The Islamic State and Information Warfare:

Defeating ISIS and the Broader Global Jihadist Movement

Threat*Knowledge***Group** Special Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ISIS, or the Islamic State (IS) as it now calls itself, is a far deadlier enemy than Al Qaeda, especially in its understanding and use Information Warfare and Psychological Operations (PSYOP).

A fully fledged insurgency which has recruited tens of thousands of fighters and controls large parts of Iraq and Syria, IS is especially skilled in the exploitation of global social media networks to radicalize, indoctrinate and recruit.

While the use of force—such as airstrikes—against IS targets may have a positive effect in the short term, victory in the long term will only come when the "lifestyle of the jihadi" is effectively delegitimized. This will require America to draft and execute a national-level Information Operations campaign against the Islamic State. Currently the true center of gravity of this group lies in its Threat Doctrine of Global Jihadism. That ideology cannot be destroyed kinetically.

THE NON-NEGOTIABLE FUNDAMENTALS

In order to defeat the Islamic State and eventually the broader Global Jihadist Movement, the US government must recognize the five following truths of Information Warfare:

1. The purpose of Information Warfare or PSYOP is to use information as a weapon to influence thought processes, beliefs, emotions, and ultimately behavior.

2. Information Warfare and PSYOP should be the military tools of first resort, not an afterthought or appendix to military action, since their effective employment can obviate the need to use force at all.

3. You cannot engage in a war of ideas without understanding the enemy's ideas. You cannot permanently defeat the enemy unless you are intimately familiar with the ideology he uses to mobilize his side and the Enemy Threat Doctrine that drives his violence.

4. All wars—kinetic or psychological—have as their practical objective causing the enemy to give up the ideas that animate their struggle. This was true for the Nazi Third Reich and the Soviet Union just as much as it is true for Al Qaeda or the Islamic State. This victory can only be achieved by making the enemy accept the illegitimacy of their ideology or crushing those who hold it, or as is most often the case, through a combination of both.

5. In order to win a morally based war of ideas you need organizational and financial means that span generations.

About the Project Director

Dr. Sebastian L. Gorka holds the Major General Matthew C. Horner Distinguished Chair of Military Theory at Marine Corps University. Previously he was Associate Dean of Congressional Affairs and Relations to the Special Operations Community at National Defense University. He is also Associate Fellow with SOCOM's Joint Special Operations University, Adjunct Professor with Georgetown University, a regular instructor with the Special Warfare Center and School in Fort Bragg and for the FBI's Counterterrorism Division. Dr. Gorka served as an adviser to the Department of Defense in the renewal of its Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept and is contributing co-editor, with the late COL Nick Pratt (USMC ret.) and Dr. Christopher Harmon, of *Toward a Grand Strategy Against Terrorism* (McGraw Hill).

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HOW TO DEFEAT THE ISLAMIC STATE AND THE GLOBAL JIHADIST MOVEMENT

One can only win a war if one has clearly defined the political end-states of that conflict. This is not clear with regard to the threat of both IS or the broader Global Jihadist Movement. Once the US has defined the political end-state of this war and declared it publicly, Information Operations and PSYOP must be positioned at the head of the fight, not treated simply as a "supporting" function of the kinetic war. PSYOP should be built into the US national strategy to defeat the Islamic State at the highest level. (Note a precedence already exists for exactly this with the Psychological Strategy Board created by President Truman at the opening of the Cold War).

In order to make tangible progress against IS and other Islamist threat groups the US policy of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) should be jettisoned as it prevents us from tackling the threat from extremists who aren't currently violent but who do share the ideology of jihad and who may turn violent in the future. As a result we should replace CVE with CGJ: Countering Global Jihadism. Additionally DoD should build education on the Enemy Threat Doctrine of the Global Jihadist Movement into all combat arms, not just ARSOF or Civil Affairs and PSYOP units, so that we can understand and undermine the mobilizational force of such groups effectively.

FIVE IMMEDIATE ACTIONS AGAINST ISIS

- The US should invest in a highly publicized campaign which has as its goal the normalization of Sunni, Shia and Kurdish relations within the borders of Iraq.

- The US should deploy forward advisors right down to the brigade level, and even lower, thus allowing an Iraqi unity government to reconstitute and effectively employ the 700,000+ soldiers and security forces nominally on its books.

- America must draft and implement a regional strategic communications campaign targeting allies and other key players. The Islamic State will continue to grow in strength and capture new territories unless Washington does a credible job of convincing Egypt, Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudia Arabia and UAE that Iraq will once again be an independent state which gives Sunnis full rights and a share in its national oil wealth and that it will not become a proxy for Iran or the Assad regime.

- Within Iraq and Syria US IO and PSYOP must target the real center of gravity of the Islamic State: Abu Bakr al Baghdadi's claim that he and his followers are the only authentic Muslims. The information campaign must have a simple objective: **delegitimize Abu Bakr and his so-called Islamic State**. The message, driven by the US and local partners, must simply be:

  Islamic State = Un-Islamic Corruption

  All narratives must lead to the same place: ISIS/IS is only interested in itself and not the local populations. (In the same way that Zarqawi, AQI's former leader, was eventually seen as "just a thug.")

The information campaign must have a simple objective: delegitimize Abu Bakr and his so-called Islamic State.

Elements of the IO/PSYOP campaign must leverage these events and themes:

- The numbers of Sunni killed or punished by IS for not being "islamic enough." We must focus greater attention on the Sunni victims of the jihadists, not just the Kurd, Yazidi or Shiite casualties so as to counter the conspiracy theory which depicts the US as in league with Iran and Assad.

- The increasing numbers of distressed Iraqi parents coming out publicly to decry their children's recruitment as jihadi fighters.

- The way that IS targeting of Iraq's minority populations has worsened the lives of all ordinary Iraqis as well as the longterm viability of local communities. (For example, the Christian families ISIS is killing or expelling provided a disproportionate number of the doctors and healthcare workers in Iraq).

  - The theater IO campaign must openly address and aggressively attack every leading conspiracy theory that empowers the jihadi narrative which represents the West as at "war with Islam" or America as secretly supporting Shia hegemony in the region.

In the end, the Islamic State can only be defeated by America and her allies if we understand and then undermine Abu Bakr al Baghdadi's claims to moral legitimacy. The members of the Global Jihadist Movement represent themselves as on the side of all that is holy and just, and they recruit on the basis of their moral rectitude. That is why tens of thousands of young men have enlisted in the jihad. The Islamic State will only cease to be a threat if we can show it and its leaders for what they truly are and depict them as amoral and unworthy of support. America must work with its allies to completely discredit the modern jihadi enterprise. ∎

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For any further questions on our findings, or for additional information on the work of the Threat Knowledge Group, please contact the project's principal investigator Dr. Sebastian Gorka at seb.gorka@gmail.com, 703-300-5014, or TKG directly at kcg@threatknowledge.org.

■ Papers

MEASURING SUCCESS IN THE WARS OF IDEAS

Robert R. Reilly

It is a very difficult task to assess how you are doing in a war of ideas during war for the very simple fact that ideas are not quantifiable and in any case, it is a tough metric to measure. What I would like to do first of all is share some maxims that I have developed about wars of ideas from my experiences as a practitioner in such wars, going back to the Cold War, but including our current conflicts, and from having thought about this subject for some time.

There are several fundamental maxims for the successful conduct of a war of ideas. In order to fight a war of ideas, one has to have an idea. This is not as simple as it may sound. A war of ideas is a struggle over the very nature of reality for which people are willing to die. Therefore, **the first thing one must do is formulate the ideas that are so central to one's life that one is not willing to live without them.** For a nation successfully to project such ideas, there must be a broad consensus as to what those ideas are.

Second, **one cannot go into a war of ideas until one understands the ideas one is at war with.** Such wars are always conducted in terms of moral legitimacy. The defense of one's ideas and the attack on those of the enemy are conducted with moral rhetoric. "Axis of evil" is a perfect example, as is "the great Satan." All moral differences are at root theological.

The State Department's new Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy, Rick Stengel, said in a recent speech that, "there is no battle of ideas with ISIL. ISIL is bereft of ideas, they're bankrupt of ideas. It's not an organization that is animated by ideas. It's a criminal, savage, barbaric organization." This is hugely mistaken. It's giving up while sounding tough. As one Islamic State fighter in Syria said,

> *"Before you defeat your enemy you must understand it. This is the first rule in combat and these idiots missed it. It is not enough for the West to call these people barbarians. Recall that Adolph Hitler exclaimed, "We are barbarians. We want to be barbarians. It is an honorable title."*

Calling Hitler a barbarian was useless. In the Nazi case, it was the ideology making barbarism honorable that had to be attacked in a war of ideas. With ISIS, we must object not only to their barbaric acts but to the Quranic principles that inspire and justify them.
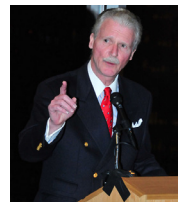
About the Author

Robert R. Reilly served in the Office of The Secretary of Defense, where he was Senior Advisor for Information Strategy (2002-2006). He participated in Operation Iraqi Freedom as Senior Advisor to the Iraqi Ministry of information. Before that, he was director of the Voice of America. Mr. Reilly has served in the White House as a Special Assistant to the President (1983-1985), and in the U.S. Information Agency both in DC and abroad. In the private sector, he spent more than seven years with the Intercollegiate Studies Institute (ISI), as both national director and then president. He was on active duty as an armored cavalry officer for two years, and attended Georgetown University and the Claremont Graduate University. He has published widely on foreign policy, "war of ideas" issues, and classical music. His book, *The Closing of the Muslim Mind: How Intellectual Suicide Created the Modern Islamist Crisis*, was published by ISI Press.

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Radical Islamists taught their doctrines in madrassas for two decades before the occurrence of any terrorist acts. After this period of gestation, the war of ideas was already won in the minds of the students who then formed the cadre of Islamist terrorist organizations.

Third, **wars of ideas, by definition, can only be fought by and with people who think.** This defines the natural target audience for this war, the so-called "elites." The term "elite" is not determined by social or economic status, but by intellectual capabilities. Trying to use ideas to influence people who do not think is an exercise in futility. Such people are led and influenced by those who do think.

Fourth, **along with a consistency of purpose, one must have the organizational and financial means for conducting a war of ideas over the course of generations.** Ideas, when they are profound enough to form the basis of a civilization, have a prolonged gestational period. K.P.S. Gill, India's foremost authority on counterterrorism, has said that, in Kashmir, radical Islamists taught their doctrines in madrassas for two decades before the occurrence of any terrorist acts. After this period of gestation, the war of ideas was already won in the minds of the students who then formed the cadre of Islamist terrorist organizations. The same is true in other parts of the Islamic world.

The war of ideas requires institutions that are capable of countering this kind of indoctrination over similarly lengthy periods, i.e. decades. Where in the United States government today can one possibly undertake a program to form a cadre of anti-totalitarian, reform-thinking Muslims? You cannot answer this question because there is no such place, and the one that used to exist to carry on activities like this, the U.S. Information Agency, was demobilized in 1999.

Today, there is no single government institution whose sole responsibility is the conduct of the war of ideas. As a result, no government agency feels responsible for it. As mentioned, this mission used to belong to the United States Information Agency, which at the height of the Cold War had some 10,000 employees (including foreign nationals) and a $1 billion budget. After the end of the Cold War, USIA's functions were dispersed to the State Department and the Broadcasting Board of Governors. Within the State Department, public diplomacy functions were further dispersed to regional and other bureaus, making coordination and control by the new Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs problematic at best.

 With these maxims in mind, let us go to the subject of war. War's practical objective is to cause the enemy to give up the ideas that animate his struggle, either by demonstrating the illegitimacy of his ideas or crushing those who hold them. Or more likely a combination of the two. It is also to convince the enemy that further pursuit of his ideas is futile. All wars of ideas, since they deal in moral legitimacy, have at their center a certain conception of justice. Determining and demonstrating the worth of the respective causes—who is truly just?—is one of the decisive elements in victory. It is the job of strategic communications to articulate that determination and to demonstrate it convincingly. Now, of course, conveying the rightness of one's cause does not guarantee victory in war, but **failure to make and support the claim to the right in a convincing matter can fatally undermine the chance for success.**

How do you know whether you are being successful in doing this? You can measure tanks. You can count airplanes. You know how many rounds of ammunition you have; you may know how many rounds the enemy has. These are quantifiable. You can map the geographic terrain. Sometimes you can map the cultural terrain. It is a bit tougher to map the terrain of the human soul, which is the arena for the battle of ideas. Ideas are not commodities. As Ayatollah Khomeini famously said during the 1979 Iranian revolution, this is not about the price of melons.

How, then, can you tell if you are winning the war of ideas? The answer is by the language people use, by the way in which they express what is right or what is "good," by the way they define what is legitimate and what is not. **Ultimate victory comes when the enemy speaks your language and embraces your idea of the right, when he accepts your standard of justice and concedes the legitimacy of your cause**. By this is meant not simply the same words, but the same meaning of those words. And this victory does not necessarily have to come through military conquest. As Sun Tsu would argue, it is an even greater victory if it comes without it.

One excellent example comes from the Cold War. In 1982, President Ronald Reagan called the Soviet Union an "evil" empire—classic rhetoric from a war of ideas. There was great perturbation in response. How can he say this? It's going to cause a war! President Reagan had done this very deliberately, very consciously. As he later explained, "I wanted them to know that we knew—that the principles ruling their society were in themselves evil."

In 1990, Alexander Yakovlev, the Politburo chief of Soviet ideology, agreed with Reagan when he said publicly that Leninism was based upon class struggle, class hatred, and that this was "evil." Yakovlev used Reagan's language and meant the same thing by it. The war of ideas had been won, and the Soviet Union collapsed within a year. This is a classic example of winning a war of ideas without firing, well, too many shots.

Successfully assessing how you are doing in a war of ideas means you will have to have assessed the nature of the war before it even begins. What exactly is in play in terms of ideas?

I sometimes use the example of an oil patch in Texas because this actually happened to a great uncle of mine. The owner of this oil patch caught somebody moving the fence posts at night. There was a shooting, there was an arrest, and there was prosecution. Why was the guy moving the fence posts at night? He wanted some of the oil on the other side of the fence posts; so he moved them. When the shooting took place, you could say that the war had already begun. It could be settled in court or with some more shooting, with some property surveys and the production of deeds for the land but, in the long and short of it, both contenders in this so-called war accepted the same conception of justice. As soon as the property line could be properly defined, everyone would go back to their business, and the conflict would be over.

However, what if you caught some guy not moving the fence posts, but eliminating them, taking down the fence posts because he did not believe there should be any, because he was against private property. His idea of an ideal society was a classless one, the achievement of which was being prevented by the fact that people have private property. So, he takes down the fence posts. Now you have a different kind of conflict. Something different is at stake because, in the second conflict, there is not a shared idea of what is just. What you have are two contending conceptions of justice, in which case there is a great deal more at stake than where that property line in the oil patch is. Two different meanings of life are at issue. So, the second war is much more likely to be a total war.

Why is this relevant to what we are discussing now? It is helpful to keep in mind when we are looking at ISIS, for instance. I just came across this statement from a combat commander of ISIS. People are often inclined to reduce the nature of a conflict to only local causes and grievances. Of course, there are always local causes and grievances—I don't mean to discount those. But pay attention to the significance of this statement by Abu Yusaf, Senior Security Commander for the Islamic State, in which he says, "We don't

> "I wanted them to know that we knew—that the principles ruling their society were in themselves evil."
> —*President Ronald Reagan*

believe in countries. Breaking and destroying all borders is our aim." So, his problem is not *where* the borders are or were; his problem is with borders, period. In this case, we have what appears to be something more like the latter kind of conflict.

Let me get to a couple of case studies to try to illustrate how to think about and how to assess a war of ideas during war, and how essential to victory moral legitimacy can be. Sometimes it is helpful to go to an historic example in another culture for these principles to become clearer than they might be when dealing with something overly familiar to us.

The Mongols came thundering into the Middle East around 1250 AD, and they made it as far as Baghdad in 1258, when they ended the Abbasid Caliphate. Their form of public diplomacy was to build several stories-high pyramids of human skulls. The next town would find out and surrender as soon as possible. One group, however, would not surrender. One group withstood the Mongol onslaught lead by Hulagu Khan. They were the Mamluks in Egypt, who controlled area up unto Syria. At that time in the mid-thirteenth century, there was no problem for the Muslim Mamluks to declare a jihad against the Mongols for the simple reason that the Mongols were infidels and they were invading the Dar al-Islam. So, the case was a very simple one for the sultans and his qadis and mullahs to declare jihad against the Mongols. The Mamluk troops were greatly inspired by this and they were the only military force to stop the Mongols.

Fast forward toward the end of that century, when the Mongols thought they would try again, except this time with a difference. The Khanate, now centered in Persia, was to be led by Ghazan Khan. Ghazan Khan had converted to Islam just before he assumed the throne. This created a serious problem for the Mamluk Sultan al-Malik al-Nāsir Muhammad in Egypt.

