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## A Radical Idea: Applying Psychological Strategy to Combat Foreign Fighters Defending the Islamic State

David Michael Smaney  
*Missouri State University*, [Smaney88@live.missouristate.edu](mailto:Smaney88@live.missouristate.edu)

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**A RADICAL IDEA: APPLYING PSYCHOLOGICAL STRATEGY TO COMBAT  
FOREIGN FIGHTERS DEFENDING THE ISLAMIC STATE**

A Masters Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of

Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science, Defense and Strategic Studies

By

David Michael Smaney

May 2017

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**A RADICAL IDEA: APPLYING PSYCHOLOGICAL STRATEGY TO COMBAT  
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Defense and Strategic Studies

Missouri State University, May 2017

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David Michael Smaney

**ABSTRACT**

This thesis focuses on the necessity of psychological strategies to combat the Islamic State's recruitment of foreign fighters. This thesis argues that psychological strategies are a primary weapon due to the psychological nature of the war against the Islamic State, which is a part of the overall war of ideas. This thesis does not consider psychological strategies for other aspects of U.S. counterterrorism strategy, nor does it reflect the difficulties involved with developing U.S. strategies in the U.S. federal government. Furthermore, this thesis only focuses on foreign fighter defending and supporting the Islamic State, which is the successor of Al Qaeda in Iraq and does not consider foreign fighters supporting other terrorist organizations. The result of the research done for this thesis finds that psychological strategies must become a core element in U.S. policy towards this issue.

**KEYWORDS:** information operations, terrorism, foreign fighters, the Islamic state, strategic communications, psychological strategy

This abstract is approved as to form and content

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Dr. Kerry M. Kartchner  
Chairperson, Advisory Committee  
Missouri State University

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Approved:

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Dr. Kerry Kartchner

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Ilan Berman J.D.

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Dennis Bowden M.A.

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Julie Masterson, PhD: Dean, Graduate College

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank the following people for their support during the course of my graduate studies. To the professors of Missouri State, who challenged me to push through barriers to enable progress. To Nick, who dared me to do more with my education. To my brothers in arms who have encouraged me to remain relentless after my enlistment. To my mother and family whom without their guidance I would not be where I am today. And most of all, I would like to thank my wife, Melanie, whose unflinching support has allowed me to reach new heights in life.

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# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO INFORMATION OPERATIONS

## Introduction

*“But there is also such a thing as a spirit of the time, an attitude of mind characteristic of a particular generation, which is passed on from individual to individual and gives society its particular tone. Each of us has to do his little bit towards transforming this spirit of the times” ~ Albert Einstein <sup>1</sup>*

This thesis asserts the role of Information Operations (IO) and its diplomatic counterpart, strategic communications, as a core instrument to ultimately bring strategic success against foreign fighters that currently fight for and defend the Islamic State. For more than fifteen consecutive years, the United States has been actively engaged in the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). This ongoing war has resulted in 1.6 trillion dollars spent, nearly 7,000 American lives lost, and the level of progress made is ambiguous due to both the fragile state of Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the reemergence of Al Qaeda and the emergence of the Islamic State.<sup>2</sup> The U.S.’s primary strategy in the GWOT has been utilizing conventional forces, such as air, land, and sea operations to disrupt, degrade, and defeat enemy combatants in multiple theaters.<sup>3</sup> During Operation Iraqi

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<sup>1</sup> Albert Einstein, *The world as I see it* New York: Wisdom Library, 1979, 8

<sup>2</sup> Niall McCarthy, “The War On Terror Has Cost Taxpayers \$1.7 Trillion”, February 3, 2015. Accessed December 10, 2016. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/niallmccarthy/2015/02/03/the-war-on-terror-has-cost-taxpayers-1-7-trillion-infographic/#12bacc175cf0>.

Megan Crigger, Laura Santhanam, “How Many Americans Have Died in U.S. Wars?”, PBS. May 24, 2015. Accessed December 11, 2016. <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/many-americans-died-u-s-wars/> As of the date of this article the total was at 6,852

<sup>3</sup> “The National Military Strategy of the United States of America”, June 2015. Accessed December 10, 2016, [http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Publications/2015\\_National\\_Military\\_Strategy.pdf](http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Publications/2015_National_Military_Strategy.pdf), 5

Freedom, the U.S. focused on air sorties and conventional land forces to disrupt the targeted regime's power; and to effectively overthrow Saddam's regime.<sup>4</sup> Operation Iraqi Freedom was successful in toppling the government, however, this did not stop the insurgencies that ensued.

