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From the Editor

Welcome to the February 2016 issue of *CTX*. Much has happened in the CT world since our November issue (vol. 5, no. 4) went online. Sadly, radical Islamist terrorism remains on the march, with major attacks on civilians in Paris and Beirut in November, and with ISIS claiming credit for bringing down a Russian passenger plane over Sinai in October. On the second day of the new year, Saudi Arabia threw some cheap oil on the flames of its rivalry with Iran by executing a prominent Shi'a cleric (along with 47 other people), and the two sectarian heavyweights broke off diplomatic relations. Where everybody is someone's enemy, there seem to be few friends.

Most of the articles in this issue, unsurprisingly, have something to do with ISIS. Captain Nicholas Dubaz starts us off, however, with some lessons drawn from his experiences as an intelligence officer and a civil affairs officer in Afghanistan. He describes how US forces can be tempted by technology to substitute quantity of information for quality of analysis, which too often leads to bad decision making. Shifting the work of intelligence to smaller, innovative *edge* organizations may be one solution.

To better understand why US and coalition strategies against ISIS have largely failed, Major Wael Abbas delves into the history of al Qaeda and ISIS. The first mistake, he points out, was to assume that the two organizations were ideologically different, which led the opponents of ISIS to underestimate the threat the group poses. The second major problem is that many coalition members have their own interests in Syria and Iraq and don't necessarily share the United States' goals for the region.

Major Caleb Slayton offers a heartfelt essay on the importance of familiarity with local language and culture for the SOF operator. Drawing on his lifetime of experience living and working in various parts of Africa, he describes how he was able to gain new insights and deepen his knowledge of local cultures by speaking even a few phrases of the local language to his hosts.

Dr. Siamak Naficy and Major Joshua Russo take a look at the human penchant to root for the underdog in unequal contests. What characteristics bestow underdog status? And is it possible for members of a perceived top dog group—in this

case, the Western coalition against ISIS—to use information operations to undermine the "deserving underdog" narrative of the opponent?

The concept of "operations and intelligence fusion" gained importance in Afghanistan as coalition military CT operations gave way to Afghan-led policing and criminal justice procedures. Major Awe (a pseudonym) describes a simple analytical tool, developed by a small SOF task force, which allowed them and their Afghan police partners to base their operational decision making on a clear, customizable intelligence picture.

Instead of our usual CTAP interview, we bring you a panel discussion in which five CT experts address questions about the rise of ISIS, the role ideology plays in its strategy planning, the proper role of the United States and its partners in the fight against the group, and how to counter its robust information operations.

Finally, for the Written Word, Blaire Harms explores a new work by terrorism experts Jessica Stern and J. M. Berger, *ISIS: The State of Terror*, in which the authors contend that ISIS is much more than just a bigger, more successful version of al Qaeda by closely examining the group's message, recruitment targets, and use of social media.

You'll notice we don't have a film review or an ethics or state of the art column in this issue. That's because you didn't write one for us. Did you see a movie about terrorism or insurgency that got you thinking? Have you faced a moral dilemma in the course of your duties that your fellow operators might be able to learn from, or that you're still looking for answers to? Are you creating works of art to help you express your feelings about what you've experienced? Contact me at the email address below, and let's talk. Or you can go ahead and send us what you have, and we'll consider it for publication.

As always, we present some of the latest publications from the Joint Special Operations University in our Publications Announcements. We welcome your letters and comments at CTXeditor@GlobalEcco.org. Keep up on global CT news and comment on articles by "liking" Global ECCO on Facebook. If you are interested in submitting an article for possible publication, send it to CTXSubmit@GlobalEcco.org.

May this new year bring peace to everyone, everywhere. May every angry heart be soothed, may every hungry belly be filled, may every grief and fear find solace.

ELIZABETH SKINNER

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Inside This Issue

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Major Wael Abbas graduated from the American University in Beirut in 1999 with a BCE in civil engineering. In September 2000, MAJ Abbas joined the Lebanese Armed Forces. He was commissioned as a lieutenant engineer upon graduating from the Lebanese Army Military Academy. MAJ Abbas's decorations and awards include the Military Valor Medal and the Medal in the Fight against Terrorism. MAJ Abbas holds a master's degree in Defense Analysis from the US Naval Postgraduate School (NPS).

Major Awe (a pseudonym) is a SOF operations and intelligence officer and an Air Force and Army intelligence analyst. He is also qualified in strategic criminal intelligence and SOF advance collection. MAJ Awe has earned nine overseas tour ribbons including a UN operational tour ribbon for Bosnia, multiple NATO ribbons, and the US Army Commendation Medal. He has worked in various SOF staffs, including ISAF SOF HQ. He is currently enrolled as an international student in the NPS Defense Analysis Department's Special Operations and Irregular Warfare curriculum.

Captain Nicholas R. Dubaz is a US Army civil affairs officer with experience in Fort Bragg, Europe, and Afghanistan as an intelligence and civil affairs officer. He holds BA degrees in international development and political science from Tulane University and is currently an MS candidate in the Defense Analysis Department at NPS.

Brian Fishman is a counterterrorism research fellow with the International Security Program at New America, a Washington, D.C., think tank, and a fellow with the Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) at West Point, where he previously served as the director of research and was a founding editor of the *CTC Sentinel*. Mr. Fishman also built and led Palantir Technologies' disaster relief and crisis response team, which develops technology for humanitarian organizations. His recent book is *Fault Lines in Global Jihad: Organizational, Strategic, and Ideological Fissures* (Routledge, 2011), co-edited with Assaf Moghadam.

Blaire Harms is currently a program coordinator in the Center for Civil-Military Relations at NPS, where she develops and executes workshops on civil-military issues including religious and ethnic violence and managing refugee crises. Ms. Harms served for 21 years in the US Army Military Intelligence Corps. Her previous assignments include multinational military training and exercise planning for US Army Pacific. Ms. Harms has a master's degree in political science from Rutgers University.

Dr. Haroro J. Ingram is a research fellow with the Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs at the Australian National University, Canberra. His Australian Research Council–funded project analyzes insurgent information operations and seeks to "reverse engineer" lessons for counterterrorism and counterinsurgency strategy. Dr. Ingram earned his PhD in political science from Monash University in Melbourne, Australia.

Dr. Casey Lucius was a professor of theater security decision making at the Naval War College Monterey, until 2015, when she resigned to run for US Congress. Prior to that, she designed and taught courses on US foreign policy and Asian studies at NPS. Dr. Lucius served for nearly a decade as a naval intelligence officer and later became operations assistant to the US ambassador in Hanoi, Vietnam. Dr. Lucius earned her PhD in political science from the University of Hawaii in

2007. Publications include *Vietnam's Political Process: How Education Shapes Decision Making* (Routledge, 2009).

Dr. Siamak Naficy is a senior lecturer in Defense Analysis at NPS. As an evolutionary scientist, his interests include cultural anthropology, evolutionary biology, and cognitive and social psychology. His research focuses on social intelligence and social preferences, including the ways in which sociocultural and evolutionary processes shape human adaptive features. Dr. Naficy earned his PhD in anthropology from the University of California, Los Angeles.

Dr. Douglas Ollivant is a managing partner at Mantid International, a consulting firm with a focus on Iraq. He is also the Arizona State University senior fellow in the Future of War project at New America and serves as an advisor to Monument Capital Group, Meridian Hill Strategies, and TranScan LLC. A retired military officer, his last assignment in government was as director for Iraq on the National Security Council during both the George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations. He has spent a total of more than three years in Iraq and Afghanistan, both in and out of uniform.

Ian C. Rice is a US Army officer with over 24 years of active service. He has served in a variety of command, staff, and advisory positions in support of combined operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Korea, all of which concentrated on the challenges of irregular war. He is currently a PhD candidate in political science at the University of California, Los Angeles, where his research focuses on the impacts of military assistance activities on the institutional development of partner militaries and subsequent effects on domestic and regional politics.

Major Joshua Russo graduated from Vanderbilt University in 2003 with a BA in history and Russian. MAJ Russo served for four years on active duty in the Marine Corps and has served for seven years in the Army. During a 2006–2007 deployment to Iraq, he observed the opening stages of the Anbar Awakening movement. Later, in eastern Afghanistan in 2011–2013, MAJ Russo worked with Afghan police forces as they endeavored to integrate security programs within and across provinces. He is an avid student of history and sociology.

Major Caleb Slayton is an active duty officer in the US Air Force, where he serves as director of the AFRICOM Theater course for Special Operations Forces. He completed a master's degree in Middle East and Africa Security Studies from NPS and graduated with honors from the Defense Language Institute in Arabic. Maj Slayton lived for 10 years in various regions of Africa and completed study immersions in Cameroon and Tunisia. He writes on African security issues, religious dynamics, and military operational culture.

Dr. Craig Whiteside is a professor of theater security decision making for the Naval War College Monterey. Dr. Whiteside came to the War College from Washington State University, where he earned a PhD in political science and taught American government and national security affairs. His dissertation investigated the political worldview of the Islamic State of Iraq (2003–2013). Dr. Whiteside was formerly an infantry officer in the US Army and is an Iraq war veteran. He is a graduate of the US Military Academy and the US Army Command and General Staff College.

COVER PHOTO

Militant Islamist fighter waving a flag, cheers as he takes part in a military parade along the streets of Syria's northern Raqqa province. © STRINGER/Reuters/Corbis

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Analysis from the Edge: Information Paralysis and Decision Making in Complexity

CPT Nicholas R. Dubaz, US Army

Throughout the last 13 years of military conflict involving US forces, commanders, planners, and civilian decision makers at all levels have demonstrated an unquenchable thirst for information. Individuals and units have had to respond to multilayered requirements for the collection of information, and dozens of new information-processing tools and systems have been deployed to capture the resulting data. The small civil affairs community alone uses at least seven different, often competing and non-interoperable, systems for civil reconnaissance and information management. The much larger intelligence community, tasked with integrating and analyzing vast amounts of data, uses hundreds of such systems. Most of these systems utilize an event-based, database-enabled ontology in which the human world operates like an engineered machine in accordance with Newtonian physics and modernist philosophy. As a result, such tools, and the people who depend on them, are ill-equipped to grapple with the complex conflicts of the twenty-first century.

Despite an ever-increasing volume of information, we are arguably less capable than ever of dealing with a world composed of complex adaptive systems characterized by their unbounded nature, diversity, and nonlinearity. Indeed, small SOF elements, like their conventional counterparts, are currently bound by processes and models that, in their attempts to provide clarity to the environment, lead only to further confusion. Thirteen years of counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan have demonstrated the peril inherent in this information overload, as well as the potential of small special operations elements to enable the military to move beyond our failed approaches and reach understanding amid complexity.[1] In doing so, commanders and staff, as consumers of information and intelligence, can be freed from reductionist ways of thinking and focus instead on developing the situational awareness that will help them adapt strategies and achieve operational objectives.

Network-Centric Warfare

In recent decades, the explosion in information technology's capabilities, and its increasing availability and application at the tactical level, have promised a revolution in command and control for every echelon of the military. Recent attempts at doctrinal innovation have largely centered on the core problems of the complexity of modern operational environments, the potential and peril of an "informatized" battlefield, and the indefinite nature of the problems our armed forces are being asked to address on a global scale. The concept of *effects-based operations* (EBO), in its various forms, is among the most famous of these attempts. EBO, however, became entangled with reductionist thinking and promised—through system-of-systems analysis and operational net assessment—much more than it could possibly deliver. A revolutionary capability in theory, EBO was supposed to enable information dominance and swift decision making to overwhelm and paralyze an adversary, resulting in his rapid, decisive

COMMANDERS, PLANNERS, AND DECISION MAKERS HAVE AN UNQUENCHABLE THIRST FOR INFORMATION.

MORE DATA...

defeat.[2] Instead, its users are the ones who have found themselves paralyzed by an onslaught of mostly disordered information.

Though the concept of *fog and friction* in warfare has been widely known and understood among military professionals since time immemorial, its implications are best expressed by strategist Carl von Clausewitz in his nineteenth-century treatise *On War*.[3] As he puts it, "Everything in war is simple, but the simplest thing is difficult."[4] Chance events and the sheer difficulty of an endeavor so intrinsic to human nature coalesce into a fog of unpredictability that has covered every battlefield in human history. For Clausewitz, it was the commander and his experience that served as the "oil capable of diminishing this friction."[5] In the twenty-first century, however, military theorists have sought to burn through the fog of war and eliminate the friction by means of information superiority and networked military organizations.

As early as 1970, before the internet and mobile technology became mainstream, futurist and sociologist Alvin Toffler described what he saw as the coming age of information overload and its dangerous implications.[6] The increasing pace of change, including rapid advancements in communication technology and faster means of transportation, was producing "decision stress" and "sensory overstimulation," according to Toffler's book *Future Shock*.[7] This perceived loss of control was resulting in cognitive withdrawal, decision paralysis, and the inability to properly use information.[8] *Future Shock* and several other works in which Toffler and his wife Heidi Adelaide Toffler outlined their ideas about the future of society proved highly influential in the development of new thinking as military strategists attempted to address the effects of overabundant information on the battlefield. Other thinkers, both inside and outside the military, have looked for ways to channel the rapid pace of change and the increasing flow of information into military success.

Network-centric warfare, as this new form of information-enabled warfare came to be known, has many parents and nearly as many interpretations. The ideas and writings of the late Vice Admiral Arthur K. Cebrowski are particularly influential. Cebrowski, inspired by Air Force Colonel John Boyd's theories of decision making in aerial combat, postulated that it was not information superiority alone that translated into victory, but the ability to transform that information into "action and behavior options" faster and more accurately than an opponent.[9] Unlike others in the network-centric warfare community who believed that technology alone would guarantee information superiority, Cebrowski understood that effectiveness was less about technology and more about information management: shared perspectives and perceptions would enable the military to better utilize the information at hand.[10] In other words, "information superiority required more than simply knowing a lot. It required knowing more of the right things, accurately and in time to act."[11]

In the decades since Cebrowski identified the problem, modern militaries nevertheless have only moved further away from a solution. We are bombarded with more and more data but develop less and less understanding. Something is missing—something that ties the information together and renders it meaningful and accessible for those who need to use it.

Information Paralysis or Analytical Malfeasance?

Few fields within the military manage a greater volume of raw data and information than signals intelligence. The supply of metadata, databases, tools, analytical methods, and systems available to analysts seeking every "piece of the puzzle" is virtually endless. According to a 2011 *New York Times* article, 1,600 percent more data has become available to all levels of the military since 11 September 2001.[12] With the increases in signals intelligence technology and adaptation to modern information communication technologies, the data available to intelligence analysts increased by orders of magnitude compared with the general military forces. The outcome of this explosion in the volume and accessibility of information, however, is a flawed sense of understanding as nearly every echelon conducts its own analysis of the same databases through the filter of its own particular slant or interest.

Chechen Ghosts

On my first tour in Afghanistan from May 2007 to August 2008, an issue of particular interest at the division (Regional Command-East [RC-East]) and theater (International Security Assistance Force [ISAF]) levels was "foreign fighter" support to the Taliban and al Qaeda. The priority intelligence requirements of the RC-East commander, along with nearly every RC-East Joint Intelligence Support Element (JISE) analytical product, focused to some extent on the foreign fighter issue. On one occasion, the JISE used information from a particular database to produce a map of a supposed Chechen presence along the Afghan-Pakistan border in Kunar, Nuristan, and Nangarhar provinces. While there is no public evidence of post–Taliban-era Chechen fighters in Afghanistan, rumors of their existence consistently find their way into both intelligence and open source reporting.[13] The reputation of Chechens as fearless fighters and capable leaders, combined with both the presence of lighter skinned, Caucasian-looking individuals on the battlefield and circular reporting by inexperienced human intelligence collectors, have contributed to such rumors, provoking an unwarranted special interest in Chechens among US military commanders and staffs.

This particular map, which indicated that there was an extensive Chechen presence across eastern Afghanistan, was briefed at a nightly commander's update. The commanding general immediately requested additional information from the brigade commander responsible for this area, and the brigade commander, caught off guard, turned to his intelligence officer demanding to know how such an extensive Chechen presence could have been missed by his own intelligence staff. Upon hearing of this incident from the Brigade S-2, I attempted to corroborate the map and analysis produced by the JISE. Using the same tools and database, I queried all references to "Chechens" in the same geographical region and produced an identical map. A deeper look at the underlying data and geographic information system software the analyst used to produce the original map, however, revealed that any connection to Chechens was completely specious. Another source was an internal Afghan National Army report, which said that American advisors had discussed the possible presence of Chechens. In most instances, the record behind the data point explicitly *excluded* the possibility of a Chechen presence.

In the end, not a single report associated with the map could be interpreted as evidence that Chechens were in eastern Afghanistan. But even if some of

BUT LESS UNDERSTANDING

the data points had proved relevant, there remains the absurdity of accepting, without question, the existence of an extensive network of Chechens operating as a highly insular insurgent group on the Afghan-Pakistani frontier and then sharing it as intelligence in a routine commander's update.

On another occasion, a different analytical section nearly persuaded a commander to conduct a direct action operation on a public call office—a telephone in a storefront, something quite common in Afghanistan and other developing countries—because the analysts interpreted the activity of the telephone's hundreds of users to indicate that the office was a key actor in multiple insurgent networks. On the surface, these appear to be simply stories of lazy analysts who could not be bothered to follow even the most basic procedures of intelligence analysis, or of commanders seeking to micromanage their units. These are, however, just a few examples among many similar ones that arose throughout my many months of service in Afghanistan as an intelligence officer and my additional tours as a civil affairs officer.

The same problems manifested at the division, ISAF Joint Command, and ISAF headquarters levels, as well as in the various special operations intelligence headquarters. Clearly, the problem was more than just an ineffective and poorly trained and led intelligence team. In fact, as an intelligence officer, I estimate that I spent well over half of my time and analytical energy preventing others from making operational mistakes based on flawed understanding gained in an environment of information paralysis. Intelligence sections at the division, Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force, and higher headquarters levels simply did what they knew best: pulling records from databases, placing dots on maps, and claiming insight. More information, paradoxically, meant shallower analysis: they had all the information in the world, but no context in which to apply it.[14]

Edge Organizations and Constrained Organizations

These intelligence analysis sections failed largely because they were situated in highly modernist organizations that are poorly suited to the task of effectively using all that information to which they have access. *Modernism*, in this sense, is a philosophy that maintains that all problems can be solved (*progressivism*); that all causal relationships are knowable (*logical positivism*); that variables can be

separated (*reductionism*); and, finally, that data can provide evidence of truth (*empiricism*).[15] Linearity, which assumes the proportionality, additivity, replication, and demonstrability of causes and effects, is embedded in this philosophy, and to a certain extent in human nature.[16] Within this flawed modernist structure, databases continue to be the military's primary method of categorizing information and attempting to share it across echelons to capitalize on the theorized promise of information superiority.

In Afghanistan, there are dozens of databases for intelligence and operational information that sit on no less than eight discrete networks operating at multiple classification and access restriction levels. Analytical sections at each echelon within the rigid hierarchical military structure pull records from these databases and attempt to reconstruct understanding, as if the whole of knowledge could be assembled from the parts contained in the database. These event-driven, database-focused processes assume that the world operates by the linear principle of additivity—that is, the whole is equal to the sum of its parts.[17] According to Thomas Czerwinski, writing in an early study of nonlinearity in warfare, "This promotes and legitimizes reductionism, the practice of taking a complicated and large problem and breaking it into more manageable pieces, analyzing the constituent parts, and arriving at a conclusion."[18] We know, however, that the problems our military forces are being asked to address are non-linear in nature and cannot be understood in pieces pulled from database records.

> **EDGE ORGANIZATIONS INTERACT FREELY AMONG ALL ACTORS AND OPERATE ON A TRUST-BASED MODEL.**

Power to the Edge, a study of new forms of military organization, command, and control for structurally complex, nonlinear, network-centric warfare, proposes a new type of organizational design known as an *edge organization*.[19] Edge organizations are so named because they operate at the "edge" of a theoretical command-and-control space that is diametrically opposite to traditional military organizations. That edge, depicted in figures 1 and 2, is one of unconstrained interaction, devolved decision making, and broad information access and dissemination.[20] Figure 1 illustrates the distinction between the information sharing and control paradigms of edge organizations, which interact freely with all actors and operate on a trust-based model, and the traditional control-based model of hierarchical military organizations. Figure 2 illustrates the shift in operational context from the well-structured problems posed by the state-on-state confrontations of the Cold

War era, for which many modern militaries were designed, to the highly unstructured "wicked" problems presented by the fluid conflicts of the present. While edge organizations struggle with certain weaknesses, particularly inefficiencies in bureaucratized, familiar, routine processes, they are more agile than other types of organizations.[21] Most critically, as the authors of the concept note, "Edge organizations are particularly well suited to deal with uncertainty and unfamiliarity, because they make more of their relevant knowledge, experience, and expertise available."[22]

For a military organization, power and effectiveness are "a function of the collective means and opportunity possessed by the individuals in the organization with respect to their ability to accomplish the ... minimum essential capabilities required for military operations."[25] Chief among these capabilities is *sensemaking*, the ability to understand the fundamental nature of a problem the organization is tasked with addressing.[26] Edge organizations are uniquely situated to develop understanding, with their unconstrained ability to engage all actors in a system and achieve information superiority. While no US Department of Defense organization lives up to the idealized model of an edge organization, small SOF units exhibit many of the edge characteristics. However capable these organizations may be at a tactical level, the knowledge and information processes and procedures of the US military, including SOF headquarters, nevertheless are not optimized to take advantage of special operations units' ability to develop understanding and inform adaptive decision making at the operational and strategic levels.

The 2010 report *Fixing Intel: A Blueprint for Making Intelligence Relevant in Afghanistan*, authored in part by then–ISAF chief of intelligence Major General Michael Flynn and commonly known as the "Flynn report," is an influential and oft-cited response to some of the well-documented failings of intelligence in Afghanistan. The report, from the Center for a New American Security, has many recommendations but is at its core an attempt to produce better intelligence through "select teams of analysts ... empowered to move between field elements, much like journalists, to visit collectors of information at the grassroots level and carry that information back with them to the regional command level."[27] The purpose of this approach was to help deemphasize analysis that focused solely on the enemy and instead foster a holistic appraisal of the operational environment—something that was absent at all levels of analysis. Other academic approaches to information overload and poor-quality analysis recommend technical and organizational adaptations such as the "pre-processing of most physical sensor data and displaying the processed data as information in a variety of formats and media," or "assisting in the identification of source perspectives and bias."[28] Despite the fact that the Flynn report correctly identified a problem, the transformed analytical enterprise described in the report's recommendations still addresses a human problem through marginal organizational adaptations and leaves the fundamental obstacle intact: analysts using fragments of information to conduct analysis without the necessary context.

Figure 1: Command and Control Approach[23]

Figure 2: Command and Control Problem Space[24]

> SMALL SOF UNITS EXHIBIT MANY OF THE EDGE CHARACTERISTICS.