First of all, Ghazan Khan, as he prepared to invade, had declarations drawn up against the Mamluks, accusing them of causing strife. Some Mongol troops had gone up into Turkey, had burned a village, killed some civilians, and raped some Muslim women. Ghazan Khan took this as an excuse to declare that the Mamluks were causing strife and that he, on the side of justice, was going to restore order. He set forth his justification in a declaration (a security assurance called an amān) read in the Great Umayyad Mosque in Damascus before his troops entered the city in January, 1300 AD. Further, in another public document, Ghazan Khan stated that, "It was the rule of Islam to fight against rebels." The Mamluks were the rebels. They caused disorder, one of the great offenses within Islam.

Back in Egypt, Sultan al-Malik was having trouble. Some of his Mamluk emirs defected to Ghazan Khan. Ghazan Khan claimed to be the Padishah Al-Islam, the Persian equivalent statement of Amir-al-Mumineen, the Commander of the Faithful, the leader of all Islam. The question the Mamluk troops asked themselves was: how are we going to fight our fellow Muslims? One of the greatest offenses in Islam is to kill a fellow Muslim. Here were fellow Muslims, how could they be fought? In fact, al-Malik wrote a letter to Ghazan Khan saying, some of my best troops refuse to fight you because of this supposed conversion of yours, and you are misusing the Islamic faith to take advantage of us. What was al-Malik going to do? He was now in a war of ideas. At stake was the very legitimacy of his regime, and who had the genuine call to jihad, Ghazan Khan or the Mamluks.

To al-Malik's rescue came a famous Muslim jurist whose name may be familiar to you today—as an illustration of the power of ideas. His name was Ibn Taymiyya. Ibn Taymiyya wrote three fatwas against the Mongols with the ruling that not only can you fight the Mongols, you must fight them.

Here is how he justified jihad. He said, first of all, not all these Mongols are Muslims. So there are infidels within their ranks. Second of all, there are apostate Muslims within their forces because the emirs who left al-Malik are now apostates. Also, there are some Shia forces with them, and we know those are apostate too. But here was the decisive element. Ghazan Khan, said Ibn Taymiyya, rules according to the Mongol Yasa code, the tribal code of the Mongols. Who, Ibn Taymiyya asks, is the source of this code? Only one man, Genghis Khan. In other words, this is a man-made code, as against a divine code from Allah called Sharia. Therefore, Ghazan Khan is not ruling according to the prescribed Muslim law, but according to a *jahiliyya*, or pagan, pre-Islamic code. He is engaged in *bida* or innovation, a serious offense in Islam. Ibn Taymiyya was the thinker in Islam who made the strongest case that a Muslim ruler is illegitimate, indeed an apostate, unless he enforces Islamic Sharia in the lands which he rules.

So over the course of three fatwas, Ibn Taymiyya made this case very thoroughly and very convincingly. Al-Malik recognized the value of what he had and sent Ibn Taymiyya to the troops. Ibn Taymiyya became a combination of combat-chaplain and political commissar. He lectured the troops when they were fighting the Mongols. During Ramadan, he wrote a fatwa giving them a dietary dispensation; they could eat during Ramadan when they were fighting the Mongols, and he himself went into battle with them.

What would you think about assessing the war of ideas during this conflict? (By the way, this was about a ten-year period, during which Ghazan Khan repeatedly tried to take Syria away from the Mongols.) If you wanted to quantify it, you could talk about the publication of the fatwas, how many copies were made, and how they were distributed, as against Ghazan-Khan's declarations, in how many mosques they were read, how often, etc.

But the reason for Ibn Taymiyya's success was the substance of his argument, not the means of its communication—as essential as they were. He won the argument on the basis of the substance of the issue as to who was just. Each side was trying to take the high ground in the Muslim version of *jus ad bellum* and to delegitimize their opponent. Both sides were moving within the same universe of meaning. It was a matter of which side had the better claim to jihad. What was the ultimate measurement of success in this war of ideas? Quite simply that the Mamluk forces fought. Wars are life and death situations. A Muslim soldier does not want to go into battle without some assurance that, if he does not come back from it, he has not endangered his soul with eternal damnation, but rather that he will go straight to paradise because he is fighting a proper jihad.

This is one example of how ideas of justice come into play during war. As an illustration of the power of ideas, Ibn Taymiyya is today one of the most frequently quoted Islamic sources in jihadi literature. The Islamists will say that this or that ruler is illegitimate, and we are living in a state of pre-Islamic jahiliyya. Why is this so? Because, invariably, the ruler is not enforcing Sharia. So al-Qaeda or ISIS will proclaim that these rulers are illegitimate because they are not enforcing sharia, and they quote as their authority Ibn Taymiyya.

For another example, let us briefly look at something closer to home in the Civil War of the United States. Abraham Lincoln was faced with a very tricky situation, to say the least, in preserving the Union, which was his principal goal when the war began—not to preserve any Union, but to preserve a Union worth preserving, by which he meant no extension of slavery into the western territories and some settlement by which one could see the ultimate extirpation of slavery from the United States, in fulfillment of the promises in the Declaration of Independence that all people are created equal.

> A Muslim soldier does not want to go into battle without some assurance that, if he does not come back from it, he has not endangered his soul with eternal damnation, but rather that he will go straight to paradise because he is fighting a proper jihad.

At the start of the war, he had on his side several slave states, the border states of Kentucky and Tennessee. Without their support, it would have extremely difficult for Lincoln to defend the Union. His position would have been strategically weakened in a major way. Had he said from the beginning that this is a war against slavery, it would have endangered the allegiance of Kentucky and Tennessee and would have considerably weakened his position militarily. So practically, he could not do that. Right at the beginning of the war, he did say privately that if we can show this war is against slavery, there is no European power that would be in a situation politically to come to the assistance of the Confederates or to recognize them. This was one of his primary worries because, from the start, the Confederate States were appealing to European powers for recognition in the hopes that they would then aid them. To create circumstances that would encourage them to do that, the Confederates stopped sending cotton to Europe. There were a million and a half textile workers in Great Britain and France at the time. By withholding cotton shipments, the Confederates could, they thought, create domestic pressure on those governments to recognize the South, so it would start shipping cotton again. However, the Union then put a blockade on the Southern ports so that the cotton could not get through in any case. As a result, the workers' situation in Manchester and other industrial cities in Great Britain was getting very difficult.

What did Lincoln do to prevent political forces in those countries from lobbying their governments to recognize the South and, indeed, to come to their aid? Lincoln engaged in what we call today public diplomacy, although there was no term for that in the 1860s. By this we mean that he appealed directly to the people in Great Britain over the heads of their government. He did this in a number of ways. He wrote to them; he encouraged them; he secretly sent them funds; and he even sometimes secretly wrote their declarations for them. The textile workers, as it turned out, despised the indignity of slave labor as much as Lincoln did. They chose to bear up under the severe economic pressures they were suffering because they shared the same sense of justice. In substance, Lincoln and the textile workers had the same view as to the immorality of slave labor. This produced massive demonstrations in Great Britain, which gained a great deal of attention in the press and then reverberated in Parliament and the British Government.

We can debate whether the British government at that time ever thought seriously of recognizing the South, but Lincoln then created a situation in which he made it impossible for them—after the battle of Antietam. Why then? Not only did Lincoln not want to lose Tennessee and Kentucky, but he did not want to issue the Emancipation Proclamation when the Union was getting pounded by the Confederate forces. He needed a victory or something, at least, that was not a defeat, before doing so. Otherwise it would appear as an act of desperation. Antietam gave Lincoln that opportunity. Of course, the Declaration freed slaves only in the Confederate states; it did not free slaves in Maryland or the border states. However, by this masterstroke, Lincoln nonetheless transformed the narrative of the war into anti-slavery versus pro-slavery, at which point it became politically impossible for any European power to come to the aid of the South or to recognize it.

What was the measure of success in that war of ideas? One could measure the number of demonstrations, the size of the crowds, the substance of their declarations (most particularly in the moral rhetoric they employed), their impact on the press and therefore on the politics of Great Britain. Also, one can count the fact that no foreign power recognized the Confederacy. These all spelt success in Lincoln's effort.

We do not seem to understand the level at which the war of ideas is taking place.

The problem in some of our current conflicts is precisely that we do not seem to understand the level at which the war of ideas is taking place. We neglect the issue of justice. We do not seem to be aware of how our adversaries, or even some of our allies, comprehend the issue of justice. We do not know the language of justice in which they speak. So how can we hope to change that language to our own? As a consequence, we have too often conceded to our enemies a theological safe-heaven, which is far more dangerous than a physical safe-haven. As a result, we have the situation recently described by former Congressman Lee Hamilton, a member of the 9/11 Commission:

> *"The ISIS challenge is, at its core, a war of ideas. I have seen virtually no consideration of a strategic component to take on ISIS on this fundamental level. We need to recognize that while it is possible to destroy an ideology (Nazism, fascism), doing so is not easy, and it cannot be done without an effective, fully supported counter message."*

Progress in the war of ideas can be assessed in terms of changes in the language of justice respectively employed by each side. He who wins the argument from justice wins the war of ideas and, most likely, the war. ∎

THE ISLAMIC STATE WAR: STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS REQUIRE A STRATEGY

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Dr. Anthony H. Cordesman holds the Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy at CSIS. He has served as director of intelligence assessment in the Office of the Secretary of Defense and is a recipient of the Department of Defense Distinguished Service Medal. During his time at CSIS, he has completed a wide variety of studies on energy, U.S. strategy and defense plans, the lessons of modern war, defense programming and budgeting, NATO modernization, Chinese military power, the lessons of modern warfare, proliferation, counterterrorism, armed nation building, the security of the Middle East, and the Afghan and Iraq conflicts. Cordesman has traveled frequently to Afghanistan and Iraq to consult for MNF-I, ISAF, U.S. commands, and U.S. embassies on the wars in those countries, and he was a member of the Strategic Assessment Group that assisted General Stanley McChrystal in developing a new strategy for Afghanistan in 2009. He frequently acts as a consultant to the U.S. State Department, Defense Department, and intelligence community and has worked with U.S. officials on counterterrorism and security areas in a number of Middle East countries.

The campaign against the Islamic State and the broader elements of Operation Inherent Resolve confront the US with some of the most complex problems in defining a viable strategy in its recent military history. Not only must the US deal with a religious extremist movement at time when Islam is at war with itself, but it also faces a wide range of allies and other states with varying goals, diverging motives, and different perceptions of US capability and motivation.

The US is being asked to operate in a theater and a wider region where Sunni is often at war with Shi'ite, and Sunni extremists are at war with Sunni moderates. This is a struggle where the US is at best seen as an outsider and is often portrayed as a neo-imperialist or "crusader," and is the natural target of conspiracy theorists in a region with no shortage of overlaying—and sometimes conflicting—conspiracy theories.

So far, the US has only made slow and unstable progress in developing a strategy to deal with the Islamic State, and shaping a workable US political and military approach to degrading the Islamic State and dealing with the other US strategic priorities involved. It has not provided any credible public rationale for its actions that would receive Congressional authorization for the use of force, shape the size of the US military role in the region, reassure US partners and deter potential enemies, and support the use of key tools like strategic communications.

Operating Against the Islamic State in the Middle of the Syrian and Iraqi Civil Conflicts

This lack of a viable and public strategy is particularly detrimental because the US effort to degrade the Islamic State must operate in the context of two major civil struggles of equally strategic importance. The campaign against the Islamic State is in many ways a mask for making hard choices about the level of US intervention in Syria and the US effort to secure and stabilize Iraq and support its Arab allies.

Syria is one of the most violent and socially disruptive civil wars in modern history. For all of the US rhetoric about a moderate Syrian political element and training and strengthening the Free Syrian Army (FSA), the reality is that Syria is a nation divided between

an Assad-Alawite dominated government in western Syria, backed by Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah on one side, and a fragmented set of rebel forces in the less populated eastern Syria split into at least 30—and as many as 70—actors, dominated by Islamist forces, on the other side.

Iraq is critical as an oil power, a counterweight to Iran, and for the security of key Arab allies. For all the public US focus on the Islamic State, it was a low-level civil war in Iraq and Maliki's alienation of Iraq's Sunnis and Kurds that empowered the rise of the Islamic State in Sunni areas like Anbar and Mosul in the north and deeply divided Arab Shi'ite, Arab Sunni, and Kurd.

Iraq's former Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki, turned the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) into an instrument of political power, corrupted the command and promotion structure, and used the police and army against the Sunnis. He also steadily exacerbated a power struggle with the Kurds, cutting off their share of the nation's oil revenues, blocking efforts to integrate the Pesh Merga into the Iraqi Army, and in turn sharply raised Iraqi Kurdish demands for independence, federalism, and/or expanding Kurdish areas of control, together with increased autonomy over their oil and gas exports.

> The US effort to degrade the Islamic State must operate in the context of two major civil struggles of equally strategic importance.

Interacting with Broader Regional Struggles

The Islamic State struggle also cannot be separated from a litany of broad regional conflicts playing out in the Middle East at this time. Struggles over the future of Islam, Sunni versus Shi'ite/Alawite, subjugation of minorities, Arab versus Persian, and Israelis versus Arabs and Iranians. These various struggles spill over into a wide range of other struggles and areas of US interest and influence—all of which further complicate the problem of information operations.

- They involve a divided Lebanon whose Hezbollah is a major element of Assad's forces, empower Al Qaida and the Islamic State in northern Lebanon, and create a massive refugee problem.

- They put pressure on Israel and the Golan.

- They complicate US tensions with Iran throughout the region and at a critical time in the P5+1 nuclear negotiations and US competition for influence with Iran in Iraq.

- They have raised serious tensions with Turkey, which gives priority to ousting Assad, has its own Kurdish crisis, faces a major refugee problem, and increasingly distrusts the US.

- They add to the pressure on Jordan caused by its own internal divisions by adding a massive new refugee problem and a threat on its border.

- They complicate the tensions in deeply divided GCC, where key allies like Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are skeptical of US resolve, and perceive the US to have failed to act in Syria, tolerated the rise of the Moslem Brotherhood in Egypt, and as leading an uncertain effort to negotiate with Iran.

- In spite of cosmetic efforts at unity, Qatar remains far more supportive of Islamist movements than the other GCC states, and is closer to Turkey in this respect. Every GCC state also takes a somewhat different stand in limiting private funding of Islamist extremist movements in Syria, the Islamic State, and Al Qaida.

- The rising flow of foreign volunteers to the Islamic State and other Islamic extremist movements sharply affects both the Islamic State conflict and Operation Inherent Resolve as well as the overall flow of violent extremist cadres throughout the MENA region and Islamic world. The early victories of the Islamic State have led to a major rise in the number of volunteers from North Africa, the rest of the Middle East, Europe and North America, Russia, Central Asia, and the East. They have also transformed the use of the Internet, smart phones, other media, recruiting and training, and much of the content of extremist information campaigns.

Mission Improbable or Mission Impossible

All of these forces interact with what may well prove to be a US failure to define a practical mission and set tangible goals for Operation Inherent Resolve. The key to a successful strategy, to a meaningful Congressional authorization of the use of force, reestablishing trust and confidence on the part of our regional partners, and a successful information operation, or strategic communications effort, is to set forth goals that are clear and credible and that meet the expectations of both the US and its partners/allies.

In practice, the US has failed to do this in all three of the most critical areas relating to Operation Inherent Resolve, although to some extent this is the inevitable result of deep differences in the goals and expectations of both our partners/allies and those involved in the conflict.

Degrading and Destroying the Islamic State?

The US has talked about "degrading and destroying" the Islamic State without setting clear goals for what this actually means. It initially focused on a very limited air campaign to both halt ISIS gains and attack key Islamic State centers in Syria. This effort came too late and was so publicly foreshadowed that key elements of the Islamic State (IS) were able to heed the strategic warning and disperse and shelter in populated areas.

Since that time, the US air effort has been driven by Islamic State actions in key areas such as the Mosul Dam and Bajii refinery, but increasingly by non-strategic operations in Syria, such as Kobani and Mount Sinjar—which USCENTCOM and the BBC report accounted for some 400 of the roughly 715 strikes conducted since the start of the air campaign on August 8th and November 4th.

Moreover, key elements of the air campaign have not been directed at the Islamic State. At least two other major series of US strikes have been directed at the Khorasan Group, an element of the Al Nusra Front in Syria, a group affiliated with Al Qaida and hostile to the Islamic State. One set of strikes was carried out on September 22 and another on November 6-7. In practice, these strikes seem to have reflected the fact that the US found the Khorasan Group/Al Nusra Front to present a more serious potential source of direct terrorist attacks on the US than the Islamic State.

> The US has talked about "degrading and destroying" the Islamic State without setting clear goals for what this actually means.

This highlights a critical set of weaknesses in the stated US strategic objective of the attacks on the Islamic State. There is no real chance that the US can destroy all of the violent Jihadist elements in the Islamic state any more than the "surge" and the Sons of Iraq could destroy the underlying structure of Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia (AQIM), from which the Islamic State evolved. Furthermore, the competing Islamic extremist threats are in many ways as serious a problem on a regional and local basis as the Islamic State.

The US did carry out at least one focused attack on the leadership of the Islamic State on November 8th, but it is unclear how much success this attack had or that the overall impact of the air campaign since it began in August has had a major impact.

The level of air activity has remained limited to an average of well under 20 strikes per day and sometimes failed to relieve pressure on Iraqi forces in Anbar. Key US officers have noted the increasing capability of IS to shelter and disperse, and it is clear that the US and its allies are operating under severe limits to their targeting and under tight rules of engagement, although no information effort has been made to explain or justify these.