Currently, the U.S. is conducting similar strategies against the Islamic State. These strategies focus on destroying the Islamic State, which has seen a surge of support from foreign fighters.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, terrorist attacks have spread outside this area to Europe, as well as the U.S. homeland resulting in the deaths of hundreds of citizens in the U.S. and Europe. As of 2016, the FBI had over 1,000 investigations for Islamic State-related threats in all 50 states, and in the past year alone the number of arrests of "Jihadist" terrorist in the U.S. reached 90 arrests.<sup>6</sup> This suggests that the problem is not improving, but in fact becoming worse.

This thesis attempts to reason that information operations, and its diplomatic counterpart strategic communications, must be regarded as a core weapon of U.S. military operations against foreign fighters supporting the Islamic State. This thesis is divided into five chapters covering important dynamics of the foreign fighter issue. Chapter one defines information operations and its functions; chapter two focuses on information operations during Operation Iraqi Freedom and lessons learned; chapter three covers an analysis on the Islamic State and how it is currently conducting an information

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<sup>4</sup>Frederick W. Kagan, *Finding the Target: The Transformation of American Military Policy*, New York: Encounter Books, 2006., Chapters 5-9 Describe U.S. shift to air dominance as a center of gravity for U.S. strategy from Desert Storm to today.

<sup>5</sup> Lisa Curtis, "Combatting the ISIS Foreign Fighter Pipeline: A Global Approach", January 6, 2016. Accessed February 10, 2017. <http://www.heritage.org/middle-east/report/combatting-the-isis-foreign-fighter-pipeline-global-approach>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

operations campaign against those it deems its enemy; chapter four focuses on the foreign fighter radicalization process and how the process is largely created through the Islamic State's IO, and the final chapter covers recommendations for U.S. policy. Each chapter is intended to support the thesis statement: information operations must be a principal weapon in the U.S. strategy to degrade the Islamic State's recruitment of foreign fighters.

The necessity of information operations stems from globalization and the advancement of technology.<sup>7</sup> As the world is now in the thick of the "information revolution", the consequences of using or not using such tools as information operations must be reevaluated. As described by Bunyamin Turner with the Naval Postgraduate School:

It is no wonder that the industrial age witnessed the appearance and dominance of, the warfighting machines such as tanks, planes, aircraft carriers, etc. The armed forces of that age became successful by making these machines faster, more lethal and more survivable, and massing them in a coordinated fashion. The industrial age resulted in the ubiquitous existence of these machines in many nations, and caused armed forces to search for better ways to employ what they have using the improvements in technology. We are now the dwellers of the so-called information age. It is no surprise that the terms like Information Operations (IO), Information Warfare, and Information Superiority have become popular as force multipliers.<sup>8</sup>

Similar to how the airplane and the machine gun revolutionized military strategies and war, from open field battle to trench warfare and beyond, today's militaries are faced with vast quantities of information covering every moment of a conflict. As well, global civilian populations are equipped with instant coverage from inside conflicts due to major

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<sup>7</sup> Peter F. Drucker, "Beyond the Information Revolution." *The Atlantic*. October 01, 1999. Accessed February 28, 2017. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1999/10/beyond-the-information-revolution/304658/>.

<sup>8</sup> Bunyamin Turner, "INFORMATION OPERATIONS IN STRATEGIC, OPERATIONAL, AND TACTICAL LEVELS OF WAR: A BALANCED SYSTEMATIC APPROACH", September 2003. Accessed January 10, 2017. <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a418305.pdf>.

social media networks. The ability for individuals or groups to spread information about a conflict without the training or limitations on providing context for that information allows for manipulation and the subjugation of actors' perceptions in a conflict.<sup>9</sup> This means that providing the context for the mass coverage is key in the new age war.

### **What Is It? Information Operations Defined**

Information operations can be described best as “an attempt by the United States to develop a set of doctrinal approaches for its military and diplomatic forces to use and operationalize the power of information. The target of information operations (IO) is the adversary decision-maker and therefore the primacy of effort will be to coerce that person into doing or not doing a certain action.”<sup>10</sup> The objective of information operations targets the hearts and minds of a decision maker, or the population around a decision maker, in order to create an effect that best suits the U.S agenda. IO focuses on intelligence collection and cultural understanding in order to efficiently influence the population or leadership.<sup>11</sup> IO requires a spectrum of soft power tactics and techniques, such as knowing one's adversary at the innermost level and implementing a strategy that focuses on the psychology of an adversary.<sup>12</sup> Not prioritizing the understanding of and winning the hearts and minds results in an ideology lingering long after an organization has been defeated, which may lead to a resurgence.

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<sup>9</sup> "Why ISIS Is Winning the Social Media War." Wired. Accessed February 12, 2017. <https://www.wired.com/2016/03/isis-winning-social-media-war-heres-beat/>.