Analysis from the Edge in Afghanistan

The 2014 presidential elections in Afghanistan were to be the ultimate test of the capabilities of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) following the
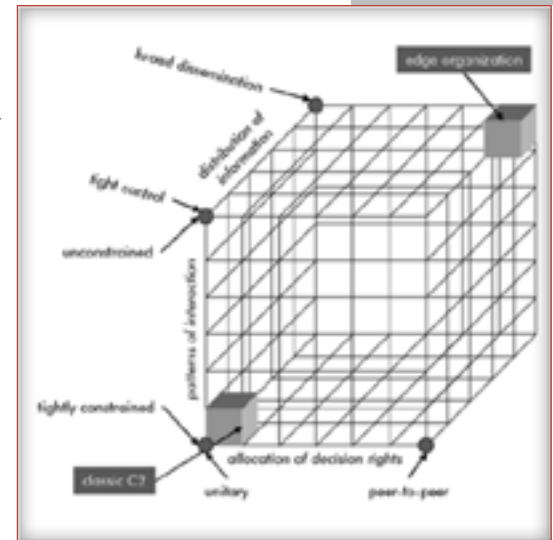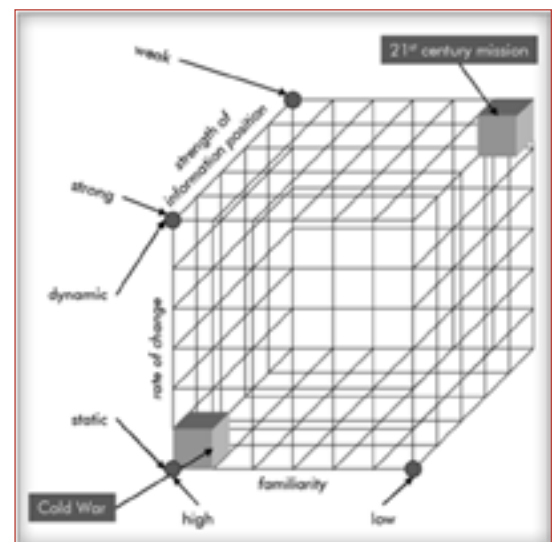
transition of security responsibilities from ISAF. ISAF was present in fewer locations across Afghanistan than at any time since the early days of the conflict. No longer would US military power be on call to support the ANSF in combat, and no longer would Afghan government ministries have access to coalition funds or equipment for tasks they could—or should—accomplish on their own. The decisive nature of the elections and the highly risk-averse tendencies of coalition military commanders meant, however, that ISAF forces would not allow the ANSF to fail if the Afghans had exhausted—or believed they had exhausted—all internal means to deal with problems. This, in turn, required the establishment of an elaborate system for identifying potential failures and responding rapidly to shortfalls.

The data demands of the various echelons of the ISAF hierarchy and the US State Department were immense, covering nearly every aspect of the election process down to the polling station level. In just the small province of Khost, information was to be gathered and processed by Afghanistan's independent election commission at 729 polling stations before the election and in real time during both the polling itself and the ballot recovery process. Dozens of spreadsheets were to be completed, and multiple reports had to be submitted on a weekly or event-driven basis. ISAF headquarters required unnecessarily detailed information on security force disposition, as well as ballot recovery routes and methods, while the State Department had an insatiable thirst for every piece of information related to female voters, female candidates, and election observers. The security transition, combined with pervasive risk-aversion and force reductions, meant, however, that these operations had to be conducted in a highly constrained environment where getting access to the required information was more difficult than ever. Neither US nor coalition military forces would directly observe the election, or have access to the government facilities where the election administrators were located, as they had in previous elections. It was necessary, therefore, to find new means to develop situational understanding during the election.

A standard organization, operating in a traditional, highly constrained command and control environment, would find itself unable to deal with such obstacles. My civil affairs team, however, were able to leverage our position as an edge organization to overcome the constraints. Working horizontally, we immersed ourselves in the Afghan National Army unit we were tasked to advise and, in conjunction with our Afghan counterparts, began to build networks of trust among the provincial and district governments through careful joint planning, rehearsals, and informal relationship building in the months approaching the election. We also developed close relationships with several highly connected non-governmental organizations across the province by offering to share information, coordinate efforts, and address their concerns while drawing on their local experience and knowledge. Most critically, we

Candidates on the 2014 presidential campaign trail

directly engaged with many highly respected leaders in the province, holding regular meetings with the chairmen of influential religious scholars', peace, and veterans' councils. Vertically, we connected with relevant individuals within the State Department and advisors in the ministries in Kabul, as well as non-governmental and international organizations across the regions, thus maintaining open communication outside the traditional hierarchies.

Outside of these formal networks, we developed extensive social media contacts and closely followed both the formal and social electronic media environment within and around the province. The extensive cellular network that extended even into areas of near-total Haqqani or Taliban control, along with the region's growing internet penetration, gave us access to previously denied areas of the province and allowed us to gather near real-time information from a significant new portion of the population.

Our success was made possible because we understood our status as an edge organization and were able to aggregate information and experience through extended, flattened networks of trust. Although we operated, technically speaking, within a traditional hierarchy as a team attached to a military organization, our position as the only element dedicated to engaging the civil component of the operational environment allowed us to expand our approach to the problem. We were able, moreover, to assist our Afghan counterparts in operating as an edge organization themselves. Already situated in their own country and comfortable within the shared culture and language, they had far more ability than we ever would to develop situational understanding and networks of trust beyond the walls of their bases.

In the days leading up to the election and on election day itself, our network offered real-time access to information across the province, and our experience informed decision making at multiple levels through a credible understanding of the environment. While we could not know everything, we also knew that we didn't need to; our network and experience enabled us to discern exactly what information was important and what was not. Time after time, we refuted erroneous reports from higher echelons and external reporting agencies, thereby preventing unnecessary and potentially dangerous coalition intervention in what had to be a purely Afghan process. Most importantly, we conducted analysis from the edge, combining our experience with the combined knowledge of our trust network to provide reliable information, analyzed in context, to decision makers as they needed it.

Conclusion

The aim of achieving information superiority in warfare is to both find clarity within a complex operational environment and enable commanders to guide the disparate elements that must work in concert to achieve operational objectives. Current military processes do not provide commanders and staffs with the tools and conceptual frameworks they need to operate effectively in a complex and dynamic world. To the contrary, standard information processing, analysis, and "sensemaking" arise from modernist and linear thinking, which not only lead us further from clarity but promise to reveal causal relationships that are in fact unknowable.

At the conclusion of Book 1 of *On War*, Clausewitz compares the value of experience to the human eye in a dark room: as it "dilates its pupil, draws in the little light there is, by degrees imperfectly distinguishes objects and at last sees them quite accurately, so it is in war with the experienced soldier, while the novice only encounters pitch-dark night."[29] Analysis from the edge, like the pupil of the eye, can aid military forces to see through the darkness of a complex and non-linear era of competition and conflict. There will be many eyes on the battlefields of the present and future, in the form of small special operations units. The persistent challenge is to develop effective processes and systems that can capture these units' understanding of ambiguous operational environments and use it to inform operational and strategic decision making. ◈

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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NOTES

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The US-Led Coalition against ISIS: Strategic Difficulties and Political Will

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Tʜᴇ ʟᴀᴛᴇsᴛ ᴛᴇʀʀᴏʀɪsᴛ ᴀᴛᴛᴀᴄᴋs ʙʏ ᴛʜᴇ ᴠɪᴏʟᴇɴᴛ ᴇxᴛʀᴇᴍɪsᴛ ɢʀᴏᴜᴘ calling itself the "Islamic State," aka ɪsɪs, which hit Paris and Beirut in November 2015, have initiated a new wave of arguments about the effectiveness of the strategy pursued by the ᴜs-led coalition to fight the terrorist organization. These successful attacks underscore the fact that more than a year after the creation of the coalition, ɪsɪs has not only proven its resilience, but has also demonstrated the ability to enhance its capabilities, widen its operational reach, and increase its international influence enough to threaten Western countries with effective terrorist attacks.

The tendency to underestimate ɪsɪs arises from a misunderstanding of its ideology and the misconception that the extremists present only a regional threat. These mistaken views have influenced the level of commitment to the fight demonstrated by the United States and its allies, and is one reason for the failure of the strategy adopted by the United States and its coalition allies to achieve decisive victories.

The Rise of the "Caliphate"

In the aftermath of its sudden military successes in Syria and Iraq, the violent jihadist organization known as "al Qaeda in Iraq" (ᴀǫɪ) declared a caliphate under the name of the "Islamic State" in early summer 2014. When the group's leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, appeared in a broadcast from the Great Mosque

> THE TENDENCY TO UNDER-ESTIMATE ISIS ARISES FROM A MISUNDER-STANDING OF ITS IDEOLOGY.

A boy poses while showing one of the fake U.S. 100 dollar banknotes dropped by Syrian army jets in the Douma neighborhood of Damascus. The note depicts the Islamic State's leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and al-Nusra Front's leader Abu Mohammed al-Joulani.

A US soldier replaces an old photo with a newer image showing the body of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (June 2008).

Iraqi Finance Minister al-Issawi attends an anti-government demonstration (February 2013).

Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri (November 2001)

in Mosul to lead prayers on the first Friday of Ramadan (4 July 2014), he publicly assumed the title of *Caliph*—the political and religious leader of all Muslims.[1] The terrorist organization had originally formed as *Jama'at al-Tawhid wal Jihad* under Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, several years before the 2003 American invasion of Iraq. It was renamed al Qaeda in Iraq after al-Zarqawi declared allegiance to al Qaeda's leader, Osama bin Laden, in October 2004. Al-Zarqawi was killed by a coalition air strike in June 2006, and in October, AQI joined with other jihadist groups to form the "Islamic State of Iraq" (ISI) under the leadership of an Iraqi, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi. ISI kept its allegiance to al Qaeda.

During that period, the US Joint Special Operations Command developed a network of special forces groups to fight the insurgencies, mainly ISI, in northwestern Iraq.[2] The United States also had an important role in the formation of the Sunni *Sahwa* (Awakening) councils in Diyala and Anbar provinces, which were able to expel ISI from the region in 2007.[3] The US strategy resulted in the death or capture of thousands of insurgents during that period, but the biggest setback for ISI came in April 2010, when Iraqi and American forces killed ISI's top two leaders, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi and Abu Ayyub al-Masri.[4] The new leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, inherited an organization in desperate condition.

The start of the Syrian uprising in March 2011 presented an opportunity for ISI to recover. Within the first year, the Syrian regime lost control over many areas of the country, especially in northern Syria. ISI, which was still part of al Qaeda, started sending fighters to Syria under the leadership of Abu Mohammad al-Julani.[5] These militants, calling their organization *Jabhat al-Nusra*, increased their numbers and military capabilities by recruiting Syrian civilians from their areas of control along with defectors from the Syrian army. On 9 April 2013, al-Baghdadi announced the merging of ISI and Jabhat al-Nusra under the name of the "Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant" (ISIL or ISIS).[6] In a statement issued the next day, however, al-Julani rejected this merger and reaffirmed his allegiance to al Qaeda and its leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, who declared that ISIS was created without his permission and that ISI and al-Nusra would continue to work separately under al Qaeda's control. Al Qaeda publicly renounced any ties with ISIS in February 2014.[7] During that period, ISIS continued its expansion by recruiting new fighters and integrating other jihadi groups, including some that split from al-Nusra.[8] On

1 January 2014, ISIS re-invaded the Iraqi city of Fallujah from across the Syrian border, and by June, it had dramatically expanded its control to Mosul without much resistance from the Iraqi Army.[9]

What caused this dramatic collapse on the Iraqi front? In retrospect, after the final American withdrawal from Iraq in December 2011, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's government failed to maintain the Sunni support it had gained from the *Sahwa* councils. The government's policies were regarded by most Iraqi Sunnis as sectarian, authoritarian, and aimed at politically targeting and marginalizing them.[10] In December 2012, following the arrest of the bodyguards of the Sunni finance minister Rafi al-Issawi, protests started in Anbar and then spread to many Sunni areas in Ninewa, Kirkuk, Diyala, and parts of Baghdad. The protests remained generally peaceful until Iraqi security forces attacked a protest camp in Huwija, killing 20 protestors. This incident caused a shift towards more violent protests in most Sunni provinces, including calls for armed resistance. On 30 December 2013, Iraqi forces tried to clear a protest camp in Ramadi in the aftermath of an attack that killed 24 Iraqi officers in the Horan valley. This resulted in further violent confrontations, which forced al-Maliki to promise the withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Ramadi and Fallujah. Consequently, ISIS was able to reinvade Fallujah with relative impunity. In other words, the Sunni Awakening that helped defeat ISI in 2007 and 2008 enabled the rise of ISIS in 2013 and 2014, as Sunni Iraqis revolted against al-Maliki and the apparent excesses of the Iraqi security forces.

The decline of al Qaeda has also contributed to the rise of ISIS. Before 2011, the decline resulted mainly from the arrests and assassinations of many of al Qaeda's operational leaders; the defeat of al Qaeda franchises in Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Algeria; and other setbacks, including the need for the group to defend its reputation and actions to Muslims.[11] Moreover, al Qaeda's main leaders had to take extreme security measures to protect themselves from being traced and killed, which forced them to limit their movements and communications and reduced their ability to manage and control the organization and its affiliates.[12] After the assassination of Osama bin Laden in May 2011 and the declaration of al-Zawahiri as the new leader of al Qaeda, the weakness became more apparent. Many questioned al-Zawahiri's ability to control the organization and maintain its unity, especially after his failure to resolve the disputes between al-Nusra and ISIS.[13] Others considered al-Zawahiri to lack the charisma to influence new groups and increase recruitment.[14]

Thus, the rise of the Islamic State has three main causes:

1. The new Sunni uprising against what many perceived to be deliberate marginalization and political targeting by an overtly sectarian Iraqi government under Nouri al-Maliki, combined with the surprising incompetence of the Iraqi Army;[15]
2. The opportunity for infiltration by radical groups that the Syrian conflict offered after 2011, and the unlimited and unconditional support that many regional countries gave to a fragmented Syrian opposition increasingly dominated by Islamist militants (the number of Salafi-jihadist groups increased by 58 percent from 2010 to 2013);[16] and
3. The decline of al Qaeda and Ayman al-Zawahiri's failure to be an effective and powerful replacement for bin Laden—especially his inability to prevent fissures in his organization.

An Ideological Comparison between ISIS and Al Qaeda

Reflecting on the events that led to the declaration of the caliphate in July 2014, it is clear that the success of ISIS has been the result of tactical and strategic choices in which religion and ideology had minor roles. In an October 2014 report, the UN Security Council considered al Qaeda and ISIS to be fairly harmonious in their ideology and stated that the "al-Qaeda core and [ISIS] pursue similar strategic goals, albeit with tactical differences regarding sequencing and substantive differences about leadership."[17] As was discussed earlier, none of the statements issued by al-Nusra, ISIS, and al-Zawahiri in the dispute over the declaration of ISIS showed any ideological friction. Moreover, even the apparent differences between ISIS and al Qaeda on many levels—political, military, and public—are purely strategic and tactical and are not based on ideology. This similarity in ideology is important because it shows that even if the regional and sectarian strategies initially pursued by ISIS differ from those of al Qaeda, policy makers should not underestimate ISIS's threat or be surprised by its latest actions (the downing of a Russian plane above Sinai on 31 October 2015, the suicide bombings in Beirut on 12 November 2015, and the attacks in Paris on 13 November 2015), which show that ISIS strategists are able to shift between regional and global jihad and benefit from the support of networks that were previously related to al Qaeda.

Even if ISIS seems to exceed al Qaeda with its use of extreme violence and brutality, especially in the posting of high quality videos on various media that show hostages being viciously beheaded or burned alive, this remains within the context of strategic rather than ideological

differences between the two organizations. The shocking violence used by ISIS can be traced back to the days of ISI's founder Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who was a major advocate of violent attacks against civilians of other sects, especially against the Shi'a population in Iraq. Although disputes among jihadist and other Islamic scholars over the extreme use of violence and the killing of civilians were based on ideology, these disputes had a more strategic context between al Qaeda leaders and al-Zarqawi. While al-Zarqawi did not differ from other al Qaeda leaders, including al-Zawahiri, in his view of Shi'a as unbelievers and heretics, he differed on the strategic effectiveness of attacks against the Shi'a community. On the one hand, al-Zarqawi defended the use of suicide bombings against the Shi'a because he saw them as a necessary tactic to unify the Sunnis. On the other hand, al-Zawahiri considered "these attacks, even if permissible from a jurisprudential viewpoint," to have had a negative effect on Muslim public support and the general image of Islam. Al-Zawahiri also argued that the attacks against the Shi'a diverted attention from the main enemy—the United States—and opened too many fronts.[18]

Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab and the Roots of Extremism

As noted earlier, ISIS's split from al Qaeda was not based on ideological differences—even the declaration of an "Islamic State" does not represent an important ideological difference between the two groups. This can be better explained by discussing the caliphate from the religious perspectives of Wahhabism and Salafism.

The Arabic term *salaf* (ancient one) refers to the first three generations of followers of the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions (*al-salaf al-salih*)—the original Muslims. Until recently, Salafist teachings were fundamentalist and

> " WAHHABIS AND SALAFISTS BELIEVE THAT OTHER MUSLIMS ARE LIVING IN A STATE OF IGNORANCE SIMILAR TO PRE-ISLAM. "

non-violent, focusing on the need to return to Islam's root texts while rejecting modern relativism.[19] Although Wahhabis—adherents to the fundamentalist theological movement founded by the Sunni cleric Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792)—consider themselves to be true Salafists, other Muslims identify them by their Wahhabist ideology.[20] Wahhabis share several Salafist beliefs, including the rejection of common Muslim practices—such as instituting schools of Islamic jurisprudence and the practice of visiting tombs and shrines—as innovative and polytheistic. More importantly, both sects believe that other Muslims have lost the true path and are living in a state of ignorance similar to pre-Islam (*jahiliyya*).

Wahhabism and Salafism differ, however, in their political views and their view of the ruling imam. On the one hand, ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab called on Arabs to fight the Ottoman Caliphate and form an independent state, and consequently legitimized rebellion against the legal imam. On the other hand, the Salafist ideology is apolitical in nature, and its adherents follow the doctrine of *al-wala' wal-bara'* (loyalty towards the Prophet and prevention of heresy and unbelief). For this reason, Salafists have preferred to live in sequestered communities where they are protected from innovation and corruption. Traditional Salafists also reject the oath of allegiance (*bay'a*) to a temporal ruler for fear that this leader might commit sinful acts. This contradicts al Qaeda's declaration of allegiance to the "commander of the faithful" and ISIS's allegiance to a caliph.

Earlier Salafists argued that Muslims should not revolt against their rulers even if those rulers were unjust, and clearly considered the creation of an Islamic state to be unnecessary.[21] The Wahhabist roots of their modern jihadist religious ideology, however, have given these groups a different point of view.[22] Images and videos that were released from areas under ISIS control clearly show the leaders' commitment to the Wahhabist notion of a caliphate, while the schools that they opened in Syria used Wahhabi religious books from Saudi Arabia. Other videos showed Wahhabi texts in an official ISIS missionary van.[23] Moreover, while al-Baghdadi has relied on former Iraqi officers for military operations, he leaves areas like religious guidance and media production to non-Iraqis, including many Saudis.[24] Other Saudis were appointed as judges, including all of the twelve judges that were appointed in the Syrian city of ar-Raqqa in November 2014.[25]

As for al Qaeda, even though bin Laden was probably affected by the ideologies of Sayyid Qutb and Abdullah Azzam, he nevertheless followed a path of jihad that differentiated him from both of them.[26] While Qutb spread an anti-American narrative, he did not call for fighting the United States.[27] Moreover, al-Zawahiri, who was a true follower of Qutb, failed to influence bin Laden's ideologies and was accused by his former companions in the al-Jihad organization of following bin Laden rather than the reverse. Azzam probably mentored bin Laden and convinced him to follow the path of jihad, but there is no evidence that Azzam influenced bin Laden's religious beliefs. On the contrary, while Azzam rejected attacking Muslims and opposed targeting noncombatants as a tool of war, bin Laden issued a *fatwa* in 1998 that called for the killing of all Americans, regardless of their religion. In addition, bin Laden accused the Saudi king of being an apostate and called for a war against the Saudi regime.

Signaling their ideological link to Wahhabism, some Saudi clerics agreed with bin Laden that the US attack on Iraq in 1991, launched from Saudi Arabia, violated their belief that non-Muslim troops must never enter Saudi Arabia.[28] Saudi

> " THE SCHOOLS ISIS OPENED IN SYRIA USED WAHHABI RELIGIOUS BOOKS FROM SAUDI ARABIA. "

Former Egyptian President
Mohamed Morsi

clerics also hesitated to denounce the creation of an "Islamic state" after it was declared by ISIS in June 2014, and the Saudi king had to publicly urge them to do so.[29] In 2001, bin Laden "called on Muslims everywhere to come to Afghanistan and engage in the jihad led by the 'commander of the faithful,' Mullah Muhammad Omar."[30] The title "commander of the faithful" was specifically given to the first four caliphs in Islam. This was similar to the call of ISIS spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani for all Muslims to vow allegiance to the "caliph" Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and join the troops of the Islamic State.[31] He, like bin Laden in 1998, also called for the killing of all Americans, military or civilians.[32]

The two organizations are similarly disparaging of other Sunni Islamic groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, and political participation in general. After the Egyptian army overthrew Egyptian president Mohamed Morsi, a member of the Islamic Brotherhood, in 2013, ISIS declared that Islamists should choose "the ammunition boxes over the ballot boxes" and called the Muslim Brotherhood "a secular party in Islamic clothes."[33] Similarly, al Qaeda viewed elections as heresy and preached that only violence could achieve political change.[34] While some scholars consider these ideas to be part of Salafism in general, others specifically relate them to Wahhabi ideology.

> ISIS DECLARED THAT ISLAMISTS SHOULD CHOOSE "THE AMMUNITION BOXES OVER THE BALLOT BOXES."

By revolting against those they consider to be unjust rulers and waging war against unbelievers, both ISIS and al Qaeda follow the teachings of original Wahhabism. The religious educational system adopted by many Saudi clerics, based on the teachings of 'Abd al-Wahhab, will probably continue to produce radical Islamists similar to the leaders of al Qaeda and ISIS. Moreover, the declaration of an Islamic state and vows of allegiance to a religious leader are specifically related to Wahhabism and not to any other Salafist group, which would indicate that both ISIS and al Qaeda have been loyal to their Wahhabi ideologies. Consequently, the tendency of the United States and its allies to regard ISIS as a regional problem caused by the sectarian conflicts in Syria and Iraq, rather than as a threat comparable to al Qaeda, is far from realistic and is one of the reasons that Western strategies to fight ISIS have proven inadequate. The similarities in the ideologies of ISIS and al Qaeda explain their similar strategies, including the use of extreme violence, targeting of civilians, and global jihad.

ISIS: From Regional Strategies to Global Jihad

While al Qaeda focused on global jihad from its earliest days, ISIS "pursued a strategy of establishing and consolidating a political entity in regions where the former state no longer functions or can be expelled. It is in this respect a fundamentally political rather than religious project."[35] ISIS initially focused on controlling territories that could be defended and that were rich with the resources needed for establishing a state.[36] It has utilized different tactics in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, it has tended to seize territories that were already lost by the Syrian regime while avoiding extensive battles with the regime's forces; at the same time, it has expanded its territories at the expense of other rebel groups.[37] ISIS has proved to be more pragmatic in Iraq, by forming alliances with Sunni militant groups related to the former Ba'ath regime.[38] ISIS also assassinated Sunni tribal leaders who had allied with the United States during the Awakening in 2007, as a way to preemptively prevent any future Sunni cooperation with the United States or the Iraqi government.[39]

The leaders of ISIS initially avoided the strategic mistakes of al Qaeda, whose focus on the global jihad contributed to its decline. To the contrary, ISIS leaders have preferred to follow in the footsteps of their founder, al-Zarqawi, by focusing on a strategy of fighting the Shi'a government in Iraq and the Alawi regime in Syria. This strategy has more popularity within Sunni communities than global jihad and can achieve higher levels of recruitment. For that reason, declaring a Sunni "Islamic State" that is contending against two Shi'a regimes, both of which are viewed as oppressing their Sunni populations, can achieve wide Sunni support. Moreover, ISIS declared a caliph of Arab origins—al-Baghdadi—whose ancestry is claimed to go back to the Prophet's Quraysh tribe and who boasts a PhD in traditional Islam from the Islamic

Trucks carrying oil products cross Syria-Turkey border

University of Baghdad.[40] This step had more legitimacy and a stronger appeal to Sunni Muslims than did al Qaeda's allegiance to an Afghan leader, Mullah Omar, whose background might be what prevented Osama bin Laden from declaring the Caliphate himself.

