda.

- Based on the above, our strategy in stopping IS *must* be part of a broader strategy of identifying and confronting territorial jihadi groups that claim to offer sectarian utopias to followers, sophisticated in their command of technology (including social media, cyber, and dark web), and have the potential to not only direct but to "inspire" attacks.[10]

Unique Characteristics of IS Ideology

In contrast to other jihadi groups, the Islamic State is distinct in a number of ways, which are also key for understanding its unique ideological appeal.[11]

- **An "Islamic" State:** This feature is common to most successful jihadi groups today (Nusra Front, Boko Haram, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula) – the aim of establishing a "pure" and exclusivist Islamic Sunni state in their respective geographic areas.

  - IS is distinct in that its Islamic state does not recognize borders (while, for example, Nusra's is a Syria-first Islamic state) and is expansionist –the idea of "remaining and expanding" could allow for a kind of agility that would allow it to "expand" beyond territory. Moreover, it is not merely a jihadi terrorist group but, like the other examples (Nusra Front, AQAP, etc.) it also seeks to govern territory and to enforce its version of Islam.

- **A caliphate:** Unlike other jihadi groups claiming territory, IS claims that it is a caliphate as well, with Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as its caliph. The title of caliph is both a sign of religious and political power, and implies leadership of the world's Muslim community. IS uses this

---

[10] For more on these points see: Jacob Olidort, "After ISIS: A Smarter Way to Fight Radicalization," *The National Interest*, 21 June 2016, http://nationalinterest.org/feature/after-isis-smarter-way-fight-radicalization-16673, Accessed 29 July 2016.

[11] For an earlier discussion of this, see Jacob Olidort, "Fueling the Islamic State's Engine," *The Cipher Brief*, 5 May 2016, https://www.thecipherbrief.com/article/middle-east/fueling-islamic-states-engine-1089, accessed 29 July 2016.

title to argue that its version of Islam is the only acceptable version of Islam today, and that any Muslim who does not join its cause or fight on its behalf ceases to be Muslim.

- **Apocalyptic narrative:** IS is unique in that its existence and legitimacy also comes from the fact that it sees itself as a divine resolution to regional sectarian conflicts preordained in hadith reports (statements from the Prophet Muhammad). Many of these describe end-of-days battles in Syrian cities and IS literature uses these, as well as battles from the Prophet Muhammad's career, as referents for present-day conflicts, with lessons for how IS is to conduct its battles.

- **Ultraviolent tactics:** Key to the Islamic State's appeal is its use of brutal violence, and its marketing these on its propaganda. Often this violence takes the form of targeted massacres of groups deemed "apostates" or "deviants," and the group draws on the harshest (even if most obscure) punishments in early sources. These are part and parcel of its claim to representing the only authentic version of Islam, and are exhibited in both how the group executes individuals in its territory and possibly how loyalists choose their targets overseas (for example, IS has executed homosexuals on over twenty occasions, has written extensively on the need to impose the hudud – corporal and capital punishments).

The "Pull" Factors: To Fight, Flee and Foment Terror

An individual "inspired" to join IS can choose one of at least three options: to **fight** on its behalf (i.e. to migrate to IS-controlled territory to become a soldier for it); to **flee** to IS-controlled territory for a non-combative purpose (i.e. to live in a Sunni utopia, to provide humanitarian care to Sunni brethren in Syria and Iraq, etc.); or to **foment terror** at home. The phenomenon of "inspiring," along with the variety of "pull" factors IS offers, distinguish the group from the more clandestine and hierarchical al-Qaeda network. Part of this has to do with the circumstances of regional instability in the Middle East and the popularity of social media, both of which allow for many more opportunities to join the group and promote its cause. Indeed, one can expect similar patterns of inspiration with Nusra Front and other groups, especially if/when the IS brand diminishes.

The potential for these "pull" factors to succeed (or, alternatively, the ability of IS to "inspire") depend on a) the group's brand; b) the physical opportunities of migrating to IS-territory, and; c) the "inspired" individuals in question. Any changes to these factors could influence whether and how the group can "inspire" others. For example, if IS in Iraq and Syria is eliminated, the options of flight and fight to IS are eliminated, and the group could exclusively promote fomenting terror at home (as it did last month). Similarly, the individual joining IS to achieve battlefield glory as one of its fights likely has a different profile from an individual migrating to IS territory to live an "Islamic" life.

Ideological Vulnerabilities

The unprecedented project of the Islamic State, and the wide range of "pull" factors also reflect the range of the group's ideological vulnerabilities and its ultimate fragility, were any of these to face obstacles. These include:

- **Ideological Purity.** The combination of a state that, at once, claims to be authentically Islamic, a caliphate and apocalyptic mean that the group ironically makes ideological tradeoffs in building an "Islamic" case for its project. For example, since some of the foundational medieval writings on Islamic governance were written by Sufi scholars, the group cites these (even though Sunni fundamentalists universally condemn Sufis). Similarly, the group incorporates the writings of medieval Persian poets in its textbooks on Arabic literature, even though it would otherwise call these deviant. Such tradeoffs in its propaganda and curricula could be exploited by the U.S. government and partner Muslim communities in order to discredit the group's purist bona fides.\

- **Promises of Sunni Utopia.** Aside from showing that IS's territorial project does not meet the purist standards of how other jihadis would define a Sunni utopia, the very failure of IS's state to offer a good life to its "citizens" is a powerful tool for discrediting its appeal. Just as the group includes photos in its propaganda of people building bridges and vaccinating orphans in its territory, so too the group's excessive taxes, harsh punishments, corruption and social injustice could all help undo its brand and diminish the appeal of all the "pull" factors.

- **Political Dependence.** The IS brand and narrative are only as good as the political narratives that validate them. This means that so long as events continue along their course in Syria, with the perceived brutality of a Shiite regime of a Sunni population, the longer IS propaganda can use these circumstances to push its cause and to attract a broad range of support. By extension, therefore, major political successes should be exploited and marketed to invalidate IS's narrative – this includes steps in resolving the Syrian conflict, partnering with Sunnis and others to rebuild war-torn areas, etc.

- **Ease of Access.** A basic reason that IS has been able to both attract large numbers of migrants to its territory and to produce foreign fighters in a way that, say, Afghanistan in the 1980s, has not is geography. More specifically, the closer proximity and relative ease of access to Syria, as compared to far-off Afghanistan, has allowed for individuals to easily move to and from Syria. The threat coming from such movement has exacerbated with the recent instability in Turkey, the only buffer between Syria and Europe. This means that focused border control and international security cooperation could deter and therefore diminish some migration to and from IS-controlled territory, thereby choking the group's manpower and resources.

Strategic Options for Reducing "Pull" Factors

While the eliminating either IS's caliphate concept and jihadi terrorism are near-impossible, the elimination of IS's "pull" factors is an attainable and urgent objective the United States government and its partners can achieve in defeating IS's ideological appeal. This mix of strategic

and tactical options can apply to other jihadi territorial groups (Nusra Front, Boko Haram, etc.), especially if/when these groups begin "inspiring" others to join their cause as IS has done.

- **Create stresses on IS's state-building project in Iraq and Syria.** This requires continued political-military operations in Iraq and Syria, targeting the group's strategic and symbolic strongholds. Strategic strongholds are those with access to water, resources and ammunition, while symbolic ones are those that hold particular significance for either early Islamic history (Dabiq, which is described in hadith reports) or recent events in Iraq and Syria (for example, Anbar, the site of the 2007 "Sunni Awakening," Ghuta, where the government of Bashar al-Assad reportedly used chemical weapons, etc.).