The US may be limiting the use of airpower in order to push the Iraqis towards some form of unity and cooperation. But the US has failed to show that the current campaign fits the threat, is effective, is not driven by current events and media crises, and is making carefully calculated judgments about the balance between effectiveness and civilian casualties and collateral damage.

The disappointing information campaign explaining both the overall US strategy for dealing with the Islamic State and the impact of US efforts to date has been worse than no information campaign. It has produced overambitious spin and largely meaningless daily strike statistics. The end result has been to convince many of the actors involved that the US is not serious or has other motives.

At the extreme, it has fueled conspiracy theories, including those that suggest the US is cooperating with Iran to create the Islamic State and/or back Assad. At a broader level, it has left both regional and other US allies with serious questions about US intentions, the credibility of US willingness to use effective levels of force, and whether this is another case where American actions fall far short of American words.

It is still unclear how the US plans to convince Iraqi Sunnis to back the Iraqi government or deal with the growing anger among the more moderate Syrian rebels (and their outside Arab supporters) about the lack of US support for Syrian Sunni rebels. It is unclear that the US can "destroy" or eliminate the Islamic State as a major terrorist force in Iraq, produce more than a minimal shift away from Islamic extremism as the dominant force in Syria, or address the much broader impact that the IS has had in the now global struggle for the future of Islam.

So far, the US only seems to have begun trying to use local sources to counter the IS wave of different media, to focus on fully informing key population segments on the abuses and extremism of the Islamic State, call attention to the fact that its chief victims to date have been fellow Sunnis, and find effective ways to make its extremism a constant focus of regional and local information warfare.

The religious, ideological, and political war against both the Islamic State and all forms of violent Islamic extremism in the region still seems to lack any coherent effort and drive. The US has said that it is seeking to create a broader effort by its Arab allies and Turkey to limit the flow of foreign volunteers, reduce the funding of the IS, and create a broad re-

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ligious and political information and education effort to convince both publics and potential young volunteers that the Islamic State is based on non-Islamic values, extremism, and is religiously and practically illegitimate.

So far, however, most measures seem to be efforts to strengthen counterterrorism and crack down on the preaching of officially recognized clerics:

- Egypt, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE have all made some effort, but most have been traditional statements by senior religious figures, and they have lacked scope, intensity, and focus.

- Turkey and Qatar have not really supported such efforts.

- Other Arab states, Jordan, for example, have focused on internal issues, and most states have relied more on stricter counterterrorism laws and activity, sometimes bordering on repression.

- US and European efforts have been general and unfocused.

- Iran and the Iraqi government efforts focus on Shi'ite priorities. Kurds focus on Kurdish interests.

- Central Asia, Russia, and China focus on stricter counterterrorism laws and activity, sometimes bordering on repression.

The need for a comprehensive strategic communications effort—tied to a common strategy—is particularly important because of the possibility that the Islamic State could be made to largely self-destruct, if exploiting its abuse and extremism can be made a key element of US strategic communications and information warfare.

Media reporting is uncertain, but there already are indications that the Islamic State is systematically purging all potential opposition in Sunni areas, executing potential rivals and dissidents, and creating growing problems with Sunni tribes and so-called Ba'athists.

These vulnerabilities will also grow if the US can develop an equal level of cooperation in making it steadily harder for the Islamic State to maintain the flow of money, services, and economic activity necessary to win public support. The Islamic State and other Islamic extremists cannot be defeated by military means alone, but US use of force will become far more effective if the US provides an equal focus on strategic communications and attacking the economic underpinnings of the Islamic State's operations.

Over time, the key enemy of extremists may be the fact they are too extreme and too poor to sustain enough support to keep power and/or to function. So far, however, the US strategy in both areas seems to be one of intentions unmatched by clear plans and actions.

Betting on Iraqi Unity and Cooperation

The US has had significant success in pushing out Maliki, creating a broader and more national government under Haider al-Abadi, bringing the Kurds back into a formal role in the government, bringing some key Sunni politicians back into the government, creating real Ministries of Defense and the Interior, and laying the political groundwork for

> The Islamic State could be made to largely self-destruct, if exploiting its abuse and extremism can made a key element of US strategic communications and information warfare.

the rehabilitation of the Iraqi security forces. It has had significant help in calling for unity from key figures like the powerful Shia Ayatollah, Ali al-Sistani, and it has not faced major challenges or opposition from Iran on these efforts.

What is not clear, however, is that US efforts can actually produce a unified and effective enough Iraqi central government to deal with and control the various problems Iraq faces:

■ *Finding a way to bring a truly national government to power, end the deep divisions within the Shi'ite political structure, and limit the role of Shi'ite militias, hardline movements, and role of Iran and the IRGC.* The divisions between Arab Sunni and Arab Shiite, and those between Iraq's Arabs and Kurds are matched to some degree by the divisions between Shi'ite elements.

The new Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, who assumed office in September 2014, is part of Maliki's Islamic Dawa party. Maliki still has serious influence. Sadr remains a major force. So do Shi'ite militias, some of which had had visible ties to the Iranian Islamic revolutionary Guard during their recent operations in support of the Iraqi Army against the Islamic State.

Abadi did succeed in making a Sunni lawmaker, Jaber al-Jabberi, defense minister, and Riyad Ghareeb, a Shiite lawmaker with the State of Law bloc, interior minister on September 8, 2014. But, it is still unclear how freely they will be able to operate. Abadi has also talked about raising one million volunteers to fight the Islamic State, but almost all were Shi'ite, and it is far from clear how they can be used or absorbed without exacerbating Sunni and Shi'ite divisions.

More generally, Iraq's lack of effective governance and ability to use its oil money and budget resources still combines with its ongoing economic and security problems and acute, permeating, nation-wide corruption. It is not enough to achieve political accommodation at the level of the central government, important as this is. Iraq needs effective government, a restoration of its rule of law and police force, and effective use of its economic resources – all areas where the US has no declared strategy and no clear plans to provide expertise and exert influence.

■ *Creating a stable, working relationship between Arab and Kurd*, solving the financing issues involved, creating a lasting level of coordination between the Iraqi forces and Pesh Merga, and creating some kind of federalism that will both help Iraq function as a nation and deal with the reality that the Kurds now occupy even more disputed territory—including key areas like Kirkuk and its nearby oil fields.

The economic crisis in the Kurdish zone that began in January 2014 when Maliki stopped sending a share of Iraq's oil wealth to the Kurds—a share that already only equaled 12% rather than the promised 17%—has been compounded by Kurdish insistence on their right to develop and export their own oil and gas.

This split has encouraged Iraq's main oil exporters in the Shi'ite south to consider following suit by restricting the sharing of what they see as "their" oil wealth, and left the broader problem that some sources estimate the Kurds could only earn some $7 billion a year from exporting their own oil and has in the near term versus that $12 billion they would get if the Iraqi central government agreed to restore their full share of national oil revenues.

> Iraq needs effective government, a restoration of its rule of law and police force, and effective use of its economic resources.

Moreover, it remains unclear how the US can help Iraq develop an effective approach to fighting the Islamic state in northern Iraq if the Pesh Merga and Iraqi government forces do not fully cooperate and could even turn on each other, or how Iraqi unity can ever be real if Arab and Kurd cannot move towards some viable form of federalism.

■ ***Creating real-world openings to the Sunnis in Anbar, Nineveh, and other Sunni-dominated areas.*** The US has talked about creating a new Sunni National Guard – somewhat similar to the Sons of Iraq—but with a more lasting federal structure based on key Sunni populated areas and governorates (provinces).

Unfortunately, the US has not explained this concept, shown how it can work, or indicated that it has clear support from the Iraqi central government. To date, the Iraqi government has lost more Sunni territory and has not had a major new Sunni element, tribal grouping, or other powerful faction break from the Islamic State or realign itself with the Iraqi military.

This is particularly striking because—as is explained below—President Obama said on November 6, 2014, that he would deploy another 1,500 US troops to train and equip Iraqi forces, but he does not seem to have made any plans to provide the manning required for the creation of an Iraqi Sunni National Guard, nor has he included this in his request for additional funding or explained how this could succeed at time when the Islamic State seemed to still be making gains in defeating the few visible Sunni tribal elements that were hostile to it.

The problem is also growing steadily worse in human terms. UNAMI estimates that some 5.2 million Iraqis are now in need, and the violence in Iraq since January 2014 has raised the number of Iraqis displaced by the recent fighting from 85,000 to 1.8 million.

Creating Effective Iraqi Forces in Time to be Meaningful

The US has said it can take up to three years to rebuild the Iraqi security forces. This does not include the police and justice systems—which eroded to the point of near collapse in many areas under Maliki. It is still, however, a massive challenge and one the US may not be able to fully meet.

- ***First, the US cannot succeed without Iraqi political unity.*** In fact, the US faces a real risk that its military efforts will be offset by a return to Sunni versus Shi'ite clashes dominated by IS and Shi'ite military forces along the (re)emerging Sunni-Shi'ite sectarian fault line.

- ***Second, even the effort to restructure, retrain, and re-equip the Iraqi forces is extremely challenging***—as General Dempsey, General Allen, and General Austin have all made clear. Military progress in Iraq requires political unity to overcome the devastating divisiveness of the Maliki regime, his split with the Kurds, his steadily growing politicization of the Army with officers loyal to him regardless of corruption and incompetence, and his increasing use of the army and police against largely peaceful Sunni demonstrations from 2012 onwards—actions which so alienated the Sunni population in Western and Northern Iraq that it created the climate in which massive Islamic State gains became possible.

The Iraqi security forces should never have been vulnerable to Islamic State (ISIS, ISIL) forces in the first place. As incompetent, political, and corrupt as many officers may have been, reports estimate that the Iraqi Army still had an authorized strength of some

Military progress in Iraq requires political unity to overcome the devastating divisiveness of the Maliki regime.

193,400 men towards the end of 2013. While Iraq did not have a real air force, it did have a sizable security force under its Ministry of Interior. While Iraq's undersized air force was made up some light combat trainers and some 30 armed helicopters, its security forces—which Maliki had increasingly used effectively against the Sunnis—totaled 531,000 personnel, made up of 302,000 regular police, 44,000 paramilitary Federal Police, and 95,000 lower quality security guards in the Facilities Protection Service.

While US intelligence estimates put the Islamic State forces at some 31,500 by the late summer of 2014, they probably did not total more than 10,000 full- time fighters when they took much of Anbar province. They were still well under 30,000 when they took Mosul. They also were initially light armed, largely with "technicals"—armored trucks mounting automatic weapons and mortars.

In contrast, the Iraqi Army initially had 2 special forces brigades, 1 armored division, 5 mechanized divisions, 3 motorized divisions, 4 infantry divisions, one commando division, and two presidential security brigades—for a nominal total of well over 50 combat brigades. It also had 336 medium tanks (including 140 M1A1 Abrams), 1,194 armored personnel carriers, 188 armored infantry fighting vehicles, 1,334 light wheeled combat vehicles, 48 self-propelled heavy artillery weapons, 138 towed heavy artillery weapons, multiple rocket launchers, and 1,200 mortars.

It may well take years to rebuild the Iraqi forces that were undermined and crippled by Prime Minister Maliki's failures and were then defeated by the Islamic State and other Sunni forces. And it is obvious from its recent defeats that it desperately needs forward US advisors, not just joint operations centers in Baghdad and Erbil and advisors in the rear down to the brigade level. Studies by the US military before the present air effort in Iraq indicated that only about half of the 56 Iraqi Army brigade equivalents (47-50 combat elements) that survived the rout leading to the Islamic state capture of Mosul were worth retraining.

As noted earlier, it is also far from clear that President Obama's announcement on November 7, 2014, that he planned to send some 1,500 more troops to support the 1,400-1,900 already in Iraq will come close to meeting the need for advisors to the Iraqi forces, the Kurdish Pesh Merga, or the new Sunni National Guard units that Iraq now plans to create with the support of a US "train and assist" mission. The Administration also has so far placed what could be crippling limits on the ability to deploy such advisors and "assist" personnel forward into the combat units that may need such support the most.

The Department of Defense described this deployment as follows:

> The commander in chief has authorized Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel to deploy to Iraq up to 1,500 additional US personnel over the coming months, in a non-combat role, to expand our advise-and-assist mission and initiate a comprehensive training effort for Iraqi forces.

> Secretary Hagel made this recommendation to President Obama based on the request of the Government of Iraq, US Central Command's assessment of Iraqi units, the progress Iraqi security forces have made in the field, and in concert with the development of a coalition campaign plan to defend key areas and go on the offensive against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

U.S. Central Command will establish two expeditionary advise-and-assist operations centers, in locations outside of Baghdad and Erbil, to provide support for the Iraqis at the brigade headquarters level and above. These centers will be supported by an appropriate array of force protection capabilities.

US Central Command will establish several sites across Iraq that will accommodate the training of 12 Iraqi brigades, specifically nine Iraqi army and three Peshmerga brigades. These sites will be located in northern, western, and southern Iraq. Coalition partners will join US personnel at these locations to help build Iraqi capacity and capability. The training will be funded through the request for an Iraq Train and Equip Fund that the administration will submit to Congress as well as from the Government of Iraq.

Over the coming weeks, as we finalize the training site locations, the United States will work with coalition members to determine how many US and coalition personnel will be required at each location for the training effort. Ultimately, these Iraqi forces, when fully trained, will enable Iraq to better defend its citizens, its borders, and its interests against the threat of ISIL. This effort is in keeping with our overarching strategy to work with partners on the ground to destroy ISIL.

On the one hand, a careful reading shows that this deployment may only be the start of a much larger deployment. The President also said that $5.6 billion would be provided for operations against the Islamic State and to help create effective Iraqi forces. The request included $5 billion for the Defense Department to conduct a range of military operations against ISIL in the Middle East, of which $1.6 billion was for an Iraqi train-and-equip fund.

The Department of Defense stated that Iraq's government and coalition nations were expected to contribute an unstated amount of support and advisors, and that the train-and-equip fund also may be used toward training Sunni tribes that are operating under the auspices of the Iraqi Defense Ministry, Kirby said. "Ultimately, we expect that we'll be able to conduct some of that training at the same locations where we will train Iraqi army and Pesh Merga brigades."

These statement may well gloss over an unworkable approach to train and equip that could cripple US and Iraq efforts, as well as the problems raised by the role of Iraqi Shi'ite militias and the Iranian IRGC.

Previous reporting has indicated that the President still opposes military recommendations to provide US advisors and support personnel at the brigade level of actual operations and below—a kind of presence that has been critical in coordinating effective close air support operations in the past and creating combat-effective allied forces. Equally important, no mention is made of the full range of challenges in creating an Iraqi Sunni National Guard and the role the US plans to play in meeting it.

The US statements also do not address the level of tensions between Arab Shi'ite and Arab Kurd, or the practical problems in driving the Islamic State out of Mosul and Ninevah in the north without creating a confrontation between Sunni Arab and Kurd over the Kurd's expansion of their zone of control into areas they sharply dispute with Iraq's Sunnis.

It is equally critical to note from both the viewpoint of gaining allied-support confidence—and any meaningful effort to win Iraqi Sunni support and conducting a meaningful information campaign—that the Iraqi government and Iraqi forces present a convincing picture to key Arab allies, as well as Iraqi Sunnis, of their willingness and ability to nationally reunify the country.

Otherwise, the US will find steadily growing opposition from Egypt, Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. This is absolutely critical to a successful information campaign because it is essential to convince our most critical Arab allies that Iraq will be an independent Arab state that gives Sunnis full rights and share of oil wealth and to alleviate fears that the US is not indirectly empowering Assad and Iran.

Betting on a Non-Strategy in Syria

The US strategy for dealing with Syria seems to be to lie by indirection and omission and hope the crisis will eventually force the Syrian government and rebels to negotiate some acceptable form of accommodation.

Ever since the US failed to support the Syrian rebels during the peak of their success (and moderation) against Assad in 2011, the US has issued a series of empty statements saying that it was going to provide more training and arms for the Syrian rebels. It has never explained in any meaningful detail what each successive statement actually means, tried to explain the changing balance of rebel forces, or gone beyond the hope that somehow a time will come when negotiations can push Assad out without letting in extremists like the Islamic State and Al Nusra Front.

As of November 2014 the US was still talking vaguely about training and equipping the more moderate elements of the Free Syrian Army at a rate of some 5,000 men in Saudi Arabia plus additional training in Jordan without any public statement of what total force is to be created, how long it will take, and what it is supposed to do. It has made over 300 air strikes in Syria, but rarely more than 15 a day, and has only provided minimal support for the Syrian rebels, who suffered major defeats in the north in early November.

The US has tended to react to media-driven events involving Islamic State attacks on Syrian minorities and an isolated enclave like Kobani instead of responding to attacks on the moderate rebels or by attacking key Islamic State targets. Actions such as these have fueled Arab conspiracy theories that the US is inadvertently aiding Assad, and the weirder theory that it is colluding with Iran to use the Islamic State to empower Assad.

The initial real world (and undeclared) goal in August 2014 when the US began its air campaign in August seems to have been to try to isolate the Syrian civil war from the US effort to attack the Islamic State's major centers and resources in Syria, while concentrating on helping Iraqi recover its lost territory.