<sup>10</sup> Dan Kuehl, “Information Operations: The Hard Reality of Soft Power”, Accessed December 10, 2016. <http://www.iwar.org.uk/iwar/resources/jiopc/io-textbook.pdf>, 11

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 13

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 12

Information operations consists of the execution of many tools, such as: psychological operations (PSYOPS), electronic warfare (EW), computer network operations (CNO), military deception (MILDEC), intelligence, military information support operations (MISO), operational security (OPSEC), public affairs (PA), and the deployment of special operations forces (SOF) and covert action units. To establish an in-depth understanding of how information operations work and why it is such a salient function of U.S. policy against the foreign fighters supporting the Islamic State, the functions of IO must be understood individually to appreciate how IO would be a successful strategy against the Islamic State.

Psychological operations are a vital and core tool for information operations. Psychological operations are designated as, “planned operations to convey selected information to targeted foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals.”<sup>13</sup> This is done in a variety of ways, for example, broadcast media and images such as pamphlets. Targeting the emotions and reasoning of an adversary or the population around or supporting the adversary can lead to the U.S. undermining and hindering the adversary’s ability to continue a conflict from lack of morale or resources.

As outlined by the Department of Defense, electronic warfare is, “any military action involving the direction or control of electromagnetic spectrum energy to deceive or attack the enemy.”<sup>14</sup> This includes electrical and signal jamming, electromagnetic pulses, and even directed energy attacks. The benefit of electronic warfare is, one can deny a

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<sup>13</sup> Clay Wilson, “Information Operations, Electronic Warfare, and Cyberwar”, March 20, 2007. Accessed February 10, 2017. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL31787.pdf>. 3

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 6

target the ability to communicate information electronically or can only allow certain information to enter the targeted area. Jamming an adversary's ability to communicate can create an uncoordinated and ineffective strategy.

Computer Network Operations (CNO) is the cyber warfare aspect of information operations. CNO includes, "the capability to (1) attack and disrupt enemy computer networks; (2) defend our own military information systems; and (3) exploit enemy computer networks through intelligence collection, usually done through use of computer code and computer applications."<sup>15</sup> CNO handles the cyber aspects of information operations, which along with electronic warfare, focuses on cyber espionage and intelligence collection. Details of this weapon are classified, and therefore, CNO will only be discussed in broad context.

Military deception consists of, "actions executed to deliberately mislead adversary military decision makers with regard to friendly military capabilities, thereby causing the adversary to take (or fail to take) specific actions that will contribute to the success of the friendly military operation."<sup>16</sup> Another way to phrase MILDEC is misinformation and disinformation. A famous example of MILDEC is June 6, 1944, where allied forces in advance of the invasion of Normandy, imparted disinformation to the Nazi's to create the illusion that the allied forces beach landing would be at France's Pas de Calais region instead of Normandy.<sup>17</sup> The deception worked and allowed for D-day to be a victory for the allies. MILDEC applications are useful in contemporary conflicts, such as against the

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 4

<sup>16</sup> Wilson, "Information Operations, Electronic Warfare, and Cyberwar", 4

<sup>17</sup> Christopher Klein, "Fooling Hitler: The Elaborate Ruse Behind D-Day", History.com. June 03, 2014. Accessed February 10, 2017. <http://www.history.com/news/fooling-hitler-the-elaborate-ruse-behind-d-day>

Islamic State, by creating confusion as to a U.S. presence or contribution to an operation or events in a targeted area.

Military information support operations (MISO) are best specified as, "... planned operations to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals in a manner favorable to the originator's objectives."<sup>18</sup> Best stated by U.S. Special Operations Command Public Affairs Office, "... the ultimate objective of U.S. MISO is to convince enemy, neutral, and friendly nations and forces to take action favorable to the United States and its allies. The ranks of the MISOC include regional experts and linguists who understand political, cultural, ethnic and religious subtleties and use persuasion to influence perceptions and encourage desired behavior."<sup>19</sup> MISO ensures that military operations are developed and provided with context to be better understood by an enemy or the population involved in a conflict. A form of MISO, known as the human terrain system, will be further discussed along with its success in chapter two.