- **Discredit the idea and viability of the Islamic State.** In particular, by exploiting the testimonials of IS defectors, exposing the group's ideological infelicities, and promoting narrative of Sunni and other local actors rebuilding their countries and fighting the Islamic State.

- **Discrediting the media the Islamic State and other groups use to disseminate their messages.** This tactical approach would have the effect of throwing the group's propaganda operations into anxious disarray and should include a consistent and coordinated targeting of social media and other communications channels the groups uses with the aim of sowing distrust between IS leadership and supporters, how they receive their messages, and what the message is.

    - **Flooding social media spaces with imitation IS supporters.** Mock IS supporters on *Twitter*, *Facebook* and *YouTube* could deliver subtle deviations from IS purist propaganda, express grievances about realities of IS-controlled territory, and provide anecdotes that contradict IS narratives. Such messaging should not occur through any consistent pattern, voice or profile. Moreover, such a strategy, delivered by a seeming random number of social media users over random spurts of time rather than continuously, could sow both ideological anxiety and mistrust between IS leadership and loyalists/fans, thereby dissuading IS leadership from depending on social media.

    - **Push out alternative "*dawa*" publications as counterweight to IS propaganda.** The idea here is to have a more permanent format and record of IS narratives and tactics. Moreover, such a format – with images and religiously-symbolic titles and discussions – could provide the space to fully showcase IS's ideological fragility. Magazines and other media could provide more continuity of ideas and counter-messaging campaigns in ways that tweets cannot. Much like the imitation IS supporter tactic, publishing can stir ideological anxiety within IS's ranks and can be effectively conceived and executed through a range of languages and with a range of regional and global partners, beginning those already partnering with the U.S. in its CVE programs.

"Futures" Projects to Consider

Looking beyond IS's progress today, the United States government could consider research into the following areas of inquiry, provided events in Middle East continue on their present course.

- **IS Extremist Offshoots.** Given the unprecedented nature of IS's territorial project, and the likelihood that more extremist offshoots will emerge because of necessary ideological tradeoffs, USG could look into where these groups might take shape, their lessons learned from IS, how they might brand, what kind of support they could muster, provided circumstances in MENA continue.

- **Where will IS Caliphate 2.0 emerge?** If we assume IS will continue losing territory in Syria-Iraq and propose that it abandon territorial pursuits and only direct offensive attacks while inspiring followers about a return of their caliphate, what are possible at-risk areas and what could be done to mitigate? Possible options: Syria (again), Saudi Arabia, Turkey. (key: launching site would need to be location of religious/apocalyptic importance for the group, like Syria was originally).

- **Prospects for competitor jihadi territorial groups.** Nusra Front, Ahrar al-Sham, and other groups. What are their chances of success at replacing IS's territorial project, inspiring and directing attacks overseas.

- **IS and its Friends?** What are possible alliances the group could make, which groups (in MENA and beyond) are likely to be sympathetic to it, and what kinds of off-ramps could be used to drive wedges into such prospects. If alliances are forged, what are likelihood that strategy will be same and in what ways could evolve? How about IS Provinces and their alliances, and to what degree will these replicate the threat from IS core?

Day-After Scenarios for IS (and Similar Entities)

The following are two possible scenarios for how IS will evolve going forward. As mentioned previously, as the most successful terrorist groups today control territory, the following scenarios could serve as blueprints for anticipating how those can evolve as well (Nusra Front, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, Boko Haram, etc.)
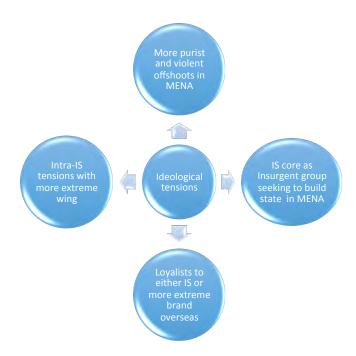
```
                    ┌──────────────┐
                    │  More purist │
                    │  and violent │
                    │ offshoots in │
                    │     MENA     │
                    └──────────────┘
                           ▲
   ┌──────────┐      ┌──────────────┐      ┌──────────────┐
   │ Intra-IS │      │              │      │ IS core as   │
   │ tensions │  ◄   │ Ideological  │   ►  │ Insurgent    │
   │ with more│      │   tensions   │      │ group seeking│
   │ extreme  │      │              │      │ to build     │
   │   wing   │      │              │      │ state in MENA│
   └──────────┘      └──────────────┘      └──────────────┘
                           ▼
                    ┌──────────────┐
                    │ Loyalists to │
                    │  either IS or│
                    │ more extreme │
                    │    brand     │
                    │   overseas   │
                    └──────────────┘
```

Figure 3: Scenario 1: IS Divides, Threats Diversify

In this scenario, IS's ideological tensions – in particular its balancing act of maintaining an image of ideological purism while justifying its state-building and other operations through ideologically "impure" religious texts and ideas – will lead to a situation in which the center can no longer hold. **IS core** in Syria and Iraq will remain, will try to control territory and will direct attacks. Grievances from more **extremist** elements within IS will cause internal friction and violence against core IS leadership and structures. Outside of IS, other **copycat** groups will crop up, claiming to be more purist and violent than IS and will try to deliver on promise that IS failed to achieve. **Loyalists** overseas and on social media will continue promoting IS and conducing terrorists in its name.

Result: Diversified threat. Self-radicalized terrorist acts in the name of IS (and potentially other groups) will continue, with temporary halt in short term. More violent imitation groups could emerge in the region, especially where opportunities exist in territory with symbolic significance and instability akin to Syria and Iraq. Damage to IS brand overall, but rebranding moment for other groups.
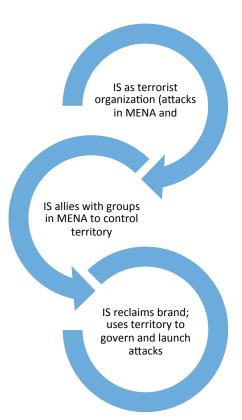
Figure 4: Scenario 2: IS Consolidates, Allies with Other Jihadis

In this scenario, IS leadership defers state-building caliphate project, marginalized to *ideal* to work towards rather than one to achieve today. Instead, prioritize uniting strategy with other jihadi groups based on greatest common denominator – terrorist activity overseas against West and Western targets and interests. When opportunities present themselves – the right combination of regional instability, good relations with competitor jihadi groups, and political circumstances with potential for driving sectarian narrative (akin to Syria under Assad) – IS offshoots ally with jihadi groups in the Middle East to prioritize controlling territory and "purifying." As these territorial conditions continue to improve for IS, could decide to break away from jihadi groups and reclaim its own state once again – possibly outside of Iraq and Syria but in location with similar religious/symbolic resonance for a sectarian narrative – as happened in summer 2014.

Result: Ebb and flow between terrorist attacks and territorial claims. Wave of high volume terrorist attacks conducted initially in the name of competitor jihadi groups (AQ, IS, etc.) or one group (IS-AQ?), followed by expeditionary territorialism and quiet season for terrorist activity, and so on, until one group claims independent state in symbolically significant territory.