To the extent US officials have explained the intention on background, the broader goal in Syria seems to have been to protect the moderate rebel elements, try to build a functional level of political unity, provide humanitarian aid, and let the broader struggle between the Assad regime and all rebel forces burn out. The objective seems to have been to reach the point where battle-fatigued and exhausted remnants would allow some Geneva-like settlement to negotiate both Assad's departure and some form of stable, moderate, compromise government that included both Alawites and Sunni Arabs.

> The US has tended to react to media-driven events involving Islamic State attacks … these have fueled Arab conspiracy theories that the US is inadvertently aiding Assad.

Events since August have shown just how grim the prospects are for the success of these objectives. The US has been driven into using airpower in Syria for very different reasons, has publicly clashed with Turkey and more privately with allies like Saudi Arabia over its lack of support for the rebels, is increasing focus of regional conspiracy theories, has seen serious new defeats of the rebels it did the most to arm, has no meaningful strategic communications to make, and is betting on the outcome for a strategy that seems to be yet another a "triumph of hope over experience" – without any serious commitment.

At the same point in November when US officials and officers were making vague claims of progress in attacking the leaders of the Islamic State and supporting Iraqi operations around the Bajii refinery, the Al Nusra Front was making critical gains in defeating the key "moderate" rebel factions the US had armed and backed in the northwest border area of Iraq in Idlib Province and near the Bab al Hawa border crossing.

The Harakat Hazam and Syrian Revolutionary Front suffered a major defeat, seemed to lose much of their US-supplied arms, and lost much of their military credibility as well. They did so at a time the US used air power to attack the Khorasan Group (aka Jabhat al-Nusra), but made it publicly clear it would not use airpower to support the rebels and potentially confront Assad.

Exactly how this can be dealt with in terms of an information strategy is the most serious of the long list of problems outlined earlier. What is certain is that another set of empty Presidential statements and a stream of equally empty daily spin is not going to help.

It is also worth pointing out that as bad as the Islamic State and Al Nusra Front are, the Assad regime is the key force behind the overall plight of Syrians—a plight that has already led the US to program more than $2.9 billion in aid funds. To put that plight in perspective, the UN and USAID estimated in September and October 2014 that Syria, a country of roughly 18 million remaining residents, had a per capita income that may have dropped to the level of Yemen, and was facing the following human consequences:

- 10.8 million people in need of humanitarian assistance

- 4.6 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in besieged/hard to access areas

- Roughly 191,369 killed and over 250,000 wounded

- 1 million injured

- Well over 6.45 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

- Well over 3.2 million Syrian refugees in neighboring countries, including:

    - 1.1 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon

    - 1.1 million Syrian refugees in Turkey

    - 619,000 Syrian refugees in Jordan

    - 222,000 Syrian refugees in Iraq

    - 140,000 Syrian refugees in Egypt

What is certain is that another set of empty Presidential statements and a stream of equally empty daily spin is not going to help.

Waiting for a Real US Strategy: Interim Steps in Strategic Communications and Information Operations

If the US is to have an effective strategy, it must address all of these issues far more honestly and show it can deal with all of the issues involved. This now only seems likely if the Congress pressures the Administration into action as part of the President's effort to get Congressional support and authorization. There is, however, one area where the US may be able to take effective action in the interim.

There is no way that the United States can conduct a truly effective form of strategic communications and information operations with its current strategy. It has not revealed its overall plan in dealing with internal tensions in Iraq. It does not seem to have a real strategy in dealing with the Islamic State. And its undeclared strategy in Syria seems to be to wait it out until the situation eventually burns out in favor of the moderate forces and produces some form of compromise that the US can accept. For all the reasons outlined earlier, the situation has also has moved far beyond the point where "spin" can substitute for substance.

There are, however, some areas where the US can at least ease the situation until it finds a more coherent strategy.

■ *Dealing with Tactical Realities in Iraq*

The Administration seems to have decided to keep US troop levels in Iraq tightly limited and to prevent them from providing any effective form of operational or forward support. It seems determined to avoid even minimal casualties at the cost of avoiding any advisory or direct combat support mission at the brigade level or below.

Historical experience since Vietnam indicates that this greatly increases the chance of failure. Between the US lack of situational awareness, Iraqi forces lack of immediate intelligence and air strike planning support, advisors who will not be present to help develop combat leaders, and the absence of a neutral presence to mediate between sects and ethnic groups, and no alternative voice to call for aid and reinforcement, historical precedence is not on the side of this sort of strategy.

The US can, however, at least try to develop tactical information operations in spite of restrictions on the role and presence of its forces that may lead to failure in both Iraq and Afghanistan. The US learned both in dealing with the Sons of Iraq and Shiite factions in the south that it needed to carefully chart and map the leaders and interests of both friendly and hostile forces at the local level, and develop support in information efforts that would reinforce the growth and support of friendly forces.

This will be critical in dealing with Sunni forces if the National Guard can actually be created, in dealing with Sunni tribes, in reducing problems with Shi'ite militias, in working with Kurdish groups, in seeking to create reintegration campaigns, in isolating foreign fighters, and in dealing with frictions between friendly groups as they develop.

Training Iraqi forces to use such methods will be critical, and so will broader US efforts to persuade Iraqi Shiite, Sunni, and Kurdish leaders to constantly emphasize unity of effort, tactical successes, and flaws in the conduct of Islamic State and other hostile forces. Information operations win or fail at the tactical level, and to paraphrase Tip O'Neill, all counterterrorism and counterinsurgency "is local."

> There is no way that the United States can conduct a truly effective form of strategic communications and information operations with its current strategy.

Information operations need to be a political weapon, not a vacuous exercise in spin.

It is critical that the US build on its earlier experience in Iraq and Afghanistan to make this work. It is also one more reason that the statements by General Dempsey, General Allen, and General Austin that the US may need to expand its advisory presence to the tactical level are likely to prove all too necessary.

■ *Focusing on National Unity in Iraq*

For similar reasons, the US needs a carefully managed information campaign that combines US official statements, media briefings, and work with Iraqi media—overtly and covertly—to push for Iraqi unity at every level, to highlight progress, and highlight failures and barriers as well.

Information operations need to be a political weapon, not a vacuous exercise in spin. The US needs to use quiet diplomacy, but it also will need to exercise every form of leverage it can. Ignoring problems and celebrating failure increases what is already a serious set of risks.

■ *Encouraging the Islamic State to Self-Destruct*

The US needs to tie its intelligence and other data collection efforts to a systematic effort to exploit every mistake and act of extremism by the Islamic State in order to encourage divisions within it. Above all, it must highlight the extent to which the Islamic State abuses and attacks Sunnis. This requires an information operations focus on (a) those still under Islamic State control, (b) other Iraqis and Syrians, (c) possible foreign volunteers, (d) "donors," and (e) the wider mix of audiences throughout the Islamic world. Wherever possible, the key media outreach effort should be led by Arab Muslims.

■ *Using US Intelligence and Analytic Methods to Make Partner Information Operations More Effective*

The US also needs to use all of its technology to clearly identify the full range of tools the Islamic State is using in its own information operations, and help partner and allied states counter and suppress such tools. Information operations should be partner operations, usually tailored to the specific needs of given countries and activities.

■ *Proactive US Information Operations in Support of Air Strikes, Train and Assist, and Aid*

The US needs to be far more proactive in communicating the extent to which it seeks to minimize civilian casualties and collateral damage, the reasons why some such losses are inevitable and reduce total losses over time, and that it does estimate civilian casualties and provides serious and reliable efforts to react when incidents occur. Past US efforts have often been slow to react, ceded the ground to the enemy for several days, then reacted in legalistic terms, and the US has perceived civilian casualties as a failure in perfect war.

The US cannot afford to give up the ability to use precision weapons, UCAVs, and a range of technology that sharply reduces civilian losses relative to past uses of airpower and indirect fire.

Similarly, the US needs to make it clear to Iraqis, Syrians, and other Arabs that it is actively providing military train-and-assist capabilities, working with real Arab partners, and is a key source of civil aid—especially in a nation like Syria where the common Arab im-

pression is that the US is doing far too little or nothing. The US military has been far too passive in explaining its train and assist efforts. USAID has developed good information sheets, but they are not a substitute for a major US campaign.

■ *Create New Information Operations Teams in Each Key Country and Make Tailored Operations a Key Activity*

The US chronically understates the differences between Arab states and moves towards broad regional or international operations when it needs to strengthen the country teams, tailor its efforts to the very real differences between Arab states, and work closely with local governments and media. The conflicting interests and differences between countries outlined at the beginning of this analysis illustrate the degree to which success stands or falls on the basis of national efforts.

■ *Push Allies Hard to Deal with the Challenge of Religion*

The US is a secular state with a Judeo-Christian tradition. The battle for religious moderation, eliminating sectarian tension and violence, defending modern Islam, and defending practical governance and progress must be won by Arab and Muslim states.

There is nothing particularly wrong with broad US campaigns, but they are inherently ineffective in comparison with well-structured efforts by our Arab and Muslim partners. The US should be encouraging and aiding its Arab and Muslim partners to every extent possible, including their media, educators, and scholars.

■ *Address and Refute Every Conspiracy Theory in Detail*

Far too often, the US seems to deal with conspiracy theories by trying to ignore them and hoping they will go away. No one who actually works with even well-educated Arabs can believe this works. The US needs to aggressively refute conspiracy efforts by publicizing the facts and doing so repeatedly.

■ *Dealing with Turkey*

The US has nothing to gain from any kind of open split with Turkey. It should concentrate information operations on building good relations—if and until—the US has a meaningful strategy for dealing with Syria.

■ *Dealing with Iran*

The US needs to be extremely careful in dealing with Iran. It should not create pointless areas of confrontation, and only focus information operations on areas where there are clear indications Iran is taking hostile action. The US should, however, make it completely clear to Arab states that there is no truth to charges that the US is somehow tilting towards Iran and away from its Arab allies.

The US also needs to realize that the nuclear negotiations present a critical challenge. If they succeed, then the US must react immediately to show that this does not occur at the expense of Arab states, Turkey, and Israel. If the negotiations fail, the US must be prepared to deal with both the practical and information-operations aspects of hostile action by Iran in Syria and Iraq.

> The US needs to aggressively refute conspiracy efforts by publicizing the facts and doing so repeatedly.

Stop making incarceration centers the training grounds for terrorists and extremists.

Foreign Volunteers and the Broader Reach of the Islamic State and Al Qaida

Finally, the US needs to combine information operations with its counterterrorism programs to address the problem of "foreign volunteers" in more depth and on a far more focused level. On the one hand, it needs to encourage its allies and other states to focus more on education, re-education, assimilation, and reintegration rather than simply taking more strict measures and relying on repression.

The kind of positive efforts to reintegrate young extremists pioneered by Saudi Arabia and the UAE are cases in point. So is the need to stop making incarceration centers the training grounds for terrorists and extremists. Minor arrests and other missteps that turn the innocent into hardened enemies are just as dangerous as unnecessary civilian casualties and collateral damage.

Success, however, needs to be based on country-by-country efforts and tailored to the specific conditions involved. The estimates of the flow of foreign volunteers to the Islamic state are—to put it mildly—uncertain, but a recent estimate in the *Washington Post* still illustrates the dangers of assuming that a common approach can work. ■

Country	Number
Tunisia	3,000
Saudi Arabia	2,500
Jordan	2,090
Morocco	1,500
Russia	800
United Kingdom	488
France	412
Turkey	400
Pakistan	330
Belgium	296
Australia	250
Iraq	247
Netherlands	152
United States	130
Yemen	110
China	10

DESIGNING AN INFORMATION WARFARE CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE GLOBAL JIHADI MOVEMENT

Dr. J. Michael Waller

The purpose of information warfare is to use information as a weapon of war. The premise of this presentation is that in warfare and political conflict, to inform is to influence. Therefore, the purpose of information warfare is to influence thought processes, beliefs, emotions, and ultimately behavior. We integrate information warfare with psychological operations and raise both to the strategic level for military and other national planning purposes. ARSOF, and USSOCOM in general, are properly situated to be the thought-leaders within the US government for planning the redesign of the behavioral modification element of US strategy against global jihadist threats.

Introduction

Warfare, like politics, is designed to induce an opponent to modify his behavior. Kinetically killing off an opponent's combatants and destroying his infrastructure and capability are merely means to the end of placing the adversary in a situation in which he cannot or will not continue hostilities.

The United States places great emphasis on the extremely expensive approach of killing the enemy's combatants and leadership. While destroying combatants and commanders is often necessary, it is not always productive or even possible. Even when it is possible, it can still be counterproductive in the case of highly costly, protracted warfare. Such warfare can have the opposite of its intended effect, strengthening enemy morale and enhancing the attractiveness of its motivational ideology, while demoralizing and fatiguing friends, allies, and even ourselves.

Some of the under-utilized alternative tools—which really should be the military tools of first resort, instead of last resort, as seems to be the case—are what the military calls information warfare and psychological warfare. For civilians, both are components of political warfare: what has been called "the art of heartening friends and disheartening enemies, of gaining help for one's cause and causing the abandonment of the enemies' through words and deeds."[1]

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[1] Angelo Codevilla, "Political Warfare: A set of means for achieving political ends," in J. Michael Waller, ed., *Strategic Influence: Public Diplomacy, Counterpropaganda, and Political Warfare* (Institute of World Politics Press, 2008), p. 206.

About the Author

Dr. J. Michael Waller has been a scholar-practitioner in public diplomacy, political warfare, psychological operations and information operations in support of US foreign and military policy for more than 25 years. He was a member of the staff of the US House of Representatives and the US Senate, served on the White House Task Force on Central America, was an operative for members of the White House Active Measures Working Group, and has been a consultant to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the US Information Agency, the US Agency for International Development, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the US Army, and the US Special Operations Command. In 2006 he received a citation from the Director of the FBI for "exceptional service in the public interest."

> The objective of warfare psychologically waged is to break their will to be our enemy in the first place.

A more useful term for the present fight is the all-inclusive "warfare psychologically waged." The objective of warfare psychologically waged is NOT necessarily to kill or capture the enemy's commanders and combatants. The objective is to break their will to be our enemy in the first place. Thus warfare psychologically waged is not an MOS like PSYOP, but a strategic approach to waging war by influencing behavior and breaking enemy will.

Successful warfare requires a defined political victory as the end-state.[2] The United States has enunciated no political end-state for defeating jihadist enemies, either as singular organizations in the cases of al Qaeda or ISIS, or globally as ideological movements. Consequently, the US has not defined a political victory for itself.

Political victory implies a political opponent. The nature of the global jihadist movement has constrained US warfighters and policymakers who treat the movement as a religion instead of as a political force. For our purposes, we define "global jihadist movement" as aggressive and expansionist Islamism, which, though religiously inspired, is fundamentally a political movement seeking political control of populations and territories.[3]

With official US objectives toward global jihadists remaining unclear—whether to degrade, to defeat, or merely to contain elements of the jihadist movement—it is apparent that there remains no widely accepted or understood strategy. In the case of ISIS, for example, decisionmakers are speaking in terms of maneuver warfare, not ideological warfare, and certainly not about means to break the enemy's will.

This maneuver warfare approach, by necessity, is time-consuming. By October 2014, senior US officials spoke of recruiting, training and equipping local forces for a "spring offensive" against ISIS in the first half of 2015. That was good news for the enemy. This long lead time was due not only to decision-making delays at the top but to the physical realities of training and logistics on the ground.

> "We do not understand the movement, and until we do, we are not going to defeat it. We have not defeated the idea. We do not even understand the idea."
> —MG Michael Nagata

Almost inevitably, the military's information warfare and PSYOP components tend to follow, or at least travel with, the generally long and slow logistical train. If they do serve as part of an advance team, they remain associated with tactical special operations units, and not as lead resources in and of themselves, nor as a core element of strategy. If they are incorporated into a military strategy, they are included as an annex, as if an afterthought, rather than part of the strategic core. This paper recommends a return to warfare psychologically waged, an approach that uses influence as a strategic weapon. This approach places IO/PSYOP at the lead of the fight as instruments to break the enemy's will and delegitimize and destroy the emotional and intellectual appeal of global jihadist ideology.

First, the US must follow Sun Tzu's principle of knowing the enemy. "We do not understand the movement, and until we do, we are not going to defeat it," MG Michael K. Nagata reportedly said in confidential minutes leaked to the *New York Times*. "We have not defeated the idea. We do not even understand the idea."[4]

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2   For a discussion of political victory as a military end-state, see Brian Crozier, *Political Victory: The Elusive Prize of Military Wars* (Transaction, 2005).

3   The purpose here is not to discuss the nature of Islam the religion but the political manifestations of aggressive and totalitarian Islamism that threaten peace and stability.

4   Eric Schmitt, "In Battle to Defeating ISIS, U.S. Targets Its Psychology," New York Times, December 28, 2014.

Reversing the Approach

Understanding the enemy's idea is at the core of successfully waging the war effort. This is where knowledge of enemy ideology and other psychological drivers become front and center.

What if, instead of serving as mere operational tools and worse, tactical "support" resources (as the name MISO—Military Information Support Operations—implied) the IO and PSYOP elements of the military became central players in strategic planning? How could they be reconfigured or re-oriented under existing structures and processes to drive strategy rather than serve as under-appreciated and under-resourced tactical/operational appendages?

