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CTX

From the Editor

I don't know what to say. I've been thinking about how to write this editorial letter for a week and, not wanting to give in to the anxieties of the news headlines, I'm coming up empty. Which is ironic, given that the general theme of the articles in this issue is communication: what makes it effective, how word choice affects emotional responses, how messaging can be used—and not used—to manipulate outcomes, how a story can affect the course of a war. How we talk about ourselves and others, what we share, and with whom we communicate are choices we make to achieve an outcome, consciously or not.

Therefore, I'm going to stop here and let this issue speak for itself.

In our first feature article, Major Charles Ware III asks what Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation can teach modern psychological operations specialists about social influencing. Luther didn't have TikTok, but he, better than those within the Catholic Church who opposed him, took full advantage of the newly invented moveable-type printing press to spread his ideas about church reform across sixteenth-century Europe.

The second article analyzes the effects that digital messaging from Q has had on the growth and direction of QAnon, the online community that spreads Q-inspired conspiracy theories across the United States and around the globe. Through a study of the word choices in "Q drops"—Q's messages to followers—authors J.R. Allan and Dr. Shannon Houck find a correlation between an increase in influential wording and the community's rapid spread.

Next, Major Christopher Smith takes a close look at the ways that the Iranian special forces, known as the Quds Force, used irregular warfare tactics to bring material and training support to the Houthi rebels in Yemen without allowing Iran to be publicly implicated. As the United States and its allies incorporate the

principles of IW into their strategic thinking, Major Smith suggests, there are lessons to be learned from the Iranians' success.

Lieutenant Commander Nikolaj Lindberg is back with the second and final installment of his fictional account of CBRN in the hands of an ISIS-affiliated terrorist group. We rejoin French Minister of Defence Florence Parlay as she and her advisors scramble to uncover the location of a chemical weapons lab, burrowed somewhere in the vast reaches of the Western Sahel, before the terrorists launch a promised second attack.

The *CTX* Interview features Peruvian Army Brigadier General Manuel Alvarez (retired) in conversation with Global ECCO's Sally Baho. General Alvarez discusses his experience fighting the violent Shining Path insurgency and his concerns about the movement's continuing influence on Peruvian society.

Finally, Major Caleb Edwards reviews *The Moon is Down*, a short novel of resistance propaganda that was written by John Steinbeck in response to the occupation of large areas of Europe by German forces in the early 1940s.

Be sure to see this issue's Publication Announcement. *By Water Beneath the Walls*, by Ben Milligan, will be of particular interest to our readers who are members of the special forces community.

Our mission at *CTX* is to bring you stories, essays, research, and ideas that will inspire and encourage you as you fulfill your role of countering threats to security wherever they arise. We invite you to share your experiences, comments, and ideas with the community. What would you suggest to make *CTX* even better? Write to us at CTXeditor@globalecco.org and follow Global ECCO on Facebook at https://www.facebook.com/GlobalECCO/.

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Inside

About the Contributors

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Brigadier General Manuel Alvarez, Peruvian Army (retired), served in active duty for 39 years, after which he taught at the Peruvian Army War College for an additional 16 years. He is a graduate of the Postgraduate School of Political Sciences at Ricardo Palma University in Lima. BG Alvarez now teaches a number of courses at the US National Defense University's Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies in Washington, DC, and teaches Network Analysis through the US Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) in Monterey, California. He is principal professor of the Chair of Military History at the Center for Higher National Studies in Lima, and an adjunct professor at the US Joint Special Operations University, Tampa, Florida.

Major Caleb J. Edwards is a US Army Special Forces officer with operational experience in the Middle East. He holds a degree in mechanical engineering from Clemson University and is currently a master's candidate in the Defense Analysis department at NPS. His thesis identifies methods for modernization and doctrinal incorporation of educational wargaming at the operational level, specifically leader development and training.

Dr. Shannon Houck is an assistant professor in the Defense Analysis department at NPS. She is a social psychologist with expertise on the psychology of influence and persuasion, psychological resilience and resistance, and extremism. Prior to joining NPS, she was a faculty member at Syracuse University from 2016 to 2020. She is the author of over 40 scholarly articles and book chapters, and her research has been featured on popular news outlets such as *The New York Times*, *Psychology Today*, and *USA Today*.

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 received his Master of Science degree in Defense Analysis from NPS in 2022.

Major Christopher Smith has served in the US Army Special Forces for 13 years, including six deployments to the CENTCOM Area of Responsibility. He holds an MS in Defense Analysis from NPS, where his work and thesis focused primarily on the Middle East and the conduct of irregular warfare.

Major Charles M. Ware III is a psychological operations (PSYOP) officer in the US Army. He currently serves as a PSYOP Company Commander at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. MAJ Ware holds an MS in information strategy and political warfare from NPS and a Master of Divinity degree from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Formerly a competitive distance runner, he won the 2011 Marine Corps Marathon and was recognized as the 2011 Army Male Athlete of the Year.

COVER IMAGE

Martin Luther preaches to the people.

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LEARNING FROM THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION:

Connecting the 16th-Century Movement to Present-Day PSYOPS

MAJ Charles M. Ware III, US Army
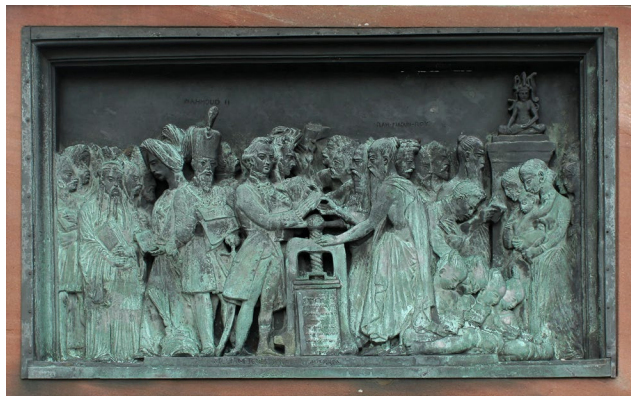
Bronze relief of the Gutenberg press, David d'Angers, 1839.

Two pivotal moments of the last millennium started in Germany, about seventy years and 250 miles (400 km) apart: the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in 1450, and the Protestant Reformation, which became a Europe-wide movement when Martin Luther wrote and circulated his *Ninety-Five Theses* in 1517.[1] Variations on Gutenberg's movable-type printing press were essential to many forms of media until the digital age, and many have described it as one of the greatest inventions of the past thousand years.[2] Luther and other leaders of the Reformation made great use of the printing press to promote their movement, and the spread of the new printing technology both enabled and benefited from the publication of a broad religious literature, including many millions of Bibles, by Protestants, Catholics, and other religious movements in the sixteenth century alone. Just how essential the printing press was to the success of the Reformation, however, is a matter of much debate. Was Bernd Moeller right when he concluded, "No printing, no Reformation"?[3] Did printing simply expedite an inevitable split in the Roman Catholic Church?

If so, what role did political, economic, and religious tensions between Church leaders in Rome and leaders and laity scattered throughout the Holy Roman Empire (HRE) play in the spread of the Reformation?

As a US Army psychological operations (PSYOP) officer living through another revolutionary time in communications (the digital revolution, with internet-based communications and social media dominating information sharing), and having studied the Protestant Reformation while in divinity school a decade ago, I was drawn to research the behavior change that spurred the Protestant Reformation. How did printing press technology affect the spread of ideas? How important was Martin Luther to this first media campaign? What can information operations professionals, specifically PSYOP practitioners, learn from this research regarding the use of new technology, media, the political climate, and propaganda to influence foreign target audiences?

This article reviews three main topics: the spread of the printing press, the spread of the Reformation, and the economic, political, and religious environment of the early Reformation. The goal is to draw out lessons from the Reformation and apply them to the principal PSYOP

objective: to influence changes in the behavior of foreign target audiences. Though proto-reformers such as John Wycliffe and Jan Hus warrant mention for their efforts to bring about ecumenical change before Luther, as do Luther's contemporaries Huldrych Zwingli, John Calvin, and John Knox, this study focuses on Luther's personal influence and his primary medium of communication.[4]

Three Catalysts for Change: Luther, the Press, and the Times

The Protestant Reformation likely benefited from a confluence of factors, all critical to its survival and ability to thrive and spread: a sophisticated and effective influencer in the person of Martin Luther; the emergence of one of the top inventions of the millennium—the printing press—geographically close to where Luther would come to prominence; and an economic, political, and religious climate ready for change.

The Spread of the Printing Press

Nearly all research into the spatial diffusion of the printing press leads to the work of the economist Jeremiah Dittmar. According to Dittmar, Johannes Gutenberg's printing press
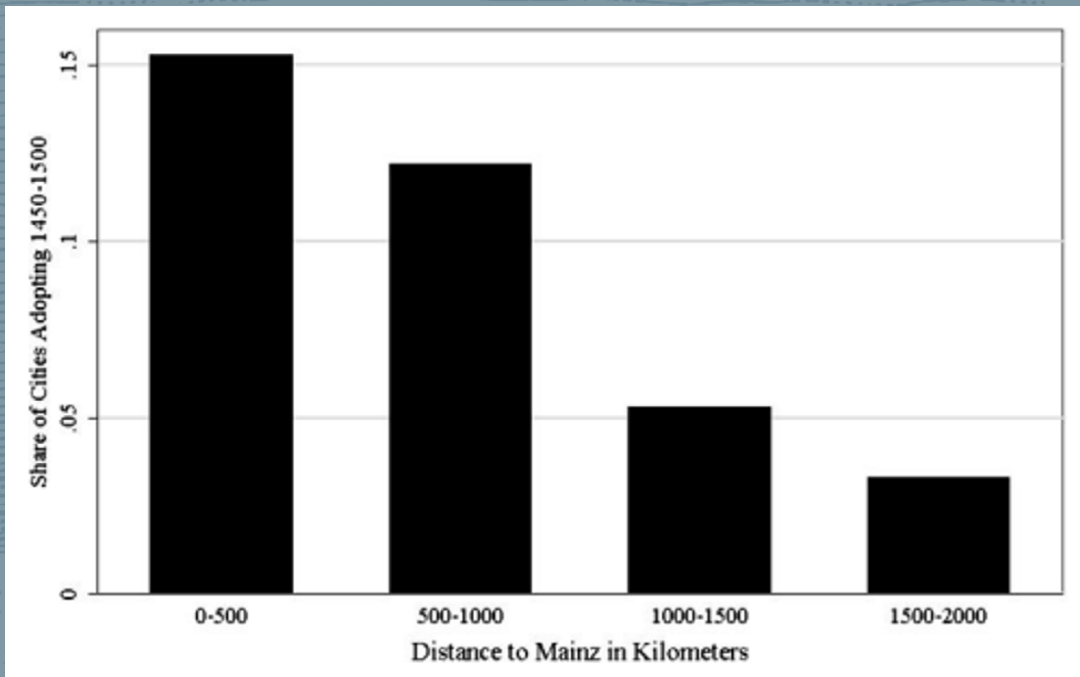
Figure 1. Cities Adopting Printing and Their Distance to Mainz[5]

Figure 2. 500 Kilometer and 1,000 Kilometer Distances from Mainz[6]

used a special metal alloy whose exact makeup remained a kind of proprietary secret for many years, although the laws of the time could not grant him a patent.[7] The first specifications of the press were not released until 1540, 23 years after the start of the Reformation.[8] Due to the secrecy surrounding Gutenberg's design, the geographic spread of printing presses remained limited for 90 years, and most printers of the time had some connection to Gutenberg or his associates. As a result, cities less than 500 kilometers from Mainz, where Gutenberg's shop was located, were about five times more likely to obtain a press during this timeframe than were cities 1,500 to 2,000 kilometers away from the origin city.[9] Figure 1 shows Dittmar's bar graph with the percentage of cities adopting the printing press for each 500-kilometer increment from Mainz. Most of the HRE lay within 500 kilometers of Mainz at the time, while most of Central Europe, France, England, and Italy lay within 1,000 kilometers (see figure 2).

Proximity, printing secrets and networks, common languages, common religion, ease of trade, and information sharing all played parts in the greater spatial diffusion within 1,000 kilometers of Mainz. Additionally, one of Gutenberg's principal projects was the Gutenberg Bible, his version of the Latin Vulgate, which the Roman Catholic

Church would have found particularly appealing. According to Angus Maddison in *Growth and Interaction in the World Economy*, "by 1500, 220 printing presses were in operation throughout Western Europe and had produced 8 million books."[10] The University of Iowa's Atlas of Early Printing website shows a slightly higher 282 printing presses by 1500, with the highest concentrations in modern-day Germany and northern Italy.[11] Figure 3 shows these locations, with the ring size around each city indicating its level of print output. As the map shows, Paris, Lyons, Strasbourg, Leipzig, Cologne, Venice, Florence, and Rome—all within a 1,000 kilometer radius of Mainz—yielded the greatest output by 1500.
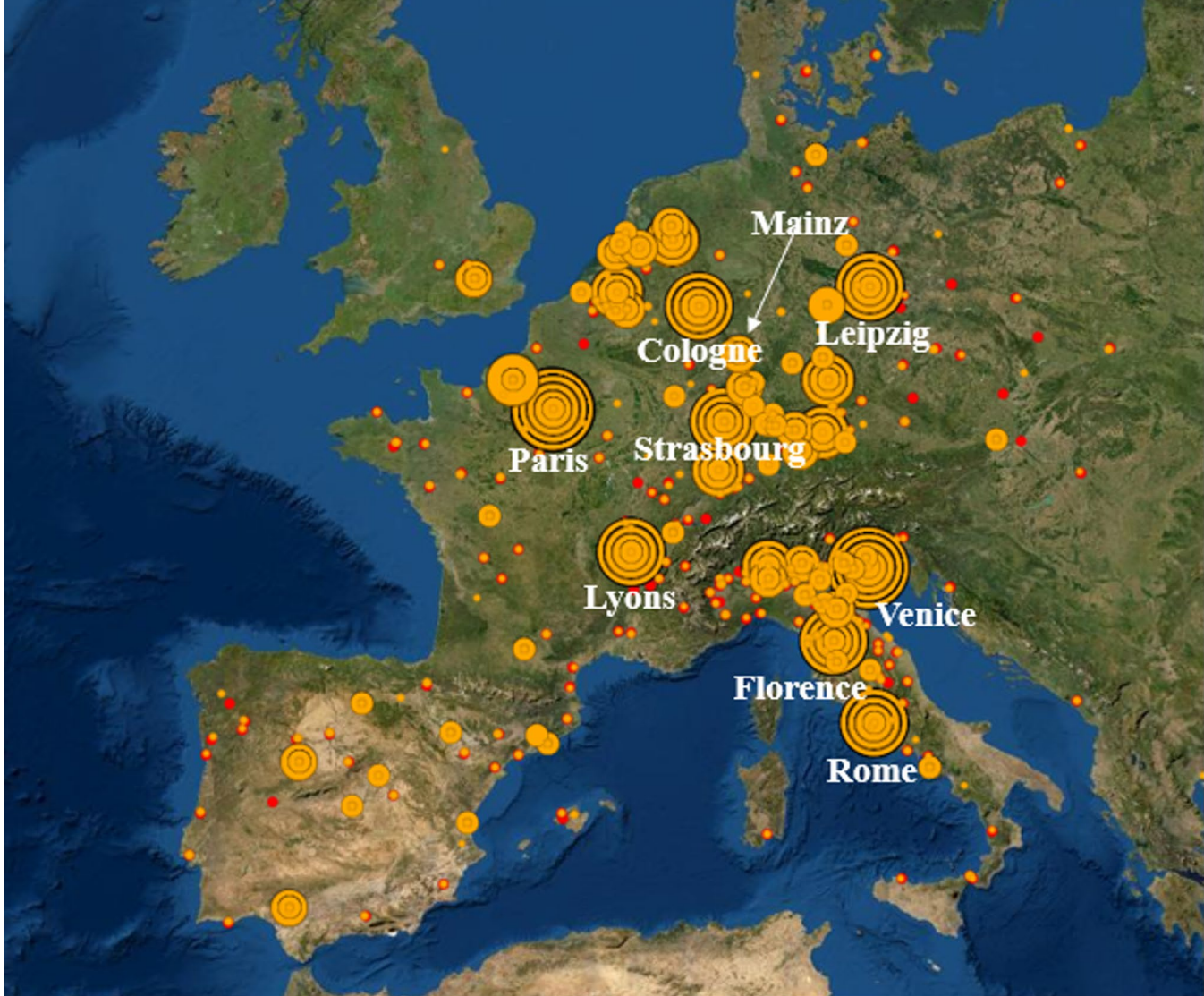
Figure 3: Printing Presses from 1450 to 1500 with Output Sizing[12]

The Spread of the Protestant Reformation

Martin Luther sparked the Protestant Reformation in 1517 with his *Ninety-Five Theses*, but many believe that act did little to truly incite the behavioral changes that led people and cities to join the Reformation movement. A number of researchers have tracked the spread of the Reformation and the potential catalysts that facilitated this diffusion, including the availability of printing presses to rapidly publish propaganda pamphlets, religious material, and Bibles; increasing use of the vernacular in such documents, which allowed far more people to read them; the greater volume of Protestant-aligned printed works compared to that of Catholics; and Martin Luther's ties to his students, other influential leaders, and the cities where he lectured.

In *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther*, for example, author Mark U. Edwards Jr. presents statistics that demonstrate Luther's publishing prowess compared to both others in the Protestant movement (whom Edwards calls

Evangelicals) and the entire Roman Catholic Church. Edwards shows how Luther's prolific writing and popular appeal were welcomed by the owners and operators of printing presses across the HRE and vastly outshone those of Roman Catholics, especially his works in the vernacular. Edwards writes, "over the period 1518 to 1544, Luther's publications (that is, printings and reprintings of his works in German, excluding Bible translations) numbered at least 2,551. For the same period, the Catholic publicists produced 514 printings (or 542 if all undated printings are to be counted within this time span)."[13]

Edwards suggests that Luther understood, better than the Roman Catholic Church's adherents, that he needed to appeal to the hearts and minds of the laity as much as the clergy, if not more, and he did this with pamphlets. Edwards writes, "vernacular pamphlets were the physical embodiment of a message. Multiplied by the art of printing into hundreds of exact copies, cheap to buy and handy to pass around, these pamphlets were in some sense what they contained: an address to the laity to become involved in an unprecedented way in their own religious destiny."[14] The Roman Catholic Church, however, continued to appeal to

the authority of clergy and scholars by printing mostly in Latin, and it largely chose not to challenge Luther and the other Evangelicals by publishing in the vernacular. After all, doing so would provide "apparent legitimacy to the Evangelical claim that there was something to debate."[15]

Edwards does mention the low literacy rates of the sixteenth century, but argues, "Luther did not have to reach everyone, only those in positions of leadership or influence. The statistics suggest that, in fact, he reached a goodly number of such people."[16] Luther's German-language New Testament seems to have had particular influence, and even Roman Catholic opponents to Luther used it as a reference when they did write in German.[17]

While Edwards emphasizes the apparent influence of printing even on a public with low literacy rates, his book does not include the statistics to show a correlation between printing and conversion. Jared Rubin's article, "Printing and Protestants," does show this connection through statistical analysis.[18] Rubin's key finding was that "the mere presence of a printing press prior to 1500 increased the probability that a city would become Protestant in 1530 by 52.1 percentage points, Protestant in 1560 by 41.9 percentage points, and Protestant in 1600 by 29.0 percentage points, ceteris paribus."[19] This implies that the effect of propaganda and printing was most important early in the Reformation, as Luther and other Evangelicals spread the ideas of the Reformation and helped them become widely understood and accepted.

In their article "Multiplex Network Ties and the Spatial Diffusion of Radical Innovations," Sascha O. Becker, Yuan Hsiao, Steven Pfaff, and Jared Rubin, while not discounting Rubin's earlier work, show the statistical significance of spatial diffusion in combination with Luther's personal associations to the spread of the Reformation:

> Luther's ideas gained institutional purchase in cities where he had personal ties. Furthermore, cities where Luther had personal influence often had trade relationships with one another, creating clusters of adopting cities, which, in turn, activated spatial diffusion. Neither Luther's personal ties nor spatial diffusion alone fully explains the spread of the early Reformation, but the *interdependent* combination of both does.[20]

Much of this was due to the charisma of Luther and his persuasive influence on his contacts. The authors add, "as became evident by the time of the indulgence controversy in 1517 to 1518, Luther's correspondence, visits, and

Luther understood, better than the Roman Catholic Church's adherents, that he needed to appeal to the hearts and minds of the laity as much as the clergy, if not more.

cultivation of a cadre of devoted students connected an ideological entrepreneur with a widely-dispersed set of local elites who otherwise would have lacked a tie to the Wittenberg movement."[21] The results of their work provide strong support for their claims: the towns from which Luther's students came to study with him at Wittenberg were over seven times more likely to become Protestant than other similar towns by 1530 (36 percent to 6 percent); towns Luther visited were over three times more likely to become Protestant by 1530 (50 percent to 16 percent); and towns to which he sent correspondence were 2.7 times more likely to be Protestant by 1530 (46 percent to 17 percent).[22] The article also emphasizes the importance of the printing press and Luther's influence to explain the timing and geography of the Reformation, and specifically to answer why the movement Luther led succeeded when prior dissenters had failed to bring widespread change to people's attitudes toward their religion.[23]

The Economic, Political, and Religious Climate of the Reformation

Another article, "Causes and Consequences of the Protestant Reformation," provides insight into the interaction of politics and religion in the HRE by analyzing the body of research on the topic.[24] It organizes causes by looking at the "supply" of alternatives to Catholicism as well as the "demand" for such alternatives, and summarizes the results thus:

Long-lasting social and cultural upheavals are possible when a confluence of supply-side features coincide to permit challengers to the old regime to become sufficiently entrenched. Demand for reform existed for centuries prior to Luther. However, the reformers of the early 16th century were successful for several reasons having to do with timing and setting. These reasons include recent advances in information technology (the printing press); outside threats (the Ottomans) that sidetracked the attention and resources of the papacy and Habsburgs; the heterogeneous and decentralized nature of the HRE; and networks of sympathetic university students and intellectuals placed in strategic locations throughout the HRE.[25]

Catholicism held a religious monopoly in the HRE and much of Europe for centuries leading up to the early sixteenth century, and thrived where it had the support of civil or royal authorities.[26] Economic, political, and religious factors can undermine a monopoly, however; for example, "first, economic growth may serve as a demand shifter. . . . Second, religious monopolists are prone to rent-seeking and poor performance. . . . Finally, religious firms seek the backing of secular political power."[27] The article shows that each of these factors was in place at the time of the Reformation, though they did not guarantee the success of an alternative religious movement, and in many locations with these factors present, reform did not succeed.[28] The Reformation, though successful, was not universal. It succeeded or failed town by town, principality by principality, as a result of the factors previously mentioned and others unique to each of those specific locations.[29]

Evaluating Luther by the Influencer Scorecard

To better understand why Martin Luther was so successful at spreading the ideas of the Reformation in sixteenth-century Europe, and to help identify potential social media influencers with whom US PSYOP practitioners might partner to reach a target audience (TA), Aaron Siebenaller and I created what we call an "Influencer Scorecard."[30] The Scorecard has seven categories that measure the potential for an individual to influence a pre-determined TA: (1) Alignment with the Desired Behavior; (2) Number of Followers; (3) Potential Reach, measured by shared demographic qualities between the influencer and the TA; (4) Engagement Rate, which is feedback from all sources; (5) Number of Times the Message is Shared; (6) Number of Times the Message is Mentioned; and (7) Frequency of Posts.[31]

We chose the categories based on influencer marketing research, two case studies, and interviews with experts in information operations. We modeled the scoring system after the US military's targeting matrix, CARVER, adopting its one (1) through five (5) score, with five (5) being the highest.[32] We then analyzed the known data about Luther's activities and the spread of his ideas according to the Scorecard, to determine how much Luther himself was a factor in the success of the Reformation. Though Luther used the printing press instead of TikTok or Instagram, these categories have analog printing press and in-person social network equivalents.