Framework for Influencing Extremist Ideology: Drs. Bob Elder and Sara Cobb, GMU

relder@gmu.edu scobb@gmu.edu

ABSTRACT

Negotiation research, drawing on rational choice theory, provides a wealth of findings about how people negotiate successfully, as well as describing some of the pitfalls that have been associated with negotiation failures. Building on narrative theory, this paper attempts to expand the theoretical base of negotiation in an effort to address the meaning making processes that structure negotiation as the basis of a framework for influencing extremist ideology.   This research is combined with decision-related research conducted in support of deterrence planning as a means to discover potential influence levers for possible use as a counter to extremist ideology. Recognizing that conflict resolution is complicated because it involves changing the story from within the interactional context from where it arises, the framework assumes a staged approach to address the narrative structure of the ideologically-based conflict which anchors the influence actions on the strategic positions and identities, embedded in the narrative logics of the key characters.
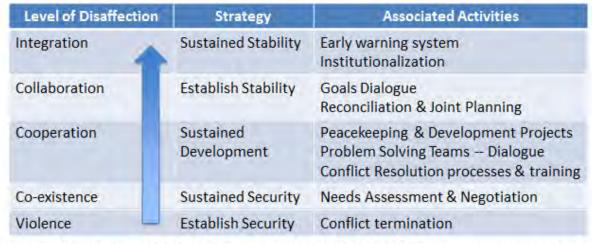
This framework for influencing extremist ideology leverages a growing body of research that seeks to understand patterns of "meaning-making" in negotiation. Rather than accentuate specific attributes of the persons, or the situation, this line of research focuses on attributes of meaning-making itself. One strand of this research employs narrative theory to describe the dynamics of negotiation processes, both escalations and transformation, in terms of narrative structures and processes (Cobb 2006, 2013; Bamberg and Andrews 2004;Winslade and Monk 2000; Hajer 1997). Research in this line treats narratives as a discursive construction that reflects parties' commitments in terms of plot sequences (past, present, and future), roles that are assigned and attributed (characterizations), and moral frameworks (values or themes). This approach has identified plots linked to sequences of events, characters that operate as protagonists, and a set of moral imperatives and behavioral injunctions as elements that, recursively, shape the development of interaction. The set of moral imperatives and behavioral injunctions, for example, create what Labov and Waletzky (2003) call the "evaluative point" of a narrative, the feature that differentiates it from a collection of events; the evaluative point, in turn, provides the foundation for positioning within the interaction (Harré and Slocum 2003). A narrative approach has been shown to be useful for analyzing meaning-making and for designing interventions in situations of protracted and escalating conflict (Bar-on and Kassem 2004). Research on narrative and conflict in the last decade has emphasized generic processes such as positioning (Harré and Moghaddam 2003), bridging (Pappe 2003), and destabilization (Cobb 1993; Winslade and Monk 2008) that can help account for protracted conflict.

The framework for influencing extremist ideology adapts a commonly used deterrence definition to examine the Decision Calculus of Actor 'X" regarding Action 'Y' under Condition 'Z' leveraging work conducted in a previous "Operationalizing Deterrence" SMA study. A given "decision calculus" arises from an associated narrative logic, which, in turn, has correlate interests. The actors of interest in this definition have been identified, and the condition of interest can be generally

described as an environment characterized by the conduct of gray zone activities. There has been an assumption that the US and its partners would want to deter "gray zone" activities, but this examination instead assumes that it is important to identify the strategic actions or behaviors (vital interests) that pose a risk to the US and its partners and then examine how the "gray zone" activities contribute to the strategic actions or behaviors that need to be deterred, or alternatively, tolerated. This argues the need to put the gray zone activities in a strategic context, recognizing that the concern for US and partner decisionmakers is that the gray zone activities may collectively lead to an undesirable behavior.

Therefore, the first step is to define for each specific actor which potential goals or objectives that the US wants to deter since it would be impractical to deter all gray zone actor activities. With that, planners will have all three components of the deterrence definition and can then focus on identifying the causal influences contributing (or opposing) the conduct of actions or behaviors that would affect these identified vital US strategic interests. It is important to establish a common understanding of each party's core interests, although it is not important or likely that the parties accept the other's core interests as their own.

The next step is to examine those actions in order to understand the narrative logic at play, and then to identify potential US responses from an escalation perspective to set the stage for modeling US (and partner) shaping, engagement, and response activities that should be considered to influence the actor's ideology in ways that reduce the risk of the adverse strategic action or behavior occurring. One of the ways that has proven effective in the past to understand other actors is through narrative analysis. This study incorporates frameworks developed by Sara Cobb at GMU's Center for Narrative and Conflict Resolution. In general, the approach analyzes the other actor's narrative in the context of an action or behavior to be deterred, and then examine the utility of US and partner actions in terms of how they either reinforce or counter the narrative.

Level of Disaffection	Strategy	Associated Activities
Integration	Sustained Stability	Early warning system Institutionalization
Collaboration	Establish Stability	Goals Dialogue Reconciliation & Joint Planning
Cooperation	Sustained Development	Peacekeeping & Development Projects Problem Solving Teams -- Dialogue Conflict Resolution processes & training
Co-existence	Sustained Security	Needs Assessment & Negotiation
Violence	Establish Security	Conflict termination

Narrative Strategy: Encourage Growth along Engagement Spectrum

Prevent	Defeat	Clear	Hold	Build	Transfer	Sustain	Transition	Regularize	Integrate	Grow

Figure 5: Narrative Strategy

The chart in Figure 5 depicts an approach to narrative strategy (Cobb, 2015) that encourages growth along an engagement spectrum, recognizing that changing the ideology of a population

must be done in stages. Drawing on Greimas (1977), we suggest that these patterned interactions can be understood as a function of narrative grammar that links the "apparent level of narration" (utterances)—which prefigure and limit action—with " immanent level, constituting a sort of common structural trunk, at which narrativity is situated and organized prior to its manifestation." As with any grammar, narrative grammar involves both morphology and syntax (Greimas 1977, p. 26). The morphology, the set of morphemes or units of meaning, is regulated by the syntax or the "operational rules … (for) manipulating the terms of the morphology" . In the case of narrative, this grammar functions to "reestablish an order of threatened values" (Ricoeur et al. 1989, p. 601). Narrative grammar is pertinent to the study of negotiation precisely because it highlights both the morphology—the meaning structures that emerge in interaction—as well as the specific syntactic rules which govern the combination and transformation of those meanings, in the struggle to assert and establish the order of values that underlie a given parties' framing of the problem, as well as their desired solutions. But narrative grammar is also pertinent to the study of negotiation because the performance of narratives limits the nature of the stories that can be told and sets in motion interactional patterns that restrict narrative complexity (Cobb 2006; Coleman et al. 2005).