As ISIS expanded in Iraq throughout 2014, it gained control over much of the Sunni provinces of Ninewa and Anbar, over portions of Salah ad-Din, and over the major cities of Mosul, Baiji, Tikrit, Hawija, Fallujah, Tal Afar, Sinjar, and areas close to Baghdad. In August 2014, the United States conducted air strikes that allowed the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and the Kurdish militia, known as the Peshmerga, to recapture the Mosul Dam and the town of Armeli. Nevertheless, the ISF managed to slow ISIS's advance only with the support of Iranian armed forces and Iraqi Shi'a militias.[41] In Syria, ISIS initially controlled about 35 percent of Syrian territory, mostly in the northeast, including six of Syria's 10 oil fields.[42] ISIS declared the city of ar-Raqqa to be the capital of its self-declared caliphate. It also controlled most of the Syrian province of Deir ez-Zor and made many attempts to expand into Syrian Kurdish territories in the Hasakah province and into Syrian opposition territories in the northwest.[43]

Analyst Eckart Woertz suggests that "ISIS is not a mere terror organization, but an insurgency that holds a classic 'Clear, Hold, Build' strategy. The aim is state building, as the very name ISIS suggests."[44] The group has a professional organizational structure with regional governors, a war cabinet, and departments responsible for media production, finance, recruitment, education, prisons, and religious guidance.[45] Now holding a large amount of territory with about 8 million people in it, ISIS provides a number of social services in addition to financing its military operations and paying the salaries of its fighters. It is believed that the main source of its current revenues is oil, followed by looting, local taxation, and financing from rich Gulf donors. Moreover, ISIS benefited indirectly from the Gulf countries' funding of rebel groups in Syria, many of which later joined ISIS.[46]

Yet with the shift to global jihad, ISIS might be following a path that proved self-destructive for al Qaeda. After the 9/11 attacks, al Qaeda lost its sanctuary in Afghanistan and has since struggled for resources and recruitment. By conducting terrorist attacks against countries that had not yet fully committed to fighting against it, as was the case with Turkey and France, ISIS is forcing these

> "ISIS IS AN INSURGENCY THAT HOLDS A CLASSIC 'CLEAR, HOLD, BUILD' STRATEGY. THE AIM IS STATE BUILDING."

countries into more active and effective participation. While France previously avoided conducting airstrikes on ISIS positions to prevent weakening their ability to fight against the Syrian government, it launched extensive airstrikes after the November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris.[47]

Though the leaders of ISIS may understand the negative consequences of following the path of global jihad, they may have been pressured onto this path because of the losses they incurred in October and November 2015, after Russian forces launched a major intervention in support of the Syrian regime (mainly in Aleppo and Deir ez-Zour). At the same time, ISIS lost important areas in Iraq's Baiji and Sinjar provinces to Kurdish and Iraqi forces with the support of US airstrikes.[48] The main goal of ISIS's attacks on Western and Russian targets could be a desperate attempt to prove the organization's resilience and increase the levels of recruitment and support coming in by showing that it can still take the initiative and surprise its enemies with successful attacks. Nevertheless, the losses incurred by ISIS so far remain limited, and even if the shift to global jihad does prove counterproductive, ISIS still may not be easily defeated in the near future.

This will be especially true if the Western coalition's strategy, which has proven to be totally ineffective at countering ISIS for more than a year, does not change. It is worth remembering that al Qaeda was deprived of its safe haven in Afghanistan only because the United States committed sufficient resources and the direct involvement of US ground forces to the fight.

> " THE COALITION IS FORMED OF COUNTRIES WITH DIFFERENT POLITICAL OBJECTIVES AND DESIRED END STATES. "

Why the US-Led Coalition's Strategy Is Failing

The US Army War College curriculum defines *strategy* as "the employment of the instruments (elements) of power (political/diplomatic, economic, military, and informational) to achieve the political objectives of the state in cooperation or in competition with other actors pursuing their own objectives."[49] In this context, achieving the political objectives of a state is related to the cooperation or competition of other actors. In addition, any strategist should "know the end state he wants to achieve" and "develop appropriate objectives leading to the desired end state."[50] In a speech on 10 September 2014, US President Barack Obama announced that the main objective of the US-led coalition against ISIS was to "degrade, and ultimately destroy, [ISIS] through a comprehensive and sustained counter-terrorism strategy."[51] This coalition, however, is formed of countries with different political objectives and different desired end states, which raises questions about the possible degree of their cooperation and consequently, the likelihood of achieving their various objectives.

The strategy of the coalition so far has consisted of conducting a systematic campaign of airstrikes against ISIS in both Iraq and Syria; increasing material support to the opposition forces fighting on the ground without introducing coalition ground forces; providing additional assistance and training to the Syrian opposition; interdicting ISIS's funding streams; countering its ideology; and attempting to limit the flow of foreign fighters into ISIS's ranks. While President Obama clearly stated that US intervention depended on the formation of an inclusive government in Iraq, only a few days before this speech, he declared the need to pursue a political solution to end the Syrian conflict without specifying the means to achieve it.[52] He also highlighted the role of the coalition's Arab members in mobilizing Sunni communities in Iraq and Syria to fight ISIS.[53]

Therefore, the coalition officially consists of countries that declared they would participate in operations against ISIS, yet unofficially, non-state actors such as the Kurdish forces and Syrian opposition militias have assumed a major role in counter-ISIS operations.

Based on the speeches of President Obama and other coalition leaders, the expected role of each of the participants in the war against ISIS appears to be as follows:

1. The United States is the major contributor of air strikes and air support to the ground forces. It has also promised to train the Iraqi and Kurdish forces and increase support to the Syrian opposition groups. It has already pushed for a political resolution in Iraq, which manifested in the formation of the government of Haydar al-Abadi.[54] To counter ISIS economically, the United States has targeted the oil refineries and oil-storage tanks controlled by ISIS with air strikes. In addition, the US Treasury Department has taken measures against the financial supporters of ISIS and is pressuring regional countries like Kuwait and Qatar to take similar measures against their citizens who sympathize with and fund ISIS.[55]

2. The Arab countries' military contribution consists of logistical support in the form of access to their military bases, from which the United States can launch airstrikes and train Syrian militants.[56] More important, the countries can help "mitigate the potential negative perceptions of this US military intervention in the Arab world."[57] They are also more effective than the United States or the Iraqi government at convincing Arab Sunni tribes to fight ISIS.[58] And as mentioned previously, they have an important role in preventing the Gulf's private donors from sending money to the extremist groups in Syria.[59]

3. Turkey's participation in the coalition is crucial "because its long and porous borders with both Syria and Iraq are the entry point for foreign fighters."[60] By controlling its borders, Turkey can cut ISIS off from its major source of foreign fighters and control the smuggling of ISIS's oil into Turkey.[61] It can also provide logistical support by allowing the United States to use the Incirlik NATO base, located 60 miles from the Syrian border.[62] Moreover, Turkey's direct participation in military operations could be decisive in defeating ISIS, especially after the Turkish Parliament granted the government the authority to send troops into Iraq and Syria.[63]

4. The Iraqi government is supposed to provide the forces on the ground for military operations. Its army is the only conventional army committed to fighting ISIS in Iraq without any legal constraints.

5. The Kurdish Regional Government's irregular forces, the Peshmerga, have proved to be more effective on the ground than the Iraqi Army. After the Iraqi Army collapsed and retreated in 2014, the Peshmerga moved into areas around Kirkuk and prevented ISIS from occupying more territories.[64]

6. The Syrian Kurds also proved to be effective at protecting their lands in eastern Syria, especially in defending the city of Kobani with the support of coalition airstrikes.

7. The Free Syrian Army and other "moderate" groups are expected to fight ISIS and the Syrian regime and to prevent al-Nusra and other extremist groups from taking areas under the control of the Syrian opposition.

A Collision of Coalition Interests

Although the strategy of the coalition to target ISIS by military, economic, and ideological means seems to be comprehensive, it is not politically coordinated. Many of the participants reportedly have joined the alliance for goals "unrelated to the degrading of [ISIS]."[65] On the one hand, the regional countries are very concerned about achieving their political objectives in Iraq and Syria. On the other hand, the non-state actors in the fight have objectives ranging from survival to achieving self-governance. Therefore, the commitment of each of the participants to their individual political objectives rather than to their role in the coalition poses real challenges to the potential for military success: the failure of one participant to meet its obligations and objectives as a member of the coalition can lead to the failure of the whole campaign.

While the United States is clearly committed to its political and military objectives in Iraq and its support for the Iraqi government and the ISF, the Gulf countries are hesitant because any victory in Iraq can benefit the Shi'a-dominated government and its ally, Iran.[66] At the same time, Baghdad is more concerned that any success achieved with the help of the Peshmerga would support the Kurds' bid for complete autonomy or even independence.[67] Regarding Turkey's role, both Baghdad and Erbil oppose a long-term military intervention by Turkish troops deep into Iraq.[68] In Syria, the political situation is even more complicated. The United States has declared that coalition airstrikes are not meant to support the Assad regime, but at the same time, Washington fears that

the regime might indirectly benefit from these airstrikes and regain territories from ISIS. Gulf Arab countries need to demonstrate more commitment to the downfall of the Assad regime to calm their publics, who generally sympathize with ISIS.[69] Turkey is more concerned about replacing the Assad regime than fighting ISIS, and it associates the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD), which is fighting ISIS in Syria, with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which Turkey considers to be a terrorist organization.[70] The Syrian opposition also accuses the PYD and its militant faction, the People's Protection Units, of collaborating with the Syrian government.[71]

A study by the Center for Strategic and International Studies on the US air operations against ISIS in Iraq and Syria compares the current air operations to the air operations in several conventional and irregular wars: the First and Second Gulf Wars, the Kosovo campaign, the most recent war in Afghanistan, and the war against insurgents in Iraq between 2004 and 2011. The study concluded that these operations "have been very limited in comparison with other recent US campaigns."[72] In addition, the study finds that even when the United States started targeting ISIS in support of the Syrian Kurds in Kobani, it diverted the air strike resources that were being used to support Iraqi forces in their fight against ISIS. This is inferred from the drop in the number of air operations in Iraq in mid-October 2014 compared to September and early October, despite the fact that Iraqi forces were still struggling in Anbar.[73] To put this in the context of the political discussion, the United States prefers to conduct a limited air campaign because of the allies' disagreements over the desired political end states in Iraq and Syria. The United States fears that a larger air campaign may benefit the Assad regime in Syria, while the Gulf Arab countries oppose a larger campaign against ISIS in Iraq before there is a political resolution between the Sunni population and the Iraqi government. Another reason for the limited air campaign is insufficient intelligence support from ground forces due to the political and sectarian nature of the conflict. The inability of the Iraqi government to control ISIS and the refusal of the Sunni populations to cooperate with the coalition limits access to intelligence information for the airstrikes.

The various actors' political objectives are having a similar effect on the ground forces' operations in both Iraq and Syria. A study by the RAND Corporation demonstrates that one of the reasons the Iraqi Army has been incapable of achieving long-term success against ISIS is the sectarian nature of the conflict.[74] Although the Iraqi Army was able to stop ISIS and regain some of the lost territories in September 2014, they achieved this only with the support of Kurdish and Shi'a militias. Likewise in 2015, even with the support of US airstrikes, the Iraqi Army needed the participation of these militias to recapture territories in Tikrit, Baiji, and Ramadi. Other territories were regained by the militias, such as the retaking of Sinjar by the Kurdish forces in November 2015, without any coordination with the Iraqi government. This support from the militias can have negative effects at the political level, especially if the Iraqi Army tries to regain the more important Sunni areas in Mosul, because it reinforces the Sunni population's perception of a Shi'a-dominated army doing the bidding of a mainly Shi'a government. Even with US air support, the Iraqi army needs to gain the support of the Sunni population for such operations to succeed. Moreover, even if the Gulf Arab countries become more willing to help the Iraqi government, the likelihood of Sunni reconciliation and collaboration with the new government or a new "Awakening" among the tribes is small.[75] As for the Kurdish forces, while the Arabs might accept the Peshmerga's defense of Kurdish territories, the coalition cannot benefit from Kurdish support to recapture Arab-dominated territories because this could spark an ethnic Arab-Kurdish conflict.[76]

> MANY COALITION PARTICIPANTS REPORTEDLY JOINED THE ALLIANCE FOR GOALS "UNRELATED TO THE DEGRADING OF [ISIS]."

The United States has faced serious obstacles to accomplishing its initial declared objective in Syria—to train and support the moderate Syrian opposition, mainly the Free Syrian Army, to stand up against ISIS and the Syrian Army. In October 2015, the Obama administration admitted the failure of its $500 million program to train moderate opposition fighters and replaced the failed program with direct support, including providing ammunition and weapons, to existing rebel groups.[77] This kind of direct support to such groups has previously proven ineffective because many Syrian rebel groups cooperate with Jabhat al-Nusra. As analyst Marc Lynch notes, "Syria's combination of a weak, fragmented collage of rebel organizations with a divided, competitive array of external sponsors was the worst profile possible for effective external support."[78] Lynch states two necessary conditions for external support for the Syrian rebels to be effective: the external supporters themselves must adopt a unified approach, and there must be a unified rebel

organization to receive the support. These two conditions are not satisfied in the Syrian case: once again, conflicting political priorities stand in the way of unified and coordinated support. The Saudi-Qatari rivalry, which affects the whole region, from the struggle over the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt to the support of different rebel groups in Syria, is a clear example. Another problem is the different perceptions that the United States and the Gulf countries have regarding which groups are "moderate." Many of the Islamist groups that are supported by the Gulf countries are not considered moderate from a US perspective and are, therefore, not entitled to support.[79]

Conclusion

ISIS has benefited from the political opportunity created by the Syrian conflict and Iraq's sectarian and political problems. All the successes achieved by the United States and its allies in the fight against al Qaeda vanished with the rise of ISIS, which benefited greatly from both the reluctance of many countries to counter its expansion in Syria and Iraq and its ability to integrate groups and networks that were previously part of al Qaeda. This initial reluctance to fight ISIS, even after the formation of the coalition, was due mainly to a misperception that ISIS and al Qaeda are ideologically different and that ISIS presents only a regional threat rather than the global threat that al Qaeda posed. ISIS clearly proved these assumptions wrong, especially with the Paris terrorist attacks in November 2015, which some consider to be France's 9/11.

ISIS may prove even more threatening than al Qaeda if it is able to preserve its safe havens in Syria and Iraq.

The swift rise and consolidation of ISIS clearly points out the failure of the coalition's strategy, which has deployed only limited air resources and relatively weak local ground forces. The US-led coalition against ISIS also faced serious strategic challenges caused mainly by the complexity of the political situation in Iraq and Syria and the conflicting political priorities of the countries forming the coalition. This lack of coordination influenced the level of commitment these countries were willing to make to the implementation of a comprehensive strategy to defeat ISIS. Now that Russia has strongly intervened in support of the Syrian regime, all the countries that have been awaiting the fall of Bashar al Assad's government before they start fighting ISIS should recognize that this goal is no longer militarily achievable. If the United States wants to defeat ISIS, it should not take into account the conflicting political priorities of its allies, especially Turkey and the Arab Gulf states, but it should instead implement whatever strategy will achieve that goal. ◈

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Language Skills for the Special Forces Operator: Access and Information in the African Permissive Environment

> COLONIAL LANGUAGES ARE ODDLY ADEPT AT RELAYING WHAT FOREIGNERS WANT TO HEAR.

US AND EUROPEAN MILITARY PARTNERSHIPS IN AFRICA HAVE BEEN growing rapidly, as a quick glance at an AFRICOM (US Africa Command) map and a perusal of SOCAFRICA's (Special Operations Command Africa) activities over the last seven years make evident.[1] In response to invitations from different African countries, and their apparent interest in forming long-term relationships, SOCAFRICA has aligned its forces in a way that encourages units to maintain regular contact with their African partners and to build progressively on these professional interactions. This means that an Army, Air Force, Navy, or Marine unit can specialize and invest in one African region or country instead of spreading its activity across multiple global regions.

Despite this alignment, many organizations—including some in the military—still have a hard time conceptualizing Africa as a continent, instead of as a single country. The diversity of African characters and personalities is most apparent in the continent's hundreds of languages, cultures, clans, and unique histories. Even today, many tribal and ethnic groups are only slowly adopting national identities inside current political boundaries. If you study and interact with Africa only in relation to political boundaries and colonial languages, you will miss the heart and soul, as well as the undercurrents of society and culture that drive everything from commerce to government to transnational threats on this expansive continent.[2]

Africa's Linguistic Environment

For SOF personnel in Africa, being able to identify and apply the proper language and customs to a specific social engagement can mean the difference between merely discussing, for example, Boko Haram and potentially dissecting its network. An extended conversation in Chadian Arabic, as opposed to French, can be the difference between understanding Chad's perspective on Sahel terrorist schemes and haphazardly digesting what BBC and Al Jazeera reporters already know. Why? French, Portuguese, English, and Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) are second, third, or fourth languages for the overwhelming majority of sub-Saharan Africans (parts of southern Africa excluded). Colonial languages are the medium of international business, diplomacy, literature, formal interactions, and tourism. In conversation, it is as if the use of colonial languages triggers a generalized, politicized, diplomatic, media copycat version of the social environment, threat networks included. Colonial languages are oddly adept at relaying what foreigners want to hear.

Not so with local language—the heart language. When Nigerians, Cameroonians, or any others, for that matter, want to vent, speak their mind, or elaborate a cultural concept, they prefer to use their mother tongue.[3] Not only is a unique store of vocabulary available to the speaker, but sometimes abstract social and cultural concepts can become watered down or misconstrued unless they are explained in the heart language. In the anthropological "iceberg" concept

of culture, the culture that exists "below the water" is difficult to express outside of the local language. In Africa, ideas and personalities can be outlined in colonial languages, but they are filled in and shaded through the deeply familiar first language.

From one permissive environment to the next, I've put these language principles into practice.[4] In northern Cameroon, a region now overrun by the terrorist group Boko Haram (which pledged allegiance to ISIS in early 2015), I was able to complete a research thesis on religious syncretism thanks to the study of local language. Fluent French assisted me only to a limited extent in acquiring an understanding of the general outlines of religious rituals. After studying Fulfulde and relaying the same ideas in Giziga and Masana, the trite, one-word answers in French that I had been getting from local friends and informants transformed through these languages into paragraphs of spiritual soliloquies, explanations of village religious dynamics, and the details of taboos and grievances among the diverse populations. In Senegal, Niger, and Chad, I was overly optimistic about what my French fluency could achieve. Six weeks of immersion in Wolof, Djerma, and Chadian Arabic, respectively, however, allowed me to build relationship ties that two years of study in French could never have created.

This analysis is not meant to discourage the study of French, Arabic, or Portuguese—and by no means is fluency in a local language required to begin making sincere connections with your host partner. Twenty local greetings, which can be memorized in a week, can easily translate to a five-minute discussion. Moreover, knowledge of language and culture go hand in hand. For example, I was immersed in East African culture and the widespread Kiswahili language in my youth, which meant that what I lacked in local language fluency I could make up for in appropriate social behavior and protocol.[5]

I find that fluency gives the speaker access to others' feelings—those intangible trends that describe the social environment.[6] Two months of Fulfulde immersion, like six weeks of daily Djerma practice, won't enable a discussion of complex politics, but for those who travel from country to country, demonstrating the willingness to learn local languages serves as a relational building block. A colonial language like French, by contrast, is appropriate for broader and deeper applications, and is more conducive to operations across borders.

> " THE TRITE ANSWERS I HAD BEEN GETTING TRANSFORMED INTO PARAGRAPHS OF SPIRITUAL SOLILOQUIES. "

"Access" for the Special Forces Operator

To a SOF operator in a permissive or semi-permissive environment, which is more important: short-term access to information or in-depth access through relationships? The military culture of strict timelines, combined with SOF tactical prowess and 15 years of involvement in non-permissive environments, have corrupted the nature of foreign internal defense (FID), civil-military relations, information operations, and many other dominant SOF core capabilities. Language and culture-specific skills have become a mere data point on the operator's résumé. We have allowed tradecraft and tactics to dominate the interaction in permissive environments, making long-term engagements and sincere relationships very difficult.

This shift in emphasis means the military is missing what thousands of NGO personnel, embassy employees, and international business people take for granted: language is not simply a part of tradecraft. It is an essential tool of both everyday life and sincere interaction with any host nation and long-term partner. Rather than let tradecraft dominate our interactions, we can rely on language to provide the cultural map and access to meaningful relations that make tactical tradecraft irrelevant. Language competency offers much more than access to information or intelligence; these are short-sighted objectives. What SOF are missing in their haste to exploit tradecraft and tactical execution is a grasp of the local environment and the atmosphere of a village, region, or country, along with the development of sincere relationships that can be gained only through interchanges in the local language.

Status of Forces agreements, Acquisition and Cross-Servicing agreements, and numerous other such bilateral and multilateral contracts are important first steps in building relationships at the top level. But for the SOF operator who is building relationships with populations, a piece of paper is not always a key to access into a society. Access in sub-Saharan Africa is not a signed and dated statement; it is a continuous process of inter-relational exchanges. Generally speaking, Africa's cultures are cultures of relationships, not contracts.

Over a period of a few weeks during my time in Chad, I was fortunate to build friendships with two Chadian military security and logistics officers. Their French was weak at best, allowing us only to exchange friendly

salutations and enquire about family health and other such general topics. In my endeavor to understand the political environment of Chad, I asked in French about terrorist groups in the region. Their answer was that there were none. I asked about the security situation in Chad. They said it was perfect. I asked what it was that makes Chad's politics and regional military interactions so unique. They responded, "Événements" (French for "events"). These observations were all partly true but also wholly unhelpful.

Then I broke into Arabic, and the country of Chad unfolded before me in the most intricate social and cultural fluidity.

Not only was the Chadian logistics captain able to express his thoughts, but I could also read his excitement and sense his national pride, and I was beginning to piece together an insider's picture of this very dynamic country. According to the captain, terrorism was the result of weak youth—city softies who had lost their connection to the desert and their cultural heritage. I learned about the difference between desert life, southern *kafir* life, and the city's entanglements. He described what it was like to travel in a Toyota convoy across international borders on desert trails, where supply trains were limited or non-existent. Finally, by communicating in Arabic, I learned about my friend, his family, and his thoughts on regional security. I was able to share my own life with him in turn. We had grown a friendship.

Americans in Africa

While I cannot speak for other non-Africans, I have noted that I and other Americans have at least three broad advantages in our cultural engagements in Africa. First, those who have limited language skills can create bonds quickly by surprising their welcoming or hesitant African counterpart with some phrases in his or her language. Second, for those who speak only English, it is not difficult to quickly find new friends who are anxious to practice their English skills and thereby become more competitive in the local job market. Finally, as a testament

> **GENERALLY SPEAKING, AFRICA'S CULTURES ARE CULTURES OF RELATIONSHIPS, NOT CONTRACTS.**

KISWAHILI	
Hello!	Habari gani!
Excuse me.	Tafadhali.
What's your name, sir?	Bwana, jina lako nani?
My name is Kelebi.	Jina langu Kelebi.
I speak only a little.	Nasema kidogo tu.
Thank you much.	Asante sana.

to Americans who have come before us, most Africans have a kindly disposition toward the United States and are eager to interact with Americans. The downside? In English-speaking countries like Uganda, the Gambia, Kenya, or Ghana, you inevitably put all your eggs in one linguistic basket and can only hope your counterpart has a favorable view of the United States or what it can "offer." If not, you may hear little that is useful. Paradoxically, local language skills can be that much more important in countries where English is a primary language. Without them, you're just like everyone else.