Alignment with the Desired Behavior

Because Martin Luther was the driving theological leader, scholar, and communicator for the reform he wanted to see in Roman Catholicism, he set the Desired Behavior and

the TA: he was both the influence practitioner and the key communicator. The TA was all Catholic believers, and specifically the laity, because he believed that Roman Catholic leaders and clergy had misinterpreted and corrupted the biblical teachings regarding salvation by separating them from what he believed to be true: that salvation came by grace through faith in Christ, not through one's actions, or "works" (e.g., participating in church sacraments, loving one's neighbor, charitable giving, or attending worship services). The overarching Desired Behavior, therefore, was for Catholics to adopt his understanding of the biblical path to salvation. Achieving this goal required the TA to develop a greater understanding of the Bible and Luther's interpretation, and it inevitably forced members of the TA to decide between the Roman Catholic Church's views and Protestant views. Luther's own Alignment with the Desired Behavior was high because he himself determined it, a factor that would make this category "unfair" if Luther were being compared to other influencers. He achieves a maximum score (5) on Alignment with the Desired Behavior, but since he was also the influence practitioner, this result is expected.

Number of Followers

Luther likely influenced more than a million people in his time (equivalent to a mega-influencer in modern social media terms) and countless millions through the present day, but he did not start that way. Luther grew his following from his network of students, scholars, and other correspondents; from his travels; and through his published writings. His German translation of the Latin Bible was used by both his disciples and his dissenters and became the standard Bible in German-speaking lands for centuries.[33] Though only a fraction of his TA could read, public readings, sermons, and public discourse helped diffuse his ideas even among non-readers. Therefore, Luther achieves a top score of five (5) in this category as well.

> **Luther likely influenced more than a million people in his time** (equivalent to a mega-influencer in modern social media terms) and countless millions through the present day, but he did not start that way.

Potential Reach

For the purposes of the Influencer Scorecard, Potential Reach is measured by demographic similarities between the key communicator and the TA: they have a shared nationality; the communicator posts (or writes, in Luther's

> # The Reformation,
> though successful, was not universal. It succeeded or failed town by town, principality by principality.

case) primarily in the TA's language; he or she is from the same general locality as the TA; he or she shares interests with the TA; he or she shares information and opinions about the TA's locality (politics, events, local concerns, and so on); and he or she falls within the TA's average age window. Luther aligns better with some of these factors than others, but largely meets them all. Though publishing in the TA's language is common for influencers today, it was not common for theologians to publish in the vernacular during Luther's time. He realized the importance of the German-speaking audience and the need to use that language to influence them. This increased Luther's Potential Reach compared to his Catholic opposition, which confined itself to scholarly Latin. Luther achieves a high score of four (4) in this category but not a five (5), because his TA was spread throughout the HRE and did not often get involved in local politics, and he was a member of the clergy while his TA was primarily laity. He does, however, align with the TA on most other demographic qualities.

Engagement Rate

Engagement Rate in social media considers others' reactions (e.g., likes) and responses (e.g., comments) to an influencer's posts and is measured in comparison to other potential influencers. The equivalent response for Luther's time would include conversations among individuals who had read Luther's works, and between his readers and those who were not. It would also include printed responses to Luther's publications, both in favor of and against them. Luther started conversations that many felt compelled to engage with, verbally and in print. Luther's support in "the press" (printed works) was stronger than the dissent, as the Roman Catholic Church's response came largely through formal written letters, interviews, and a trial at the Diet of Worms (during which the content of Luther's writings was the primary evidence, and after which Luther was excommunicated from the Catholic Church).[34] Luther's publications spurred most of northern Germany and several other major cities to adopt Protestantism by 1529 (in the form of the Lutheran Church, the eponymous name of the Protestant church formed by those who accepted Luther's views

on the Bible and ecclesiology).[35] The reaction to Luther's body of printed material spearheaded unprecedented change in the religious landscape of the HRE and Western Europe, and thus he receives a maximum Engagement Rate score of five (5).

Times a Message is Shared

Times Shared measures shares or retweets on social media. This occurs when a person chooses to show someone else's post on his or her own social media feed. The equivalent during the early Reformation would be true sharing, such as passing print editions of Luther's publications from one person to another, or public readings of Luther's works. Perhaps the most effective sharing mechanism was

Frequency of Posts

"You miss one hundred percent of the shots you don't take," is a quote often attributed to Wayne Gretzky, the great hockey player (and commandeered by the Michael Scott character in *The Office*).[38] One of the keys to a successful influence campaign is frequent messaging to the TA, whether in social media posts or printed pamphlets and books. Luther excelled in the volume of material he produced. Many of these were short pamphlets, but he also translated the entire Bible into German and had it published. Luther far exceeded all other writers of his time in the frequency with which his works were printed, so he receives a five (5) for Frequency of Posts.[39]

Luther's score of 33 on the Influencer Scorecard shows that he was undoubtedly the best influencer of his time, using the best available media, and he was probably one of the most successful influencers ever.

reprinting. Luther's writings were by far the most reprinted and shared during the early years of the Reformation, so he would have achieved a maximum score of five (5) in Times Shared.[36]

Times a Message is Mentioned

Times Mentioned differs from Times Shared because a social media persona will attempt to bring the attention of another user to the persona's original post by tagging or mentioning that other user. Because Luther was the most prolific writer of the early Reformation, many other writers did seek to gain his attention through direct responses to his works, expanding on his ideas or expressing direct opposition.[37] Since Times Mentioned is measured relative to other potential influencers (the influencer mentioned the most gets the highest score), an argument could be made for Luther to receive a maximum score in this category, but because Luther's focus and the focus of others was usually broader than directing their discourse toward or responding to a single individual (though this did happen occasionally), Luther scores a four (4) on this category of the Influencer Scorecard.

Results

For social media influencers, a "good" score typically lands in the mid-to-high 20s out of a possible 35. Luther's score of 33 on the Influencer Scorecard shows that he was undoubtedly the best influencer of his time, using the best available media, and he was probably one of the most successful influencers ever. Today the world has more than 800 million Protestants, 37 percent of the global Christian population, all of whom trace their key beliefs to Luther's interpretation of the Bible.[40] Though Luther was the only influencer analyzed here, this exercise reveals the utility of the Influencer Scorecard, with some slight shifts in language to capture the specifics of the medium used (e.g., the Gutenberg press vs. Instagram).

What Can PSYOP Practitioners Learn from the Reformation?

Prior studies reveal that many factors correlated strongly with the timing of the Reformation. Was Moeller correct when he said "No printing, no Reformation"?[41] Probably. No Luther, no sixteenth-century Reformation? That is also likely. A political and religious climate with just enough open space for personal, political, and religious advancement to permit alternative theological ideas? A compelling claim. All these explanations could simultaneously have affected the success of the movement, which leads back to the concept that the Reformation was likely not a result of just one or two causal factors, but a confluence of many factors that ripened the environment in the sixteenth-century HRE for religious reform.

If each of this article's main findings remains valid, how can the results inform the decisions and actions of those seeking to achieve behavior change in a target audience 500 years after Luther? Specifically, what can PSYOP practitioners learn from this study to apply to their primary mission of persuading foreign target audiences to adopt behavior change that support national security objectives? The case of the Reformation reveals three important components of a change movement that can apply to media campaigns in any era or location: identifying the right person (key communicator) and utilizing the right platform (medium or media) in the right environment (a favorable economic, social, religious, and political milieu).

US PSYOP practitioners often focus on creating the right series of messages to persuade a TA to change its behavior. TA analysis remains the primary step on which all other parts of the seven-phase PSYOP process hinge.[42] Often, however, PSYOP efforts are frustrated because the communicators of the messages do not succeed in stirring up the necessary groundswell of support for the desired behavior change. Additionally, the political and socio-religious environment in which PSYOP practitioners launch their series can sometimes prevent a message from reaching the tipping point at which the desired behavior change can make a lasting difference.

Do movements happen only when a perfect storm of events, people, and environments collide, or can the building blocks of "reformation" be engineered? Special Operations Forces, PSYOP included, understand that a firm grasp on the operational variables—politics, military, economics, society, information, infrastructure, physical environment, and time—helps build understanding for any area of operation. Incorporating better means of identifying and selecting key communicators, however, has not received the same attention.

Viewing Luther's role through a PSYOP lens reinforces the perception that there are persistent gaps in the ways that US PSYOP doctrine, tactics, techniques, and procedures identify and analyze key communicators.

US PSYOP personnel have often tried to communicate the message themselves, through host-nation partner forces, or through select key communicators chosen for their willingness to work with the United States. Despite many available analytical tools in the broader PSYOP process, adoption of selection criteria for identifying, analyzing, and recruiting key communicators remains limited.[43] As the literature on Luther and the Protestant Reformation suggests, the right communicator for a particular target audience using media that effectively reaches the audience can make the difference in achieving the desired behavior change.

Conclusion

A confluence of favorable factors and entities helped give rise to the Protestant Reformation in the 1500s, including the founder and chief influencer (Martin Luther), world-changing technology (the printing press), and a political, economic, social, and religious environment open to religious competition. As revealed by statistical analysis from many sources, Luther and his prolific writing were responsible for much of this change, but he probably would not have achieved the level of success he did without having the moveable-type press to spread his message and the political context to permit it. Viewing Luther's role through a PSYOP lens reinforces the perception that there are persistent gaps in the ways that US PSYOP doctrine, tactics, techniques, and procedures identify and analyze key communicators.

Long-lasting behavior change can prove difficult for even the best change agents and key communicators. Looking back at historical examples, such as Martin Luther and the

Protestant Reformation, can help identify some key components to achieving behavior change, but they also reveal the many interdependent factors to consider and the difficulty in engineering circumstances to achieve the desired behavior change. In light of the world's ever-increasing complexity, influence practitioners may not achieve every goal, but they can achieve their greatest potential by using the best person to communicate to the target audience, using the best available platforms within the operational context.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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NOTES

1. Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses*, written in 1517, disputed the Roman Catholic Church's practice of selling indulgences to forgive sins and reduce the sinner's time in purgatory. Luther believed indulgences cheapened grace and provided a false idea that one could purchase forgiveness of sins, avoiding true repentance. Volker Leppin and Timothy J. Wengert, "Sources for and against the Posting of the Ninety-Five Theses," *Lutheran Quarterly* 29 (2015): 389.

2. Larry Gormley, "The Greatest Inventions in the Past 1000 Years," eHistory, 2000: https://ehistory.osu.edu/articles/greatest-inventions-past-1000-years

3. Bernd Moeller, "Stadt und Buch: Bemerkungen zur Struktur der Reformatorischen Bewegung in Deutschland" ("City and Book: Remarks on the Structure of the Reformation Movement in Germany"), in *Stadtbürgertum und Adel in der Reformation (The Urban Classes and Nobility in the Reformation)*, ed. Wolfgang J. Mommsen, Peter Alter, and Robert W. Scribner (Stuttgart: Klett–Cotta, 1979), 30.

4. See, for example, Hans J. Hillerbrand, *The Protestant Reformation:* rev. ed. (London: HarperCollins, 2009); David Guy Fountain, *John Wycliffe: The Dawn of the Reformation* (Southampton, UK: Mayflower Christian, 1984); and Thomas A. Fudge, *Jan Hus: Religious Reform and Social Revolution in Bohemia* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

5. Adapted from ibid. with permission from the author.

6. Satellite view of Western Europe map, Google Maps: https://www.google.com/maps/@47.6828817,6.7275781,3092 372m/data=!3m1!1e3le . Radius layers created by author.

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14. Ibid*.,* 57.

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23. Ibid., 866.

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25. Ibid., 21.

26. Ibid., 5.

27. Ibid., 5.

28. Ibid., 7–8.

29. Ibid., 22.

30. Charles M. Ware III and Aaron Siebenaller, "Identifying Influencers for PSYOP," (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2021): https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/68761

31. Ibid. Scoring of Luther here uses closest equivalents to the social media Influencer Scorecard baseline and a brief justification of the score. For a more detailed understanding of the social media Influencer Scorecard and the baseline scoring system, see Ware and Siebenaller, "Identifying Influencers for PSYOP."

32. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Countering Threat Networks*, JP 3-25 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2016), IV–12: www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3_25.pdf . CARVER is an acronym that stands for Criticality, Accessibility, Recuperability, Vulnerability, Effect, and Recognizability.

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41. Moeller, "Stadt und Buch," 30.

42. The Seven Phase PSYOP Process: (1) Planning; (2) Target Audience Analysis; (3) Series Development; (4) Product Development and Design; (5) Approval; (6) Production, Distribution, and Dissemination; (7) Evaluation. US Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, *Military Information Support Operations Process*, ST 33-01 (Fort Bragg, NC: USAJFKSWCS, 2014).

43. Two recent NPS theses have attempted to address this gap: Ware and Siebenaller's "Identifying Influencers for PSYOP," and Alexander R. Wingate, Kyle M. Gerik, and John A. Benson, "Analyzing Key Communicators" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2022): https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/69722 . While outside the scope of this article,

Luther would have stood out among his peers as a key communicator according to both the Influencer Scorecard created by Ware and Siebenaller and the Key Communicator Assessment Process developed by Wingate, Gerik, and Benson.

QAnon's
Psychological Influence:
Investigating Q's Digital Messaging

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"The community takes its directions from Q, whose position in the movement is as much that of a deity as an extremist leader: their wisdom is absolute and their word gospel."

— James Suber and Jacob Ware, "Examining Extremism: QAnon"[1]

It is difficult to imagine any commonalities between California yogis and German right-wingers—or between new-age hippies, senior military leaders, US elected politicians, and French influencers. Yet people from these seemingly disparate groups have connected over what started on the fringes of the internet: QAnon. A 4 June 2021 Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) bulletin that was circulated among members of Congress describes QAnon as a constantly evolving conspiracy theory. Acknowledging that QAnon does not behave like other groups, the FBI bulletin concludes that QAnon is a decentralized online community that propagates a multitude of false narratives and conspiratorial beliefs.[2] Chief among these narratives and theories is the belief in a "deep state" of corrupt, Satan-worshipping elites who run a sex-trafficking ring and control the media and politics. The QAnon movement originated with "Q," an anonymous digital user who began posting messages on the 4chan message board in 2017, and later moved to the website 8kun. These messages are commonly referred to as "drops" that, according to QAnon followers, contain secret intel about the deep state's criminal activities. Q quickly became the authoritative source for the QAnon community, arguably until the final drop in 2020, after which Q took an 18-month hiatus from posting messages. Although Q is certainly not the sole source of information for QAnon followers, a 2021 report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies suggests that Q is the source from which adherents ultimately take their directions.[3]

QAnon significantly increased its support base in a relatively short period of time, and understanding the reasons behind its widespread influence remains a critical national security task. As others have noted, it is difficult to know the exact number of QAnon supporters, but several indicators clearly point to rapid growth.[4] In their recent work *Pastels and Pedophiles*, Mia Bloom and Sophia Moskalenko write that from 2019 to 2021, the number of QAnon supporters in the US nearly doubled every year—surging from 5 percent of the US population in 2019 to roughly 17 percent in just twenty-four months.[5] Moreover, the Institute for Strategic Dialogue estimated that from March 2020 to June 2020, the number of QAnon posts on social media increased by 175 percent on Facebook, 63.7 percent on Twitter, and 77.1 percent on Instagram.[6] The spread of QAnon beyond the shores of the United States has been equally impressive. QAnon researcher Marc-André Argentino identified QAnon adherents in at least 71 countries.[7] Estimates in August 2020 found the largest increases in Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom.[8]

Previous research on the emergence and spread of QAnon has focused primarily on individual-level factors (e.g., fear, anxiety, a sense of lost control, and uncertainty about the future: factors that motivate people to seek explanations in an attempt to resolve these feelings), societal considerations that exacerbate these pre-existing individual tendencies, and the role of disinformation in social and mass media.[9] The tensions surrounding the 2020 presidential election and the global pandemic, with its associated consequences for heath, economic stability, and social freedom, are two obvious triggers. For example, QAnon conspiracies about the Covid-19 pandemic and vaccines—such as the false idea that the pandemic was created by world elites, or that vaccines would be used to track people—play on people's fear and anxiety. Those who start to follow QAnon content risk becoming isolated from alternative sources of information and people who do not share their beliefs, as the algorithms of social media platforms systematically reinforce human tendencies to seek out information consistent with one's pre-existing beliefs.[10]

However, it remains unclear how Q's digital messaging capitalizes on some of these factors in ways that research suggests influence how people think and ultimately behave. This is a gap that merits exploration. To investigate, this study uses a quantitative natural-language processing tool, the Linguistic Inquiry Word Count (LIWC), to evaluate

the content of all Q drops over time, focusing on language themes associated with three core principles of psychological influence: *cognitive, emotional,* and *social* processes. Before detailing this study, we situate it within the broader contexts of national security and the social psychology of influence literature.

QAnon's Threat to National Security

Many scholars and practitioners have labeled QAnon a national security threat.[11] Its success in spreading dangerous falsehoods about vaccines, the pandemic, election security, political leadership, and many other issues, underscores a broader set of security challenges that the United States and other democratic societies face with disinformation and misinformation in the modern information environment.

QAnon's false narratives have also harmed social connections. False narratives that denigrate social groups or public figures, claim moral superiority, and foster "us versus them" distinctions fuel social and political discord. This should not go unnoticed given the increasing problems the United States faces with societal division and political polarization. For example, according to a 2017 poll, 86 percent of Americans reported feeling that the country was more politically divided than ever, and 2020 polling data find this trend has worsened over time.[12] Political division has consequences, as evidence suggests that liberals and conservatives not only dislike each other, but also demonstrate prejudice and discrimination against each other.[13] There is ample reason to conclude that QAnon cultivates significant discord. Consider that "QAnon Casualties," an online support group for friends and family members of QAnon adherents, has 167,000 members at the time of this writing.[14] Media reports have indicated that QAnon is in fact tearing families apart, a trend that directly interfaces with national security vulnerabilities.[15] Former national security adviser and ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice has stated that she has "long viewed domestic division as our greatest national security vulnerability. Political

polarization is a 'force multiplier' that worsens other threats and cripples our ability to combat them."[16]

Combating the activities of QAnon adherents extends beyond the digital domain, since some have taken violent action against the so-called deep state, including kidnappings, murder, assassination plots, and participating in the US Capitol riot on 6 January 2021.[17] Due to concerns that it could stoke extremist violence, the FBI designated QAnon a domestic terror threat.[18] Although QAnon has not imposed the same societal costs in terms of violence and destruction that other modern extremist threats have (e.g., white supremacist groups, the Weather Underground), it nevertheless represents the larger problem of domestic extremism within the United States. But this threat extends outside the United States, too. For example, violent far-right demonstrators rushed the German Reichstag on 29 August 2020.[19] Conspiracy theories promoted by QAnon communities in Germany played a role in stoking the violence carried out by agitators in the crowds.[20]

Taken together, the national security implications are clear. In just three years (2017-2020), QAnon went from internet message boards to a designated domestic terror threat. How did Q's messages achieve this level of influence? Research on the social psychology of influence offers important insights.