Operational security, more commonly known as OPSEC, is a government or military's full control of information that is beneficial to an enemy. Defined as, "a process of identifying information that is critical to friendly operations and which could enable adversaries to attack operational vulnerabilities."<sup>20</sup> OPSEC breaches range from

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<sup>18</sup> Joint Publication, "Military Information Support Operations", December 20, 2011. Accessed February 10, 2017. [https://www.pksoi.org/document\\_repository/Lessons/JP3\\_13\\_2\\_MISO\\_\(20-Dec-2011\)-LMS-1255.pdf](https://www.pksoi.org/document_repository/Lessons/JP3_13_2_MISO_(20-Dec-2011)-LMS-1255.pdf), vii

<sup>19</sup> "MILITARY INFORMATION SUPPORT OPERATIONS COMMAND (AIRBORNE) (PROVISIONAL) FACT SHEET", Accessed February 10, 2017. <http://www.soc.mil/MISOC/MISO%20fact%20sheet.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Wilson, "Information Operations, Electronic Warfare, and Cyberwar", 4

an adversary locating friendly forces to an adversary infiltrating and acquiring tactical, operational, or strategic level information that hinders U.S. operational performance and ultimate success. OPSEC is crucial for any clandestine or covert operation that is conducted. As will be discussed along in the recommendations portion, OPSEC is the foundation on which U.S. strategy can be successful.

Public affairs is the military's pairing with strategic communications and public diplomacy capability. Public affairs deal with the public perception of government and military activities both domestically and abroad. Public affairs, "comprises public information, command information, and public engagement activities directed toward both the internal and external publics with interest in DOD. External publics include allies, neutrals, adversaries, and potential adversaries."<sup>21</sup> Public affairs are open dialogues, often press releases and informational documents, that are related to an information operation or psychological strategy. Public affairs are different from MISO, in that MISO is mission specific and public affairs are more operationally focused.

Other aspects that will be considered as part of an information operations capability are the special operations forces that conduct information operations, as well as covert action units. Both tools of foreign policy handle direct action portions of information operations and are designed to leave very little if no U.S. footprint in the targeted area. As stated by Major Gottschalk with the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, "The special forces group is a flexible, multipurpose organization designed to plan, conduct and support special operations in any operational environment in peace,

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<sup>21</sup> Joint Publication, "Information Operations", November 20, 2014. Accessed February 10, 2017. [http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new\\_pubs/jp3\\_13.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp3_13.pdf), II-7



conflict or war.”<sup>22</sup> This is beneficial for a U.S. information operations policy because of the clandestine nature of IO, which SOF and covert action are best suited to conduct.

Covert action will be considered as part of special operations due to the emerging shift in how covert actions are currently being executed. Covert action has been, traditionally, run by the Central Intelligence Agency. However, after 9/11, decision makers involved with the planning of covert action argued that SOF plays a greater role.<sup>23</sup> This has been controversial due to lack of congressional oversight that CIA covert action requires.

However, the trend continues that special operations have largely taken over a fair amount of covert action and therefore, will be considered as a tool for SOF and IO units.

An example of such is the training of foreign militia to overthrow an existing government or covert action creating an economic crisis to further worsen a conflict. For the purposes of this paper, SOF and covert action will be mainly propaganda campaigns, economic covert action, and paramilitary operations to both discredit the Islamic State and change public perception of them in a way that best suits U.S. interests.

Along with these tools is also the collection of intelligence. Information operations require the collection of intelligence that may assist in changing public or government perception and rationale.<sup>24</sup> The concept of knowing one’s adversary is paramount to an effective strategy against it. This includes cultural insight of a target area, as well as psychological profiles of the individual leaders and sociological and

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<sup>22</sup> Fredrick Gottschalk, “THE ROLE OF SPECIAL FORCES IN INFORMATION OPERATIONS”, 2000. Accessed February 10, 2017. [handle.dtic.mil/100.2/ADA383815](http://handle.dtic.mil/100.2/ADA383815), 25

<sup>23</sup> Fredrick Best, Andrew F., “Special Operations Forces (SOF) and CIA Paramilitary Operations: Issues for Congress”, August 3, 2009. Accessed February 10, 2017. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RS22017.pdf>, 3

<sup>24</sup> Joint Publication. "Information Operations." November 20, 2014. Accessed February 10, 2017. [http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new\\_pubs/jp3\\_13.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp3_13.pdf).

anthropological knowledge.<sup>25</sup> As previously stated, chapters three and four are devoted to an in-depth analysis of the Islamic State and the radicalization process for foreign fighters and why the Islamic State is so appealing to foreign fighters.