What about francophone countries? As an American, be aware that even your best French accent will give you away. Like English, French can be a comfortable language for highly educated political officials and foreign-trained military officers. For that small minority, the colonial language is very useful. On one occasion, for example, I was sitting in a seminar room with security elements and SOF commanders from four neighboring countries (Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria). It was impossible for this group to communicate in anything other than French and English because they were the only two common languages of the Lake Chad region. Access to more than one language in this environment was indispensable. In sidebar discussions, the partners spoke in local languages—some of which did reach across multiple borders—to describe their views of terrorism, elaborate on the local social networks, and voice the region's challenges and popular perceptions. Each linguistic interaction added another facet to the overall argument.

The fluent speaker of colonial languages often represents the political view, the state perspective. But Africa's politics do not always align neatly with

WOLOF	
How's it going?	Nanga def?
How's work?	Naka ligeey bi?
I'm fine.	Mangi fii/Jamm rekk.
Where did you learn Wolof?	Fan nga jange Wolof?
Please.	Su la neexe.
My friend!	Sama xarit!
Okay!	Baax na!
Thank you.	Djeurejeuf.

> EACH LINGUISTIC INTERACTION ADDED ANOTHER FACET TO THE OVERALL ARGUMENT.

international relations theory's state-centric analysis. Rather, the populations, the religious leaders, the streets, and the villages embody the most powerful variables, decoded in multiple linguistic nuances.

Outsiders to local language, politics, and culture can ultimately misread the permissive environment altogether. In one humorous example, I was on board the latest version MC-130J aircraft as we rolled into a Nigerian military ramp. Rows of Nigerian maintenance teams paused in their work as each man raised the latest model smartphone (along with a few iPads) to capture—and, no doubt, announce—the aircraft's arrival. Like any professional, these maintenance troops were giddy to see the latest factory model in their industry. The SOF aerial platform was a far cry from the scrap models surrounding the ramp that were being used for parts.

Even though the MC-130J presence was for a regional unclassified exercise, the American crew was a little wary of so much attention—a SOF presence regrettably uploaded to the cloud. But instead of hyping the instance as an operational security concern, the air crew broke through the awkward cultural barrier and brought the interaction into the human domain. After all, Nigerians speak English, and any C-130 crew anywhere in the world would naturally be curious to see the latest model. Instead of worrying about what could not be helped, we got much more enjoyment and insight from chatting with these amateur

photographers, asking them to share their pictures with us and tell us their impressions.

Unless we allow ourselves to push against cultural barriers, we may be missing the sincerity and honesty of our own host partner—as well as the opportunity to transform insecurities into sincere curiosity and relationship-building.

Operators and Enablers in a Permissive yet Sensitive Environment

The SOF world has developed various official and tacit status levels for different types of operators and enablers. Operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, along with Hollywood movies, have identified the direct action tactical combat experts as the "elite force." What tactical experts do is tough. Their training is extensive and intense. For my part, I've dedicated long years of study to language acquisition and have been asked why someone like me wouldn't "cross over" to join the more prestigious club. In other words, why wouldn't someone leave the enabler world of relation-building and try for something more elite? But the reverse logic could be directed at SF operators: they already have the tactical knowledge, so why wouldn't they cross over to the side that makes a deeper, more fruitful impact on their host partners through language?

> "SHORT-TERM SOLUTIONS REDUCE INTERACTIONS TO TACTICAL TERMS; LONG-TERM, IT'S CALLED "BEING HUMAN.""

I've noticed that the best Army Rangers can demonstrate tactical acumen through swift, decisive action, but they truly prove their worth to an African partner by squatting on their heels, resting their armpits on their knees, and bantering in pidgin English with, for example, members of Nigeria's Special Boat team or Cameroon's Rapid Intervention Battalions. Africans want partners who can see beyond the threat—who can communicate in small unit tactics but

DJERMA (NIGER)	
Hello!	Fofo!
My friend	Ai choraa
How are you?	Mata gahham?
Fine (I thank God).	Ai ga irkoy saabu.
No problem!	Tali kuli si no!
Thank you.	Ai saabu.

also interact in sincere relationships. That is the difference between short- and long-term security development. Some would call this HUMINT—collecting or tradecraft. I prefer to call it conversation. Short-term solutions reduce interactions to tactical terms; from a long-term perspective, it's called "being human." Sometimes all the military jargon, qualification tabs, and tactical courses on communication can make us forget what it means simply to be human.

Local atmospherics and language research can easily identify a permissive environment. If you miss the cultural identifiers, you risk mislabeling the environment and misclassifying a partner as a threat. You cannot operate in the "orange" or the "red" at all times. Special forces working in a permissive environment have the opportunity on the one hand to build on local partnerships. Ignorance, on the other hand, leaves the operator with no choice but to rely on self-sufficiency, building security walls where none are needed. Exaggerated threat positions send

the wrong signal within the permissive environment and are the complete opposite of SF's intent. A smile extended to those in your local environment and a respectful exchange in the local language can be more effective than razor wire and more protective than the menacing face of aircraft security. Retreating to the tactical "safe zone" can easily invite the opposite effect. Even verbal judo has its place, but languages like Hassaniya, Wolof, Songhay, Tamashek, Djerma, Hausa, Fulfulde, Luganda, Kiswahili, and Somali are security multipliers beyond calculation.

In early 2015, at a time when parts of central Africa had become less stable under Boko Haram's advances, an aircraft was scheduled to meet me and a small group I'd been working with at an airfield after dark. Through no fault of their own, unit intelligence had prepared the aircraft security element with inaccurate information on threats in the region, which influenced the crew to take a robust security posture upon arrival and parking. After observing the approach of their stone-faced security detail, I led a few of the crew members around the airfield and introduced them in the local language to the "threat" rustling in the bushes: the sandaled AK-47–toting security guards. The air crew now have the pictures to prove it: this dark airfield was an unknown factor to the aircrew, but it was far from being a threat. The seeming "threat" became an asset—those local guards represented an extra layer of security who knew the true environment leagues beyond what a transient team could ever know.

> ❝ THE PERMISSIVE ENVIRONMENT IMPLIES PARTNERSHIP-BUILDING BY INVITATION. ❞

It is never wise to let your guard down completely, but it's always helpful to know what you're guarding against. The permissive environment offers SF more security assistance on which to build, especially when they are using local language and relationships. Relationships in the permissive environment also offer SF the best source of advanced warning—something a limited ring of perimeter security could never offer their camp or aircraft.

Ten years after I lived in northern Cameroon, for example, the region was threatened by violent extremism. As I followed up on the NGO personnel who lived in the now troubled region, I found out that their long-term friendships with the Fulani and their daily use of the Fulfulde language became an early warning device when the situation turned dangerous. The same was true for the coast of Kenya, where only a few short years ago Mombasa and Lamu were prime tourist destinations instead of the terrorist targets they have since become. In both of these locations, the NGO staffs were connected through deep friendships to the local residents. As the terrorist group al Shabaab developed its Kenyan offshoots, it would attack various local districts on random evenings, making them increasingly dangerous for passersby. If these NGO outsiders had not been plugged in to the local ethno-linguistic culture, they would not have been able to read the shifts in the security level. The permissive environment implies partnership-building by invitation and a level of security that provides more freedom of movement for perceptive outsiders. From Senegal to Mali to Chad, and in parts of Kenya and Somalia, the permissive environment can still be politically sensitive.[7]

HAUSA	
Hello.	Sannu.
Good morning.	Ina kwana.
See you later.	Sai mun sake saduwa.
Thank you.	Na gode.
Yes! Wow!	Yawwah!

Adopting the Long-Term Mindset

The majority of African environments allow for operator education to take precedence over tactics. Human relations should come before HUMINT. My

conversations with military partners, street vendors, shopkeepers, chauffeurs, and political activists invariably take a different trajectory depending on the language spoken. Speaking Djerma, the chauffeur wants to know why I haven't found a local wife to supplement my Sahel lifestyle. Speaking Chadian Arabic, my shopkeeper acquaintance wants to assist me in finding the right medicinal herbs to cure what ails me. In Fulfulde, my military partner is excited to share with me his cultural background, the dynamics of family relationships in the Sahel, and his disgust with local politics and corruption.

Local language, combined with sincere interest, offers access to shops and markets where the vendors don't interact enough with foreigners to know how to hassle them. You will feel the curious stares of your fellow tea shop clients, unaccustomed to seeing the *tubaab*, *nassara*, or *mzungu* ("foreigner" or "white" in the languages of Senegal, Niger, Chad, and parts of East Africa, respectively) in such an authentic environment. In my experience, local language brings broad grins all around. It moves you from the courtyard to the sitting room. In short, the commitment to building long-term relationships will change the way you see and experience a country. Perhaps French or English could achieve a similar outcome—but if you rely only on colonial languages you'll never know what you may be missing.

> **IN MY EXPERIENCE, LOCAL LANGUAGE BRINGS BROAD GRINS ALL AROUND.**

SOCAFRICA's mission is to build long-term partnerships at all levels. It is very difficult, however, for education to keep pace with the rapid expansion of these relationships. Language can provide security in an unknown environment. Language can allow us to explore ideas and reap insights into actual threats, the local perception of threats, and population networks. But even this is a limited view of the SF potential offered by better cultural and language education. Language is an investment in long-term relationships where tactics become secondary and SF can again become people. ◈

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NOTES

1   See the AFRICOM website for more information: http://www.africom.mil/africa

2   About the author: Between 1983 and 2015, I lived in East and Central Africa, studying African security and languages, before finally deploying for US Special Operations Command (SOCOM). I have learned French, Portuguese, and Arabic; spent time in Malawi, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Uganda, Egypt, Chad, Niger, Senegal, and Liberia; lived in Mozambique, Kenya, Cameroon, and Tunisia; and immersed myself in the ethno-linguistic environments of Makhua, Kiswahili, Fulfulde (Fulani), Djerma, Hausa, Wolof, and Chadian Arabic.

3   In Nigeria and Cameroon, even English has a common pidgin variant.

4   A *permissive environment* is one where the host country's military and law enforcement have control and are willing and able to assist operations as needed.

5   Kiswahili has a wide reach, serving as a common language for millions of people in Tanzania, Kenya, and parts of Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Consequently, an outsider speaking a few phrases in Kiswahili will not surprise locals as much as the use of lesser-known languages in other regions.

6   These are the "atmospherics" that we often rely on interpreters to explain.

7   This paper does not touch on the non-permissive environments found today in Libya, parts of northern Mali, and the al Shabaab–occupied regions of southern Somalia. Learning the local language of a non-permissive environment is still extremely helpful, but the caution necessary to interact and build proper relationships in such an environment requires much greater sensitivity. It is easier to correct misconceptions using indigenous language in a location where you are more of a curiosity than a potential enemy or threat.

Siding with the Egg

Dr. Siamak Naficy, US Naval Postgraduate School and MAJ Joshua Russo, US Army

> Between a high, solid wall and an egg that breaks against it, I will always stand on the side of the egg.
> — Author Haruki Murakami, upon accepting the Jerusalem Prize for Literature[1]

About two months after 9/11, Osama bin Laden boasted to a group of supporters, "When people see a strong horse and a weak horse, by nature, they will like the strong horse."[2] Not only did the weak horse turn out to be bin Laden's own, however, but bin Laden was also probably quite mistaken about popular psychology. Data from social psychology suggest that a majority of people consistently favor and identify with the "underdog," whether it be in politics or in sports, or even with shapes on a map.[3] In one such example, when subjects were shown a map of Israel dwarfing the occupied Palestinian territories, they expressed greater support for the Palestinians, but when they were shown a map of the neighboring Arab countries dwarfing Israel, they expressed more support for Israel.

The underdog is colloquially defined as the one who is at a disadvantage in a contest or competition and therefore is expected to lose.[4] This underdog exists, of course, in relation to another, the "top dog," who has the advantage of more resources and as such, is most likely to win. This rhetorical structure applies to many well-known stories. Tales of the underdog hero—as portrayed in popular Hollywood movies like *Rocky* and *Star Wars*, in books like *The Lord of the Rings*, and in sports narratives such as the 1980 US Olympic hockey team's defeat of the Soviet Union in the "Miracle on Ice"—have a broad appeal.[5] Businesses and political candidates, US President Barack Obama among them, routinely position themselves as underdogs to take advantage of this psychological phenomenon.[6] The underdog effect is not a uniquely American narrative, either.[7] Stories about underdogs are found across cultures and religious texts—such as the Old Testament story of David and Goliath—and throughout history, such as Aesop's fable of the tortoise and the hare, from approximately the sixth century BCE.

(En)Countering the Underdog Narrative

> George Washington was fighting the strongest military in the world, beyond all reason. That's what we're doing. Exactly.
> — Osama Hamdan (Hamas politburo member)[8]

How a conflict is framed and thus perceived, and who the players are supposed to be or are imagined to be, are as relevant to what people think about the fight as how it is fought. Robert Entman, a professor of media and public affairs at George Washington University, defines *framing* as "the process of culling a few elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights

A MAJORITY OF PEOPLE CONSISTENTLY FAVOR AND IDENTIFY WITH THE "UNDERDOG."

Wile E. Coyote

connections among them to promote a particular inter-pretation."[9] We know that political and security objectives cannot always be achieved through greater material or numbers. But data on possible psychological biases in favor of underdogs would suggest more: the use of military instruments of power—whether it be in the form of boots on the ground or bombs from the sky—can in fact strengthen the perceived deservedness of a comparatively weaker underdog adversary and amplify its narrative. The fact that disadvantaged entities might be motivated by this sense of righteous entitlement to fight on—and that third-party audiences might feel emotionally compelled to side with such groups—is crucial to both our understanding of human psychology and our capacity to craft coherent national security policies and their associated narratives.

Meanwhile, there is evidence to suggest that there is cross-cultural variation in the likelihood that an audience will favor underdogs. Underdog biases tend to be stronger for individuals who are from cultures in which underdog narra-tives are part of their national or group identity.[10] Studies also indicate that there are boundaries to the underdog effect beyond which observers of the competi-tion perceive the disadvantaged side no longer as an underdog but simply as a loser and undeserving of support.[11] This would suggest that there is no simple "underdogma" phenomenon whereby people reflexively believe that whichever side they see as disadvantaged is therefore also more righteous. If this is the case, then it follows that counter-narratives can be crafted that (1) are tailored to possible cross-cultural affinities for an underdog biography, and (2) amplify the reasons that a disadvantaged side may have violated the requisite conditions of underdoggedness.

The Size of the Fight in the Dog

> It's not the size of the dog in the fight; it's the size of the fight in the dog.
> — Unknown[12]

One explanation for underdog support and human psychological biases in favor of such entities is the rational calculation of one's own emotions. In other words, because an underdog's success is by definition unexpected, this may increase the excitement of rooting for the underdog (calculated by its *likeliness* to win or lose). In this way, rather than being strongly supportive of under-dogs, people might instead actually be rooting *against* the

dominant entities, an attitude captured by the sentiment, "My favorite baseball team is whoever is playing against the Yankees."

The data from social psychology seems to also suggest, however, that at least part of the reason people favor the underdog is our perceived sense of the underdog's "disadvantage." For example, students watching a taped basketball game not only rooted for whichever team they had been told was the underdog, but also attributed more "hustle, effort, heart, and wanting to win" to that team. In this way, people may favor the disadvantaged underdog because we want to help compensate for what we consider to be undeserved inequality. "If one contestant is out-matched for reasons that aren't his fault, that's unfair, and our sense of justice reaches out to fix it."[13]

According to marketing experts Anat Kienan, Jill Avery, and Neehu Paharia, "The biographies of underdog brands share two important narrative components: a disadvantaged position (they highlight a company's humble beginnings and portray it as being 'outgunned' by bigger, better-resourced competitors) and a passion and determination to triumph against the odds."[14] Various studies in the fields of marketing and social psychology define underdogs similarly: a materially, socially, or physically disadvantaged entity that displays a "*strong will or indefatigable spirit*" during a competitive struggle.[15]

> STUDENTS ATTRIBUTED MORE "HUSTLE, EFFORT, HEART, AND WANTING TO WIN" TO THE UNDERDOG TEAM.

In line with this reasoning, then, if the team (or group or individual) that is likely to lose is *not* disadvantaged, that side should no longer enjoy favoritism. Accordingly, when research subjects were told that a team was likely to lose and that it had a lot less money than the other team, they rooted for that team. But when they were told that a team was likely to lose even though it had a lot *more* money than the other team, they didn't much care who won.[16] Disad-vantage alone, then, is insufficient for observers to perceive a contender as an underdog. Stripping a disadvantaged opponent of its underdog status may require the crafting of counter-narratives that demonstrate the reasons that the opponent, though possibly disadvantaged in one or more domains, is not a true underdog deserving of support.

The current data suggest that these boundaries, or under-dog qualifiers, can be divided into two general catego-ries: those that are dependent on the observer and those that are dependent on the perceived performance of the

underdog. In other words, if one already identifies with one of the competitors, then that competitor's narrative status as underdog or top dog may not matter all that much. It is when one has no dog in the fight, so to speak, that an underdog narrative may become compelling. Unsurprisingly, the degree of sympathy and support offered to the underdog is often simply a function of the observer's vicarious self-serving motives.[17] Relatively neutral observers are likely to feel sympathy for the underdog only when there is little negative personal consequence for doing so. Observers who strongly identify with the underdog—those who view themselves as players on the disadvantaged team—may be unswayed by the high personal risk their support engenders.[18]

In the world of *Star Wars*—a classic underdog narrative in popular culture—the question becomes whether it would be possible to convince Luke Skywalker and Han Solo *not* to join the Rebel Alliance. It would likely be harder to dissuade Luke Skywalker because he has the ideologue Obi-Wan Kenobi to recruit and mentor him, as well as personal reasons—such as the assassinations of his uncle and aunt by imperial stormtroopers—to identify against the Empire. (At least, Luke is told by Obi-Wan that storm troopers are responsible for the attack that killed his relatives.) But, what of Han Solo? It might be worth the time to consider why we accept the idea that a self-serving smuggler—who says he doesn't believe in "hokey religions" like the Jedi and calls Luke's assault against the Death Star not an act of "courage" but one of "suicide"—would end up joining Luke and the Rebel Alliance in the end.

> "DISADVANTAGE ALONE IS INSUFFICIENT FOR OBSERVERS TO PERCEIVE A CONTENDER AS AN UNDERDOG."

A strong desire for fairness may also allow observers to justify a moral double standard when evaluating the actions of underdogs and top dogs.[19] This double standard holds the top dog to the letter of the law, but it turns a blind eye to the occasionally unsavory behavior of the underdog. Thus Israel is a bully, if you see it primarily as the oppressor of Palestinians, or a victim, if you see it as facing persistent existential threats. Nevertheless, there is undoubtedly some threshold beyond which the relatively neutral observer, on the one hand, can no longer overlook the underdog's moral transgressions. Observers that strongly identify with the underdog, on the other hand, may have no such threshold.

The Palestinian resistance organization Hamas provides a good example of this double standard. In its recent 2014 war with Israel, Hamas may have damaged its own underdog-brand credibility in the eyes of many neutral observers. When compared to previous battlefield encounters with the Israeli Defense Force in 2008–2009 and 2012, Hamas's military wing performed impressively well in 2014. Yet despite its relative tactical success, widespread condemnation of alleged war crimes among regional and international audiences threatened to diminish Hamas's traditional underdog position and with it, an aura of deservedness.[20] For most closely affiliated supporters of Hamas, however, the organization's conduct in the recent war probably needed no explanation or justification—these observers were sufficiently invested in the Hamas cause to remain convinced of its righteousness. For those not already committed to a side, however, damage to or loss of the underdog label can shift attitudes regarding its deservedness. It was this dilemma that arguably compelled the Hamas leadership to wage a media campaign of damage control in the aftermath of the war, in an attempt to restore underdog legitimacy with a larger audience.[21]

> ## " ISIS IS ADEPT AT PORTRAYING ITSELF AS A DESERVING UNDERDOG WITH IMPRESSIVE HUSTLE. "

Underdog qualifiers that depend on the observer's perception of the disadvantaged team's performance comprise the second category. The underdog demonstrates its deservedness not only through its actions but also through its narrative. Underdogs must demonstrate passion, endurance, and "hustle" to be judged as deserving of support.[22] If individuals or group members show a lack of effort, they are more likely to be regarded as losers.[23] The perceived probability of underdog success in the competition is another qualifier. Although observers often overestimate the likelihood of success,[24] underdogs "need to come close on occasion or at least show flashes of potential in order to merit support."[25] In one study, "participants showed the strongest rooting for the underdog team when it was unlikely—but not impossible—to prevail."[26] Finally, the underdog narrative must be negatively framed—the sympathetic protagonist struggling against the odds—in order to win support.[27]

The self-declared Islamic State (aka ISIS) has proven adept at portraying itself as a deserving underdog with impressive hustle. The group's combat footage highlights three themes: (1) smiling martyrdom-seekers who are ready and willing to sacrifice themselves for the cause; (2) hard-fighting foot soldiers who demonstrate tactical skill and grit; and (3) battlefield victories against ISIS's numerous better-supplied enemies, in which its fighters seize large quantities of weapons and equipment. The resultant underdog narrative is a strong one. In the face of a well-resourced international coalition, ISIS is not backing down. On the contrary, its sophisticated information operations not only convey battlefield competence and determination, but also suggest that the Islamic State has great future potential.[28]

Conclusion: Turning Underdogs into Losers

> The guerilla wins if he does not lose. The conventional army loses if it does not win.
> — Henry Kissinger[29]

Embracing and perpetuating the status of the underdog assists groups in garnering support that would otherwise be unavailable to them. The indirect and tacit support underdogs receive from observers may be the very thing that allows them to

continue their struggle. Usually this support comes from those who care less about the outcome or consequences of a struggle than they do about the qualities or attributes of the players involved. By disallowing the label of underdog for radical groups through targeted information campaigns, states can subvert sideline support for these extremist organizations.

Of course, clever communicators are aware of their audience and wield flexible and fluid narratives. An underdog always exists in relation to a top dog. As such, an underdog narrative may not always be advisable or possible. The fictional boxer Rocky Balboa may have been an underdog when compared to the champion, Apollo Creed, but he would be no underdog in a match with at least one of the authors of this paper. Likewise, in the *Star Wars* films, Luke Skywalker and the Rebel Alliance are the underdogs pitted against Darth Vader and the Galactic Empire, but would have been top dogs compared to, say, the Ewoks of Endor.[30]

His whole life was a million-to-one shot.

ROCKY

ISIS's leaders appear to understand the group's various audiences well: their media operations are carefully calibrated for local, regional, and international consumption as well as for would-be constituents.[31] The group's regionally oriented media content—arguably the most potent of its products— aims, in part, to inspire a particular slice of the neutral or partially invested observer population by promoting the status of ISIS as an underdog fighting a regional war against corrupt Middle Eastern regimes and wealthy (and corrupt) Western interventionists. Of course, when measured against the diverse array of Levantine Sunni jihadi groups—many of which also espouse violence and the reestablishment of a regional caliphate—ISIS is no underdog and even poses a lethal threat to some of these groups. This fact only underscores the potency of a well-framed and manipulated underdog narrative.

It is, of course, unrealistic to try to frame global powers like the United States as underdogs in irregular warfare. Strategic planners should instead consider crafting counter-narratives that tarnish the underdog image their extremist adversaries cultivate. It is to our advantage that many of the jihadi fighters who profess pious principles

regularly ignore their own stated moral ideals. It may be possible to minimize the indirect support that ISIS and its ilk receive by attacking their appealing underdog image and recasting them as hypocrites and losers.