Recently, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff equated the "information" aspect of conflict with the other major elements of power. The defeat of ISIS, he said on August 21, "requires the application of all the tools of national power, diplomatic, economic, information, military."[5]

That information tool, he noted, falls along the continuum of diplomatic levers of the State Department and the armed levers of the Department of Defense. The wartime information tool is almost unique in that it can be wielded by diplomats, warriors, economists, and politicians alike. Yet nowhere in the national leadership is there an office to coordinate information strategy.[6] Even in the areas of information warfare, the stress tends to be more on the "information" aspect than on the psychological impact to destroy the enemy's will.

Given the absence of such an office, and the tendency for the military to take the lead in confronting the global jihadist problem, the initiative should start within the Department of Defense.

DoD's Information Toolkit

The Department of Defense's information toolkit includes information operations (IO), the uncomfortably accepted psychological operations (PSYOP) and its unfortunately-named Military Information Support Operations (MISO) stamp, public affairs (PA), and other components. The downside is the tentative acceptance of those tools, as if they were some sort of afterthought or awkward appendage. A cursory review of many IO and PSYOP efforts shows a tendency to stress "informing;" to equate "informing" with "information; and to avoid the admission that our purpose of informing is to influence. Likewise, we see a marked tendency in DoD public affairs to "inform" without regard to how that information can undermine our friends and allies and aid and abet the enemy we are mobilizing to defeat.

Let us look at DoD's own definitions and then see what we can do to make them work to our greater advantage.

> We see a marked tendency in DoD public affairs to "inform" without regard to how that information can undermine our friends and allies and aid and abet the enemy we are mobilizing to defeat.

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5   Jim Garamone, "Islamic Terrorists Must Be Defeated, Chairman Says," DoD News/Defense Media Activity, August 21, 2014.

6   The closest approximation, the civilian United States Information Agency, was abolished in 1999 and not replaced. The issue of central civilian leadership for psychological warfare has plagued US policymakers since World War II. See Paul M. A. Linebarger, *Psychological Warfare* (Military Institute Press, 1948; Coachwhip reprint, 2010), Chapter 10, "Organization for Psychological Warfare." Also see, William E. Daugherty and Morris Janowitz, eds., *A Psychological Warfare Casebook* (Operations Research Service, Johns Hopkins Press, 1958), Chapter 4, "Organization and Personnel," pp. 119-230.

In searching the latest revision of the *DoD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, one finds no official definition of "information strategy." The search results come up as: "No results found." So we are forced to move down the chain to the operational level, where we find "information operations."

Information operations. DoD defines information operations as follows: "The integrated employment, during military operations, of information-related capabilities in concert with other lines of operation to influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp the decision-making of adversaries and potential adversaries while protecting our own."[7]

This is a good definition for the operational side of information warfare. The official purpose is to influence the enemy and potential enemy—not to "inform" civilian populations. To itemize each point in the definition, IO is integrated with other capabilities and resources for aggressive purposes:

- To influence the decision-making of adversaries and potential adversaries;
- To disrupt the decision-making of adversaries and potential adversaries;
- To corrupt the decision-making of adversaries and potential adversaries; and
- To usurp the decision-making of adversaries and potential adversaries, while
- Protecting our own decision-making from adversarial influence.

Nowhere in the United States government is there a similar official definition for the national strategic level.

How well do we influence, corrupt, or usurp the decision-making of ISIS and other jihadist movements, and those who support them? This is a military question.

How well do we prevent our adversaries from influencing, corrupting or usurping our own nation's decision-making? This is more of a political question. In the case of ISIS, it can be argued that the extreme nature of its actions—particularly mass beheadings of local populations and the made-for-TV beheadings of a select few American and European civilians—did indeed influence and disrupt our own national decision-making. Thus, ISIS beheadings are designed partly as information operations and part of a more sophisticated propaganda campaign for both local and international audiences. In the case of other jihadist movements that are not presently violent but that share the strategic objectives of ISIS and al Qaeda, we find that they have penetrated our own OODA loop and have affected our ability to orient, decide and act.[8]

Psychological operations (PSYOP). The DoD Dictionary says nothing about what used to be called psychological strategy,[9] so again we are forced down to the tactical-operational level. Despite the changes in name from PSYOP to MISO in 2010 and back to PSYOP again in 2014, the official definition has remained the same: "Planned operations to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their

> How well to we prevent our adversaries from influencing, corrupting or usurping our own nation's decision-making?

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7 *DoD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms,* Joint Publication 1-02, 8 November 2010, as amended through 15 August 2014.

8 A case in point is the Muslim Brotherhood and its front organizations, which have served as subject-matter experts for DoD and other federal agencies and arguably influenced how the US approaches the global jihadist movement.

9 President Truman established a national-level Psychological Strategy Board (PSB) in 1951, comprised of the Under Secretary of State, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, and the Director of Central Intelligence. President Eisenhower abolished the PSB as insufficient, reasoning that psychological strategy should be foremost on the minds of all concerned with defending the country from the prevailing ideological threat, but the mindset was never institutionalized.

emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals in a manner favorable to the originator's objectives."[10] Let us examine each piece of the official PSYOP definition:

Planned operations. . . . Indeed PSYOP are planned, but only at the tactical-operational levels.

. . . to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences... "Selected information and indicators" places indicators on par with information, and thus vastly expands our ability to influence by using psychological pressure points other than information. This gives us many new opportunities in the fight against global jihadist movements.

. . . to influence. . . . This means that the PSYOP/MISO is not out there merely to "inform." The job is to influence attitudes and behavior and to deprive the enemy of its ability or will to constitute a threat. One does not deprive the enemy of its ability or will by focusing PSYOP primarily on local civilian populations to "win hearts and minds." One influences the enemy by targeting the enemy's psychological ability and his will.

. . . their emotions. . . . By informing, we are not merely appealing to the enemy's sense of reason. Therefore, we must not fixate too closely on "narrative" and "counternarrative" at the expense of disrupting the enemy's cognitive and decisionmaking capabilities. Psychological warfare is not primarily persuasion by reason. It is mostly persuasion by emotion. Narratives can drive emotions, but other factors apart from information and narratives are vital drivers, as well. They can include the imposition of unbearable psychological and physiological stresses on target audiences in order to break them of their will and to make them more receptive to the power of our suggestion, in which the suggestion is to change the enemy's belief system and worldview, as we shall see.

. . . motives. . . . We want to influence the enemy's motives. What are we doing to deprive the enemy of his motive to be our enemy? We don't want him to like us. We want him to lose his motivation to be our enemy. We must understand the enemy's motives in order to influence and eliminate them. One of the problems the US has encountered, as MG Nagata implied, is that it has failed to appreciate what motivates the jihadist enemy. There is a tendency to analyze enemy motives through social movement theory, as if grievances about socioeconomic conditions are the driving motivator, rather than a sharply defined and regimented ideology.[11] By recognizing and knowing the ideology, we can wage ideological warfare within the enemy's own cognitive space.

. . . objective reasoning. . . . To influence a target's motives is to influence his objective reasoning. It is to influence his actual thought processes—his psyche. It is to influence the physiological processes within the human brain—the electro-chemical, neurological, biological processes—that modify the psychological processes of the mind.

> By recognizing and knowing the ideology, we can wage ideological warfare within the enemy's own cognitive space.

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10   *DoD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Joint Publication 1-02, 8 November 2010, as amended through 15 August 2014.

11   See, for example, the important critique by Katharine C. Gorka, *The Flawed Science Behind America's Counter-Terrorism Strategy* (Council on Global Security, 2014).

To achieve victory against the global jihadist movement, one must modify the behavior of the foreign governments that fund, indoctrinate, organize and otherwise support the jihadist organizations, groups and individuals.

. . . and ultimately the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups and individuals. Influencing the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups and individuals is the ultimate goal of any type of political or military conflict. One need not exterminate the enemy physically to win. In the end, victory[12] is all about behavior modification. To achieve victory against the global jihadist movement, one must modify the behavior of the foreign governments that fund, indoctrinate, organize and otherwise support the jihadist organizations, groups and individuals.

Taking IO and PSYOP to the National Strategic Level

Now, for military planning purposes, let us take IO and PSYOP from the "planned operational" level to the "campaign" level and up to the national strategic level. While it might seem odd to the warfighter, today's strategic planners in Washington depend on the operators and tacticians to formulate and propose much of the strategy that they ultimately approve, so the strategic thinking really needs to begin with the SOF community at Fort Bragg.

We will start with the last or "ultimate" part of the PSYOP definition first: influence "the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups and individuals."

In our IO/PSYOP strategy, one must put this last point first—always to keep prominently in mind that our job is to influence the very behavior of foreign elements that sustain and motivate our enemies from above, rather than focus on killing individual combatants one-on-one from below. Would it not be easier, more economical, more humane, and more advantageous for us to be attempting first to influence the behavior of those who sustain our enemies as enemies? Could we not incentivize those providers of our enemies' moral and material sustenance to act in our interests, either through positive incentives, more likely, or through threats to their own existence?

For our purposes, we will focus only on the jihadis and their support networks, and more specifically on al Qaeda and ISIS, since they constitute the enemy of the moment. Let us take each element among our targets of influence in the global jihadi movement in order to induce them to modify their behavior. We will reverse the order in the "ultimate" part of the PSYOP definition, going from smallest target to largest:

- **Foreign individuals.** We are not interested, at this point, in targeting populations with our own narratives. We are interested in modifying the behavior of target foreign individuals who think and act as enemies of the United States. The foreign individuals in the global jihadi movement include:

    1. individual combatants and commanders,

    2. individuals, generally not functionally violent, in the violent jihadis' support structures in the immediate AOR and worldwide,

    3. individual thought-leaders, generally not functionally violent, who justify and motivate enemy action in theory as philosophers, teachers, ideologists and authority figures;

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12   The DoD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms has no definition of "victory."

4. individual thought-leaders who provide passive ideological support for the enemy through non-opposition to enemy ends and means, and non-support for our objectives;

5. individual action-leaders, again generally not functionally violent, who indoctrinate, train and mobilize enemy action in practice; and

6. individual decision-makers in foreign governments. Note that only the individuals in group 1 are violent; those in groups 2 through 6 are not necessarily "violent extremists" but are nevertheless part of the enemy camp and are therefore targets.

- **Foreign groups.** The United States has been fixated on "violent extremists" to the point of not paying much attention to those extremists who are not presently violent. The DoD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms has no definition for the term "enemy." The closest definition—"enemy combatant" contains a modifier that focuses our attention on violent extremists, and not on the types of individuals in items 2 through 6 above who form the groups that constitute the enemy movement. This important modifier means that officially the military has not been conditioned to view foreign groups in terms of friend or enemy according to their ideology or strategic goals. Instead, the national security community at large has been conditioned to view them in terms of whether or not their tactics are presently violent. Nevertheless, foreign "groups," comprised of individuals, are targets for behavior modification.

- **Foreign organizations.** Foreign jihadi organizations have differing tactics and strategies to achieve the common objective of the creation of an Islamic State. ISIS is not the only such organization. Even groups that are not presently violent, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, have the creation of a transnational or even global Islamic State as their supreme objective.[13]

  o ***Adding to the challenge is that many of these "foreign groups" have become transnational, with operations inside the United States.*** Foreign-sourced groups operate on our homeland, and even within our government institutions, including the armed forces. We see this with the best-organized global jihadi organization, the Muslim Brotherhood. We also tend, officially at least, not to view domestic jihadis as part of a terrorist network, as the military's treatment of MAJ Nidal Hasan's case shows. Officially, the military leadership views Hasan not as an ideologically-driven "home grown terrorist" along the lines of those ISIS is cultivating, avoiding what one military prosecutor called "the t-word," and unofficially attributing his 2009 mass shooting to "workplace violence."[14] Failure to understand Hasan's ideology before the fact, which he detailed in a PowerPoint presentation to military colleagues as late

Failure to understand MAJ Hasan's ideology before the fact meant total failure to protect the forces that Hasan was motivated to maim and kill.

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13 See the North American Muslim Brotherhood internal document, "An Explanatory Memorandum On the General Strategic Goal for the Group in North America," May 22, 1991. Arabic original and English translation provided by the US Department of Justice as evidence in the United States v Holy Land Foundation terrorism financing trial.

14 Heather Somerville, "Fort Hood Attack: Did Army Ignore Red Flags Out of Political Correctness?" *Christian Science Monitor*, February 3, 2011; and Manny Fernandez and Alan Blinder, "At Fort Hood, Wrestling With Label of Terrorism," New York Times, April 8, 2014.

as 2007,[15] meant total failure to protect the forces that Hasan was motivated to maim and kill. Even in military custody, the military has permitted Hasan to continue his ideological work, defy military penal authority by growing a jihadi beard, and spread jihadist messages.[16]

- **Foreign governments.** If our job is to influence the behavior of foreign governments to stop supporting the global jihadi movement, then we have to itemize which governments constitute part of the problem. This is difficult, because identification of foreign governments as part of the jihadist problem can have profound economic, diplomatic, political, security, military and other ramifications. Foreign governments are the single most important sources of funding, organization and ideological support for the global jihadist movement.

  - *Identify governments that are part of problem and solution.* Then, we have to identify which elements within those governments are the worst part of the problem, and which are part of the solution.

  - *Problem governments include US partners.* In the global jihad, foreign governments on our PSYOP target list include not only those like Iran, or other regimes that are our avowed enemies. They also include our partners and nominal allies. Our dependence on Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries has distorted our perspective on the nature of the threat and the possible solutions to defeating that threat.

  - *Solid partners are part of solution, despite US policy.* We have some very solid partners: the United Arab Emirates and the Egyptian military are among the most influential and important. Saudi Arabia increasingly has become aware of the need to do something as the jihadi threat that it had helped fuel is coming back to threaten the existence of the House of Saud, although it has a significant way to go as a reliable partner of the US in this area.

  - *The single most important target.* In the case of ISIS, which government is the most important to influence? Arguably, with Saudi Arabia's recent reconsideration of its jihadist support, that government is Qatar.[17] Yet Qatar is adept at playing both sides; just as it helped the Taliban, Qatar is the single largest state sponsor of the international Muslim Brotherhood and is arguably the most important state sponsor of ISIS[18] and other hostile forces. The US military is reluctant to be frank with Qatar because of the peninsular kingdom's hosting of American facilities, its facilitation of talks with extremists, and its negotiation to free jihadist commanders from Guantanamo in exchange for a US Army deserter. Our relationship with Qatar trades our strategic interests in defeating the jihadist movement in exchange for Qatar's easy and cheap dialogue and lopsided prisoner swaps.

> Qatar is the single largest state sponsor of the international Muslim Brotherhood and is arguably the most important state sponsor of ISIS and other hostile forces.

15 Dana Priest, "Fort Hood Suspect Warned of Threats Within the Ranks," *Washington Post*, November 10, 2009.

16 Heather Saul, "Fort Hood Gunman Nidal Hasan 'Writes Letter to ISIS' Asking to Become 'Citizen' of Islamic State," *The Independent* (London), August 30, 2014.

17 David Blair and Richard Spencer, "How Qatar Is Funding the Rise of Islamist Extremists," *The Telegraph* (London), September 20, 2014.

18 Paul Vallely, "Meet the Frankenstein Monster of Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Or as We Know Them, ISIS," *The Independent* (London), August 24, 2014.

o ***What PSYOP plan do we have for Qatar?*** What recommendations is the Army making to DoD and the US government at large about the need to modify the behavior of Qatar in order to defeat ISIS? The Army's options are severely limited. Some argue that these sort of questions are inappropriate for the Army to be discussing. But can the Army really hope to be a prime instrument in defeating ISIS and other jihadi forces without drying up state support for the jihadis, which means modifying the behavior of Qatar?

These questions may seem far above the battalion and group levels on which PSYOP is organized, but they are really quite germane. However, they should not be left to the PSYOP MOS; they should be considered by the entire joint military leadership and the civilian interagency process, and integrated for the purpose of destroying enemy morale and motivation.

Depriving the enemy of its sustenance, and destroying its morale

Imagine, then, designing a strategic IO/PSYOP campaign against the global jihadi movement that does not swat the flies but rather that denies the flies their sustenance. The strategy would begin from the top, targeting the state sponsors and private individuals who provide the jihadis with their cash and other physical resources and with their ideological justifications.

If we modified the behavior of Qatar and the others in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere who aid the jihadis with doctrine, training, organization and money, what would happen to the jihadi movement itself?

What would happen if the money, the ideological justifications, the doctrine, and all the support infrastructure with which the big oil and gas states fuel jihad suddenly dried up?

The jihadist expansion would begin to reverse: the ideological underpinnings of the movement would reverse through US-enforced rejectionism; and the networks, channels, and individuals would, over time, be betrayed and turned over for ultimate removal from the battlespace.

A prime motivator for state sponsors of the global jihadist movement—states that enjoy the protection of the United States—to change their behavior is to put the very survival of those regimes, financial empires, and individual figures into question.

One part of the answer: The United States must demonstrate, in statement and action, that it cannot guarantee the sovereignty or stability of any government that supports jihadists.

Prospective opportunity. An illustration of a prospective PSYOP operation against a financial sponsor of global jihadi forces consists of a cyber attack on a target's bank accounts and stock portfolios, to render the target materially impoverished overnight. Such a cyber attack is, in reality, a psychological operation, as the end goal of the operation is not to steal the individual's investments, but to use the disappearance of those investments as a means to the end of either modifying the target's behavior or making an example of the target in order to eliminate him as a problem and to modify the behavior of other targets.