Conflict resolution is complicated precisely because it involves changing the story from within the interactional context from where it arises, once the narrative structure of the conflict has already been established and is anchoring the strategic positions and identities of the characters (Cobb 2013). Further, given that narratives do have a grammar that regulates their production, the interaction of conflicting narratives anchors, and solidifies the syntactic rules that lead to escalations. So while researchers in the narrative tradition routinely note the tremendous variability of narrative content, as well as the importance of context for understanding the dynamics of conflict (Whitebrook 2001), certain narrative patterns are empirically dominant in negotiation (Nelson 2001). Conflict scenarios, for example, can often be summarized as rather simple binary junctures in which each party "punctuates" the sequence of events (Watzlawick et al. 1967) in a manner that externalizes responsibility, in spirals of escalation that can lead to violence. This approach seeks to reverse the sequence of events from one that fuels violence to one that seeks accommodation by incrementally addressing the factors which contributed to the development of ideologies that threaten US interests. Identifying and prioritizing the gray zone activities to be deterred and understanding the nature of how the narrative logics correlate to those behaviors would allow US operators to design narrative logics to support strategic deterrence of certain actions, and to design and launch the narrative logics associated with the Engagement Spectrum.

Off-Ramps for Da'esh Leadership: Preventing Da'esh 2.0, Dr. Gina Ligon, University of Nebraska Omaha and Dr. Jason Spitaletta, The John Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory

We have argued that Da'esh is comprised of leaders with heterogeneous talents and motivations (Ligon, 2014; Ligon & Derrick, 2015; Derrick et al., in press). Upon examining the Da'esh leadership team (both formal and informal leaders) for past seven years, we have identified that they have a more heterogeneous Top Management Team (TMT) than other VEOs, particularly than their peers in the Global Jihad Industry[12]. To date, these differences have been either overlooked or seen as a strength[13]. However, in conventional TMTs, we often see such heterogeneity leads to significant barriers to collaboration[14], and these barriers can lead to fissures and seams that can cause decreased decision making, splintering, and other organizational tensions. In short, while a strength of Da'esh is its diverse workforce, in conditions of external pressure and competition, this diversity can also result in tremendous barriers to collaboration. In addition, they also require tailored approaches when deciding what to do with these leaders to prevent them from creating Da'esh 2.0 or taking their talents elsewhere. Precision is a necessary component for effective influence and segmenting Da'esh's TMT allows for more personalized lines of persuasion[15] based on typologies. Thus, the focus of this chapter is two-fold. First, we will share the underlying theory of TMT collaboration, and provide practitioners with some tactics to foment barriers and distrust to aid the operations meant to degrade the organization (e.g., retaking of Mosul). Second, given our analysis of what motivated each of these leaders to join and remain in Da'esh, we will provide a set of tailored off-ramps to be considered to deter captured leaders from reconstituting Da'esh 2.0.

Capitalizing on Operations: Fomenting Barriers to Collaboration among Leaders
In combination with the remarkable kinetic operations to retake key territory such as Mosul, influence operations should foment **Distrust** within the Top Management Team. Using social identity theory, social dominance theory, and information processing theories, there are typically three types of subgroups in organizations: 1) Identity-Based Subgroups 2) Resource Based Subgroups 3) Knowledge-Based Subgroups[16]. Da'esh TMT has identifiable subgroups based on *all*

---

[12] For a detailed report of our longitudinal study of VEO leadership teams, please visit **http://www.start.umd.edu/research-projects/organizational-determinants-violence-and-performance**

[13] Weiss and Hassan's 2015 book described the role of the former Baathists as a significant operational advantage in early Iraq territory gains.

[14] M. Hansen's (2009) work on barriers to collaboration informs how to foment organizational factions.

[15] Spitaletta, J. (2013). Neuropsychological Operations: A Concept for Counter-Radicalization. In M. Reynolds & D. Lyle (Eds) (2013). *Topics for Operational Considerations: Insights from Neurobiology & Neuropsychology on Influence and Extremism—An Operational Perspective*. Washington, DC: Strategic Multilayer Assessment Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense.

[16] Carton, A. M., & Cummings, J. N. (2012). A theory of subgroups in work teams. *Academy of Management Review*, 37: 441-470.

three of these drivers. Analysis of the targets (i.e., message, receivers) for the three subgroups/Da'esh leader typologies (i.e., Violent Seekers, True Ideologues, and Pragmatics) follows on subsequent pages. Messaging to each of these groups should take into account their decision-making style (and errors/biases), organizational functions, life history, psychological characteristics, network, influence levers[17]

Mayer's model[18] of trust among leaders is based on TMT members perceiving each other's 1) **Ability** (expertise source), 2) **Benevolence** (to each other and external "in-group actors"), and 3) **Integrity**. One way to foment distrust and cause a barrier to effective collaboration (e.g., C2, decision making) is to erode perceptions among the TMT of each other's ability, benevolence, and/or integrity. Thus, messaging should have these goals to accelerate fissures and barriers to collaboration among the three identified leader groups.
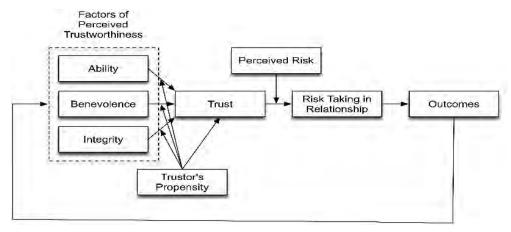

Figure 6: Factors of TMT Trust (Adapted from Mayer et al., 1995)

---

[17] Influence mechanisms based on Yukl's model (1990) of inspirational versus rational appeals.
[18] Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman (1995). An integrative model of organizational trust. *Academy of Management Review, 20* (3), 709-734.

Analysis of the Target (i.e., Message, Receiver): Da'esh Leader Typologies[19]:

True Ideologues:

Decision Making: Focus on ideological goals in decision making (e.g., return to past levels of greatness, use of negative mental models/past experiences with failure to inform on lessons learned and mistakes to avoid (thus, historical references valued), use of symbolic imagery and rituals in communications.

(1) **Likely Cognitive Errors:** low integrative complexity, black and white thinking, lack of flexibility, can overly attend to potential negative consequences.
(2) **Likely Organizational Functions:** Sharia Council members at Central or Regional/Province levels; governing wing and administrative functions; high organizational knowledge/expertise.
(3) **Biodata/Life History:** Highly educated, strong understanding and identity with tenets of Islam; 10 years or more in formal religious training.
(4) **Psychological Characteristics:** Deferent to authority, High Allegiance to ISIL[20]; Risk-taking; Patient with new converts and loyal to those with ideological expertise.
(5) **Network:** Muftis and Elite Clerics; tangential connections to some former Baathists.
(6) **Influence Levers:**
    a. Inspirational Appeal – Emotional requests or proposals that arouse enthusiasm by appealing to Takfiri values and ideals, or by increasing their confidence they can do something well. May be provoked if challenged on their credentials.
    b. Upward Appeal – persuade him that the request is approved by upper leadership, or appeals to upper leadership to gain compliance with request (insinuate approval by individuals they perceive as powerful, expert, or trustworthy.
(7) **Factors of Perceived Trustworthiness:**
    a. **Ability** – perceived inspiring cohesion, commitment to cause; expertise in Sharia; seen as the conscience and Spiritual leader.
    b. **Benevolence** – Equitable distribution of ISIL resources to populace, as long as seen as compliant with ISIL.
    c. **Integrity** – Seen as pure and deeply committed to religious ideals.
(8) **Message Characteristics:**
    a. **Do:** craft inspirational messages in ideal of Islam and purity. Focus on incongruence of decisions of other subgroups that are in conflict with historical vision of Caliphate.
    b. **Don't:** attack ideology, don't have incomplete or weak arguments based on misunderstanding of Islam. Don't use Apostates to deliver message.
(9) **Message Characteristics ABOUT THEM from CREDIBLE SOURCE:**
    a. Attack source of expertise: focus on his hypocrisy.
    b. Focus on lack of data behind decisions (if to Pragmatists)
    c. Focus on lack of penchant for violence (if to Violence Seekers)
    d. Focus on Ideologues' unwillingness to directly partake in violence (if to Violence Seekers)
    e. Focus on Ideologues' strategic shift away from Iraq & Syria (if to Violence Seekers)
(10) **Message MOEs:**
    a. Questioning pragmatic and violence goals/decisions
    b. Increased Risk-Taking
    c. Weakening loyalty to other leader subgroups

---

[19] Please email gligon@unomaha.edu and dcderrick@unomaha.edu for more information on this effort.