As information operations are regarded as a military aspect, the diplomatic counterpart must also be considered in this thesis. Strategic communications coordinate the U.S. message beyond military strategy, to political strategy. Strategic communications are designated best as, “(a) the synchronization of words and deeds and how they will be perceived by selected audiences, as well as (b) programs and activities deliberately aimed at communicating and engaging with intended audiences, including those implemented by public affairs, public diplomacy, and information operations professionals.”<sup>26</sup> Strategic communications have a prominent role in U.S. foreign policy, from the United State Information Agency to Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty. However, this prominence has diminished since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

### **Why It Matters: Information Operations And The War On Terror**

Information operations would benefit the U.S. conflict against the foreign fighter problem, as well as the Islamic State, when one considers the ideological nature of the conflict, as well as the definition of terrorism overall. Terrorism is a word that has been used widely both before September 11<sup>th</sup> and exponentially after to mean a variety of concepts, thus has been diluted with misinterpretations. Therefore, to ensure no

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> The Whitehouse, “NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION”, 2008. Accessed February 10, 2017. <https://fas.org/man/eprint/pubdip.pdf>, 2

misunderstandings happen regarding the significant impact information operations would have against the Islamic State and the foreign fighter dilemma, a definition of terrorism must be provided. A good working definition of terrorism was developed by Christopher Harmon, Andrew Pratt, and Sebastian Gorka. The definition of terrorism is composed of four main factors: (1) terrorism is a tool and not an ideology, (2) terrorism is always used for political reasons, regardless of the propaganda pushed by the organization, (3) this tool is used to influence a broader audience, both to instill fear, and to gain support, and finally, (4) where often terrorism is confused with freedom fighters, terrorism targets innocent civilians directly while freedom fighters do not.<sup>27</sup> These factors make up the terrorism tactic. The definition provided takes a more holistic approach, centered on terrorism as a tool and not an organization. This is significant because terrorism is often looked at as a group, and therefore leads to the illusion that destroying the group ensures victory. However, as Benjamin Kuipers, a professor at the University of Michigan and an expert in cognitive mapping and spatial knowledge states, “purely military tactics and strategy will fail against the terrorists, and will even be exploited to their advantage.”<sup>28</sup> The meaning of this statement is that conventional methods of war are insufficient against terrorism because the ideological nature behind the use of the terrorism tool may survive the destruction of an organization.

Therefore, instead of viewing terrorism as a group, it is more important to separate the terrorism tool and the ideology behind it. This matters because a tool is used

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<sup>27</sup>Christopher Harmon, Andrew N. Pratt, and Sebastian Gorka, *Toward a Grand Strategy against Terrorism*, New York: McGraw Hill Companies, 2011, 6

<sup>28</sup> Benjamin Kuipers, “How To Defeat Terrorism”, August 5, 2004. Accessed February 10, 2017. <http://www.cs.utexas.edu/users/kuipers/opinions/defeating-terrorism.html>.

only when there is a desire to use it. By separating the two concepts, it is better understood that the U.S. is at war not with the terrorism tool, but with the violent ideology behind the act. Therefore, the war on terrorism is an ideological war. It is in the hearts and minds of any population susceptible to being radicalized to the point of using the terrorism tool. Combating an ideology requires weapons focused on changing perception and psychology.

The understanding of the nature of the war on terror, as well as the functions of information operations and strategic communications, are essential in realizing a successful policy against the foreign fighter dilemma, as well as successfully combating the Islamic State. As well, understanding the situation is equally necessary, as the conflict regarding the Islamic State and the foreign fighters is not a new conflict, but the continuation of a previous one. The next chapter will assess lessons learned concerning information operations conducted throughout Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). By identifying the positives and negatives of the operation, one can eliminate repeated mistakes, and promote effective recommendation.

## CHAPTER TWO: ASSESSMENT OF INFORMATION OPERATIONS DURING OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

*“... purely military defenses, no matter how powerful, can never insure any nation’s security” ~ Dwight D. Eisenhower*<sup>29</sup>

Support for the Islamic State by foreign fighters partly stems from a continuation of certain U.S. entanglement in the Middle East, primarily Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). The OIF conflict left the region in a profoundly vulnerable situation, such as a frail Iraqi government and sectarian violence, which allowed for the Islamic State to flourish and rally support. To the Middle East, the Islamic State is not necessarily separate from Operation Iraqi Freedom, therefore, the dynamics of OIF should be addressed to fully understand the current situation. Therefore, an analysis of U.S. strategy regarding information operations must be made to establish lessons learned and foresee future possible outcomes.

This chapter aims to demonstrate U.S. information operations and strategic communications strategies conducted during Operation Iraqi Freedom as well as the consequences of such policies. The focus of this chapter is the military strategy leading up to the invasion, to the Coalition Provisional Authority, to the Anbar Awakening and the surge, to finally the withdrawal from Iraq. It will not cover in detail the events after the withdrawal of U.S. forces in 2011.

