

# CTX

Volume II, No. 2 2021



ISSN 2162-6421 (online)  
Summer 2021

# CTX

## EDITORIAL STAFF

ELIZABETH SKINNER *Editor*  
ELIZABETH ROBINSON *Copy Editor*  
SALLY BAHO *Copy Editor*

## EDITORIAL REVIEW BOARD

VICTOR ASAL  
*University at Albany, SUNY*

CHRISTOPHER C. HARMON  
*Marine Corps University*

TROELS HENNINGSEN  
*Royal Danish Defence College*

PETER MCCABE  
*Joint Special Operations University*

RAJAN RAVINDRAN  
*Indian Army (Ret.)*

IAN RICE  
*US Army (Ret.)*

ANNA SIMONS  
*US Naval Postgraduate School*

SHYAM TEKWANI  
*Asia-Pacific Center for  
Security Studies*

CRAIG WHITESIDE  
*US Naval War College*

Layout and Design Provided by  
Graduate Education Advancement  
Center, Naval Postgraduate School

## From the Editor

When most human beings perceive a threat, the natural reaction is to lash out with whatever power is available to stop and, preferably, destroy the threat. In simplistic Darwinian terms, whoever is most successful at eliminating threats is the one most likely to spread its DNA into the next generation. And it is said that procreation is the primary motivator for life on earth, for all of us, from bacteria to humans.

However, in a world as complex as the one we've developed for ourselves, the meaning of "survival" has become increasingly complicated and ever more nuanced. At eight billion and counting, our species is in no danger of dying out—that is, unless we engineer our own demise, which we seem intent on doing. So why does it seem like we're still all fighting for survival all of the time? The evolutionary psychologist Robert Wright has suggested that some of the basic psychological-biological imperatives that enabled our ancient forebears, such as aggression, desire for status and the accumulation of wealth, dread of losing status, even greed for fatty and sugary foods, may be the same impulses that are now impelling our destruction. Arguably, this means that the differences between Genghis Khan and Jeff Bezos are more cultural than they are of kind. Both men are highly successful avatars of the ancient human impulse to accumulate wealth and power, although in our modern, increasingly crowded, fossil fuel-powered world, too much of a good thing is itself a source of stress. Think: heart attacks, endless wars, and a badly damaged planet.

Bring in religion and, especially these days, it seems that there's no hope for people to even identify, much less work toward, any common good. Even so, I want to make the radical proposal that people are basically good and overwhelmingly seek to avoid pain and suffering. The problem is, we are very prone to misinterpret what actually gives rise to peace of mind, especially when it comes to the question of "Whose peace?" That of *my* self, *my* family, *my* tribe, *my* nation, *my* beliefs? As long as humans see life as zero-sum—what you gain, I lose—then we, the planet, and everything on it will continue to struggle and suffer.

This issue begins with the story of a Nigerian boy called Obi. Lieutenant Commander Nikolaj Lindberg uses fiction as a skillful way to describe how a young villager, bereaved and embittered by personal tragedy, is drawn into a culture of extremist violence. With everything taken away from him, and robbed of a sense of meaning or power, Obi falls prey to a charismatic, ruthless imam who knows exactly how to fill those needs.

Next, Lieutenant Colonel Regan Lyon takes us on a first-hand tour of portions of the ISIS medical “system” in Syria and Iraq, revealing the reality behind the slick propaganda videos that aim to lure doctors and nurses from abroad to work for ISIS. Far from “state-of-the-art” facilities and supplies, as the videos claim, Major Lyon witnesses a medical shambles exacerbated by the group’s relentlessly violent ideology.

In the final feature article, Dr. David Belt presents the second part of his ethnographic study of extremism in Pakistan. Extrapolating from the trends he outlined in part one (published in *CTX* 11, no. 1), Dr. Belt offers his view of why current trends toward increasing extremist violence in Pakistan are unlikely to shift and what the United States and other influential players might do to change this trajectory.

This issue’s *CTX* interview features General David Petraeus, who talks about the significant changes he made to US counterinsurgency doctrine based on his experiences leading US forces in Mosul, Iraq, following the US invasion in 2003. As Commander of Multinational Force–Iraq during the 2007 troop “surge,” he developed and implemented a new strategy to drive insurgents from the cities and increase overall security. General Petraeus was interviewed in 2019 by Chuck Woodson, a co-founder of the Special Operations Research Database.

With *The Game Floor*, Global ECCO team members Amina Kator-Mubarez and Sally Baho offer a primer on how to facilitate strategic games, whether in person or online. They describe the many, sometimes hard-won, lessons learned by members of the Global ECCO team over the course of facilitating more than 200 games in venues around the world. Like everything else, the pandemic forced the team to devise new strategies for game facilitation from a distance.

Next, Dr. Victor Asal poses a sticky ethical question for anyone who has had to decide between doing the easy thing and doing the right thing. When the choice means deflecting harm onto the other or inviting harm onto oneself, what *do* you do?

Our book review by Major Temesha Christensen explores *Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS*, by Joby Warrick. The book’s focus is the rise of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, founder of the Sunni insurgent group al-Qaeda in Iraq (which would eventually become ISIS), and describes how his extreme sectarian violence laid the groundwork for the caliphate.

In the Publications section, be sure to check out the new book by Dr. Michael Freeman, *The Global Spread of Islamism and the Consequences for Terrorism*. And, as always, our colleagues at JSOU have a selection of new publications for your perusal.

As many of you will recall, in March we sent out an invitation to our readers to submit their own work for possible publication in *CTX*. The response has been very encouraging, and we’re now in the process of reviewing several submissions. I want to remind you that this remains an open invitation. If you have experience or have done research in the fields of counterterrorism or special operations that you think will be of value to your peers, write about it and send it in for review! While we can’t accept documents in languages other than English, the quality of the writing is much less important than the quality of the thinking behind it. When a piece is accepted for publication, our experienced editorial staff will work with the author to ensure that the final product meets *CTX*’s publishing standards. There are no deadlines for submission; once a piece is accepted, it will generally appear in one of the next two issues.

For more information about *CTX* and the Global ECCO project, go to <https://nps.edu/web/ecco>. You can also follow *CTX* and Global ECCO on Facebook

**Elizabeth Skinner**  
Editor, *CTX*

# Inside

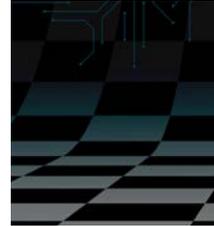
## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Elizabeth Skinner



06

**At the Very End, I Smiled**  
LTC Nikolaj Lindberg,  
Danish Special Operations  
Command



48

**THE GAME FLOOR**  
Facilitating CT Virtual Games:  
The Transition to the Virtual World  
Amina Kator-Mubarez, US Naval  
Postgraduate School and Sally Baho,  
US Naval Postgraduate School



16

**ISIS Medical System as a  
Target for Counterterrorism  
Efforts**  
Lt. Col. Regan Lyon,  
US Air Force



54

**ETHICS AND INSIGHTS  
Sometimes**  
Dr. Victor Asal, University at  
Albany, SUNY



24

**The Future of Islamic  
Extremism in Pakistan:  
An Ethnography, Part Two**  
Dr. David D. Belt, National  
Intelligence University



56

**THE WRITTEN WORD**  
*Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS*  
By Joby Warrick  
Reviewed by Maj. Temesha  
Christensen, US Air Force



36

**THE CTX INTERVIEW**  
GEN David Petraeus,  
US Army (ret.)  
Interviewed by Charles “Chuck”  
Woodson, Middlebury Institute  
of International Studies at  
Monterey



60

**PUBLICATIONS**

## ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

**Dr. Victor Asal** is director of the Center for Policy Research and a professor of political science at the Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy, University at Albany, SUNY. His research focuses on violent nonstate actors, pedagogy, and political discrimination related to ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. He co-created Big Allied and Dangerous Data (BADD), which collects data on extremist groups. Dr. Asal has participated in research projects funded by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, the Department of Homeland Security, the National Science Foundation, and the Office of Naval Research.

**Sally Baho** is a faculty associate in the Defense Analysis department at the US Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) in Monterey, CA, and an associate editor with *CTX*. She is active on the Women, Peace, and Security initiative, working extensively in the SOUTHCOM AOR on the integration of women into peacekeeping operations and government. Ms. Baho earned a BS in biochemistry and cell biology from the University of California, San Diego, and an MA in food studies from the University of the Pacific in 2020.

**Dr. David D. Belt** is a professor at National Intelligence University, Washington, DC, where he specializes in the social analysis of strategic-level security issues emerging from global Islamist movements worldwide. Previously, Dr. Belt was an assistant professor of National Security Studies at National Defense University, where he developed and taught the university's first national security professional certified course on countering violent extremism. He served 26 years in the US Navy's Special Operations Officer community (non-SEAL) before retiring with the rank of captain.

**Major Temesha R. Christensen** is a US Air Force Cyberspace Operations officer. She currently serves in the 688th Cyberspace Wing as the Air Force Information Network, Mission Assurance Center, Director of Operations. She has deployed to multiple countries throughout the Middle East and Africa. Maj. Christensen recently earned her second master's degree in Defense Analysis (Irregular Warfare), and a certificate in regional security studies for East and Southeast Asia, from NPS.

**Amina Kator-Mubarez** joined NPS in 2011 and is currently a faculty associate for the Global ECCO project. Previously, she was a research associate for the Program for Culture and Conflict Studies at NPS, where she drafted and briefed unclassified strategy papers related to counterinsurgency and stability operations in Afghanistan for DARPA and US Central Command (CENTCOM). Ms. Kator-Mubarez earned a BA degree in political science from the University of California, Berkeley, in 2006, and an MA in security studies from NPS in 2009.

**Lieutenant Commander Nikolaj Lindberg**, Danish Special Operations Command, has served in the Danish Defense Forces since 2002. He has been deployed on several international operations, most notably in Afghanistan and Syria, and across a handful of African countries. He is currently a graduate student in the Department of Defense Analysis at NPS.

**Lt. Col. Regan F. Lyon**, US Air Force, is an emergency medicine physician and recent graduate in Defense Analysis from NPS. She completed medical school through the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USUHS), and graduated from the Emergency Medicine Residency at San Antonio Military Medical Center. In 2014, Lt. Col. Lyon deployed as the Medical Director of the 83rd Rescue Squadron at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan. She served as an emergency medicine physician for the Special Operations Surgical Team, 720th Special Tactics Group, in 2017, and as Team Leader in support of Operation Inherent Resolve in 2019. She is currently an assistant professor at the USUHS Department of Military and Emergency Medicine.

**General David Petraeus** graduated from West Point in 1974 and was commissioned into the infantry as a second lieutenant. After serving with the UN mission to Haiti (1995) and in the NATO Stabilization Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2001–2002), he commanded the 101st Airborne Division during the US-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003. In 2007, GEN Petraeus was elevated to full general and took command of Multinational Force–Iraq; he stepped down in 2008 to succeed ADM William J. Fallon as head of CENTCOM. GEN Petraeus was named Commander of US and NATO forces in Afghanistan in 2010. After retiring from the Army in 2011, he briefly served as director of the CIA.

**Charles “Chuck” Woodson** is a retired US Army Special Forces Chief Warrant Officer Four (CW4) with 24 years of service in Europe, Latin America, and the Pacific region. He began interviewing members of the Special Operations Forces (SOF) in the early 1990s. Post-career, he earned a BA in International Policy and an MA in Nonproliferation and Terrorism Studies from the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey (MIIS) in Monterey, California. While at MIIS, Woodson co-created the Special Operations Research Database (SORDB), Asymmetric Conflict Project, as a part of the Center on Terrorism, Extremism, and Counterterrorism (CTEC). He currently serves as a Senior Research Fellow at CTEC.

---

#### COVER PHOTO

Kuje, one of the Local Government Areas of the Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria, is popularly known as the Food Basket of the F.C.T., due to its wide expanse of vegetation and farmlands. (Photo by Joseph C. Okeke / CC BY-SA 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>))

---

#### DISCLAIMER

This journal is not an official DoD publication. The views expressed or implied within are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the views of any governmental or non-governmental organization or agency of the United States of America or any other country.

---

#### TERMS OF COPYRIGHT

Copyright © 2021 by the author(s), except where otherwise noted. The *Combating Terrorism Exchange* journal (CTE) is a peer-reviewed, quarterly journal available free of charge to individuals and institutions. Copies of this journal and the articles contained herein may be printed or downloaded and redistributed for personal, research, or educational purposes free of charge and without permission, except if otherwise noted. Any commercial use of CTE or the articles published herein is expressly prohibited without the written consent of the copyright holder. The copyright of all articles published herein rests with the author(s) of the article, unless otherwise noted.

# At the Very End, I Smiled

*LTC Nikolaj Lindberg,  
Danish Special Forces*



*“Fight with those from among the people of the Book, who don’t believe in Allah or in the last day, who don’t make unlawful that which Allah and His Messenger have made unlawful, and don’t adopt the Right way as their way. Fight them until they pay Jizya with their own hands and are humbled.”*

Surah Tawbah 9:29

**T**he explosion is a muffled noise, but the tremor in the ground discloses the enormous power of the blast. I blow my whistle and we get up. A second later, the muzzle flashes make the night glimmer and sparkle. Half of all the world’s sounds fall away as the explosive bangs of the gunshots mix with the metallic noises of rifle actions. We fire as one, all eight of us, and death rains on the *kuffar*. The stock punches hard against my shoulder, adding a liberating sensation of numbness to the fight. The fear is gone now. Our tracer rounds draw bright lines through the darkness, leaving purple and green echoes of their passing on the inside of my eyes. Through the waning moonlight I see the fruits of our endeavors, as figures collapse to the ground while struggling to leave their burning armored vehicle. The hard rounds clink off the side of its armor in a whining cacophony. My magazine clicks empty. I swipe my hand past the release, yank the sickle-shaped canister out with a hard tug, grab another from my rig, and click it into place. I reach over and pull hard on the tap. The bolt slams home and I resume fire. Suddenly, explosions blossom in the air around us and dirt sprays over me. It feels like a giant’s whip is splitting the air with vicious cracks. The air is boiling with heat and blinding lights. Instinctively, I crouch down in the ditch, water spilling into my pants. I realize my error the second I am on my knees. Commander Jayamma and Abu Mazen were adamant about this: “When they shoot back, and they will, do not flinch, do not cower or show fear. Keep shooting and shooting and shooting. Therein lies the key to your victory and survival—or, if you should be defeated, the very keys to the gates of Heaven. Keep the words of the Prophet, *alayhi as-salām*, in mind: If failure befalls you, do not say, ‘Oh, if only I had done otherwise.’ Rather, you should do what Allah decrees. Saying ‘if’ opens the door to the deeds of Satan.”

Madi is on his knees next to me. I can hardly see him through the darkness of the night, but I can tell he is contemplating the same as I am. I snarl in frustration and try to stand but fail utterly. The second I crest the top of the ditch, more explosions rain down on us and I am showered in dirt and heat. My legs refuse to accept my desperate command; my body does not comply. I fall back to my knees and stay down. Madi gets up and fires his AK. The weapon appears to be silent as it repeats in his hands in an absurd slow-motion. Even the muzzle flashes look slow and disjointed from reality. I try to get up, but then, with a sound unlike anything I have ever heard, Madi is struck. The entire lower part of his face breaks open. I am showered in blood and bone fragments and scream soundlessly in shock. Madi slouches oddly towards me, his tongue lolling absurdly from the gaping hole that was once his jaw while blood and bile gush out of him in impossible quantities. He stumbles over me, and I land on my back in the water-filled trench. I stare into his malformed face and lose every measure of self-control I have left. Screaming, I punch and claw at him, pushing his profusely bleeding body away from me. I scramble down the ditch away from the explosions and my dying friend. I run and stumble, crawl and stagger through the muck, all the time trying to keep my head low. The trench leads me to the end of the next tree line, and I clamber over the edge. Whip-cracks of gunfire follow me, but I feel no pain and run into the night. I run and run until I cannot hear them anymore—until I cannot hear anything. No gunfire, no shouting, no nothing. I keep running through the night without stopping. Several times I stumble and scrape my hands and knees on the hard dirt. When I realize dawn is coming, I stop. I have never been this tired in my life. I have no idea where I am. It is then I realize, with horror, that I have lost my rifle. I must have left it in the ditch or dropped it in the night. I feel so worthless. I have betrayed the responsibility I was granted. I am a failure to the cause, and this is the straw that breaks the camel's back. I have failed my father's memory; I have failed the Jamā'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihād; I have failed Allah. I collapse under a tree, and as the first rays of the sun touch my face, I cry. I cry for the first time since my father died. I am destroyed.

## I scramble down the ditch away from the explosions and my dying friend.

### One

My father's name was Bunamo. He used to drink his chai hot. Boiling hot, straight out of the pot. I would sit and cradle my cup in my hands or let it rest for minutes on

the floor while it cooled enough for me to drink it, but he would stir his a few times and then happily swill down the near-boiling liquid while I stared in amazement. There was always something impervious about him, as if the toils of life didn't wear down on him. The long days working the fields under the sun didn't faze him; his hands and feet didn't crack or blister like mine, despite the many hours of hard labor and many miles of walking; and I swear by Almighty Allah, I even saw him shake off the bite of a carpet-viper once, as if the creature's venom had no impact on him at all. He was a tall man, even for a Kanuri, and he was easy to spot from afar. Even if I had to run all the way across our fields to fetch him, I'd be able to see his sinewy figure rising above the landscape. When we finished work for the night, he would often carry my tools as well as his own, as we walked the long way home to the village. Before bedtime he would tell stories to my brother and me, as Mother swept the floor and rolled out mattresses on the ground. He would talk about the ancient times, when the Kanuri were masters of the Bornu Empire, which ruled this part of Nigeria for many centuries. He would recite the Qur'an for us and have us observe our prayers. He was like a rock, solid and unflinching. Maybe that is why his death still seems so impossible to me, and so unfair.

It happened on a Wednesday and it happened fast. Two men were passing through our village on a motorbike and shouted out to some of the women on the street that they had seen Fulani herders nearby, coming this way. My mother's face turned bleak with concern. "Best let your father know," she said. "He is in the north field—but please be careful!" I remember running like the wind. When I found my father, his face turned equally solemn. "Did they say from where?" he asked me. I had to answer that the two men hadn't said, but told him that the men on the motorbike had come into the village from the east. "Good boy, Obi," my father said and gave my cheek a pinch before grabbing a reaper and running out across the fields as swift as a leopard. Best as I tried, I couldn't keep up with him, but his tall figure was hard to miss. I followed him through several hedgerows and across many fields that weren't our own, until he reached the farthest end of old man Ngwari's fields, more than a mile from the village. Hundreds of cattle were trotting through the field, herded by hard-looking men and a few big boys roughly my own age. Although they were giving the village itself a wide berth, the cattle herd had already trampled much of Ngwari's field, destroying the crops, while others were grazing on seedlings. My father and two other men from the village, Yuram and Ishaq, were engaged in a heated argument with some of the herders. I stopped at the last hedgerow, about a hundred paces away on the edge of the field, trying to make out what they were

yelling about, surmising that the details were related to the damage done to the crops. The only words I could actually make out were profanities. All three men from our village were brandishing some kind of farming tools, aggressively pointing to the ruined field. It didn't seem to upset the herders much, maybe not least because all four of them had rifles slung over their shoulders.

### Then, a thunderclap split the world in two as the young herder fired without warning.

After a few minutes, something seemed suddenly to rile the youngest of the herders, who violently unslung his rifle, which to my confusion spurred both my father and Ishaq to become even louder. The argument continued for another few minutes before the same man suddenly gave Ishaq a violent push and cocked his weapon with a loud metallic clang. The other three men unslung their rifles, and everyone froze. Now I could hear my father's voice clearly

enough. It was trembling, something I had only heard once before, when my little brother, Rahim, was very sick. He was pleading with them, asking them to forgive Ishaq's insults and be reasonable. He pointed to the trampled field and said something about crops coming and going under the will of Allah. For a while, the men didn't answer him, and I could hear nothing except the sound of my own heart racing. I started to feel as if his words had appeased them. Then, a thunderclap split the world in two as the young herder fired without warning. The others immediately joined in, shooting in cold blood. My father, Ishaq, and Yuram were shredded with blasts and fell to the ground, limp like rag dolls. My screams vanished in the noise of their demise. The world went black around me. The next thing I remember is my mother's face contorted in pain and her endless wailing screams as the other villagers tried to console her. How I managed to escape with my life, I could not tell you to this day.

Mourners attend the funeral of 43 farm workers in Zabarmari, about 20km from Maiduguri, Nigeria, on 29 November 2020 after they were killed by Boko Haram fighters.



The shooting caused exactly nothing to happen. Life carried on. A part of me wanted it all to end. I was at my wits' end with grief and rage, but tried to stay strong for my younger brother's sake. I bit my tongue in anger and sorrow and didn't shed a tear. What initially frustrated me was that no one came to our village to investigate the murders. No policemen from Maiduguri bothered to make the trip. No one cared. No one asked any serious questions; no one attempted to pursue and apprehend the Fulani herders; no one investigated a motive for the brutal and meaningless killings. Then something did happen: something so unforgivable that I lack the words to describe the indignity. Someone did care about my father's death, as it turned out—but not about who killed him or why he died. A month after we had buried our dead, my uncle Mavdé came to claim his brother's lands. Despite my mother's pleading and the many heated comments he received from the village's other farmers, he insisted that the land was his family's property and that, my parents having no children of age, the land was legally his. In the end, my mother agreed to let a court of elders serve as *takhim*. They discussed the matter for less than an hour before referring to the *fiqh* that Mavdé should offer my mother marriage in exchange for the land. He of course did, knowing full well that she would never accept. We packed our few belongings that same afternoon and left our home on foot with my mother in tears. It was at that point I swore to Almighty Allah that I would right the wrongs that had been done unto me.

## Two

Maiduguri was noisier and messier than I had ever imagined it could be. Back in the village, things were tidy enough, people could be trusted, and a car might come by every other day. In the state capital, cars and people were everywhere, the locals cheated and lied, and trash littered the streets. We stayed for almost a year with my mother's sister, Súma, and her husband, Yacub, until my mother and I had scraped together enough money to rent a shed where she, Rahim, and I could live. I spent my days working at a cement shack, carrying heavy bags and mixing mortar for the masons. That's where I met Madi, who worked the mortar same as me. He was a whole head taller than I, and had turned sixteen a week before my fifteenth birthday. We got into the habit of saying our daylight prayers together, and started frequenting the Bama Road Mosque for Friday prayers. Here we met Hakeem al-Yaoundé, a man who helped open my eyes. I am not sure how he noticed us, Madi and me, but he did. One evening after prayers, as we were getting ready to leave, he walked straight up to us and asked if we had liked the sermon. It had been a reading on the Prophet, *alayhi as-salām*, his years in Medina, and

his preparations to return to Mecca. Hakeem looked like a person of influence to me. He was tall and dressed in a clean, white thawb. I answered him that I had liked it very much, not only because I liked the story, but because it proved to every Muslim that patience is a holy virtue. He smiled at my answer and nodded. "You two strike me as men who can think for themselves," he said and, still nodding enthusiastically, shoved a business card into my hand and put another in Madi's shirt pocket. "My name is Hakeem. Hakeem al-Yaoundé. The two of you should come to Friday prayers at our mosque. We talk about the teachings after the sermon! I think you would like it. Our imam is the best in town. The best in the whole country, maybe even." He laughed in a self-assured way. "Because we talk about the meaning of the readings, we only invite people who are bright enough to form their own opinions. It's not for everyone." I looked at Madi, who smiled at Hakeem's poorly concealed flattery. I didn't really know what to make of him, and though there was something likeable about him, my own smile failed to manifest. That didn't seem to faze him and he smiled back at both of us. "Anyway, think it over. Although we are a bit farther down the road, it is worth the walk." He winked at us, shook our hands, and walked away. "What was that about?" Madi asked as we left the mosque. "I don't know," I answered. "Maybe he just meant what he said. That he thinks we are able to make up our own minds about things. . . ." I looked at the business card he had given us. It had only an address on one side and *as-shahada* on the other. Madi was silent for a while as we walked home together. Such was his way when he became pensive. He finally spoke, just as we were about to part ways. "Should we give it a try? The other mosque, I mean?" I had given it some thought myself and decided that something new might be interesting. "I am game if you are," I answered. "All right then, let's do it," he said. We bumped fists and parted ways.