Q's Digital Messaging and Principles of Social-Psychological Influence

Central findings in social psychology reveal that persuasive messaging uses, among other things, repetition, emotion, extremity, and scarcity/urgency.[21] Of course, the conditions under which an attempt to influence others is most
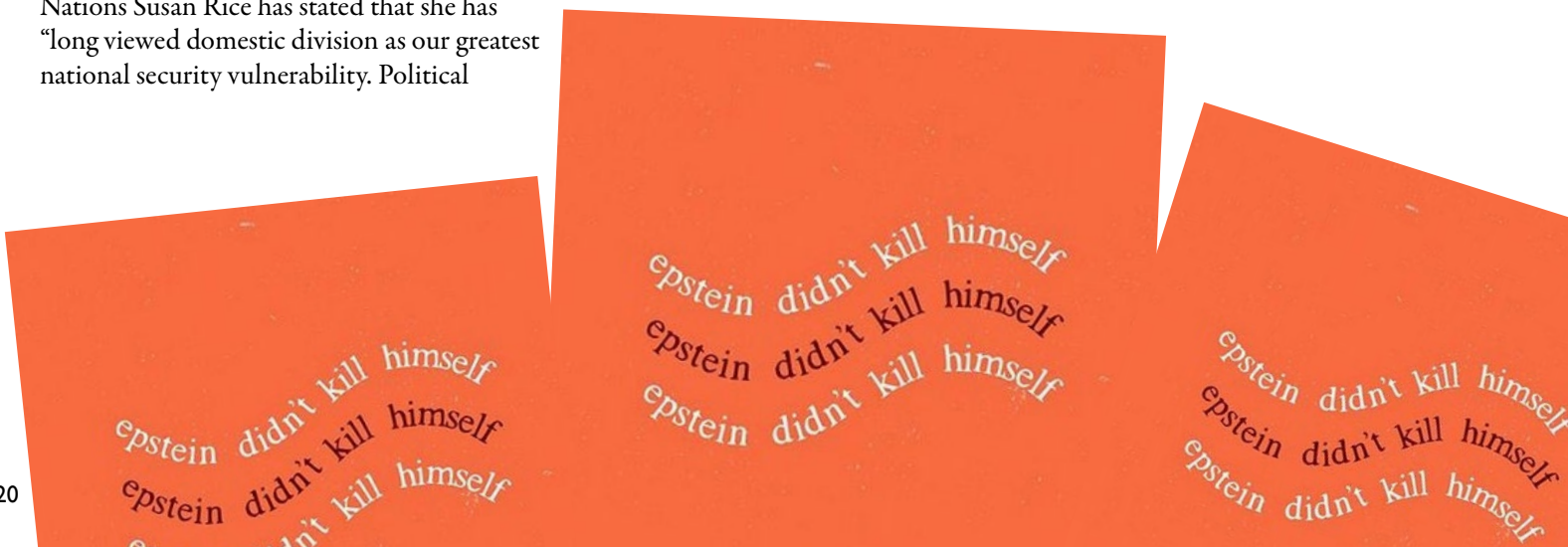
likely to succeed or fail involve many other considerations. Among these are the individual and social factors previously mentioned, as well as the state of the audience, the personal relevance of the topic, socio-political motivations, and group identification (and de-identification with outgroups), to highlight a few.[22] Detailing this vast scholarship on psychological influence is beyond the scope of this article. Since the precise focus of this research is to examine Q's messages within three core categories of influence that can also be measured with the LIWC's natural language processing software—cognitive, emotional, and social processes—we constrain our discussion of the literature to the foundational aspects of influence within each of these areas.

Cognitive Processes and QAnon's Influence

Research suggests that explicit, direct attempts to influence individuals' thinking are less effective than indirect attempts. For example, on average, arguments that are overheard rather than targeted are more persuasive.[24] This is in part accounted for by psychological reactance theory, which states that when people's freedom is taken away (e.g., if they think they are being forced or pressured to agree), they feel a desire to resist the pressure or undergo an attitude change in order to reestablish their freedom.[25] As such, inducements toward autonomous thinking give a sense of control back to the individual.

"QAnon's writings are crafted to be oracular, that is [sic] in the form of puzzles and hints, that the audience is challenged to interpret."

– Jeffrey Kaplan, "A Conspiracy of Dunces: Good Americans vs. A Cabal of Satanic Pedophiles?"[23]

The prevalent QAnon narrative, "do your own research," capitalizes on this longstanding influence principle. Q does not deliver arguments stating the reasons people should believe Q's claims, but rather asks people to think for themselves and actively participate in interpreting "puzzles and hints." Of note, what Q calls "research" involves "connect the dots" online activity that keeps followers engaged with QAnon content.[26] Repeated exposure to QAnon messaging itself can change how people think and feel. According to the Mere Exposure Effect, the more we see something, the more we agree with and like it.[27] This can be manipulated simply by spreading information as quickly and widely as possible—a relatively easy task in today's digital age. When people repeatedly see the same false narrative across many different sites, shared by numerous people and groups, they are more likely to believe that the narrative has merit.[28] This is especially true for emotionally charged messages.

epstein didn't kill himself
epstein didn't kill himself
epstein didn't kill himself
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epstein didn't kill himself
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epstein didn't kill himself

Emotional Processes and QAnon's Influence

"No matter how logical we consider ourselves, and no matter how certain we are that our views are grounded in facts and reason, emotions and cognitive biases still play a significant role in how we perceive the world and make decisions."

– Sean Lonnquist, "QAnon Doesn't Make Sense, but its Popularity Does"[29]

As evidenced by a long history of research, emotional appeals are persuasive.[30] According to the Elaboration Likelihood Model,[31] positive and negative emotions alike can enhance persuasion, depending on the context.[32] For example, research suggests that anger and fear reinforce attitude and behavior change, a tendency that can be seen in the digital domain, where negative messages that play on fear, anxiety, anger, and moral outrage are particularly engaging.[33] People are not only more likely to share such content, but consistent with emotional contagion (a form of social contagion involving the spread of shared emotion), they also become more negative in their own online behavior.[34] What is more, the human brain rewards this behavior. Indeed, Yale researcher Molly Crockett found that moral outrage makes us feel good, and this can be seen via increased activation of reward pathways in the brain.[35] Fear and uncertainty have also been shown to fuel beliefs in conspiracy theories.[36]

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that QAnon relies heavily on emotionally laden narratives. QAnon adherents share a sense of deep distrust in the government, political leadership, corporations, and the "fake-news" media; as such, QAnon content tends to perpetuate fear and anxiety by emphasizing (baseless) reasons for this distrust.[37]
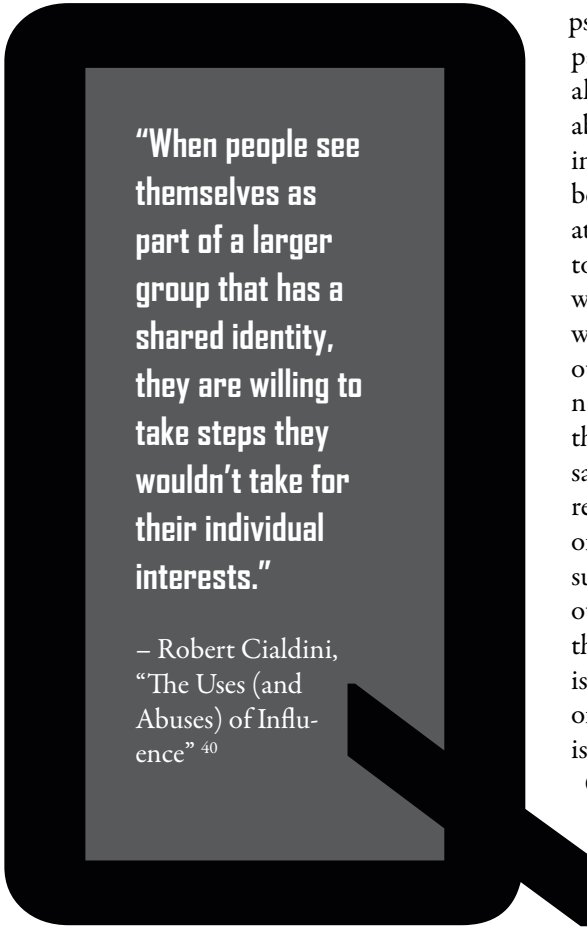
As journalist Julia Wong notes, "on Facebook, anxiety over children due to the coronavirus pandemic, a resurgent anti-vaxx movement, and QAnon-fueled scaremongering about child trafficking have all combined to inspire a modern-day moral panic, somewhat akin to the 'Satanic Panic' of the 1980s."[38] This emotional content is not without consequence. Consider, for example, that after QAnon hijacked the phrase "save the children" from the humanitarian organization by that same name, QAnon groups that operated under the guise of "anti-trafficking" causes increased their membership by 3,000 percent.[39]

Whether intending harm or simply expressing opinion, part of this online behavior is driven and reinforced by a new sense of community felt among groups within social networking platforms. This has worked to QAnon's advantage. Although users may perceive QAnon forums as communal interactions that bring together those with shared feelings, the lack of direct and interpersonal social consequences may in fact prove more isolating.

> "When people see themselves as part of a larger group that has a shared identity, they are willing to take steps they wouldn't take for their individual interests."
>
> – Robert Cialdini, "The Uses (and Abuses) of Influence" [40]

Social Processes and QAnon's Influence

The key QAnon tagline, "where we go one, we go all," signals group cohesion and belongingness. This is a compelling message, as psychological research underscores the importance of belonging as a fundamental human motivation, and conspiratorial people are often seeking group affiliation.[41] Social identity theory—deriving a sense of self from group membership—addresses how belonging to a group influences people's attitudes and behavior toward both their ingroup and outgroups.[42] Within the digital domain, identities hide behind assumed usernames, profile descriptions, and photos. These disguised "personas" can then freely interact, post, comment, and become influential communicators within their individually created spheres of influence because online interaction diminishes

social consequences. QAnon is no less susceptible to these processes than other online and offline communities.

While there are many positive psychological benefits to feeling part of a group, the group lens also changes the way we think about and behave toward "others" in ways that can sometimes be harmful. The tendency to attribute positive characteristics to our own groups and to those who share similar ideas coincides with a tendency to cast dissimilar outgroups in fundamentally negative ways.[43] These "us versus them" distinctions become more salient under threat, whether real or perceived. A long history of social psychological research suggests that when we feel that our group or group ideals are threatened, one consequence is more extremism in defense of those ideals.[44] Given this, it is perhaps easy to understand QAnon's trend toward more extremist thinking and behavior. Identifying what it perceives as threats from the "deep state" is a key activity of the QAnon community.

Method: Overview and Expectations

The aim of this project was to quantitatively examine Q's messaging over time with respect to three broad categories of influence: cognitive, emotional, and social processes. Based on previous social psychological research and theory, and on media reporting about QAnon, we expected linguistic analyses of Q drops to show (1) an increasing reliance on cognitive-focused messages over time; (2) more emotional language over time, particularly with respect to negatively valanced emotional messages; and (3) less social language over time. This expectation was driven in part by previous research on conspiracy groups indicating that followers become increasingly detached from society, and in part by media reports on QAnon specifically that describe the tendency of QAnon adherents to become isolated from society, family, and friends.[45]

Procedure: Data Set and Variables

To assess the linguistic properties of Q drops over time, we used the LIWC software, a text analysis program that quantifies words with corresponding psychological categories.[46] Q drops were first published on 4chan before moving to 8chan, which later became 8kun. The initial dataset included all 4,952 messages, commonly referred to as "Q drops," starting with the first on 28 October 2017 and ending on 13 November 2020.[47] Q posted once more on 8 December 2020; however, the post was solely a website link to a YouTube video and thus was excluded from the dataset because there was no message to analyze. Q did not post again until 24 June 2022, at which point our analysis was already complete. Therefore the five most recent drops (24-29 June 2022) are not included. We removed drops that were blank, as well as those containing only numbers, brackets, symbols, or website links without any corresponding text. This resulted in a final dataset of 4,087 Q drops.

The LIWC offers many language-processing capabilities, but this analysis focused specifically on linguistic categories directly related to expectations about influential messaging: cognitive processes, emotional processes (termed "affective processes" in the LIWC system), and social processes. The LIWC uses a dictionary of words to categorize cognitive processes into specific thinking-oriented themes: insight (e.g., think, know); causation (e.g., because, effect); discrepancy (e.g., should, would); tentative (e.g., maybe, perhaps); certainty (e.g., always, never); and differentiation (e.g., hasn't, but, else). Emotional processes are categorized into specific emotions: positive emotions (e.g., love, nice, sweet); negative emotions (e.g., hurt, ugly, nasty); anxiety (e.g., worried, fearful); anger (e.g., hate, kill, annoyed); and sadness (e.g., crying, grief, sad). Finally, the social processes category includes words like "talk," "us," "they," and "mate,"

and further separates social-oriented language into the following subcategories: family (e.g., daughter, dad, aunt); friend (e.g., buddy, neighbor); female references (e.g., girl, her, mom); and male references (e.g., boy, his, dad).

To measure time, we opted to number the 4,087 Q drops used in this study based on their chronological order, with 1 the first drop and 4,087 the last, rather than assess drops by days, months, or years. There were times when Q did not post for several days or even weeks, so looking at the Q drop number as the metric for time bypasses the missing data issue that comes with using "days" or "months." Moreover, an analysis using "years" would be inadequate given that this dataset spans just three years. Using the Q drop number not only allows for the most precise test of Q's language use over time, but it also maximizes statistical power.

Results and Discussion

We followed the same analytic approach to examine Q message characteristics over time. Analyses include a series of multivariate linear regression tests using the Q drop number as a predictor for each summary category (cognitive, emotional, social) and its subcategories. In the sections that follow, we first report the results for the summary category before highlighting effects that emerged for the subcategories. Discussion and interpretation of findings follow. (See table 1 for a summary of all findings.)

Cognitive Processes: Q's Thinking-Focused Messaging Over Time

To assess Q's thinking-focused messaging over time, we performed a multivariate linear regression test using the Q drop number as a predictor for cognitive processes. Results were consistent with expectations. The summary variable for cognitive processes revealed a significant increase over time ($r = .04^{**}$, $p = .005$), which was primarily driven by the specific category for insight ($r = .60^{***}$, $p < .001$) and, to a lesser extent, tentative language ($r = .04^{***}$, $p = .008$). These two linguistic properties emphasize different aspects of cognition. Q's messages increasingly contained content like "think," "know," and "consider" (*insight*), while also promoting a *tentative* mindset as reflected through verbiage like "maybe," "perhaps," and "guess." Further substantiating the idea that Q's messages promote tentativeness, there was no effect of certainty ($r = .01$; $p = .463$) or discrepant language ($r = -.01$, $p = .503$), both of which signal more rigid communication (certainty words, e.g.: "never," "always"; discrepancy words, e.g.: "should," "would").

Taken together, these findings suggest that Q's messages exemplify more cognitively focused language with indications toward more flexible, open-ended thinking (e.g., insight and tentativeness over certainty). This type of cognitive openness may seem counterintuitive given the connections between conspiracy beliefs, political extremism, and cognitive rigidity.[48] However, QAnon followers are active participants who attempt to disentangle the cryptic Q drops, often doing so together online. QAnon also evolves by accommodating new claims, reframing narratives when specific predictions do not come to fruition, and incorporating a multitude of conspiracy theories that appeal to a broad audience. Indeed, QAnon draws followers from strikingly diverse social, cultural, and ideological backgrounds. According to a June 2021 *New York Times* article, "the earliest adherents were mainly far-right Trump supporters, but in 2020, the movement expanded its reach to include health-conscious yoga moms, anti-lockdown libertarians and evangelical Christians. . . . There are Harvard graduates and Wall Street executives who believe in it, as well as people with less elite pedigrees."[49]
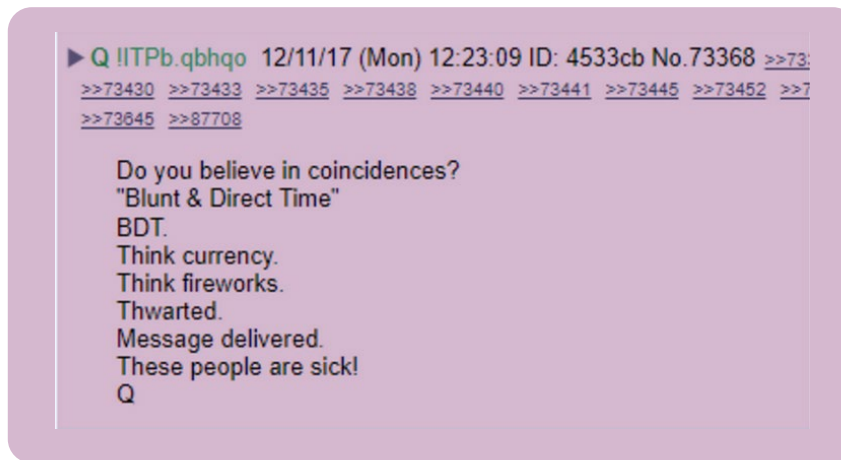
Given these characteristics, it makes sense that Q messages use thinking-oriented language that signals tentative, open thinking. To achieve influence across such a broad range of people requires cognitive flexibility.

Emotional Processes: Q's Affective-Focused Messaging Over Time

Using the same analytic approach that we used to test Q's thinking-focused messaging over time, we performed a multivariate linear regression test using the Q drop number as a predictor for emotional processes. Findings are largely consistent with expectations. Although there was no effect of positive or negative emotion over time, Q's messages increasingly reflected more anxiety ($r = .03^*$; $p = .052$) and anger ($r = .08^{***}$; $p < .001$) while simultaneously conveying less sadness ($r = -.07^{***}$; $p < .001$).

The opposing effects of anger and sadness are particularly noteworthy considering previous research that shows anger can mobilize individuals and motivate action, whereas sadness often has the opposite effect. Research also suggests that anger provides individuals with a sense of control.[50] One explanation for these findings is that Q capitalized on the contentious socio-political climate by strategically using angrier, more anxiety-laden messaging to both embolden followers and influence new individuals toward QAnon content. However, these data only shed light on some of the content themes from Q's messaging over time; they do not indicate the effects the messages did or did not have on the audience. Thus, it is also worth considering alternative interpretations. For example, it is possible that Q's messaging reflected this pattern of emotionality because the socio-political climate influenced Q, and thus Q's shifts in language represent an unintentional consequence of the environment rather than an intentional communication strategy. Additional research is needed to disentangle these and other interpretations. But regardless of the underlying reasons, this clear trend in emotion-focused messaging is a noteworthy observation and an initial step to understanding the QAnon movement from an influence and communication perspective.

Social Processes: Q's Social-Focused Messaging Over Time

Consistent with expectations, the multivariate linear regression test using the Q drop number as a predictor for social processes revealed a decline in social language over time ($r = -.03^*$, $p = .040$). This finding lends some empirical support to qualitative reports that indicate that many Q followers become isolated from their social connections as they align more with the QAnon movement.[51] While the same descriptive pattern emerged for communication about family and friends, these effects were not statistically significant and therefore merit some caution in interpretation. Further, whereas male references became less prevalent over time ($r = -.05^{**}$, $p = .005$), this effect did not emerge for female references. Despite these inconsistencies,

Q !ITPb.qbhqo 12/11/17 (Mon) 12:23:09 ID: 4533cb No.73368 >>73:
>>73430 >>73433 >>73435 >>73438 >>73440 >>73441 >>73445 >>73452 >>7
>>73645 >>87708

Do you believe in coincidences?
"Blunt & Direct Time"
BDT.
Think currency.
Think fireworks.
Thwarted.
Message delivered.
These people are sick!
Q

the overall picture offers some support for the idea that Q messages increasingly de-emphasized sociality.

Conclusion

Taken together, these findings empirically demonstrate that Q's messages blend insightful, tentative thinking with emotion (namely anger and anxiety) and isolation. Although none of these linguistic elements is a direct measurement that explains how Q attracts and influences followers, Q's incorporation of language that corresponds to aspects of psychological influence principles, and an increasing use of this language over the same period of time when QAnon followership dramatically increased, may at least partially shed light on the effect of Q's messages. It cannot be known from these data whether these language patterns reflect an intentional messaging strategy or are incidental. Moreover, we remain cautious about overinterpreting these findings given the relatively small effect sizes. Detecting small effects is common in psycholinguistic research, so this was not unexpected, but we would be remiss if we did not acknowledge this statistical point, especially given the large sample.

There are also interpretational ambiguities with respect to the linguistic properties of Q drops over time. The LIWC system only indicates the presence of words associated with language categories, but does not indicate the context in which these words were used. Consider, for example, the cognitive processes categories that measure words like "think," "know," and "consider." It is possible that more cognitive-focused messaging emerged over time because Q messages contained statements like "don't *think*" or "you *know* I am right" and thus discouraged rather than

Language Marker	Sample Words	r	p
Cognitive Processes	cause, know, ought	.04**	.005
Insight	think, know, consider	.60***	< .001
Tentative	maybe, perhaps, guess	.04***	.008
Discrepancy	should, would	-.01	.503
Certainty	never, always	.01	.463
Causation	because, effect	-.01	.366
Differentiation	hasn't, but, else	-.01	.745
Emotional Processes	happy, cried	.023	.145
Positive Emotion	love, nice, sweet	.01	.356
Negative Emotion	hurt, ugly, nasty	.02	.228
Anxiety	nervous, worried, tense	.03*	.052
Anger	hate, kill, annoyed	.08***	< .001
Sadness	grief, cry, sad	-.07***	< .001
Social Processes	talk, us, they, mate	-.03*	.040
Family	mom, brother, daughter	-.03	.109
Friend	pal, buddy, neighbor	-.02	.290
Female references	girl, her, mom	-.02	.144
Male references	boy, his, dad	-.05**	.005
Table Notes: p = probability value that indictes statistical significance; ***p < .001, **p < .01, *p < .05; r = correlation coefficient			

Table 1: Linguistic Properties of Q Drops Over Time

encouraged open, flexible thinking. The same could be said for the effects of emotional and social processes. Future research is needed for more context.

Another important next step for further research would be to examine more directly the effects of Q's messaging on followers' online and offline behavior. For example, do specific patterns in Q's messaging correspond to subsequent QAnon-inspired violence and conflict in the real world? What types of Q drops are most likely to garner support among existing followers and who is most vulnerable to QAnon messaging? Such questions represent critical next steps in this line of research.

The quantitative analysis of QAnon messaging in the context of social psychological influence theory presented in this paper opens new and exciting avenues for scholars and practitioners to pursue. It constitutes a first step in the study of QAnon, especially for specialists in the field of psycholinguistics. It is the hope of the authors of this article that scholars across a range of disciplines, such as psychology, behavioral sciences, semiotics, sociology, criminology, and terrorism studies, will generate additional hypotheses and produce elucidating knowledge about QAnon.