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<sup>29</sup> Michael Waller, *The Public Diplomacy Reader*. Washington: Institute of World Politics Press, 2007, 294

## Leading to the Invasion

U.S. strategy in the Iraq war was derived from a continuous evolution in the U.S. way of war throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many events that shaped U.S. strategy date back to before the 1990s during the second offset after the Vietnam War, and the change in U.S. posture in the post-Cold War era.<sup>30</sup> After the Vietnam war, the United States went through a major revolutionary military affair, or RMA.<sup>31</sup> The outcome of this, “second offset” was the United States refocused towards superior technology, much of that technology being in airpower.<sup>32</sup> The need for the U.S. military to be technologically superior extended beyond the war in Vietnam towards the Cold War, which strategies focused on a balance of power between the U.S. and the USSR. This resulted in policies based on symmetric warfare, which prioritize large conventional forces that matched an opponent’s might.<sup>33</sup> The result was a heavy emphasis on U.S. hardware and winning decisive battles.

Moving past the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States engaged in multiple small wars throughout the world during the 1990s. Operations such as Desert Storm, Gothic Serpent (Mogadishu 1993), and the Balkans wars began to shape U.S. strategist’s mindset on how to best effectively train and operate the U.S. military. Much of these U.S. war strategies centered around major air strikes followed by ground forces being a secondary element to conduct an occupation of territory and to combat broken

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<sup>30</sup> Kagan, *Finding the Target*

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., Chapters 1-5 discuss the U.S. weapons and strategy modernization focused on air dominance.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., Chapter 1

<sup>33</sup> Kagan, *Finding the Target*, 78, “He [Reagan] therefore focused on the size and composition of the Navy in order to allow it compete with the Soviets in multiple theaters...He dramatically expanded the military reserve components, especially the Army National Guard and Reserves...”

forces who survived the air strikes, apart from perhaps Mogadishu, which did not utilize air strike campaigns and was not successful in establishing U.S. dominance.<sup>34</sup> Because of the high success that the Balkans wars and Operation Desert Storm, and because Mogadishu was considered a blunder of an operation by U.S. ground forces, U.S. strategy prioritized advanced technology and weaponry, primarily regarding superior air power and precision ordinance over boots on the ground during small scale conflicts, which Operation Iraqi Freedom was expected to be.<sup>35</sup>

The strategy developed was also beneficial because of the time it's implementation, when the U.S. had a strong desire for less defense spending and a smaller military.<sup>36</sup> During the peace dividend, the United States concentrated on domestic issues and no longer spent considerable money on a robust national defense. Along with the fiscal restraints came the notion that the U.S. would be fighting smaller wars as the operations in the 1990's seemed to represent, which led to a reduction in intelligence collection and military spending overall.<sup>37</sup> The concept of the U.S. fighting small, short wars, along with the understanding that having its military strategy oriented around a strong air campaign, led to U.S. strategist disregarding long-term policies used throughout the Cold War, such as information operations. This confidence in the new U.S. air dominance strategy was further shown 1999, when the U.S decided to

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid Chapters 5-9 discuss this the second offset; a revolutionary military strategy in the 1990s.

<sup>35</sup> Kagan, *Finding the Target*, 220

<sup>36</sup> "Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review", 2003. Accessed December 10, 2016. <http://www.dod.gov/pubs/qdr/>. The report discussed the reduction of national defense spending.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., Section 3

deprioritize strategic communications elements, such as the United States Information Agency.<sup>38</sup>

The United States Information Agency (USIA) had been the U.S.'s main source for propaganda during the Cold War. However, after the Cold War ended, the U.S. questioned the necessity to continue such operations because of the new small-scale, rapid warfare. The USIA was then absorbed into the U.S. State Department, where it remains today.<sup>39</sup> The USIA was considered to be a cornerstone during the Cold War strategy, yet was no longer seen as needed in the post-Cold War era. The shift in focus and priorities shaped U.S. policy decision making for future warfare and narrowed U.S. options after September 11<sup>th</sup>.

The ramifications of these policies and strategies were considered with high regard and were supported as sound strategies after the events of 9/11 when U.S. forces deployed to Afghanistan to both hunt Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda, as well as overthrow the Taliban regime controlling the state. U.S. strategy in this was based on the same shock and awe campaign that had been successful in the Balkans wars, where U.S. forces would sweep through a country quickly to overthrow the regime.<sup>40</sup> The theory of shock and awe was to overwhelm and disorient the adversary enough to where the U.S. could overthrow the Taliban regime without large-scale forces on the ground.<sup>41</sup> The U.S. was successful in

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<sup>38</sup> William Chodkowski, "The United States Information Agency", November 2012. [https://americansecurityproject.org/ASP Reports/Ref 0097 - The United States Information Agency.pdf](https://americansecurityproject.org/ASP%20Reports/Ref%200097%20-%20The%20United%20States%20Information%20Agency.pdf).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 4

<sup>40</sup> Kagan, *Finding the Target*, 261, "The effects of a series of improvements... in fact, this synergy allows NCW [Network Centric Warfare], for the first time, to provide us with the possibility of moving beyond a strategy based upon attribution, to one based on shock and awe."