**Abu Mazen's preaching was not for the faint of heart, and unless you had pure convictions, you might take offense at his descriptions of the kuffar, the Yehudis, or the shirk.**

Three major things happened over the following six months that shook my world: the Abu Bakr Mosque turned out to be an amazing and eye-opening experience; Madi, my best friend, turned out to be a Fulani; we both got fired by our fat Christian overseer. To begin with, I was surprised by the Abu Bakr Mosque. It was much smaller than the Bama Road Mosque and did not have near the

same amount of décor, but the imam, Abu Mazen, was an incredible preacher. He came from out of town, and not only was he convincing in his explanations and well-versed in all the holy texts, he also encouraged discussions on the topics of the day after his sermon and welcomed all deliberations that weren't *haram*. It was during one of these that I realized that Madi was a Fulani. We had been coming to the mosque for five months and had been entrusted this evening with welcoming two other young men, Hassem and Ekong, whom Hakeem al-Yaoundé had eyed out in one of Maiduguri's many mosques the week before. It seemed more and more reasonable to me that Hakeem would screen all new members of the congregation. Abu Mazen's preaching was not for the faint of heart, and unless you had pure convictions, you might take offense at his descriptions of the kuffar, the Yehudis, or the *shirk*, those who worship idols. The preaching that day had been on the role of the traitor and his painful rewards on the Day of Judgement. Madi, I, and a handful of other young men, including Hassem and Ekong, were discussing the reading with Abu Mazen. I had finally built up the courage to talk about what had happened to my father that fateful Wednesday a year and a half before, because the treacherousness of the act seemed to fit the discussion well. "The worst thing was probably not even the slaying of my father," I explained. "The worst thing was that they were traitors. They were Fulanis and Muslims, the men who shot my father, but they acted like traitors and pigs!" Madi looked like he had been struck. "I am Fulani," he responded, and the room fell silent.

It had never even crossed my mind that he could be. He was tall, yes, but his muscular build was much more akin to a Kanuri. I felt like hitting him. I felt like charging headlong toward him, the gall of eighteen months of grief rising in my throat as a bitter taste in the back of my mouth. Drops of cold sweat formed on my forehead. I started shaking. Then Abu Mazen spoke. "Be still, brothers. Be still and say nothing more, for the Lord weighs every spoken word on his golden scales, and we will answer for our wrongdoings with grief." The sound of his voice was like a balm to my temper. "Behold the division of friends," he said to the rest of the room while indicating Madi and me. "It is the kuffar at work. This I do tell you: it is the function of the kuffar to cause dismay and unbrotherly feelings within the ummah. Brother Obiefune and Brother Maduka are now at what they perceive to be a justified impasse. But in reality, it is not justified. They should be even closer brothers because of this wrongdoing. One has lost his father to the actions of a small group of Fulani traitors; the other hails from the Fulani tribe, which by association makes him a traitor as well—or does it?" He looked at both of us and then slowly looked at the faces of everyone present. "Does it?"

he asked. "No! It does not! The treacherous act that led to the death of Brother Obi's father is a perfect example of the workings of the kuffar. Neither of the two men present is guilty of any wrongdoing in the eyes of Allah. Both are devout Muslims; both are good sons and loyal brothers; neither was involved in these killings or the cause of them, but they are at each other's throats. The lands of the Fulani have been diminishing for a hundred years, as the Christian government in Abuja takes away the land of their forefathers and gives it to Christian people from the south. They build churches where mosques once were, and they build villages in the land of the Muslim Fulani, leaving the herders to look for new land under the threat of death. The herders cross into the lands of the Kanuri farmers and understandably trouble ensues. Does this justify the actions of the killings? Never! It merely explains it. But what it also explains is that the grief that now fills this room did not begin with the killing of Brother Obi's father. It began with Christian kuffar stealing Fulani lands and sowing the seeds of division in the ummah. Therefore, I tell you, behold: here are two friends, close as brothers, and the hatred between them was planted by others. It shall be my wish that the two of them serve as an example for the rest of us. Their continued friendship will prove to all of us that the brotherhood of the ummah is stronger than the divisions sown by kuffar and traitors." He smiled and nodded at the two of us. I felt completely drained of strength but got to my feet. So did Madi, and a strange elation surged through me. I could tell from the look of him that he felt the same as I: relieved to understand by the words of the Book that the two of us were not enemies and never would be. As we hugged, the whole room cheered.

**"The grief that now fills this room did not begin with the killing of Brother Obi's father. It began with Christian kuffar stealing Fulani lands."**

Not two weeks later, we were fired from the cement shack without warning. Joseph, our fat Christian overseer, gave little in the way of a meaningful explanation. He started off with some insulting nonsense about the two of us not working hard enough, but as that was easy enough for us to refute—we were the oldest and strongest of the "mortar-boys"—he continued on a rant about there not being enough projects to keep everyone on the shack. Neither of us felt like pleading with him and, in the end, there was nothing to be done about it. He was going to have it his way no matter what, so we collected our last week of pay and left. Two days later he took on two scrawny-looking kids from his church congregation in our stead. I was fuming

when we arrived at the Abu Bakr Mosque to pray that Friday. Abu Mazen, in his wisdom, could tell something was amiss with Madi and me, and he asked us to stay and talk after sermon and classes. We explained the entire situation to him. As our story gained momentum, it felt like there was much more to tell than I had realized: Joseph's many snide comments, the advantages given to the Christian workers, the unfair treatment of the Muslim brothers, the poor pay, and finally, our completely unjustified sacking. We ended up talking for more than an hour. Abu Mazen listened intently but asked only a few questions.

**“It shall be my wish that Brother Obiefune and Brother Maduka be shown the good work. I will offer them a job worthy of their devout beliefs.”**

Afterwards, he sat back with a contemplative look on his face. After a while he said, “The Surah Tawbah 9:29 reads: ‘Fight with those from among the people of the Book, who don’t believe in Allah or in the last day, who don’t make unlawful that which Allah and His Messenger have made unlawful, and don’t adopt the Right way as their way. Fight them until they pay jizya with their own hands and are humbled.’” He leaned forward and spoke in a more hushed voice. “Not every Muslim realizes, but the Holy Qur’an tells us what to do about this. Though the Christians are of the Book and are not shirk, they should be mindful that they are not of the ummah. They should be paying jizya, the tax on the kuffar, for our tolerance, and they should most certainly be humble. Here in Maiduguri, they are not. In all of Nigeria, they are not! A reckoning is coming in Borno. For too long have we tolerated how the Christians subdue the ummah, when in fact it is they who should be subdued. I think your time has come.” He turned around and signaled Hakeem to come over. Hakeem knelt beside us so that the four of us could whisper in confidence, then Abu Mazen said. “It shall be my wish that Brother Obiefune and Brother Maduka be shown the good work. I will offer them a job worthy of their devout beliefs.” Hakeem smiled broadly. “Finally!” he said. “Finally!”

### Three

Madi kicked like a horse. The corrugated iron door almost flew off its hinges and we stormed inside. The first room was a living room with a stamped dirt floor covered in carpets. Across the room, another doorway was covered by drapes. An oversized flat-screen television stood on a table facing a large sofa. Joseph was struggling to get up, surprised at our violent entry. He seemed terrified at the

look of us in our uniforms and balaclavas, and he exclaimed something in a language I didn’t understand. We didn’t give him time to recover. In an almost synchronous motion, Madi and I brought the AKs up and opened fire. The noise was absolutely deafening in the confines of the room; the heat and clap of the rifle fire was like a slap in the face. Joseph was riddled with shots and spatter flew from his fat belly and chest. He staggered and swayed for a moment, trying to hold his hands up in defense. When a shot hit him above the left eye, his eyes went blank and he collapsed in a disorderly heap. Blood pooled around him on the floor. A feeling of rightful vengeance blossomed in my chest. I felt like laughing, but ended up snarling in spite. Four months. Four months of preparations, four months of training with the Jamā’at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da’wah wa’l-Jihād, all to prepare for this moment, to prepare for our initiation, to prove that we were true soldiers of Islam and not just young hotheads. Four months to finally get our revenge on that fat bastard. Then a woman screamed. She stood in the other doorway clinging to the frame. She was probably his wife. A stout little woman in a colorful dress. Most likely Igbo, from the look of her. Her screams seemed endless. I brought the rifle up and shot her in the face. Then we ran into the night. We followed the planned route down the street and left across the first field, along the hedgerow at the end and across two more fields before we knelt down and listened to make sure no one was following us. Not surprisingly, there was some kind of clamor in the distance as people came out to see what had occurred, but nothing to indicate that anyone was in pursuit. We took our balaclavas off, changed magazines on the rifles, bumped fists, and started the long walk to the agreed rendezvous point.

**We took our balaclavas off, changed magazines on the rifles, bumped fists, and started the long walk to the agreed rendezvous point.**

“The ummah, as the Prophet, *alayhi as-salām*, saw it, does not require the populations of the world to be its subordinates. The ummah includes; it does not exclude. It preaches love and respect. But it does so only within the ummah. This I tell you, there is one people who stand above all others, but they will not be known as superior because of the color of their skin or because of their ancestral heritage. They will not be known as superior because of their wealth in coin, or whom they know, or whom they are related to. They will be known as superior because of their faith and their pious submission to Allah. The ummah require the peoples of the world to submit and become as them. And a joyous day it will be when the Shari’ah rules the lives of

all men.” We sat in the sand surrounding Abu Mazen. All the brothers were in military fatigues, rifles slung over their shoulders, balaclavas around their necks. The black flag of the ummah flew behind Abu Mazen. He spoke with fervor and there was truth in every sentence. We hung on his every word. “The kuffar are everywhere. They spin their web to make a rule of law in all Nigeria that strives only to divide the faithful. They will come with their stories, their books, and their films, and claim to be knowledgeable. They are not. There is only one knowledge for mankind, only one book that we need. It is the Holy Qur’an. It holds all knowledge for all mankind for all eternity. The other books are haram as declared by the holy Sheikh Ustaz Mohammad Yusuf. This past Saturday, one of the kuffar was granted the justice of the ummah. Joseph Kuta, a Christian racist and apostate to the faith, was given what he had deserved.” A murmur of agreement spread amongst the brothers. “We will now let it be known in every town in Borno that this was the judgement of the Jamā’at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da’wah wa’l-Jihād. We will let it be known that when the kafir employs a member of the ummah, he should be thankful and humble and show respect, or he will have judgement passed on him as well. We owe a debt of gratitude for this act of goodness to Brother Obiefune and Brother Maduka. Let us therefore embrace them as our own. Come forth, little brothers, it is time.” We all got up and, one after another, the brothers embraced us. I had never been prouder, but somehow the smile wouldn’t manifest. Abu Mazen noticed. “We should call you ‘The Solemn One,’” he said. “Never a smile from you, even on such a day of joy.” I forced a smile, which only made him laugh. “No need to smile on my account,” he said. “I know your solemnness. I was like that for years after the Sheikh died. There is pain in your heart still after your father’s death. It will go away, I promise. As you become the instrument of Allah’s justice, it will go away.” I nodded but said nothing. “Look at me, Brother Obiefune,” he said. “You are one of us now. I and Brother al-Yaoundé will continue to recruit new brothers, but you will get to deliver the justice of the Jamā’at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da’wah wa’l-Jihād to the infidels of Borno! Don’t worry about your heart. Allah will make it glad again when you kill His enemies.”

My mood didn’t lighten over the following months, though. We received enough money in taxes and jizya from farmers and villagers to make a good life for ourselves, even though we were almost constantly on the move from village to village, camp to camp. Sometimes we were many; sometimes we were few. We were asked to do many larger or smaller tasks for various commanders, sometimes alone, sometimes in groups. I managed to meet with my little brother Rahim once a month on the outskirts of Maiduguri to give him money for our mother.

I participated in three attacks from February to May. Close to Gudda village, Madi and I killed two farmers by slitting their throats. Their farm was half a mile from the village, and everyone knew that those two men lived as man and wife. Why the locals tolerated it, I couldn’t say—we most certainly did not. In April, Madi, six other brothers, and I shot eighteen southern forest workers who were stealing both jobs and firewood from the Muslim community in Gamboru village. That even caught the President’s attention, and Abu Mazen was very pleased. In early May, I snuck one of Abu Mazen’s chosen around two army checkpoints to the outskirts of the town of Mubi. He went into a mosque where a fallen imam had condemned the actions of the ummah. Madi escorted another brother who went to the nearby market. I could feel the force of the blasts from more than a mile away and I was touched by the selflessness of their sacrifices. We killed 86 apostates. Allahu Akbar!

**I could feel the force of the blasts from more than a mile away and I was touched by the selflessness of their sacrifices.**

At the end of May, the kuffar army began to ramp up operations in Borno again. Checkpoints popped up everywhere, and six brothers were caught and executed without warning. It was nearly impossible for me or anyone else to get to Maiduguri and we lived in villages close to the Cameroon border. It was then that I was approached by Commander Jayamma and Abu Mazen. “Solemn One, I’ve been meaning to talk to you,” Commander Jayamma said. “You have been doing well these past many months. Don’t think we haven’t noticed. I have been talking with Sheikh Abu Mazen about entrusting you with more responsibility.” I wondered at the term Sheikh. Abu Mazen had always been an unofficial leader of us. The wisest and most trusted of the clerics, he seemed to always eschew the use of titles himself. I nodded in consent. “I will give you seven of my men and entrust you with a dangerous mission. It will not be easy, this much I tell you.” “I stand ready to serve the ummah,” I replied. Abu Mazen smiled at my answer. “Good,” Commander Jayamma replied. “Not far from here, just outside the town of Gwoza, the kuffar have built a base for their soldiers. From there, they come and go to do their checkpoints in this area. We need to punish them. We need to strike fear into their hearts. They need to feel the judgement of the ummah, so that they stay in their camp and fear to tread the very ground outside.” I nodded. “I understand, Commander. I will have Brother Ifechi prepare one of his bombs. We will scout out the place and prepare an ambush for them. They will burn and bleed and they will curse the day they volunteered to fight the ummah.” Abu Mazen was



A boy walks through the remains of homes burnt down by Islamist Boko Haram fighters in Maiborti village, on the outskirts of Maiduguri, northeast Nigeria.

still smiling. He nodded at Commander Jayamma. “Did I not tell you? Brother Obi is the right man for the job.”

We prepared tirelessly for a week. We hid in a village not far from the base. Ifechi and two of the brothers ground out the aluminum and mixed it carefully with fertilizer. Madi and I scouted out the location and all the roads in the area. The kuffar had built their tiny outpost along a dirt road not far from Gwoza. There was a decent amount of traffic in the area, which was both good and bad. It was easy enough for us to walk past the base, sit in one of the fields for a while and look, or even buy some food at the local market, without drawing suspicion. The kuffar worked on a schedule. Every morning, half of their soldiers would roll out, and every night after sundown, they would come back home. Their vehicles were truck-like, armored cars with five or six men in each. They would go out in groups of two vehicles and be gone all day. They were predictable. The farmers in the surrounding fields were not. For that same reason, placing the bomb was difficult. It would have to be done at night and just before the attack. Using a pressure plate wouldn't work either. One of the locals might trigger it and waste the element of surprise. We would have to place it the same evening and use a wire to activate it.

**We sat crammed into an old, worn-out truck with the bomb between us, trusting in Allah's mercy and Ifechi's work to keep it from going off.**

After a week, we were ready. The moon was waning; the bomb was complete. It was so big it required two of us to lift it. Commander Jayamma and Abu Mazen gave us a speech on the seriousness of the mission before seeing us off just before sundown. One of the older brothers drove us. We sat crammed into an old, worn-out truck with the bomb between us, trusting in Allah's mercy and Ifechi's work to keep it from going off. We stopped at our agreed point, an adjacent dirt road about a mile from the base. We hauled the bomb through the darkness and arrived less than an hour later. I helped Brothers Ifechi and Mfoniso place and conceal the bomb, while Madi got the rest of the brothers into position in a semi-dry watering trench that ran parallel to the road. At 2100 we were ready and in position. We waited for another hour, but nothing happened. The soldiers normally returned at around 2130. I whispered to Madi what he thought we should do. He just shrugged his shoulders and replied, “Maybe wait another hour and see? I don't know, Obi. You are in charge.” I shook my head and cursed under my breath. “Make sure the brothers aren't sleeping,” I answered. He nodded and disappeared, sloshing

down the trench. Five minutes later, the kuffar appeared. The sound of their armored vehicles was unmistakable, their headlights bright as the dawn. I have no idea why they were delayed. Madi appeared by my side, panting hard from running. “They are ready,” he whispered. “Time to bring the justice.” I nodded and waited for the explosion.

## Four

It is late afternoon before I start coming to my senses. I have remained under the tree where I collapsed, trying to stay out of the sun. I haven’t seen a living soul all day. Not surprisingly, I am in the middle of nowhere. I don’t even know where I am myself. Worse even, I don’t know what to do. I cannot return to my mother and brother; I wouldn’t want to even if I could. I would endanger them. The kuffar would take my actions out on them. I cannot return to the Jamā’at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da’wah wa’l-Jihād. I have failed them and fled from the responsibility they bestowed on me, my fear of death sufficient to drive me to abandon my martyred brothers. I am a failure—a coward and a failure. Should I just start walking and try and make a new life for myself somewhere else? It is nighttime before a revelation descends upon me. I must give myself up for the judgement of Allah. I must return and confess everything. My life may very well be forfeit, but the Lord is merciful, and, in His glory, He will find a way to forgive me. But not if I run away again. I get up and start to walk. It takes me a few hours to catch my bearings and it takes me all night to find my way back to the village. The sun is coming up when I stagger in. Brother Chikezie sees me coming in and his reaction surprises me. I halfway expect him to shoot me dead on sight, but instead, he embraces me. He leads me to one of the houses where Brother Abegunde is cooking breakfast. They ask me questions and I answer them as best I can. After a while, they tell me to eat and rest. They will find Commander Jayamma and bring me to him. I wake sometime in the afternoon as Brother Abegunde tells me to get up and come with him. He brings me to another house. Sitting on the floor is Abu Mazen. I avert my eyes in shame, but he gets to his feet and embraces me. “Sit down, Brother Obiefune,” he says. “Relax. You are home now. Tell me what happened.” A knot builds in my chest, my eyes sting, and a sobbing rises in my throat. “There now, Solemn One,” Abu Mazen says. “This is not like you.” With a massive effort, I calm myself down and explain the events of that fateful night not two days ago. As always, Abu Mazen listens intently while asking few questions. Without ever averting his attention, he brews a pot of chai. The words flow more freely from me as I calm myself down. Abu Mazen serves the chai as I talk. He drinks his boiling hot, straight from the pot. When I finally finish, he nods to himself and

begins to slowly work through the prayer beads of his misbaha. We sit in silence like that for almost an hour as his lips move silently and the beads pass through his fingers one after the other. Finally, he turns to me. “Brother Obi. When the devout say insha’Allah, we mean insha’Allah. In other words, we accept the judgement of almighty Allah. We accept His will in all things. Therefore, you are here for a reason. We suffered a defeat two nights ago. Seven brothers were killed. But the defeat was not absolute. Five kuffar soldiers died at the hands of you and your men, and Allah, in his endless wisdom, spared your life. I have contemplated why. I do believe He has great plans for you!”

**It is nighttime before a revelation descends upon me. I must give myself up for the judgement of Allah.**

## Five

The truck is rumbling along. The discomfort of being hidden in a crate with airholes doesn’t even upset me anymore. I am aching to be delivered unto Allah. It is not my body that hurts; it is my soul. I am ready. I will make up for all the injustices served unto me by weaker souls. We’ve been on the road for seven days now. The past five months have been terrible. I have been moved from safehouse to safehouse as kuffar operations have spread across Borno State. I have had very little contact with others, even though Abu Mazen has been good to me and has stopped by once a month to test my convictions. I have remained pure in purpose. I am ready to be the Prophet’s chosen son, alayhi as-salām. It is dusk when the truck stops. They let me out of the box. I climb out and stretch my tender limbs. The driver, Chiemeize, who looks Fulani to me, hands me a bottle of water. I drink a sip and hand it back to him. “No, no,” he says. “It is for you.” I drink the rest. Abu Mazen appears from the front and looks at me. “How are you, Solemn One?” he asks. “Good, Sheikh,” I reply. “I am ready.” He smiles and nods. We are parked at the side of a seemingly empty dirt road. Apart from a few farmhouses on the horizon, there are no discernable terrain features. After a few minutes, a car appears. Two men jump out. The look of them is so different that it makes me wonder just exactly where we are. I need not wait long for the answer, as the taller of the two blurts out, “Welcome to Gao.” His accent is thick and hard for me to place, but I know well that the ummah here in Mali are struggling. I suppose this is as good a place as any to meet the Lord. Abu Mazen speaks with the two men for a while before turning to me. “Brother Obiefune, this is where we part ways. It has been a pleasure and an honor to get to know you. I have seen you

become a man, and it pains me that I will not be there to share in your ascension.” “The honor has been mine, Sheikh Abu Mazen,” I answer. “No, Brother,” he replies sternly. “The honor is genuinely mine. The end comes to all men. It is what we do with the time given to us and how we choose to leave the Earth that matters in the eyes of almighty Allah. You are truly one of His chosen. By your selfless act, you will rectify any and all wrongdoings done by you or against you. This righteous act will save a hundred souls. It is written, little brother; it is written. Your ascension will be on the wings of angels, and for your valor, you shall feast in golden halls. Seventy-two virgins shall be waiting to marry you, and when the time comes that we meet again, it is *you* who will teach *me*, and I who will call *you* Sheikh.” He embraces me in a rare show of genuine emotion and we hold each other tight. We stand like that for a minute before he releases me and nods. Tears are welling in his eyes. “On the wings of angels,” he says and walks away. He and Chiemeize climb into the truck. It starts with a growl and spits black smoke. Then they rumble on down the road. The taller of the two men walks over to me and holds out his hand. “I am Ousmane,” he says. “It is an honor to meet you.”

**What a marvelous world this is. What a day to be alive. My lust for life has never been greater, my joy has never before been so manifest.**

Ousmane drops me off on a dirt trail next to a field. It is dawn. He helps me strap the heavy sack to my back. It looks exactly like those carried by the local rice farmers coming to market, but contains a hundred pounds of explosives instead. He checks the detonator, wiring, and trigger. Then he pulls the wire through my neck collar, down through my sleeve and carefully places the trigger in my palm. He looks at me intently and speaks slowly in his heavy accent. “Brother, you are ready now. Across the field, you’ll find the road to Tassiga.” He points. “Before the town, you will reach the bridge across the river. The French kuffar are there, checking everyone who comes and goes. When you squeeze the trigger, the bomb will arm. When you let it go, the bomb will explode. Do you understand?” I nod. “Yes, Brother Ousmane,” I answer. “We’ve been over this. I understand, and I am ready.” He smiles and claps my cheek. “On the wings of angels,” he says, repeating Abu Mazen’s departing words. Then he gets in the car and drives off. I look around. I can make out the road easily enough from here. A few people are strolling along on their way to sell goods at the market. Dew has fallen across the field next to me. It looks like a million pearls. I make my way across the field and up on the road. The heavy smell of wet dirt is

beautiful to me. The Niger River’s green waters emit a fragrance of life and promise. I notice everything around me. The fine red sand. The intense blue sky. The humming of the farmer in front of me. The chiming of cow bells. Busy ants working on the side of the road. The sound of the river. A bird soaring high overhead. What a marvelous world this is. What a day to be alive. My lust for life has never been greater, my joy has never before been so manifest. My fingers tingle; butterflies fill my stomach; my pack feels lighter than air. Ahead of me, the farmers bunch up to cross the bridge into Tassiga. Seven French kuffar are checking them one by one, their armored vehicle parked close by. I get in line and wait my turn, giddy with joy. I squeeze the trigger as hard as I can. Then one of the kuffar signals me to come forward. He gives me a strange look and begins to smile as I walk towards him. I realize that he is mimicking my expression and my heart is fit to burst with glee. Finally, I will hold my promise. I will avenge the wrongs done unto me. The kafir’s expression suddenly becomes apprehensive. For good reason. I am fulfilled. I smile. I let go.