[20] Please email lkuznar@nsiteam.com and Jason.spitaletta@jhuapl.edu for more information on psychological profiling.

      d. Greater attention to potential negative consequences of action.
      e. Silo communication (lower communication, information sharing with other leaders)

Pragmatics:

(1) **Decision Making:** Focus on secular, tangible goals in decision making (e.g., control of government, critical resources, strategic revenue streams such as highly traveled roads); use data and facts to make decisions, rational and incremental progress toward long-term goals. Focus on solving day-to-day problems for organization and people.

(2) **Likely Cognitive Errors:** decision paralysis from overly analytical approach; can overly weigh importance of pragmatic goals versus ideological goals, misunderstanding of Violence Seekers rationale for participation..

(3) **Likely Organizational Functions:** Shura Council members, military functions (with some rotations to administrative functions – high levels and large span of control).

(4) **Biodata/Life History:** Highly educated, typically secular in nature. Some ideological training, but far less than true ideologues. Technical training (e.g., accounting, engineering functions), military training. Many are former Baathists who saw ISIL as a way to regain power.

(5) **Psychological Characteristics:** Deferent to authority, Moderate allegiance to ISIL (seen as a way to meet more pragmatic goals); low risk-taking; pragmatic loyalties based on perceived usefulness.

(6) **Network:** Baathists; some Yazidis if from Northern Iraq; distrustful of formal government in Iraq.

(7) **Influence Levers:**
      a. Rational Appeal – Use logical arguments and factual evidence to persuade him that a proposal or request is viable and likely to result in attainment of task objectives.
      b. Exchange Appeal – Make explicit promises or implicit promises that he will receive rewards or tangible benefits if he complies with a request or supports a proposal, or remind him of a favor to be reciprocated.

(8) **Factors of Perceived Trustworthiness:**
      a. **Ability** – perceived as expert problem solvers and planners; often have special technical expertise and training that makes them assets.
      b. **Benevolence** – Lowest of the three characteristics for them; situational kindness (almost always based on pragmatic exchanges) ; reciprocal altruism
      c. **Integrity** – Seen as loyal to the ISIL organization, but may actually view the organization simply as a means to an end.

(9) **Message Characteristics:**
      a. **Do:** craft rational messages based on data, facts, and logical arguments. Highlight how ideological goals and violent goals conflict with more data-driven, incremental approaches. Remind them of their education, training in academics. Praise their attention to detail and careful planning.   Focus on the future.
      b. **Don't:** Use ideological or inspirational appeals to influence them. Avoid focusing on past Da'esh atrocities (if possible) as it might present perceived barrier to defection.

(10)   **Message Characteristics ABOUT THEM from CREDIBLE SOURCE:**
      a. Attack source of expertise: denigrate his planning, technical skills.
      b. Focus on identifiable outgroup characteristics (Baathist, relationship to Yazidis)
      c. Focus on lack of religious conviction (if to Ideologues).
      d. Focus on lack of direct participation in violence (if to Violence Seekers)

(11)   **Message MOEs:**
      a. Questioning ideological and violence goals/decisions
      b. Slower decision making
      c. Weakening loyalty to ISIL organization and other leader subgroups
      d. Focus on day-to-day short term goals over long-term, strategic goals.

Violent Seekers:

1) **Decision Making:** Focus on adventure seeking, sensation seeking activities; short-term decision-making; escalation of violence and means to punish others.
2) **Likely Cognitive Errors:** Overlook pragmatic and ideological goals of organization in name of increased violence and excitement, Overestimate potential rewards of success/victory and underestimate the risks.
3) **Likely Organizational Functions:** Military or Hisbah if administrative; if from Western country or Tunisia, likely in higher level and greater span of control.
4) **Biodata/Life History:** Variable levels of education, but experience with crime, hunting, or combat. Likely experienced prison or detention early on; problems with authority. Early evidence of thrill seeking.   Novice in ideological training.
5) **Psychological Characteristics:** Difficulty following authority unless very brutal, controlling; high risk taking, low allegiance to ISIL as an organization. May appear fervent in commitment, but is likely a recent convert with superficial understanding of Islam. Often seeking a masculine social identify and tend toward behaviors that advertise "maleness",
6) **Network:** heterogeneous, but made of foreign fighters outside of Iraq and Syria.
7) **Influence Levers:**
   a. Pressure Appeal – use of demands, threats, or intimidation to convince him to comply with a request; responds to assertiveness.
   b. Exchange Appeal – Make explicit promises or implicit promises that he will receive rewards or tangible benefits if he complies with a request or supports a proposal, or remind him of a favor to be reciprocated. Rewards should be tied around thrill-seeking and violence.
8) **Factors of Perceived Trustworthiness:**
   a. **Ability** – perceived as expert fighters; also perceived as knowledgeable about home country (e.g., targets of interest).
   b. **Benevolence** – Lowest of the three characteristics for them; situational kindness (almost always based on opportunity for excitement)
   c. **Integrity** – Seen as committed as they traveled from comfortable home countries to join; but over time, may be seen as imposter/foreigner.
9) **Message Characteristics TO THEM:**
   a. **Do:** craft messages about chance for violence; need to escalate (and other's slow decision making); do use forceful messengers who have expertise in fighting.
   b. **Don't:** Use ideological or rational appeals to influence them.
10) **Message Characteristics ABOUT THEM from CREDIBLE SOURCE:**
   a. Attack source of expertise: denigrate his fighting ability.
   b. Focus on identifiable outgroup characteristics (accents, skin color)
   c. Focus on lack of religious conviction and/or intellectual skill.
   d. Highlight the Ideologues and Pragmatists relative lack of regard for Violence Seekers.
11) **Message MOEs:**
   a. Questioning ideological and pragmatic goals/decisions
   b. Impulsive decision making
   c. Weakening loyalty to ISIL organization and other leader subgroups
   d. Low information sharing and decrease in exchange.

Providing Off-Ramps for Da'esh Leaders

Retaking Da'esh Territory is the first step in defeating them as an organization. However, there is a danger to think that it is the end of the battle. Moreover, many of the leaders of Da'esh have led other conflicts throughout their lives, in fact serving as mercenary leaders for violence of all types.

Thus, the purpose of our final section is to offer some potential off-ramps for these leaders to influence them to desist from ideologically-motivated violence. To do this correctly, however, the nature of what motivates them must be taken into account. Thus, our longitudinal work profiling these leaders as detailed in the previous section is critical for providing tailored off-ramps or "Golden Bridges" to encourage them to desist from violence.