We have seen how tactical strikes such as those from predator drones can backfire in public opinion by making martyrs of their targets. Media campaigns that highlight the apostasy of violent jihadi groups—especially their leaders—may be a better way to erode the groups' attraction for new recruits. Disseminating accurate reports and images of revered leaders—sporting Rolex watches and committing rape and cold-blooded murder—can help shift their popular image from the idealized one of deserving underdogs fighting the good fight to the more realistic one of self-indulgent criminals ready to exploit their would-be supporters.[32] No single technique will likely be sufficient to bring about this shift, of course, and it will be necessary to tailor-make these counter-narratives for specific audiences. For example, a particularly strong argument can be made by amplifying the stories of defectors. While some returning foreign fighters will no doubt seek to self-glorify by exaggerating their purported accomplishments, there are also those who leave because they have become disillusioned by their experiences. In exchange perhaps for a safe return or some other incentive, these voices can be instrumental in countering the narratives the jihadis use for foreign recruitment.
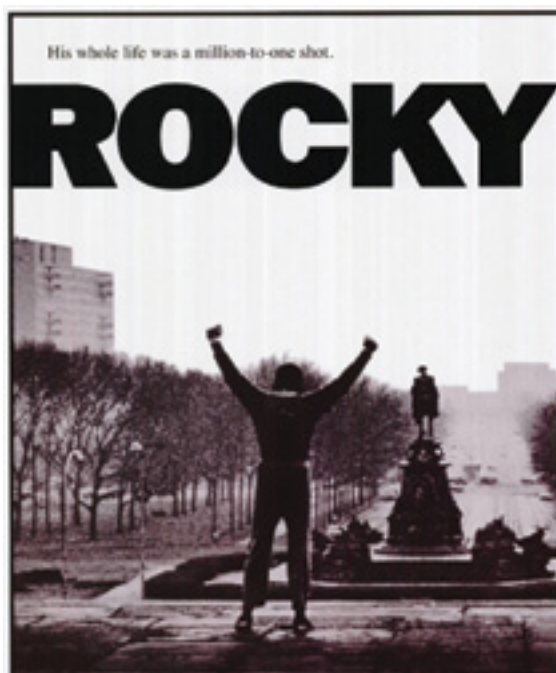
In addition, counter-narratives to discourage foreign recruits should highlight the fact that these fighters are routinely exploited by extremist leaders to settle local disputes rather than to pursue the regional or international goals that the recruits might have had in mind when they joined up. For instance, between 2005 and 2007, a cadre of suicide bombers in Iraq was used not against coalition troops but in small affairs targeting local tribes and groups. An Iraqi emir described the situation in a letter quoted in a 2008 *Washington Post* report.

Potential suicide bombers were told by coordinators on the border that they could choose a suicide mission, which would kill 20 to 30 US-led troops or their supporters, the letter says. Yet a would-be bomber would then wait in the

Osama Hamden (l); George Washington

desert for months. "At the end he will be asked to do a small operation, such as murdering someone or blowing up a police car," the emir wrote. The foreigners would then become discouraged, he said, and return to their home countries.[33]

Such groups also routinely devour their own in other ways, either by arbitrarily meting out "justice" for undesirable actions or making sure would-be defectors publicly pay with their own lives.[34] One 2014 report states that "ISIS has executed at least 120 of its own militants in the past three months, the majority of whom were foreign fighters trying to return home, according to a Syrian monitoring group."[35] Stories of treachery and the murder of recruits can be amplified and disseminated to effectively influence both foreign and local audiences.[36]

These are only a few examples of campaigns that could be designed to combat jihadis' "deserving underdog" narrative. It must be conceded, however, that these various examples still feel weak, paternalistic, and negative, especially when compared to the "positive" recruitment message from an Islamist warrior who appears, by virtue of his underdog status, to deserve respect and support. They all lack the empowering draw and broad arc of the ISIS story of standing "up against the world." Custom-made counter-narratives that are personalized to fit specific audiences will be stronger.

Meanwhile, the fact that the United States routinely perceives itself as the top dog, in terms of military capability and resources, versus adversaries that use asymmetric strategies may be counterproductive. In 480 BCE, to take one famous historical example, a resonant underdog narrative coalesced around the Greek victory over the Persian navy at Salamis. The Persians, whose trireme fleet was markedly superior to that of their opponents in terms of number of vessels, naval

technology, and combat seamanship, exposed themselves to defeat by seeking to trap and overwhelm the Greeks in the confines of the Salamis straits. If US officials and strategic planners were more judicious in their selection of methods and instruments to execute their policies, the United States might smack less of a top dog throwing its weight around. For example, all things being equal, the United States, like the ancient Persians, fed certain insurgent narratives when it deployed heavy, armored units to Iraq and then lost dozens of technologically advanced tanks to improvised roadside bombs and accidental rollovers into canal ditches. In other words, perceiving and projecting oneself as a top dog has the potential to undermine strategy.

This is not to say that assuming the role of the inevitable winner is always inadvisable, but there are consequences and tradeoffs to doing so, and strategic postures and narratives must be crafted with such consequences in mind. Top dogs who persist in looking through the veil of their own narratives can find it difficult to appreciate the more discrete and subtle means that they may have at their disposal. ◈

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NOTES

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Trying to Work Smarter: Fusion Tools for a Small SOF TF Staff

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A NEW BUZZ PHRASE IS CIRCULATING AMONG SOF PLANNERS AND operators these days: operation and intelligence fusion. The goal is for the operations and intelligence sections to work together more closely; become better integrated; and feed off each other's thinking, ideas, and processes to produce better outcomes. Military operations in Afghanistan and elsewhere have matured over the last decade into police-led operations to disrupt and degrade insurgent and criminal networks. As a result, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) staffs have needed to "work smarter" in order to develop a concept of operations (CONOPS) and get approval from higher authorities, as well as respond to numerous requests for information and reports. Naturally, this puts a lot of strain on the staff: how can a small SOF staff create an operation-intelligence fusion environment, along with an approach that facilitates the development and direction of intelligence-led policing operations?

Small SOF task forces (SOF TFs or simply TFs) typically don't have enough staff to handle all of the training and mentoring needs, as well as the targeting efforts and the execution, required by such police operations. Normally, these operations have been driven from the bottom up, and the demand from higher headquarters was for a high operational tempo. As the police forces took responsibility for local security from the military, warrants and evidence were introduced to execute arrest and search operations according to law. Fulfilling these kinds of legal requirements was also an important means to educate the police force and judicial system. As a result of this shift, the TFs needed to better manage the balance between training, mentoring, and operations. TF mentoring teams, together with partner units from the local police and representatives of the judicial system, tried to build a workable and sustainable judicial system led by intelligence. Warrants and evidence became prerequisites to prosecute a target or conduct an operation.

This article shares a best-practice model for operations and intelligence fusion and uses a case study to describe how a small-nation SOF TF might apply an operation-intelligence fusion plan that combines military planning and processes with a law enforcement mindset. It describes a simple model of the Commander's Critical Information Requirement and a "fusion tool" in the form of a pie chart that can be used by the planning staff to assess, plan, and direct resources for both intelligence operations and strike operations.[1]

Evidence-Based Operation in Afghanistan

The following vignette illustrates the relationship between a particular ISAF SOF task force and the Afghan provincial response company (PRC) it mentored and trained between 2009 and 2012. In support of the local prosecutor, the PRC contributed to a forensic database of IED components and types that eventually supplied the prosecutor with sufficient evidence to identify and convict several bomb makers.

HOW CAN A SMALL SOF STAFF CREATE AN OPERATION-INTELLIGENCE FUSION ENVIRONMENT?

The Relationship and Tasks

The SOF TF staff of seven officers, including specialists in operations, intelligence, logistics, and communications, had been working with a SWAT-like PRC for over four years. The PRC functioned as a crisis response unit in addition to conducting deliberate arrest and search operations. A mutual process for quick reaction operations (with a standard notification to move in 15 minutes) allowed the TF to launch immediately with the PRC. The ISAF regional commander, the regional command staff, and the battle space owner, along with the Afghan chain of command (including the prosecutor) were notified at the same time.

Although the PRC was almost fully operationally capable when it was directed to undertake the operation described below, the TF had assigned two advisors and mentors to each of the three PRC platoon leaders. Moreover, the TF ground force commander advised the PRC company commander, while the SOF TF commander advised and assisted the provincial chief of police in the use of the PRC. The local situation also called for some "mission creep": the provincial prosecutor needed support to carry out his duties, so the SOF TF helped him with training and education in the rule of law as well as with matters regarding the use of evidence.

Deliberate operational planning was initiated sometimes by the Afghan partner and sometimes by the SOF TF. Over time, both the PRC and the provincial police chief had begun to initiate investigations and launch arrest operations and even conduct unilateral operations with minimum oversight by the SOF TF. The deliberate planning process followed ISAF's normal standard operational procedures to get CONOPS approval. Three to four operations per week, including quick responses, were the norm.

The Background

By the summer of 2009, the Explosive Ordnance Disposal, Improvised Explosive Device, and Weapons Intelligence sections of the ISAF Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in the province had started to collect data about IEDs for a database, at a time when insurgents had started to use IEDs more frequently. These sections and the explosives experts in the PRT had been working closely with other centralized anti-IED sections within ISAF to build cases for and increase knowledge about the IED threat. The building of this database became a key factor in their later success.

In the early fall of 2009, the PRT conducted a company-sized operation in a village in one of the province's problem areas. The team secured IED components and other evidence and sent it all in to be analyzed against the database. Unfortunately, there was no match, but the database, which was about two years old at the time, was updated with the new data. This process had by now become standard protocol, and occasionally a match was found that connected an individual to a device, but only rarely could the specific insurgent or IED maker be fixed at a certain time and place.

Several weeks later, the SOF TF, working very closely with the fusion cell at the regional command headquarters, as well as with the PRT's intelligence section and other units, identified three suspected insurgents and IED facilitators in the same area where the PRT's infantry company usually operated. The Afghan

> ONLY RARELY COULD THE SPECIFIC INSURGENT OR IED MAKER BE FIXED AT A CERTAIN TIME AND PLACE.

provincial prosecutor had already issued warrants for two of the three suspects. The third individual's warrant was in process but not ready to be executed. One of the suspected insurgents was considered more of a priority, but the TF could not make a positive identification (PID) because they had only a vague physical description of him. The homes of the three suspects were known, down to the exact house; they were known to be part of the same network; and they went regularly to evening prayers in the village mosque. But the men themselves were not fixed—there was other information suggesting that the pattern of life (POL) of each insurgent had not been confirmed. The prosecutor had firm evidence on the second most important suspect, Suspect Y, but neither he nor the police as a whole, including the National Directorate of Security in the province, had such firm evidence on the other suspects. The prosecutor wanted the three men arrested anyway. (See figure 1 for a depiction of the target set. The use and development of the pie chart is explained later in the article.)

Figure 1: Example of the Target Set[2]
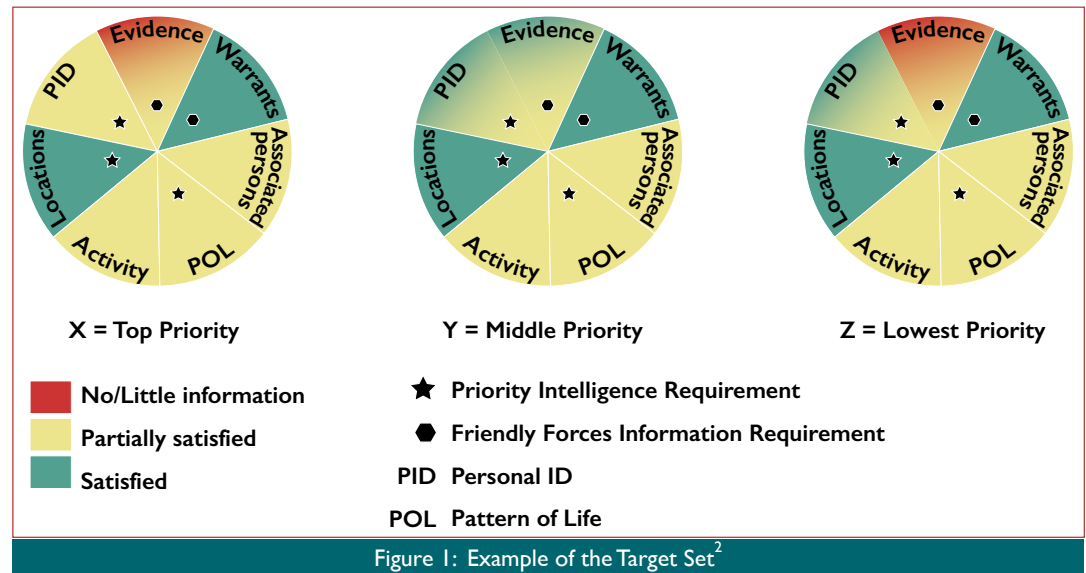
ISAF intelligence confirmed that all of the suspects were part of an insurgent IED network. Everybody wanted Suspect X arrested because he was believed to be a network leader and was therefore the top priority. The prosecutor had issued a warrant for his arrest, according to the judicial process at the time. The SOF TF were not too concerned by the fact that evidence for Suspect X was missing; from their point of view, it was more likely that they and the PRC would be able to find, fix, and arrest Suspect Y because they had more information, including evidence from the prosecutor and likely also from the PRT. It was easier for the PRC and the TF to identity Suspect Y than the others, and he was also considered easier to track once he had been found and fixed. The SOF TF, as a norm, used the CARVER matrix—*criticality, accessibility, recuperability, vulnerability, effect, and recognizability*—to assess the target or target system.[3] Suspect Y thus became the priority for the PRC, as well as the SOF TF at the time, based on *recognizability*. Both the PRC and the SOF TF believed, however, that if they could arrest Suspect X, it would have much more of an effect on the IED threat network.

The deliberate planning of the operation went ahead, and it was eventually authorized from the regional command level, as well as from the Afghan provincial chief of police. Because of the shortage of rotor-wing assets and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) support, such operations were usually time-based instead of trigger-based. The staff therefore estimated a time window by assessing the patterns of the suspected insurgents' movements.

Execution and Dry Hole

Right on schedule, the PRC, along with the prosecutor and mentors and combat supporters from the SOF TF, landed on target in darkness. The use of rotor-wing aircraft was uncommon in this particular area and therefore contributed to the effect of speed and surprise. Suspect Z, the lowest priority of the three suspects, was the only one who was partially fixed at the time, following the criteria and processes used by the SOF TF. Notwithstanding, in a matter of minutes, Suspect Y's compound and other houses of interest were surrounded and searched following standard procedures and directives, which included the use of trained female Afghan police officers from the PRC. Seven Afghan men were found and held for identification using biometrics and physical description, but none was positively identified, so the prosecutor had to let all seven men go before the helicopters came to pick up the ground force and return them to base. Eventually, all the material the team had gathered in their search was systematically processed by various elements of the Afghan police, the SOF TF, and the PRT, as well as other ISAF organizations.

> ❝ SUSPECT Q QUICKLY GOT A PIE CHART OF HIS OWN. ❞

Exploitation and Breakthrough

After two weeks of analysis, a positive match came from a crime lab, which confirmed the identification of one of the seven men found on target and connected him with the IED component that had been found by the PRT earlier in the fall. Further research, however, also concluded that none of the seven was Suspect X, Y, or Z. This match belonged to a new suspect, Q, a previously unknown IED maker. The SOF TF now had everything it needed for a positive identification and a likely location, as well as confirmed evidence. Suspect Q and his likely whereabouts were known to the PRT troops and the infantry company's intelligence officer, so the TF went to them for more information on the suspect. Suspect Q quickly got a pie chart of his own, to help the staff visualize and focus on the efforts and directives that would be needed during the planning and preparation phase of this new arrest operation (see figure 2). It was very easy to get a warrant for Suspect Q's arrest, once the case and the evidence were processed and presented to the prosecutor. The TF's rule-of-law subject matter expert also made considerable efforts to ensure that the prosecutor understood the value of certain biometric evidence, something which was completely new to the prosecutor and the Afghan court in the province.

Suspect Q

- 🟥 **No/Little information**
- 🟨 **Partially satisfied**
- 🟩 **Satisfied**
- ★ **Priority Intelligence Requirement**
- ⬣ **Friendly Forces Information Requirement**
- **PID** Personal ID
- **POL** Pattern of LIfe

Figure 2: Suspect Q's Pie Chart

The findings, along with the intelligence and evidence to back them up, were released to the Afghans. Once again, the SOF TF staff worked to get the ISR and rotor-wing support the operation required, as well as the various CONOPS approvals. This time, however, the rotor-wing support was not available, and it would be too difficult and dangerous for the PRC and the SOF TF to go by armored vehicles into the IED-infested area where Suspect Q was believed to be.

As luck would have it, the PRT infantry company was ready to conduct a handover-takeover with an incoming company. The SOF TF staff urged their PRT counterparts to make sure that the handover took place in the targeted village, in order to both arrest Suspect Q and conduct a road-clearing and patrol mission. The Afghan PRC and the SOF TF—less than a handful of people at the time of
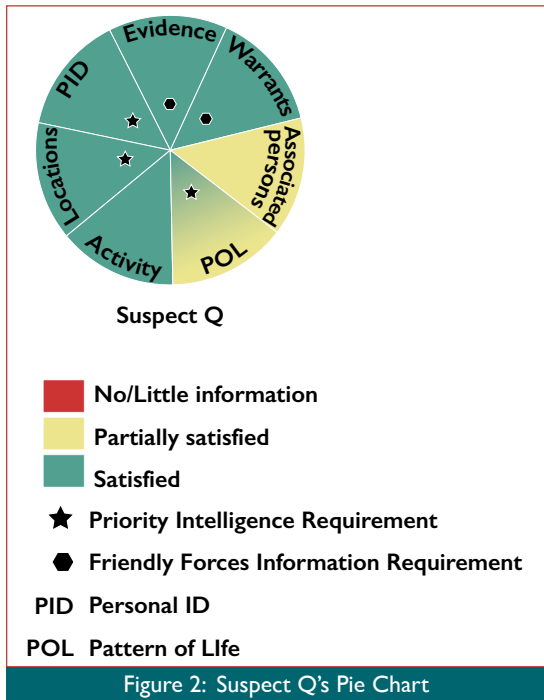
the operation—were embedded in the company-plus–sized operation. After a couple of hours of conventional road clearing, the teams entered the village. Suspect Q was identified hanging around very near where the IEDs had been found, and where the PRC and the SOF TF had conducted their night operation weeks earlier, doing his business as usual while he observed the ISAF soldiers and local Afghan National Security Forces personnel. Suspect Q was arrested very smoothly and expeditiously by the Afghans, and was subsequently taken to police headquarters to be processed.

Aftermath

During the investigation and subsequent judicial processing of Suspect Q by the Afghan prosecutor, the Taliban shadow governor of the district called several times to insist that Suspect Q be released without trial. This had never happened before, so the prosecutor became even more insistent on prosecuting Suspect Q. During the process, the provost, the ISAF military police, and the rule-of-law experts from the SOF TF supported the prosecutor and police in their efforts to ensure a fair trial and fair treatment for Suspect Q. Eventually, Suspect Q was sentenced to 10 years in jail for acts of terrorism.

A Discussion of SOF Fusion

Counterterrorism organizations and units normally use a decision support template to make decisions, and to help them understand when there is risk involved and when they have actionable intelligence. The decision support template usually consists of a high-value (high-payoff) target list, named areas of interest, target areas of interest, time-phase lines, and decision points.[4] This template is a product of the intelligence preparation of the operational environment or battlefield, and forms the foundation for a commander's decision making. This process and the products are well known and have been available for years. The question remains, however, whether the template can be as useful in a conventional police-led operation when the process and products have a focus other than terrorism or counterinsurgency.

> **IS THE CT DECISION SUPPORT TEMPLATE USEFUL IN A CONVENTIONAL POLICE-LED OPERATION?**

A Decision-Making Model

Normally, the decision points are made up of what is known as the Commander's Critical Information Requirements (CCIR). The CCIR consists primarily of Priority Intelligence Requirements (PIR) and Friendly Forces Intelligence Requirements (FFIR). A PIR can be broken down into Specific Intelligence Requests, which can be broken down even further into Essential Elements of Information. Several elements of a Specific Intelligence Request might go into the PIR that the TF uses to positively identify a person behind an attack on coalition forces, including

- the person's physical description,
- the person's biometrics, and
- a recent photograph of the person.

The SOF TF had developed, over the years, a simple formula to enable more rapid decision making and also to push the level of decision making down to the operators as much as possible, to help maintain the initiative and tempo. The formula is: DP = CCIR = (PIR + FFIR). That is, the commander, or whoever has

Figure 3: SOF TF If-And-Then Model for Decision Making
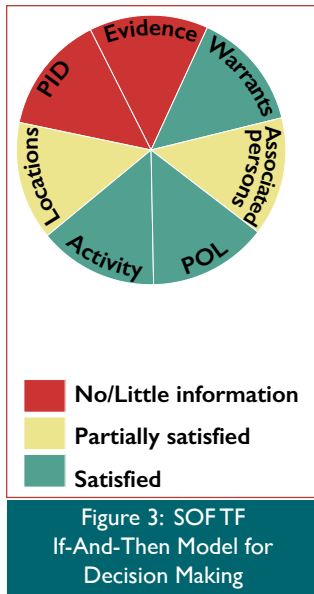
the authority, can make a decision based on information regarding the enemy and the enemy's condition set plus information regarding his own forces and their condition set. To support and further develop the results, the SOF TF used a formula similar to this: If (PIR) and (FFIR), then (DP) (see figure 3).

There can be several PIRs and FFIRs that go into a decision point, depending on the outcome of the planning and war gaming processes. The operations officer or section is responsible for developing information for their own or other friendly forces' FFIR. The intelligence officer or section is responsible for developing what the organization needs to know regarding the adversary—the PIR. This distinction is important because it normally takes longer to collect and estimate the enemy's condition and courses of action than it does to develop one's own courses of action. The operations section usually already has all the information it needs regarding its own forces, organization, equipment, and strengths and weaknesses compared to the enemy. Therefore, intelligence planning and preparation can be characterized by proactivity, foreknowledge, patience, and reflection.

The information and intelligence support the commander's decision making. Because this particular SOF TF normally consisted of a small staff, its team members developed another simple tool that would enable the planning and direction of their operation-intelligence fusion to be both creative and organized. This tool is, foremost, a matter of approach and mindset. It has become somewhat irrelevant within the TF to argue whether intelligence drives operations or operations drive intelligence. One way to settle this is to decide that intelligence drives the commander and the commander drives operations. The norm, if there is no consensus regarding intelligence collection, is that the intelligence officer has the final say on *why* and *what*, while the operations officer has the final say on *how* and *when*. It helps if the staff officers see themselves as combinations of operations/intelligence or intelligence/operations, depending on their primary function, rather than being categorized into stovepiped sections or functions.
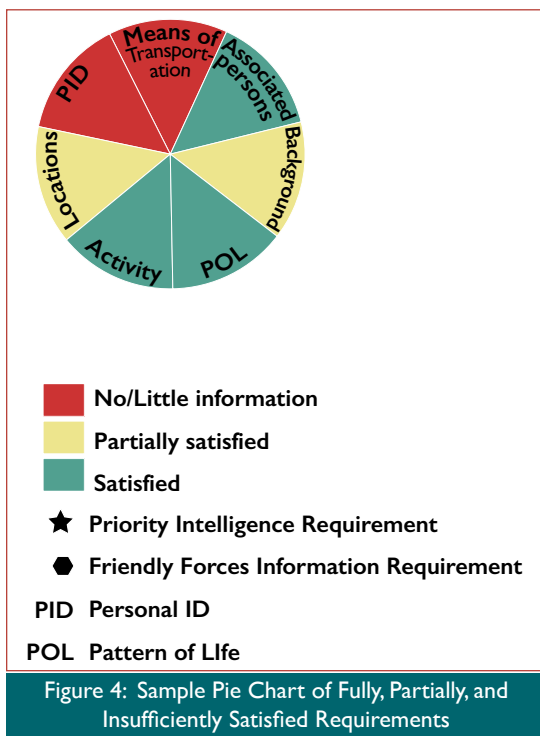
Analysis of a Manhunt

The team developed a color-coded pie-chart tool to consolidate information and allow decision makers to have a common understanding and awareness of a target (see figure 4). The pie chart depicts the information required to make a decision on whether to take action against the target. The information is color-coded to indicate how much information and knowledge is available regarding a certain target. Red means *no* or *little information*, yellow means the requirement is *partially satisfied*, and green means it is *fully satisfied*. In general, when the information requirements have been satisfied, and especially if there is a positive identification and the target location is known or will be known, the organization can prosecute the target with an expectation of success, if it so chooses.