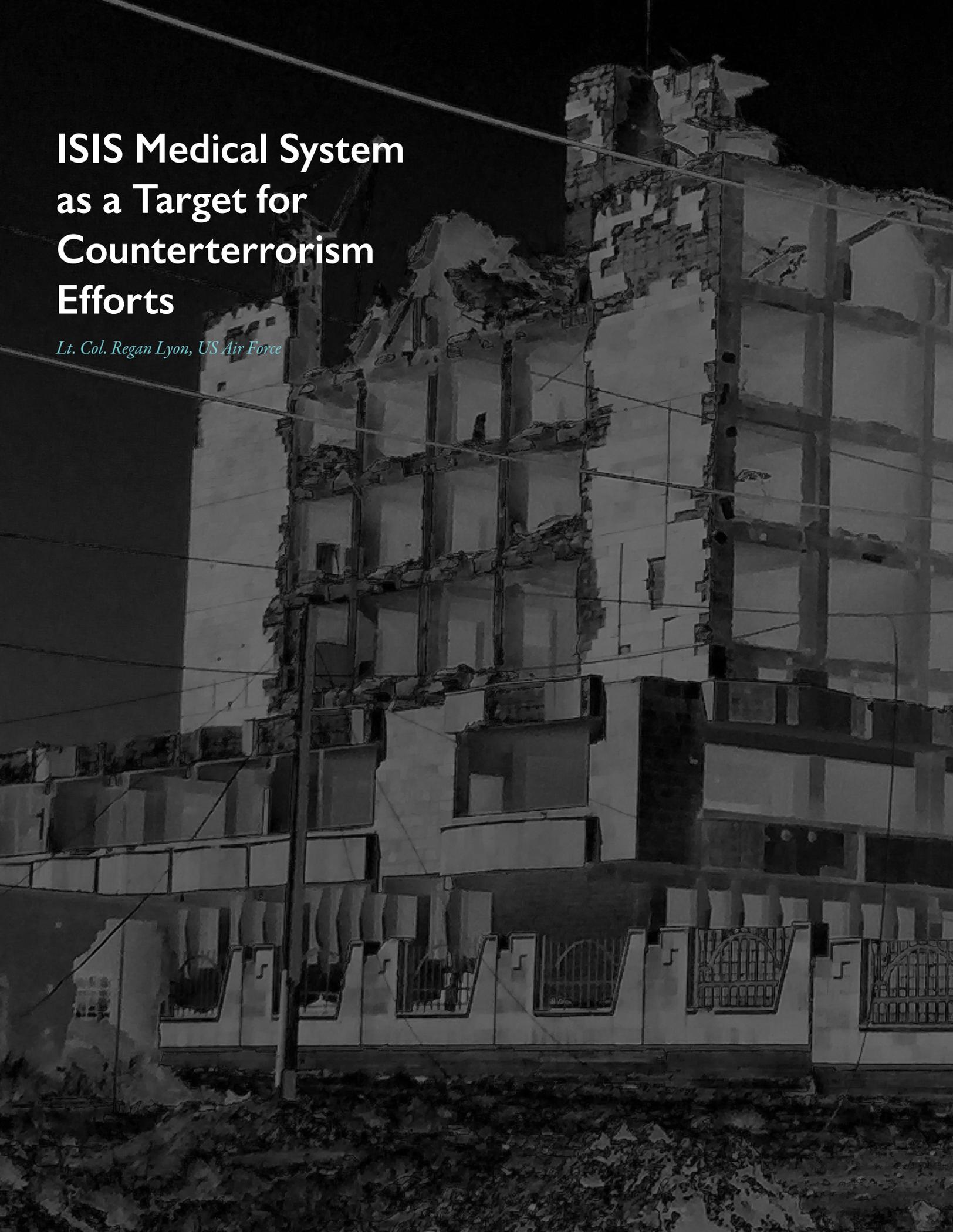
#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

LTC Nikolaj Lindberg serves with the Danish Special Operations Command.

This is a work of the US federal government and is not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Foreign copyrights may apply.

# ISIS Medical System as a Target for Counterterrorism Efforts

*Lt. Col. Regan Lyon, US Air Force*



“Everyone deserves [quality/affordable] healthcare.” This statement can be found in thousands of sources ranging from personal opinions to politicians’ speeches to organizational position statements. Regardless of the source, the sentiment is the same: all humans, irrespective of demographics, should be entitled to medical treatment. Aside from the question of who should fund such access, it would be difficult to find anyone who disagrees.<sup>1</sup>

Part of a fighting force’s defense strategy hinges on its capacity to treat and rehabilitate combat casualties for the current or future fights.<sup>2</sup> States typically have the resources to fund and outsource such systems, but we cannot assume that non-state adversaries do not have a medical capability. Warfighters universally expect to be treated if they are injured in battle. Without the reassurance of receiving medical care for potentially life-threatening injuries, the individual risk-benefit ratio dramatically shifts and the individual’s motivation to fight begins to waiver. The leadership of the Islamic State (ISIS) recognized both the universal belief in access to healthcare for citizens and the expectation that fighters will be treated if injured. As part of its quest to establish a caliphate, ISIS established the Islamic State Healthcare System to meet the needs of both the populations under its control and its warriors.

This article discusses the ISIS Healthcare System and ISIS’s paradoxical actions in promoting a healthcare system while simultaneously attacking medical personnel and infrastructure. The quality of ISIS medical supplies and treatment, which I witnessed during a 2017 deployment in Raqqa and a 2019 deployment in the Middle Euphrates River Valley (MERV), shows that ISIS exaggerated its medical capabilities and was unable to provide adequate trauma care to its warfighters. It may be possible to exploit this weak healthcare system through a combination of information operations and humanitarian aid as part of a holistic counterterrorism approach. Through this approach, the United States and its allies can undermine ISIS’s community support, decrease ISIS warriors’ motivation to fight, prevent the enlistment of Western physicians into the terrorist group, and play a crucial role in delegitimizing ISIS and preventing the resurgence of its caliphate.

## The Islamic State Healthcare System

In a bid to establish its caliphate, ISIS gained control over large parts of northern Iraq and Syria by capitalizing on the desperation of communities there to have protection, governance, and social infrastructure. By 2014, civil society in large parts of both Syria and Iraq had unraveled, as years of continuous warfare had caused essential social services to

collapse. As ISIS moved into these regions, it established a system of governance and provided services to the community. Typically, employees of the local government system were retained as long as they conformed to ISIS’s rules, and sometimes they even continued to be paid by the government. ISIS’s leaders recognized that, to gain the support of the civilian population, they had to provide access to the basic necessities, including healthcare.

**ISIS’s leaders recognized that, to gain the support of the civilian population, they had to provide access to the basic necessities, including healthcare.**

During the initial phase of invading territory, however, ISIS worsened the population’s already desperate need for reliable healthcare by targeting hospitals, civilian patients, and healthcare providers. Several reports from Syria describe a widespread campaign against indigenous physicians throughout the region, including a public execution of two emergency surgeons in Mosul, Iraq, who were unwilling to transfer to a field hospital to treat ISIS fighters.<sup>3</sup> Female medical professionals were targets for the imposition of social controls and religious restrictions by ISIS; for example, a female gynecologist was denied access to the hospital to perform an emergency surgery because she was not wearing a veil.<sup>4</sup> Kefah Basheer Hussein, former ISIS minister for health, ordered fleeing physicians to be executed.<sup>5</sup> ISIS’s atrocities against the established healthcare system worsened an already dire lack of medical care in the region. In 2015, the Syrian American Medical Society and the World Health Organization estimated that, in some locations, 90 percent of physicians had been killed or fled; of those left, 70 percent did not have access to a hospital or clinic.<sup>6</sup> In some places, the mass exodus of physicians led to physician-to-patient ratios of 1:500,000.<sup>7</sup>

In a seemingly contradictory move, ISIS began a campaign to recruit healthcare workers to the caliphate. In April 2015, ISIS released a propaganda video utilizing high-tech videography and graphics; it boasted of a state-of-the-art healthcare system for ISIS-controlled communities, complete with emergency care equipment and advanced medical schools.<sup>8</sup> The video featured an Australian ISIS physician, who implored Western providers to help treat the citizens suffering from an oppressive government and an “overt lack of qualified medical care [and specialists].”<sup>9</sup> The recruitment propaganda promised to alleviate the stresses of financing medical education and assured providers that they would work in first-rate facilities stocked with the best medical equipment available.<sup>10</sup> The

recruitment strategy also highlighted the establishment of a caliphate and addressed issues of Western discrimination against Muslims. Even in a profession dedicated to unbiased treatment of those in need, Muslim physicians have faced discrimination based on their religion, which makes them a prime target for ISIS recruiting propaganda. For example, although most American Muslim physicians self-identified as being primarily secular, an article in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* claimed that 24 percent of them reported experiencing frequent discrimination in their careers based on their religion.<sup>11</sup> Other physicians joined ISIS because they believed in the cause. Issam Abuanza, a British endocrinologist who joined ISIS in Syria in 2014, commented in a 2015 social media post about the video-taped immolation of First Lieutenant Muadh al-Kasasbeh, a Jordanian F-16 pilot who was captured after ISIS fighters shot down his plane over Syria. Abuanza wrote, “I would’ve liked for them to burn him extremely slowly and I could treat him so we could torch him once more.”<sup>12</sup>

### Optimistic stories of ISIS healthcare initiatives did not reflect a widespread reality in ISIS’s territory.

Although joining the ranks of a violent organization seems contradictory to the Hippocratic Oath, doctors from the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Israel went to Iraq and Syria to practice medicine for ISIS, only to find that conditions were much worse than what they had been promised. While ISIS has superficially provided medical care to the civilian population under its control, its establishment of a healthcare system was primarily directed at treating its warfighters. Large health initiatives, such as ISIS’s mass polio vaccination campaign, would appear to support the philanthropic narrative the caliphate gave its populations.<sup>13</sup> These optimistic stories of ISIS healthcare initiatives, however, did not reflect a widespread reality in the territory that ISIS controlled. Many of the public clinics were reserved for the impoverished, and public hospitals were critically understaffed, undersupplied, and poorly supported. The relatively high-end medical equipment the ISIS ministry of health did have was kept in secret hospitals reserved for fighters.<sup>14</sup>

In 2015, as the ISIS casualty rate increased due to coalition bombings and field operations, the redirecting of medical supplies to the hospitals treating those fighters became more dramatic, and directives from the minister of health became more drastic. Blood transfusions are a critical aspect of ensuring survival from major traumatic injury. With the increase in wounded fighters, ISIS leaders ordered



Figure 1. Original Tabqa Hospital, which was turned into an ISIS C2 center. Tabqa, Syria, 2017.

doctors to reserve blood transfusions for those fighters, leaving civilians to locate blood donors on their own.<sup>15</sup> Hisham al-Hashimi, an expert on ISIS, told CNN in a 2015 interview that then-Minister of Health Hussein ordered blood to be collected from prisoners slated for executions, thus both restocking the blood bank and leaving the prisoners weak and less likely to struggle.<sup>16</sup> In the same interview, al-Hashimi also asserted that after the prisoners’ executions, their kidneys would sometimes be harvested from their bodies and sold for revenue. (While there was circumstantial evidence to support his claims, CNN was unable to independently verify the allegations.) The horrific, unethical measures ISIS took to support casualty medical care underscored its prioritization of fighters and its minimization of civilian care.

### Observations from the Battlefield

I deployed to Raqqa in 2017 and to the MERV in 2019. The information in this section is based on my professional medical training and first-hand experience during those deployments.

#### Tabqa, Syria

In early 2017, ISIS was being driven out of a previously well-established foothold in Tabqa, Syria, as indigenous rebel forces moved toward ISIS’s capital in Raqqa. A large hospital nestled next to the Euphrates River in Tabqa (figure 1) had been converted by ISIS into a command-and-control center; the ground floor was barricaded off and the hospital was moved to a neighboring building (figure 2), which had significantly less space for patient care. This bait-and-switch was done to prevent air strikes against the command infrastructure (albeit unsuccessfully, as figure 1 shows) because the building was known by coalition forces to be a hospital.



Figure 2. The smaller building that ISIS turned into a hospital. After ISIS abandoned it, it was renovated by partner forces. Tabqa, 2017.

After reclaiming control of Tabqa, the Syrian rebel forces began to establish a governance and social system to support the population and prevent further terrorist influence. The smaller hospital building, which had now been abandoned, was to be renovated into a clinic for both the rebel fighters and the civilian population. During the summer of 2017, a team of US special operations personnel, which I was invited to accompany for the day, conducted a site survey of the facility to determine what support was required for the clinic to become fully functional. During this visit, we were able to gain some insight into ISIS's medical capabilities.

The clinic building was three stories high, but when we arrived, only the middle floor had been cleaned and was functional for patient care. The remainder of the facility still had abandoned ISIS medical equipment and supplies strewn throughout. Because their limited budget did not allow them to purchase all the equipment they needed, the rebel force repurposed many of these abandoned materials to outfit their medical facility and allow for active patient care. Although the rebels boasted that the medical/surgical rooms had patient-monitoring capability, in reality their confiscated ISIS equipment was inoperable due to mechanical issues, missing parts, and/or obsolescence. Figure 3 is a picture of one of these rooms. The patient monitor on the left is a piece of abandoned equipment that is missing the cables needed to hook up to the patient for monitoring, and is so outdated that it is no longer possible to order replacement parts for it. The defibrillator on the stand in the background by the window does not work. Finally, the electrocardiogram machine in the foreground does not have any paper for printing and is also significantly outdated.

It is unclear whether this equipment was left behind because ISIS knew it didn't work or whether it shows that ISIS personnel were trying to provide medical care with outdated and broken equipment; perhaps both things were

true. In any case, the condition of this clinic demonstrated that the group's recruitment video claims of having a superior medical system with "top innovations" was far from the truth.

**The condition of this clinic demonstrated that the group's recruitment video claims of having a superior medical system with "top innovations" was far from the truth.**

The basement remained in disarray, just as ISIS had abandoned it, minus any equipment the rebel forces had salvaged. In this room were large supply storage spaces, patient treatment areas, rehabilitation equipment, autoclaves for instrument sterilization, and an abundance of soft medical goods, such as gauze, gloves, bandages, and procedure kits. Figure 4 is a closeup of one area of the basement, which boasts three autoclaves, suggesting that a large number of surgeries or procedures were being performed. Walkers and other rehabilitative equipment are also visible. The presence of rehabilitation and physical therapy equipment implies an intent to treat patients in order to allow them to return to normal life and, possibly, to battle.

### The Middle Euphrates River Valley, Syria

When my team arrived in the MERV in 2019, rebel forces were driving ISIS out of the area and clearing buildings as they retook territory. After a major push through a community in early 2019, one of the buildings was found to be littered with medical supplies. The rebel fighters gathered the equipment and brought it to the US surgical team for evaluation, and eventually took it to use in their own medical facilities. Figures 5 and 6 are pictures of some of the acquired supplies.



Figure 3. Medical ward with non-functional patient monitors and defibrillator left by ISIS. Tabqa, 2017.



Figure 4. Some supplies left by ISIS in clinic basement. Tabqa, 2017.

Figure 5 shows a box of random supplies one would expect to see in an operating or procedure room. On the left side of the box is a bloody stainless-steel tray containing a few surgical instruments. In the middle is a stainless-steel box with a surgical set to be sterilized. All the instruments in this tray and box are bloody, indicating that they had been used relatively recently, either for major procedures or for something that was causing significant blood loss.

Interestingly, one of the instruments in the box in figure 5 is a vaginal speculum used for female pelvic exams. There are a few theories to explain the presence of this instrument. First, this medical facility may have been established as a community resource and had the ability to perform routine female pelvic exams. As families (and the need for pelvic speculums) evacuated, the clinic might have been converted into a battlefield hospital. Second, the clinic may have been provided with a potpourri of supplies by a logistical chain that had little knowledge of the supplies that were actually required. Finally, and equally plausible, it is possible that the medical personnel at the clinic did not have an appreciation for which instruments were more likely to be used in trauma care or were simply having to improvise with the supplies present.

The gas piping and valves in the middle of the box in figure 5 indicate the presence of delivery systems for at least oxygen, and possibly for mixed anesthesia gases. In figure 6, the small box in the bottom left corner is full of endotracheal tubes, which are used in patients who are either critical or undergoing major operations. In order to use these tubes, a patient must be adequately sedated, either manually or mechanically ventilated, and provided with supplemental oxygen. The large piece of equipment in the top right of the picture is a cauterization machine for cauterizing bleeding vessels during surgery. Although this device is missing several pieces, it implies advanced surgical skills or, at least, a desire for such capability.

After the fall of the caliphate, ISIS fighters who surrendered were evaluated and cataloged into a security database. They were also taken to a facility where their health and welfare needs could be addressed. My team was onsite at one of these locations to address any acute life-threatening conditions—specifically, a suicide vest detonation. As prisoners proceeded through the processing stations, my team observed their poor health condition and complications from substandard treatment of battle injuries. Malnourishment, infectious diseases, and poorly healed wounds were common, indicating a lack of adequate forward medical support.

At one processing line where my team was not located, a former fighter (figure 7) had a chest tube in place and was holding the drainage container full of thick, bloody pus. Patients with such drainage systems, especially with the amount of drainage present in this man's container, are supposed to be treated in a hospital. The contents indicated the need for surgery, or at least for a robust antibiotic regimen for a large pus-filled lung cavity. While the fact that a chest tube insertion was performed demonstrated some advanced medical skills, the current condition of this patient suggested either that competent medical personnel were not available on the forward line of troops (FLOT), that the limitations of a FLOT hospital prevented adequate care, or that the patient had left the medical facility to surrender.

## Observations and Conclusion

Having adequate medical support is a significant psychological motivator for warfighters to continue to put their lives in jeopardy. In a CBS special report on Special Operations Surgical Teams, one of the anchors recalled an interview with a US Marine general, who said the “first thing he did with his troops before sending them into the fight was have them watch [medical teams] and say ‘if you get in that horrible moment, somebody is going to come take care of you.’”<sup>17</sup> A high survival rate from battlefield injuries provides valuable reassurance to the troops, and assuages the fear of death that can render a soldier non-functional.

The expectation of battlefield medical support is not limited to coalition troops who benefit from the expansive Joint Trauma System. In Anbar Province, a US-led joint task force worked with the Anbar Operations Command for missions in Ramadi to provide airstrike capabilities, intelligence, reconnaissance, and medical resources for the Iraqis.<sup>18</sup> US surgical teams conducted initial evaluations and immediate or life-saving treatments for injured Iraqi soldiers. A task force advisor stated that medical care was a huge contribution to the Iraqi forces' motivation to fight,

because “they know that . . . there is medical help fairly close and they are going to be taken care of.”<sup>19</sup>

The lack of such medical support has resulted in fighters deserting a government fighting force to join insurgent or terrorist organizations. In 2016, CNN interviewed a Taliban soldier who had previously been a soldier with the Afghan army.<sup>20</sup> He explained, “I decided to leave the army when my dead and injured comrades lay in our base, and nobody took them to hospital. My army training is very useful now, as I am training Taliban fighters with the same knowledge.” There is a general expectation among members of a government’s military that they will receive adequate support to carry out the fight, including medical care. Should military members believe that they will not be cared for and might not survive if injured, they might refuse to fight or might defect to the opposite side.

**It was apparent to me that the basic trauma care that ISIS fighters received in the field was substandard and negligent.**

The ISIS leadership promised advanced and top-of-the-line medical care to its population and fighters. As my observations on deployment showed, this did not seem to be a realistic or attainable promise. The “high-tech equipment” I saw that had been siphoned off to the fighters’ hospitals was largely outdated and missing parts. It was apparent to me that the basic trauma care that ISIS fighters received in the field was substandard and negligent, and led to potentially fatal complications. These are potential weaknesses that counterterrorism efforts could target in a holistic approach.



Figure 6. More supplies recovered from presumed ISIS forward surgical hospital. MERV, 2019.



Figure 5. Supplies acquired from presumed ISIS forward surgical hospital. MERV, 2019.

One of the goals of counterterrorism is to delegitimize the terrorist organization as a means to decrease both support from populations and the allegiance of the group’s members. Humanitarian efforts should focus on setting the minimal acceptable standard for medical care and, wherever possible, providing superior healthcare to the civilian population. Information operations should target the discrepancy between promises and reality in ISIS-held territory and highlight the substandard healthcare provided by ISIS, both of which will undermine the claims it makes through its messaging apparatus. Information operations that highlight the lack of resources in the ISIS healthcare system, the brutal treatment of medical providers, substandard medical practices, and complications from inadequate medical treatments will help decrease confidence in the militants’ system. These efforts can also be used in Western countries to expose ISIS’s false claims of better medical education and workplace benefits to prevent the recruitment of physicians to ISIS.

Although the caliphate was nominally defeated in 2019, ISIS still remains a threat in the Middle East. As it rebuilds its forces and attempts to reestablish a caliphate, information operations to delegitimize its healthcare system should be continued to help thwart these efforts. Propaganda targeting medical care will not single-handedly prevent the resurgence of ISIS, but it can bolster a collective effort to expose the failures of the organization to deliver on its promises of a functional caliphate.

Aside from the political discourse that surrounds access to health care and the quality of care, the belief in the right to healthcare is deeply ingrained in individuals and society, including those under the control of terrorist organizations. ISIS took advantage of the regions the Syrian and Iraqi



Figure 7. ISIS fighter with chest tube, holding container full of blood and pus.

governments had neglected by promising to provide social services, including healthcare, as a way to increase local support and recruitment. Its healthcare system not only preferentially treated warfighters and neglected desperate citizens, but it failed to meet even minimally acceptable medical standards on all fronts. Through violent acts and coercion tactics, ISIS drove out many medical professionals from the areas it controlled, worsening everyone's access to care. Simultaneously, using propaganda that targeted Western providers, the group recruited foreigners who were promised free education and advanced medical technologies; much to the dismay of those who responded, however, these promises proved to be hollow.

As the photographs from two deployments to areas of Syria previously controlled by ISIS make clear, even the ISIS battlefield hospitals were devoid of both state-of-the-art equipment and medical providers competent in and supported for forward combat care. Exposing these weaknesses through information operations and humanitarian missions offers another avenue for delegitimizing ISIS, decreasing its fighters' confidence in the casualty care they may need, and discouraging providers from joining the organization. The medical support system of terrorist organizations should be considered more widely as another avenue for exploitation when developing a holistic counterterrorism strategy.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Lt. Col. Regan Lyon** is a medical officer with US Air Force Special Operations Command.

This is a work of the US federal government and is not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Foreign copyrights may apply.

## NOTES

1. The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or opinion of the US Naval Postgraduate School, Special Operations Surgical Teams, Special Operations Command, Department of the Air Force, Department of Defense, or the US government.
2. Editor's note: For more on Special Operations Surgical Teams in the field, see Arto Hilden and Antti Lahdenranta, "Finland's Special Operations Surgical Team in Action," *CTX* 9, no. 1: 5–12: <https://nps.edu/web/ecco/ctx-vol-9-no-1>. For more on US combat surgery, see Regan F. Lyon and D. Marc Northern, "REBOA by a Non-Surgeon as an Adjunct during MASCAL: A Case Report," *American Journal of Emergency Medicine* 36, no. 6 (June 2018): 1121.e5-1121.e6; D. Marc Northern et al., "Recent Advances in Austere Combat Surgery: Use of Aortic Balloon Occlusion as Well as Blood Challenges by Special Operations Medical Forces in Recent Combat Operations," *Journal of Trauma and Acute Care Surgery* 85, no. 1S (July 2018): S98-S103; Alex Hollings, "The Air Force's Special Operations Surgical Teams: Saving Lives in the Line of Fire," *SOFREP*, 18 August 2017: <https://sofrep.com/news/the-air-forces-special-operations-surgical-teams-saving-lives-in-the-line-of-fire/>
3. Archit Baskaran, "The Islamic State Healthcare Paradox: A Caliphate in Crisis," *Inquiries Journal* 7, no. 7 (2015): <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/1054/the-islamic-state-healthcare-paradox-a-caliphate-in-crisis>
4. Georgia J. Michlig, Riyadh Lafta, Maha Al-Nuaimi, and Gilbert Burnham, "Providing Healthcare under ISIS: A Qualitative Analysis of Healthcare Worker Experiences in Mosul, Iraq between June 2014 and June 2017," *Global Public Health* 14, no. 10 (2019): 1414–27: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17441692.2019.1609061>; Baskaran, "The Islamic State Healthcare Paradox."
5. Arwa Damon and Gul Tuysuz, "The Rheumatology Doctor Who Helped Terror Group Morph into ISIS," *CNN*, 2 March 2018: <https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/02/middleeast/isis-doctor-prisoner-intl/index.html>
6. Baskaran, "The Islamic State Healthcare Paradox."
7. Ibid.
8. "Islamic State Release ISHS Video That Bears Strange Resemblance to UK's NHS," *ITV News*, 24 April 2015: <https://www.itv.com/news/2015-04-24/islamic-state-release-ishs-video-that-bears-strange-resemblance-to-uks-nhs>
9. Ibid.; "Islamic State NHS-Style Hospital Video Posted," *BBC News*, 24 April 2015: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32456789>; Baskaran, "The Islamic State Healthcare Paradox."