> What would happen if the money, the ideological justifications, the doctrine, and all the support infrastructure with which the big oil and gas states fuel jihad suddenly dried up?

Accompanying the cyber attack on the target's investments is a more traditional PSYOP messaging campaign to let others know what we want them to know about what happened and why, and to let some of those on a target list know that they are on a target list—and to cause others to wonder and modify their behavior.

A Word About Public Affairs

Public Affairs, by its nature, must remain objective and credible. At the same time, public affairs officers must be cognizant of how their words can damage military efforts by inadvertently boosting enemy morale and undermining those we seek to support. Some quick examples relating to ISIS:

- **Validating enemy doctrine.** By purporting to predict in advance the fall of cities across Iraq to ISIS, Pentagon public affairs inadvertently affirmed to individual ISIS fighters and potential recruits the inevitability of what they see as a divinely inspired politico-military campaign. In June 2014, a DoD spokesman reinforced a sense of inevitability by calling ISIS a "legitimate threat" to Baghdad, where ISIS seeks to establish its caliphate. "We certainly have enough visibility to see that they continue to press into central and southern Iraq … And they're still a legitimate threat to Baghdad." The spokesman reiterated the statement in July, and the US government broadcast the comment worldwide on the Voice of America.[19]

- **Validating enemy propaganda.** A State Department counter-propaganda production intended to discourage young people from joining ISIS[20] arguably validated ISIS propaganda by "branding" it with the official US government seal.

- **Aiding enemy planning, and undermining the morale of friends.** DoD public affairs effectively briefed ISIS repeatedly on what the United States would and would not do. So, by not planning an IO/PSYOP campaign against ISIS, DoD effectively helped ISIS plan out its next few months and exploit a window of opportunity, and demoralized an already ineffective set of Iraqi allies at the same time.

- **False reassurance of the enemy's inevitable success, as allies are left to fight for their lives.** As Kurdish fighters, backed by US-led air power, fought hard for three weeks to defend the Syrian town of Kobani from ISIS forces, the Pentagon spokesman stated flatly that the Kurds would probably be defeated. The spokesman stated on October 7-8, "I think we all understand that that's a possibility, that Kobani could be taken," adding, "ISIL does not own Kobani right now," but saying again, "We all need to prepare ourselves for the reality that other towns and villages, and perhaps Kobani, will be taken by ISIL."[21]

Public affairs officers must be cognizant of how their words can damage military efforts by inadvertently boosting enemy morale and undermining those we seek to support.

19   Jeff Seldin, "Pentagon: 'Presence' of ISIL Threatens Baghdad," Voice of America/VOA News in English, July 1, 2014.
20   "Think Again, Turn Away," YouTube channel sponsored by the US Department of State, August 2014. https://www.youtube.com/user/ThinkAgainTurnAway
21   A reporter pressed the DoD spokesman for clarification: Reporter: "Are you preparing the public, in effect, for the fact that not just Kobani but other Syrian towns may fall over the long haul of this air campaign until you have those competent forces on the ground?" Spokesman: "I think we all should be steeling ourselves for that eventuality, yes." Kate Brannen, "Pentagon: We Can't Rule Out Kobani Falling to the Islamic State," *Foreign Policy*, October 8, 2014.

- **Boasting about how hard we are hitting the enemy, then admitting how ineffective we have been.** The Pentagon spokesman told reporters that even after 300 air attacks, ISIS remained a very "potent" force. His comment forced the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, alongside the Secretary of Defense, to interject that ISIS had to be "defeated."[22]

- **Repeatedly stressing the inevitability of enemy victories.** In June, 2014, ISIS announced its intention to take Baghdad. That October, in the midst of the president's opposition to "boots on the ground" in Iraq, the Pentagon spokesman needlessly reiterated his prediction that more Iraqi cities would fall to ISIS: "There are places where [the Islamic State] continues to make gains in Iraq. We talked about Hit. We talked about Ramadi. We talked about Fallujah, which is still in contention right now. That's worrisome, because it's close to Baghdad."[23]

> DoD public affairs effectively briefed ISIS repeatedly on what the United States would and would not do.

Modifying enemy belief and behavior

Good PSYOP will create confusion among enemy combatants, commanders, and supporters; exacerbate divisiveness to cause the enemy to fight against itself; and destroy the morale of the enemy and its supporters. This often can be done without the need physically to locate individual targets.

In the case of combating ISIS, PSYOP is properly a component of the overall strategy, as it requires targeting the movement's international sponsors by demonstrating the ability and the will to harm the sponsors' own self interests. Such harm can range from simply making life difficult for individual sponsors, to destroying individual sponsors' financial empires, to treating individual sponsors as military targets for the material as well as psychological effect. Sample options include:

- Making it known that financial, ideological or organizational sponsorship of ISIS or another jihadi enemy movement is intolerable and will be dealt with as a military problem;[24]

- Through multilateral coordination, selectively and subtly revoke visas of individual targets, their family members, clan members, and business associates, for the purpose of making travel difficult, provoking shame and infighting, and causing certain jihadists whose visas are not revoked to fall under suspicion of those who trust them;

- Multilaterally coordinated, selective freezing of physical and financial assets of individual targets, family members and associates—not necessarily as a legal matter, but as a military prerogative for physical and psychological effect;

- Criminally prosecuting individual targets for the PR value of the prosecutions, whether or not the actual cases are fully prosecuted, and implying that those close to the targets are secretly collaborating against them;

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22   Jim Garamone, "Islamic Terrorists Must Be Defeated, Chairman Says," DoD News/Defense Media Activity, August 21, 2014.

23   Rowan Scarborough, "Pentagon Sees Baghdad at Risk of Islamic State Takeover, Expects Kobani to Fall," *Washington Times*, October 8, 2014.

24   For example, the US took no sanction against the Qatari banker who financed Osama bin Laden's 9/11 terrorist attacks, thus allowing that banker to continue financing jihadist extremists, including ISIS and other terrorist groups. See Robert Mendick, "Banker Who Financed 9/11 Mastermind Now Funding Terrorists in Iraq and Syria," *The Telegraph* (London), October 4, 2014.

- Collection of intelligence, for PSYOP purposes, on the targets and their associates and leaking damaging information to the international media;

Thus we do not necessarily need to locate individual combatants and commanders in order to defeat their offensive.

We have done this in the past

Breaking the enemy's will to fight is insufficient, as he and his followers are likely to resume fighting another day. The larger goal should be to break the enemy's will to be our enemy, and, indeed, to cause the enemy to stop believing in his cause.

The United States has done this successfully in the past. The strongest case study is that of Imperial Japan in 1945, when the United States was preparing to invade and subdue Japan at colossal cost. Quickly successive traumatic developments and events shocked the Japanese war council and Emperor Hirohito to abide by the Allies' demand for "unconditional surrender"—an unheard-of demand in Japanese politics or culture to which suicide was preferable under their honor system (and a demand that some say motivated Japan to continue fighting longer than it might have). Japanese culture at the time practically required all Japanese men to continue fighting to the death for the sake of the emperor. Japan's surrender was not the final political victory. It was just the beginning. The political victory was for Japan never to be able to threaten the United States and its allies again.

Conclusion

The design of an "information warfare" campaign against the global jihadi movement requires the tactical-operational practitioners of IO and PSYOP to serve as the thought-leaders for strategic planners.

A redesigned campaign should concentrate less on the information aspect of the conflict (narrative) and more on the psychological aspect (changes in thought processes and behavior). Proper psychological warfare, then, includes the following elements:

- Raise the tactical-operational level of PSYOP to the national-strategic level, even if it is only to have PSYOP serve as a thought-leader for the rest of the defense and security community;

- Absolute certain knowledge of who is the enemy, what motivates the enemy to be our enemy, and what are the enemy's strategic goals;

- Absolute certain knowledge of who is not the enemy;

- A general approach to break the will of the enemy and those who support him, and to break the targets' belief in their cause;

- A standard strategic and operational approach to divide the enemy camp against itself and hasten its self-destruction, and never to take actions that would unite and strengthen our enemies;

- Knowledge and understanding of the ideology or ideologies that motivate individuals, groups, and organizations to act as an enemy;

Proper psychological warfare includes knowledge and understanding of the ideology or ideologies that motivate individuals, groups, and organizations to act as an enemy.

- Treatment of the enemy's total operational networks—not just armed combatants and commanders, but all ideological, political, educational, training, organizational, financial, and other material supporters—as enemy entities;

- Inducing the enemy's foreign sponsors, especially other sovereign states, to cut off all support to the enemy and turn them actively to undermine the enemy through the appropriate national, cultural, linguistic, ideological and other means;

Warfare psychologically waged is not an MOS like PSYOP. Information, narrative, culture, language, and belief are only components of warfare psychologically waged. Done effectively, such warfare is waged across the spectrum: From the hard brutality of targeting to the softest confidence-building of public affairs. Just as everyone in military service wears a uniform, knows the traditions of the service, behaves in a certain manner, and has basic marksmanship qualifications even if he or she will never fire a weapon in combat, every warfighter, regardless of rank, should be fully conscious of the psychological nature of his or her duties. ∎

COUNTERING THE MENTAL UNIVERSE OF AQ AND IS: THE ROLE OF PROGRESSIVE MUSLIM REFORMERS

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About the Author

Stephen Ulph is a Senior Fellow with The Jamestown Foundation. One of the pre-eminent analysts of the Islamic world, Mr. Ulph specializes in the analysis of jihadist and Islamist ideology and regularly lectures on aspects of Islamist and Jihadist ideology impacting Western democracies and the course of the war on terrorism. He is the founder and former editor of Islamic Affairs Analyst and Terrorism Security Monitor for Jane's Information Group. His publications include an analysis on jihadism in Syria for the CTC, an ideological analysis of the 'Virtual Border Conflict' (the online arena for Islamist extremism) for *The Borders of Islam*, an in-depth examination of the relationship of Islamism to other totalitarian systems of thought in *Fighting the Ideological War*, and a 4-part reference work, *Towards a Curriculum for the Teaching of Jihadist Ideology*, available online at the Jamestown Foundation. He is also the Director of The Reform Project and its bi-lingual website Almuslih ('The Reformer' www.almuslih.org) which supports Arab reformist writers and promotes their work to an English-language readership.

A few days ago a celebrated ex-member of the *Hizb al-Tahrir* in Britain, Ed Husain, put things bluntly:

> It is time to admit the inadmissible: the West is not yet equipped to dismantle ISIS. Our weaknesses are its strengths. Too many of us see the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant as a medieval cult that can be destroyed with air strikes; **ISIS is a manifestation of an aggressive ideology that we do not wish to understand.** Without understanding it, we cannot defeat it. The West's increasing intellectual distance from most things religious hinders us from grasping the ISIS worldview.... ISIS does not operate in a vacuum, and its numbers will swell unless the theology and grievances on which it stands are uprooted.[1]

No one should be surprised by this reference to theology. Much like al-Qaeda, or the earlier phase of ISIS as the Islamic State of Iraq under Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, the language of faith was always the definer of the struggle. It informed the vocabulary of the jihad against the *Sahyu-Salibiyya* (the 'Crusado-Zionists'), the *rawāfid* (the 'rejectionists'[2] of the Shia), peppered the militants' discourse with Qur'ānic citations, and introduced the pointing finger of chastisement, made famous by Bin Laden, as the *mujāhidin* signaled their claim to the moral high ground.

Yet on the other hand, we witness the chorus of outraged Muslims who genuinely find this violent doctrine entirely alien to their experience of living their faith. How does one resolve this conundrum? Is the Islam of ISIS to be written off as an outright deviancy, a diversion from 'true Islam' into an alien ideology that merely paints itself with Islamic colors, or are there ambiguities that render the condemnation a somewhat more complicated affair?

Attempting to set the guidelines on what is 'in' and what is 'outside' of some form of normative Islam is not easy for non-Muslim westerners; nor is it easy for those brought up in the fold. The Lebanese analyst Hassan Mneimneh outlines the problem:

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1   Ed Husain, 'Until we understand Isis, we cannot hope to defeat it', *Financial Times*, Oct 30, 2014.
2   So named since they rejected the legitimacy of the first Orthodox caliph Abu Bakr following the death of the Prophet.

Through its unabashed actions, ISIS has imposed their radical Islamic theology as a challenger in Islamic intellectual circles ... Responses to radical Islamic theology have been so far hesitant and confused, and have exposed severe gaps in contemporary Islamic thought.[3]

The question is an important one, if we wish to construct a counter-ideological message in a way that does not end up re-enforcing the opposing message and ceding authority to the *mujāhidin.*

A Universe of the Text

I think we are now beyond the stage of those early attempts at counter-ideology which attempted to use the argument of reason and logic. Counter-ideology efforts could only be constructed at the level of opposing ideas with more enlightened, pluralistic counter-arguments, relying on the strength and quality of these ideas, if there were nothing in place that could compete with them.

Most analysts have now become aware of the scriptural universe in which the radicals circulate, and the need to navigate in this universe in order to seek materials with which to construct a counter-message. But to do that the discussion must inevitably go the Islamic sources that the ideology draws upon, and it is here that we enter upon more uncertain ground.

Discussions on the Islamists' misquoting of scriptural texts have a habit of working both ways. The most familiar examples illustrating this are half-used quotations, such as the famous Qur'ānic verse *'There is no compulsion in religion'* employed by scholars to delegitimize the intolerance of the *mujāhidin*. Radicals simply read the entire verse by which it is made clear that those who fail to embrace Islam will be condemned,[4] and bolster their position by appealing to the canonical commentaries by al-Tabari (839-923) and Ibn Kathir (1301-73), both of whom understand it to be conditional on whether the non-Muslims had already submitted to pay the *jizya* (poll) tax in lieu of conversion. This is just one example, but the Qur'ān text variously makes the case for tolerance and for intransigence, the tone encountered usually being associated with whether the verse is revealed in the Meccan or Medinan period of revelation. In any case this is a fairly useless tactic, since the protagonist simply enters the attrition of 'hadith wars' which he will lose, even if he chooses to confine himself to the 'sound' hadith.

The alternative, but related, argument on the 'context'—that the actions and statements of the Prophet and the early Companions—in opposition to the Islamists—cannot automatically be held to be valid today since much depended on the *context* of the time and place in which they originated, itself backfires, since it comes up against the problem hovering in the background and which tends to be left 'unsaid': if those were barbarous times and places and called for more robust acts and laws than now, on what grounds should legislation for 7th century Arabs have a relevance for any other, less barbarous, re-

"Through its unabashed actions, ISIS has imposed their radical Islamic theology as a challenger in Islamic intellectual circles."
—Hassan Mneimneh

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3   Hassan Mneimneh, *The Loss of the Universal? Radical Islamic Theology and Its Implications for the Elusive Peace of the 21st Century*, The Nexus Institute, October 2014.

4   *Qur'ān II,256: "There is no compulsion in religion. Verily, the Right Path has become distinct from the wrong path. Whoever disbelieves in Taghut and believes in Allah, then he has grasped the most trustworthy handhold that will never break."*

> For a group such as ISIS obedience, faith and loyalty are presented as paramount values that transcend life, liberty and dignity, and this is how it can build itself an immunity from criticism stirred by the ethics of its behaviour.

gions?[5] Similarly, how should the mores and ethics of a time and a culture that considered slavery, religious discrimination, collective killing and robbery ('The Spoils'—*Al-Anfāl*—is the name of a chapter of the Qur'ān) be regarded as a model for a contemporary state? Finally, and more ominously, why should the Prophet himself continue to be considered *khayr al-anām,* 'the finest of mankind', if—from the evidence of his political activities recorded in the *sira*—he would certainly not now be considered a model to follow?

These arguments, it should be said, are convincing only to those who would be responsive to a debate on the universality of values. For the Islamist radicals they are irrelevant. The robustness of their position lies in the fact that they reject this universality because they reject the idea *that such a thing can be universal.* Any universality for the Islamists is determined solely by the scriptures, which are divine in origin and not the product of mere human speculation as to the nature, or the judgment, of good and evil. For a group such as ISIS obedience, faith and loyalty are presented as paramount values that transcend life, liberty and dignity, and this is how it can build itself an immunity from criticism stirred by the ethics of its behaviour. As Hassan Mneimneh observes,

> By engaging in patent acts of atrocity [ISIS] seeks to move the centre of gravity of Islamic debate away from compatibility with universal human rights and onto a discourse on the 'hypocrisy' of international legality... It is thus evident that a serious affront has been made to the notion of a global commonwealth based on shared values. We have lost the universal, and have reverted to an unarbitrated world order.[6]

This 'loss of the universal' is not confined to militant activists, but is a much broader problem. It embraces the religious discourse across the Muslim world:

> Discussions in learned Islamic circles, as conducted in Cairo, London, and Riyadh, are not about the legitimacy and morality of slave markets—both issues are categorically settled: on the authority of scripture and the consensus of scholars, under defined conditions, enslavement and the slave trade are stipulated legitimate and moral. Discussions are, instead, about the advisability of their erection in the current circumstances—a calculus of costs and benefits. Arguments against include the potentially negative images to be propagated by the Western press ... according to the doctors of this 21st century Islam, those who deny the fundamental validity of enslavement are committing deliberate or incidental apostasy.[7]

Under the influence of this pre-occupation with propriety to the text over everything else, Islamists strenuously oppose what they see as the progressive 'ethicisation' of Islam since it has the effect of distracting Muslims from the dynamic of a larger war against

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5   The *locus classicus* for this argument is the purported response of the Persian Shah Yazdgird to the Caliph 'Umar's demand to surrender and convert: "You Arabs who mercilessly put people to the sword, who mistreat your women, who are highway robbers who commit murder, how dare you presume to teach us, who are above these evils, how to worship God?"