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THE FUTURE OF **IRREGULAR WARFARE** BETWEEN NATION-STATES: WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM IRAN'S SUCCESS IN YEMEN

MAJ Christopher Smith, US Army Special Forces

The world is changing and with it the threats to US national security. For nearly two decades, the Department of Defense (DoD) has been primarily concerned with counterterrorism. Now the focus has shifted to competition with near-peer nation-states, and DoD priorities for resources and training guidance have changed accordingly: more emphasis is being put on large-scale combat operations involving the deployment and maneuver of complex joint forces. While this is necessary to maintain a qualitative edge, deter foes, and prepare for contingencies, it is important to recognize that three of the four primary adversaries of the United States are nuclear powers (Russia, China, and North Korea, with Iran being the non-nuclear fourth), thus making the risk calculus for engaging in conventional warfare exceptionally difficult. I contend that future struggles between the United States and its nuclear-armed opponents will mimic conflicts of the Cold War, with most conflicts falling

The purpose of this article is to present innovative ideas for the conduct of IW against a near-peer adversary, as one or both actors seek to achieve their national security objectives abroad without escalating to conventional armed conflict.[1] I begin by defining IW according to doctrine and evaluating the unclassified IW annex to the 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS), and then present a case study regarding Iran's IW campaign in Yemen against its peer adversary, Saudi Arabia, and Saudi allies, including the United States. This case study demonstrates the possibility of competing violently with an enemy state while keeping the conflict from turning into a traditional war. Traditional warfare is defined by US doctrine as

> force-on-force military operations in which adversaries employ a variety of conventional forces and special operations forces (SOF) against each other in all physical domains as well as the information

Left to right: 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, North Korean Propaganda, Russian Coat of Arms

within the realm of irregular warfare (IW). These conflicts are characterized by violent and non-violent confrontations between limited conventional forces, proxies, and special operations forces, and activities in the information and cyber domain. It is essential that DoD does not repeat the mistakes of the post-Vietnam era, when the hard-won lessons of counterinsurgency and IW were lost in favor of returning to a sole focus on large-scale combat operations. DoD must be prepared for irregular threats and be ready to innovate if it hopes to compete with revisionist states—states that seek to change the geopolitical status quo—that will seek to circumvent the conventional strength of the US military.

> environment. . . . Traditional warfare is characterized by a series of offensive, defensive, and stability operations normally conducted against enemy centers of gravity. Traditional warfare focuses on maneuver and firepower to achieve operational and ultimately strategic objectives.[2]

Finally, I summarize lessons learned from the conflict that military planners should consider when examining future options and risks for conducting IW against adversaries.

The US Approach to Irregular Warfare

In the summary of the 2018 NDS, former Secretary of Defense James Mattis notes that revisionist powers will seek ways to subvert the conventional military and diplomatic strength of the United States and coerce others through intimidation to counter US objectives, without risking conventional armed conflict.[3] All four of the United States' primary adversaries utilize some form of IW against US interests. China, Russia, and North Korea use cyber tools for political disinformation, espionage, and the theft of intellectual property. Russia and Iran regularly support and employ proxy forces in conflicts abroad to maintain deniability of their involvement.

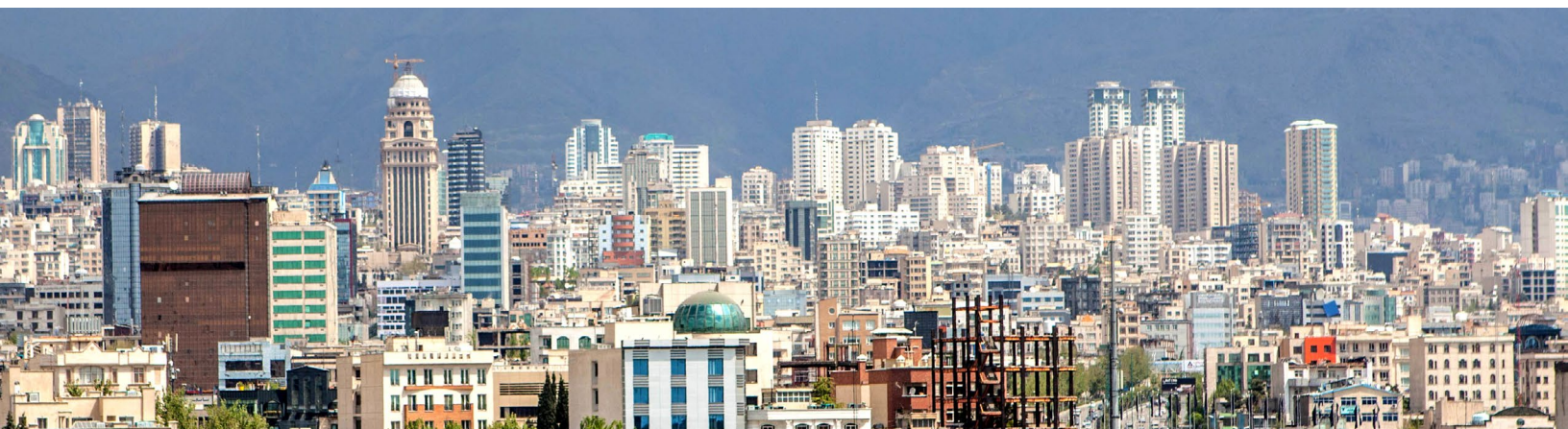Joint Publication 3.05, *Special Operations*, defines IW as

> a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s). Non-state actors often seek to create instability and disrupt and negate state legitimacy and governance to gain and maintain control or influence over and the support of a

of the 2018 NDS, the NDS does not ignore it, and an unclassified annex for IW was released in October 2020. The summary of this annex, which covers the future of IW while admitting to previous failures in conducting and countering IW in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan, emphasizes making the study and practice of IW a core competency for conventional forces and SOF.[6]

The authors of the summary also note that adversaries with significantly weaker militaries and resources favor the IW approach because it circumvents traditional military strength.[7] Traditional militaries rely on the ability to locate an adversary's uniformed military force and then use firepower and maneuver to overwhelm that enemy. In traditional warfare, the military with greater strength in military hardware, technology, and manpower is typically the victor. In today's world, the US military is by far the strongest when it comes to weaponry, technology, and a large professional fighting force. This traditional dominance was demonstrated in the Gulf War, where firepower and maneuver devastated the Iraqi military that was occupying Kuwait. US power was also demonstrated in 2003, when the US-led coalition quickly overwhelmed the Iraqi military once again and overthrew the Iraqi regime

Tehran

relevant population. Non-state actors use political, psychological, and economic methods, reinforced with military-type activities that favor indirect approaches and asymmetric means. Countering these methods requires a different mindset and different capabilities than traditional warfare methods.[4]

The issue with JP 3.05's definition is that it appears to limit the adversary to a non-state actor, traditionally seen as terrorists or insurgencies. However, other doctrine makes clear that the less powerful participant can also be a state.[5] Although IW is not included in Mattis' summary

in less than two months. The Iraqi military's primary error was that its uniformed military, although significantly handicapped, sought to take the US mobile units and airpower head-on in a conventional fight. In IW, the enemy is not easily identifiable, and uses tactics that avoid taking on an opposing force directly. The less powerful enemy will use proxies where possible, as a way to disavow blame, making direct retaliation more difficult to justify. The less powerful enemy will also compete for influence over the local population using tools such as news media and social

US Navy Battle Force Zulu, Gulf War, 1991.

media to further its narrative and sabotage the opponent's efforts to win the hearts and minds of the relevant population. In the Vietnam War, the Soviet Union and China fought the United States through an IW strategy that used the North Vietnamese as a proxy force, knowing that direct involvement by their own militaries likely would have escalated the guerilla fight into a larger war, in which the United States' economic and military might would be brought against them. Therefore, they indirectly fought the United States through mechanisms that included supplying the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong with weapons and materiel, and providing intelligence and advisors.

To avoid repeating past mistakes and remain primed to react to unconventional actions, the authors of the 2018 IW unclassified annex's summary advise that DoD must be creative as it institutionalizes and operationalizes IW:

> It is in this competitive space that the Department must innovate. We must creatively mix our traditional combat power with proactive, dynamic, and unorthodox approaches to IW that can shape, prevent, and prevail against our nation's adversaries and maintain favorable regional balances of power alongside our key partners and allies.[8]

As DoD develops models for conducting IW, researching the successes and failures of adversary states like Iran is prudent. Iran makes up for its handicaps in resources, allies, and military power by taking unconventional approaches to competition with its adversaries. Every conflict Iran's

forces have taken part in since the end of the Iran-Iraq War in 1988 has been conducted in the realm of IW. The study of Iran's operations in Yemen, presented below, is meant to highlight innovative methods that can be replicated by the US joint force as it seeks to compete. The extraterritorial SOF unit of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) is known as the Quds Force (QF; "al-Quds" is the Arabic name for Jerusalem). QF operatives undertake a host of operations, including subversion of Middle Eastern governments, assassinations, illicit financing, and the arming and training of ideologically aligned proxy forces. The QF represents how SOF can be used to conduct IW in pursuit of a nation's national security objectives, while keeping conflict below the level of traditional war.

Yemen as a Case Study in the Conduct of IW

The principal goal of this article is to examine how the US military can plan for future irregular wars with hostile nations when the United States' primary objective is to defeat the hostile nation or prevent it from achieving its primary goal(s). One could argue that the Yemeni Civil War is a limited conflict that lacks relevance for the US military's competition with adversarial nations like Russia. It is reasonable to think that the conflict in Syria between the United States and Russia may hold better lessons: the two powers compete for influence with several populations in the country, and their irregular and regular forces have exchanged direct fire, something that has not happened against the QF in Yemen.

However, the Syrian Civil War is outside the scope of this article for several reasons. First, the war is overt; it involves the deployment of thousands of soldiers and extensive military hardware by both the United States and Russia. These forces are focused on defeating third-party actors like ISIS, not one another; outside of a clash in 2018, neither side has targeted the other's forces with the intent to inflict casualties, knowing that to do so risks starting a larger war.[9] Most important, the only goal of the United States in Syria was and is the enduring defeat of ISIS. If Russia succeeds in keeping the Syrian regime intact, the US mission has not failed. If ISIS reconstitutes in Syria, Russia may have a propaganda win by demonstrating the failure of the US mission, but it would then have to take up the fight against ISIS itself. In Yemen, by contrast, the objectives of Iran and the Saudi-led alliance are in direct competition with each other.

Background to the Conflict in Yemen

As happened in many Middle Eastern countries in 2011, the Arab Spring movement in Yemen led to large-scale protests and popular uprisings calling for reform. The authoritarian president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, was forced from power, but the Saudi-backed regime of his successor, Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, found itself unprepared to deal with the systemic issues the country faced.

Sometime in 2012, a marginalized Zaidi Shi'a Muslim group called the Houthis, under the religious leadership of Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi, took advantage of the

Qassem Soleimani in 2019

weakened government and began a violent uprising; in 2015, President Hadi was forced to flee to Saudi Arabia. The Houthis, while not fully aligned ideologically with the Iranian regime, were open to receiving Iran's support in their efforts to take over Yemen's government. Saudi Arabia and several of its Gulf State allies, including the United Arab Emirates, viewing the possibility of an Iran-allied

government in Yemen as an existential threat, began a campaign in 2015 to defeat the Houthis and reinstall a regime in line with their interests. The United States began supporting the Saudi coalition with intelligence, advisement, and military aid, but did not become directly involved in the fighting.[10] The conflict has now dragged on for over seven years and devastated the country both politically and economically. The people of Yemen have suffered catastrophe after catastrophe in a conflict that has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives and left millions in danger of famine. As of August 2022, a ceasefire has survived for several months, but the competition for control of Yemen's future continues, and the possibility of an end to the civil war remains far from certain.

Why Iran got Involved in the Yemeni Civil War

Iran, a fundamentalist Shi'ite country, and Saudi Arabia, which is Sunni and Wahhabist, are archrivals. One of Iran's goals in supporting the Houthi forces in Yemen is to establish a foothold on Saudi Arabia's southern border. Iran has followed an IW strategy there, because, according to Nader Uskowi, a former senior policy advisor to US Central Command, the lack of a shared border and efforts by the anti-Houthi coalition to blockade sea and air infiltration have prevented Iran from deploying its expeditionary force into Yemen.[11] According to Uskowi, this forced Qassem Soleimani, the QF commander at the time, to limit the campaign to a minimal deployment of forces for training and advising, along with the covert delivery of weapons and aid.

Former Canadian defense analyst Thomas Juneau contends that Iran's ambitions in Yemen were limited: a controlled investment in the Houthis that would aggravate Saudi Arabia.[12] Juneau posits that Iranian leaders believed significant intervention in Yemen would likely lead to conventional conflict between Iran and the Saudi-led coalition, and that this would be an unacceptable outcome. Alex Vatanka, a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute, points out that countering the possibility of regime change in Syria and ISIS's activities in Iraq in 2015 likely overextended Iran's expeditionary capabilities, and that winning in Yemen was low on the priority list for Iran's leadership in comparison.[13] I contend that the model the QF utilized in Yemen reflected a combination of these reasons; limited resources, blockades, and the possibility of escalation to traditional warfare were all likely factors in the minds of Soleimani and Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei. The reason, however, is not quite as important as what transpired as the war dragged on. The irregular war that the QF waged via the Houthis has eroded the Saudi-led coalition without garnering a significant direct response,

despite escalating attacks into Saudi territory. Recent events demonstrate that its innovative approach may be successful pending ongoing ceasefire negotiations in 2022.[14]

Quds Force Operations in the Yemeni Civil War (2014-2022)

The QF campaign in Yemen has been built around investing in the Houthi rebellion to maintain pressure on Saudi Arabia and gain influence in the event of a Houthi victory, while managing risk to avoid an escalation to conventional war with nations of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Iran's level of support to the Houthi rebellion is modest compared to what it gives to other non-state actors, but this is because it recognizes the consequences of escalation. The QF's activities are about gaining spoils during and post-conflict, such as access to ports, lines of communication, and an ally on the southern border of Saudi Arabia.[15] Iran was also initially limited in the support it could provide due to its inability to move personnel and equipment freely into Yemen as it had into Iraq and Syria.

Gulf of Aden coastline, Yemen

Iran does not share a border with Yemen, and the GCC coalition quickly closed air and sea access in early 2015 as the coalition sought to stop the QF's efforts to support the rebellion.[16] Because the expeditionary model the QF had utilized in Iraq and Syria was not an option, the QF shifted its approach to more covert training and financial and material support, including weapons, ammunition, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), and ballistic missiles.[17] This support increased over the years both in quantity and sophistication, based on the actions and inactions of the Saudi-led coalition.

To smuggle these items into Yemen, Iran has taken advantage of the 2,700 kilometer-long Yemeni coastline by disguising naval vessels as commercial or local vessels. The GCC's blockade efforts have proved largely ineffective over time due to several factors, including the long coastline and the difficulty of identifying suspect vessels in an immensely busy shipping lane. A 2015 UN

report concluded that Iran began sending arms to the Houthis in 2009, in defiance of a 2007 UN resolution forbidding Iran from shipping arms. The report cited six incidents, including the February 2011 seizure of an Iranian fishing vessel that was loaded with 900 Iranian anti-tank and anti-helicopter rockets.[18] By March 2012, US intelligence recognized the QF's widening outreach to the Houthis. QF operatives were delivering rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, and IEDs, among other weapons, primarily smuggled via small boats and freighters.[19]

As external entities sought to stop the flow of Iranian support to the Houthis, the delivery methods and types of ordinance changed. Ships disguised as commercial vessels began delivering increasingly destructive weapons.[20] Beginning sometime in 2016, coalition navies began finding long-range ballistic missiles hidden on vessels, and by 2017, the Houthis had Iranian Qasef-1 UAVs, which were primarily used to target coalition air-defense infrastructure.[21] The Houthis also began using a type of unmanned boat filled with explosives to attack coalition ships, including a Saudi frigate in January 2017, and have retaliated against Saudi strikes by launching attacks on the Saudi-Yemeni border and firing missiles into Saudi territory.[22]

Saudi Air Force General Turki Maliki

By January 2018, the Saudis had evidence, in the form of recovered ballistic missile pieces, that Iran was supplying the Houthis with missiles that could be launched into Saudi Arabia. The recovered pieces demonstrated the apparent lengths being taken to hide their origins: welded segments suggested that the missiles were being shipped in parts to avoid detection.[23] In a January 2018 interview with CNN, Saudi Air Force General Turki Maliki refused to delineate Saudi Arabia's "red line" for retaliation after the reported 88th ballistic missile was intercepted near the capital of Riyadh.[24] Facing no retaliatory targeting by the Saudis, the QF appeared to feel safe in enabling the Houthis to continue targeting Saudi soil and pushing the line of provocation.

In 2019, the Houthis, with an unknown level of guidance from Iran, claimed responsibility for more prominent attacks, including a strike on the Abha airport in southwestern Saudi Arabia in June 2019 that injured 26 people, and a drone-swarm attack on Saudi oil facilities in September 2019.[25] Again, the attacks brought no escalation from the Saudis or other coalition members, despite threats from the Saudi government and the Trump administration. Since early 2021, the tempo of drone and missile attacks against targets inside Saudi Arabia has increased, but the Saudi-led coalition's responses have not kept pace.[26] The covert delivery of material support for these attacks has allowed the QF and Iran to maintain plausible deniability, even as Houthi attacks increased in destructiveness and sophistication between 2015 and 2022.

Complementing the delivery of materials and finances to the Houthis, QF operatives have trained and advised the rebel forces. It is unclear when the QF began training Houthi rebels, but by 2014, open-source reporting suggested it was ongoing inside and outside of Yemen. According to an Iranian source for Reuters, the QF had a few hundred training personnel in Yemen, and about 100 Houthis had traveled to Qom, Iran, for training at that time.[27] By 2015, US intelligence had concluded that, although Iran's direct involvement in the civil war was limited, IRGC personnel were training and equipping Houthi fighters.[28] After Houthi forces captured Sana'a in 2014 and took control of the Yemeni Army's missile units, the QF provided technical help to extend the range of these systems up to 400 miles.[29] Training and technical assistance from QF operatives

appear to remain unimpeded, with the anti-Houthi coalition members focusing primarily on interdicting material and financial deliveries to the rebels.

The QF's training support and inventive methods for delivering equipment to Houthi rebels via intricate smuggling schemes were devastating to the Saudi campaign. When one route was blocked, the QF found another by consistently innovating. Most important, these methods prevented any nation from definitively laying blame at Iran's feet, thereby preventing any escalation against the Iranian homeland or its interests.

The Saudi Coalition's Reaction to Iran's Yemen Campaign

Due to its covert nature, the QF's campaign in Yemen has not resulted in any significant reaction from Saudi Arabia, its allies, or the Iranian population. During the initial phases of the coalition's intervention, Yemeni airspace was declared restricted and the coast was blockaded. In April 2015, Iran sent naval vessels to challenge the blockade, but ultimately reversed course when challenged by the US Navy. Iran next tested the air restrictions by sending civilian Mahan Air airplanes to the Sana'a airport under the guise of providing humanitarian aid; the Saudis responded by bombing the airport's runways.[30] The covert smuggling routes via sea and land that the QF developed, however, were harder for the Saudi-led alliance to find, fix, and finish.

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud

When the Saudi coalition's strategy of severing major lines of support to the Houthis proved unsuccessful, it escalated its air campaign in an effort to bomb the Houthis into submission. Several observers have suggested that Saudi Arabia's King Salman and his son Mohammed bin Salman, the current Crown Prince, intended to send a message about Iranian influence by subduing the rebellion in several months.[31] In the minds of Saudi leaders, the Houthi rebellion represented a potentially vital security threat to Saudi Arabia that required an exceptionally forceful response. The result on the ground, however, was only stalemate, and the air campaign has hurt the coalition in international public opinion because it has appeared to be indiscriminately harming civilians. Iran's calculus at first

Houthis protest against airstrikes by Saudi-led coalition.

likely included risk mitigation against a Saudi response, and Tehran may also have wanted to deploy greater forces and support than it ultimately was able to send. Time has shown that the covert nature of the campaign has kept the QF and Iran from receiving significant blowback.

As the war continued, the QF increased the sophistication of the weaponry it delivered to the Houthis, while taking care to disguise the materiel's Iranian origin. A 2020 US congressional report on Yemen, however, cited several pieces of evidence from ship seizures and debris analysis over the past several years that linked weapons used by the Houthis to Iran.[32] Despite numerous findings by UN and US experts that strongly indicate Iranian involvement in the civil war, none of the evidence is clearly marked "Iran," nor have any Iranian operatives been captured alongside these materials to provide definitive proof.[33] Without a "smoking gun," no nations or organizations such as the UN have been able to lay definitive blame for the escalation of war at Iran's feet. Similar to the CIA's successful operation that supplied the Afghan mujahideen with weaponry during the Soviet-Afghan War, masking where the materiel came from and who delivered it allows the culprit to maintain plausible deniability. In the absence of proof of culpability, the affected nation is less likely to engage its foe directly, because it cannot justify the escalation towards traditional war to the international community. Such a move risks sanctions, isolation, and removal from certain organizations vital to the country's economic and political interests.

The US military has provided support to the Saudi coalition, but the political issues surrounding the civil war and the presence of other threats to the United States have limited US involvement, in particular against the QF. The Saudis' handling of the war has been politically distasteful, given the humanitarian crisis devastating the Yemeni people and the documentation of indiscriminate air operations by the coalition. From the start of the conflict, the US military has provided intelligence and naval support to the coalition to locate and interdict shipments to the Houthis,

but in 2018, the US Air Force stopped refueling coalition combat planes amid criticism of air strikes on civilians.[34] The Houthis do not present any realistic threat to US security.

By late 2017, the United States had begun sending teams of Army Special Forces to Saudi Arabia to train Saudi soldiers and assist with locating and targeting Houthi ballistic missiles. The mission was focused on training, border defense, and intelligence, and steps appeared to have been taken to keep it apart from any offensive operations.[35] There is no open-source evidence that US Special Forces teams accompanied Saudis on counterinsurgency operations. The United States did attempt to target a QF general in Yemen, Abdul Reza Shahlai, on the same day that Qassem Soleimani was killed in Iraq, but the operation appeared to be more about disrupting and signaling to the IRGC following increasing tensions in Iraq than in retaliation for operations inside Yemen.[36] The QF's support to the Houthis does garner some attention in US national security circles, but the limited nature of US operations against the Houthis demonstrates that the Yemeni war is a secondary or tertiary concern.