10. Lauren Vogel, "Why Are Doctors Joining ISIS?" *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 188, no. 3 (16 February 2016): 177–78: <https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.109-5217>; Grace Kyallo, "Get Your Free Health Care. . . From ISIS," O'Neill Institute for National and Global Health Law, 5 August 2015: <https://oneill.law.georgetown.edu/get-your-free-health-care-from-isis/>
11. Vogel, "Why Are Doctors Joining ISIS?"
12. Samuel Osborne, "NHS Doctor from Sheffield Travelled to Syria to Join Isis," *The Independent*, 24 May 2016: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/nhs-doctor-sheffield-travelled-syria-join-isis-a7047171.html>
13. Baskaran, "The Islamic State Healthcare Paradox."
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Damon and Tuysuz, "The Rheumatology Doctor Who Helped Terror Group."
17. "Profiles in Service: Air Force Elite Surgical Team's 'Outside-the-Wire Medicine,'" 25 May 2018, CBS News, video, 5:15: <https://www.cbsnews.com/video/air-force-elite-surgical-teams-outside-the-wire-medicine/>
18. Rick Hurtado, "The Role of U.S. Troops During Operations in Anbar Province," Operation Inherent Resolve, 6 February 2016: <https://www.inherentresolve.mil/Releases/News-Releases/Article/673405/the-role-of-us-troops-during-operations-in-anbar-province/>
19. Ibid.
20. Nick Paton Walsh, "Afghan Soldiers Desert as Taliban Threaten Key Helmand Capital," CNN, 11 April 2016: <https://www.cnn.com/2016/04/11/middleeast/afghanistan-helmand-taliban-soldiers/index.html>



Hafiz Saeed (center), leader of Jamaat-ud-Dawa, waves to supporters as he leaves a court in Lahore, Pakistan, on 19 October 2017. Saeed was designated a global terrorist by the United States and has a \$10 million bounty on his head.

## The Future of Islamic Extremism in Pakistan: An Ethnography, Part Two

*Dr. David D. Belt, National Intelligence University*

**W**hat do activists and experts on the front lines of efforts to either promote or counter Islamic movements in Pakistan believe will be the likely trajectory of religious extremism in this nuclear-armed Muslim-majority country of 195 million? This article, the second part of a two-part ethnography, seeks to shed light on this question, using the new conceptual framework outlined in Part One.<sup>1</sup>

The narratives for both parts of this ethnography were sourced from digitally recorded in-person narrative interviews with 25 highly diverse and well-placed Pakistanis. These individuals, who held important positions in government, civil society, academia, NGOs, and political and religious movements across all regions of the country, were actively promoting, countering, or studying the more relevant Islamist movements.<sup>2</sup> As is the case with all ethnographies, these interviews add value to the literature by their less-scripted, free-flowing cultural narrative responses.<sup>3</sup> The interviewees described their perceptions of the likely longer-term future of extremism in Pakistan in their own unfiltered words, which are placed in the larger historical-political context through a running commentary that engages with the relevant literature. To aid the reader, a list of the 25 interviewees and their affiliations is included on page 34.

This study uses the 25 narrative interviews as a means to predict the trajectory that religious extremism in Pakistan will take over the next decade or so. The relevant information from the narratives is organized according to the conceptual framework produced in the first part of this ethnography.<sup>4</sup>

## The Radicalization of Pakistan's Religious Landscape

This section summarizes the more detailed interviewee narratives in Part One, which describe the present level of extremism and provide the basis for this article's predictions about Pakistan's future.<sup>5</sup>

Several of the interviewees described how some segments of Pakistani society had undergone or were still undergoing mass-level Islamist radicalization. Source 001, who is the founder of an academy and a conflict resolution organization in the Swat district, described extremism as "spreading very quickly." Source 004, who works for an organization in northern Punjab that advances counternarratives to extremism, asserted that in Pakistan, "the whole society has become a factory of radicalization." Source 006, a highly educated and accomplished activist in Pakistan's Swat district who is leading a civil society organization focused on containing extremism, noted that "nowadays, it is general thinking that 'jihad is religion.'" Source 013, a high-level activist in the secular Awami National Party's (ANP) student wing, described the "jihadi mindset" as being institutionalized in Pakistan's bureaucracy, while Source 014, an activist leader in the ANP who is promoting peace, claimed that in Pakistan's northwestern tribal region, "the whole society is radicalized." This process was set in motion in the 1980s, he continued, when the jihadi cadres had "the vast support of the masses." Other interviewees made similar comments.

According to the interviewees, the most significant factors driving radicalization in Pakistan were, first, the various religious ideologies themselves, which had become ensconced broadly across significant segments of Pakistan's religious landscape; second, the interested agents—including people, groups, and institutions—that personally connect with individuals and socialize them into an extremist worldview; and, a distant third, identity insecurity and political grievances.<sup>6</sup>

### Forms of Extremism

The underlying structure of extremism in Pakistan, according to most interviewees, is largely a function of Salafism and two of its ideological pillars: jihadism broadly, and its more extremist form, takfirism. Salafism and its offshoot Wahhabism are among the more puritanical movements within Sunni Islam. These movements have spread so extensively in Pakistan that the country has been referred to as the "Wahhabi Republic."<sup>7</sup>

## Jihad, in the context suggested by the interviewees, is a broad doctrine of defending and advancing the faith.

Jihad, in the context suggested by the interviewees, is a broad doctrine of defending and advancing the faith. For instance, Source 005, a scholar with a doctorate who leads a youth organization in the Swat district, said that "the enemy propagates false messages about jihad. If Muslims do not engage in jihad, they will be destroyed." Source 012, a teacher who is sympathetic to the Wahhabist Ahl-e-Hadith movement, also embraced a more global form of jihad fought against disbelievers, "but not within Pakistan." He noted that "jihad is obligatory on Muslims." Source 016 is a Deobandi (Deobandism is a South Asian form of puritanical Salafism) who became a leader in the Markazi Jamiat Ahl-e-Hadith (JAH) movement. He lauded Hafiz Muhammad Saeed, the Pakistani Islamic militant who co-founded Lashkar-e-Taiba and who is the chief of Jama'at-ud-Da'wah, but qualified his support, noting, "it is currently not possible to conduct traditional jihad through the sword because for that [to happen], there would have to be an Ameer-ul-Momineen [Commander of the Faithful] and a truly Islamic state that properly implements shari'a." He added, "if there is an Islamic revolution through which a purely Islamic state is established, only then, under the orders of the Ameer, will jihad be legitimate." Source 018, a Salafi researcher with a graduate degree, who was born into the Ahl-e-Hadith movement, spoke of non-Muslims and particularly the West in conspiratorial terms, including blaming sectarianism on Western influence: "What they could give us was anarchy—small internal differences between us. We listen to them as if they are our friends, although it says in the Qur'an that they are our enemies." 018 added, "I'm not saying to do jihad against them in this interview."

Takfir, a Salafi sub-doctrine that obligates pure or true (i.e., Sunni) Muslims to purge all heretical systems of belief, such as Shi'ism and Sufism, is a major source of violent extremism in Pakistan. Purifying the ummah (the Muslim community) is seen as a prerequisite to the establishment of a unified Islamic state, or caliphate. In this way, takfirism and caliphatism are inseparable. This takfiri trend gained force when a split among Pakistan's Salafists led to the creation of more militantly sectarian groups, including Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP, the Pakistan Taliban). Many members of Pakistan's Salafist community have joined ISIS to kill Shi'a and Alawite Muslims in Iraq and Syria. Takfir is a form of jihad that promotes not only sectarianism, but also forms of revolution and separatism from the government. Source 005, for instance, said that "there is criticism of jihad because the leadership knows that if the people were to resort to

jihad, no one would listen to them and they won't be able to rule. The current leadership are merely Muslims by name." Blending concepts of takfir and jihad, 005 added:

It is ideal if the head of state gives permission for jihad [to make it legitimate]. However, permission can also be given from one who is also on the path to jihad or one who is convinced of it. We are in a state of war and under the influence of the enemy. But we can't wage jihad against [the Pakistani government], because we can only wage jihad against non-Muslims.

**"The leadership knows that if the people were to resort to jihad, no one would listen to them and they won't be able to rule. The current leadership are merely Muslims by name."**

Source 020, a member of the secular Awami Nationalist Party, who helps create counternarratives to this kind of extremism in the social media, described takfir as essentially Salafi, and said that the more sectarian elements of this Salafist trend are represented by the groups Jama'at-ud-Da'wah—the rebranded Lashkar-e-Taiba—along with the more Deobandi breakaway groups, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, and Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan.

Although all of the five Salafi interviewees in this ethnography embraced jihad, none embraced takfir. Source 016 said that "any militant organizations that are conducting terrorist activities and suicide bombings in the name of jihad should be banned and the government should deal with them forcefully," adding that "Ahl-e-Hadith organizations have restricted their jihadi wings to carry out no such activities within Pakistan." 016 also believed that "what the Taliban is doing—slaughtering people—is wrong." This notion about killing other Muslims was, of course, the primary distinction between al-Qaeda and ISIS. Source 018, another Salafi in the Ahl-e-Hadith movement who had more extremist views of jihad towards non-Muslims, gave this answer on how Salafis should deal with Shi'a: "It has to be through love and compassion. Eating with them, visiting them. When they know that 'Ahl-e-Hadith people think we are kafirs but this guy still sat with me and ate lunch,' it warms the relations. And it starts from there. Through preaching and love, and they will understand that this person is sincere."

The point to take away from this discussion is that Pakistan's Islamists and Salafis can hold jihad to be theologically and morally superior to takfir. It seems likely, therefore, that if the Pakistani government were to create a counterextremism

campaign, it would likely target the takfiri strands of the extremist worldview, while leaving relatively unchallenged jihad that is waged outside of Pakistan, as espoused by the interviewees.

## Factors Shaping the Trajectory of Extremism in Pakistan

In view of these broad forms of extremism in Pakistan—Salafism and its jihadi and takfiri offshoots—the interviewees outlined nine main factors that are likely to promote the further radicalization of Pakistan's religious landscape for at least the next decade.

### I. Cultural Limitations

All forms of extremism in Pakistan are catalyzed by a culture that lacks a spirit and tradition of open discussion and tolerance. Source 007, a government official in Peshawar, described a cultural context of "rigid thought" that makes any reform "difficult." "In our country," 007 noted, "there is no tradition of dialogue or logic. The answers are given through bullets." Source 018, a relatively moderate member of Ahl-e-Hadith, also spoke of the lack of genuine dialogue in Pakistani society. He lauded the approach of Maulana Tariq Jameel, of Tablighi Jamaat, whom he quoted as saying that "all denominations should sit together and talk with love and compassion." Source 018 added that "prominent scholars within the different denominations need to sit together and talk," indicating that he did not believe this was actually happening. Similarly, 013 lamented that "the customs and traditions [of society] have been demolished." Source 016 also explained sectarianism in terms of a broader culture that is too easily radicalized.

Sources 024 and 025, professors at the same university in Peshawar, pointed to the problem of rigid mindsets that legitimize Islamic militancy. When first asked about the usefulness of counternarrative strategies or movements, the two scholars dismissed this notion out of hand. The culture of militancy is so engrained within the ulema (clerics), 025 noted, that they "consider all [counterextremist] narratives as un-Islamic and against shari'a." In the same vein, Source 007 concluded that counternarrative strategies and similar initiatives "are not effective in this environment." Counternarratives and those who try to introduce them meet with steep resistance at every level. Source 008 pointed to the serious danger to any group or organization advancing an "alternative narrative," noting that "organizations working in this regard are facing danger." Source 013 described how members of "local conflict resolution committees [that were] very helpful to deal with radicalization . . . [were] targeted



During Ramadan, Pakistani religious leader Molana Tariq Jameel addresses the faithful at Friday prayers in the Bahria Town Mosque, Lahore, Pakistan.

and killed” the day after their committee was formed. Source 024 cited a case a few years ago when a state governor, accused of violating the nation’s blasphemy law, was summarily killed by a militant, adding that “[the assassin] was named a hero” by the popular press. Although the governor’s funeral was performed inside his house, “not one cleric was ready to offer a funeral prayer.” “In this cultural milieu,” 024 said, “if we talk about deradicalization, it will be dangerous.”

**“In this cultural milieu, if we talk about deradicalization, it will be dangerous.”**

## 2. Taqlid and Illiteracy

The Islamic doctrine known as *taqlid* is the cultural propensity to not think critically, and to blindly follow religious leaders. Source 003, a Salafi, was one of several interviewees who blamed taqlidism as the main source of sectarianism in Pakistan. He noted that

Maulana Maududi [Pakistan’s famous Islamist ideologue] argued that the reason for sectarianism is that people relied on *ijtihad* [an Islamic legal term meaning independent reasoning by a jurist] when the hadith were not yet compiled as a book. When the companions returned to their native lands they had limited knowledge. People began asking them for solutions on issues and problems, and they would give answers based on *ijtihad*.

The four imams did stress that if you find a hadith on a certain matter, then you should accept the hadith over their *ijtihad*. According to Maududi, people ignored the imams’ instructions and favored the imams’ opinions over hadith.

Source 014, a teacher who works in counterextremism in the Federally Administrated Tribal Areas-Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (FATA-KP) region, also noted that the people “go in any direction the mullah chooses.” Source 017, the president of an Islamabad-based NGO focused on counterextremism, similarly said that “our people blindly follow the instructions of these militant mullahs without any verification.” The cultural propensity to taqlidism is reinforced by a high level of illiteracy in Pakistan, which means that, unless these conditions change, the radicalizing influence of the local *ulema* promises to continue for the foreseeable future.<sup>8</sup>

The deep cultural embeddedness of extremism across the Deobandi and Wahhabi parts of Pakistan’s religious landscape has strategic implications, according to several of the interviewees.<sup>9</sup> Source 013, a high-level activist in the secular Awami National Party’s student wing, saw no hope for any attempt at disengagement, let alone deradicalization, of Pakistan’s militants. “The people who had joined these organizations are fully brainwashed,” he said. Nor do aspiring militants join these movements for material reward: according to Source 020, “they even spend from their [own

meager funds] on the hope that they are fighting physical and material jihad.”

### 3. Government Inaction

Despite decades of gradual radicalization, Pakistan’s successive governments have shown little interest in countering violent extremism at the narrative or ideological level. For example, Source 001 said that the government was failing to conduct deradicalization programs for militants, which would, in his words, “help them know what is good and what is wrong” in their understanding of Islam. He added that “the government should be forming a committee of credible religious leaders [with] the task to prepare madrasa curriculum.” Source 006 said that what was necessary to counter extremism was “a long-devised program of education, awareness,” while Source 004 lamented that across all of Pakistan, “there is no program of counter-radicalization.” Source 009 similarly did not know of any ongoing counterextremism programs. “Those who are in power are not serious in this regard,” he said. Source 013 noted that there was not even a deradicalization program in Pakistan’s prisons. Source 014 similarly complained that “there are no activities of counter-narratives, especially in the tribal belt.” He saw little hope for a strategic counternarrative campaign taking place through the socialization nodes of the print, broadcast, and social media, especially in the least developed and most highly radicalized FATA-KP region.

Source 016 was concerned that the government had no meaningful program to address sectarianism. “If the government wants to solve sectarian issues, then they should take some effective measures,” he asserted, adding that “there should be peace representatives or committees at the union council level, and clerics should participate.” Source 017 likewise worried that “there is no counterforce” to what the more radical ulema are teaching. Source 023, interviewed in Islamabad, lamented that “counternarratives are negligible in Pakistan and there is no serious struggle for these narratives.” Source 024 agreed that, while a counternarrative strategy was the solution for Pakistan’s growing extremism, there had never been and was not currently “any counternarrative, either by the government or by the ulema.” The Pakistani state was “silent and has no capacity in this regard,” said Source 024, adding that “if we look at the literature of Maududi, [his legitimization of jihad] is not challenged yet, or we have not seen its counternarratives.” Source 004 believed that, even if the Pakistani government did manage to create a counterextremism program, it would take at least fifteen years to show success.

### 4. Government Complicity

Beyond the government’s apparent lack of interest in creating counterextremism programs, interviewees directly implicated it in the spread of extremist activity. Elements of the Pakistani government seem to have found some forms of domestic extremism useful, and therefore have been complicit with the Salafization of the country. Several interviewees talked about how the “military-mosque alliance” that controls Pakistani politics cooperates with Saudi Arabian proselytizers.<sup>10</sup> Key government entities take money from the Saudi government and Saudi non-governmental organizations in exchange for turning a blind eye to Salafist radicalization.

**Key government entities take money from the Saudi government and Saudi non-governmental organizations in exchange for turning a blind eye to Salafist radicalization.**

Source 001 described what he believed the government *should* do but was *not* doing, such as taking “stern action against all the people who are either political leaders [or] religious leaders who support and propagate jihadism and militancy,” and “identifying the people who get inspired from militants.” Source 004 echoed this statement, saying that there is “not any policy or program to contain Salafism.” He added that the government “has no long-term focus, . . . has not developed any political will yet,” and is enacting “only cosmetic stuff.” He assessed that “currently, the government is on zero.” Source 012 said, “There have been no serious activities to reduce conflicts or differences, like dialogues,” adding that every Pakistani administration “has contributed to aggravating sectarian conflicts.” 012 added that “there is an interfaith and intra-faith ministry, but it is useless.” Source 013 directly attributed the spread of Salafism to a lack of government interest, noting that no one is going after the sources and resources that allow extremism to propagate.

Source 017 similarly complained that Pakistan’s government lacked disengagement or amnesty strategies that would help militants to leave extremist movements and reintegrate into society. Speaking specifically of terrorist groups, Source 017 said, “nowadays, recruitment is very low. . . . But those who are part of these groups have no way to escape.” If a militant who had made himself an enemy of the state wanted to surrender, 017 continued, “our government policy is to punish” him. It seems apparent that the Pakistani government is not only avoiding counternarrative strategies; it is also not

interested in less politically sensitive policies that would encourage militants to deradicalize.

Some interviewees believed that the dearth of programs to counter extremism was not merely a product of government ineptness, but was actually a purposive government strategy. Source 013 implied as much when he pointed out that “those who write against these terrorist organizations and ideology [are] blamed as foreign agents and traitors and [are] banned, killed, or jailed.” Source 020 corroborated this: “The culprits are well-known to the authorities, but still they are not arrested. . . . This means that the state is also involved.” He reiterated this point later in the interview: “If we take the example of the police, they know the local population—their businesses and links—but normally we hear that when the police arrest any person involved in militancy, he is released at the call of a high official.” For example, 020 said, “the state protected Sufi Muhammad [bin Alhazrat Hassan—an Islamist militant and founder of the extremist group Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi], although his crimes were well known.”

Apart from the interviews, the signs of this official complicity are everywhere. Several convicted high-profile militants from the anti-Shi’a group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, for example, have inexplicably been able to escape from military and civilian detention, while others who were apprehended and charged for terrorist attacks have rarely been convicted by the courts.<sup>11</sup> External studies also describe Pakistan’s lack of seriousness with regard to countering extremism. On paper, the country has a counterterrorism National Action Plan (NAP), but in a 2015 assessment, the International Crisis Group concluded that, unless the government develops a “reformed and strengthened criminal justice system” that would keep extremists locked up, “the NAP looks far more like a hastily-conceived wish-list devised for public consumption during a moment of crisis than a coherent strategy.”<sup>12</sup>

When asked why the state was being complicit in the spread of militancy, Source 020 accused the Pakistani government of playing a “double game”: taking money from the United States to combat terrorism and from Saudi Arabia to advance Salafism, all the while forming an alliance with Islamist and even extremist movements for domestic political and regional geopolitical purposes.<sup>13</sup> At the domestic political level, 020 said that, “to an extent, the state is beholden to [Islamist] political parties” for its continued existence. At the broader geopolitical level, several interviewees noted that the Pakistani government’s alliance with Islamist movements was an important aspect of Pakistan’s defense-in-depth against India. State-sponsored extremist groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba used violence to destabilize India’s hold on Kashmir,

while the Taliban, also sponsored by Pakistan’s government, worked to destabilize Afghanistan and deny India a strong ally on Pakistan’s western border.<sup>14</sup>

## 5. The Political Economy of Extremism

Several of the interviewees mentioned the role of foreign funding and foreign agents in Pakistan’s religious radicalization. Saudi Arabia in particular has long been an exporter and sponsor of Salafi ideology, as a means to both diffuse and deflect takfiri attacks on the Saudi regime. Source 023 saw external aid to Pakistan from Saudi Arabia as the “most important” factor in Pakistan’s rising militancy. Source 017 described how decades of proselytizing by both Saudi Arabia and Iran have created two opposing sectarian political economies, with Saudi Arabia sponsoring the anti-Shi’a movement Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan, and Iran sponsoring the reactionary Shi’a militant movement Sipah-e-Muhammad Pakistan. According to 017, sectarianism “has become a business; either side’s leaders receive reasonable amounts from [Saudi Arabia and Iran], and they will not be ready to leave such a business.” According to Source 013, the army, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI: the military’s internal intelligence arm), and other local government authorities play a “double game”: the incoming Saudi money fuels the very extremists that the incoming US aid money is designed to counter. Thus, some elements of the government have every incentive to allow and even help the Saudis create anti-Western extremist groups that will compel the United States to send more aid money.

**Some elements of the government have every incentive to allow and even help the Saudis create anti-Western extremist groups that will compel the United States to send more aid money.**

When asked about the possibility of disrupting the flow of Saudi funding, Source 024 dismissed the notion as no longer possible because today’s Pakistan is self-radicalizing. In other words, Pakistan itself is now a source or node of Salafization. “In the Swat region and other parts of Pakistan,” Source 024 explained, “these movements were started with financial contributions from the masses,” adding, “you can see in your mosques how much contribution from the common people goes to these organizations.” He then used an analogy, pointing to how US charities had institutionalized the practice of asking people to donate gifts in kind—everything from furniture to autos to luxury items like boats. 024 said that this gift-in-kind economy was how Pakistani organizations raised capital to fuel violent extremism in Pakistan:

“Recently, I was in Dir. A signboard’s message called for the contribution of animal skins to Hizb ul-Mujahideen, [and] military personnel were also standing there,” to supervise the collections.

On the prospect of disrupting the stream of foreign funds, Source 013 said, “Basically, the state does not want to; the army and intelligence services want this program to continue.” Source 017 observed that “they do not want to because their business will stop. . . . Every state has its own agenda and proxy; they are not willing to stop this.” Source 023 complained that reforming the education system amounted to evicting Saudi Arabia’s influence from the country, and “the government does not want to do so.” “To some extent,” 023 added, “funding has been disrupted” by the United States, but “our government and military do not want to stop the financial resources” that are coming from Persian Gulf states. The prospect of reforming the army and ISI was small, according to Source 022, who lamented that “all of the commanders are independent and they have

sufficient power and money; they can challenge the state authority.” “Therefore, as long as the state is involved,” 020 reasoned, “all policies and programs are of no use against extremism and militancy.” Source 014 also said as much: “The only way for a reeducation program to work [was] to end . . . brainwashing” by this decades-old radicalization apparatus.