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 263



overthrowing the Taliban regime in a matter of several weeks with a small level of U.S. forces in Afghanistan.

The quick success of overthrowing the Taliban regime in Afghanistan established further support from policy makers towards shock and awe as an effective strategy for the global war on terror and asymmetric warfare. As argued by Frederick Kagan, a former professor at West Point Military Academy, “Rumsfeld and his team in the Pentagon largely took away from the war in Afghanistan the conclusion that their transformation program worked...They thus prepared the war in Iraq based upon many of the presuppositions they had had before 9/11, oblivious of the fact that these theories had not really been tested in Afghanistan or anywhere else.”<sup>42</sup> However, as time has revealed, the “shock and awe” method of warfare was not successful on the strategic scale in either country. The Taliban adapted and resurged in 2005, and the U.S. is still conducting operations in the region.<sup>43</sup>

These factors created the environment in which U.S. strategy regarding Iraq would be forged. Because of the success of the operation in Afghanistan, Central Command, the combatant command responsible for Iraq war planning, focused on conventional tactics to create a war strategy that fixated on shock and awe, and the overthrow of Saddam’s regime as the primary objective for the U.S.<sup>44</sup> At the time, concepts such as information operations did not seem necessary for such a speedy and

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<sup>42</sup> Kagan, *Finding the Target*, 328

<sup>43</sup> “The Taliban Resurgence in Afghanistan”, British Broadcasting Company, Accessed December 10, 2016. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/events/the\\_taliban\\_resurgence\\_in\\_afghanistan](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/events/the_taliban_resurgence_in_afghanistan).

<sup>44</sup> Catherine Dale, “Operation Iraqi Freedom: Strategies, Approaches Results, and Issues for Congress”, February 22, 2008. <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/101771.pdf>, 9, “The Administration’s short-term goal for OIF was regime removal. As President Bush stated in his March 17, 2003, Address to the Nation, ‘It is too late for Saddam Hussein to remain in power.’ In that speech, he promised Iraqis, “We will tear down the apparatus of terror...the tyrant will soon be gone.”

decisive conflict. It is no wonder then as to why CENTCOM overlooked information operations in its war planning.

Consideration for information operations in the Iraq strategy was best seen in CENTCOM's "Phase IV" planning of Operation Iraqi Freedom, which was the transitioning of the new Iraqi government.<sup>45</sup> The underlying assumptions behind this transition were that the Iraqi people wanted to be liberated from Saddam, and would accept democracy wholeheartedly.<sup>46</sup> The U.S confidence in this assumption was such, that U.S. war planning deemed that only 150,000 troops, or the equivalent of the number of police in California, would be needed in the invasion. As Kagan states, the low number of troops was suggested because "No serious thought was given to the contingency that Iraq might not behave like California."<sup>47</sup> The expectation was that the Iraqi people would take advantage of the opportunity for democracy without resistance. What was overlooked perhaps, was the intense sectarian issues that lay dormant beneath Saddam's oppression waiting for an opportunity to surface.<sup>48</sup> The sectarian tensions were not considered because the war planning did not require methods and technical aspects that would allow for this information to be a focal point. Aspects such as solid intelligence collection and analysis as well as cultural awareness were discarded for what could be considered mirror imaging, or one perceiving and processing information through the

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<sup>45</sup> Kagan, *Finding the Target*, 336

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 340. The strategy was based around a "peaceful society" and not prepared for an insurgency.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 340.

<sup>48</sup> Dale, "Operation Iraqi Freedom", 36

filter of personal experience.<sup>49</sup> Mirror imaging can lead to misunderstandings and false assumptions about intelligence collected or the goals of actors.

The U.S. strategy leading to the invasion of Iraq overlooked many aspects that a policy encompassing information operations may have foreseen and mitigated. First, the lack of intelligence collected led to assumptions about the capabilities of the Iraqi military. Over a decade of sanctions against Iraq had left the country deprived of many assets and necessities to make war.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, the Iraqi population had also been suffering the effects of the West with their own line of sanctions. The sanctions, along with the embarrassment of Desert Storm had created resentment towards the West.<sup>51</sup> This, along with the understanding of the effectiveness the U.S. had against the Iraqi army in 1991, would lead to the understanding that shock and awe may have been overzealous.