As described in the previous section and in other publications (e.g., Ligon et al., 2014), the three "types" of Da'esh leaders hold distinct positions, have unique decision making styles, and will be influenced by very different off-ramps. First, the *True Ideologues*, who have held positions of religious authority in Da'esh, make decisions based on historical lessons of what to avoid and what has been gleaned from the past. They view current battles as part of a long, historical battle between Islam and Crusaders, and they genuinely believe their religion is under attack. While their allegiance to the more pragmatic members of Da'esh (e.g, former Baathists, alliances among tribes, etc) has been shaken in former months, they are highly trusting of others who they perceive to have religious piety and conviction to the cause. Off-ramps that may work should be delivered by credible messengers, or those with ideological mindsets (credentials are less meaningful with this group, as they believe in Takfir and are weary of those with formal ideological training; instead, focus on third party endorsements from meaningful networks to increase credibility of the messenger). These ideologues may be swayed by the *opportunity for recognition of the meaningfulness of the cause and their historical roles in it.* One option could be ensure that they help chronicle the movement, playing up that we need their input on the decisions they made along the way that inspired the one of the "most important Islamic Social Movements" of our time. This appeal for chronicling history is highly persuasive to ideologues, as they want to ensure what they did will be remembered and studied. Next, if these leaders have family, ensuring safe passage for their family members to a Sunni Country/Territory where they can be instrumental in overseeing the confinement conditions of captured fighters would also engender greater feelings of trust among the coalition and the families of the true ideologues. The least effective off-ramp for this group would be to send them to a traditional deradicalization program; as the leaders of Da'esh see their beliefs as central to their identity, trying to deradicalize them from these strongly held beliefs and values will be unsuccessful in this group. Instead, programmatic efforts should focus on desistance from violence and alternative mechanisms to affect social change.

Contrary to the ideologues, pragmatics often hold very technical or administrative positions. Their decision making is characterized by loyalties based on perceived instrumental use, and they can be persuaded with more rational, logical and interest based appeals. They also are influenced by explicit promise of reward (or reduction in punishment), and the administration of resources cannot be underemphasized with this group. Again, these leaders will be persuaded by the promise of safe passage for their families with visitation elements similar to those in witness protection programs. In addition, off-ramps should focus on leveraging their expertise for restoration planning for formerly occupied land (particularly because they were often leads at holding territory once gained by Da'esh), and collaborating with them to assist in the rebuilding of the formerly Da'esh-held territory. Many of these individuals have unique skills and talents that made them useful to Da'esh, and off-ramps that highlight these can yield greater commitment to desist from violence down the road.

Finally, the violence seekers often held positions of leadership where they meted severe punishment. For example, anyone involved with the atrocities against the Yazidis, in administrative

positions in the Hisba where they were involved in administering "justice," or anyone who can be connected to direct violence and atrocities above and beyond complicity or knowledge post hoc will meet these criteria. These individuals often traveled from other countries to join the fight, and rose in the ranks due to the extreme levels of brutality and violence in which they engaged. They have difficulty following authority, and they often have personality disorders such as extreme narcissism (and accompanying object beliefs), anti-social personality, and oppositional defiant disorder as classified by western diagnostic manuals. They may appear fervent in their conviction, but in reality, have superficial training and knowledge about Islam (many are recent converts). With these leaders, our view is that there are no suitable off-ramps; moreover, these individuals will not benefit from opportunities for desistance or rebuilding Iraq and Syria. Thus, it is our recommendation they be detained and allotted punishment commensurate with their home countries' norms.

In summary

Da'esh as a paramilitary force is in withdrawal (if not defeat) and Da'esh as an organization is in decline; however, Da'esh as an idea persists. The US and our allies should continue to sew fear, uncertainty, and doubt within the ranks of the Violence Seekers who comprise a significant portion of the paramilitary force. This effort needs to focus on not only degrading their current capacity to resist but also using the Violence Seekers themselves as warnings to others not to affiliate. The US and our allies also needs to engage the Pragmatists within Da'esh's TMT to end the conflict and bring about a better peace; this requires nuanced appeals and political compromise but the effort in necessary in order to split the Pragmatists away from the Ideologues. The Ideologues represent the most incorrigible of the Da'esh TMT and thus the most resistant to influence. Efforts must still be made to not only limit their ability to retain those under arms but also mobilize new adherents. As Machiavelli cautioned, the US must avoid making martyrs out of the Ideologues but instead delegitimize them. This entails using their former clerics, bureaucrats, and soldiers against them and those who may come next. Doing this requires a nuanced understanding of the organizational and individual psychology of Da'esh, it's TMT, and it's members. This paper summarizes years of work done to develop that understanding along with suggestions about how those research findings may be operationalized.

Comprehensive Communications Approach: Drs. Todd Helmus and Elizabeth Bodine-Baron, RAND

Excerpted from Elizabeth Bodine-Baron, Todd C. Helmus, Madeline Magnuson, and Zev Winkelman, *Examining ISIS Support and Opposition Networks on Twitter*, RAND, 2016, available at http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1328.html

The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), like no other terrorist organization before, has used Twitter and other social media channels to broadcast its message, inspire followers, and recruit new fighters. Though much less heralded, ISIS opponents have also taken to Twitter to castigate the ISIS message. This report draws on publicly available Twitter data to examine this ongoing debate about ISIS on Arabic Twitter and to better understand the networks of ISIS supporters and opponents on Twitter.

To support the countermessaging effort and to more deeply understand ISIS supporters and opponents, this study uses a mixed-methods analytic approach to identify and characterize in detail both ISIS support and opposition networks on Twitter. This analytic approach draws on community detection algorithms that help detect interactive communities of Twitter users, lexical analysis that can identify key themes and content for large data sets, and social network analysis. This research set out to answer three key questions:

- How can we differentiate ISIS supporters and opponents on Twitter?
- Who are they, and what are they saying?
- How are they connected, and who is important?

How Can We Differentiate ISIS Supporters and Opponents on Twitter?

While ISIS has formally requested that its followers refer to it as *The Islamic State*, or الدولة الإسلامية, group detractors often use the abbreviation, داعش, or *Da'esh*. We examined whether these two terms would serve as putative measures of ISIS support or opposition, respectively. Using a ten-month sample of Twitter data, we lexically analyzed the content and key themes of users who mostly employ *Da'esh* versus those who mostly use *Islamic State* in their tweets. As predicted, we found that frequent users of *Da'esh* had content that was highly critical of ISIS, with users using such terms as *Terrorist Da'esh*, *Kharijites*, *militants of Da'esh*, *dogs of fire*, and *dogs of Baghdadi*. Users of *Islamic State*, however, used glowing terms such as *monotheists Mujahideen*, *Soldiers of the Caliphate*, and *lions of the Islamic State*. Other references to people, states, organizations, and location names were similarly predictive of support.

Drawing on this measure of support and opposition, we found that over the ten-month period (July 1, 2014, to April 30, 2015), ISIS opponents generally outnumber supporters six to one. On a daily basis, ISIS opponents outnumber supporters nearly ten to one. However, ISIS supporters routinely outtweet opponents, as they produce 50 percent more tweets per day. In examining the timeline of ISIS-related tweets, we found that the burning of the Jordanian pilot, Moath al-Kasabeh, sparked a huge upsurge in anti-ISIS tweets. In addition, at the end of our reporting period (March to April 2015), we found a significant reduction in the number of tweeting ISIS supporters and an upsurge in tweeting opponents.