What is Success in Yemen?

Since 2019, there has been an increase in friction among the Saudis, Emiratis, and other members of the coalition stemming from a lack of resolve and unity of effort.[37] These issues have left several parties looking for a way out. In May 2017, before it withdrew from military action in 2019, the UAE created the Southern Transitional Council (STC), which included several separatist non-state actors it supported in southern Yemen. This conglomeration of militant groups aligned with the UAE's interests has fought the Houthis and competed for influence in negotiations, giving both the UAE and the STC a say in the formation of any future Yemeni government, while weakening the position of Yemen's existing Saudi-backed government.[38] This move further divided the Saudi-led coalition and undermined its campaign against the Houthi rebels. In response to Houthi

gains around the city of Marib, the UAE did re-enter the fighting in mid-2021 with the deployment of its Giants Brigade militia. The militia's operations have helped prevent the Houthis from taking the city, but the Houthis responded by unleashing their arsenal of drones and missiles at targets in the UAE.[39] Given the Emirati military's inability to effectively counter the attacks, this escalation proved a significant problem for the UAE government. Tourism accounts for over 12 percent of the UAE's gross domestic product, a fact that is especially significant in 2022 as the country looks to recover from pandemic losses.[40] The Emirati leadership likely miscalculated the Houthis' capacity for a violent response to the UAE's return to a more direct role in the Yemeni conflict. Like its Saudi allies, the UAE needs a way out of the war if it hopes to return to post-pandemic norms and rebuild the losses to its economy.

Eighty percent of Yemen's population now relies on humanitarian aid; there is widespread famine, and Saudi military operations continue to draw criticism on the world stage for exacerbating the human toll.[41] The COVID-19 crisis offered the Saudis an opportunity to withdraw under the guise of humanitarianism, but Saudi leaders did not use the excuse to cut their losses.[42] Until April 2022, the Saudis were unable to maintain any ceasefire; the Houthis continued to launch attacks into Saudi territory while the Saudis' only response was to continue their politically damaging air strikes.

In February 2021, in a major blow to the Saudis, US President Joe Biden announced an end to US support for offensive operations in Yemen. After the announcement, several current and former US officials were quoted as saying that the Biden administration needed to try to make up for the guilt it felt about prior administrations' support for the conflict.[43] The Saudis' situation has been made worse by US intelligence reports that openly place blame for the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi leadership's feet, and by US officials' calls for an immediate termination of the blockade of Yemen's coast, which they blame for preventing humanitarian relief from reaching Yemeni civilians.[44]

Not only did Saudi Arabia's biggest supporter, the US government, withdraw from involvement in the conflict, but the coalition with which Saudi Arabia expected to end the war in six weeks back in 2015 is more fractured than ever. While UAE-backed groups are working to ensure that the UAE's security objectives are being met in the south, the Saudis and Omanis vie for influence over tribes in east Yemen with money and military aid. In fact, one Brookings Institution article summarized the state of Yemen in 2021 as being split into seven separate Yemens, based on geography and ideological boundaries.[45]

Saudi Arabia needs a way out of a conflict it went into based on misjudgments. The rest of the coalition members are also looking for a way to leave. After seven years of fighting, the Houthis appear to have the upper hand, thanks in many ways to the support of Iran and its Quds Force. A source from the March 2021 round of peace talks referred to the state of affairs for the Saudis as "a case study on how to end a war you didn't win."[46] In 2022, there is little evidence that the status has changed. A Yemen expert with the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Elana DeLozier, noted that "the Saudis want to end the war—in part because of the damage it has caused to US-Saudi relations," and that "they have the political will, they just can't figure out exactly how to get out."[47] When the drawdown

Flag of the Quds Force

does occur, Iran will be in a better position to assert influence over the Houthis and begin reaping more benefits from its IW campaign in Yemen.

Innovation in IW Practice and Lessons Learned

A properly executed IW strategy appears, in 2022, to have mostly achieved Iran's strategic intent in Yemen. I contend that its intent aligns with what was posited by Thomas Juneau: to aggravate and pressure an adversary through irregular means that do not risk escalation to traditional war.[48] This finding is similar to that of a Congressional Research Service Report, which asserts that Iran's intent is to project power and spoil Saudi efforts to ensure a stable and ideologically aligned government in Yemen.[49] In the

Mujahideen in Kunar, Afghanistan, 1987

Houthis, Iran found an ideologically aligned proxy with which it could punish its archrival and the rival's allies. Iran could not do so through diplomatic or economic mechanisms, and traditional military action would have entailed an unacceptable cost. As discussed at the beginning of the case study, the exact reasoning for the QF's approach in Yemen remains debatable due to the lack of access to IRGC documentation or official statements. Whatever the exact reasons, however, a covert strategy appears to have been the best way for Iran to meet its strategic intent. Based on circumstances in 2022, it appears that Iran's intent has nearly been met, given that the Saudis and other coalition members have been looking for a way out of the war since 2020.[50]

The Yemen case study demonstrates that a nation-state can compete with its peer adversaries using an IW strategy that is executed with careful attention to risk management and the maintenance of plausible deniability. While the competition between Iran and the Saudi coalition is not between nuclear powers, the lessons provided by the QF's innovative tactics do suggest methods for violent competition that minimize the possibility of escalation between relatively peer militaries. Iran's actions were never going to result in a nuclear exchange, but they could have led to the deployment of conventional forces and ballistic missile exchanges into both countries' sovereign territory. Iran could also have faced military retaliation by US and other coalition nations.

US military doctrine concerning the intent of different forms of warfare states that "an enemy using irregular methods will typically endeavor to wage protracted conflicts in an attempt to exhaust the will of their opponent and its population."[51] The QF has effectively done this in Yemen without triggering military retaliation from the Saudis or any of their allies. The QF used several principal methods that were innovative when compared to previous IW campaigns conducted by Iran, or other revisionist states such as Russia, against near-peer militaries. These methods include inventive ways of delivering materiel to the conflict zone; minimizing potential casualties

among its personnel in the conflict zone; and gradually escalating pressure to test an adversary's red lines. The QF has also been patient. It has taken seven years to get to the current stalemate in Yemen. One must not try to rush to victory in irregular warfare; this is a war of small cuts, not the swing of a sword.

The QF delivered personnel and materiel across a border it did not share, primarily by smuggling and taking advantage of the extensive Yemeni coastline. The CIA did something similar in Afghanistan in support of the mujahideen during the Soviet-Afghan War of the 1980s, but Iranian operatives innovated further. Weapons and other hardware were delivered in pieces that were hidden in cargo and assembled at their destinations. The QF has been able to get hundreds of ballistic missiles through coalition nets via this method. QF advisers assisted in the assembly of clandestine aerial and waterborne craft in Yemen that were used to sabotage coalition interdiction craft and air defense systems. The QF's delivery methods were truly unique and proved vital for maintaining Tehran's plausible deniability.

The QF deployed operatives to Yemen, but has managed their activities so as to not present targets or appear overtly engaged in combat operations. The US-orchestrated train-and-equip program for Syrian militias fighting against ISIS in Syria demonstrated the failures of using proxies without putting advisors on the ground with them. The inability of US SOF to maintain positive communications with, advise, and verify the activities of the proxy militias there nearly led to the dissolution of the entire campaign in late 2015.[52] Russia's and Iran's deployment of conventional forces in the Syrian war demonstrated the negative impact of combat casualties on the international stage and among the home population. Iran's casualties and its economic expenditures in the Syrian Civil War, which could not be completely hidden from public view, contributed to extensive protests across Iran in November 2019. In Yemen, by contrast, the lack of open-source reporting on Iranian casualties, despite data showing

Iranian operatives have been active there, demonstrates that their use is being more carefully managed: they provide technical and tactical assistance, verify proxy activities, and provide ground-level intelligence without being overtly engaged in the fighting.

IW operations and campaigns will occasionally result in overt retaliation when the opponent decides the activities have reached the point of being unacceptable. The case of Soleimani's targeted killing in Iraq in 2020, the US response to Russian irregular forces' aggression towards US SOF in Syria in 2018, and the Israeli response to Iran's launch of drones from Syria into Israeli territory in 2018 all demonstrate the potential consequences for exceeding an adversary's level of tolerance.[53] In all three events, one party exceeded an opponent's threshold of violence and the opponent responded in exceptional fashion. In contrast, Houthi actions taken with QF support have not brought significant retaliation by the Saudis; the only response has been more of the indiscriminate air attacks that further erode support for the war. Due to this careful management of escalation over a lengthy time and Iran's ability to disavow involvement, the QF has avoided crossing the coalition's red lines. This approach takes time, but it demonstrates the viability of a protracted approach to slowly wearing down an opponent via deniable, gradually escalating violence.

Concluding Thoughts

IW provides a solution for violent and non-violent competition with hostile states, whether they be near-peers or asymmetric. The 2018 NDS Problem Statement concerning IW recognizes that

> IW is a persistent and enduring operational reality employed by non-state actors and increasingly by state actors in competition with the United States. Past U.S. approaches to IW have been cyclical and neglected the fact that IW—in addition to nuclear and conventional deterrence—can proactively shape conditions to the United States' advantage in great power competition.[54]

Although the Yemen case does not represent competing nuclear powers, over 40 years of conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union after the Soviets became a nuclear power demonstrates that nuclear use is only likely to be considered when sovereign territory and civilian lives are put at risk. Nation-states will accept economic and military losses in foreign lands so long as the activities of an adversary maintain plausible deniability and avoid escalation past an acknowledged threshold.

There are lessons to be learned from Iran's success in Yemen as the DoD innovates for the future of IW. The ongoing war in Ukraine and diplomatic maneuvering with China for alliances and control in the Pacific are two primary areas of concern. Iran has shown no signs of stopping its support to non-state actors across the Middle East as it seeks to expand its regional influence. The DoD must be prepared to use IW against adversaries' interests in these areas in a manner similar to what the QF has been able to do in Yemen. Developing inventive methods for delivery of support, managing the risks of SOF operatives deployed inside the conflict theater, and escalating in a manner that avoids surpassing thresholds for retaliation are innovative ways to conduct IW. The US military has traditionally ignored these methods, favoring the funneling of arms and money to proxy forces without SOF boots on the ground to provide oversight. This occurred during the first year of the war against ISIS in Syria and in the Iran-Contra affair of the 1980s.[55] In other cases, the US military seems inclined to interject conventional forces into a conflict and turn it into a conventional war of maneuver and attrition. This happened in both Vietnam and Afghanistan before either conflict warranted such an escalation. By contrast, Iran kept the Yemen Civil War to one mainly of proxies. Through protraction and managed escalation, popular and political support among the Saudi coalition partners has faltered to a point where the Houthis appear to have the advantage and may determine the future of Yemen.

These IW techniques do not represent an all-inclusive strategy, but serve to complement nuclear and conventional military power in deterrence and coercion. Irregular warfare, properly executed, provides decision makers with a relatively low-cost and low-risk method for competing with adversaries. The Yemeni Civil War shows that one nation can further its regional objectives in a violent manner without risking traditional warfare. What is required is some unconventional thinking, and such lessons can be learned from adversaries who have been practicing IW for quite some time. Leaders in the future of strategic planning should take note.

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NOTES

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THE FOG

Part Two: Occam's Razor

LCDR Nikolaj Lindberg,
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In Part One: Scimitar of the Prophet (*CTX* 12, no. 2 [Summer 2022]), French Defence Minister Florence Parly and her staff are jolted into crisis response when a radical Islamist group carries out a suicide bomb attack on a French outpost in Mali, releasing a previously unknown and extraordinarily lethal chemical agent. With a deadline of only one week before more attacks are threatened, the Ministry scrambles to determine the nature of the agent and track down the perpetrators. Where the trail leads is more alarming than anything they had expected.

Ministry of Defence, Paris [morning, 15 October]

I stare out of my office window. The clouds and rain in Paris seem relentless. It has been overcast for a week now and the deluge this afternoon is supposedly the heaviest Paris has experienced since 1880. I know it makes no sense, but I cannot escape the thought that somehow all of this, even the weather, is connected. It feels unnatural. My eyes hurt, and I can feel my pulse beating in them. I take a deep breath. "It is lack of sleep, Florence, nothing more," I tell myself. The ultimatum expired yesterday morning. The seven days have now come and gone, and ISWAP have failed to deliver on their threats.

Frustratingly, the intelligence community is feeding us conflicting messages about the new weapon. For all their informants and spies, they have found little in the way of proof of its provenance. For all the hundreds of analyzed reports, tapping of communications, and scrutinizing of satellite imagery, the experts have ended up pointing in two different directions. DRM sees the situation as a confirmation of its initial assessment. Its analysts believe there are indications that ISWAP have not been successful in producing vast quantities of the sulfur-mustard agent and likely are having difficulties storing it. Moreover, DRM does not agree with DGSE's suspicions of direct Chinese involvement; in its assessment, the relatively ineffective approach of using a suicide bomber as the method of release attests to this. A collaboration with the Chinese state would have meant that rockets, artillery, or even drones would have been used for the attack. Questioning of captured ISWAP fighters has yielded only hearsay and

Cast of Characters

Captain Sebastian Bernard
Minister Parly's Chief of Staff

Bernard Émié
Director of DGSE

General Jean-François Ferlet
Director of DRM

Admiral Laurent Isnard
Chief of SOCOM

General François Lecointre
Chief of the Defence Staff

Emmanuel Macron
President of France

Florence Parly
Minister of Defence

List of Abbreviations Used in the Story

AFSOC
Air Force Special Operations Command

BRGE
Brigade de Renseignement

CBRN
Chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear

CCP
Chinese Communist Party

CNOOC
China National Offshore Oil Company

COM FST
Commandement des Forces Spéciales Terre

DGSE
Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure

DGSI
Direction Générale de la Sécurité Intérieure

DRM
Direction du Renseignement Militaire

ISWAP
Islamic State West Africa Province

JCPOA
Joint comprehensive plan of action

MINUSMA
Mission Multidimensionnelle Intégrée des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation au Mali

QRF
Quick reaction force

UNIMAID
University of Maiduguri

WMD
Weapons of mass destruction

DRM's analysis is in stark contrast to the report DGSE has just given me. It is terrifying reading.

intangible hints at something big going on within the organization. DRM agents have not found a single enemy officer with knowledge of a larger logistical operation to transport the agent to other nations, nor anyone who knows of an artillery, missile, or drone program to develop means of delivery. DRM deems the enemy to have gone all-in on a bluff that we have now called. It believes that the use of the sulfur-mustard agent is simply an attempt by ISWAP to level the playing field against the relentless onslaught of Operation Barkhane and coerce their enemies to halt ongoing military operations against them. If that is the case, it is a short-sighted solution. Operation Barkhane had reduced its operations, but within days it will be fully operational once again.

DRM's analysis is in stark contrast to the report DGSE has just given me. It is terrifying reading. DGSE personnel have jumped headfirst down the rabbit hole and followed every lead that could confirm their suspicions. They have attempted to track hundreds of misplaced shipping containers with chemical compounds from Lagos, Cotonou, and Accra, only to lose track of them in the depths of the Malian Desert or the Niger Delta. They have found reports from across the Sahel of stolen hazmat suits, laboratory apparatuses, and dual-use medical equipment—usable in the production of chemical weapons—that have disappeared from hospitals, clinics, and universities, never to be seen again. They have found disconcerting reports of ridiculously lucrative smuggling operations to bring unmarked crates and boxes to the middle of nowhere or into the hands of known ISWAP sympathizers, with no questions asked. They have followed trails of money from middlemen in Egypt and Saudi Arabia into offshore accounts affiliated with Chinese front companies in Mali and Nigeria. They have even found an informant ready to swear that he has heard commanders refer to Asians helping them "temper the steel of the Scimitar of the Prophet." What both reports are sorely missing are actionable targets. There are several mentions of villages in the ISWAP-controlled areas in Mali and Niger, and even references to a Tuareg village

in the southern Algerian desert, but nothing concrete enough to justify direct action.

DGSE will not rule out that preparations for a large-scale attack are underway and that it could be on European soil. It sends a shiver down my spine. I think of my son, Cyril. It could be him and his friends, attacked on the streets. It could be anyone. I imagine the horror of what an attack in Paris with that sulfur-mustard agent would look like. The Bataclan would become a footnote in history in comparison.[1] If the terrorists were to follow Aum Shinrikyo's example and release it in the subway, thousands of people would die under horrendous circumstances. In my mind's eye, I see the explosions shake the underground stations. I see glimpses of people fighting to escape the gas. A screaming horde of drowning, desperate civilians, crawling over one another with blood gushing from their mouths, black tears streaming down their faces, and blisters swelling across their bodies. It cannot happen.

There is a smart rap on the door, the calling card of Captain Bernard. "Come in," I say, and the door opens. He crosses the office in four strides and stands to attention.

"We are ready for you, Madame Minister," he says, forcing a smile.

I appreciate the gesture. Everyone is feeling the pressure. "Thank you, Sebastian," I reply and stand up. "How are you?" I ask as I move from behind the desk.

The smile reaches his eyes and becomes genuine. "Thank you, Madame Minister, not too bad at all. I managed to sleep in my own bed last night and ate breakfast with Colette and Noelle this morning. I can't complain."

"Good," I answer, smiling in return. "I am glad to hear it." I find the thought of him eating breakfast with his wife and baby girl comforting. It is a soothing thought that, all across France, people are still going about their business in the face of this evil. Life will not so easily be stopped.

"Shall we?" he asks.

We leave the office together and walk down the hall for this morning's decision briefing. Over the past week, we have been pushing four lines of operations in preparation for another attack. All law-enforcement units in the country were put on highest alert, while DGSI has been tasked to follow every conceivable lead to find indications of domestic preparations for an attack. In Mali, all operations have ceased except for HUMINT and intelligence

French armored vehicle burning, Gao, Mali, 2018

people scattered on the ground with bleeding mouths and eyes and horrible, oozing blisters.

Ministry of Defence [morning, 16 October]

This briefing room is full of charts and pictures. Headshots of what I can only assume to be ISWAP leaders are plotted into surprisingly comprehensive organizational diagrams. Screens with maps of Mali and the broader Sahel region line the wall. There is something slightly more self-assured about both Director Émié and General Ferlet this morning. Yesterday's distraught behavior has been replaced by a more optimistic demeanor. I can only hope they have good news for me.

We are alone, the three of us. The two heads of intelligence have requested a meeting without analysts or staff officers. I silently pray that this is not going to turn into a discussion or another series of mutual accusations. I need facts. I need intelligence and information. And I needed them a week ago. The past twenty-four hours have been insane. The ISWAP attack hit three locations at once. They attempted to hit Operation Barkhane's Regional Operations Base in Gao but failed. A drone spotted a truck moving towards the base from more than two kilometers away. Warning shots were fired and as the truck failed to slow down, perimeter defense subsequently destroyed it. The attack was poorly executed. No injured or dead other than the

collection. Every French unit has reviewed its CBRN equipment and procedures, and every frontline unit has received full CBRN warfare equipment. We have been in direct contact with the governments of Mali, Niger, Nigeria, and Burkina Faso to reassure them that France is unwavering in her support for their struggles against ISWAP and that we will not sit idle in the face of these new threats. And lastly, we have been working to coordinate military and intelligence efforts with our partners in the US, UK, and Germany. All these lines have required a series of decisions on my part, and every briefing from the various security branches has presented me with a series of courses of action with which to continue. To his credit, General Lecointre is an expert in leading his chiefs of staff. The decisions to be made are sanitized of unnecessary clutter, the pros and cons made clear, and the next objectives on the lines of operation distinctly emphasized. He is accustomed to working with the political level and knows how to cut to the chase.

> **I need facts.** I need intelligence and information. And I needed them a week ago.

We turn the corner and walk the last few meters to the briefing room. The door opens to a scene of complete disarray. Everyone is on their feet, staring at the television screens. General Lecointre is the only one with enough presence of mind to notice my arrival. He turns towards me. He has a look on his face like he has been struck. I stare at the nearest screen. It is a TV5 Monde Live broadcast. The pictures are unmistakably from Africa but are as confusing as they are horrifying. The audio is distorted by desperate and hardly comprehensible yelling and wailing screams. The only discernable images are of scores of dead

attackers. CBRN teams were on site within the hour and confirmed a severe contamination of the area. ISWAP also hit a Senegalese MINUSMA base in eastern Mali. Two suicide bombers walked up to the base and detonated their belts. Despite being bold as brass, the two bombers appeared to have lost their nerve before getting all the way into the compound. The walls took the brunt of the explosion and minimized the spread of the sulfur-mustard agent. Miraculously, given the potential for disaster, only nine peacekeepers were killed in the attack and a further six injured, though the base was subsequently abandoned.

But in Bamako, a suicide bomber detonated a truck laden with gas and explosives in a busy marketplace, not far from the Cité du Niger, the city's diplomatic neighborhood. The sulfur-mustard agent was vaulted upwards and turned into

The Malian Desert

a lethal aerosol cloud that spread inland with a breeze from the Niger River. It rolled down several adjoining streets, slaying like a biblical plague as it moved and causing a terrible stampede of desperate civilians. In less than 20 minutes, it killed more than 1,400 people and sickened three times as many, including the TV5 Monde crew who were on site. Even as their cameraman began to succumb to the gas, they broadcast scenes of the aftermath to the world, including all of us in that briefing room.

Completely incapable of handling a mass casualty event of such proportions, the local authorities and hospitals reacted slowly. Though rudimentary treatment facilities were erected on the outskirts of town and the contaminated area evacuated and cordoned off, the death toll soon rose to 1,600. This morning, the reports claimed a total of more than 1,900 dead from that single attack. This is an event that will be seared into the memory of the world—an African 9/11—and I cannot escape the feeling that we are at fault. We should have found those devils before this happened. France is better than this, and the two gentlemen in front of me know it. President Macron took the stage only a few hours after the attack and spoke like a true statesman. Composed, but visibly moved by the indiscriminate carnage, he promised not only solidarity with and help to the Malian people, but also to hunt down those responsible and bring them to justice by any means necessary. He publicly declared three days of mourning in France and encouraged the world to remember and assist Mali in her time of need. An hour after his address, he released a statement to denounce religious violence and further the work for peace and coexistence, signed by himself and religious leaders from the Catholic and Protestant Churches, the

French Jewish community, and the French Council of the Muslim Faith.