6   H. Mneimneh, *Loss*.

7   H. Mneimneh, *Loss*. In recent years there has been a 'reopening' of the issue of slavery by some Salafist scholars, after its 'closing' earlier in the 20th century when Muslim states banned slavery. Shaykh Salih Al-Fawzan, a member of the Senior Council of Clerics (Saudi Arabia's highest religious body), Imam of Prince Mitaeb Mosque in Riyadh, professor at Imam Muhammad Bin Saud Islamic University and the author of the country's religious curriculum, has stated that "slavery is part of jihad, and jihad will remain as long there is Islam." Muslims who contend Islam is against slavery, he says, "are ignorant, not scholars ... they are merely writers ... whoever says such things is an infidel." (From a lecture recorded on tape by the Saudi Information Agency, included in article posted November 10, 2003, *World Net Daily*).

Western values.[8] Indeed, under this perception, the whole practice of self-examination and speculation on the morality of Islam's religious and political practices is to be shunned:

> A wise Muslim should never be lured into such traps, because this would make the Muslim nation more likely to be lured into more moral challenges.[9]

When narrowed down like this, an Islam exclusively of the texts possesses its own logic. And given the antiquity of these texts—in an Age far removed from the Enlightenment and debates on the Rights of Man—a law and a morality constructed on the letter of these texts (shorn of the mitigating influence of human history and experience) inexorably leads to doctrines that are anti-humanity and anti-nature.

Entry Points—The potential of the Comparison

So far we have flagged up a series of what appear to be insuperable problems. How about some points of entry? If we are confronted, as we have seen, with the denial of any neutral ground or common intellectual space in which a debate can take place, particularly with an outsider, we can at least make an attempt to challenge this denial through the instrument of comparison. I think there are two areas of comparison worth looking at:

- The comparison with western totalitarianisms
- The comparison with other faiths

The Comparison with Western Totalitarianisms

There is certainly mileage in the totalitarianism comparison. Muslim thinkers in the Middle East have recognized the validity of the more easily grasped parallels with the preoccupations of 20th century fascism, notably:

- the call for 'authenticity' and the restoration of lost vigor;
- the cult of tradition (the cult of the *Salaf*)
- cultural purity and fear of diversity;
- the 'permanent conspiracy'[10]

> "The objections to the actions of ISIS formulated by the Saudi religious establishment, however, are based on the damage these actions cause to the stature of Islam, not on their intrinsic harm to human rights."
> —Hassan Mneimneh

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8   As Hassan Mneimneh observes, in joining the coalition against ISIS, "The objections to the actions of ISIS formulated by the Saudi religious establishment, however, are based on the damage these actions cause to the stature of Islam, not on their intrinsic harm to human rights." H. Mneimneh, *Loss*.

9   Shaykh Tāhā Jābir al-Alwāni, cited in Eric Brown, *After the Ramadan Affair: New Trends in Islamism in the West* in Current Trends in Islamist Ideology, II, 26.

10   The argumentation for this is the following: everything not Islamic (under the Islamists' conception) is *anti-Islamic*, as opposed to non-Islamic, or non-religious. Islamists cannot conceive of a space which is non-religion. They can conceive of 'non-Islam', but not a space which is neither 'non-Islam' nor 'non-Christianity' or 'non-religious'. Such a conception explains why the title of a work such as Muhammad al-Maqdisi's الديمقراطية دين   (*'Democracy is a Religion')* is not intended as a simile, but as statement of fact. Consequently, violent campaigns against the ballot box are more than simply an attempt to impede political progress, the imperative is understood religiously.

> - the cult of the hero and the permanence of the struggle—("the jihad is a law in force until the end of time".[11])

But more than western commentators, they have also grasped the analogies on the level of *intellectual mechanisms*.[12] The parallelism was certainly enough to convince ex-Islamists such as Ed Hussein (author of *The Islamist*) and Maajid Nawaz that they were being indoctrinated in a modern political ideology in Islamic garb. Briefly[13], the most cogent parallels in these interesting intellectual mechanisms are to be found in the following commonalities:

> - the crisis of the contemporary world—we think of the writings of Sayyid Qutb and Hasan al-Bannā' on the world being "on the edge of the abyss"[14]
>
> - 're-birth' and the 'anthropological revolution'—the Islamist repudiation of their earlier *jāhiliyya*[15]
>
> - collective (not individual) identity in a sacralised community or state—the *umma* in Islamist terms
>
> - the refusal of a separation between private and public life.

This last element is particularly interesting for the comparison, since the lack of Islamic uniqueness and authenticity is particularly in evidence here. Even if it is not considered strictly speaking to be a straight 'borrowing' from the European ideologies (since it is an ancient intellectual mechanism) it can be demonstrated to be the 'typical product of totalitarian thinking', and one that is necessarily shared with profane political ideologies. Sayyid Qutb, on the other hand, apparently thought that this comprehensiveness was a unique badge of Islam's belief system, and that its absence in the West had caused *al-*

The parallels with totalitarianisms was certainly enough to convince ex-Islamists that they were being indoctrinated in a modern political ideology in Islamic garb.

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11   Thus Sayyid Imam in an interview with Muhammad Salāh for al-Hayat (London), December 10, 2007: ‏والجهاد ماض إلى يوم القيامة، والجهاد ليس محصوراً في تنظيم معين كما ينظر إليه، بل هو شريعة ماضية إلى آخر الزمان.‏ A typical commentary on a Salafist forum illustrates this permanence: "Jihad will continue until the end of time, whatever period of time a person is in, there will always be Jihad happening. There is actually hidden wisdom behind it, but it might not be apparent to you right now, but the more you learn about Allaah and His existence, the more you will understand why certain things have been prescribed." Posted on November 12th 2009 on the Islamic Awakening forum: http://forums.islamicawakening.com/f18/jihad-relevant-for-present-past-30191/ .

12   Examples are: Saudi columnist Muhammad bin 'Abd Al-Latif Aal Al-Sheikh: Al-Jazira (Saudi Arabia), ‏المقدسي وتبرئته‏ ('Al-Maqdisi and his acquittal') July 10 and ‏بل هم أسوأ من النازيين وأضل سبيلا!‏ ('But they are actually worse than the Nazis and more misguided!') July 24, 2005, where the columnist proposed that jihadism be classified as Europeans classified fascism, a movement "whose thought, propaganda and propagation is destructive to international security and peace ... The two groups drink from the same source ... if the denomination differs, the results are still the same." See also Abd al-Rahman al-Rāshid: ‏بالتأكيد هم فاشيون‏ ('But they surely are Fascists') *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, August 13, 2006.

13   For a more extensive treatment of this comparison, see S. Ulph, 'Islam and Totalitarianism: the Challenge of Comparison', in K. Gorka & P. Sookhdeo (Eds): *Fighting the Ideological War, Winning Strategies from Communism to Islamism*, The Westminster Institute, 2012, pp.45-75.

14   Hasan al-Bannā', *Toward the Light*, 1947: "We assert that the Western civilization, which was for a long time brilliant by virtue of its scientific perfection subjugating the whole world with the products of this science, is now in ruin ... Its people are at a loss as to the cure and have strayed far of the path ... All of humanity is tormented, wretched, worried and confused, having been scorched by the fires of greed and materialism."

15   'Ignorance'. The term was originally understood historically, to denote the unenlightened, pre-Islamic age, but under the influence of Islamist ideologues such as Abu al-'Alā' al-Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb it has come to mean, for the Islamists, a contemporary 'pagan' state of mind or a political system that is insufficiently 'Islamic'.

fisām al-nakid, the 'hideous schizophrenia'[16] that afflicted her civilization. Yet totalitarians have always been attracted toward the conception of belief systems as being *complete ways of life,* intruding into every area of human activity—one thinks here of Mussolini's corporate state and Hitler's *Gleichschaltung*—the 'co-ordination' of every possible aspect of life in Nazi Germany. The radical Islamist theorist Abu al-'Ala al-Mawdudi actually made a comparison to other totalitarian ideologies even more explicit, with his now famous assertion that the *Shari'a*-ruled state:

> cannot restrict the scope of its activities, its approach is universal and all embracing… in such a state … no one could regard any field of his affairs as personal and private. Considered from this aspect the Islamic state bears a kind of resemblance to the Fascist and Communist states.[17]

The main point is this: if the Islamist political program is a divinely sanctioned endeavour, it should be fairly solidly Islamic from *alif* to *yā'.* Therefore, if there is anything else about this endeavour that parallels something other than Islam—the infidel political ideologies of the 20th century no less—it ought to raise question-marks about the religious authenticity of the Islamists' politically activist interpretation of their faith.[18] To defend their case would mean having to acquaint themselves in depth with other manifestations of totalitarian thought, likely with the same effect that this exercise had on Ed Husein and Maajid Nawaaz. **If a comparison demonstrates likes this that most of the core features of Islamism and its militant Jihadism are manifestations of a *commonly found deviation*, the Islamists are left deprived of their authority, their justification and their cause.**

This, of course, still pre-supposes that a debate can take place beyond the ruminations of a troubled Islamist who is minded to read more widely. The problematic truth is that some of the features which underpinned these 20th century totalitarianisms—the distrust of rationalism, or analytical criticism, the exclusion of contemporary thought and cultural xenophobia—have actually been part and parcel of the intellectual universe of Muslim thinkers for centuries, even since the rationalising Hellenist philosophers of the Muslim world lost the battle to the *Ahl al-Hadith*[19] who accused them of importing into

> Totalitarians have always been attracted toward the conception of belief systems as being complete ways of life, intruding into every area of human activity.

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16   Sayyid Qutb, *Social Justice in Islam*, p.42. Qutb's argument is that the Church gave up the struggle to show society how to incorporate faith into everyday life by turning to monasticism and separating itself from society. For Qutb, the Protestant Reformation represented the final surrender, and the acceptance of the concept that religion could not act as a system of life.

17   Sheikh Abul Ala Maududi, *"Islamic Law and Constitution,"* Chapter: The Political Theory of Islam, 9th edition, Lahore 1986, p146-147). The use of this citation has aroused the ire of Islamist activists and media watchers, who see such internal parallelism of Islamism with totalitarianism as highly compromising. See, for instance, the objections by the Muslim Council of Britain (http://www.mcb.org.uk/media/response-tobbc.pdf) and the 'Islamic Human Rights Commission' (http://www.ihrc.org.uk/show.php?id=1497) to a BBC Panorama documentary aired in August 2005 where this passage was quoted.

18   The claimed uniqueness of the 'Islam is a total faith' slogan can indeed backfire, as underlined by one Muslim critic of politicised Islam: "Islam knows nothing of the separation between politics and religion, something supposedly distinctive of Christianity. It would accomplish nothing to remind them, as I have done, that their remarks reproduce, almost word for word, what European reactionaries at the beginning of the nineteenth century (such as Bonald and de Maistre) said to condemn the rupture that the Enlightenment and the French Revolution had produced in the history of the Christian West." See Samir Amin, 'Political Islam in the Service of Imperialism', *NewAgeIslam.org*, 16 Aug 2009.

19   'People of Hadith', who came to prominence from the late 8th century AD led by noted scholars such as Ahmad ibn Hanbal, as a countervailing school of thought to the rationalist schools such as the *Mu'tazila* and who promoted the more 'Arab,' textually-founded sciences of Hadith scholarship.

Islam the 'interloping sciences' of the Greeks.[20] What is more, the legacy of the distrust towards the influence of these Muslim rationalisers strengthens culturally xenophobic instincts enough to outlaw the prospect of discussions on comparative matters of faith, particularly if that discussion involves outsiders.

Perhaps the best expression of this instinct is the doctrine of *al-walā' wal-barā'* ('loyalty and renunciation'). This apparently exotic phrase should be much more familiar a term than is presently the case. In some ways it could form a litmus test for deciding:

- how informed people, western commentators in particular, actually are about the nature of the intellectual challenge posed by the radicals

- how sincere those who are indeed aware of this doctrine, such as Muslim spokesmen, are in setting out to seek solutions to the crisis.

What does *al-walā' wal-barā'* demand? It is a polarizing doctrine which divides humanity into 'believers' and 'infidels,' and seeks to establish that the only relationship between them can be one of active enmity or passive hatred. It derives from the understanding of Islam as a faith at war, and stipulates that the 'true Muslim' does not assimilate into the enemy's society or imitate its ways on even the most trivial level.[21] This is not an arcane issue, **it is a central doctrine of textual Islam**:

> If you live under kafir rules and try to practice or teach your children or others the doctrine of al-wala'a wal bara'a you will be prosecuted for committing "hate crimes". Al-wala'a wal bara'a is what Islam is all about; no Imaan is complete without it. So if you go along with the Kafir and keep your mouth shut you will end up committing the crime of not hating for sake of Allah. Which crime is easier to handle, a crime against Kafir people or a crime against Allah?[22]

Its most ominous manifestation is the classic Sharia principle on living abroad among the *kufār,* a state considered by Islamists to be illegal for a Muslim[23] and one that is palliated only by active proselytism or activities characteristic of someone operating behind enemy lines. Failing that, at least a demonstration of continuous hostility and hatred … For

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20 An eloquent example of this is the statement by the 13th century scholar Ibn Taymiyya: *man tamantaq fa-qad tazandaq*—"he who practices logic is an atheist." He expounded further the implications of this position: "As for the books of logic, they do not contain knowledge that is commanded in the Sacred Law—even if the independent reasoning of some people has led them to the view that learning logic is communally obligatory. Some people have stated that the sciences are not established save with it—this is a gross error both rationally and legally."

21 The standard textual authority adduced for this are the following: *O you who believe! do not take the unbelievers for friends rather than the believers; do you desire that you should give to Allah a manifest proof against yourselves?* [Qur'ān IV, 144]; *Let not the believers take for friends or helpers Unbelievers rather than believers: if any do that, in nothing will there be help from Allah except by way of precaution, that ye may Guard yourselves from them. But Allah cautions you (To remember) Himself; for the final goal is to Allah* [Qur'ān III, 28]; *O ye who believe! take not the Jews and the Christians for your friends and protectors: They are but friends and protectors to each other. And he amongst you that turns to them (for friendship) is one of them* [Qur'ān V, 51] and more explicitly in the following sound Hadith narrated in Ahmad: *The most powerful knot of Imān is to love for the sake of Allah and to hate for the sake of Allah.*

22 Abu Haithem Al-Hijazee, *Setting the Record Straight: Was Islam Really Spread by the Sword?*, January 2007 (The author argues that it was).

23 The position is held to be justified by the Qur'ānic passage: *Was not the earth of Allah spacious enough for you to move yourselves away [from evil]? Such men will find their abode in Hell* [Qur'ān, IV, 97] and the following hadith of the Prophet: *"I am not responsible for any Muslim who stays among polytheists"* (Sunan Abu Da'ud: Book 14, Hadith 2639); *"Anyone who associates with a polytheist and lives with him is like him"* (Sunan Abu Da'ud: Book 14, Hadith 2781).

whoever fulfils this with knowledge and action, and clearly demonstrates this until the people of his land are aware of this from him, then emigration (Hijrah) is not an obligation upon him from whatever land he is in. [24]

Deep Reform — And the Role of Progressive Muslim Thought

We are still confronted, however, with the conundrum of Muslims who simply do not recognise this form of Islam as anything familiar to the way they were brought up. Are the extremists 'deviants' or not? What part of their beliefs may be subject to a counter-message, without offending the religious sensibilities of the broader community?

The key to the conundrum is perhaps best given by the late Tunisian intellectual Lafif Lakhdar, who defined the issue of Islamist violence as being the work of the *'Islamic Far Right'.* That one term solves at a stroke our confusion as to what it is that we are up against. That is, it is not something separate from Islam, some form of contemporary deviant perversion, but more precisely a tendency (and a culturally authentic one at that) which once had fair claim to being the 'mainstream', as indeed Islamists now claim for it. As Hassan Mneimneh laments:

> As abhorrent as radical Islamic theology and rejectionist Islamist practices are, they remain an integral part of the current manifestation of the multiple and plural Islam. The problem faced by the world community is that these currents — of a virulently predatory character — have little potent adversary in the body religion of Islam today. [25]

How is this possible? In brief, what aids the virtual triumph of the Islamist claim to represent Islamic authenticity, is their skillful manipulation of the space left historically by the abdication of Arab and Muslim intellectuals from the task of indigenizing modernity. Arab thinkers of the 19th and the early 20th century *Nahda* ('Resurgence') failed to revisit intensively enough issues of authority, the state and the citizen, or update the traditionalist repudiation of any forms of 'non-divine rule' *(hukm al-tāghut).* Fascinated by western achievements in these areas, the Arab educated élite simply imported a foreign conceptual language. It was thus left to lesser minds, such as that of Hasan al-Bannā' — the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood — to seek the indigenization with the inherited Islamic corpus. The result was that individual initiatives such as 'Ali 'Abd al-Rāziq's attempt to disqualify the concept of a Caliphate in his work, *Islam and the Foundations of Political Power,*[26] stood little chance against the tide.