Who Are They, and What Are They Saying?

We used lexical and network analysis in an iterative approach to identify and characterize different communities within the Twitter ISIS conversation. Drawing on community detection algorithms, we distilled 23 million tweets from 771,321 users into 36 distinct communities and ultimately into four major *metacommunities*. We then used lexical analysis to characterize the identities and prominent themes of these metacommunities.

Lexical analysis shows that these four metacommunities appear to belong to Shia, Syrian mujahideen, ISIS supporters, and Sunni.

- The Shia group condemns ISIS using historical Islamic terms and links to Saudi Arabia, expresses positive attitude toward the international coalition and Christians, and focuses on sectarianism and frustrations with Sunni/Shia divisions.
- Syrian Mujahideen supporters represent individuals throughout the Middle East who support the anti-Assad Syrian Mujahideen movement. These individuals have mixed attitudes toward the Islamic State and generally negative attitudes toward the international coalition for "supporting" the Syrian regime.
- The ISIS supporters frequently invoke threats against Islam, highlight positive themes that include religion, belonging, and positive terms, and use a variety of insults and derogatory terms to refer to Shia, the Syrian regime, the international community, and others. The analysis also suggests that ISIS supporters more actively adhere to good social media strategy by actively encouraging fellow supporters to "spread," "disseminate," and "link" messages to expand their reach and impact.
- The Sunni community is highly fractured in comparison with other metacommunities, and resonant themes are very different within the various Sunni subcommunities and appear to align with different Middle East nation-states. For example, one Sunni sub- community appears to focus on themes of Egyptian nationalism, to include the threat of ISIS toward Egypt and concerns about the Muslim Brotherhood. Another group appears focused on Jordanian issues, with common themes including the ISIS threat to Egypt, the execution of the Jordanian pilot, Moath al-Kasabeh, and Jordan's role in the international coalition.

How Are They Connected, and Who Is Important?

We next applied social network analysis at the community level to assess relative strength and weaknesses of different connections between communities and how they were positioned with respect to one another. We found

- the core of the Syrian Mujahideen metacommunity serves as an important connection between the Shia metacommunity, some Sunni communities, and the ISIS Supporter metacommunity, who are otherwise disconnected. It is thus possible that individuals within the Syrian mujahideen community could serve as influencers of ISIS supporters and connect ISIS opponents together.
- The Egyptian, Saudi Arabian, and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) communities form the core of the Sunni metacommunity, which is by far more fractured than the Shia, Syrian Mujahideen, and ISIS Supporter metacommunities. In general, each subcommunity is concerned with its own specific issues, which could complicate constructing a coherent Sunni anti-ISIS countermessaging strategy.
- Within the Sunni subcommunities, the Yemeni community has the highest percentage of ISIS supporters and is sharply divided between ISIS supporters and opponents.

Implications and Recommendations

Based on these findings, we offer several recommendations for policymakers:

- Research institutions should continue to use the model of *Da'esh* versus *Islamic State* for ISIS to gauge worldwide activity of ISIS supporters and opponents. The U.S. government may use such models to test the impact of anti-ISIS programs.
- ISIS opponents are plentiful but may require assistance from the U.S. State Department, in the form of social media trainings and other engagements, to enhance the effectiveness and reach of their messaging.[21] Of course, with al-Qa'ida and its affiliates counted among the ISIS opponents, care will have to be taken in selecting those suitable to train and empower.
- Twitter should continue its campaign of account suspensions: This campaign likely harasses ISIS Twitter users, forces them to lose valuable time reacquiring followers, and may ultimately push some to use social media channels that are far less public and accessible than Twitter.
- U.S. military Information Support Operations planners, as well as State Department messengers, should continue to highlight ISIS atrocities. The Twitter impact of the burning of the Jordanian pilot as well as previous findings suggesting a relation between ISIS atrocities and ISIS opposition on Twitter indicate that such atrocities may galvanize opponents. Note, however, ISIS clearly uses ultraviolence as a key component of its brand, and a messaging strategy, consequently, highlighting such actions risks playing into its hands (Winter, 2015). A more systematic examination of the causes behind these spikes and troughs, such as ISIS atrocities, would be valuable.
- Nations and organizations (such as U.S. military and State Department messengers) looking to countermessage ISIS on Twitter should tailor messages for and target them to specific communities: The ISIS Twitter universe is highly fragmented and consists of different communities that care about different topics. Countermessaging should take this into account with tailored communications to different communities.

Winter, Charlie, *The Virtual "Caliphate": Understanding Islamic State's Propaganda Strategy*, London: Quilliam Foundation, July 2015. As of April 12, 2016: https://www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/publications/free/the-virtual-caliphate- understanding-islamic-states-propaganda-strategy.pdf

---

[21] The U.S. and the international community already provide training in social media to select civil society members in the Muslim world, and such programs could be expanded and strengthened to provide a more robust effort to expand the voice of ISIS opponents.

A Human Geography Approach to Degrading ISIL: Dr. Gwyneth Sutherlin, Geographic Services Inc.

gsutherlin@geographicservices.com

Abstract

- Human Geography analysis of Da'esh context
- Using the relationships between locations, social groups, and socio-cultural attributes to understand relevant context
- Support post-conflict rebuilding and resettlement planning through mapped relationships
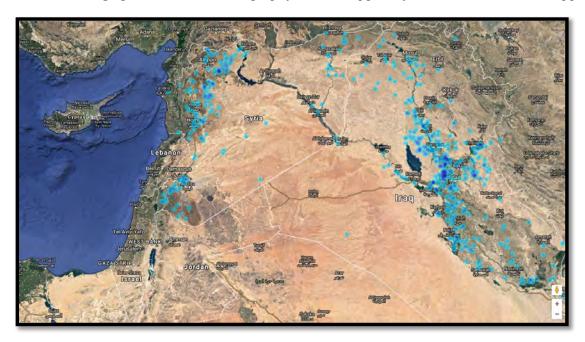- Leverage granular Human Geography data to support synthesis of multi-modal approach

Figure 7. Pro-ISIL Family Groups that make up the Human Geography across Syria and Iraq

Introduction

Human Geography analysis is an approach that integrates the physical geography and the networks among the people who live there. The research used in the approach, maps relationships between locations and groups of people along with fundamental socio-cultural attributes including ethnicity, religion, language, and tribal affiliation (or social relationships) at a granular family-group level. From this foundation, more complex and dynamic socio-cultural relationships can be analyzed and mapped, such as political allegiance or proxy influence. The approach provides critical context for understanding local drivers of conflict, particularly the factors that make groups vulnerable to violent extremist organizations (VEOs). The relationships and attributes within Human Geography can be used to investigate communications patterns, motivations, allegiances, biases, and decision-making patterns. Finally, the refugee and displacement crisis in the region demands a significant focus on humanitarian development in the post-conflict planning. The relationships and preserved

pre-migration locations (in addition to current locations) are valuable for rebuilding and stabilization efforts in the region.