In the example provided in figure 4, the target is a person, and the information that has been assessed as important is as follows:

Figure 4: Sample Pie Chart of Fully, Partially, and Insufficiently Satisfied Requirements

- *Positive ID*: Is the person identified? Does the organization have a picture, description, or biometrics, and so on?
- *Means of transportation*: What cars, motorcycles, trains, and other public transportation does the targeted person use?

- *Locations*: What are the home, work, and other addresses associated with the target?
- *Associated persons*: Who are the targeted person's closest friends, co-workers, and relatives? These individuals can become the subject of a pie chart of their own.
- *Background information*: What schools has the targeted person attended? What level of education has he achieved? What is his social status? What are his interests, and so on?
- *Activity*: What does the target do, and why?
- *Patterns of life*: How and when does the target move? Where does he go, and what does he do?

In the example of Suspect Q, positive identification and locations were priorities, along with the suspect's pattern of life. Using this pie chart, the small TF staff could plan, discuss, analyze, and direct resources, depending on what information was still missing. If there was not enough information to positively identify a target, then the next objective for the intelligence resources would be to collect that particular type of information.

Furthermore, as in Suspect Q's case, the pie chart can be modified depending on what the staff consider important. For instance, the focus of counterinsurgency in Afghanistan in recent years moved from military operations towards police operations. Police operations are subject to investigations and a regular judicial process. Arrest and search operations require warrants and preferably some kind of evidence to present in court. In the case of Suspect Q, the warrants and evidence against the target were considered FFIR. Figure 5 presents the positive identification, locations, and pattern of life of Suspect Q as PIR.

Such evidence could obviously be intelligence-related, but in this particular case it was important to be able to present the evidence openly in court, and for it to come from someone outside of the TF or the partnered PRC unit. Also, the target might already be wanted for questioning or already have been arrested in conjunction with ongoing criminal activity, in which case the available evidence might not be intelligence-related. Evidence is a prerequisite for a warrant: without substantial evidence, there would most likely be no warrant, and without the warrant, the PRC would not be able to execute the operation.

In Suspect Q's case, however—like so many other TF operations—a warrant was issued for a search or an arrest with the aim to "hopefully" find some evidence on location that could be used in court. Before the analytical model described in this article was developed, on multiple occasions, the suspected targets were released without charges because of lack of evidence or some other culturally or politically sensitive reason. This hit-or-miss approach changed after the judicial system became more mature and its officials better understood the rudiments of the rule of law. The process needs to start with information, which is developed into intelligence and confirmed with evidence. The only alternative is to secure evidence from an existing crime scene, as was the case with Suspect Q and the IED that led to his identification.

In the example illustrated by figure 5, a warrant has been issued and the target's activity and pattern of life are well-known; these areas are colored green. The information requirements for positive identification, location, and evidence, however, are only partially satisfied and are therefore colored yellow. With the

> " A WARRANT WAS ISSUED WITH THE AIM TO "HOPEFULLY" FIND SOME EVIDENCE ON LOCATION. "
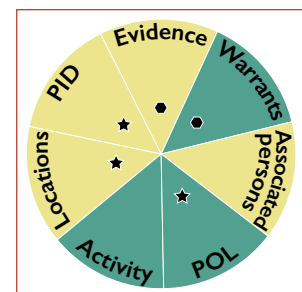

Figure 5: Modified Decision-Point Pie Chart for Police-Led Operation

situation depicted in figure 5, it becomes apparent that any decision to make a search, arrest, or strike will have to involve some risk. With this model, a commander can visualize and understand where there are risks based on whether sufficient information is available for each factor.

Furthermore, figure 5 suggests that if no more evidence can be collected, then most likely the detained person or target of interest will be released. On the one hand, although the operation may be deemed worth conducting, if there is no reliable target description or confirmation that the target is present and if there is a danger that the operation might not uncover enough evidence for the prosecutor to continue the investigation, then the decision to act can be considered to have a moderate risk of failure. On the other hand, if the target is fixed, located, and positively identified (all green), and there is sufficient evidence (green), then it is almost certain the target will be arrested with enough evidence to go to court and get a conviction.

The Decision Tree: Combining It All into One Picture

A decision tree that combines the different phases of an operation with the If-And-Then model to identify decision points and outcomes might look like figure 6.

There are essentially two decisions to be made in this example. From the find-phase, assuming the target is present and confirmed, the operation can move into

a fix-phase and finally a finish-phase (the yellow-star decision points). If the target is not confirmed but the location is confirmed, then resources can be allocated to confirm the pattern of life and/or target refinement (the blue-star decision points).

Once the target is confirmed and positively identified, then the pie chart sections for identification and location will be colored green, indicating that the threshold and risk, as well as the uncertainty, are lower compared to the find-phase. The decision maker can therefore make a better and more conscious decision to move into the finish-phase and strike in order to arrest the target. Evidence, in this case, is still only partially satisfied (yellow). It is likely that there will be evidence at the target location or that the target will confess. While the TF could support the prosecutor's decision-making process using the pie chart and other tools, it is ultimately the prosecutor's decision whether to act. In this particular example (figure 6), the prosecutor has already issued a warrant (indicated by the color green) and wants the suspect in custody. The operation has been focused to lower the uncertainty by enhancing or conducting target refinement, and developing actionable intelligence from that information.

Conclusion: Some Key Take-Aways

Operators should always use processes their team is familiar with, but they should also be prepared to alter the criteria they use for FFIR and PIR in order to solve the
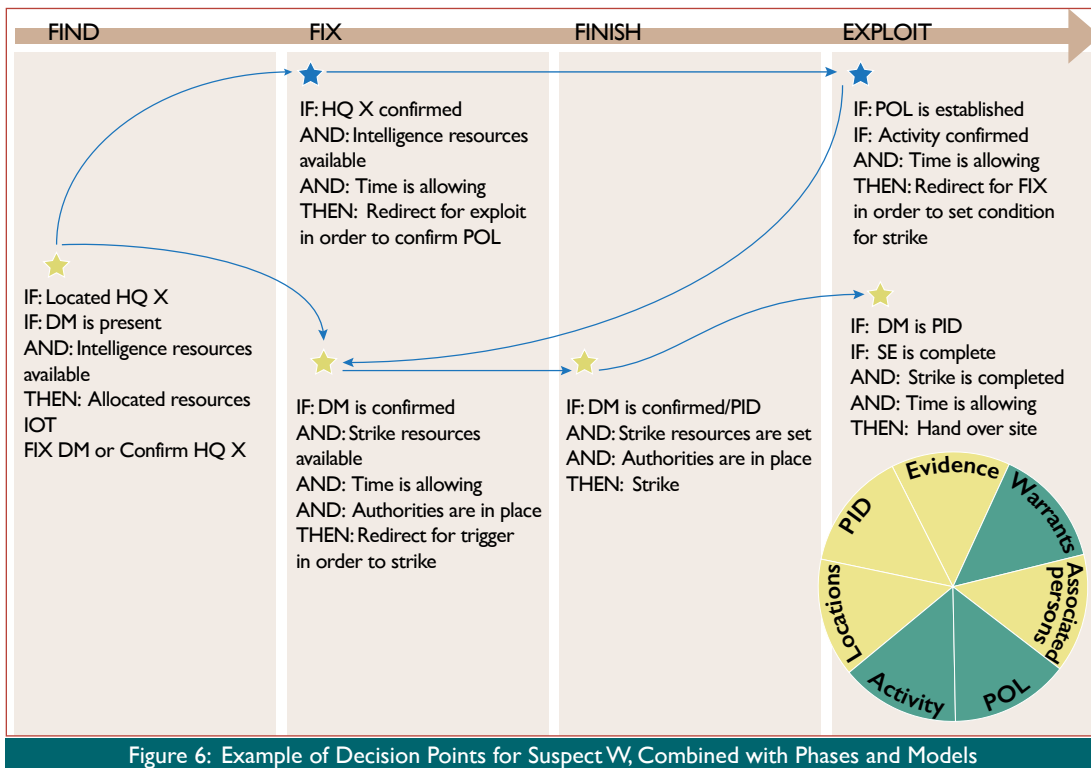

Figure 6: Example of Decision Points for Suspect W, Combined with Phases and Models

mission or the problem. The If-And-Then formula needs to be developed further and used to support the current ops or the battle captain's decision making if the commander is not available to provide the authorities to act. The conduct of military operations, which are usually planned over a long period of time using all the available intelligence resources to develop an understanding of the target and the mission, is still quite different from a police force's quick-reaction, event-driven, and often evidence-based operations, in which operators can end up at a location without knowing what is going on or what they may encounter.

The SOF TF staff always held an open brainstorming forum to plan operations, and let people who were not part of the core planning team excuse themselves whenever they felt they were no longer needed. The pie chart has proven to be a good working tool for operations and intelligence fusion, which allows the operations and intelligence officers and staff to work out their priorities together and develop a common understanding of the situation. The fields in the pie chart can be changed depending on the operation and its particular friendly-force information and priority intelligence requirements. This approach, along with a fusion mindset, are key to working smarter and putting the focus on unity of effort instead of rivalry. For the SOF TF described in this article, the interagency and combined approach came into effect in a way that exceeded all expectations. The TF members learned a great deal from this experience and continue to refine their methods and processes so they can work smarter and better. It is hoped that the Afghan partner force also gained something from the experience of working with the SOF TF's methods. ◈

> THE PIE CHART HAS PROVEN TO BE A GOOD WORKING TOOL FOR OPERATIONS AND INTELLIGENCE FUSION.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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NOTES

1   Deployable Training Division Joint Staff J7, *Commander's Critical Information Requirements (CCIRs)*, 3rd ed. (Suffolk, Va.: Deployable Training Division, July 2013): http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/fp/fp_ccirs.pdf

2   All figures in the article were developed by the author.

3   Army National Guard Battle Command Training Center, *Battle Staff Guide: A Reference Tool for Commanders and Battle Staffs* (Fort Leavenworth, Kan.: Army National Guard, August 2010), 347: http://www.benning.army.mil/mcoe/dot/mc3/reserve/content/pdf/Battle%20 Staff%20Guide_Aug2010.pdf

4   US Army Intelligence Center and Fort Huachuca, *Combat Commanders Handbook on Intelligence,* ST 2-50.4/FM 34-8 (Huachuca, Ariz.: USAIC&FH, 6 September 2001): https://fas.org/irp/agency/army/st2-50-4.pdf

Edited by Ian C. Rice and Craig Whiteside, US Naval Postgraduate School

The Return of the Zarqawists: How to Deal with the Islamic State Movement

On 20 August 2015, the Defense Analysis Department, the Naval War College Monterey, and the Global Education Community Collaboration Online (Global ECCO) hosted a panel at the US Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) titled "The Islamic State: Remaining and Expanding?"[1] The five researchers on the panel discussed the Islamic State (ISIS) from different perspectives and then took questions from the audience. The panelists were

- Major Jon Baker, a US Army Special Forces officer and student at NPS;[2]
- Brian Fishman, a counterterrorism research fellow with the New America think tank in Washington, D.C.;
- Dr. Haroro Ingram, a professor at the Australian National University;
- Dr. Casey Lucius, a former professor of National Security Affairs with the Naval War College Monterey; and
- Dr. Doug Ollivant, a managing partner at the consulting firm Mantid International.

Editor's Introduction

The purpose of the panel was to answer a series of questions about the Islamic State movement's return from near-defeat in 2007–2008. How was it able to return, and what were the factors that allowed its rise? What is the nature of the organization and its ideology? What aspects of insurgency, counterinsurgency, and irregular warfare are present in this current conflict? At what level should the United States be involved? Finally, how do we defeat the robust capability of the Islamic State movement in the realm of information operations?

NOTE: We use the name "ISIS" throughout the discussion to refer to the movement that is alternatively called ISIL, Daesh, and the Islamic State. When referring to the generic movement over time, we use the term "Islamic State movement."[3]

The Panel: The Islamic State—Remaining or Expanding?

QUESTION: What is the nature of the Islamic State movement? Is it an insurgency, a terrorist group, or a state? How did it develop into the organization it is today?

DR. BRIAN FISHMAN: I'll give a brief run-through of the history—and more recent development—of ISIS, starting in 2007, which is the later period in the progression of this organization. I'm going to start with the phrase "remaining and expanding." The reason people use the word "remain" with regard to ISIS is because ISIS leaders talk about how it still remains. The Arabic word for this is *baqiya*. There is a famous passage that ISIS folks refer to again and again, to this day, that talks about how the State [referring to the *Dawlah Islamiyah*, or "Islamic State" in Arabic] still remains, despite all of the pressure from so many different places. In the very narrow world of the jihadi, there is a very famous paragraph in a speech given by Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, who was the first emir of the Islamic State of Iraq [ISI]. [He was appointed in October 2006.] At this time the [Anbar] Awakening was just getting off the ground, the US troop surge was

THE ISI "WILL REMAIN SAFE BECAUSE IT HAS BEEN BUILT ON THE BODY REMAINS OF MARTYRS."

just starting to get off the ground, but ISI already felt heavy pressure from those events as early as spring 2007.[4] Abu Omar said the Islamic State of Iraq would remain: "It will remain safe because it has been built on the body remains of martyrs; it has been watered with their blood streams."[5] That quote still shows up in ISIS propaganda over and over again.

We measure ISIS in lots of different ways to try to determine whether we are winning or losing. But I would say, from their perspective, they set the bar low: ISIS will remain—in the sense of ISIS continuing to be a powerful force. Continuing to be something that is worth fighting for. That's not the bar of what they want to achieve, it's the bar that says, "We are not defeated so long as we still exist." In June 2010, [US Army Chief of Staff] General Ray Odierno said, "Well, over the last 90 days we have killed 34 out of 42 of the Islamic State of Iraq's top leaders." That was the primary metric the US military was using to understand the success we were having against this group. The ISI rejoinder during that period was "The Islamic State will remain. We are still fighting and we will continue to fight." I think we have to recognize that we are using a different set of metrics to measure how weak this organization is compared to the metrics that ISIS is using. What

our metrics ought to be, I don't know, but I think that is something to think about.

So the subtext of all of that is these guys think they have existed [as ISI or ISIS] since October 2006—not just since the Syrian civil war began, not just since they took over Mosul last year. We continued to call them al Qaeda in Iraq until they declared themselves to be ISIS or ISIL, crossed into Syria, and separated themselves formally from al Qaeda. But, if you look at the statements by Ayman al-Zawahiri, by Abu Faraj al-Libi—all the senior leaders in al Qaeda—in 2006 and through late 2007, they acknowledged that no, there was no such thing as al Qaeda in Iraq anymore. There was just the Islamic State of Iraq. We interpreted al Qaeda in Iraq's declaration of an Islamic State of Iraq as a rebranding exercise rather than a definitive political shift in the kinds of things that they wanted to accomplish. I think that from that early point they wanted to build this state. I think that Abu Musab al-Zarqawi wanted to build an Islamic State and was preparing to declare it even before he was killed. So you have this dynamic where the state gets declared in October 2006, and al Qaeda acknowledges that but still wants to exert influence over it.

MAJOR JOHN BAKER: ISIS is the evolution of a brutal organization that first formed in Iraq in 2002. Driven by a Salafi jihadist ideology [not the popularly ascribed Ba'athist influence], ISIS has a history of brutal actions directed at punishing the Iraqi Shi'a populace, which it views as apostates. The extreme ideology is likely not representative of the natural preference of the collective Sunni population in Iraq. The Awakening movement, the *Sahwa*, demonstrated that moderate Sunnis were present and willing to participate in efforts to undermine Zarqawi's version of Salafi jihad. With the end of the US mission in Iraq, however, this effort lost sponsorship and was quickly eroded from within by the remaining vanguard of the ISI. Subsequently, the Islamic State of Iraq entrenched itself in the social, political, and economic fibers of the Sunni population. The ISI revolutionary methodology penetrated tribal dynamics: collecting and coercing tribal leaders; achieving integration through marriage; manipulating lots of businesses; and, of course, assassination.

ISIS has proved itself to be a resilient organization and demonstrates resolve routinely through the information operations [IO] realm. Because of both the inability of the *Sahwa* to sustain itself after the end of the US mission and the revolutionary methodology of ISIS, there is at present little alternative for the Sunni population to turn to. The bandwagoning effect and fear of repercussions discourages the Sunni populace from betraying ISIS for a system that might align more closely with their natural preferences. Pockets of Sunni resistance exist, but how long can they endure?

> " THERE IS AT PRESENT LITTLE ALTERNATIVE TO ISIS FOR THE SUNNI POPULATION TO TURN TO. "

ISIS as a Network

FISHMAN: If you look [at our efforts to defeat the ISI movement] from 2009 to 2010, when we were making tactical and operational progress against this organization, one of the metrics we used [to measure their viability] was whether they had reliable communications back to Afghanistan. In fact, they couldn't talk to their senior leadership. So this debate over whether they were already operating as an independent entity was not just academic. It was a function of whether we were really measuring something that mattered at that time. We said, they have got to do all of their fundraising locally now, here in Iraq. But today, it's easy in 20/20 hindsight to look back and say that [having to rely on local extortion and

War in Syria

taxation as opposed to outside funding] actually strengthened them over the long run. That's a really interesting dynamic. The other piece of this that I think is key, is when we think about ISIS today, we think that it developed solely out of the organization that was started by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, had a connection with al Qaeda, became al Qaeda in Iraq, and then spread into Syria and came back to Iraq. But I would posit to you that the very earliest networks that Zarqawi built in Iraq were [a series of] regional networks that extended into Jordan and into Syria. They extended into Lebanon. And these networks never really went away.

A fascinating piece of this is that we had uprisings of jihadi organizations in Lebanon, the most famous of which was in 2007 by a group named Fatah al-Islam. It was largely crushed, but the people escaped. Well, [Shaker al-Abssi] led that uprising, [and he is the same person] who was indicted in Jordan in 2002 for collaborating with Zarqawi to kill an American diplomat named Laurence Foley. Shaker was later killed by Syrian forces, but this was a man who built a jihadi movement in Lebanon that was training people to go to Iraq, and that was receiving wounded fighters from Iraq and essentially doing rehabilitation for them. Shaker then tried to start his own organization in northern Lebanon, and it spread into parts of Syria.

The roots of these kinds of organizations still exist, and when we wonder how ISIS was able to explode so quickly in the context of Syria, it's because of this same network in Syria. It was not only funneling foreign fighters, but there was this indigenous network that was moving people [on behalf of various jihadist groups] from Lebanon into Syria, into Iraq, and vice versa. So I think one of the most important dynamics of ISIS as we think of it today, or as the "Islamic State" with no geographic boundaries, is that it is accepting pledges of allegiance from organizations around the world, including in Afghanistan. This is a definitive change. This is, in my opinion, one of the very few definitive changes from the organization that it was trying to be—from 2006 forward. We have documents from Syrian-based logisticians in ISIS saying, "I am going to negotiate with the guys in Lebanon, and I am going to do the Haj in Saudi Arabia, and I am going to meet up with our guys in the Gaza Strip and talk to them there." So the ISIS network was this underground network that [existed throughout the region].

> **RELYING ON LOCAL EXTORTION AND TAXATION AS OPPOSED TO OUTSIDE FUNDING ACTUALLY STRENGTHENED THE ISI.**

ISIS as an Insurgency

DR. HARORO INGRAM: I [find it helpful to look at ISIS as] an insurgency based upon these broad kinds of strategic principles that it shares with thinkers like Mao [Zedong], Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin, Abu Bakr Naji, and to some extent, [Abu Musab] al-Suri.[6] One of these principles is the establishment of a fully integrated politico-military campaign. ISIS thinks like an insurgency, presenting a competitive system of control [in contrast to the Iraqi and Syrian governments]. Now, the thing about a competitive system of political control is that when you look at insurgencies in their strongholds, they look remarkably state-like. They tend to structuralize, to institutionalize their functions. Even militarily, they have some kind of uniforms and they set up police and infantry. If, however, you look further out from those strongholds, insurgencies start to look very much like guerilla warfare—more insurgency-like. The way that the center interacts with those outer areas is through a functional political and military engagement. Militarily, they use guerilla warfare tactics, hit and run, those kinds of things, but certainly politically and socially, the way they operate is that the tax-man will appear, and he is just a guy who is carrying a gun. He walks past someone and says, "Pay up." That's taxation. They will engage with these populations functionally, with the differences between the areas being whether those functions are formalized in what we could call structures or institutions.

> " THE TAX-MAN IS JUST A GUY WHO IS CARRYING A GUN. HE SAYS, "PAY UP." THAT'S TAXATION. "

ISIS as a Pseudo-State

DR. CASEY LUCIUS: States have certain capabilities that terrorist organizations don't have. Most terrorist organizations carry out physical attacks for a political aim, but once that political aim is achieved, they don't necessarily have a desire to govern territory. ISIS is different with regard to what they want: they have political aims, they carry out physical attacks, but they also have the will to govern territory, to govern people. They also want to be recognized as a state, both on maps and internationally, and they have the ability to use multiple tools of power—information, political, military, and so on. We know that they have significant economic tools [extraction of taxes from locals, oil infrastructure]. So, in many ways, I think ISIS has the characteristics of a state, and if we treat them as a state, it opens up a range of policy options for dealing with them. Instead of thinking the only options are either to engage or not engage, it opens up the scope, and we can say, What do we do with this state? We negotiate, we impose economic sanctions, we attack the state's military, we isolate them, and we encircle them, or maybe apply a multipronged approach and do all of those things at the same time.

ISIS and Its Relationship with Shi'a States

FISHMAN: What is the relationship between the Assad regime and ISIS? It's absolutely indisputable that ISIS hates Shi'a Muslims—they have hated the Iranian and Syrian governments for years as a result of that sectarian

King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia (r) has coffee with Bahraini King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa.
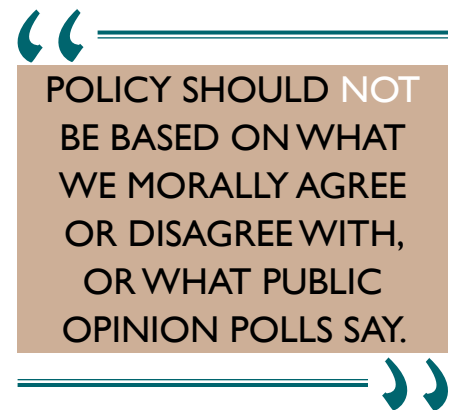
Syrian President Bashar al-Assad

perspective. At the same time, ISIS would not be what it is today if the Iranians didn't tolerate its networks operating back and forth between Iraq and Afghanistan for years. It's a fact that Iran allowed a range of different jihadi organizations to operate on its territory going back into the 1990s, mostly because the jihadis were hostile to Arab governments in the region, including the Saudis and the Egyptians, and so Iran allowed them to operate.

As for Syria, it's even more interesting. I mentioned Shaker al Abssi, who was a key ally of Zarqawi. Before the Syrian government killed him back in 2008, Shaker was part of a jihadi organization sponsored directly by the Syrian government in Lebanon. So why was the Syrian government doing that? Well, they weren't doing it because they actually supported these guys' goals. They were supporting pseudo-jihadi groups in Lebanon because they didn't want Palestinian organizations to get too powerful. So they were going to do anything they could to divide those movements. The radical would-be jihadi organizations would go to war against secular Palestinians as well as Palestinian Islamists like Hamas. So the Syrian government was playing all of these people against each other. When we look at Syria today, I don't believe there is this tight relationship between the Syrian government and ISIS that some people say exists. But it's absolutely true that the Syrian government over the years has supported radical groups, *takfiri* groups, in order to divide other opposition movements. That's just what they do. It is the playbook. So it's not surprising that in the first years of the Syrian civil war, the Syrian government would focus on fighting insurgent organizations that were not ISIS because they knew that ISIS would divide the insurgency. That's not some new strategy—that's what they have always done. The best place to see that is in Lebanon.