Chronological Alienation

With a scholastic tradition now unchallenged in its 'authenticity' pre-occupation, and spurred on by a single-minded drive toward regimentation, their domination of educational programmes (all of them proudly medieval in pedigree)

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24   Shaykh Hamad ibn 'Atiq, cited in Shaykh Abdalaziz al-Jarbu': *When Does Hijrah Become Obligatory: The Reality of Displaying The Deen From the book The Announcement of the Obligation to Emigrate from the Land of Disbelief to the Land of Islām*, At-Tibyān Publications, n.d

25   H. Mneimneh, *Loss.*

26   For a brilliant analysis of the Caliphate as founded on an 'optical illusion', a projection of an episode of Muslims' history into a 'precept' of Islam, see Abdou Filali-Ansari's paper for the *Almuslih* Conference, *Progressive Arab Voices on Islamic Reform*, December 2014, and his study (and translation) of 'Ali 'Abd al-Rāziq, *Islam and the Foundations of Political Power,* Modern Muslim Thinkers, Aga Khan University, Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilizations, Jul 2012

turn out hundreds of thousands of students suffering from a state of 'chronological alienation', living in the 21st-century while their brains wander up and down the corridors of the 11th century at best.[27]

We can see this chronological alienation in action in Boko Haram's proclaimed prohibition of modernity and 'western' systems of education[28], and in the untroubled reanimation by ISIS of the culture, and practice, of slavery.[29]

Progressive Muslim intellectuals are not so reticent to state the obvious: that this is a religious issue. It is about Islam.

This brings us to the role of progressive Muslim intellectuals in the struggle against Islamism. It is a somewhat odd omission that such a resource should not be employed or conspicuously supported to confront Islamism with a precisely-nuanced counter-ideological message. For these are reliable voices, of high intellectual quality and authority, that have already embraced the task of combating the Islamist advance, and often at high risk to themselves. More importantly, in an issue such as this which is sabotaged by perceptions, these alternative voices have the virtue of being *culturally bi-lingual.* It means they have the advantage of viewing the potential of reform from the western experience and, unlike some of our spokesmen and commentators in the West, are not so reticent to state the obvious: that this is a *religious* issue. It is about Islam. Perhaps not as many perceive it at the moment, but very much about Islam, about its legacy and its intellectual infrastructure.

What is their diagnosis? Something far more through-going, more radical, than any western commentator would venture—basically *the deconstruction and re-building of the entire edifice of Arab-Islamic thought.* The core edifice to be targeted, according to the Algerian intellectual Mohamed Arkoun, is the 'dogmatic enclosure', a mental universe pared down to a series of sacralised texts—a 'logosphere' if you will—beyond which Muslims cannot go and in which is legitimised

> the rupture with profane human experience. The Texts lose their rôle to inspire thought, and become more and more a means to *police* thought.

The result, over Islamic history, of this preoccupation has been textual continuity at the cost of intellectual discontinuity. The prime casualty of this has been the consistent demotion of rationality, for as the Saudi intellectual Ibrahim al-Buleihi laments, a centuries-long tradition of hostility to the exercise of rationality

> has ended up with a wholesale mustering against reason—not only lining up against specialists but inducing all students to hate reason, abhor thinking and imagine that this is what the Islamic religion demands of them. The emotions of the entire Muslim Nation have been conscripted to this cause.

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27 Babikir Faysal Babikir, *'Chronological Alienation'*, www.Almuslih.org.
28 Muhammad Yusuf was heavily influenced in his diagnosis by the work of the Saudi Wahhabist Abual-Hasan al-Nadwi: "The Western system of education … carries its independent spirit and individual conscience which manifests the creed of its exponents and the mentality of its founders … Whenever this educational system comes to be applied in a Muslim country or an Islamic society, before anything else a mental conflict takes place which leads step-by-step to a shaking of belief and intellectual apostasy, and finally to religious apostasy." Abu al-Hasan al-Nadwi, الصراع بين الفكرة الإسلامية والفكرة الغربية في الأقطار الإسلامية ('*The Conflict between Islamic Thought and Western Thought in Islamic Lands'*), Dār al-Nadwa lil-Tawzi', Lebanon, 2nd ed. 1968, pp.177-179.
29 On the responsibility for traditional syllabuses of education for allowing this loophole, see Babikir Faysal Babikir, *'Chronological Alienation'*.

The cult of tradition, or 'ancestor-worship' as some have dubbed it, defines the arena, and since this is what is maintaining the dogmatic enclosure, the reform initiative of necessity will have to revisit the entire edifice of Islamic historiography. At present, in its unchallenged form, it barely rises much above the level of a sacred history unfolding according to a pre-determined scheme of a perennial struggle against the forces of Disbelief.[30] In such a sacralised scheme the off-message evidence of economic or cultural defeat has to be rationalised away as a *religious* failing. Since the 19th century, argued Lafif Lakhdar,

> when the Muslims finally recognized their decline, they have legislated to exonerate the Qur'ān from responsibility for this decline, which they instead ascribed to the Muslims' abandonment of the Qurān.[31]

In order to counter this escapism the reform process needs to be carried through to the deepest level, to the core of the infrastructure, to the scriptural texts themselves—the way they were compiled, the way they are read, the contours of the divine and the human in the process of revelation.[32] Establishing the human agency in the transmission of the Qur'ān (that is, countering the doctrine of the infallibility of the text) serves to open up the dogmatic enclosure. This is because it re-focuses attention onto the religious meaning over against the linguistic expression—the one is adaptable and updatable, the other morphologically frozen at a moment in time.[33]

The re-assessment of the scriptural texts, a radical task in itself, is the ultimate key to reforming the mental universe in which radical Islamists operate. Both Islamists and militant Jihadists justify their behaviour with constant reference to what they consider to be non-negotiable primary source material—the *Qur'ān* and the *Hadith*, along with the Prophetic *sira* (biography) literature—in order to establish that they are replacing a tainted, modernist Islamic pattern with a more authentic one. This is the point of strength that must be dismantled. According to the former mufti of Marseilles Soheib Bencheikh,

> Any attempt to reform Islam—and Muslim jurisprudence in particular—must disregard its sanctity and reread texts in the light of modern thinking, in quest of a [new] orientation. [34]

The reform process needs to be carried through to the deepest level, to the core of the infrastructure, to the scriptural texts themselves.

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30   Progressive Arab authors deplore the tacit acceptance, even by many western historians of the canonical, sacralised version of history: "Not only are believing Muslims imprisoned within this dogmatic enclosure, Orientalist scholarship has also long contented itself with transferring to European languages the ideas of the dominant Sunni Islam, before doing the same with Shi'i Islam" (Mohamed Arkoun, *Islam: To Reform or To Subvert?* Saqi Books, London 2006, p.86). Noting the effects of what appears to be a curious exceptionalism in western writing on the Muslim world Hassan Mneimneh observes "the philological efforts of Western Orientalists, relying primarily on the output of the [Muslim] scholastic tradition—and corresponding chronologically to the reordering of the political forms of Muslim societies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—provided a textually biased view favoring the normative reading [of Islamic history]. Islamist thinkers today still productively utilize this work to confirm components of their own ideology" (Hassan Mneimneh, 'The Islamization of Arab Culture,' in *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* vol. 6).

31   Lafif Lakhdar, *Is the Qur'ān an encyclopaedia of science?* www.Almuslih.org.

32   On the boldness of progressive Muslim reformers in this regard, see S. Ulph & P. Sookhdeo, *Reforming Islam*, (Chapter VII, *Deep Reform: Questions on the Texts*), Almuslih Publications, December 2014, pp.337-449.

33   This focus on the Arabic language of the Qur'ān has wielded a major influence on the development of law, perpetuating stagnation. It is founded upon the formula *al-iibra bi-'umum al-lafz lā bi-khusus al-sabab* ('the precepts are derived from the universality of the expression, not the specificity of the context'). That is, the authority of the text overrides the lessons of life's experience, a standpoint that accounts for the in-built anachronism of Islamist legal thought. "The notion of an Arabic language sanctified by the fact that God had chosen it as the vehicle by which to address humankind was too powerful", argues Mohamed Arkoun, "Henceforth, correct usage of the grammatical and lexical rules of Arabic is sufficient to ensure the permanent validity of the meanings. Hence the 'linguistic' introductions to works of usul al-fiqh." M. Arkoun, *Islam: To Reform or To Subvert?* Saqi Books, London 2006 (updated from his earlier *The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought*), p.161.

34   "Quotations by Soheib Bencheikh": http://soheib.bencheikh.over-blog.com/categorie-733578.html.

"What I wish to say to Muslims here," argued Mohamed Arkoun,

> is that [Muslims] cannot forever avoid the following difficult project. I mean by this the analysis of the foundation texts in the light of contemporary scholarship and science, and even their deconstruction from within in a methodically exact and scholarly way ... One should not understand deconstruction to mean something negative here, but rather a great positive activity that brings salvation and freedom. Deconstruction represents the first stage in the process of critically re-evaluating all the profound generally accepted truths behind which the Islamic reason shields itself, and continues to shield itself until now.[35]

The key to breaking this equation, therefore, lies with the historian. And here is where the superior strength of the reformers over their Islamist opponents lies: for scholars of the context will always claim greater authority than literalist scholars of the text, once it is demonstrated that Islam was never a static, discrete, complete system, but rather a product of its time and a work in constant progress. There are several layers to reconstruct, and reading the message of these reformers, the process embraces the following tasks:

▪ **Severing the bond between *din* ('faith') and *dawla* ('state')**

> To transform the state into a purely mundane institution dealing with citizens from a rational starting point. When freed like this of theological constraints, modern systems of constitutions, laws and education programmes may proceed unimpeded

▪ **Transferring to an objective, scientific standard of historiography**

> The *din* and *dawla* doctrine is founded upon a fictional, sacralised history, one which purports to construct a divinely sanctioned model from an era of early Islam whose fluidity only precluded the establishment of such a model

▪ **Applying this standard to Islam's origins, Qur'ānic interpretation and *fiqh***

> Unscientific historiography promotes the myth of a pristine faith revealed to primitive people[36]. The view that their history begins only with the advent of Islam makes cultural orphans of Arabs and perpetuates 'specialness' and a 'disconnect' with the rest of the world, feeding the doctrine of *al-walā' wal-barā'*

▪ **Reviewing the status of the scriptural texts**

> *Establishing the imperfection of the text would throw the attention of the believer on to the meaning over the letter of the Qur'ānic text*—thus rendering irrelevant the Islamists' claim to authenticity (and the militants' claims to justification for their acts) on the grounds of strict adherence to the letter of scripture

Establishing the imperfection of the text would throw the attention of the believer on to the meaning over the letter of the Qur'anic text.

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35   Mohamed Arkoun, 'The Struggle for Humanism in Islamic Contexts' (Tr. Zakia Pormann) in *Journal of Levantine Studies*, Summer 2011, No. 1 pp. 161-3.

36   "Islam is thus presented, like any other religion, as but one of the cultural entities that have borrowed its rituals from cultures that preceded them, such as Judaism, Christianity and Manichaeism—from which last Islam took many of his doctrines such as 'the Seal of the Prophets' and no less than four of its five pillars of faith: the *shahāda* (Declaration of Faith), Prayer (five times a day), *Zakāh* (Alms), and Fasting'. This puts it in a position to ask questions and express doubts, and thereby take itself out of the shell of its ancient certainties." Lafif Lakhdar, *'Separating the Islam of Faith from the Islam of history'*, www.Almuslih.org.

The authority of passive textual referencing in legal thought would be challenged—delegitimizing the Islamist technique of plucking verses, or even half-verses out of context (on the pretext that 'every part of the Text is valid for all time')

It would delegitimise fundamentalist readings—In demonstrating that the establishment of the Text was a dynamic, selective process replete with revisions and expansions, the Qur'ān would emerge more properly as a text *about* God and hence subject to re-interpretation in the light of changing times

- **Promoting instruction in the intellectual underpinning of non-Islamic cultures**

  to inculcate an understanding of their moral and intellectual foundations, particularly of the West, against which Islamism chiefly, and artificially, defines itself

- **Introducing the teaching of comparative religion**

  to highlight commonalities between the faiths, illustrate the shared dialectic between faith and reason, inculcate respect for the religious sincerity of non-Muslims, deflate religious narcissism by reducing Islam to an equal footing with other faiths, and to defuse antipathy to doctrinal diversity

- **Prioritising the spiritual dimension of Islam**

  to underscore the shared conception of divinity among the Middle Eastern faiths, highlight the attribute of mercy in that conception, and alleviate the psychological dysfunctions bequeathed to generations reared in guilt and fear of a vengeful God.

Such are the priorities of these reformers from the inside, fighters against the 'Islamic Far Right' which defines and dominates the full spectrum of the conceptual universe of Islamism, from political activists to the *mujāhidin* fighting under the banners of Al Qaeda and ISIS.[37]

> The struggle confronting the forces of reform is definitely a generations-long reconfiguration of the educational system in the Muslim world that is placing obstacles.

A War of Ideas

What is clear is that the conflict with ISIS, as it is with all other radical militant groups—and indeed with Islamism as a whole—is more than anything else a war of ideas. And a deep-penetrating one at that. The struggle confronting the forces of reform is definitely of the *longue durée*—a generations-long reconfiguration of the educational system in the Muslim world that is placing obstacles—religious, social even epistemological, to integration into a global modernity. The chief impediment is the wholesale rush to the past,

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37 For a more detailed treatment of the contribution of progressive Muslim thought to the current Islamist crisis, the forthcoming publication: S. Ulph, *The Importance of Progressive Arab Reformers*, The Westminster Institute, Spring 2015.

Westerners and non-Muslims have no reason to see themselves excluded, any more than Muslim intellectuals, from the internal debate on Islam at every level that this debate is taking place.

the pre-occupation with an opaquely justified 'authenticity' which sidelines, and prohibits, any discussions on how to bring Islamic thought up to date with the modern era and its values.[38]

The matter is more urgent than may at first appear. Failing the updating of Islamic thought and any revision of the concept of a divinely mandated law (that is, something more than a matter of mere 'moratoriums' on *hadd* punishments *à la* Tariq Ramadan), the stage-posts on the path to radicalisation are logical, coherent and *authentic* for any Muslim youth fired up by the reductive simplicity of a pared-down, textual Islam. This is due to the lack of any alternative pedagogy that can offer the same badge of authority in an educational climate dominated in the Middle East by Salafists.

If we are to see that totalitarian vision of the Islamists de-legitimised, the task before us is to make modernity in Islam more authoritative. But a reform of this nature needs an institutional footing, and a level of funding at least the equivalent of what is emanating from the Gulf. This is where the western world must make its contribution. If westerners and non-Muslims have a somewhat large learning curve ahead of them, this is all the more reason to follow closely the unfolding of the debate where it is being conducted at its most internal, and to pro-actively lend it our support, both moral and material. We should neither undermine the courageous Muslim voices of reform by a lazy deference to those whose louder voices *appear* to constitute the 'centre of gravity' of the Muslim world, nor be deterred by spurious reticence concerning the 'kiss of death' associated with western backing for Muslim progressives—they are already accused by their foes of everything in the alphabet, from Atheism to Zionism, with or without our support.

It is certainly not the answer to 'leave it to Muslims alone to decide.' Westerners and non-Muslims have no reason to see themselves excluded, any more than Muslim intellectuals, from the internal debate on Islam at every level that this debate is taking place.[39] As a faith that makes claims to universalism, the abuses of which are reverberating globally, the key to this advanced, deep reform of Islam lies in the *joint* western and progressive Muslim enterprise to re-examine, discuss and criticise Islamic doctrines. And for this co-operative endeavour in a common cause the Muslim cleric Soheib Bencheikh has perhaps put the case best:

> Islam is a message for all humanity. Therefore, it is not the property of Muslims alone. Everyone has the right to be fascinated by this religion, to adhere to it, to be critical of it, and even to be hostile to it. To avoid criticizing Islam is a form of segregation.[40] ∎

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38   Islamist ideologues proscribe imitating western modernity on the grounds that this blinds Muslims from discovering the sciences which God has placed in the Qur'ān, and feeds the believers on the interloping sciences which do not accord with God's Book. "Given that almost all of the sciences fail to accord with God's Book, they have been expelled either from the school system or from the Muslim consciousness through their proscription. Something even more disastrous results upon this: the terrors experienced by a cross-section of young students at the sciences they are studying (even in western universities) in that they are constantly aware that these conflict with 'scientific' *religious* truths." Lafif Lakhdar, *Is the Qur'ān an encyclopaedia of science?* www.Almuslih.org.

39   There is one sense in which Westerners have already intervened in the theology, albeit not the way they would have intended. Fed by the work of western, Orientalist scholars scientifically dissecting the 'true Islam' from its folkloric weft, and scientifically establishing the 'linear progression' of Qur'ānic suras, 20th century Muslim scholars consolidated the principle of abrogation into a doctrine that prioritised the chronologically later intolerant, martial suras. The instinct for definition and contours has also paired up western analysts with Islamists in a shared conviction that Islam has a monolithic nature and that there is such a thing as a 'normative' Islam – a logocentric, scriptural, un-folkloric, a-historical Islam whose totalitarian vision is only bolstered by mutual perceptions of a clash of civilisations. See H. Mneimneh, Loss.

40   Le Parisien (France), October 3, 2006.

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