The entire world has reacted to the attack with abhorrence. From across all continents, declarations of sympathy have been flowing into Mali. In a public address from Brussels, Secretary General Stoltenberg made the defeat of ISWAP one of NATO's primary objectives. In a tactlessly direct fashion, President Putin promised an increase of Russian military action in Syria to grind the last strongholds of ISIS to dust. President Xi declared that China will not only send military advisors to the Malian Army, but also send CBRN teams to countries across the Sahel to help defend against this new terrorist threat. President Trump was comparatively slow to react, and gave a speech that was as cryptic as it was worrisome. In a droning voice, he promised incomparable retaliation and complete annihilation of those who had perpetrated this heinous act, before somehow managing to change direction. He accused the previous administration of not taking proliferation issues seriously enough, went on to criticize the JCPOA, and then left the room without taking questions. The African Union not only declared sympathy with Mali, but also called for a summit to discuss how to protect the Sahel from the scourge of Islamic terrorism. All these declarations are, at least, a step in the right direction.

Soon after the attacks, ISWAP released a pre-recorded message claiming responsibility. They threatened further attacks soon, but this time without giving deadlines. I am incapable of comprehending what they hope to achieve. In their heavy-handedness, ISWAP have shown the world what monsters they actually are and have alienated the few that still supported them. Only ISIS and a splinter group

of al-Qaeda have expressed sympathy for the act, calling for the Scimitar of the Prophet to rain death on the *kuffar* across the globe. At this hour, the world is appalled by their actions and is waiting for a response. France must be the first to move.

"We believe that we have good news for you, Madame Minister," Director Émié begins. "Our allies in the CIA have approached us with intelligence from a source in Niger. It is a single source, but it looks promising."

"Good," I answer. "Don't keep me waiting. We could certainly do with a breakthrough."

General Ferlet stands and points to a mugshot of an African male in his late teens or early twenties. "Madame Minister, meet Hassem Abdullahi, a former ISWAP mid-level commander. He claims to have been hoodwinked into the organization. He is from Maiduguri in Borno Province, Nigeria.[2] He is a former student of UNIMAID, the University of Maiduguri, where he studied chemical engineering. He claims to be a devout and non-radical Muslim, but was recruited into a local ISWAP-friendly mosque in 2016, while attending the well-known Bama Road Mosque. Patrons of the radical mosque lent him money for his studies. When he was unable to repay them, the patrons required him to engage in active support of the insurgent organization. He claims that before long, he was in over his head, became estranged from friends and family, and gave up on his studies at the university. He kept operating within ISWAP, but finally fled the organization after being part of a failed attack on a Niger Army base some seven days ago. With Nigerien soldiers on his heels, he took a desperate chance, killed one of his comrades, and surrendered. After interrogation, the Nigerien Army handed him over to US Army Special Forces five days ago, where he has been interrogated thoroughly ever since."

"Five days?" I exclaim. "Five days?!" General Ferlet's confident expression vanishes immediately. "You mean to say this man was in CIA custody three days before the Bamako attack, and the United States didn't deem it important enough to share the intel they gathered from him before now?!?"

"Madame Minister," General Ferlet quickly continues, "the CIA wasn't sure his intelligence was genuine and has spent this time confirming elements of it. Moreover, like ourselves, the CIA did not believe the threat of a large-scale attack to be credible."

For a second, Director Émié looks like he is about to interject, but I silence him with a raised finger and a look that could kill. Wisely, he stays quiet. "Well, we all now

"You mean to say this man was in CIA custody three days before the Bamako attack, and the United States didn't deem it important enough to share the intel they gathered from him before now?!?"

know how precise that estimate turned out to be," I answer the general, seething with barely contained fury.

"I understand your anger, Madame Minister," General Ferlet answers in a defensive tone. "But it would likely have made no difference at all if they had contacted us sooner. This man has no knowledge of any concrete plans of attack or the enemy's lines of operations. He is a mid-level commander, equivalent to a sergeant. He has been responsible for various tactical missions, like extortion of locals, ambushes of enemy convoys, and assassinations of critics. Interestingly, however, he was also charged with providing security for some of ISWAP's own logistics. He and his men have been responsible for protecting a series of convoys transporting heavy equipment from various pickup locations to a small village in the eastern Malian desert. What is particularly interesting is the fact that this man has a relevant education. He was able to identify that several of these transports contained laboratory equipment and construction materials. Some of the equipment he saw is potentially dual-use. When he realized what his organization was attempting to do, he decided that ISWAP's intentions had become so immoral or downright evil that he could no longer stomach them. He decided to leave the organization and seized the opportunity when it presented itself. The intelligence he is handing us is exactly what we have been hoping for. This man is presumed dead by his own organization, and he quite possibly knows the location of ISWAP's chemical weapons production facility."

The Hexagone Balard, Paris

Ministry of Defence [evening, 18 October]

"We are ready for you, Madame Minister." I nod, get up, and follow Capt. Bernard out the door. We walk in silence to the briefing room. If there is one thing I have always respected the military for above all else, it is their ability to plan and execute complicated operations at incredible speed. It is a mere twenty-six hours since President Macron authorized direct action against the expected chemical weapons facility and COM FST is already set to strike. There are only seven other soldiers present: General Lecointre, SOCOM Chief Admiral Isnard, and a handful of technicians. They stand as I enter.

Admiral Isnard welcomes me. I shake hands with everyone present. "Madame Minister," the admiral says, "the men are assembled and ready. The tactical orders are given. The connection is secure, and the floor is yours."

I thank the admiral and ascend the tiny podium they have set up for me. A surprisingly sharp picture is projected onto the facing wall, where more than fifty Special Forces operators are staring back at me from Barkhane's Regional Operations Base in Mali. They are seated in neat rows in what looks to be an operations room whose walls are lined with timelines, pictures of suspected militants, operations charts, satellite photos, and maps. They are hard-looking men, and they are watching me expectantly. I take a deep breath.

"Gentlemen, France thanks you for your service. The President thanks you for your service. I do as well. The mission you are about to undertake is undoubtedly a dangerous and complicated one. The risks we are asking you to take upon yourselves are not lost on any of us here in Paris. It is

Militants on the Mali-Niger border

specifically because of the nature of this mission that you have been tasked with this job. You are the best France has to offer; you are among the best in the world, and you are, for what you are about to do, already heroes. The horrible attack that hit Bamako three days ago has left us all in profound shock and sorrow. It was an unspeakable act of terror that no one would have believed possible just a month ago. Like the events that unfolded on September 11, 2001, it has changed everything. A weapon of mass destruction was brought to bear on defenseless civilians.

It cannot go unanswered. It must be countered, even if it cannot be reversed. The terrorists must be stopped. France has taken upon herself the burden of ridding the world of the Islamic State West Africa Province. We have taken upon ourselves the task of uprooting this evil. It is of paramount importance that it is we who act. It is paramount that *we* eliminate this disease. You fine men are the fire that will purge this plague. Every asset France and her allies have is now at your disposal. Though I will not be quoted on this, I will allow myself to be blunt with you. I expect you to hit them hard! I expect you to put them down! Destroy their operation once and for all! Bring us the scientists who created this weapon and bring us every shred of evidence you can find. Make no mistake, gentlemen. The world is watching, and those few malicious individuals who still align themselves with this ideology must be thoroughly dissuaded." Smiles are spreading among the operators. I can sense their eagerness. "I realize that once again the many are asking much of the few. I want you to know there is no fighting force in the world I should sooner hand this great responsibility to. From this moment on, the fate of us all is in your hands. From the bottom of my heart, I thank you!"

I step down and nod to Admiral Isnard, who takes the stand. He addresses his men in a cordial fashion, even greeting a few individuals by name. He keeps his speech short, finishing with the words: "Men, you hereby have the green light."

I look at General Lecointre. He has a weary smile on his face as we leave the briefing room together. "This is it, Madame Minister," he says. "*Alea jacta est*."

The die is cast.

Defence Ministry [nighttime, 20-21 October]

It is the middle of the night, but the OPS room is buzzing. Everyone is here. President Macron and I are seated in front of three massive screens. General Lecointre, General Ferlet, Admiral Isnard, Director Émié, and a score of staff officers from all other branches are either seated next to

us or are hard at work coordinating the imminent attack. Four US AFSOC liaison officers are coordinating additional US assets on call. A US U2 spy plane is circling the area at an unbelievable 70,000 feet, feeding us a thermal

> **General Lecointre, General Ferlet, Admiral Isnard, Director Émié,** and a score of staff officers from all other branches are either seated next to us or are hard at work coordinating the imminent attack.

and night-vision image of the area in astounding resolution. Two Tigre attack helicopters from four Regiment d'Helicopters des Forces Speciales have just checked in. They are in a holding position some 30 kilometers from the target, ready be on station within ten minutes upon the Ground Force Commander's request. Farther out, a US AC-130 Spectre gunship is loitering, ready to add its terrible firepower to the fight if needed.

The reinforced platoon from COM FST spent the first night infiltrating on foot. To take the enemy by surprise and prevent them from destroying evidence or killing possible hostages, the men have opted not to use a HELO INFIL or to land directly on target. Instead, they conducted a decoy operation and attacked an ISWAP-controlled area two days ago, and then proceeded to stage a post-operation EXFIL to throw off any suspicions. They have walked more than fifty kilometers to the positions they now occupy, where they have effectively boxed in the village. With the area under control, they remain undetected. I have hardly been able to sleep for the past two days from a combination of anxiety and expectation. Part of me can't wait for this to commence, simply so it can be over with. The village, if it can even be called a village, is a group of buildings consisting of one larger compound and six smaller houses close to a hard-packed dirt road. The informant has identified the compound south of the road as the suspected fabrication facility. It is to this place he claims to have led the transports he oversaw. The rest of the houses belong to local farmers. The area surrounding the village is open terrain with very little cover apart from random bushes and the occasional tree. Satellite imagery has confirmed steady vehicular traffic to and from the compound, and the COM FST has verified that there is

a rotation of armed guards protecting the entrance and circling the village at semi-regular intervals.

The battle-captain approaches the president. "Monsieur President, all units are green light. Any objections at this time?"

"No, Major," he answers without hesitation. "You are clear to proceed."

The battle-captain nods and returns to his station. Within seconds, the COM FST men are in motion. The U2's thermal image reveals their figures in stark white against the dark background. They close on the village with remarkable speed and slow to a creeping pace as they reach the rear of the compound. Slowly now, they clear the corners and divide into two groups moving in separate

is, it is vaporized in a flare of gunfire. "Squirter," one of the AFSOC liaison officers says. "There must have been an underground exit." There is a sudden cacophonous chatter of communication in the background. The battle-captain approaches. "We have cleared the top of the compound and found a large, functional elevator and a staircase to a lower level. Fifteen enemy combatants are killed so far. COM FST report no injured or wounded."

President Macron nods with a smile but says nothing. An elevator in a remote Malian compound? Butterflies tingle in my stomach. This has got to be it. More than thirty agonizing minutes pass. Scattered reports reach us of sustained firefights in the depths of the building. A grainy helmet-camera feed flickers on and off with several minutes delay, giving us fractured images of what appears to be a

> **I was not joking,"** I continue. "I want you to explain this to me. I want you to speak the words out loud. I want you to explain it and feel how unhinged it is to say this."

directions. They close on the patrolling guards and the front of the compound simultaneously. A second later they strike, the thermal image blinking with their gunfire. "Shots fired," the battle-captain says, calmly. The guards collapse. The two groups quickly link up, break open the gate, and slowly move inwards through the courtyard. A door appears to open suddenly. The motion causes the lead soldier to fire again. A man falls headlong out the door. Several more of the assaulters open fire, though I cannot tell what they are shooting at. The train of men pushes aggressively forward. "Contact, wait, out," the battle-captain says. Both the president and I lean forward. My palms are sweaty. The majority of the men charge forward into the building and disappear from view. A handful of them clear the rest of the courtyard and take up defensive positions.

Minutes pass with no communications. The two Tigre helicopters arrive at incredible speed. They circle the outskirts of the village like wolves searching for prey. After a few more minutes, one of them suddenly peels off and opens fire on something I cannot make out. Whatever it

shockingly sophisticated underground installation. To my dismay, two operators are reported wounded, but the COM FST presses on. At the end of the hour, the battle-captain finally says the words we have all been silently praying to hear. "Target clear! Gold 2 and 3 are Jackpot. Gold 1 KIA. Commencing search and secure." The OPS room detonates in celebratory cheers. Everyone is on their feet. I find myself hugging the president.

Office of the Minister of Defence [afternoon, 27 December]

"Explain the findings of this report to me as you would to a five-year-old," I say. The demand makes both General Ferlet and Director Émié look uncomfortable. The report on my desk is a massive thing, several hundred pages long. I have read as much as I had time for, but focused my efforts on the abstract and conclusion. "It has not been often that you two gentlemen and your agencies were in agreement this past month, but now you are?"

"Yes, Madame Minister," General Ferlet answers. "We are. After having assessed all the collected data and material from the installation, after having read the interrogations of Gold 2, Gold 3, and the four ISWAP survivors . . . yes. Our analysts have done a formidable job and we are in agreement. That is why our agencies have co-authored this report."

"Be that as it may," I reply, "the conclusion borders on the insane." There is a long silence. "I was not joking," I continue. "I want you to explain this to me. I want you to speak the words out loud. I want you to explain it and feel how unhinged it is to say this, because I am the one who must deliver a clear recommendation to the president. Should we share the entirety of these conclusions with our allies? I want a substantiated answer with a yes or no decision."

The two men eye each other. In that moment, they remind me of children. Director Émié takes the lead. "As you wish, Madame Minister. We believe that the arming of ISWAP with the sulfur-mustard agent was an act perpetrated by North Korea, and that it was supported by agents of the Chinese government. In early 2016, at the end of the Obama administration, Pyongyang decided that it needed to investigate avenues other than nuclear weapons to coerce the international community to reduce sanctions on the country. In the style of the proxy wars of the Cold War era, they decided to supply an organization already fighting against the West with a new weapon system. Or rather, they helped build a facility capable of producing a WMD. They decided that ISWAP would be the optimal choice, as the organization was radical enough to attack its enemies using any means necessary, but was not directly at war with the United States, Russia, or China. North Korean agents contacted ISWAP sympathizers through a Salafist network working out of Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and were smuggled into eastern Mali along the so-called "contested route" through Libya and Algeria. Here they entered into negotiations with the ISWAP leader, al-Sheikawi, who happily accepted their offer of assistance. The agents scouted out a location to build a sophisticated underground laboratory and provided ISWAP leadership with a wish list for construction materials, dual-use equipment, and required components. ISWAP leaders agreed to channel considerable funds into the project, under the impression that they would receive a production facility capable of producing nearly unlimited amounts of the proposed chemical agent.

"We believe that ISWAP were convinced this would successfully compensate for the military discrepancy between them and us. By means of deterrence, they hoped that the chemical weapon would provide them with a 'Caliphate' to call their own, just in time to pick up the mantle of the collapsing Caliphate in the Levant. Though ISWAP were able to provide most of the material needed to build the laboratory, they remained absolutely dependent on North Korean support for the chemical agent's actual fabrication. Simply providing components and instructions was insufficient. North Korea promised to provide experts to manage the production but failed to deliver on this promise. After several failed attempts at smuggling scientists out of North Korea, agents of the Reconnaissance General Bureau approached Chinese counterparts to request help in the undertaking. For reasons unknown, China decided to get directly involved instead of merely assisting North Korea. Chinese operatives planned and executed a staged kidnapping of three chemical engineers from the Usan oilfield off the Nigerian coast and proceeded to pretend they were negotiating for their release. Major Zhang Yuanbo, Liu Mingjie, and Wei Te Dan then proceeded to assist ISWAP in completing the installation, supported by the North Korean operatives, who provided blueprints and know-how.

"The installation appears to have been finished in early 2017. From that point, the Chinese chemists commenced with the production of this new and highly refined sulfur-mustard agent. It seems that production was slower than ISWAP's leadership had hoped, and that safely storing the finished chemical agent was a challenge. Also, both North Korea and China appear to have been unwilling to provide weapons systems for delivery, which explains why ISWAP had to rely on suicide bombers for their attacks. At some point, the cooperation between the Chinese, the North Koreans, and ISWAP appears to have soured over this question and the chemists became actual hostages. Supposedly, the North Korean operatives disappeared around the same time. Whether they escaped the Sahel or ISWAP made examples of them to put pressure on North Korea for delivery systems, we are unable to ascertain. With shortages of components, production began to run dry. When Mosul fell in July, ISWAP leaders decided the time had come to establish the new Caliphate. They threw themselves into a desperate gamble and began preparing for an attack intended to put pressure on France and the governments in Mali, Niger, Nigeria, and Burkina Faso to end counter-insurgency operations. When we failed to comply with their demands, they decided to go all in and spend most of the remaining sulfur-mustard agents in the attacks on our ROB, the Senegalese MINUSMA base, and Bamako. From the captured production manifest, we gather that most of their stockpile has been spent. The success of Operation Barkhane's renewed thrust and the speed with which the Nigerian Army's campaign in Borno province is advancing these days seem to validate this conclusion."

I click my tongue involuntarily and Director Émié falls quiet. "It is not that I disagree with your work in its

Chinese military advisors
and CBRN teams have been welcomed with open arms across West Africa in the past weeks, expanding Chinese influence there even further.

entirety," I begin in a conciliatory tone. "I understand . . . no, rather, I *fathom* the motivations for ISWAP. I see how they could be misled into believing that ownership of a WMD would be in their interest. But there is a *lex parsimoniae* element—an Occam's Razor—missing in the conclusions of your report. Particularly the accusations about China's, but also to some extent North Korea's, involvement in all of this. It just doesn't sit well with me. Neither of those two states has any particular love for religion in general or Muslim extremist organizations in particular. Why would they agree to help the most insane organization of them all? Is it not more likely that things are as they appear to be? Is it so unlikely that the scientists were kidnapped and forced to work for ISWAP? Can we not entertain the possibility that they provided the know-how for the construction of the facility and production of the agent at gunpoint?"

General Ferlet raises his eyebrows in ill-concealed irritation. "Pardon, Madame Minister, but we believe not! If you had had the time to read through the report in detail, you would have known that these conclusions were not simply drawn out of thin air! Our contacts in Mossad have confirmed North Korean links to Wahhabi networks in Saudi Arabia and Egypt. We found individual components in the production apparatuses that were produced in North Korea. We have found copies of correspondence between three named North Korean military construction engineers and ISWAP leaders on USB drives, and a partially destroyed North Korean chemical weapons production manual on site. Both Gold 2 and Gold 3 have independently confirmed the involvement of the Guoanbu, the Chinese Ministry of State Security. We have found copies of financial transactions from a well-known Chinese front company to pay for a significant part of the construction materials needed to produce the laboratory. And may I remind you that Gold 1, Lieutenant Colonel Wei Te Dan, who was formally in charge of the Chinese scientists, seized a weapon off the body of a dead ISWAP fighter and not only proceeded to open fire on our operators but then shot himself in the head rather than be taken alive! The conclusions of this report are not a fantasy; they are not

guesswork. They may not sit well with any of us, but they are the product of thorough and unbiased intelligence work."

General Ferlet's face has turned red and his breathing is heavy. Though part of me feels a sting to my pride for being berated in such a manner, I appreciate his candor and cannot fault his arguments.

Director Émié smiles cautiously. "Madame Minister, I understand your concern. You are justified in searching for the *why* in all of this. There are many possible reasons. For North Korea, this operation is likely viewed as a success. We have known of their chemical weapons program for decades. They have mostly used it for assassinations of critics but, frankly, we always believed their large-scale chemical weapons operation to be intended for deterrence by denial. We believed that they would use it to contaminate US bases in South Korea in case of the outbreak of war. They have chosen to use it in a way we never saw coming. They have proven to the West that they are both willing and able to arm our enemies with these weapons. Even if they themselves are unwilling to lash out for fear of retaliation, they know that others may be willing to do their dirty work for them. They know we will not engage in a full-scale war over this and thus expect a low cost in retaliation. On the other hand, they have now introduced another bargaining chip to use as leverage against the West in future negotiations. China, for its part, will categorically deny any involvement in all of this. Xi will likely free-ride the zeitgeist of disinformation and stick to the Occam's Razor explanation you yourself just presented. Chinese military advisors and CBRN teams have been welcomed with open arms across West Africa in the past weeks, expanding Chinese influence there even further. They have managed to field-test a new and terrible chemical agent on civilian and military targets but still manage to play the role of the savior. Cleverly, they have not provided any means of delivery that could potentially be used to retaliate against Chinese forces in any meaningful way. What changes this new chemical weapon will bring to the great power competition remain to be seen."

He sighs deeply. "We might even ask ourselves whether their involvement serves an internal rather than an external objective. I would not be the least bit surprised if the CCP uses this whole ordeal to increase surveillance of the population, restrict movement of critics, give further authority to the Guoanbu, and increase the oppression of the Uighur minority."

I suddenly feel tears welling up and blink them away in irritation. Émié falls quiet. I take a deep breath, clap my

"They will obscure everything in a dense fog of falsehood through which the beacon of truth can never shine."

hands down on the desk, slowly stand, and turn towards the windows. The afternoon sun is shining lazily over Paris. In the distance, a siren wails. "What does one do against such remorseless evil?" I ask. The question is as much to me as it is to them. "How am I to advise the president? We have no tools to compensate for such blatant disregard for human life. France sees herself as a beacon of democracy, of human rights, of truth. It is not just a national motto. Liberty, equality, and brotherhood are ideals we live by. We aim to use our military capabilities to defend and further those ideals. What do we do now?"