ISIS as a Global Threat

LUCIUS: Is ISIS a threat to our national interests? To answer this question, first, you identify national interests. Second, you identify your goals. Third, you identify your policy options. Using this approach, and starting with our national interests, I turn to Hans Morgenthau, who wrote, in his book *In Defense of the National Interest*, that the national interest should be the standard by which we develop policy.[7] In other words, policy should not be based on what we morally agree or disagree with. Policy should not be based on what we can afford or can't afford or what public opinion polls say. Specifically, Morgenthau suggested that moral principles in the international sphere have no concrete universal meaning, and he warned that without consistency in foreign policy, decision makers will simply demonize the enemy, rather than recognize the real threat and the opposing state's real power. This raises two big questions about ISIS. First, Morgenthau says that we should focus on interests, not morals. So, what I think he would say in regard to ISIS is that no matter how horrific ISIS's actions are, no matter how morally reprehensible we find these actions, our reaction should not be the basis of our policy. I think that's at least worth thinking about. We should allow that to sink in and inform the policy process.

The second question is [the threat]. We don't want to just demonize our enemy—we want to focus on what the real threat is and [what ISIS's capabilities are to harm or oppose any of our vital interests]. So I identify six vital interests: trade and economic prosperity; energy supply; freedom of the seas; space access; cyber security; and homeland security. Again, we could talk about what

> " POLICY SHOULD NOT BE BASED ON WHAT WE MORALLY AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH, OR WHAT PUBLIC OPINION POLLS SAY. "

those six actually mean and go on forever about whether those really are vital interests and what they encompass. But in terms of how that list relates to ISIS, I would submit that it could be our baseline to try to answer that question: does ISIS threaten our national interests? I will say ISIS does not threaten our trade supply, freedom of the seas, or space access. I will go on to suggest there is not an immediate threat to our energy supply or cyber security, although I do think there is possibility over time that the threat could grow. I would, however, submit that ISIS is a threat to our homeland security. The reason I say this is that [ISIS's own stated goals] are to expand its territory across the Middle East, Asia, and Africa; to recruit Westerners; and to attack the West and the United States. So, if we use that list of six national interests we can say okay, there may be one national interest that is actually threatened by ISIS.

FISHMAN: I think it's pretty clear that ISIS's strategy for engaging the West aims to inspire people there to do homegrown attacks. That's not always been the case, and it's also true that ISIS's predecessors have, at least rhetorically, had their eye on the West for longer than is usually understood.[8] In 2008, Abu Ayyub al-Masri was the minister of war in the Islamic State of Iraq, and he claimed credit for a bombing attack on the Glasgow airport in Scotland. Now, how much exactly did ISI [influence the perpetrators to act]? Did they actually drive that kind of attack in the West? It's hard to know. But I think that there is a lot to the idea that they had some influence on it. Most importantly though, this organization had its eyes on something bigger than just Iraq much earlier than we have generally given it credit for. I think that as we combat this group, it's important for us to understand that its leaders measure their legacy in those terms.

Dealing with Sectarianism in Iraqi Politics

QUESTION: ISIS's leadership must be credited with developing a successful strategy that facilitated its growth in support among the Sunni community. But this can only be part of the story. The return of the Islamic State movement

Glasgow airport bombing, 30 June 2007.

occurred in a political environment in Iraq that created the conditions for it to grow. How did this happen?

DR. DOUG OLLIVANT: The Iraqi government is a weak and largely dysfunctional one. It is also a democratic and representative one. Of course, those two aspects are intertwined. Democratic and representative governments have a hard time getting things done. It is difficult in a democracy to make things happen. They are inefficient by design. This is a problem now that Iraq is in a crisis. Iraq has what we call a national unity government, which means that all parties are represented in the executive. National unity governments, even within the subset of democracies, are on the least functional side of the spectrum. I think the only national unity government in the history of mankind that worked well was [British Prime Minister Winston] Churchill's government during the Second World War, and all it was doing was to focus on fighting the war. The government postponed all other concerns about what was going on at home. To understand the national unity government, I give this example: imagine if, in the current Barack Obama administration, four ministries—including one or two important ones like State, Interior, or Treasury—were controlled by Republicans who reported to Karl Rove or some similar figure.[9] What if President Obama had to work with a cabinet that included people who were quite intent on making sure his government did not function effectively? I tell people that government is hard to make function effectively even when everyone is dedicated and trying to make it function effectively. When some people are trying to ensure that it does not function effectively, that's actually very easy to do.

So, we are in a situation right now where we actually have some fairly decent leaders in the current Iraqi government. By decent, I mean well-meaning—I don't mean particularly capable. Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi is Western-oriented and spent his exile in London. He and the people he has surrounded himself with come from the London-exile branch of the Da'wa party, while [former Prime Minister] Nouri al-Maliki and the previous group came from

> **"GOVERNMENT IS HARD TO MAKE FUNCTION EFFECTIVELY EVEN WHEN EVERYONE IS DEDICATED AND TRYING."**

US Army General William B. Caldwell (r) displays a photo of Abu Ayyub al Masri.

those who spent their exile in Damascus and Iran. Abadi speaks fluent English, and he used to work for Hewlett Packard in London, where he was a technocrat. He also got 5,000 votes in the last election—not a huge support base for him to draw on—whereas, I believe, Maliki got 850,000. Abadi's most senior Sunni counterpart, Dr. Salim al-Jabouri, who is the speaker of the Iraqi parliament, comes out of the Muslim Brotherhood but has tried to leave that behind and is presenting himself as a more moderate and conciliatory figure. Both Dr. al-Jabouri and Prime Minister Abadi, I believe, are trying to reach out and cut a deal. The issue, of course, is that both of them have problems with their base. You know—and this is something that current congressional leaders in Washington can also understand—just because you're trying to get a deal, it doesn't mean that you can bring all of your backbenchers along with you.

BAKER: In response to the sectarian attacks that began in 2004, the Shi'a popular movements became increasingly violent and influential within the Baghdad government. The Iraqi security forces (ISF), which were predominantly Shi'a during the US involvement, had become increasingly homogeneous, and Shi'a popular movements are suspected of having infiltrated these organizations. The uniformed ISF was unable either to control the Sunni population or protect the Shi'a population; thus, the security gap inspired the actions of the Shi'a popular movements. Furthermore, Sunni participation in the Baghdad government is likely less than wholly meaningful. It is either too small to be influential within the national political realm, or participation in the government taints the authenticity of the individuals as representatives of Sunni causes. These factors have combined to create what I consider to be centrifugal forces within the Islamic State and Shi'a popular movements—giving alleged legitimacy to each other's atrocities.

OLLIVANT: There is a fundamental question we need to ask [about how much the sectarian issue affects the rise of the Islamic State movement]. Clearly the Sunni citizens of Iraq perceive that they are being deprived and persecuted, that they are not getting what is due them, and are on the receiving end of violence and oppression and imprisonment more than others around them. The question is, how much of this is real, and how much of this is perceived? If the persecution is real, then something can be done about it. If the persecution is largely perceived, then it's very difficult to know what the government might do.

> SHOULD WE THINK OF IRAQ'S SUNNIS IN THE SAME VEIN THAT WE THINK OF THE KOSOVAR SERBS?

Let me give a counter narrative to that. In the last election, the Sunni parties won 19% of the parliamentary seats in Iraq. [When we talk about the major divisions of Iraqis]—Sunni, Shi'a, Kurds—the impression is that they are divided 1/3–1/3–1/3. It's absolutely not the case. The country is 2/3 Shi'a, approximately 1/6 Arab Sunni, and 1/6 Kurdish Sunni. The Shi'a population is somewhere between 60% and 70% of the country. So you start to understand that when you deal with the Shi'a majority, you are dealing with a huge part of the population. When people say this government is Shi'a-dominated, well, if it's about 70% Shi'a, that's demographically proportionate. You have to remember that. So again, the Sunni won about 19% of the seats. From those 19% of the seats, they had 30% of the ministries.

There has been lots of talk about the Sunni in the security institutions being purged. The Iraqi government does not release demographic percentages of its rank and file, so we don't know what they are. They did release the names of the top 20 military officials and what sect and nationality they come from. Again, we find the Sunni Arabs dramatically overrepresented relative to their proportion in the population. So we have to ask the question: is their sense of oppression real, or is it simply that they are no longer getting the disproportionate amount of the goods and services and attention and jobs and prestige and positions that they enjoyed during the prior regime? Should we think of them in the same vein that we think of the Kosovar Serbs or the Afrikaners and the English in South Africa? Sunnis are simply never going to enjoy the advantages they once had, and they need to reconcile themselves to their new place in society. I think that is an open question. I don't like the fact that most people seem to think it's settled.

The United States as an Ally

OLLIVANT: Very quickly, let me talk about Iraqis' perception of the United States. When I travel Iraq and talk to the Iraqi people about the United States, the first thing they will tell me is that the United States is a remarkably unreliable ally. This is the story they will tell. ISIS came through in June of last year, swept down through Mosul, pushed down to Tikrit, and took the territory we all know about. In the Iraqis' telling, which is remarkably accurate, the Iranians essentially showed up the next day, asking, "How can we help?" They provided advisors, provided weapons, provided training; they were there for the Iraqis.

The United States said, "This looks a lot like a Sunni uprising against oppression to us, and we really think the Maliki regime is the problem, and we are not doing anything until the Maliki regime is removed." Or, as I put it to other people, when Iraq found itself in a crisis, the United States, rightly or wrongly, decided that it was time to burn political capital in order to accomplish our foreign policy objectives in Iraq and get rid of Nouri al-Maliki. And we accomplished that. The Iranians decided that this would be a really, really good time to bank political capital; therefore, the current outcome in which Iranian influence is clearly waxing where American influence is waning, should be utterly predictable. Who would you prefer to have as an ally? The one who is there, or the one who says, "Well, once you meet all my conditions, then I will think about it." So, that's a very real perception problem. To those of us who might have spent two or three years of our life there, this might stick in our craw a little bit, but nonetheless, it's a very real perception among the Iraqi populace.

The second thing I hear is that there is an extremely strong perception, particularly in the Shi'a south, that the United States sponsors ISIS. Now, as I tell people, this comes in what I call strong versions and weak versions. In the strong version, the United States has a fleet of black helicopters that are flying into ISIS-controlled territory and providing them with a resupply of money, weapons, and fighters. As I tell any Iraqi who tells me this, "That's just crazy talk. The United States is clearly not doing this." And we go back and forth. When you can push them off that narrative, though, they will start to peel back to what I call a warm moderate version that goes something like this: "Look, we know that ISIS is getting aid, money, fighters, weapons, certainly ideology, from American allies." They will name them: Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey. "These are US allies. You provide them all a lot of money, you provide them support, and they are either NATO allies or major non-NATO allies of yours. You have influence with them. If you wanted to, you could make them stop. Since you are not making them stop, perhaps you are engineering this behind the scenes and using these three states as cutouts to do your bidding and support ISIS." As I tell people, that's wrong—but it's not crazy. That is a reasonable

interpretation of facts on the ground. For people who aren't privy to what actually happens in the United States government—those of us who have been in the United States government know we could never pull off anything so sophisticated—you know, it's believable to them.

US Civil-Military Relations and the Iraq War

OLLIVANT: I think that we [the United States] are in a very dangerous moment right now, particularly for civil-military relations but also for learning the right lessons from Iraq. I think we have a large story line that has been popularized in a number of recent books on Iraq, and I think our last Army chief of staff also believes it. The story goes something like this: we invaded Iraq in 2003, which was probably a big mistake. We stumbled through 2004, 2005, and 2006 not really knowing what we were doing. About the middle of 2006—well, either in the middle of 2006 or on Valentine's Day [February] 2007, depending on which version you believe—we figured out that things needed to go differently in Iraq. We started doing them differently. By 2008, thanks to the Surge and the Awakening and everything else that went along with it, we had AQI/ISI defeated.

We moved into 2009 and 2010 with great expectations, and then three things happened. Ambassador Chris Hill showed up on the scene; Nouri al-Maliki contested the 2010 election, eventually emerged victorious, and started persecuting the Sunni; and President Obama precipitously—that is the word usually used—withdrew the entirety of the US force from Iraq in 2011. Essentially, this became a "things were going fine until the politicians—US and Iraqi—screwed things up" story. "But for being stabbed in the back by these politicians, things would be much better in Iraq." This story doesn't make the United States look hard at things that it did to set Iraq up for failure. Let me give you one example. By October 2007, in Baghdad, we had recruited 40,000 *sahwa* (Sunni militia fighters) in Taji District. 40,000 of them! About the time we got to the 15,000-point, I asked, "Hey, what are we doing here? Do we really need 15,000 *sahwa* to secure Taji District? We could probably do it with a lot less than this." Of course,

Nouri al-Maliki, former Prime Minister of Iraq

the response was, "More is better." More is better. We ended up with 40,000 *sahwa* (enlisted as a security force) in Taji District by the end of 2007. How on earth was the Iraqi government going to integrate four divisions' worth of *sahwa* into any type of security job? How could that possibly happen even if the Iraqi government wanted to do this? Let's accept that the Iraqi government wasn't really excited about it, but even had they wanted to do this, how on earth would they have found security jobs for 40,000 men in Taji District? I have no earthly idea.

So, my point is, I think that this narrative of "we really figured everything out and everything was going swimmingly, and then these politicians—American and Iraqi—betrayed us" is keeping us from looking hard at the things that the United States military did. Again, I was the chief of plans for Multi-National Division Baghdad in 2007. I was in the middle of this. I am partially responsible for some of the things that did not go so well. I like to think that I am trying to be reflective about that. I think that this narrative makes it difficult for us to recognize the mistakes we made in 2006, 2007, and 2008 that set the conditions for the failures that came later.

QUESTION: What are our strategic objectives as a nation concerning ISIS? Is this our fight, or should regional or local actors take the lead? How should we proceed as a nation to secure our interests in the region?

LUCIUS: What is it that we hope to accomplish in regard to ISIS? Do we want to just degrade their capabilities? Do we want to contain ISIS? Do we want to defeat or eliminate ISIS? It's important to consider what it is we want to accomplish, and it's important to consider that before you develop the policy. However, the current policy of contain, degrade, and defeat are, I think, more specifically military objectives, and I would argue that there are also political objectives, economic objectives, and social objectives that we need to consider as well. Someone mentioned that we need to bolster the Iraqi security forces, for instance, but we also need some stability within the Iraqi government, we need a capable police force, a justice system, things like that. We need to cut off the Islamic State's economic revenue. I read recently that ISIS receives between $3 million and $5 million a day from the sale of oil. So, there are also those economic and political objectives that we need to consider. If ISIS is a threat to our national interests, then there is probably a time element that we have to consider as well, which means that we would want to act swiftly so as to not allow ISIS to continue to strengthen its own capabilities.

BAKER: These concerns suggest four related efforts to address the problem of the Islamic State movement, and each comes with significant obstacles. The first is separating ISIS from the Sunni populace. This is essential. But given the conditions, is it still a viable goal? After the defeat of the Awakening movement, is there still a sense of abandonment [by the United States] among Sunni moderates, and how do we overcome this? Are there enough surviving Sunni moderates to even establish a quorum? What means are available to convince Sunnis to participate in an alternative system of government, and how do we protect them? Finally, any grassroots movement would need support from the national strategic level. Is it possible to garner lasting commitment from the government of Iraq?

The second effort is minimizing the role of Shi'a militias and building the capacity of the Iraqi security forces. I believe these two efforts are inexorably linked. The weaker the ISF becomes, the more justification exists for Shi'a militias

> "THE WEAKER THE ISF BECOMES, THE MORE JUSTIFICATION EXISTS FOR SHI'A MILITIAS AND IRANIAN INFLUENCE."

and therefore, Iranian influence. An Iranian-controlled militia will not be able to separate the Sunni populace from the Islamic State. The US mission in Iraq committed many troops and resources to create a new ISF that would be enduring. Based on the growth of the Islamic State, the ISF were either incapable or unable to connect with the populace and therefore failed. Subsequently, given our constrained resource environment now, how long will it take us to rebuild a force that is actually capable of accomplishing those things? Furthermore, beyond recording airstrikes and building up the security forces, what other measures do we have available to us to mitigate the influence of the Shi'a militias?

The third effort, which is mostly beyond the purview of the US military, is to foster an inclusive and reconciliatory Baghdad government. Most of this effort, again, is out of our hands, but this effort is the one that enables the first two to succeed. However, the US military is in a position where it can assist in this effort. What military actions can we take to increase the overall level of influence that the United States has with the government of Iraq? How do we protect moderates in the Iraqi government at the subnational level? Finally, what is the appetite within the government for reconciliation with the Sunni populace?

> AFTER 14 YEARS OF FIGHTING, WE STILL BELIEVE THAT A WAR OF ATTRITION IS A VIABLE STRATEGY.

Lastly, direct kinetic engagement will likely be a part of any strategy to combat ISIS, but this comes with significant strategic dangers. Kinetic engagements at the behest of the Iraqi national government without other measures are likely to be viewed by Sunnis as repression by the "Shi'a government" and reinforce the Islamic State worldview. Last week, a well-known proponent of counterinsurgency was here [at NPS] and argued that we should dramatically ramp up the amount of air strikes we are doing against ISIS, based on his assumption that ISIS fulfills most of the criteria of a natural functioning state. While I do agree with that perspective of the "Islamic State" as a somewhat functioning state, an air campaign against the Sunni populace would seem very similar to the search-and-destroy operations conducted by the US government during the Vietnam War. It's amazing that after 14 years of counterinsurgency fighting, we still believe that a war of attrition is a viable strategy for addressing this particular insurgency.

Finally, why should we care? Why is all of this important? I would like to propose four concerns about ISIS that I think make it extremely relevant. First, the terrorist acts of

9/11, executed by individuals trained during the 1990s and 2000s, were the product of Salafi-jihadist upbringing and extremism that was fostered in obscure locations across the Muslim world. If we continue to allow a generation of young Iraqis and Syrians to grow up under that same ideology, what fruits of terrorism will that bear for the next generation? Second, although ISIS isn't likely to ever create a spectacular domestic terror event like 9/11, their business model of employing homegrown terrorism in lieu of pulling individuals into training camps to develop attacks is harder to defend than al Qaeda's previous strategy. Third, a fractured Iraq, I believe, further destabilizes the Middle East, increases Iranian influence and opportunity, and perhaps furthers the goal of establishing Hezbollah 2.0 in Iraq. This, again, forces the other Sunni states within the region to counterbalance [the increase in Iranian and Shi'a power].

Fourth, I believe ISIS is a significant threat to our largest overseas military operation right now—Afghanistan. ISIS's growth there has been frequently dismissed as a rebranding of Taliban forces who are disenfranchised. For that, I would offer an analogy from the 1990s. There was an organization that was somewhat fractured and stagnant in that there were many Pashtuns who were disenfranchised within it. A small upstart group in southern Afghanistan changed a flag, rebranded itself, and was able to become wildly successful over the next five years. Of course, that organization is the Taliban. So breathing new life into an organization with an ideological change and a new arm patch has been effective in the past.

QUESTION: How do we defeat ISIS in the realm they dominate—information operations—particularly in the cyber domain?

INGRAM: ISIS excels at creating a perception of a global conflict, whereas the heart of the conflict, in fact, is in Muslim lands. Information operations, the media campaign, propaganda, whatever you want to call it, have a central, strategic role in insurgency thinking. Why? Because it is all about creating perceptions. It's about leveraging political and military actions in the field, along with messaging to influence the perceptions of contested populations. Contested populations include potential supporters but also enemies. It's very, very difficult to describe ISIS's information operations. The sheer breadth of their campaign is immense, from local audiences to

broader regional and transnational ones. If we look at their means of communication, these are as varied as local-area pamphlets, billboards, and speakers who [put up a screen and] hold movie nights, to transnational efforts, such as a magazine that is disseminated online.

My assessment is that in the "perceptions war," it is very difficult to deny that we are getting beaten. I suspect that the roots of this lie in an intellectual failing. I think that American commentary on and analysis of the ISIS information operations campaign—but even before that with al Qaeda and with other asymmetrical combatants—has tended to be very, very narrow. There is a kind of cognitive bias that has infiltrated our analysis of these problems. In the last year there have been a lot of publications about ISIS that focus on four factors or threats. One such focus addresses ISIS's central media units. The problem with that myopic focus is that ISIS actually has a multitiered organizational structure that is responsible for its media efforts. So yes, you do have those central media units like *al Hayat* and *al Furqān*. However, the most active producer of official ISIS information operations material is, in fact, at the secondary level, and it's run by the *wilayet* [provincial] information officers. They are actually the most prolific producers. And then, of course, you have this more influential means of IO dissemination, the unofficial production, which some people call the "fan boys." The "fan boys" use social media to disseminate these messages.

> ## IN THE "PERCEPTIONS WAR," IT IS VERY DIFFICULT TO DENY THAT WE ARE GETTING BEATEN.

The second popular focus is on how ISIS uses social media as a means of communication for its target audiences. I fear that this focus has resulted in confusion about the *means* of communication and the *meaning* of communication. A corollary to this is that the way we develop metrics for success have become warped. I don't know whether you are aware of the "Think Again, Turn Away" campaign and the sarcastic "Run to ISIS-land" video that was produced by the State Department? Well, there were mixed reviews on the effectiveness of these, but one of the defenses to that criticism said, "Well, look how many tweets we got. Hundreds of thousands of tweets on this! It was getting out there, it was being retweeted." In actuality it was being retweeted by the ISIS fan boys. *They* were retweeting it because they thought it was funny. They were mocking it. Here is something that should be really clear to everybody: if your enemy is disseminating your IO for you, you probably shouldn't think it's effective.

The third point I want to highlight is this myopic focus on ISIS's violence. You know, there is almost a hypnotic obsession with violence, and ISIS makes its videos to achieve precisely that. They want you to be hypnotized by the blood falling into a trench and flowing down. The problem with that focus is that we lose sight of its broader messaging. ISIS has extraordinarily diverse messaging, not only to its local audiences—its full spectrum of messaging is very, very diverse. I suspect that when we myopically focus on violence, we lose sight of that much broader picture, and we fall victim [to our emotions]: we end up driven by this rage, and we respond to violence rather than what we should be doing, which is soberly looking at things and analytically trying to understand what's going on.

The fourth point is this fixation on production. As if it was production that makes a difference in the efficacy of the product. There are commentators on CNN, on Fox, or whatever else, and they will mock the latest issue of Inspire [al Qaeda's magazine] and say how it's much less slick than Dabiq [the ISIS magazine]. Slick production is the glossy package that obscures what's more important, and that is the ISIS message.

From Mao to the Islamic State

INGRAM: There is no big single factor that sets ISIS information operations apart from its predecessors or its contemporaries. Those core, fundamental mechanics of ISIS's information campaign are broadly similar to the basic tenets of how Mao Zedong and [North Vietnamese General Vo Nguyen] Giap and all these other guys spoke about how propaganda should actually be used. Messages should be used essentially to check the perceptions and to polarize the support of contested populations. The way you do that is by leveraging two sets of factors. The first set is the one I call pragmatic factors, which are tied to security, stability, and livelihood. ISIS messaging tries to convince the population that "we" have the most effective competitive system of control. And not only do we have the most competitive system of control, if we tell you that we are going to do something, we are going to do it.