## 6. Radical Education

Several of the interviewees described the radicalizing role of the state education system. Source 015, a renowned expert on radicalization, especially in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region, described how the state education system functioned as a base-level radicalizing agent by teaching students to be suspicious and intolerant of different cultures and ideas. Even so, most radicalization directed at students occurs in extracurricular settings, such as Islamist student groups. Source 008 explained that, even if “traditional religious schools and [madrassas] have nothing in their

Supporters of the Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP), a hardline religious political party, chant slogans during a protest on the blocked Faizabad bridge.



curriculum about extremism,” they provide activities outside of the classroom that specifically fill that purpose. Curricular reform thus would do nothing to solve the problem.<sup>15</sup>

Although much has been said in the Western press and think tanks regarding the radicalizing influence of Pakistan’s madrassas, the interviewees in this ethnography had a far more nuanced view of them. Source 019, who works to remove extremist content from madrassas’ curriculae, assessed that the religious schools played a smaller role in radicalization than did foreign state funding and the influence of local imams. Source 017 corroborated this and pointed out that “religious institutions and education have a limited role in spreading Salafism in Pakistan, because most of the madrassas belong to the Hanifi school of thought,” a movement that does not typically follow Salafi interpretations of the Qur’an and hadith. Source 017 also noted that, despite the role of Arab money and strategies of Salafization, these Hanifi-run madrassas “remained always independent.” For this reason,

in 017’s opinion, Salafization of Islam in Pakistan had been and thus reasonably would continue to be hindered.

## 7. The Power of Imams

Another socializing force that bodes poorly for deradicalization in Pakistan is the role of the local imam in people’s lives. As Source 005 put it, “Anyone who knows even a little bit about religion writes Qur’anic tafsir [commentary, elucidation] and there is no check on the quality of their work.” Source 006 agreed, saying, “unfortunately, Islam is in the hands of those people who negatively interpret it,” and “they exploit and misinterpret the verses of the holy Qur’an . . . and use them in extremism.” Source 016 similarly commented that ending sectarianism or the war between fellow Muslims in Pakistan had to be largely a function of the local imams. “Even though renowned ulema sign peace agreements,” he said, “local clerics try to spoil their efforts.”

Because the country is so underdeveloped that television is unavailable in most areas, “the role of the ulema is very



important,” 014 said, adding that “if the mullah is modern, the population under him will be modern.” But that is the problem, according to the interviewees: the ulema broadly are infected with militant ideology, and attempts to preach counternarratives are met with hostility as being un-Islamic or, even worse, Western-inspired. Thus, the key socialization component needed for a counterextremism campaign—a large, moderate movement of ulema—is not merely weak in Pakistan; it is almost non-existent.

To several of the interviewees, controlling the extremist imams doesn’t seem possible. Source 018, for instance, pointed out that “imams of [mosques] are paid by the neighborhood or some person.” “If I were some important person in the neighborhood who is paying the imam,” he reasoned, “I can easily censor what he talks about and [decide] what he doesn’t because I am paying him.” 018 worried that “individuals are controlling imams for individual purposes,” and that “these types of imams are ruining the country.” Regarding possible solutions, Source 011, a Salafi and imam at a prominent madrassa, noted that “it will not be possible to have state-regulated mosques, because the government could not manage it.” Source 012 shared that bleak assessment. He asserted that the kind of religious ministry that most Muslim-majority countries have instituted to exert state control over the mosque, and which typically appoints thoroughly vetted imams and ulema, is not even possible in Pakistan because of the widespread support for various kinds of extremism.

**“Individuals are controlling imams for individual purposes,” and “these types of imams are ruining the country.”**

Source 016 blamed Pakistan’s Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony (MORA), saying that it “is not doing its job properly” and that its officials are corrupt. He believed that clerics should be appointed or tightly regulated by the state, and he pointed to the successful policies of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in this regard. “No cleric should be allowed to promote sectarianism via mosque,” he insisted, implying that some clerics *are* being allowed to radicalize Pakistanis into a sectarian worldview. The MORA website, which makes no mention of anti-extremist or deradicalization programs or missions, seems to corroborate 011’s, 012’s and 016’s assessments.<sup>16</sup>

## 8. Media’s Role

Interviewees also pointed to the importance of social media in promoting and institutionalizing extremist views throughout Pakistani society. According to Source 003,

there is the “new phenomenon of self-radicalization” in which “the youngsters get involved through the internet” without personally meeting with an extremist. Source 008, a senior administrator at a major Islamic university, described the Salafis and Salafi-jihadists in Pakistan as “very strong at social media,” noting that “al-Qaeda has their own websites,” and that ISIS’s messages have spread to Muslims even in neighboring India. Source 004, whose organization in Islamabad was trying to advance a counternarrative to one form of extremism, blamed the radicalization spreading through Pakistan on virtual socialization, broadcast media, and internet-based social media. Source 001 noted that the part of the Qur’an that has been used to justify extremism, Surah-e-Anfal, is prominently featured on the country’s web portals—a clear indication that Pakistan’s government is not interested in countering extremism. Pakistan has only 33.9 percent internet penetration at this juncture, which means that self-radicalization can be expected to mushroom over time as the remaining two-thirds of Pakistan’s youth become able to join those whose worldviews are significantly shaped online.<sup>17</sup>

## 9. The Momentum of Success

The future of extremism in Pakistan is also in part a function of momentum and, in particular, the durable and proven radicalizing strategies of extremist elements within the government and extremist religio-social movements in the broader society. According to radicalization expert Source 015, extremist groups use a deliberate strategy to infiltrate and influence the marginalized segments of society that lie outside of Pakistan’s tight patronage network. The state’s failure to govern at all levels of society creates a vacuum that draws in non-state actors with money and a message, and enables them to build a radical Islamist parallel society loyal to them rather than to the state. Source 015 described a remarkably successful eight-step process, featuring what he called the jihadi and martyrdom mindset, that these extremist groups carry out in various “specific areas” of these overlooked sectors of society:

1. They start . . . through pamphleting, FM radio, public speaking, and establishing training camps to . . . sensitize the community to their interests and delegitimize their enemy. Through identifying the enemy, they construct [an extremist] mindset.
2. In a very planned manner, they then reach to the marginal and vulnerable parts of the community. They reach to the youth, the socially marginalized and politically marginalized, or expatriates—those who earn money in a foreign country but have no say in the society.

3. In the third stage, they initiate social welfare work, such as settling legal disputes or dispensing justice.
4. Then . . . they start making madrassas in communal or ethnic disputed land, which is easy to get and where nobody resists their use of the land.
5. They start exploiting or producing natural resources and collecting charitable donations, and then [engage in] more illegal activities such as smuggling and kidnaping.
6. Then they strengthen their networking with other militant organizations . . . and invite trainers [from more established groups] to train [the local group].
7. Gradually, the socially influential people [who might stand against radicalization] are forced to leave the area.
8. Then, [the extremists send] some of their brighter minds to [be employed by] the state. This works in two dimensions: first, the people lose trust in the state because the state fails to rescue them and, second, [the extremists] start creating . . . parallel state institutions, with a judicial system that solves peoples' problems. At this stage, the community is hostage [to the extremists] and cannot rescue themselves. It is similar in all militant areas.

This durable eight-part strategy has been carried out successfully without challenge in several areas, according to Source 015. The key point is that this process builds its own kind of momentum, which favors the further radicalization of Pakistan's religious and social landscape for the foreseeable future, unless and until the underlying structure of societal and cultural conditions changes.

## Takeaways and Recommendations

In this second part of the two-part inquiry, the narratives of the 25 interviewees outlined nine factors that are shaping the future of extremism in Pakistan. The interviewees agreed that not only does the current Pakistani government not have any kind of meaningful counterextremism program to prevent radicalization on a mass scale, but that it also is, itself, the chief radicalizing agent. The interviews corroborate what the literature describes: extremism, especially sectarianism, is a form of majority and identity politics that the regime finds useful to its survival on both the political and economic fronts. Funding from Saudi Arabia and its Wahhabi clerical establishment is a crucial resource for

powerful elements of the Pakistani state and the religio-political parties that it has aligned with to remain in power.<sup>18</sup> The literature affirms the interviewees' claims that Pakistan—in the words of Farhan Zahid—“does not have a comprehensive counter-terrorism policy,” and future success in rolling back extremism will “remain limited.”<sup>19</sup> This ethnographic study suggests, therefore, that the prospect for reversing Pakistan's extremist trend is at best limited. In the words of Source 017, “to control all these forms of extremism and radicalization will take ten to fifteen years, as this mindset has been built [over] 30 years.”

Despite this pessimistic outlook, there seems to be little likelihood that Pakistan will become a larger form of the Islamic State that we saw recently in Syria and Iraq, and the literature outlines several structural conditions that hinder an outside group like ISIS from gaining significant ground in South Asia, especially in Pakistan.<sup>20</sup> But there is no room for the international community to be complacent. The interview narratives collected here suggest that the radicalized elements of Pakistan's religious landscape may create a sufficient safe haven and propagation node for Salafism, jihadism, and takfirism to spread, and that elements of the Pakistani government, such as the army and ISI, will continue to find these conditions politically useful.

Although this trajectory toward increasing violent extremism seems certain, a soft coalition of China and the United States, working with Saudi Arabia, could significantly alter this course by the end of the 15-year window that Source 017 mentioned as being the minimum requirement. The United States, the European Union, and China could agree to geopolitically and economically incentivize the Saudi regime and Pakistan's government—and its most deeply illiberal elements, the army and ISI—to fundamentally change course. Achieving this would, necessarily, entail two grand bargains. First, the Saudi regime could be incentivized by Beijing, Washington, and Brussels to begin rolling back its support for sectarian extremist groups, ending all support for Salafization projects, and curtailing payments to corrupt elements of the government; to gain rewards and avoid penalties, Riyadh would have to meet certain verifiable benchmarks on a predetermined timeline. Second, the United States, the European Union, India, and China could provide geopolitical and economic incentives to the Pakistani government, army, and ISI to implement specific counterextremism programs, particularly those related to takfirism, also with measurable benchmarks of success. Short of such a double grand bargain led by the world's major geopolitical and economic powers—a coalition that could bring significant influence to bear on both Saudi Arabia and

Pakistan—the nine shaping factors outlined in this futures assessment suggest that lesser strategies will have little effect.

Given the reasonable probability that the nuclear-armed, Salafi-propagating, sectarian-battle-zone state of Pakistan will become even more radicalized over the next 10 to 15 years, I recommend that further research be conducted to delineate the future trajectory of extremism in Pakistan. This research should entail a mix of grounded theory-based ethnographies such as the present one, with the addition of more traditional large-N data sets; several statistically representative attitudes surveys; and a series of social analyses targeting the specific radicalizing trends identified in this study.

## List of Interviewees

001: a civil society activist working to contain militant extremism, among other things

002: a government official and university professor in Peshawar, whose classes focus on countering violent extremism

003: a Salafi

004: worked for an organization in the northern Punjab that produced a counternarrative to Islamic extremism

005: a scholar with a doctorate degree who leads a youth organization in the Swat district

006: a highly educated and accomplished resident and activist of Pakistan's Swat district, who leads a civil society organization focused on containing extremism

007: a government official in Peshawar

008: a professor and former dean at an Islamic university near Peshawar

009: a professor of political science

010: a member of the politically active South Asian Salafi movement Ahl-e-Hadith

011: An imam at a prominent madrasa, editor of a prominent Islamic journal, and political representative

012: a teacher who is sympathetic to the Salafi Ahl-e-Hadith movement

013: a high-level activist in the secular Awami National Party's student wing

014: a lecturer in the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas

015: a renowned figure in Pakistani society, an expert on radicalization, and a recognized contributor to one of Pakistan's major newspapers, who resides in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa area.

016: a former Deobandi and key leader within Pakistan's only Salafist party, Markazi Jamiat Ahl-e-Hadith

017: the president of an Islamabad-based NGO focused on countering extremism

018: a researcher with a graduate degree, and a second-generation member of the Ahl-e-Hadith movement

019: was working to curb extremism by reforming Pakistan's madrasas

020: an activist within the pro-US Awami National Party who has a large social media presence directed at countering violent extremism

021: a member of Ahl-e-Hadith

022: a government official who writes columns for a Pakistani newspaper

023: a "counter-radicalization" activist in social media who works in the Islamabad area

024: a professor in the Peshawar area who uses academic freedom to counter extremism

025: another professor at the same institution as 024, who similarly counters extremism in the university classroom.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Dr. David D. Belt** is a professor at National Intelligence University.

This is a work of the US federal government and is not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Foreign copyrights may apply.

---

## NOTES

1. David D. Belt, "Causes of the Ongoing Mass Radicalization of Islam in Pakistan: An Ethnography," *CTX* 11, no. 1 (Winter 2021): 36.
2. For a detailed description of the research methodology, see *ibid.*, 34–36.
3. All statements of fact, analysis, or opinion are the author's, and do not reflect the official policy or position of the National Intelligence University, US Department of Defense, or the US government.
4. Belt, "Causes of the Ongoing Mass Radicalization," 36.
5. *Ibid.*, 34–57.
6. Editor's note: *CTX* has published several articles on the topic of radicalization in Pakistan. See Amina Kator-Mubarez, "Equivocated Intentions: Blasphemy Laws in Pakistan," *CTX* 3, no. 1 (February 2013): <https://nps.edu/web/ecco/ctx-vol-3-no-1-february-2013>; Sanchita Battacharya, "Pakistan: Money for Terror," *CTX* 4, no. 4 (November 2014): <https://nps.edu/web/ecco/ctx-vol-4-no-4-november-2014>; and Surinder Kumar Sharma, "Hizb-ut-Tahrir: The New Islamic State," *CTX* 5, no. 1 (February 2015): <https://nps.edu/web/ecco/ctx-vol-5-no-1-february-2015>
7. Shamil Shams, "The 'Wahabi Republic' of Pakistan," *DW*, 24 August 2012: <https://www.dw.com/en/the-wahabi-republic-of-pakistan/a-16191055>
8. For more on these problems, see Belt, "Causes of the Ongoing Mass Radicalization," 42.
9. About half of Sunni Muslims in Pakistan belong to the less fundamentalist Sufi Barelvi sect. See "Barelvi Islam," Global Security, n.d.: <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/intro/islam-barelvi.htm>. A Shi'a minority comprises at least 6 percent of the population. See "The World's Muslims: Unity and Diversity," Pew Research Center, 9 August 2012: <https://www.pewforum.org/2012/08/09/the-worlds-muslims-unity-and-diversity-executive-summary/>
10. See Belt, "Causes of the Ongoing Mass Radicalization," 42–47, for more details on this aspect of the causes of radicalization.
11. "Pakistan: Rampant Killings of Shia by Extremists," Human Rights Watch, 29 June 2014: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/06/29/pakistan-rampant-killings-shia-extremists#>
12. "Revisiting Counter-terrorism Strategies in Pakistan: Opportunities and Pitfalls," International Crisis Group, Asia Report 271 (22 July 2015): <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/pakistan/revisiting-counter-terrorism-strategies-pakistan-opportunities-and-pitfalls>
13. This explanation is supported in the literature. See, for example, Husain Haqqani, *Pakistan: Between Mosque and Military* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005), 311.
14. For more on this dynamic, see S. Akbar Zaidi, "Special Report: Darkness Descends 1977-1988," *Dawn*, 1 November 2017: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1364410>
15. Islami Jamiat Talaba website: <https://jamiat.org.pk/about-us/>; and: <https://jamiat.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/IJT-Intro.pdf>
16. Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony, Government of Pakistan: <http://www.mora.gov.pk/#>
17. "Asia Stats," Internet World Stats (as of December 2020): <https://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm>
18. Uzair Hasan Rizvi, "The Rising Threat Against Shia Muslims in Pakistan," *The Wire*, 11 June 2016: <https://thewire.in/politics/the-rising-threat-against-shia-muslims-in-pakistan>
19. Farhan Zahid, "Pakistan's CVE Programme: An Overview of Achievements and Challenges," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 9, no. 6 (2017): 16: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26351527>
20. See, for instance, Abdul Basit, "IS Penetration in Afghanistan-Pakistan: Assessment, Impact and Implications," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 11, no. 3 (2017): 19–20: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26297839>



## The CTX Interview General David Petraeus, US Army, retired

*Interviewed by Charles "Chuck" Woodson*

**O**n 10 December 2019, General David Petraeus, US Army (retired), spoke via video teleconference with Chuck Woodson and Dr. Clint Biggs of the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey, California, and Professor Orion Lewis and five students from Middlebury College in Middlebury, Vermont.<sup>1</sup> They discussed GEN Petraeus's service in Iraq during the 2007 troop surge, his subsequent experience in Afghanistan, and the significant changes he made to US counterinsurgency (COIN) doctrine.<sup>2</sup>

**CHUCK WOODSON:** Good morning, sir. The first question we'd like to ask is about your work to remodel US counterinsurgency doctrine and how, in your opinion, it relates to today's CT operations.

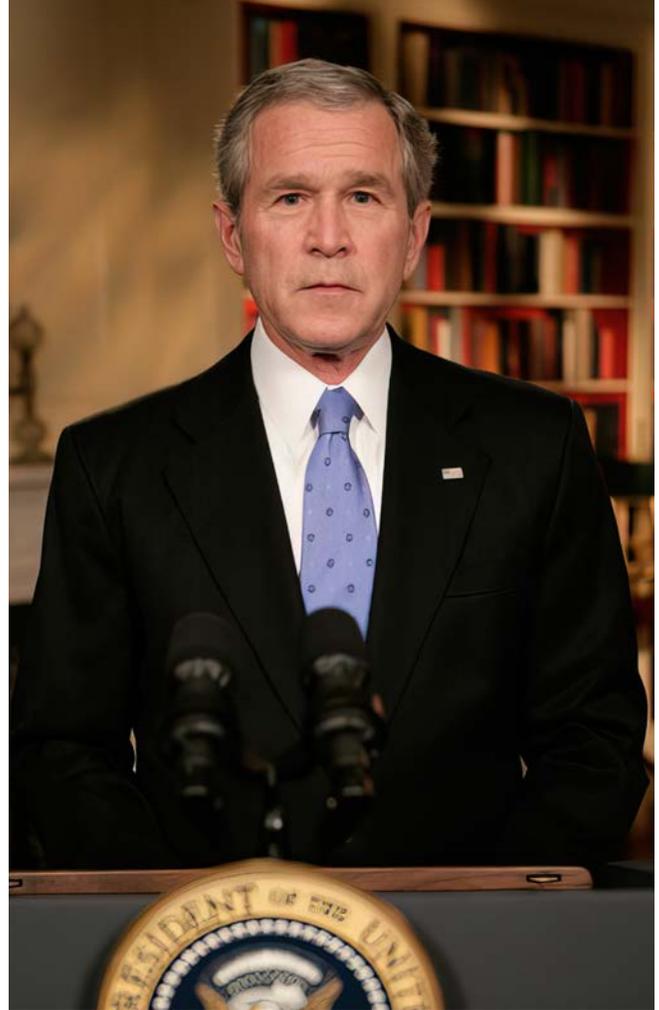
**GENERAL DAVID PETRAEUS:** What we sought to do in the counterinsurgency Field Manual that was published in late 2006 was to distill principles, paradoxes, and thoughts on the conduct of a counterinsurgency campaign, and then to discuss the various lines of operation that typically comprise such a campaign. It was not based solely on the nearly two and a half years that I'd already spent in Iraq when we commenced that manual. It took into account the lessons that all of us had tried to learn from Iraq and from Afghanistan, but also what we'd gleaned from history, such as the successful counterinsurgency supported by the British in Oman and their effort in Malaysia; the French in Indochina, as they termed Vietnam, and in Algeria; and so forth.

**In Iraq in 2007 and 2008, it was a surge of ideas that was vastly more important than the surge of forces.**

When we actually implemented the concepts in the manual in Iraq in 2007 and 2008, it was a surge of ideas that was vastly more important than the surge of forces. We did add 25,000 or so forces, and they were very important in enabling us to accelerate the implementation of what was essentially a completely new strategy, the main elements of which reversed what we had been doing prior to the start of the surge. This new strategy recognized that the number one function of a counterinsurgency campaign is to achieve security for the people, because, without security, you have no foundation on which to conduct all the other ambitious tasks you may have enumerated for yourself. Security for the Iraqi people was in an abysmal state at the start of the surge; [the country] was on the verge of an all-out Sunni-Shi'a civil war in Baghdad and in many of the other mixed Sunni-Shi'a areas. Also, of course, there was a major Sunni insurgency and extremist campaign in many of the Sunni areas on top of all of that, and Iranian-supported Shi'a militias were making life difficult in some Shi'a areas, as well. We recognized that we could only secure the people by reversing what we had been doing, which was consolidating on big bases and handing off responsibilities to Iraqi security forces that could no longer handle the very high level of violence. Particularly after the 22 February 2006 bombing of the very sacred Shi'a Samarra mosque, in a Sunni-controlled area north of Baghdad, the violence skyrocketed, getting worse and worse throughout the remainder of 2006 and into early 2007.

**We recognized that we could only secure the people by reversing what we had been doing.**

In fact, when President George W. Bush made the decision in December 2006 to conduct a surge, he made the decision to pick a new ambassador and a new commander of the Multinational Force–Iraq, and to provide us with more than 25,000 additional US men and women in uniform. After that, some coalition countries came in with additional forces as well. He did not prescribe a comprehensive civil-military counterinsurgency campaign in line with the ideas in the new field manual, but this is what we indeed executed. Again, the biggest element in that was the imperative to improve security, and we could only do that by living with the people. So, instead of continuing the consolidation of US forces on big bases and the handoff



President George W. Bush concludes his address to the nation Wednesday evening, 10 January 2007, from the White House Library, where he outlined a new strategy for the war in Iraq.

of security responsibilities to the Iraqis, we completely reversed those actions by moving back into the neighborhoods—so significantly that we created 77 additional locations for our forces just in the Baghdad division's area of operations alone. Our forces typically were deployed, together with Iraqi forces, in neighborhoods 24/7, and thereby they gradually identified the extremists, whether Sunni extremist insurgents or Shi'a militia elements, and removed them from the population. This often meant walling off the entire neighborhood—sometimes hundreds of thousands of people—and then controlling the access and egress to and from those areas, so that we could achieve and then maintain security. It's only when you have the security foundation that you can pursue all the other necessary tasks of a counterinsurgency campaign: restoration of basic services to the people, repair of war-damaged infrastructure, re-establishment of markets, getting schools and health clinics going again, etc.—all of the different components of life that we take for granted, but which were lacking because there was not sufficient security.

We sought to pursue some other very big ideas that would also contribute very centrally to the improvement of security, in terms of reconciling with as many of the

rank-and-file of the Sunni insurgents as was possible, and then, later on, with the rank-and-file of the Shi'a militias supported by Iran. At the same time, we were intensifying the special mission unit efforts to conduct precision raids every single night, doing roughly 15 or so of these when we fully ramped this up. So we were trying to reconcile with as many as we could, and then pursuing even more relentlessly the “irreconcilables”: the leaders of the Sunni extremist group al-Qaeda in Iraq and of the other significant Sunni insurgent movements. We focused first on the Sunni problem, and then a bit later, in 2008, on the Shi'a problem, although we had to do some of that during the course of that first year as well, depending on what the threat was in each individual area. This strategy was founded on a recognition that you cannot kill or capture your way out of an industrial-strength insurgency; you have to reconcile with as many of the lower-level insurgents and militia members as possible, and convince them to support the new Iraq rather than oppose it. So that was another very, very big idea.

**This strategy was founded on a recognition that you cannot kill or capture your way out of an industrial-strength insurgency.**

We also had to reform how we were doing detainee operations. It turned out that we were running what were, in effect, terrorist training camps—detention facilities from which young Sunni men emerged more, not less, extreme in their views and behavior. This was hugely significant; we had 27,000 Iraqi detainees in our detention facilities at the height of the surge, and it was recognized very early on that some of the large detainee enclosures were essentially being run by extremists who were radicalizing those who were in the facilities. We recognized that we had to conduct counterinsurgency inside the wire just as we did outside the wire: we had to identify the extremists, remove them from that enclosure, and then put them in maximum security facilities that we had built for that purpose. Then, and only then, could we conduct rehabilitation programs, such as moderation training by Iraqi clerics, job skills training, basic education, etc. We bought bread factories and brick factories and offered training for them, along with a variety of other activities that dramatically reduced the recidivism rate, which had been at about 80 or 90 percent prior to these reforms. The situation in the detention facilities was so serious when I assumed command that we had to stop releasing detainees for a period of months, until we could make the changes. Once we established a review process and finally resumed the release of detainees, we involved

local judicial and tribal authorities so that there were people keeping an eye on these young men who had gone a bit off the rails or been in the wrong place at the wrong time, which was the case in many situations. In this way, we could ensure that they would not return to a life of insurgent activity, terrorism, or crime. The recidivism rate was driven down below 10 percent as a result of these initiatives.