To consider the Human Geography, start by examining a single family group (defined as the extended family that might gather at a reunion). An individual Da'esh member can be associated to that family group through research. That family group is the basic unit within a social hierarchy. It has the attributes of ethnicity, language and religion that combine over a shared history to inform that family's identity, its values and beliefs. Its collective memory that is connected through extended family and social relationships across a wide geography. Social capital among social networks has high value. The mapped relationships describe where allegiance is owed, in what direction, and due to what level of influence particular groups or individuals have. As in Figure 1 (below), that family group is visualized in relation to its location. That location has significance. It has a history. It has schools and places of worship and sites of cultural significance. The location has a local dialect. It has a spatial connection to other family groups with their own attributes to explore, their own prominent individuals and relationships. It is a bounded area from which to collect communications, understand local patterns, connotations, and build context-specific messaging.
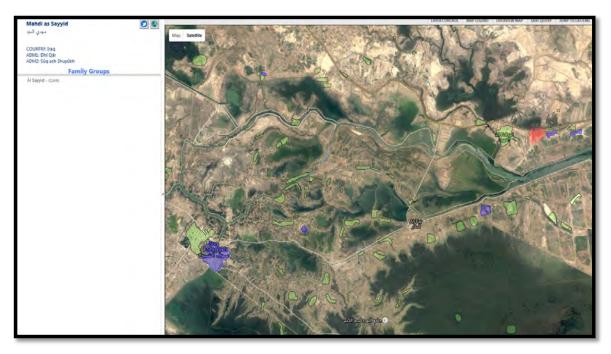

Figure 8. The pro-ISIL groups are highlighted in purple. The green polygons represent the highly diverse area. For example, most of the green polygons have family groups or clans that are Shi'a and have a pro-Government allegiance. The red polygon is a Sunni Clan.

There are hundreds of pro-ISIL family groups, clans, sub-tribes, and tribes connected to locations across Syria and Iraq. At each one, the attributes of that family group offer insight into the group's past, its values, grudges, biases, and disposition to trust. Social connections in this area of the world are vital. They support business transactions maintaining local economies and sustain alliances for generations. The basic units of economy and social function are captured in the network of social relationships from family to clan to tribe. Additionally, prominent individuals at each level of the social hierarchy are described in this approach. These individuals lend influence to particular groups and are important models of strategic communications within the culture. For example, if a certain clan has many prominent figures, such as tribal sheikhs or government ministers, this clan would be more influential among other clans within its tribe.

When analyzing communications or directly engaging, these details will assist in developing messaging and leveraging key relationships for stabilization efforts.

Figure 9. The tribal footprint. of extended family and clan relationships to the family group above. This is a pro-ISIL tribe with 108 family groups and 27 Prominent Individuals

Applying Human Geography Analysis to Da'esh Context
Placing Da'esh members within their Human Geography– a set of relationships including ethnicity, religion, language, tribe, clan, family group, political or other network affiliations, and location—offers several avenues to pursue analysis and understand three (3) key concerns for degrading their influence and capabilities in order to stabilize the region.

1. How can Da'esh members be reframed for post-conflict engagement? In order to move forward, redefining Da'esh members by non-extremist characteristics. Characteristics of identity are accessible through the relationships they have to family, clan, tribe, location, history, and socio-cultural context.

2. Addressing grievances of the local population from the ground up makes conditions less favorable for VEOs. This conflict has displaced large groups of people. Retracing social group relationships and understanding socio-cultural claims to locations will be of value in rebuilding and resettlement.

3. Engaging with local populations and a portion of post-Da'esh members to arrive at political resolution through cultural and context-specific persuasion mechanisms.

Human Geography as Foundation to Synthesize Stabilization

In previous conflicts involving terrorist organizations, such as in Colombia with the FARC or in Northern Ireland with the IRA, there was a political aim because the terrorism targeted a particular government. And in both cases, the end to the violent conflict involved a shift to political engagement (Ramsbotham et. al, 2016). In this case, while Da'esh made some movement toward creating a State, its primary objectives have not been to alter political policies. A post-conflict approach will necessarily need to involve the local populations where it is anticipated that these fighters will return in order to develop a post-ISIL transition that shifts from violence to political engagement around a
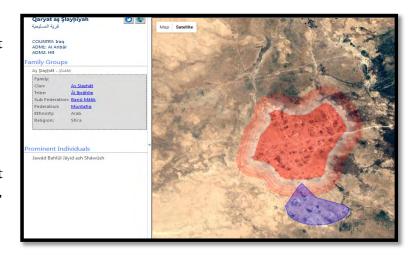

Figure 10. Neighboring family groups, one Shi'a one Sunni in the Al Anbar Province. The 'fuzzy' buffer around the polygon indicates the fuzziness of the human geography footprint. It has several applications including radius of influence for prominent individuals and catchment area for communications analysis that relies on human boundaries rather than lat/long. In this case, they overlap.

platform that is locally-driven. Understanding the Human Geography is essential for gauging the disposition of the population and planning for post-conflict rebuilding. The lack of precedence and inherent complexities necessitate a multi-modal approach to stabilization.

1. What are the local sympathies? And how was the local population affected by Da'esh during the course of the conflict?   How are Da'esh leaders perceived by clan leaders in areas where former Da'esh members might reintegrate, seek refuge, resources, recruits, etc.? Human Geography analysis offers insight into granular allegiances, overlap of events (attacks) and population attributes, and current locations of various types of socio-cultural, religious, and politically aligned or influenced groups.
    a. Using a sample of several prominent individuals identified through their online activity as pro-ISIL, the radius and reach of their influence was observed by following the relationship paths of their tribal connections to other locations across the geography, then observing online communications from other associated groups that they could influence. The tone and themes of the communications at various points within the radius of influence were noted. Performed over the span of pro-ISIL territory, with several thousand prominent individuals, results indicate the strength of tribal connections to drive allegiance vs. more idiosyncratic or other variables.

2. What is the local concept of reconciliation, justice, and trust-building that should be at the forefront of any dialog or approach? With communications analysis or direct engagement, can these culturally specific and culturally accepted concepts be integrated into approach? Human Geography analysis captures local dialect, attributes that indicate context and connotation, and relevant socio-cultural factors. It can support both narrative analysis and

direct engagement at local or national levels. Themes of particular interest would indicate the presence of fear driving the adoption of messages within a location, something that might happen with a higher speed or urgency vs. other themes that are more consistently present within the community and are stronger indicators over overall allegiance, motivation, and disposition. (Sutherlin, 2015)

3. Selection of 'off-ramp' models based on cultural 'touchstones' for Da'esh members. These 'touchstones' will include culturally specific, tribally relevant, or generationally meaningful references that hold significance for group members. They can become folkloric or simply be a shared narrative that may feed biases or define identity roles. The known locations, socio-cultural attributes, and relationships can be used to discover culturally relevant history and resonant narratives-- touchstones. This will increase likelihood of success in de-escalation activities, trust-building, and persuasion based on culturally determined reward/punishment concepts.

Conclusion
Stabilizing the region and degrading ISIL will be an international effort with geopolitical and large network engagements. Ultimately, the activities proposed here will have an impact for families and their homes on the ground in Syria and Iraq; therefore, the perspectives and priorities of these populations should be foregrounded in any approach, including the involvement of key stakeholders from the earliest possible phase, to lay the groundwork and build partnerships for the long-term stabilization process.

Ramsbotham, O., Woodhouse, T., & Miall, T. (Eds.). (2016). *Contemporary Conflict Resolution: The prevention, management and transformation of deadly conflict*. 4th edition. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

Sutherlin, G. (2015). Emerging Technologies: cultural concepts in ICT design for conflict contexts. Uganda: *Voices: Justice and Reconciliation Project Magazine*.