I turn towards them. The look on their faces would suit a funeral. I can feel tears running down my cheeks. I don't care. "We are faced with opponents who will kill thousands of civilians for an advantage. We are faced with enemies who will use any means necessary to tighten control over not only their own nations but the entire world. This is reminiscent of Germany's actions in '38 and '39. They will hide behind lies and denial. They will reject, dispute, or simply ignore any proof we leverage against them, knowing full well that we are not interested in another world war. They will obscure everything in a dense fog of falsehood through which the beacon of truth can never shine."

Director Émié stands. He forces a tired smile, reaches into his blazer, and hands me a handkerchief. "Madame Parly," he says. "You have proven to be a formidable Minister of Defence. You have handled yourself without reproach during these trying times. I would not have wanted to be in your shoes these past months, and I am confident that history will remember you fondly no matter what you choose to do. Our advice is that you recommend to the president that France share this knowledge with as many of our allies as possible. Even if the consequence is that two separate narratives will come to exist again in East and West, even if this is the first step into another Cold War, it is paramount that our allies be told the truth about the enemy we are up against. We cannot keep our eyes closed and pretend this did not happen."

I blink and regard him levelly for a few seconds, attempting to appraise whether he meant his little speech as a slight, but his smile seems genuine. After another moment, I nod. "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown," I answer with poorly concealed irony.

Ministry of Defence [morning, 29 December]

There is a smart rap on the door. "Come!" I say.

Captain Bernard enters and stands to attention. "Madame Minister, they are ready for you."

"Thank you," I answer and look over at General Ferlet and Director Émié. Regarding them, I suddenly remember the long-ago sensation of launching myself off a tall cliff for the first time, into the sparkling water of the bay below: frightening, exhilarating and, once that last running step had been taken, utterly irrevocable. I stand up and move from behind my desk. The two men rise from their chairs as well.

"So, you are absolutely sure that the conclusions you presented to me are as sound as the report indicates, and agree that we should share all the information we have with our allies?" They both nod briefly, their faces grave as my own.

"Good work, gentlemen. I will present your recommendations to the president."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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NOTES

1. The Bataclan, a music venue in Paris, was the site of a massacre carried out by Islamist terrorists in November 2015, in which nearly 100 people died.

2. The author wrote an earlier piece for *CTX* that tells the fictional story of the young Nigerian man who detonated ISWAP's first chemical bomb. See Nikolaj Lindberg, "At the Very End, I Smiled," *CTX* 11, no. 2 (July 2021): 6-15: https://nps.edu/web/ecco/ctx-vol-11-no-2-july-2021

General Manuel Alvarez, Peruvian Army, retired

Interviewed by Sally Baho,
US Naval Postgraduate School
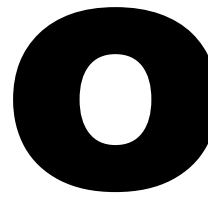
On 27 April 2021, Brigadier General Manuel Alvarez, retired, of the Peruvian Army, was interviewed virtually by Sally Baho of Global ECCO. They discussed General Alvarez's role in combating the violent revolutionary group Shining Path (*Sendero Luminoso* in Spanish), starting in the early 1980s, and his observations on the current social and political situation in Peru. General Alvarez was commissioned as a first lieutenant in the Peruvian Army in 1973 and retired as a Brigadier General in 2006.[1]

SALLY BAHO: Start off by telling us about your military career, which coincided with the domestic terrorism of the Shining Path.

GENERAL MANUEL ALVAREZ: My name is Augusto Manuel E. Alvarez Torres. I am a retired Brigadier General, having served in the Peruvian Army for 39 years as an active-duty officer. Following that, I was an intelligence instructor at the Peruvian Army War College for 16 years, which totals about 55 years of service in the Armed Forces.

From 1980 to 2000, Peru lived through a period of very strong terrorism, with two main terrorist organizations operating in Peru: the Shining Path and the Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement. Even now, there is a remnant faction of the Shining Path that operates in the valleys of the Apurímac River.

The problem with the Shining Path began on 17 May 1980, when it launched its first attack in the town of Chuschi. On 24 April 1983, the Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement attacked the police station in Villa El Salvador, which is a district south of Lima. Faced with the different movements and attacks that were taking place, Fernando Belaúnde Terry, the president at the time, did not think that these were terrorist attacks; rather, he believed that they were carried out by cattle rustlers.[2] Later, he said that the attackers were guerrillas, and the Minister of the Interior agreed. Belaúnde Terry and his cabinet didn't know who they were facing; they did not know what the attacks meant or what those conducting the attacks wanted. As time went on, these types of attacks became more frequent and began to look like the attacks of terrorist organizations, as they targeted police stations, ambushed police patrols, and carried out an assault on the central prison of Huancayo to release prisoners detained for terrorism. It became clear that these attacks were more than just small crimes or guerrillas and bandits: this was organized crime.

Members of the Shining Path had been training since 1968. Although they began their armed fight in 1980, they had formed cadres during those 12 years of preparation. In April of 1980, they created the first Shining Path Revolutionary Military School, in Ayacucho, and the first course to train those who would lead the armed fight. This was the first and only graduating class of Shining Path commanders.

In May 1980, Shining Path began a war against the people by burning down a school that was serving as a polling place. They burned all the ballot boxes. Again, the government did not react, so the Shining Path continued to grow and spread through the Central Sierra, especially in Ayacucho. After numerous attacks, the Peruvian government mobilized the Armed Forces in December 1983 and declared Ayacucho to be in a state of emergency.

Here in Peru, we have an article in the constitution that gives the president the authority to determine a state of war in two cases. The first case is the "state of siege" and applies to an external war: in other words, Peru is at war with another country. The other, which is the "state of emergency," addresses a domestic insurgency or subversion. Both cases require Congressional approval. But I would like to clarify that in Peru, we do not use the word "insurgency" because insurgency is addressed in our constitution. The people have the right to rise against the government, but not against a de facto government elected by the people and supported by the Armed Forces. That is why those who try to overthrow a legitimately elected government and change the structures to a radical ideology are not called insurgents, but subversives. That is how it all started, and it is an important point to understand about the domestic terrorism of the Shining Path. Shining Path slowly gained influence over more and more of Peru. I say influence because they did not control these regions, but influenced them by terror. By 1988, Shining Path dominated 18 of the 23 regions of Peru.

> **Shining Path** slowly gained influence over more and more of Peru. I say influence because they did not control these regions, but influenced them by terror.

But let me go back. In 1983, the Armed Forces began combating the Shining Path in the countryside. Because the Shining Path was unable to fight the Armed Forces, it moved to the cities. The group didn't capture or control the cities, but had a lot of influence in the big cities of Peru: Lima, the capital; Trujillo, to the north; in the south, Tacna on the border with Chile; and Moquegua and Arequipa on the border with Bolivia. In the Central

Sierra, Ayacucho, which is where the Shining Path originated, was considered its stronghold. It also had a presence in Huancavelica, and even in the Northern Sierra, the Ancash region, the Cajamarca region, and the Huánuco region. In the jungle, it controlled the central areas, the department of Cerro de Pasco and the region of Ucayali. It controlled very little in the Amazon. For example, it had very little influence in Iquitos, which is an important city in the Amazon but is surrounded by rivers, the main one being the Amazon. Iquitos is practically an island; the Shining Path couldn't "act" there because there would have been no way to escape. That is why the terrorism of the Shining Path was hardly felt in Iquitos. The terrorism felt in the other regions included massacres in Lucanamarca, where approximately 80 villagers died, including men and women, the elderly, and children.

During those two years, we fought the Shining Path at close range, in the middle of the jungle or in small towns. In one sector of the jungle, they had practically decimated the entire population by machete.

Also, there was the infamous "caravan of death" in Ayacucho. Comrade José, who was in command and drove the caravan of death, went from town to town assassinating people all the way to its destination, where the terrorists unloaded the 63 people they had brought on board, all with their throats cut. And so on.

All of these violent attacks made the government act by deploying the Armed Forces, but at the beginning there was a big mistake. President Belaúnde deployed the Armed Forces under the leadership of Brigadier General Noel Alvarez without any legal protection. In other words, there was no protection for intervention of these forces; the only legal protection we had was military justice. And while we won the military war, we have not entirely won the political war, because there are former Shining Path ideologists in our government who have the support of both domestic and international NGOs. Over the years, certain politicians practically dissolved everything that the Fujimori government had done: they released terrorists, redid all the trials, and began the persecution of soldiers who had intervened in different zones. But that is a story for another time.

As I mentioned before, when the Shining Path terrorists found themselves surrounded by the military forces, they began to move to the key cities. Can we say it was an urban war? No, it wasn't a war, but it was the confrontation of the Shining Path terrorist organization against the Peruvian government. We do not call it a war because it was not an internal war; it was not even an internal armed conflict. It was a violent confrontation by a group of terrorists with the government.

There is a difference of opinion on what subversion means. According to the doctrine, the Shining Path was born as a subversive group. It came to power by using terrorism as a method of subversion. Guzmán [Abimael Guzmán Reynoso] led the Shining Path as an organization against the nation of Peru and declared the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party of Peru, a communist guerrilla group following Marxism–Leninism–Maoism and Gonzalo Thought.[3]

BAHO: Can you tell me more about your experience in the two years that you served as a commander in the fight against the Shining Path?

ALVAREZ: In 1989, when I was a lieutenant colonel, I was appointed as a commander of both a counter-subversive [special forces] battalion and a battalion of commandos. It was a great honor for me because there were very few battalions of this sort. We received 111 specially trained troops who were highly regarded. The logistical and administrative support varied; sometimes we received support directly from the joint command, and sometimes directly from the division commander.

In my case, I was a reserve mobile force—in other words, I did not have an established camp; we set up in tents and waited for support to arrive in helicopters. We didn't have distinct special forces uniforms. Some wore the clothes of officers, helicopter pilots, NCOs, paratroopers—they all wore different clothes. When I arrived, the first thing we did was train and train through the months of March and April, until we were ready to move. We followed the terrorists to different areas, conducting counterterrorism operations that, for security reasons, I'm not going to list.

We used the French system of protecting the roads: we set up checkpoints and registered villages and towns, and if people said they were going to visit someone, they were asked why and where. Then we would often accompany them to find out if what they'd said was true. That is how we managed to capture many Shining Path terrorists. This may sound like interrogation, but we didn't have the power to do formal interrogations. Those captured were sent to the top echelon to be interrogated. We only did what is called "combat interrogation," the specialized interrogation that was allowed by the police and other law enforcement agencies.

During those two years, we fought the Shining Path at close range, in the middle of the jungle or in small towns. In one sector of the jungle, they had practically decimated the entire population by machete. They murdered pregnant women by cutting out their wombs. It was pure savagery.

I can't tell you that I had a battalion in a barracks or in a camp. No. We were a battalion that moved all over when we were required to use our force. We were a very powerful battalion, well-equipped, well-trained, and with all the weapons available to us. In other words, we were operational 24/7, which included combat operations, civic actions, patrolling, and checkpoints, as I mentioned before. My battalion also had the good fortune of having two helicopters assigned to it that could be used for positioning troops at any moment.

Unlike the battalion I commanded, there were fixed bases and from there, the men went out to patrol. They had reconnaissance patrols and combat patrols. And there were times where they had to do those at the same time. In effect, it was reconnaissance: a small force to be able to infiltrate and see what the enemy was doing. If it was combat, it was a stronger force able to make a defensive attack. The battalion had four permanent bases and various mobile bases in the central jungle. We operated in thirds: a third on patrol, a third on surveillance of the base, and a third in rest conditions but ready to go at any moment. Those resting often played soccer while the others patrolled the perimeter of the base.

That was the constant for two years. For a brief time, certain personnel were taken by plane to Lima for R&R [rest and recuperation]. They had to go by plane to avoid any problems on the roads.

The act of coexisting with the other officers was very special—we weren't on a handshake basis. We gave all of ourselves there, every one of us equal. It was brotherhood: brotherhood because you start to love these people as if they were your own children, and when one gets hurt in combat, you feel the love and pain that a father feels if he loses a child.

I am proud because I defended my country. But I never wanted war. I never wanted any confrontations, but those were the cards I was dealt. My daughter told my story in a photographic composition. She has a degree in communication sciences, specializing in photography and videography. She won first place for her photo composition of the photos that I gave her from this time. When she wrote to me, she never asked, "What did you do in the war?" but rather "Did you have to go to war?" It's true, I never went searching for it. But it's as if it came looking for me, like many other officers of my generation.

BAHO: Do you think that there is a threat from the current Communist Party in Peru right now? Or that the Shining Path has the potential to resurface?

In the original interview, which was conducted on 23 April 2021, BG Álvarez stated his concern about the continuing influence of Shining Path sympathizers in Peru, particularly in the area of education. Later that month, Pedro Castillo, who ran as a member of the Marxist-Leninist Free Peru (Peru Libre) political party, won the presidential election. Out of respect for the political situation in Peru, *CTX* chose not to include some of Álvarez's concerns about Castillo and the country's leadership. On 7 December 2022, however, Castillo was impeached, convicted, and removed from office for corruption and for attempting illegally to dissolve Congress, thus confirming Álvarez's skepticism. Castillo was later jailed and sentenced to 18 months detention on charges of sedition and rebellion. Increasingly active and violent protests by Castillo's supporters demanding his release subsequently spread across Peru, particularly in the regions where he had the most popular support. Twenty people had died as of 16 December 2022, as this issue of *CTX* was being finalized.[4]

ALVAREZ: That's a great question. There are several groups, and some are very radical, which could pose a threat to the democracy of Peru. Some political parties have Shining Path members in their ranks. There is a movement for the defense and amnesty of the human rights of the prisoners of war. They call them prisoners of war—Abimael Guzmán [who died in prison in September 2021] and all the criminals who are in jail—but they are not prisoners of war; they are incarcerated terrorists. There is a self-appointed radical faction, the National Reconstitution Committee of the militarized political party, which is a Communist-Marxist-Leninist-Maoist party—principally a Maoist party—that wants to rebuild with ideas from the Shining Path.

All the people feel resentful because for the past 20 years of democracy, there has been corruption. In the past 20 years, all presidents have either been put on trial or sent to jail. In the United States, name me one president who has been in prison. Here, the last four have been indicted. One is in jail and the other three have sentences that could lead to jail time. People are disillusioned by the corruption, and by the lack of work despite the gross domestic product, which is one of the highest in Latin America. Poverty has decreased, but there is inequality. Not like Chile: Chile's GDP is worth the same as ours, but here we have inequality and poverty. If we did not, we would be ahead, economically speaking, of Chile. Professor [José Pedro] Castillo has gained the support of the very people affected by the inequality: the poor.[5] Why does he have the support

of President Evo Morales of Bolivia? Because Castillo is supported by Maduro of Venezuela and by José Mujica [former member of Tupamaros revolutionary group, president from 2010 to 2015] from Uruguay.[6]

> **People are disillusioned by the corruption,** and by the lack of work despite the gross domestic product, which is one of the highest in Latin America.

You know that Peru is a very important country to South America's wellbeing, one of the largest and most powerful. We find ourselves now in a situation where many countries in South America are socialist-leaning. Brazil fell to the left, as well as Argentina. Colombia has problems. So, they want to create the Säo Paolo Forum. They call it the Socialist Union of South America: in other words, the Soviet Union of South America.

BAHO: Do you think that those who have power will mobilize to make a Soviet Union in South America?

ALVAREZ: [Former Peruvian President Alejandro] Toledo was extradited for corruption and is now in the United States, and they can't bring him back. There's Alan García who committed suicide, a bad man who was being investigated for embezzlement. Pedro Pablo Kuczynski is under house arrest. Then there's Martín Vizcarra, who has been banned from Congress for having robbed the people.

BAHO: Are there other internal threats?

ALVAREZ: Yes. We have a big problem with the illicit trafficking of drugs, which is run by terrorist organizations. We are the second largest coca producer in the world, after Colombia. The Mexican and Colombian drug cartels are present here, and who controls the VRAEM [*Valle de los Ríos Apurímac, Ene y Mantaro*: the Valley of the Apurímac, Ene, and Mantaro Rivers] is disputed. This is a severe security challenge in Peru; as such, the Armed Forces are deployed and are actively combating the drug trafficking and terrorism in the region. This is happening despite the fact that we have lowered cocaine production. In the midst of all of this, the police and the Armed Forces are practically entirely devoted to controlling the main threat Peru is now facing, which is COVID-19. I have to say, governments are in part guilty for this pandemic disaster. In Latin America, Peru has the fifth highest infection rate, after Argentina, Mexico, Colombia, and Chile.

BAHO: How is the government responsible with its response to COVID-19?

ALVAREZ: Thank you for the question. We want to use the word "guilty" because the government knew that this pandemic was coming in March 2020, or they had some background on it. They could tell from the money being spent. China and other countries began buying masks, various pills, and other medical supplies here in Peru, but it was too late to stop. Masks were bought for 20 cents on the dollar. The government did not realize or understand this acquisition from China, Russia, and the United States. Then, in March, the pandemic comes to Peru and what do government officials do? They lock us in for three months, until June 2020. But what did that do? They did not buy ICU beds. Peru only had 1,500 ICU beds for a population of 28 million people. We did not have enough hospital beds. It was the ultimate government deception. Hospitals were at 50 percent capacity and those who died the most were the doctors, who didn't have the proper material to cover and protect themselves. We reached a peak of 400 dead; 400 is enough. In the United States, 400 were dying each day. But that wasn't a lot, because you have 300 million people. We are only 28 million. And you have a hospital system, a well-established medical system. Imagine here, 1,500 ICU beds but no respirators, no oxygen tanks. Just now [April 2021] we are starting to get them, thanks to the Catholic Church.

So, they locked us up until June, when the cases dropped, and in July and August they continued to drop, but the government didn't take the opportunity to buy what they needed. I hope they can before the second wave comes next winter. We have gone from 1,500 ICU beds to 2,500, which is still not enough.

And now the government is inundated with vaccines. There was a total deception with the vaccines. We were told that the Peruvian government had bought 38 million Sinovac vaccines from China. Later, we were informed that I don't know how many more millions had been offered to Peru. We were even given a name—it was AstraZeneca—when in fact nothing was ever bought. Everything was a lie told by President Vizcarra, and then came [President Francisco] Sagasti.[7] Now the government has bought millions of doses, but the vaccines are arriving little by little.

Almost 750,000 Peruvians have already been vaccinated with the first dose and 500,000 with the second dose. It is expected that all those over 80 years old have already been vaccinated. On the first of May 2021, everyone from age 70 to 80 will be eligible for the vaccine. And in June or July it will be ages 50 to 70, and so on. But that was also a lie by the government; President Vizcarrra was dismissed by Congress

and it wasn't until President Sagasti took office that he began to purchase the first vaccines for COVID-19. The people have felt deceived with regards to medical supplies and vaccines, and also the response by the government to combat the pandemic. They were deeply unhappy by the number of deaths due to the pandemic. If the government officials knew about the pandemic problem, they could have lightened the blow. The government locked us up because they didn't buy the supplies they said they bought. They bought lousy masks and lousy equipment, so the real threat in Peru is corruption. On top of that, the congressmen were the first to get vaccines, but this was hidden from the people. Corruption is an endemic evil. That is the problem. So Free Peru [*Perú Libre:* a Peruvian Marxist political party] has taken advantage of this, has advocated for the poor, telling them to go get their vaccine and calling out how poorly the current government handled the vaccine situation.

BAHO: Are you comparing COVID-19 to terrorism, the Shining Path, or the response from the government?

ALVAREZ: Yes. I think that with the terrorism, the government did not act with the necessary promptness. Like I told you before, President [Fernando] Belaúnde said "No, no, they are not terrorists: they are cattle rustlers; they are guerrillas." When he realized they were terrorists, they had caused a loss of more then $28 billion dollars, more than 250 transmission towers destroyed, more than 100 bridges blown up, more than 38,000 people murdered.

> **We won the military war,** but the political war was lost because Fujimori fell and a socialist government entered.

But as I told you, we won the military war, but the political war was lost because Fujimori fell and a socialist government entered, with socialist ministers who wanted new trials. Of the 24 people who were serving life sentences, only six remained; the rest were released. Those released were given positions, and they work for the state now. So the old people like me are unhappy with this. But the young guys, they think, "What a beast that Guzman is." They admire that old revolutionary because the Ministry of Education is leftist, and so that's what they teach the youth.

BAHO: You have addressed this a little, but I want to ask the question directly. What have been the longstanding effects of the Shining Path on Peruvian culture?

ALVAREZ: During their heyday, Shining Path realized what the people wanted, so the popular culture favored

Abimael Guzman, aka Gonzalo

the revolutionaries. But from the perspective of the Armed Forces, they won no favors with us. Maybe the Armed Forces lost a little bit of their popularity for serving under the Fujimori government. But it was restored after two or three years, due to the actions that were carried out by the Armed Forces in their new role of helping the people. The Armed Forces come in during disasters and threats, and they have helped the people with helicopters and trucks, going out to the hospitals in the countryside to face COVID. This made the Armed Forces the third most trusted group in Peru: first, the media, then the Catholic Church, and third, the Armed Forces. So, the Shining Path, instead of lowering the trust in the Armed Forces, actually raised it, because we did not make a peace accord. We did not make any peace agreement. We fought to the end. It affected the culture because people were afraid. There was excess on our part, as well, and those officers who committed those acts are in jail.

But now we have the population divided about the Communist Party, especially among the young, between 18 and 25 years old, who did not live through the terrorism. For them, there was no terrorism; there was no internal war; they deny that the terrorists massacred people. They say the terrorists are political prisoners, and to that I say no, I'm sorry, they are prisoners of war. It's like denying the Holocaust, as Iran does. It's the same for these youths:

Fortunately,

not very many politicians are members of the Shining Path. But it is still something. Isn't it dangerous that there are members of the Shining Path still working for government institutions?

they deny it, with the help of the government, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture. The schools do not teach what they should teach; instead, they favor their leftist interests. Here in Peru, we call them "caviar." A caviar is a leftist person who lives very well, in the best areas of Lima.