There were a number of other very big ideas, such as the further integration of the civil and military components of the surge. Ultimately, US Ambassador Ryan Crocker and I both signed the campaign plan and it completely encompassed all of the changes and activities I have described, and many more. This was fairly easy in Iraq because, unlike in Afghanistan, where you had a very substantial NATO component and the NATO chain of command, my only chain of command in Iraq was the US chain of command, even though it was a US-led *multinational* force. I certainly kept the other major NATO nations and NATO contributing nations informed, and their ambassadors and their national contingent commanders were included in all of our important sessions, just as our staffs were truly multinational. But at the end of the day, Ambassador Crocker and I were the ones who oversaw development of the campaign plan, signed it, and then oversaw its implementation. I was the one overseeing the military component of it, while he was overseeing the political, economic, and other aspects; some of these we did together, albeit with plenty of non-US military personnel and diplomats involved. For example, a high-ranking American diplomat and a British two-star oversaw our reconciliation committee. The counterinsurgency itself had made clear the need for all of these elements, and it thus provided the intellectual framework for what we actually then did in Iraq.

My experience was fairly unique: by the time I became Commander of the Multinational Force–Iraq, I had already spent over 26 months in the country, as a two- and three-star commander. I then came home and had a 15 and a half-month break from overseas duty while commander of the US Army Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, a position that included five other “hats” [titles]. I oversaw, to varying degrees, all US noncommissioned, warrant, and commissioned officer training courses and centers; the scenario for the pre-deployment exercise at our national training center in the Mojave Desert; changes to doctrine and preparation of doctrinal manuals; the pre-command course; the Command and General Staff College; the School for Advanced Military Studies; the authority for command and control headquarters and doctrinal activities; and the battle command training program, which ran the exercises for our division and corps



President George W. Bush makes a statement to reporters about the war in Iraq after meeting with senior national defense leaders at the Pentagon, 10 May 2007.

headquarters before they deployed and also provided a week-long seminar to our brigades at the start of preparations for their deployment. There were a variety of other capabilities that I had oversight of as well, such as the Center for Army Lessons Learned, the Army's Counterinsurgency Center, and the Center for Army Leadership. In fact, at Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's direction, I even oversaw the establishment of the Joint Center for International Security Force Assistance and served as its director. So the Fort Leavenworth command had purview over a lot more than just all of the elements at Fort Leavenworth, which were considerable in and of themselves. It extended to every one of the schools and centers for a combat or a combat support branch, in addition to the Defense Language Institute and the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation [the former School of the Americas].

**The counterinsurgency field manual was an intellectual framework to prepare leaders for situations that they might not have encountered before.**

What we sought to do with the counterinsurgency field manual was to develop a manual at a fairly high level that

would provide guidance for the development and conduct of a counterinsurgency campaign. It did not prescribe what company or battalion commanders in Iraq or in Afghanistan should do, per se; rather, it was an intellectual framework, including thoughts, challenges, and even paradoxes, to prepare leaders for situations that they might not have encountered before, but which some of us, fortunately, had already experienced. In my case, I had spent the summer of 1986 at US Southern Command, working for General John Galvin, for whom I'd been an aide previously and for whom I'd be a speechwriter when he became the NATO commander a year or so later. And there were serious counterinsurgency campaigns going on. The United States was supporting partners in El Salvador, Colombia, and Peru, as well as some other countries to a degree. And of course, on the then-classified side, other government agencies, although not the US military per se, were supporting an insurgency against Nicaragua's government. So it was an incredible vantage point for me, to be with the commander in chief of US Southern Command, which was the title then, and to be writing for him and so forth.

Then, in early 1995, I went to Haiti as the chief of operations for the United Nations Force, where we had a large coalition that was very much engaged in nation-building, in addition to maintaining security after toppling the



The destroyed shrine of the al-Askari mosque, an important holy site for Shi'a Muslims, is seen (to the right) on 13 June 2007, in the city of Samarra, Iraq. This was the second attack on the mosque by militants. The first attack, in 2006, set off a wave of sectarian violence that claimed thousands of Iraqi lives.

military regime that had controlled that country. In 2001–2002, I spent an entire year as the assistant chief of staff for operations for the NATO stabilization force in Bosnia, but I was also dual-hatted as the deputy commander of a clandestine Joint Task Force, hunting war criminals with special mission units, in coordination with the CIA, the FBI, and others. And then we did the first counterterrorism operations after 9/11, refocusing that element and its special operations forces on extremists that were transiting Bosnia from Pakistan. We continued with sporadic additional missions and eventually gave support to the Bosnian authorities to take down four non-governmental organizations that were in various ways supporting the transit of extremists from the Afghanistan-Pakistan region through Bosnia and into the Schengen Area.

This was a great education on man-hunting, both for the war criminal piece and for the terrorist piece, which was very, very useful later on. Also, our activities on the NATO side included a very well developed and comprehensive multi-year roadmap, which we actually used as an example for the plan we developed when I was a two-star in Mosul. Having no other really good framework to apply to Iraq in May 2003, we just decided to adapt that and apply it to

our circumstances, noting that we didn't have any of the non-governmental organizations or international organizations—the United Nations, the High Representative of the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program, or any of the other entities present in Bosnia—to take responsibility for the innumerable civil tasks we had to perform in Iraq. This was especially true after the bombing of the UN headquarters in Baghdad and the death of extraordinary international diplomat Sérgio de Mello.<sup>3</sup> That led to the withdrawal of the UN mission for a period of time and also scared off the other NGOs and IOs we had hoped would help us in Iraq.

The truth is that, in Mosul and Ninevah Provinces during that first year, we actually did essentially what we would later do countrywide during the surge. But, of course, in 2007, I “was Baghdad.” I was no longer a two-star division commander responsible for northern Iraq, where we lived with the people, did all the civil tasks, promoted reconciliation after de-Ba'athification. We even created our own reconciliation program with a special authority from Ambassador Paul Bremer of the Coalition Provisional Authority, and it went exceedingly well until, tragically,

those in Baghdad—the Iraqis, in particular—refused to accept our recommendations. But again, in that first year we did a great deal of what we ultimately did nationwide. We also went after high-value targets—as many as 43 in one single-night operation, using a mix of special mission units, “regular” special forces, if you will, and conventional forces that were trained for those tasks.

It’s about getting the big ideas right, and the fact is that, in many respects, the bombing of the Samarra mosque in February 2006 invalidated the approach that arguably had been achieving success until then, which was to train the Iraqis, hand off to them, and get out of the neighborhoods ourselves. But as the violence escalated, that was just no longer possible. It took some period of time for everyone to recognize that, and by no means did everybody support the deployment of all five brigade combat teams and two marine battalions and the Marine Expeditionary Unit that we ultimately received. Nor was there any real guidance saying that we should conduct a certain kind of campaign. We decided even before I took over that we were going to be doing reconnaissance for the joint security stations in Baghdad. There was already a nascent effort at reconciliation that was begun a good four or five months prior by a very thoughtful colonel, who eventually returned as a three-star in the fight against the Islamic State. So we accelerated getting back into the neighborhoods and taking responsibility for the security situation. This is not just about going in, finding an empty house, and setting up. You had to go in at last light and build an entire wall around the site with concrete Texas barriers, because in the morning, the suicide car bombs were going to be driving at the joint security station if it was in an area of significant importance to the Sunni insurgents or extremists.

**In the morning, the suicide car bombs were going to be driving at the joint security station if it was in an area of significant importance to the Sunni insurgents or extremists.**

There were huge differences between Iraq and Afghanistan. After coming home as a division commander, I was sent back fairly quickly to Iraq to establish what became known as the Multinational Security Transition Command Iraq, the train-and-equip mission for all of the elements of the Iraqi Ministry of Interior, with all of its police elements, and the Ministry of Defense, with its Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and so forth. When I was returning home in September 2005, after about 15 months, on my way to Fort Leavenworth, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld said,

“On the way, come home through Afghanistan.” So I took a team there and we did an assessment. I subsequently gave a briefing to the secretary based on that visit, and the very first slide of that briefing said that Afghanistan does not equal Iraq. I then laid out all the areas in which you could compare these two different countries. Iraq had the prospect for generating very significant revenue—as much as \$100 billion a year if we could get the oil production and exports going again—while Afghanistan’s potential was less than \$1 billion. One country was highly literate; the other one was not. One country had a lot of infrastructure; the other did not. Much of one country is fairly flat, with a couple of rivers through it, and so on. The other country has the Hindu Kush spine running down through it. Perhaps most importantly, Iraq had enemies that were, by and large, internal. There certainly were facilitators in Syria, and trainers, equippers, and funders in Iran, but nothing like what we experienced in Afghanistan, where the enemies have their headquarters and significant capabilities outside the country, in either Pakistan’s Baluchistan Province (the Afghan Taliban) or what used to be called the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan (the Haqqani network, al-Qaeda, Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, etc.). These are very mountainous areas with 14,000 foot peaks in western Pakistan, and beyond our reach for the most part.

Iraq has enormous potential if you can just get some basics going again, which are not trivial, such as getting the electrical towers back up and the lines on them actually transmitting electricity; patching up the oil pipelines, all of which have been blown up; repairing the bridges that have all been blown up; and on and on. But Iraq had huge potential, which was realized during the surge and then built on in the three and a half years after the surge. In contrast, Afghanistan has a glimmer of potential here and there, but it is very difficult to exploit that potential because of the sheer lack of infrastructure, the lack of supply chains, the lack of human capital, the lack of capital investment, and all the rest of that. There is also a very, very challenging security situation that is incredibly frustrating because, in many cases, you can’t get to the actual leaders of these insurgent organizations.

That’s why, for example, at my confirmation hearing for the command in Afghanistan in June 2010, I said that we would not be able to do what we had done in Iraq, which was to drive violence down by 85 percent in the course of the 18 or 19 months that I was commander there, because, again, we *could* flip Iraq. I actually believed we could do what we did in Iraq; I just wasn’t one hundred percent certain that we could do it in the first six months, which

was the time Congress gave me before I had to come back and report.

Let me give you what I think are five really important lessons that we should have learned from this experience in Iraq and Afghanistan—focusing on the fight against Islamist extremists in particular and not on the Shi'a militias, which are a different problem set. The first lesson is that we have to recognize that ungoverned spaces in the Muslim world—not just the Middle East and Central Asia, but beyond that in North Africa, the Asia-Pacific region, and so forth—ungoverned spaces in predominantly Muslim countries *will* be exploited by Islamist extremists. It's not a question of if, it's a question of when, and how significant the extremists' activity will be. The second lesson is that you actually have to do something about it. You cannot study this until it goes away, because Las Vegas rules do not apply in these areas: what happens there does not stay there. Rather, the extremist elements tend to spew violence, extremism, instability, and a tsunami of refugees not just into neighboring countries but, as we have seen with Syria and some African countries, all the way into Western Europe, causing the biggest populist challenges for our fellow democracies and NATO members in that part of the world.

The third lesson is that the United States generally has to lead, although we want to do it with a coalition of countries, and that coalition should include Muslim countries, because they have been very important in many of the areas of progress that we've had over the years. We've obviously had successes and setbacks; there's no defining victory where you can plant the flag on top of a hill and go home to a victory parade. As I'll get to later, this requires a sustained commitment. But again, the United States generally has to lead because the predominance of US military capabilities has actually grown. If you look at NATO as an example, the United States does not just spend more on our military than all of the other 29 NATO countries; it spends more than twice as much as all of the other NATO countries put together, and some NATO countries' capabilities have actually been declining in recent years for a variety of different reasons, not the least of which have been the euro crisis, the increase in social expenditures, social safety net programs, and so forth. Then, if you look at the rest of the world, we spend about three times as much as China, and more than China and the next nine or ten or eleven countries put together.

**The United States does not just spend more than all of the other 29 NATO countries; it spends more than twice as much as all of the other NATO countries put together.**

US capabilities are just extraordinary, especially when it comes to those that are really important in fighting these wars in a different way than we were able to do—or had to do—when I was a commander. For example, we had nowhere near the constellation of drones that now exists. In fact, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and I were the two biggest and arguably most forceful proponents for dramatically expanding the number of orbits that we could maintain. An orbit is defined as the ability to keep one unblinking eye on a target. The most capable platform used to be a Predator; now it's a Reaper. These are the really extraordinary systems; it takes 140 to 150 people to keep one unblinking eye in the sky, and usually at least three platforms, because there's one on station, one returning, and one going out, with maybe another in maintenance. Think of all the pilots, payload operators, and communications technicians required to control them remotely from wherever the crews are in the world. Also, there are the signals, imagery, and other intelligence analysts who take the data from these surveillance platforms, integrate it, fuse it, and then disseminate the finished products. We can do somewhere between 60 and 65 orbits of this particular drone capability. These are the backbone. This is what a commander of a theater allocates personally to special mission units and the different conventional units that are in his area of responsibility. I did that as commander of Central Command, as commander in Iraq, and as commander in Afghanistan. But our unique capabilities extend well beyond drones. They include the precious precision strike capabilities, the willingness to shoot from our drones and do it very accurately, and the ability to carry out intelligence fusion on an industrial-strength scale. This is what the United States brings, and it generally is indispensable.

The fourth lesson is that you cannot counter terrorists like the Islamic State with just counterterrorist force operations. You have to employ a comprehensive civil-military campaign to defeat groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda, and to resolve the conditions and grievances that those groups exploited. But we don't want to have to conduct all those tasks ourselves. Rather, we want to train and equip, advise and assist, and enable the local partners to do the fighting on the front lines, restore basic services, repair damaged infrastructure, revive markets and schools, reestablish local governance, and so on.

Keep in mind that ISIS, at its height, was much more than just terrorist cells. It ruled a caliphate and essentially had an army, which we helped our Iraqi and Syrian partners to defeat. Now, of course, it has devolved into insurgent groups and terrorist cells, which we and our partners have not yet defeated. There are still 20,000 or more ISIS fighters in Iraq and Syria, which is why it is so important that we maintain a presence in northern Syria and support our Syrian Democratic Force partners with capabilities that they do not have. Keep in mind that they did the fighting on the front lines in Syria; they actually lost some 10,000 of their fighters, which is nine or ten times the number of troops we even had committed, and we took relatively few casualties in those operations. Similarly, in Iraq, we have a larger force of 5,500 or so, but they're performing a lot of other tasks—train, equip, and advise, and so forth—in addition to the enabling and on-the-battlefield advising and liaison. But this is a revolutionary way of fighting.

**You cannot counter terrorists like this with counterterrorist force operations only; in other words, you can't just "drone strike" or "Delta Force raid" your way out of it.**

Again, you cannot counter terrorists like this with counterterrorist force operations only; in other words, you can't just "drone strike" or "Delta Force raid" your way out of it. You have to have a comprehensive civil-military counterinsurgency campaign, for lack of a better term. You have to have all the components that Ambassador Crocker and I oversaw during the surge in Iraq and that we sought to bring to bear in Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, to be sure, the chain of command was much more complex than it was in Iraq; the US ambassador there was by no means the only civilian in my life, the way the US ambassador was in Iraq. There was a NATO senior civilian representative, and probably six to eight or ten other very significant individuals, including the UN Special Representative to the Secretary General and other ambassadors. But again, you've got to have a comprehensive campaign, and we've figured out now how to do this in a way that requires far fewer US troops. With the enablers that we can bring to bear, the key is to have the host nation do the fighting on the front lines; frankly, they take the casualties for their country on the front lines. They do the political reconciliation component; they do the restoration of basic services. We certainly provide some assistance and advice, perhaps some resources, but by and large, they're doing it. They reestablish schools, markets, health clinics, rule of law, repair the damage, etc.

**The final big idea or lesson that we have to acknowledge and embrace is that this is a generational challenge.**

It is crucial that they do all of this, because the fifth and final big idea or lesson that we have to acknowledge and embrace is that this is a generational challenge; it's not the fight of a decade, much less of a few years. This is going to go on for a very long time. We have, in the past, defeated and destroyed al-Qaeda in Iraq and the Sunni insurgents according to the military doctrinal definition of destruction. The remnants were still there, however, because you can't eliminate all of them, and they were eventually able to reconstitute after the departure of our final combat elements, and after the Iraqi prime minister pursued highly sectarian actions that once again alienated the Sunni Arabs.

Beyond that, even though we've helped Iraqi and Syrian forces eliminate the caliphate on the ground in Iraq and Syria, we've been unable to completely eliminate the caliphate in cyberspace and its use of social media—the dark web and all the rest—to establish a virtual caliphate. We certainly haven't been able to put a stake through the twisted horrible ideas that, tragically, do motivate a very tiny number of a large population, a large faith, to pursue a life of extremism or insurgent activity. Therefore, you have to have a sustained commitment but, as we know, in a democracy you can only sustain a commitment if the cost is sustainable, and here the metrics are blood and treasure. If you can keep the cost in blood and treasure modest, as I would contend, we have in Iraq and Syria, and even now in Afghanistan, where we dramatically reduced the 150,000 US and NATO troops that I was privileged to command to less than 12,000 now—if you can do that, then you can sustain this commitment, just as we have sustained deployments of hundreds of thousands of troops in Europe at one point and still have tens of thousands there, tens of thousands of troops in South Korea, and tens of thousands in places like Japan and other locations around the world.

So those are the big five lessons that I think should guide us. Generally, I think you have to have a counterinsurgency campaign as the intellectual construct, but we don't want to be performing all the tasks that we had to perform during the surges in Iraq and Afghanistan, because the cost is just unsustainable. We need to get to a situation that enables us to have a sustained, and sustainable, commitment.

**WOODSON:** I would like you to talk about what you were able to achieve with doctrine and policy. From your first-hand experience and those who had experience on the



President George W. Bush (c) is greeted at Baghdad International Airport by US Ambassador Ryan Crocker (l) and US Commander in Iraq General Ray Odierno, on 14 December 2008.

ground, how did you get those changes to be accepted so quickly, from a policy standpoint?

**PETRAEUS:** The beauty of the surge in Iraq is that when the president picked me and Ambassador Crocker to lead the surge in 2007, he didn't tell me what to do. He said he'd give us 20,000 initial troops, and we asked for some more because we needed another division headquarters to handle the brigades under the Baghdad division. We had to ask for another aviation brigade, additional engineer assets—a variety of other capabilities that were necessary. President Bush supported this so fully and wholeheartedly that it didn't matter that some of the Joint Chiefs really were not wholeheartedly behind the surge because of the strain on the force. It's quite understandable. We received five and two-thirds brigades (two Marine battalions) because that was all the military had left and, as you'll recall, the Army units that were part of that surge served not only the traditional twelve months that we'd been serving; they were extended to serve fifteen months on that tour because we just didn't have any more forces that could deploy. That's a long time at war, I can tell you, especially if you've already done one tour and were home for only maybe 12 months. In some cases, many of us had already done two

tours or even more than two, as in my case, before the surge began.

So, how did we implement the changes to doctrine and policy? We came in and, in my first remarks, during the change of command ceremony and then to the commanders afterward, I said, "We're going to live with the people." There's a book titled *Surge*, which was written by Peter Mansoor, a full colonel who was essentially my internal chief of staff, my executive officer.<sup>4</sup> He oversaw the 200 or so people who worked directly for me in a variety of capacities. The bulk of that was security, but also designated thinkers, trip planners, schedulers, officer aides, enlisted aides, speech writers—just a ton of different people who were performing a lot of different tasks to ensure our efficiency. COL Mansoor happened to have a PhD in history from Ohio State University; he had been number one in his class at West Point and also taught history there. He was one of my real inner-circle "COIN-danistas," as we were termed—the true believers in counterinsurgency. I brought him to Fort Leavenworth with me after my three-star tour in Iraq, where he established the Army's counterinsurgency center. Secretary Rumsfeld also directed me to establish another center, which was about security force assistance, to capture the lessons that we'd learned during my train-and-equip mission in Iraq. It was actually a joint service organization, so I reported to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs as an Army three-star while I was at Leavenworth. So COL Mansoor was made the head of this counterinsurgency center. When the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs wanted to do an assessment of Iraq, starting in the late summer of 2006, I made sure that COL Mansoor and COL H.R. McMaster, who was another of my "protégés," were the two Army representatives on this. I needed to know what was going on because I'd been told that I would likely be going back to Iraq in the summer of 2007 to take command.

**I said, "Chief, you got any guidance for me?" He said, "Yeah, shake up the Army, Dave."**

By the way, in September 2005, after my three-star tour in Iraq and while en route to Fort Leavenworth, I also was given the most incredible marching orders from a chief of staff imaginable. I went to see Army Chief of Staff General Peter Schoonmaker, whom I had known before, who had commanded JSOC and SOCOM and Delta. and so on. I said, "Chief, you got any guidance for me?" He said, "Yeah, shake up the Army, Dave." I responded, "I can do that, Chief. As long as you've got my back, I can do that." And

we did. There is no way you publish a field manual in a year otherwise. Normally, manuals are a three- to five-year process, and there's an incredible amount of review and arguing over adjectives and adverbs and nouns. Upon taking command in early February 2007, I announced the first of the big ideas in my first-day speech: we are going to secure and serve the people and we will do it by living with them. That was all the commanders needed to know. I gathered them right after that, and I said, "We're going back downtown; we're getting back into the neighborhood. You guys know how to do that. You're already actually reconning the first of the joint security stations in Baghdad as the additional forces are beginning to flow. We want to push them out very quickly and get our forces off the big bases on which they've been consolidated; it's the only way we can secure the people."

The second big idea, reconciliation, was not as positively received. A lot of the brigade and battalion commanders said, "Hey, sir, you know these guys have our blood on their hands. We're gonna sit down across the table with them?" And I said, "Yeah that's how you end these things." Now, the insurgents' senior leaders were assessed to be irreconcilables, and they were going to be captured or killed, and that was who we were going after every night. But the reconcilables, the rank and file of the insurgents—yes, some of these guys had killed or wounded our soldiers, had blown up infrastructure, and so on—but we had to reconcile with them, because that's how you resolve these situations. And we ultimately reconciled with about 80,000 Sunnis and about 23,000 Shi'as using a very comprehensive, complex program, one that initially didn't allow us to pay them. So the idea that we "bought our way" out of the insurgency is not correct. It was only after four or five months that my gifted legal counsel came up with a way to allow us to actually pay the shaykhs for fixed site security using their tribal members, which solidified the fact that they had come out in opposition to al-Qaeda and the Sunni insurgents.

The big idea of living with the people to secure them—that's pretty straightforward and the commanders knew how to do that. Nobody from Washington gave me any guidance. The person who was my boss at CENTCOM when I took command in Iraq had announced that he was leaving; he had not been a huge supporter of the surge. He and the previous commander in Iraq had tended to think that we were part of the problem, that we needed to get out of the population rather than offering a solution to the problem by living with the people. Some of this is understandable, but there are dynamics that explain why the Iraqi people wanted us back with them, because

security had deteriorated so much. But, you know, there's a saying that every army of liberation has a half life before it becomes an army of occupation, and occupiers are not continually gratefully received. We were received well at first, during the fight to Baghdad in March and April 2003, but then an accumulation of catastrophic errors and decisions, such as firing the Iraqi army without telling them what their future would be, firing Ba'ath Party government officials down to level four without an agreed reconciliation process—these were catastrophic blows. But there is also an accumulation of other mistakes or just happenstances: the antennas on your vehicles knock down the jury-rigged electrical wires in these very densely populated areas of Baghdad; you run into a civilian's car because you're driving aggressively; over time, this kind of stuff alienates the population. You have to really coach the troops so that they realize how to gain the support of the people—the hearts and minds—and then get popular support for the Iraqi forces as well, because we didn't want to run the country forever. We wanted to bring the violence down and then do what we were doing before, which was to gradually transfer tasks to the Iraqis once we'd reconstituted their military and police forces, and then stay with them so that instead of handing off, we thinned out. And that was another guiding principle that we employed as the surge went on through the first year.