The second set of factors, which I think are very important but which tend to be over-emphasized at times, are perceptual factors. Perceptual factors essentially relate to the cause, which is a very broad, abstract way of putting it. But this messaging plays on identity–crisis–solution constructs. For ISIS there is a very simple narrative: we

are the champions of Sunni Muslims. Our enemies are malevolent, oppressive groups that are responsible for your crisis. So join us to defeat them, because we have the solutions. Regarding the core narrative, ISIS will actually interplay those different kinds of constructs. So they will put out some messaging, which I call "value reinforcing," that will say that ISIS has the solutions and all their enemies are causing crises. They have their economic reinforcement messages that will actually say: compare us, compare how good we are, to how bad and malevolent our enemies are.

ISIS has demonstrated a real appreciation for the fact that different audiences require different messaging. So ISIS information campaigns have tended to stress pragmatic factors, what I would call rational choice appeals, about making a decision between what's effective and what's ineffective. What is going to keep you safe, and what is not going to keep you safe. What is going to get you killed and your wife and children raped, and what will allow you to live a relatively happy life. To transnational audiences, ISIS has tended to prioritize those perceptual things. Read *Dabiq* or watch ISIS videos, and you will see that proportionally, comparatively, there is a greater emphasis on perceptual factors and nefariously playing on that core narrative.

However, even though ISIS messaging tends to stress certain things to certain audiences, it is actually when you compare that messaging to the messaging of al Qaeda Central, or al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and other Islamist groups, that you start to see the really subtle differences in the way that ISIS appeals to contested populations. The hallmark of an ISIS information campaign is its ability to interweave identity and rational choice appeals, and in doing so, to align those two crucial types of decision-making processes—rational and identity choice. We really struggle to try to understand why it is that foreign fighters have made the decision to go overseas so rapidly. What is it that has made these lone wolves decide to act so quickly? I think it is because the narrative is so well constructed. While narrative doesn't explain everything, I think it gives us a pretty good insight because ISIS information campaigns interweave these identity and rational choice appeals almost seamlessly. I leave you with this question: what is our narrative?

> **THE HALLMARK OF AN ISIS IO CAMPAIGN IS ITS ABILITY TO INTERWEAVE IDENTITY AND RATIONAL CHOICE APPEALS.**

ABOUT THE EDITORS

Ian C. Rice is a US Army Special Forces officer.
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NOTES

1 The Combating Terrorism Archive Project (CTAP) aims to collect and archive knowledge on strategy, operations, and tactics used by military and other security personnel from around the world in the twenty-first–century fight against global terrorism. Collectively, the individual interviews that CTAP conducts will create an oral history archive of knowledge and experience in counterterrorism for the benefit of the CT community now and in the future.

2 Please see the About the Contributors section of this issue for more information on the participants.

3 This interview was edited for length and clarity. Every effort was made to ensure that the meaning and intention of the participants were not altered in any way. The ideas and opinions of all participants are theirs alone and do not represent the official positions of the US Naval Postgraduate School, the US Department of Defense, the US government, or any other official entity.

4 The Awakening refers to the Anbar Awakening or *Sahwa* movement—the 2007 Sunni uprising against the ISI on the Syrian border.

5 Abu Omar, as quoted in a speech by Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, "The State of Islam Will Remain Safe," 7 August 2011, 4: http://triceratops.brynmawr.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/10066/15267/ADN20110807.pdf ?sequence=1

6 Mao Zedong led the insurgent Chinese Red Army to victory against extreme odds in 1949. Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin was an early al Qaeda commander who fought against the Soviets in

Afghanistan. Abu Bakr Naji is almost certainly a pseudonym for one or more Salafist extremists whose writing has influenced al Qaeda and ISIS. Abu Musab al-Suri (the pen name for al Qaeda strategist Mustafa Setmariam Nasar) wrote a major treatise in 2005 on the strategy to achieve global jihad.

7 Hans J. Morgenthau, *In Defense of the National Interest* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1982).

8 This refers to Zarqawi's failed first attempt to establish a terror cell in Germany in 2002. For more information, see Matthew Levitt, "USA Ties Terrorist Attacks in Iraq to Extensive Zarqawi Network," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1 April 2004: http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/usa-ties-terrorist-attacks-in-iraq-to-extensive-zarqawi-network

9 Karl Rove served as President George W. Bush's senior political advisor and deputy chief of staff between 2001 and Rove's resignation in 2007.

Flowers left near Paris' Bataclan concert hall, 14 November 2015, the day after the terror attack

THE WRITTEN WORD

Not Your Dad's Al Qaeda

Reviewed by Blaire Harms,
US Naval Postgraduate School

THE NEWS IS FULL OF THE DAILY HORRORS THAT ARE TEARING SYRIA and Iraq apart. The recent involvement of Russia is just one more twist in this story. Hundreds of thousands of Syrians are fleeing not only the Bashar al-Assad regime, but also the self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham (ISIS). From reports of its rivalry with al Qaeda (AQ) for the allegiance of other jihadis, to the declaration of a caliphate, to the rise in terrorist acts around the world by individuals or groups claiming affiliation with or inspiration from ISIS, the group seems ubiquitous in the headlines of the world's newspapers.

For a non-specialist, following the rise and fall of the various factions and splinter groups, the changing loyalties, and the internal disputes that have helped create ISIS as it is today can be as bewildering as any TV soap opera to a first-time viewer. In *ISIS: The State of Terror*, Jessica Stern and J. M. Berger provide a simple and timely "Who's Who" of major ISIS players; an overview of the group's origins, goals, and methods; and an analysis of what makes ISIS unique on the jihadi scene. The clarity that Stern and Berger bring to this murky subject makes this book a must-read for anyone interested in the modern Middle East and jihadist terrorism. Dr. Stern is the author of several books related to religious militants and terrorists, including *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill* (Harper, 2004). She is a lecturer on terrorism at Harvard University and served on US President Bill Clinton's National Security Council staff (1994–1995). J. M. Berger is the author of *Jihad Joe: Americans Who Go to War in the Name of Islam* (Potomac Books, 2011) and is a non-resident fellow with the Brookings Institution.

Stern and Berger begin by describing the original incarnation of ISIS, Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). Given the prevailing assessment by some television "talking heads" that the departure of US combat troops from Iraq in 2011 led directly to the rise of ISIS, the authors' more nuanced take is refreshing. They point instead to the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, along with the "de-Ba'athification" of government and military ranks (largely Sunnis), as the true sources of Sunni discontent and the rise of AQI. The US troop surge of 2006–2007 briefly calmed sectarian fears and helped bring about the "Sunni Awakening." This period also saw the death of AQI leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and the organization's name change to the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), although the group remained aligned with the less brutally violent al Qaeda Central. Stern and Berger go on to demonstrate how the increased sectarianism of the Iraqi government after the 2010 elections, along with the Arab Spring uprisings—particularly in Syria, with the formation of ISI affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra—and the departure of US combat troops, fueled Sunni fears and the spread of ISI, and led to the eventual merger in 2013 of ISI and Jabhat al Nusra as ISIS under the leadership of Abu Omar al-Baghdadi.

Having established this background, Stern and Berger delve into the central theme of the book: how and why ISIS is not "just your dad's al Qaeda."[1] The differences in methods and means between al Qaeda and ISIS mark an important shift in approach for the modern jihadi movement. The authors highlight three
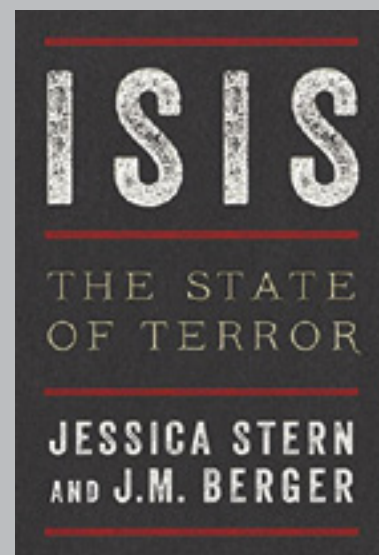
primary, mutually reinforcing distinctions: the message, the recruitment targets, and the use of social media. They discuss these broad subjects along with closely linked topics such as the use of "electronic brigades" and psychological warfare. In one example, Stern and Berger describe ISIS's use of a Twitter app called "The Dawn of Glad Tidings," which includes a "computer code that could take control of a consenting user's account to automatically send out tweets."[2] This is not new technology, but ISIS has excelled at using Twitter strategically: "ISIS had a name for these [Twitter] users—the *mujtahidun* (industrious). The *mujtahidun* could be observed repeatedly using specific tactics to boost the organization's reach and exposure online."[3] This section of the book, about the ways ISIS has changed the message, the methods it uses to disseminate that message, and the individuals and groups with which that message resonates, was particularly compelling—and alarming.

Stern and Berger contrast the messaging of al Qaeda and ISIS, pointing out that AQ retains the older jihadi focus on Muslims as being in a position of weakness—the perspective, in other words, that jihad is an act of defense. This message was typically supported by lengthy ideological papers and static "talking head" videos, along with the occasional action video showing AQ soldiers training in a desert or blowing up "asymmetrical targets" (because AQ leaders did not view direct combat as a current possibility).

ISIS, in contrast, projects a much more active, successful, and violent vision of jihad. *The Clanging of the Swords* movie series, produced by ISIS's media outlet, is emblematic of this transition. The films are a higher-quality and more aggressive portrayal of ISIS fighters' strength and ability to win in direct combat.[4] This new approach also promotes the vision of an Islamic "utopia" in the here and now, which is an important part of the group's appeal to new audiences for whom the more muted AQ message does not resonate. The notable violence of ISIS's current messaging, in both nature and transmission, appears to have been largely influenced by the writings of jihadi strategist Abu Bakr Naji. In Naji's view, a lesson learned from previous failed jihads is the need for a phase of "highly visible violence, intended to send a message to both allies and enemies."[5] ISIS has taken that lesson to heart.

Not only does ISIS offer a different message from that of al Qaeda, its target audience is also significantly different. Like AQ, ISIS primarily woos foreign fighters, but unlike

> " ISIS INVITES WOMEN, FAMILIES, AND EVEN FOREIGN PROFESSIONALS TO JOIN THE *HIRJA* (EMIGRATION). "

AQ, it also invites women, families, and even foreign professionals to join the *hirja* (emigration). This broad recruitment pool is directly linked to the group's dual goals: not only to reestablish the caliphate, but also to create a state and society of like-minded Muslims. ISIS is actively appealing to a wide range of internal and external motivations, making it much more difficult for Western CT analysts to typify ISIS's foreign fighters. Stern and Berger also lament ISIS's use of children to carry out their atrocities, noting that people, especially children, who are inundated with violence and death tend to lose their empathy and respect for human life. As a result, the world is faced with a significant challenge as countries consider the reintegration of both returning and liberated ISIS fighters. Moreover, ISIS has a message for those "left behind," sympathizers who are unable for whatever reason to travel to Syria or Iraq but might be willing to act at home. This message of encouragement to "lone wolf" jihadis has allegedly provoked a number of incidents in Western countries, raising fear among Western populations and heightening the psychological warfare factor.

In later chapters, Stern and Berger highlight ISIS's innovative use of social media. Whereas AQ is much more likely to produce a long-winded video monologue revolving around a theological point, ISIS has turned to Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube to share "victories," such as hostage beheadings, interspersed with happy images of jihadi family life in ISIS territory. This use of media technology and brand marketing takes advantage of Western countries' protection of free speech, which raises interesting (and troubling) questions about the circumstances under which messages can, or should, be designated as "terrorist" and shut off. Is it better to shut down terrorist accounts or leave them up for intelligence purposes? Who should be in charge of making such decisions: governments or the corporations that own the social media sites? Social media helps spread the organization's message of strength and victory, not only to the world at large, but also to its rivals in al Qaeda.

Stern and Berger make it clear that realistic military options against ISIS are limited, and unlikely to do more than degrade its fighting capacity and perhaps contain its growth. They offer two principal prescriptions: counter the black-and-white jihadi message by "fleshing out the nuance and complexity of situations and conditions" in vulnerable communities; and design policies that do not "lend credence and support to ISIS's simplistic and

apocalyptic worldview."[6] The first prescription, however, seems to contradict a discussion earlier in the book regarding the generally limited ability of vulnerable populations to process nuance. This in turn suggests that, somehow, ISIS's opponents first have to increase a group's (or society's) capacity for critical thinking, and only then can they engage in discussions of specific "situations and conditions." This makes the task much more complicated than the authors imply in their recommendation.

The second prescription appears, on the surface, easier to accomplish. States simply need to avoid overreacting to atrocities committed by ISIS and playing into the jihadis' narrative. This would, however, require that democratic governments be willing—and able—to resist public pressure for immediate action following acts of savagery and violence, or the repercussions of terrorist violence elsewhere, such as a massive influx of refugees. This recommendation also relies heavily on the Western media and how they report the ISIS "story." Stern and Berger focus more on "control" of the social-media battlefield rather than the role of social media per se, but they also acknowledge the minefield of legal and moral obstacles that lie along the boundaries of free speech, private business, intelligence, and the actual terrorists who are using social media. They rightfully point out that the West "owns the battlefield" of social media, and if that power is used correctly in this war of ideas and messages, we will have an indisputable advantage in our confrontation with ISIS.

In their conclusion, Stern and Berger seem uncertain whether there is anything to do beyond containing the virus that is ISIS. And while they clearly oppose any full-scale military response, each of their recommendations for containing ISIS seems to come with a caveat, which makes their ideas less useful for real planning or action. Their analysis of a proposal to cancel the online accounts of anyone distributing terrorist content provides an example of the complications for democratic societies. The authors

> ## EACH OF THEIR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONTAINING ISIS SEEMS TO COME WITH A CAVEAT.

warn that such a policy can lead to "chronic framing problem[s]. Advocates of free speech see it as a censorship issue, as do some social media companies."[7] Later, Stern and Berger point out that, while "additional study is necessary to fully evaluate the impact of such suppression techniques [as suspending accounts], the early data is very encouraging. ... That said, it is not so easy to implement a policy of suppression."[8] The authors' framing of the problems in countering ISIS is excellent, but deriving actionable policies from their discussion is less easy.

Overall, however, *ISIS: The State of Terror* is an interesting and quick read. The authors do an excellent job of laying out ISIS's history, tactics, and techniques, and the ways in which ISIS differs from previous jihadi movements like AQ. Stern and Berger intersperse their discussion of ISIS's messaging, recruitment strategies, and use of social media with descriptions of the methods Western states have used successfully to degrade some of these efforts. It is also satisfying to catch a glimpse of the internal *jihadi fitna* (infighting)—which shows that ISIS and its leadership are not unanimously supported even within the jihadi community.

Stern and Berger bring clarity and perspective to the threat we are facing—a threat that is not an existential one. Despite the lack of innovative policy recommendations, *ISIS: The State of Terror* helps to provide context for the recent events in Syria and Iraq, as well as their impact on the world at large. Anyone who is interested in, but unfamiliar with, violent religious extremism and the evolving situation in the Middle East will find value in this insightful book. ◈

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Blaire Harms teaches in the Center for Civil-Military Relations at the US Naval Postgraduate School.

NOTES

1   "Not your dad's..." is a colloquial American phrase that means something is no longer as simple as it was a generation ago. I use it ironically here and in the title of the essay to suggest there is a generational shift between al Qaeda and ISIS.

2   Jessica Stern and J. M. Berger, *ISIS: The State of Terror* (New York: Ecco Press, 2015), 143.

3   Ibid., 155.

4   This series, the fourth of which appeared online in May 2014, is produced by al-Furqān Media, the production wing of ISIS.

5   Stern and Berger, *ISIS*, 23.

6   Ibid., 243.

7   Ibid., 245.

8   Ibid., 247.

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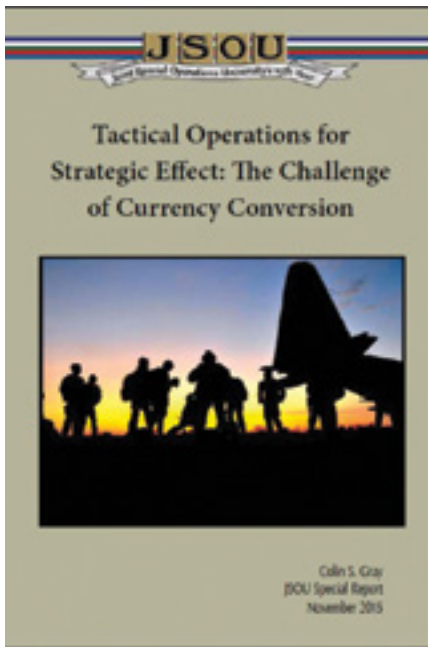
Tactical Operations for Strategic Effect: The Challenge of Currency Conversion
by Colin S. Gray

Dr. Gray examines the currency conversion between tactical behavior and its strategic consequences. All strategy consists of tactical actions, and Special Operations Forces (SOF) are often tasked with tactical operations with the expectation that the actions will have the desired strategic effect. A SOF community seeking to explain its functions needs to be crystal clear in distinguishing between the fundamental meanings of strategy and tactics. If there is confusion about these two concepts—and the author believes there is—then charting a sensible relationship between them is impossible. The author explains, for example, that "there are no, indeed there cannot be, any 'strategic' troops, forces, or weapons, for the simple reason that all troops, forces, and weapons have strategic meaning, be it ever so slight, or even arguable." This monograph attempts to reinforce the understanding of strategy and tactics by using historical examples of where the two have failed each other. In the end, there must be the necessary direction and leadership that provides solid strategic sense, so that SOF may achieve the effects needed to advance US policy.
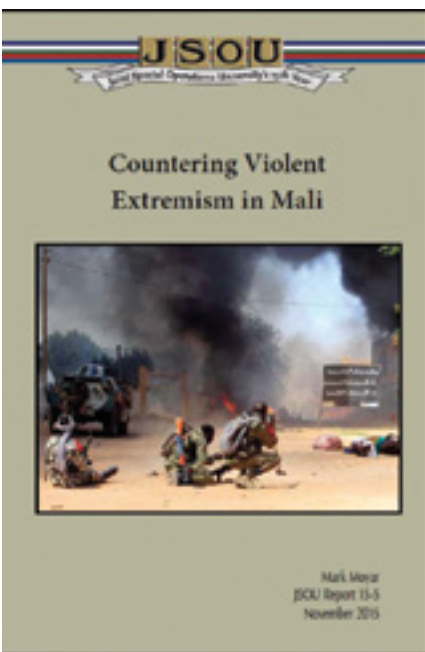
Countering Violent Extremism in Mali
by Mark Moyar

Dr. Moyar analyzes US and international efforts to counter Mali's panoply of extremist organizations. Violent opposition to Mali's government has deep roots, which include historic tensions between the Tuaregs and other ethnic groups, as well as the emergence of Salafist extremist groups in Algeria. Extremist attacks on Mali's democratic government in late 2011 and early 2012 culminated in a military coup that allowed rebels to take control of northern Mali. Because Mali had received extensive military and non-military assistance from the United States and other foreign countries in the preceding years, these disasters led some to question aid practices, including those of United States Special Operations Forces (USSOF). This study adds to a growing body of knowledge on special operations and counterterrorism in Africa. It also contributes to the general understanding of the troubling events in Mali, where the government continues to confront violent extremism and other forms of rebellion. Perhaps most significantly for USSOF, the monograph offers insights into the building of partner capacity.

JSOU PUBLICATIONS

Maskirovka 2.0: Hybrid Threat, Hybrid Response
by James Q. Roberts

In this paper, Mr. Roberts describes the irregular and hybrid tools and techniques that Russian President Vladimir Putin, his security forces, and his intelligence forces have used, first in the attack against Georgia in 2008, then in the assault on Ukraine, and now in Syria, to advance renewed Russian regional hegemony and strategic reach. The paper also describes the mobilization of Russian minority populations, the cooptation of the Georgian and Ukrainian regimes, and the West's seeming inability to effectively counter these Russian moves. Since this paper was finalized for publication, Russia moved into Syria and the assessment of this adventure remains very speculative. Nevertheless, many aspects of the Syrian case are fully congruent with Russia's hybrid approach in Georgia and Ukraine. Mr. Roberts holds the Office of the Secretary of Defense chair at the Eisenhower School, National Defense University. His prior assignment was as the principal director, Special Operations and Combating Terrorism, Office of the Secretary of Defense.
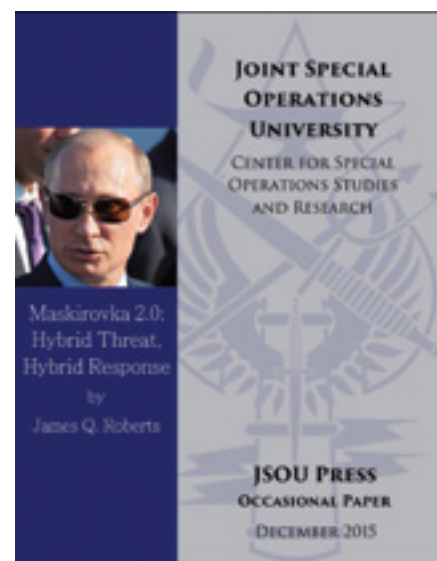
Sun Tzu and Machiavelli in Syria: Attacking Alliances
by Richard Rubright

The purpose of this short work is to contextualize the ongoing conflict in Syria through the combined lens of Sun Tzu and Machiavelli, juxtaposed to the normative trend the West has followed so ineffectually since the Syrian conflict began. This work is an alternative view of the conflict that should be read as a cautionary tale concerning our lack of proficiency in strategy. It is broken down into three distinct parts. The first part contextualizes the conflict and the actors involved, including the proxies. The second part lays out the strategic principles of Sun Tzu as they pertain to the conflict, to provide a strategic framework to help the reader make sense of the conflict's complex nature. The final part focuses on US action in the Syrian conflict, keeping in mind Machiavelli and as informed by Sun Tzu's strategic principles. Dr. Rubright is a senior faculty member at the Joint Special Operations University and teaches in the fields of special operations, strategy, and counterinsurgency.

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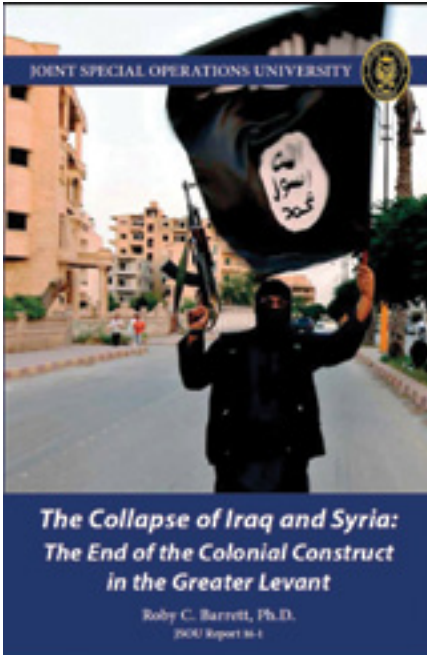
The Collapse of Iraq and Syria: The End of the Colonial Construct in the Greater Levant
by Roby C. Barrett

A day does not go by without something about Iraq and Syria, as well as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), in the news. Most of the news coverage deals with atrocities, factionalism, civil war, and cultural/ethnic strife. The value of this monograph is that Dr. Roby Barrett delves expertly and deeply into history to explain this complicated story. It is a story of states created with artificial borders, which had to be ruled with iron fists to keep a lid on fractured societies. Barrett explains that what we are witnessing is the dissolution of these borders and the collapse of central governments in Iraq and Syria. In fact, the author contends that Iraq and Syria no longer exist as nation-states, but that their ultimate fate is yet to be seen. This monograph provides the reader with a historical overview of the Greater Levant that helps explain the reality on the ground today.

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The *Combating Terrorism Exchange* (*CTX*) is a quarterly peer-reviewed journal. We accept submissions of nearly any type, from anyone; however, submission does not guarantee publication. Our aim is to distribute high-quality analyses, opinions, and studies to military officers, government officials, and security and academic professionals in the counterterrorism community. We give priority to non-typical, insightful work and to topics concerning countries with the most pressing terrorism and CT issues.

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