BAHO: Am I understanding correctly that there continues to be a division between those who support the Armed Forces and those who support the Shining Path?

ALVAREZ: Shining Path did not just pop up out of nowhere. Everyone knows what it did. But, as I told you, it is the sector of youth that we call *pulpines*.[8] They don't know what terrorism is. They think the Shining Path is a political party because that is what their teachers instilled in them. But people 30, 40, and older know all about it and not one of them wants the terrorism to return. There has never been a case as divisive as this: supporters of the guerrilla movement versus supporters of the Armed Forces. No, here the support for the Armed Forces has always been strong.

Shining Path School

BAHO: Are the political parties in Peru polar opposites, or binary?

ALVAREZ: Thankfully no, not here. There is a variety of parties. But the problem is that people don't care. In the primary elections, many people, instead of voting, went to the beach; they went and had their BBQs; they sunbathed; they didn't care; and then they are surprised by the results.

BAHO: What are the Armed Forces or the National Police doing currently to combat the Shining Path? What has been successful?

ALVAREZ: In the year 2000, through the famous pacification strategies, it was possible to defeat the Shining Path. But that policy was not continued because the Toledo government had many leftist members. They abolished what the military judges had done. This goes to show the important role that political wars play in support of military wars. Lately, there have been very well-done operations by the Armed Forces where they have captured or neutralized elements of the Shining Path in the VRAEM. The latest one was the Shining Path's second in command, who died of wounds and a kidney problem. Not to mention the reconnaissance and observation actions of the Armed Forces in the VRAEM: in two separate police operations, 72 and 56 members of the Shining Path who had infiltrated MOVADEF were arrested.[9] But most were released by the Public Ministry. They said it was due to a lack of evidence.

So, there are operations that are successful, but the circle is not closed because the Public Ministry sometimes does not comply as it should. So the operations

that are carried out by the police and Armed Forces look a bit forced, or calculated. Fortunately, not very many politicians are members of the Shining Path: maybe only four or five. But it is still something. Isn't it dangerous that there are members of the Shining Path still working for government institutions? Another problem is that universities are being infiltrated by Shining Path members and they are practically brainwashing young people again. Not to mention that the Court of Justice in the Hague ordered Peru to compensate each terrorist who is released from prison who had not been tried.

BAHO: Thank you for your time, General Alvarez.

ABOUT THE INTERVIEWER

Sally Baho is a member of the Global ECCO project and a faculty research associate in the Defense Analysis department of the US Naval Postgraduate School.

NOTES

1. This interview was conducted in Spanish and translated by Sally Baho. It has been 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.

2. The word in Spanish is *abigeos*, which means "cattle rustler" in South America.

3. "Gonzalo Thought is a social and political theory originated by Abimael Guzman (also called 'Gonzalo'), who was the chairman of the Communist Party of Peru-Shining Path. It proposes following the military line of struggle, by militarization and concentric construction of the party. Gonzalo also believed that such a revolution in a single country could spark a world revolution." Urban Dictionary, s.v. "Gonzalo Thought," last modified 29 January 2022: https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Gonzalo%20Thought

4. Augusto Álvarez Torres, "Crónica de un suicidio por Augusto Álvarez Torres (OPINIÓN)" ("Chronicle of a Suicide by Augusto Álvarez Torres, OPINION") (in Spanish), Diario Correo, 12 December 2022: https://diariocorreo.pe/opinion/cronica-de-un-suicidio-por-augusto-alvarez-torres-opinion-noticia/ ; Marco Aquino, "Peru Declares State of Emergency, Seeks 18-Months Jail for Castillo," Reuters, 14 December 2022: https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/perus-top-court-mulls-detaining-ex-president-castillo-18-months-2022-12-14/ ; and Caitlin Hu and Claudia Rebaza, "Peru's Ex-President Castillo to be Jailed for 18 Months as Protesters Declare 'Insurgency,'" CNN, 15 December 2022: https://www.cnn.com/2022/12/15/americas/peru-castillo-detention-intl-latam/index.html

5. José Pedro Castillo Terrones, known as "El Profesor" because he had been a schoolteacher, was elected as Peru's president and took office in July 2021.

6. Pedro Castillo won the presidential election in July 2021. He was impeached and removed from office on 7 December 2022 on charges of corruption and after attempting illegally to dissolve parliament. Castillo was arrested on 14 December as he tried to flee the country and remains in custody. Marco Aquino, "Peru declares state of emergency, seeks 18-months jail for Castillo," Reuters, 14 December 2022: https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/perus-top-court-mulls-detaining-ex-president-castillo-18-months-2022-12-14/

7. President Francisco Sagasti was in office from November 2020 to July 2021.

8. The word *pulpin* comes from a Peruvian labor law that addressed 18- to 24-year-olds in Peru. The word derives from a box juice called "Pulp," and refers to the segment of the population that grew up drinking this juice. In this context, it refers to the newest wave in the labor and voting population, which did not experience the violence of the Shining Path.

9. MOVADEF, the Movement for Amnesty and Fundamental Rights, is a political organization that has been linked to the Shining Path. See, for example, Lauren Villagran, "Is Peru's History of Terrorism Coming Back to Haunt It?" *Christian Science Monitor*, 5 August 2013: https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Americas/2013/0805/Is-Peru-s-history-of-terrorism-coming-back-to-haunt-it
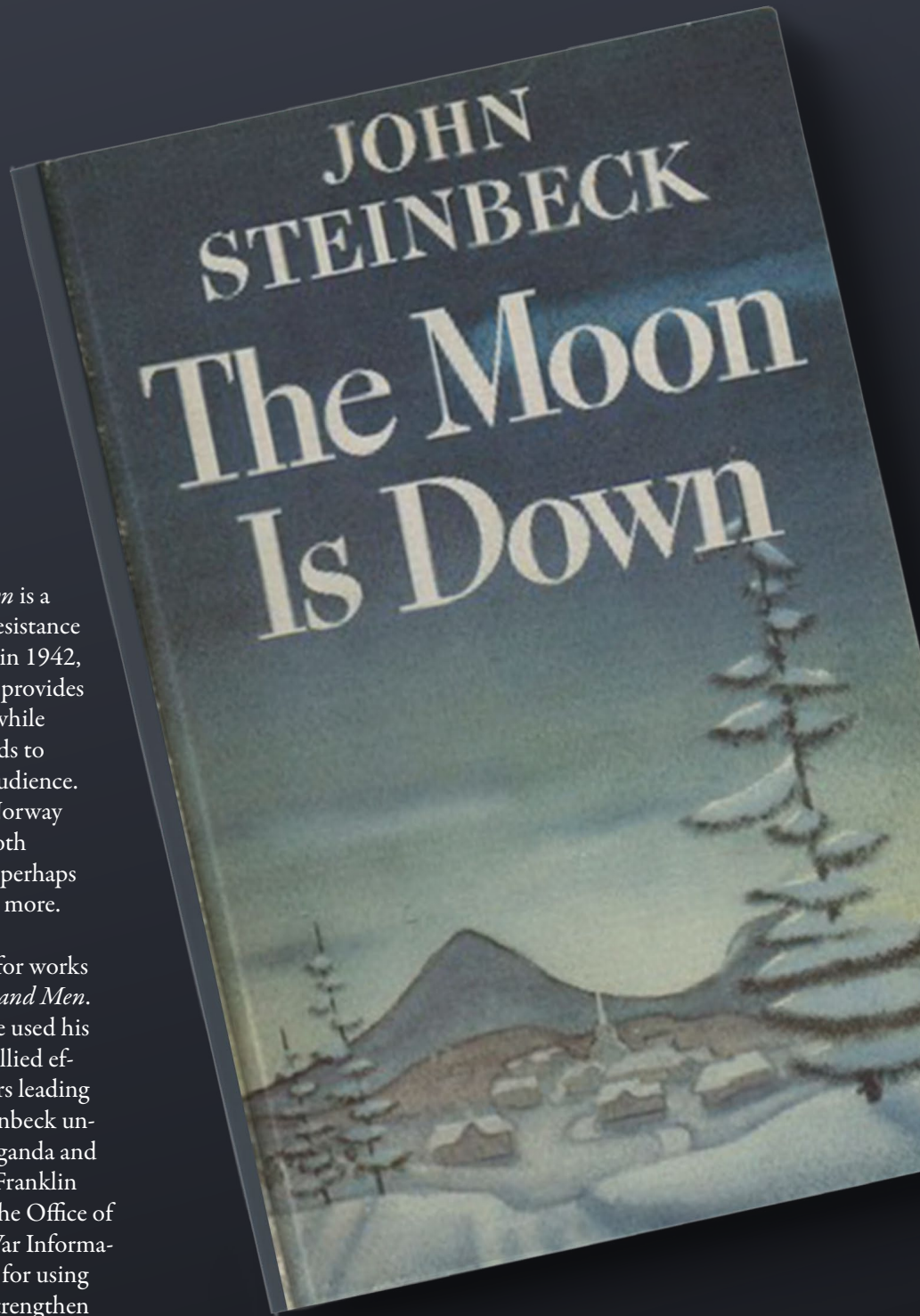
The Moon is Down
by John Steinbeck

Reviewed by MAJ Caleb Edwards,
US Army Special Forces

J ohn Steinbeck's *The Moon is Down* is a "meta" example of motivating a resistance movement. Originally published in 1942, this novel of invasion and occupation provides instruction for resistance techniques while leveraging cunning translation methods to encourage mobilization amongst its audience. Distributed as a propaganda tool in Norway in 1942, this short 114-page read is both entertaining and informative. It ends, perhaps intentionally, with the reader wanting more.

Steinbeck became a household name for works like *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Of Mice and Men*. Less well known is the story of how he used his skills to produce propaganda for the allied efforts during World War II. In the years leading up to US involvement in the war, Steinbeck unsuccessfully presented ideas for propaganda and misinformation directly to President Franklin Roosevelt. It was not until he joined the Office of Strategic Services and the Office of War Information that he materialized his concepts for using written works, such as this novel, to strengthen Europeans' resistance against the Nazi occupying forces. In 1942, after befriending refugees from Nazi-occupied territories, Steinbeck wrote *The Moon is Down* to "encourage resistance in victim nations."[1]

▲
New York: Penguin Classics, 1995
Paperback: US $9.95
112 pages

In 1942, after befriending refugees from Nazi-occupied territories, Steinbeck wrote *The Moon is Down* to "encourage resistance in victim nations."

The book tells the story of a small coastal town's struggle against an invading and occupying force. The town lies within an unnamed country with characteristics reminiscent of Norway, Denmark, and France. Though never identified explicitly, the invaders represent Nazi Germany. Their objective is to maintain the city's coal mining operations to support the broader war effort. While the occupation meets little overt resistance, the townspeople do not capitulate to the new martial government. As tensions between resident and occupier grow, the book follows a nascent resistance movement and its eventual transition to guerrilla warfare. The reader learns about resistance milestones, catalyst events, and associated resistance nuances through a series of relatable scenarios. Steinbeck speaks directly to the reader, through character dialogue, as a means to both instruct and encourage resistance. Here he offers a lesson on the importance of a decentralized approach, as Dr. Winter speaks to Mayor Orden, the story's hero: "They think that just because they have only one leader and one head, we are all like that. They know that ten heads lopped off will destroy them, but we are a free people; we have as many heads as we have people, and in a time of need leaders pop up among us like mushrooms."[2]

Later in the text, Steinbeck encourages resistance as "free men," through the voice of Mayor Orden: "The people don't like to be conquered, sir, and so they will not be. Free men cannot start a war, but once it is started, they can fight on in defeat. Herd men, followers of a leader, cannot do that, and so it is always the herd men who win battles and the free men who win wars. You will find that is so, sir."[3]

The invader's authoritarian rules, cultural insensitivity, and overly centralized decision-making process ultimately cause the resistance to escalate into violence. While the book is intended to inform and encourage resistance, Steinbeck's descriptions of the invader's failures can be useful for the study and execution of counterinsurgency strategies.

In true Steinbeck style, *The Moon is Down* relies on brevity to encourage the reader to fill in absent details. The story follows the incipient phases of the resistance, and abruptly ends as the resistance prepares for the transition to guerilla warfare. If the book is read solely for entertainment, the reader may be left with the feeling that the story is incomplete. Perhaps Steinbeck's goal was to provide his readers in the occupied areas with a starter package of resistance tools and inspire them to finish the story through actions applied to their own circumstances. Toward that end, Steinbeck has a good deal of concrete advice about resistance and insurgency. Throughout the novel, he introduces resistance techniques that are as applicable to current events as they were in 1942. In the story, for example, townspeople properly utilize tradecraft to arrange clandestine meetings and organize an effort to contact and request support from England.[4] He also illustrates lessons in supporting resistance by having British warplanes airdrop packages to assist in the town's disruption efforts. The packages, wrapped in blue paper for easy identification, contain sticks of dynamite, a time fuse, a bar of chocolate, and an instructional sheet on how to use the dynamite against designated infrastructure targets. The bar of chocolate provided added motivation for the

townspeople to scour the countryside in search of the packages.[5]

Dialogue between Mayor Orden and Colonel Lanser, commander of the occupying force, reveals much about the complicated dynamic of humans in war.

Dialogue between Mayor Orden and Colonel Lanser, commander of the occupying force, reveals much about the complicated dynamic of humans in war. Early in the story, Colonel Lanser attempts to convince Mayor Orden to sentence a town citizen to death:

> [Orden] said, "You wish me to pass sentence of death on Alexander Morden after a trial here?"
>
> "Yes, and you will prevent much bloodshed later if you will do it."
>
> Orden went to the table. . . . "You and your government do not understand. In all the world yours is the only government and people with a record of defeat after defeat for centuries and every time because you did not understand people. . . . I have no right to pass sentence of death. There is no one in this community with that right. If I should do it, I would be breaking the law as much as you."

"Breaking the law?" said Lanser.

"You killed six men when you came in. Under our law you are guilty of murder, all of you. Why do you go into this nonsense of law, Colonel? There is no law between you and us. This is war. Don't you know you will have to kill all of us or we in time will kill all of you? You destroyed the law when you came in, and a new law took its place. Don't you know that?"

. . . "The military, the political pattern I work in has certain tendencies and practices which are invariable."

Orden said, "And these tendencies and practices have been proven wrong in every single case since the beginning of the world."[6]

Readers who understand US insurgency and counterinsurgency doctrine will be reminded of similar, less artistically presented, rhetoric in FM 3-24 and the *Comprehensive Defence Handbook*.[7]

The Moon is Down was a practical instrument of insurgency. The Norwegian version of the text manipulates acceptable translation rules to align the environment more closely with that of the target audience, while converting rather neutrally descriptive terms into something more seditious. For example, where the source text refers to the invading soldiers as "men," the Norwegian translation uses the

word *fremmede*, which literally means "strangers."[8] This translation technique is a deliberate attempt to reinforce the psychological framework of "us versus them." More subtle techniques involve adjusting descriptions to align them more closely with the reader's culture. For example, the original English text describes a shooting competition in a "glade." While the most direct translation is *lysning,* the Norwegian text uses *setervoll,* which is uniquely descriptive of terrain associated with Norwegian farming and culture.[9] The Norwegian text also relies on menacing translations to drive a psychological wedge between the reader and the Nazis. When Colonel Lancer appeals for the town's people to "get along" with the invaders, "get along"—meaning essentially to tolerate—is translated to *avfinne seg med,* meaning to "tolerate against your wish."[10] Other creative translations aim to encourage the reader. When the invaders discuss the status of their "replacements," the Norwegian translation uses the word *forsterkninger*. *Forsterkninger* is not a direct translation and is closer to "reinforcements." This purposeful shift in meaning is meant to indicate that the resistance is exhausting the invaders and that there is hope in opposition.[11]

The book, though successful, received criticism in the United States for not demonizing the Nazi enemy to the degree seen in other pieces of US propaganda. But Steinbeck's humanization of the invaders was intentional. After speaking with refugees from Nazi-occupied countries, he determined that assigning relatable qualities to the characters provided realism to his story and reduced the risk that it might be disregarded as hyperbolic propaganda.[12] After the war, Steinbeck was awarded the Haakon VII Freedom Cross, one of Norway's highest honors, for his work.[13]

> **Steinbeck's humanization of the invaders was intentional.** After speaking with refugees from Nazi-occupied countries, he determined that assigning relatable qualities to the characters provided realism to his story and reduced the risk that it might be disregarded as hyperbolic propaganda.

While the book was originally intended for distribution to those living in Nazi-occupied territories, it remains relevant and purposeful today. This timeless approach to informing and motivating resistance techniques could be aptly applied in both Eastern Europe and Asia today. The *Comprehensive Defence Handbook* and *Resistance Operating Concept* serve as military references for hardening cultures against an occupying force.[14] However, artistic renderings of those principles, as accomplished in *The Moon is Down,*

use storytelling at its best to inculcate the psychological framework for resistance in vulnerable populations.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MAJ Caleb J. Edwards is an Army Special Forces officer.

NOTES

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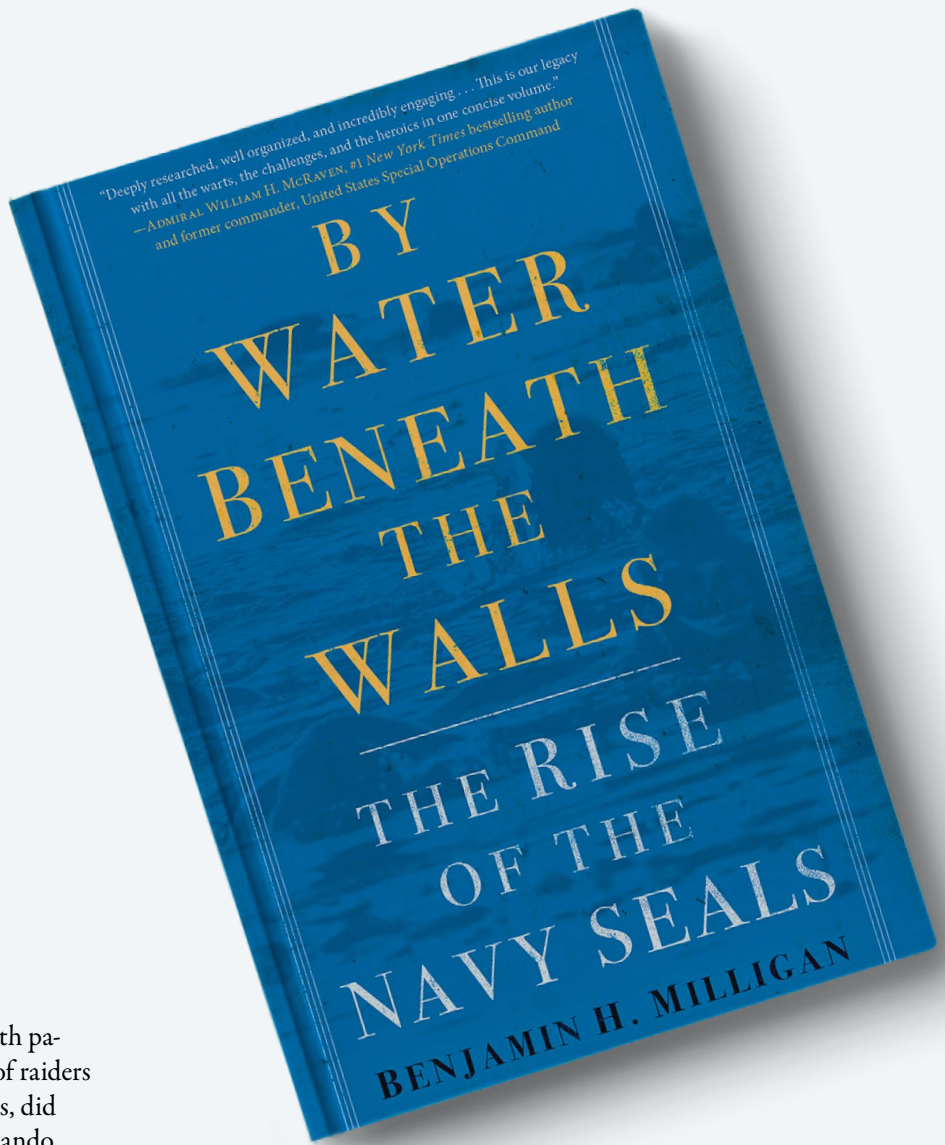
By Water Beneath the Walls: The Rise of the Navy Seals

Benjamin H. Milligan
New York: Bantam Books, 2021
US $30
640 pages

How did the US Navy—the branch of the US military tasked with patrolling the oceans—ever manage to produce a unit of raiders trained to operate on land? And how, against all odds, did that unit become one of the world's most elite commando forces, routinely striking thousands of miles from the water on the battlefields of Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, even Central Africa?

Behind the SEALs' improbable rise lies the most remarkable underdog story in American military history—former Navy SEAL Benjamin H. Milligan captures it as never before. Told through the eyes of notable leaders and racing from one longshot, hair-curling raid to the next, *By Water Beneath the Walls* is a tale of the unit's heroic naval predecessors, and the evolution of the SEALs themselves. But it's also the story of the forging of American special operations as a whole—and how the SEALs emerged from the fires as America's first permanent commando force, when again and again some other unit seemed predestined to seize that role.

Here Milligan thrillingly captures the outsize feats of the SEALs' frogmen forefathers in World War II, the Korean War, and elsewhere, even as he plunges us into the second front of interservice rivalries and personal ambition that shaped the SEALs' evolution. In equally vivid, masterful detail, he chronicles key early missions undertaken by units like the Marine Raiders, Army Rangers, and Green Berets, showing us how these fateful, bloody moments helped create the modern American commando—even as they opened up pivotal opportunities for the Navy. Benjamin H. Milligan also takes us alongside as the SEALs at last seize the mantle of commando raiding, and discover the missions of capture/kill and counterterrorism that would define them for decades to come.

About the Author

Benjamin H. Milligan became a US Navy SEAL in 2001. He is a recipient of the Bronze Star and other awards. A native of Indianapolis, he currently lives in the Chicago area and has three sons.

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