### **| If the president supports you, you can actually do as I did in Iraq.**

So again, if the president supports you, you can actually do as I did in Iraq. As we approached the six-month mark, the Joint Chiefs gave me three courses of action to evaluate, thinking that that would bound what I was able to recommend to the president. Of course, their institutional interest as chiefs of the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines was to reduce the enormous strain on the forces. I appreciated that but, as President Bush pointed out correctly, the biggest blow to our military would be to lose a war. I understandably wanted—not to *win* a war, because you don't win these kinds of wars—but to continue to achieve progress, as we were doing in the security line of operations, and then gradually bring progress to these other areas of focus as well. I considered the chiefs' three options or courses of action. We reported to the chiefs three times via videoconferences and, in the final videoconference, I said, "Chiefs, I really appreciate the drill that you have put us through. It has been useful for the staff and me, and helped inform the course of action that I will recommend to the president two days from now, which is not any one of these three courses of action."



Prime Minister of Iraq Nuri al-Maliki listens to a speech during the Sarafiya bridge opening in Kadhimiya, Iraq, 27 May 2008.

**All you need to do is emphasize a handful of the right “big ideas,” and then you have to drive the implementation.**

But the president was behind me, and he held a video-conference with the ambassador and me every single Monday morning at 7:30 a.m., with the entire national security team around him in the White House Situation Room. When you have that level of presidential support, you can be pretty aggressive in pursuing your strategy. I don't think it is an overstatement to say that a good bit of President Bush's legacy was staked on the surge in Iraq and, you know, I'd like to think that we delivered, not just for him but for our country, the coalition countries, and for Iraq as well. If you look at the book *Surge*, you can see the counterinsurgency guidance that I issued personally. The first-day speech may be in there, and also the letter I sent out to all the soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and civilians of the Multinational Force Iraq on the first day. All you need to do is emphasize a handful of the right “big ideas,” and then you have to drive the implementation. You drive a campaign, make no mistake about it, and it is a grinding experience to command an endeavor like this because it gets much harder before it gets easier, as I told Congress it would. The casualties are very, very tough and there are daily setbacks and blows. I mean, it was a good day if, when we were flying—because we couldn't drive the 10 minutes from where my headquarters was located over to

the embassy where I would meet with the ambassador on several days of the week—we saw only one fire out there, the kind that typically was a result of a serious car bombing or the blowing up of an oil pipeline or some other facility. Oftentimes, we would see two or three.

**ORION LEWIS:** General, I want to thank you for that description of the surge and your effort to implement more of a COIN-based strategy in Iraq. What, in your view, were the main challenges that you faced in doing that?

**PETRAEUS:** There were several. The number one challenge, of course, was a pretty capable, determined, well-armed, well-equipped, and sometimes barbaric enemy—actually, *enemies*, because al-Qaeda in Iraq was the worst of the worst, but there were also Sunni insurgents who were trying to fight the government of Iraq and its forces and the coalition forces. And there were Iranian-supported Shi'a militias that were also very capable, especially when Iran gave them explosively-formed penetrators that would slice through the hull of an M-1 tank. We had a whole variety of initiatives, for example, to reduce the number of suicide bombers coming from neighboring countries through Syria into Iraq. There were 110 or 120 in the first few months. Over the course of the surge, we drove that number down to less than ten. We also killed the individual in Syria who was the most significant facilitator of would-be suicide bombers transiting through Syria into Iraq.

But there was also a very serious obstacle in the form of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. He had his national security advisor, someone I had worked with in the past, call me in within the first few days of my taking command. He said that the prime minister had the following demands, which were essentially to continue doing what we had been doing: in other words, continue getting out of the neighborhoods, continue consolidating US and coalition forces on big bases, continue to hand off to Iraqi security forces, continue to release detainees, and on and on. I felt as though the blood was boiling in my body when I heard these demands, because this was a really significant moment. Every single item was contrary to what we were going to do, so we had a pretty significant showdown in that first week. I told the national security advisor to please convey to the prime minister that, if the prime minister truly was determined to pursue that course of action and that strategy, he should tell President Bush the following day, during their normally scheduled videoconference. The prime minister should also know that if he told President Bush that that's what he wanted to do, he would do it without me because I would be on the next plane to Washington, and I intended to take the new policy with me.

So this was my very first all-in “threaten to quit” moment. I did that two more times with Prime Minister Maliki over various issues, but this was far and away the most significant because it was right in the beginning. I basically said to the national security advisor, “Now let me get this right. What you’ve asked me to do is to continue the elements of a strategy that is failing; in fact, you actually want to do it faster, so you want to fail faster!” The previous US commander and US ambassador had actually signed a document a month and a half before the surge that said the existing strategy was failing to achieve its intended outcomes, which is a pretty profound statement. I said to the national security advisor, “This is a pretty big deal for me and please be sure the prime minister understands the stakes that are involved here, because I’m going to go back to Washington and tell President Bush that this failing strategy shouldn’t be pursued. I’m going to tell Congress and the president that the Iraqis will not allow us to do what’s necessary, and so we ought to fold our tents and let the place go up in flames and try to help contain it.” By the way, I told each president before I deployed that, if I ever felt that we could no longer achieve progress, I owed it not just to them and the coalition countries but to our troops on the ground to be forthright about that, say that it’s over, and then figure out how in the world to extricate ourselves from Iraq or Afghanistan in a way that tried to limit the catastrophic outcome of such an occasion.

**The security gains in Iraq were irrefutable—they were, as I always noted, fragile and reversible, but also indisputable.**

The security gains in Iraq were irrefutable— they were, as I always noted, fragile and reversible, but also indisputable. They were significant in Afghanistan, as well, although by no means as significant as in Iraq. We did, however, take away control of Mullah Omar’s home districts of Zari and Panjwai from the Taliban, and also Arghandab, in Kandahar, and we made similar gains in Helmand. In all these different locations, we took areas where the insurgents had held sway and, for the first time in maybe the entire war, the weekly attack numbers compared to the previous year went down, for the final six or seven months of my time there and then the first six months of my successor’s time. So I stand by the assessments that I provided to the president and Congress. As I warned Congress before deploying to Afghanistan, we would not be able to do there what we had done in Iraq—to truly “flip” a country and drive violence down very, very substantially, because the context

and circumstances in Afghanistan were very different from, and much more difficult than, those in Iraq.

**WOODSON:** Thank you, General.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**GEN David Petraeus**, US Army (retired) served more than 37 years in the US military, including five combatant commands.

**Chuck Woodson** is a co-founder of the Special Operations Research Database at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey.

This is a work of the US federal government and is not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Foreign copyrights may apply.

#### NOTES

1. This interview came from the archives of the Special Operations Research Database (SORDB), Asymmetric Conflict project, which is an active research database of interviews with members of the greater SOF community, the military, and other government agencies who are experts in counterinsurgency and counterterrorism. The interviews capture “lessons learned” for current and future operators, students, and others researching ways to improve military doctrine and policy for both the United States and its allies. SORDB was founded in 2017 by Professor Orion Lewis and Chuck Woodson at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey (MIIS) and is now a major component of the Center on Terrorism, Extremism, and Counterterrorism (CTEC) at MIIS.
2. 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.
3. Sérgio Vieira de Mello was serving as the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and UN Special Representative for Iraq when he and several staff members were killed in a bombing on 19 August 2003. The attack was claimed by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.
4. Peter R. Mansoor, *Surge: My Journey with General David Petraeus and the Remaking of the Iraq War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014).

# The Game Floor

## Facilitating CT Virtual Games: The Transition to the Virtual World

*Amina Kator-Mubarez, US Naval Postgraduate School  
and Sally Babo, US Naval Postgraduate School*

**E**ven before the world went virtual in 2020, the Global ECCO team was already facilitating virtual “serious games” to train professionals on counterterrorism (CT) strategy. Global ECCO, which stands for Education Community Collaboration Online, is a team of researchers and educators based at the US Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. The mission of Global ECCO is to “build and strengthen the Regional Defense Fellowship Program’s (RDFP) global alumni network of Combating Terrorism (CbT) experts through innovative and engaging technologies and techniques that both enable and encourage collaborative partnership between individuals, nations, organizations, and cultures.”<sup>1</sup> One of these innovative technologies is virtual gaming, using games developed by subject matter experts (mainly academics) to teach CT principles in an easy-to-use format. The games address subjects relevant to CT, such as terrorist financing, cyber warfare, counter-ideology, social network analysis, and social media, among others. Over the years, the Global ECCO team has facilitated these games more than 200 times in locations all around the world. In doing so, the team has gained extensive insight and experience in how best to use these serious games for teaching, learning, and practice.

Global ECCO is hosted on a secure, password-protected web-based platform that connects more than 35,000 RDFP alumni from more than 140 countries. It allows RDFP alumni and CT experts—both military and civilians alike—to better understand CT, by providing relevant resources, tools, and a platform for engaging with other practitioners. The games developed by Global ECCO, which are strategic multiplayer games about various aspects of insurgency and conflict, can be accessed through the Global ECCO website by users who have

**Most people play games to win, but games can also be used to test out new strategies with very low or no consequences—besides a bruised ego.**

an account.<sup>2</sup> Many of the games incorporate elements of asymmetry, where the two sides have different levels of information, mobility, and/or power. For example, in the game *Contagion*, the state and the terrorists are competing for popular support and territory, and one way to acquire them is by gaining new recruits. In the game *Balance of Terror*, insurgents and the state vie for dominance and face difficult tradeoffs between stability and legitimacy.<sup>3</sup>

## Why Games?

Games and simulations have long been used in education; now, rapidly emerging and evolving technologies have made them accessible to a wider audience. Even in a subject as serious and global as CT, gaming and simulations have several important benefits, including learning, social networking, interacting, team building, and good old-fashioned fun. In the classroom, playing games helps students learn, because they become actively engaged in the delivery of the learning material as opposed to passively listening or watching.<sup>4</sup> Games can also be used to encourage strategic experimentation and outside-the-box thinking. Most people play games to win, but games can also be used to test out new strategies with very low or no consequences—besides a bruised ego. Multiplayer games give students the ability to interact with their classmates, which can serve as a team-building tool or a valuable ice-breaking exercise at the beginning of a course, in addition to the intended objective of the game itself. Furthermore, games are excellent tools to enhance learning by allowing students to think, engage, and interact in ways that more traditional teaching methods cannot. While some Global ECCO games can be played against a virtual opponent and are, as mentioned earlier, available to anyone with an account, the games were developed for optimum use in a larger learning context, such as a class or a seminar.

## The Process of Game Facilitation

Game facilitation involves a lot of moving parts, especially since the Global ECCO team usually travels to the school or venue to carry out the facilitation. These sites might be quite nearby, on the other side of the world, or anywhere in between. Facilitation therefore requires travel by personnel and the transport of computers and other equipment, both of which entail substantial preparation and, often, the ability to think on one's feet.

### Preparation and Setup

Preparation is key when facilitating games. Things can—and will—go wrong, but careful preparation helps to minimize these snags, and also aids the facilitator in



A game of *InfoChess* being played at the US Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA. *InfoChess* is a spin on traditional chess, adding hidden information and information warfare.

anticipating and reacting to them. Over the years, the Global ECCO team has identified a number of questions that should be reviewed in preparation for a facilitation. For example, in what kind of venue will the games be facilitated? Do the facilitators need to arrive a day early to do a test run? Is there a good wifi connection? Does audio-visual equipment need to be set up? Which particular game is being facilitated, and for which course? What are the course objectives, and how does the game that has been selected support those objectives? Are the students military or civilian, or a mix of both? What is their age range? Do they have prior gaming experience?

Each situation is different, and over the years, the Global ECCO team has assembled a “know-before-you-go” checklist for each venue and course that identifies certain known points and issues. For example, some venues don't have access to wifi, so mobile hotspots must be brought to the site. Other venues require the facilitation to take place in classified spaces where mobile devices are strictly prohibited. This poses its own set of challenges for the facilitation managers, who typically rely heavily on their mobile devices to communicate between several rooms where teams are playing against one another. Of course, it is essential to have open lines of communication with the on-site course coordinators to minimize surprises well in advance of game day.

**Over the years, the Global ECCO team has assembled a “know-before-you-go” checklist for each venue and course.**

Once the ECCO team has arrived at the game location, ample time is required for setup. If laptops are being used



A team of international students strategize as they play the game *Balance of Terror* at the Bucerius Summer School of Global Governance, Hamburg, Germany.

to run the game, they should be fully charged the night before—it can be a mistake to assume that conveniently placed electrical outlets will be available within the venue. If the facilitators plan to distribute post-game surveys to the participants, these will have to be printed or prepared electronically ahead of time; directions to the venue and any access codes must be confirmed; and the games themselves will take time to set up—including extra time to meet special requirements or solve the unexpected glitch. For example, a game may need to be manually altered to meet a specific learning objective, such as giving the terrorist excess resources to reinforce a teaching point. Again, our facilitators have learned the importance of allowing sufficient time to deal with such requirements as they arise.

### Facilitation

The actual facilitation begins with a brief presentation by the Global ECCO team to explain its mission and introduce the game. Depending on the dynamics of the game, the students are generally split into teams and instructed to play at least two rounds of the game to ensure that each team has the ability to play each role; in a typical game, these are state and insurgent. The teams are physically separated, either in different rooms or in different corners of a large auditorium, and the facilitators move among them to answer questions and serve as IT support. After

both rounds have been played, the groups come together to debrief, talking about their game strategy in each role and what they learned. Often, when one team discloses its strategy, the opposing team is able to make better sense of the game; this, in itself, is a teaching point. The facilitators take this opportunity to highlight their observations of the teams' gameplay and apply these observations specifically to the game's objectives and, more generally, to the course objectives and real-world CT strategies.

### Some Useful Lessons for Game Facilitators

After more than a dozen years and hundreds of facilitations, the Global ECCO team has learned many useful lessons about facilitating strategic games for diverse audiences:

**Know your audience and venue.** To be relatable as an instructor, it is important that the facilitators have some knowledge of the culture of the students, use examples they understand, and respect their learning process. The events facilitated by the Global ECCO team involve students who are part of a military or, more broadly, a government, which brings a certain set of restrictions and requirements. For example, we were not aware that, in one heavily

restricted intelligence institution, we had to be escorted at all times. When the facilitation had wrapped up and it was time for us to leave, we attempted to return our visitor badges and exit the building. We were stopped by security and scolded for not having an escort while we were still on the premises. Be sure to know and adhere to all the rules and regulations that apply to you at the institution where you are facilitating.

**Be culturally sensitive.** Students come from a variety of backgrounds and may have varying levels of English or other second-language skills. It is important not to offend them, or use excessively colloquial language or examples that are not relatable and which may confuse and/or isolate some students. The point of the facilitation is to teach an objective. To be effective at doing this, the facilitator should ensure that students feel comfortable, and one way to achieve this is by understanding how to find common ground with them.

**The human factor.** There will be resistance. There will be difficult personalities. There can be a great deal of skepticism when it comes to the use of games in an academic, professional, or military environment. When such situations arise, the facilitators should not get defensive. Instead, they should demonstrate the value of the game by its application, rather than by forcing the principles on the

critics. More often than not, those critics do come around after they have had the opportunity to experience the game and discuss their impressions of it with peers.

**There can be a great deal of skepticism when it comes to the use of games in an academic, professional, or military environment.**

**Murphy's Law.** What can go wrong will go wrong. At one facilitation, even though we had arrived the day before to do a tech check and made sure everything was working smoothly, on the day of the facilitation, the games were not loading properly and kept freezing. From experiences like this, the facilitators have developed a repertoire of work-arounds, many learned the hard way, that can be used to make the games work. It is helpful to have more than one facilitator present; while one works to fix the tech issue, the other can engage the students, discuss game principles, ask them to start strategizing, and generally occupy them with game-related topics until the problem is resolved. In one instance, while using our "game in a box" kit, which entails a laptop and a portable wifi jetpack, we were forced to work inside a bunker that had extremely limited technology. The wifi aircard was not working, so we scrambled to get wifi through the hotspots on our phones. The goal



Two Global ECCO facilitators present the game *CounterNet* at the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany.

is never to lose your cool and always try to have a proven workaround in your back pocket.

**Maintain objectivity and professionalism.** The role of the facilitator is to be as objective as possible. You do not want to be seen as untrustworthy by the students, or as a “double agent” when you are rotating from one team to another. Your goal is to get the students to discuss strategy, collaborate as a team, and engage in stimulating conversations about the game. You want to provide them with options as to how to play the game, but be careful not to help a team win; participants need to figure out how to do that on their own. If you come across as duplicitous, then students on a losing team may blame you and accuse you of disclosing information to their opponents. Under these circumstances, nobody wins. Always remember that one of the facilitator’s goals is to build trust with the teams and encourage them to think about what they are learning.

### Learning to Facilitate in a Fully Virtual Environment

As the world transitioned to a virtual learning and working environment early in the COVID-19 pandemic, so did Global ECCO game facilitations. When this issue of *CTX* went to press, the team was still not traveling for facilitations. Everything is being done virtually. Although many of the lessons learned from in-person facilitations have carried over into the virtual environment, new and unexpected hurdles have arisen. Just like the rest of the world, the Global ECCO team has learned to be patient with slow or unreliable internet connections and to prepare accordingly. Seemingly overnight, the team learned how to operate on various platforms, including Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Blackboard Collaborate, Cisco WebX, and Canvas. Each platform has its own quirks and nuances, which the team has had to become familiar with through trial and error.

But the team has also developed some strategies that work well for this new world of virtual facilitation. During one event with multinational students held in Estonia, we played *Balance of Terror*. Each team had two or three students, and we had preselected the “captain” of each team so that there would be no confusion as to who would be sharing the screen and submitting the turn. The facilitators contacted the captains ahead of time and provided them with the link, username, and password for a match that we had already set up for them. We had all of the students begin the session together in the virtual “main room” for the gaming brief. The platform we were using allowed us to then separate the teams into breakout sessions to play against one another. The setup worked well because having two to three players per team allowed for a good flow of

conversation throughout the facilitation. It also allowed us to achieve the learning objective of having students be actively engaged while working within a team setting.

Although typical IT issues have occurred in some of these virtual facilitations, such as broken links and new-user learning curves, the transition to virtual facilitation has been a remarkably smooth process. There have been no glaring technical issues (so far, at least), and the games haven’t broken or stalled. The team quickly learned when to tell students to refresh or share their screens in order to troubleshoot IT issues. Some online meeting applications are particularly friendly for game facilitation, especially those that feature breakout sessions such as the one mentioned above, where subsets of students can meet separately from the larger group, and those that offer the ability to share screens. When students are dialing in from a distant location like Nigeria, being able to share their screens and have their video feeds on are vital assets.

**When students are dialing in from a distant location like Nigeria, being able to share their screens and have their video feeds on are vital assets.**

The advent of virtual strategic game facilitation, both in a highly globalized world and during a pandemic, has been something of a double-edged sword. On the positive side, virtual facilitation is significantly easier to organize and manage than in-person facilitation, because the facilitators can provide the platform, online credentials, and detailed instructions for students to follow. In addition to the comparative technical ease, not having to spend days traveling or haul equipment to venues makes online facilitation far less complicated and laborious than in-person facilitations at the various institutions; thus, more of the team’s facilitators are able to participate in an event. By lowering the student-to-facilitator ratio, online events allow the participants to get more individualized attention. Finally, online game facilitation during the pandemic has actually been more personal, because people typically are participating from their homes; oftentimes, participants may hear a child laughing or a dog barking in the middle of the game, which helps everyone smile and relax.

Virtual learning does have its downsides, however. Facilitators at in-person events can walk around the room and engage the participants with humor and skill, answer a quick question, spot a potential problem, and so forth; in contrast, watching a limited view on a sometimes lagging screen has a very different feel. There are, of course,

occasional technical difficulties as well, such as poor connections, lack of experience with or knowledge of the interface, and various distractions. But with experience, the team has learned to take these in stride and to focus on the task at hand.

## Conclusion

The most important lesson we have taken from our years of game facilitating, whether in person or online, is to be flexible and ready to adapt to the situation at hand. There is not a one-size-fits-all approach to facilitating; therefore, team members need to know the requirements of the particular institution or schoolhouse requesting the facilitation and ensure that those requirements can be accommodated. After facilitating more than 200 games, the Global ECCO team has become very proficient in conducting these events, and has received much positive feedback from both students and instructors. We have seen how effective the games can be in reinforcing the concepts taught in the courses that use them, strengthening the bonds and relationships among groups of players, and helping students to learn in an engaging—and fun—way.

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Amina Kator-Mubarez** and **Sally Baho** are research faculty members of the Defense Analysis department, US Naval Postgraduate School.

This is a work of the US federal government and is not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Foreign copyrights may apply.

---

### NOTES

1. “Mission,” Global ECCO: <https://nps.edu/web/ecco>
2. There are restrictions governing who is eligible to acquire an account and have access to these games. For a list of eligibility requirements, and to apply for an account, go to the “Request an Account” page at <https://globalecco.org/request-account>
3. To see all of the games available on the Global ECCO website and find more information on each game, go to: <https://nps.edu/web/ecco/game-center1>. The game center and game study guides are accessible without an account.
4. Michael E. Freeman, “Pushing the Envelope of Pedagogical Gaming: *Dark Networks*,” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 50, no. 4 (2017): 1083–1088.



## Ethics and Insights Sometimes

*Victor Asal, University at Albany, SUNY*

**S**ometimes you find yourself in a situation with people who are incredibly unpleasant and you want to just walk away—to keep walking and not come back. Sometimes, however, you simply can't do that, especially when you are on duty. It's your job to be at your station, to staff the checkpoint and work together with your partners as you pass people through. People and more people—and some of them seem nice enough and some of them are fed up—but dear God, if I had to routinely wait in an endless line to get from point A to point B, two points that are no more than 100 meters away from each other, I would be ready to go nuts, too. But you and your team need to be patient, check their stuff, and then pass them through—unless of course there is an issue, in which case you move the problem person out of the line and send him or her to other personnel to get seriously checked.

Think about how much fun everyone is *not* having: going through such a line can take hours and hours and hours. Clearly, everyone involved in policing or standing in that line knows how miserable it is, although there are a whole lot of people who think that the misery is deserved and that, even if not all the people standing in line are killers, some of them likely support killers, and that if the people standing in line could kill those responsible for the line, they would.

That is what a lot of people think. Not me. I know that having a foreign military occupy your country is awful and makes people angry and resigned and desperate. Sure, not everyone wants to kill and a lot of people try not to hate, which is why the whole situation is so awful.

What a lot of people don't think about, meanwhile, is how demoralizing it is to be on the other side, the occupiers' side. Think about it: an 8-hour or 10-hour or 12-hour shift of:

“Please (maybe using the word ‘please,’ or maybe not) put your bag here.

Please remove that item.

Wait there.

Move on.

Next.

Please put your bag here.

Please remove that item.

Wait there.

Move on.

Next.”

Again.

And again.

Ad nauseum.

It is soul-crushingly boring. That is, it is boring until a threat suddenly appears, or seems to appear. Then, in an instant, it becomes terrifying because someone seems to want to kill you. And so, given that likelihood, you need to be constantly at the ready even though you are numbingly bored. A bad combination.

It turns out that this bad combination of boredom and fear gets even worse when you add in the realities of being an 18-year old boy, especially one who has been raised to see the “other” as evil, as a likely terrorist who wants to destroy you, your family, and everyone like you. Also, did I mention that we are talking about 18-year old boys? Have you ever met any 18-year old boys? It is true that many of them can be outstanding human beings, but a lot of them are still dealing with growing up and all of the things that go with being very young, and a lot of that stuff can make them jerks of epic—and I do mean truly epic—proportions.

**It is soul-crushingly boring. That is, it is boring until a threat suddenly appears, or seems to appear. Then, in an instant, it becomes terrifying.**

This means that some of these young men treat the people they are checking through like dirt. What do I mean? They might tell a person, “Go stand over in the corner and wait until I call you back,” and the person waits and waits and waits, not for any real reason but just to drive them crazy. Or some other 18-year-olds might find it amusing to drop belongings—glasses, a purse, or a wallet—on the floor instead of handing them back to the person they belong to, forcing that person to have to bend down and pick their possession up from the dust and dirt covering the floor of the checkpoint. Why would anyone do this? Because they are tired and bored and scared—or maybe just because they really are jerks.

Meanwhile, what happens when you see this happen and you are one of the people responsible for doing the checking? Do you say something? That could get you a tremendous amount of crap from your compatriots in uniform for being “a sniveling idiot who is sucking up to the enemy.” You would likely be on the receiving end of a storm of derogatory, homophobic, racist epithets. It could mean water poured over your bed as you sleep or short sheeting or literal crap in your shoes—or, if your partners are really innovative, scorpions in your shoes (because there are scorpions in the bunk rooms and, regardless, you should always check your shoes). Or it could mean complaints go to your commander about your negative behavior, which is something you really don’t need

because being grounded to base for two months might make you really want to shoot someone, yourself included.

So you could decide to just shut up and look the other way. Ignore them. Feel bad for the civilians who have to put up with the petty cruelty but keep quiet so none of it falls on you.

Have you had that kind of stuff fall on you? Have you chosen to be a target by trying to be a good person? Was it worth it? I bet that for a lot of people who have tried to do the right thing, the good they did was not worth the consequences they suffered. So-o-o-o-o, what do you do? Accept suffering for you or suffering for the civilians? And remember, those civilians are part of the “hostile population.” They don’t like you and some even hate you—and some of them really do want you to die.

So maybe what you should do is let the jerks be. After all, they are on your side. Or do you open your mouth and push back and suffer the consequences, with the full knowledge that something might change for 10 minutes or an hour or a shift at your particular checkpoint, but it is not going to change for longer than that? Nor is it going to change at any of the other endless lines out there going from point A to point B.

So, what do you do? Sometimes it truly is miserable to be someone with a conscience, a gun, and a job to protect your people and your country from frustrated, angry, tired civilians, even—maybe especially—when you are part of the reason they are frustrated, angry, and tired. Of course, your misery is not as bad as the misery of the person in line being humiliated by a bored, scared, angry young soldier, is it?

So what *do* you do?

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Dr. Victor Asal** is a professor of political science at the University at Albany, SUNY.

Copyright 2021, Victor Asal. The US federal government is granted for itself and others acting on its behalf in perpetuity a paid-up, nonexclusive, irrevocable worldwide license in this work to reproduce, prepare derivative works, distribute copies to the public, and perform publicly and display publicly, by or on behalf of the US federal government. All other rights are reserved by the copyright owner(s). Foreign copyrights may apply.

# The Written Word

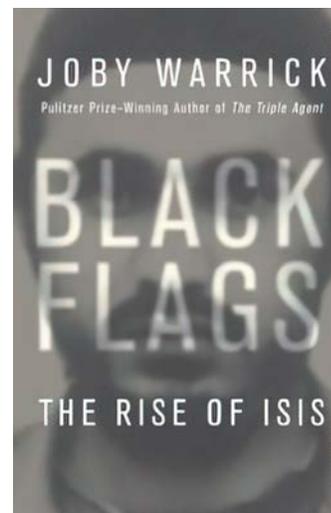
## Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS

by Joby Warrick

*Reviewed by Maj. Temesha Christensen, US Air Force*

**T**he terrorist group that became known as ISIS first captured international attention through suicide bombings and media blitzes of extremely violent videos. In his Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS*, author Joby Warrick provides an intense, detailed, and informative narrative that paints a vivid picture of the key events and people that shaped the terrorist group from its earliest years. Warrick meticulously describes important aspects of the development of the men who became ISIS leaders, their radicalization, and how they influenced a global network of terrorism.<sup>1</sup> He captures the complexity of key players such as Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the founder of the al-Qaeda group that would become ISIS, through the perspectives of multiple credible sources, such as the CIA officer who tracked Zarqawi for many years.

The book is divided into three main parts: The Rise of Zarqawi, Iraq, and ISIS. Warrick details Zarqawi's troubled life from his youth in Jordan, characterizing him then as a petty criminal and vicious brawler, and follows his increasing fascination with studying the Qur'an and watching propaganda videos. According to Warrick's account, Zarqawi discovered his aptitude for militancy when members of the local mosque convinced him to volunteer to fight in the Soviet-Afghan War. Zarqawi remained in Afghanistan for four years after the Soviet-Afghan War ended, studied militant Islam under radical clerics, and served as a reporter for an Islamist magazine. Warrick describes how, similar to other Islamists who fought in Afghanistan, Zarqawi returned to Jordan as a combat veteran with radically changed views about Islam.



---

***Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS***  
by Joby Warrick

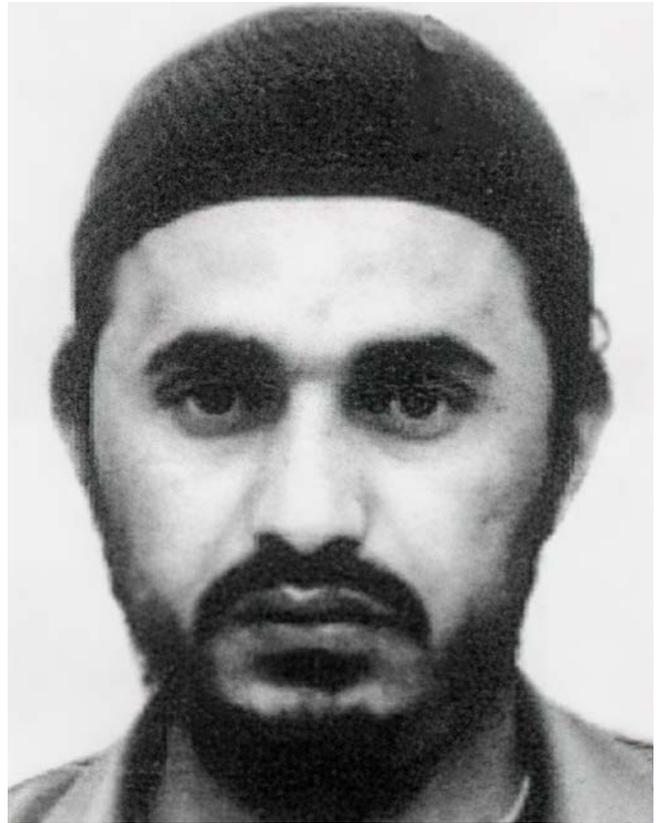
New York: Anchor Books, 2016  
384 pages  
Paperback: \$16.95

---

**Zarqawi discovered his aptitude for militancy when members of the local mosque convinced him to volunteer to fight in the Soviet-Afghan War.**

The book vividly describes how Zarqawi's frustrations with less puritanical Muslims led him to seek out known extremists such as Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi. Maqdisi was well-known in the Muslim world for the extremism of his books and articles on Islam. The author depicts how Maqdisi and Zarqawi formed a group and planned their first terrorist attack, which was disrupted by the Mukhabarat, the Jordanian intelligence service. Maqdisi and Zarqawi were arrested and sentenced to fifteen years in prison. Warrick also paints an eerie picture of the process by which Zarqawi later became fully radicalized under the instruction of Maqdisi, serving as his second in command while they were incarcerated together. In a testament to Zarqawi's radicalization, he became so immersed in strict compliance with the laws of Islam that he memorized the Qur'an, and even tried to scrub off a tattoo in multiple ways, including with bleach. He was unable to remove the tattoo on his own, and leveraged help from a relative who brought a razor, hidden in his clothing, when he visited the prison. As described by Warrick, "the kinsman cut two elliptical lines around the tattoo. He then sliced away the upper layers of skin. Once the tattoo was mostly gone, he closed the wound with crude stitches."<sup>2</sup> When the prison doctor later asked Zarqawi about the scar, Zarqawi recounted the story as if "the act of hacking off an offending piece of flesh were as natural as squashing a cockroach. Islam—his brand of Islam—required it."<sup>3</sup>

Zarqawi's time in prison did not deter him from terrorist activities; Warrick outlines a scheme that Zarqawi conducted in Pakistan six months after his release. In November 1999, the Mukhabarat discovered that Zarqawi had served as a minor consultant in planning the Millennium Plot, which included a wave of bombings and small arms attacks in Jordan and an attempted attack in the United States.<sup>4</sup> To avoid being arrested, Zarqawi fled Pakistan and sought refuge with Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan. Warrick makes clear bin Laden's reluctance to deal with Zarqawi; bin Laden only provided him with some start-up money and sent him far away, to start a training camp in the city of Herat, near the Iranian border. Warrick highlights an important distinction between the strategies that bin Laden and Zarqawi used while trying to establish a caliphate. While bin Laden aspired to gradually liberate Muslim nations from Western influence and eventually unify them under a caliphate, Zarqawi was much more



Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, taken some time before 2003.

impatient. He planned to attract the most extreme jihadists by carrying out acts of brutal violence that would frighten people into submission, and thus would enable him to create a caliphate immediately.

**Zarqawi planned to attract the most extreme jihadists by carrying out acts of brutal violence.**

After the 9/11 attacks, the United States waged war on al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, and Zarqawi was wounded in one of the attacks targeting senior al-Qaeda leaders. Warrick identifies this incident as the motivation for Zarqawi to publicly name the United States as a target of his hatred. One of the most interesting aspects of the book is Warrick's discussion of the CIA's role in the US response to 9/11. As the CIA worked to identify bin Laden's location, its officials were constantly questioned by the George W. Bush administration about potential connections between the 9/11 attacks and Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. Although the CIA reported no evidence of any Iraqi involvement, Warrick's description makes clear that Vice President Dick Cheney and his team were relentless in trying to make that connection. Warrick's detailed account of the administration's mistakes and misplaced efforts



Jordanian police close off the area in front of the Hyatt Hotel after an explosion 9 November 2005 in Amman, Jordan. Explosions rocked three hotels: the Hyatt, Radisson Sas, and Days Inn, in the Jordanian capital, killing at least 53 people and injuring about 200 others.

concerning the invasion of Iraq is amazing. According to Warrick, as the Bush administration built its case to justify invading Iraq, it claimed that Hussein's government was harboring a dangerous terrorist network led by Zarqawi. The primary CIA analyst who studied and tracked Zarqawi was astonished by the administration's statements; based on the information she had, Zarqawi was in Iraq but the Iraqi government was not protecting him. Ultimately, the effort to leverage Zarqawi's activities as a reason to declare Iraq to be a significant contributor to international terrorism elevated Zarqawi from an unknown jihadist to international fame within the Islamist movement.

Hussein was removed as president of Iraq in 2003, and a year later Zarqawi received approval from bin Laden to operate as part of al-Qaeda in Iraq. Zarqawi's first order from bin Laden was to stop the upcoming Iraqi elections. Warrick paints a graphic picture of Zarqawi's attempts to undermine Iraq's first National Assembly election, scheduled for 2005, by committing horrific acts of violence. This included kidnapping and killing Sunni government officials and intimidating Sunni citizens from running for office and voting.

Warrick describes cultish behavior within Zarqawi's group that was very different from the way that bin Laden and his deputies conducted themselves, and notes that al-Qaeda's leadership did not support Zarqawi's violent actions

toward other Muslims. They were concerned that Zarqawi was tarnishing al-Qaeda's image within the Muslim community and warned him to cease the execution videos and attacks on Shi'a mosques. Bin Laden's deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, warned Zarqawi, "The mujahed movement must avoid any action that the masses do not understand or approve."<sup>5</sup> According to Warrick, Zarqawi blatantly rejected the rebuke, and violent extremists continued to join his cause in large numbers. Despite US counterterrorism efforts, in November 2005, Zarqawi ordered a coordinated attack on three hotels in Jordan's capital city, Amman, which killed 60 people. Prior to this, Zarqawi had been viewed as something of a folk hero in the poor areas of Amman, but now the Jordanian public and even Zarqawi's own family turned against him. In 2006, shortly after the attacks in Jordan, the US military located and killed Zarqawi at his hideout north of Baghdad.

**Al-Qaeda's leadership was concerned that Zarqawi was tarnishing al-Qaeda's image within the Muslim community.**

Under the leadership of Zarqawi's successor, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, a Syrian-led Islamist militia was created in 2011 to help Syrian rebels fight Bashar al-Assad's government. Warrick's imagery of the chaotic civil war shows

how Syria became fertile ground for the Islamic State to attempt to reestablish itself, after the United States surged troops in Iraq and Sunni tribes coordinated their efforts to expel foreign jihadists. By the end of 2013, Baghdadi had dispersed jihadist fighters all across Syria, which Warrick attributes in part to the Obama administration's failure to help address the threat that the Islamic State posed in Syria. According to Warrick, the Obama Administration was reluctant to get involved in Syria after the prolonged and unpopular war in Iraq.

In April 2013, Baghdadi rebranded the organization as the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham, which became known in English as ISIS (and occasionally, ISIL). Warrick provides a great deal of detail on how ISIS incorporated a strategy to exploit local grievances and conflicts in Iraq and Syria that helped the group attain its goal of establishing a caliphate. As ISIS was taking control of the Syrian city of Raqqa in 2013, jihadists from fifty other countries joined ISIS and increased the size of its army to about 10,000 fighters. With the aid of disenfranchised Sunnis, ISIS had taken control of almost a third of Iraq by the spring of 2014, and later that year, al-Baghdadi declared that the caliphate was established.

Overall, Warrick presents readers with a highly readable tale of the rise of the caliphate: ISIS cleverly made promises of freedom from tyrannical regimes and the establishment of a godly and just society, but instead delivered a violent, cruel, militaristic dictatorship. The inclusion of multiple perspectives on the primary characters is both a strength and a mild weakness of the book. Although the various narratives from minor characters provide an engaging presentation, they can occasionally become distracting. Additionally, although Zarqawi's childhood and family interactions are relevant, the author may spend a little too much time on them for readers who are most interested in the evolution of ISIS. But these are minor issues in an otherwise solid book. I highly recommend *Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS* as an excellent starting point for learning about the rise of ISIS.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

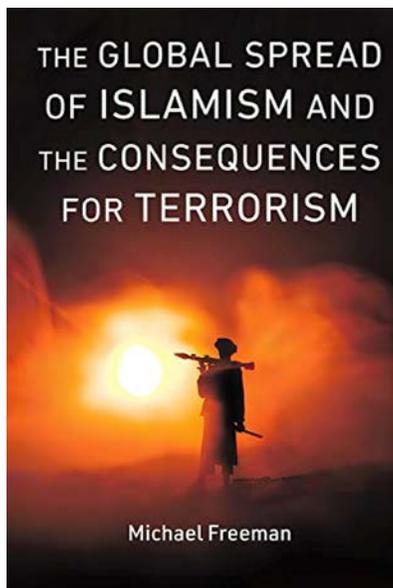
**Maj. Temesha R. Christensen** is a US Air Force Cyberspace Operations officer.

This is a work of the US federal government and is not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Foreign copyrights may apply.

## NOTES

1. Joby Warrick has worked as a reporter for the *Washington Post* since 1996. He was awarded the Pulitzer Prize Gold Medal for Public Service in 1996, and won a second Pulitzer Prize in 2016, this one for general nonfiction, for *The Triple Agent: The al-Qaeda Mole Who Infiltrated the CIA* (New York: Anchor Books, 2012).
2. Joby Warrick, *Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS* (New York: Anchor Books, 2016), 27.
3. *Ibid.*, 28.
4. For more information on the Millenium Plot, so called because the attacks were to take place on or around 1 January 2000, see "The Millenium Plot," Global Security: <https://www.globalsecurity.org/security/ops/millenium-plot.htm>
5. Warrick, *Black Flags*, 185.

# Publications



---

## *The Global Spread of Islamism and the Consequences for Terrorism*

by Michael Freeman

Lincoln, NE: Potomac Books, 2021

264 pages

Hardcover \$23.90

---

## *The Global Spread of Islamism and the Consequences for Terrorism*

by Michael Freeman

Terrorism motivated by Islamist religious ideology has been on the rise for the last forty years. Why? The three prior waves of terrorism—anarchist, nationalist, and Marxist—arose generally from a combination of geopolitical events and local grievances. This “fourth wave” of terrorism, however, has risen out of a different set of conditions.

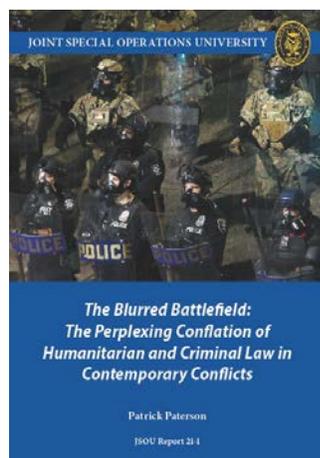
Existing analyses of terrorism often consider how terrorist ideologies have evolved or how grievances have changed over time. But these approaches miss what could be called the “supply” side of ideology—how state and nonstate actors have exported an ideology of Islamism and how this ideology has taken root beyond what grievances or ideological interpretations would predict. Michael Freeman connects the dots between several key events in 1979—the hostage crisis at the Grand Mosque in Mecca, the Iranian Revolution, and the Soviet incursion into Afghanistan—and the incentives these events created for different actors to spread the supply of Islamism, the institutions they produced in various countries, and the terrorists who emerge from these institutions.

In *The Global Spread of Islamism and the Consequences for Terrorism*, Freeman examines four countries that have experienced this export of Islamism—Indonesia, Pakistan, the United Kingdom, and the United States—and briefly describes similar patterns in other countries. Understanding the importance of the supply side of Islamism helps us better understand the strength and staying power of this current wave of terrorism as well as opportunities to better counter it.

Michael Freeman is a professor in the Department of Defense Analysis at the US Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. He is the author of *Freedom or Security: The Consequences for Democracies Using Emergency Powers to Fight Terror*, the editor of *Terror Financing: Case Studies*, and the executive editor of the journal *Combating Terrorism Exchange (CTX)*.

## JSOU Publications

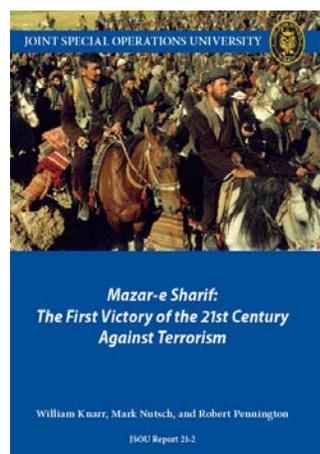
These recent Joint Special Operations University (JSOU) Press publications are available electronically on the USSOCOM Research Library website in the JSOU Press Publications 2019 and 2020 sections: <https://jsou.libguides.com/jsoupublications>



### **The Blurred Battlefield: The Perplexing Conflation of Humanitarian and Criminal Law in Contemporary Conflicts**

by Pat Paterson

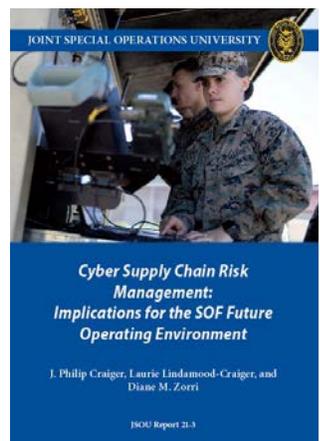
This monograph is a serious and wellresearched investigation into crucial factors of contemporary warfare. Readers will learn lessons on the distinctions between the Law of Armed Conflict and criminal law, particularly on important issues like lethal force, escalation of force tactics, and security detention. Professor Paterson makes a strong argument that the stated policy of respect and promotion of human rights (HR)—that has long been a guiding principle of the U.S. military—does not translate into specific and mandatory directives at the tactical and operational levels. Indeed, he asserts that at those levels there is no formal attention to HR, only ad hoc efforts by operational units that don't receive guiding policy. This monograph will be essential reading for policymakers and those whose task is the development of granular precepts to guide implementation and execution of policy on the ground.



### **Mazar-E Sharif: The First Victory of the 21st Century Against Terrorism**

by William Knarr, Mark Nutsch, and Robert Pennington

In this monograph, William “Bill” Knarr, Mark Nutsch, and Robert Pennington offer an unvarnished examination of America’s initial response to 9/11—the battle for Mazar-e Sharif and the events that preceded and followed that critical battle. Most remember the “horse soldiers” and the role U.S. Special Forces played fighting alongside the Central Intelligence Agency and Northern Alliance forces. Accounts of this operation have been portrayed in movies, but the difference between this monograph and other accounts is simple: the authors employ an academically rigorous methodology that is based on documentary evidence supplemented by interviews with those involved in the operations.



### **Cyber Supply Chain Risk Management: Implications for the SOF Future Operating Environment**

by J. Philip Craiger, Laurie Lindamood-Craiger, and Diane M. Zorri

The emerging Cyber Supply Chain Risk Management (C-SCRM) concept assists at all levels of the supply chain in managing and mitigating risks, and the authors define C-SCRM as the process of identifying, assessing, and mitigating the risks associated with the distributed and interconnected nature of information and operational technology products and service supply chains. As Special Operations Forces increasingly rely on sophisticated hardware and software products, this quick, wellresearched monograph provides a detailed accounting of C-SCRM associated laws, regulations, instructions, tools, and strategies meant to mitigate vulnerabilities and risks—and how we might best manage the evolving and ever-changing array of those vulnerabilities and risks.

## Image Credits

Page 1: Joseph C. Okeke, CC BY-SA 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>)

Page 5: Fatih Bilen, CC BY-SA 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>)

Page 6: Fatih Bilen, CC BY-SA 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>)

Page 8: Photo by Audu Marte/AFP via Getty Images

Page 13: Audu Ali Marte/AFP via Getty Images

Pages 16–22: Photos courtesy of the author

Page 24: Arif Ali/AFP via Getty Images

Page 27: Rana Sajid Hussain/Pacific Press/LightRocket via Getty Images

Pages 30–31: Aamir Qureshi/AFP via Getty Images

Page 36: R. D. Ward, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Page 37: White House photo by Eric Draper, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Page 39: DoD photo by Staff Sgt. D. Myles Cullen, US Air Force., Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Page 40: Photo by Getty Images

Page 44: Eric Draper, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Page 46: US Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. Jessica J. Wilkes, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Page 49–51: Photos courtesy of the authors

Page 54: US Army photo by Spc. Ryan Lucas. Public Domain

Page 57: United States Department of State employee, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Page 58: Photo by Salah Malkawi/Getty Images

## Terms of Copyright

Copyright © 2021. The copyright of all articles published in *CTX* rests with the author(s) of the article, unless otherwise noted. The *Combating Terrorism Exchange (CTX)* is a peer-reviewed, quarterly journal available free of charge to individuals and institutions. Copies of this journal and the articles contained herein may be printed or downloaded and redistributed for personal, research, or educational purposes free of charge and without permission, except if otherwise noted. Any commercial use of *CTX* or the articles published herein is expressly prohibited without the written consent of the copyright holder.

# Call for Submissions

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.

## Submission Guidelines

For detailed submission guidelines, go to <https://GlobalECCO.org> and click on the *CTX* Home link. Then click on Submissions in the left menu bar.

*CTX* accepts the following types of submissions. Please observe the following length guidelines:

- **academic analyses** (up to 6,000 words)
- **reports or insightful stories from the field** (up to 5,000 words)
- **photographic essays**
- **video clips** with explanation or narration
- **interviews** with relevant figures (no longer than 15 minutes)
- **book reviews** (up to 2,000 words), review essays (up to 2,000 words), or lists of books of interest (which may include books in other languages)
- reports on any **special projects**
- Any kind of submission can be **multimedia**.

## Submission Requirements

Submissions to *CTX* must adhere to the following:

- The work must be copyedited for basic errors *prior to* submission.
- Citations should adhere to the *Chicago Manual of Style*. See the latest version at <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html>
- The work submitted may not be plagiarized in part or in whole.
- You must have permission to use any images, videos, or statements included in your work.
- You must agree to our Terms of Copyright, which appear at the bottom of page 62.
- Include a byline as you would like it to appear and a short bio as you would like it to appear (we may use either, or both).

Submissions should be sent in original, workable format. In other words, we must be able to edit your work in the format in which you send it to us, such as Microsoft Word—no PDFs, please.

Submissions must be in English. Because we seek submissions from the global CT community, and especially look forward to work that will stir debate, *we will not reject* submissions outright simply because of poorly written English. However, we may ask you to have your submission edited before submitting again.

## Ready to Submit?

By making a submission to *CTX*, you are acknowledging that your submission adheres to the requirements listed above, and that you agree to the *CTX* Terms of Copyright, so read them carefully. The *CTX* Terms of Copyright appear at the end of page 62.

Submit to [CTXEditor@GlobalECCO.org](mailto:CTXEditor@GlobalECCO.org)

If you have questions about submissions, or anything else, contact [CTXEditor@GlobalECCO.org](mailto:CTXEditor@GlobalECCO.org)

CTX is online at [globalecco.org](http://globalecco.org)