In addition to the misunderstandings of the situation of Iraq at the time leading to the invasion, was also much miscommunication of U.S. strategy domestically from 2002 to 2005. News coverage and media can influence a population the same as any strategic communications strategy or information operation. As public perception is the driving force behind democracy, influence factors on the U.S. population determine success and failures in much of the U.S. agenda. September 11<sup>th</sup> forced the Bush administration to set

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<sup>49</sup> Lauren Witlin, "Of Note: Mirror-Imaging and Its Dangers." SAIS Review of International Affairs. March 13, 2008. Accessed March 01, 2017. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/233105>.

<sup>50</sup> Kagan, *Finding the Target*, 330, "The trouble is that destroying the Iraqi military's ability to continue to fight was never the major problem facing the U.S. armed forces in 2003. It was well and widely known that a decade of sanctions following a disastrous war had left the Iraqi military a hollow shell."

<sup>51</sup> William Wunderle, "Through the Lens of Cultural Awareness" June 22, 2006. Accessed November 13, 2016. <http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/cgsc/carl/download/csipubs/wunderle.pdf>, 44.

aside its initial agenda to manage the aftermath of the attack.<sup>52</sup> Any combat operation planned before 9/11 was viewed as inconsequential as suddenly the United States was faced with the gravity of the new world that emerged on September 12<sup>th</sup>. The Bush administration was forced to shift concentration on the new mission of defeating the Taliban quickly, by having deployed forces in Afghanistan in less than one month.<sup>53</sup> However, the quick and decisive victory over the Taliban allowed the Bush administration to refocus resources to Iraq. However, deciding to invade Iraq in the wake of both the 9/11 attack and overthrowing the Taliban government in Afghanistan confounded many as to whether the invasion into Iraq was part of the overall Global War on Terror.

This confusion was further amplified when White House officials, to include both President Bush and Vice President Cheney, stated the reasoning behind the Iraq invasion was a strong relationship between Al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein. Best explained in an article by Glenn Kessler in the Washington Post, "In former CIA director George Tenet's memoir, *In the Center of the Storm*... the CIA's battles with Cheney's office over the intelligence concerning connections between al-Qaeda and Iraq. Before the invasion of Iraq, the CIA also tangled with the Pentagon operation that provided its own (disputed by the CIA) assessment of the available intelligence... the agency even has to fend off White House interference to publish a paper by top analysts showing three areas of concern regarding Iraq and al-Qaeda- safe haven, contacts and training-but in which '*they could not translate this data into a relationship where the two entities had ever moved beyond*

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<sup>52</sup> "O'Neill: Bush planned Iraq invasion before 9/11." CNN. January 14, 2004. Accessed March 02, 2017. <http://www.cnn.com/2004/ALLPOLITICS/01/10/oneill.bush/>.

<sup>53</sup> Kagan, *Finding the Target*, Chapter 8

*to seeking ways to take advantage of each other”* (emphasis added by author).<sup>54</sup> The uncertainty about the reason for the invasion of Iraq would lead to many Americans unsupportive for the war as it progressed. Transparency as to the reason for the war in Iraq from the U.S. policy was crucial to rallying support from both the U.S. domestic population as well as the international community. The misperception from vague or misleading speeches and information created more misunderstanding domestically and hindered success as the Iraq war continued past the expected time frame.

At the same time as the U.S. was preparing for Iraq, Al Qaeda was pushing its own information operations against the West, by stating the West was at war against the Ummah (Islamic community).<sup>55</sup> This propaganda had been ongoing years before 9/11, such as Osama Bin Laden’s 1996 fatwa declaring that the Crusader-Zionist alliance, meaning the United States and Israel, were corrupting the way of Islam and occupying Islamic holy sites.<sup>56</sup> Bin Laden claimed the United States had wrongfully attacked Iraq, referring to Operation Desert Storm. Propaganda such as this can be easily vindicated when the U.S. does not have a message of its own countering Bin Laden. Because Bin Laden’s statements were made in the mid-1990s, Bin Laden may have established an

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<sup>54</sup> Glenn Kessler. "The Cheney’s’ Claim of a ‘deep, Longstanding, Far-reaching Relationship’ between Al-Qaeda and Saddam." The Washington Post. July 14, 2014. Accessed December 10, 2016. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2014/07/17/the-cheney-claims-of-a-deep-longstanding-far-reaching-relationship-between-al-qaeda-and-saddam/?utm\\_term=.9c046f59d77b](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2014/07/17/the-cheney-claims-of-a-deep-longstanding-far-reaching-relationship-between-al-qaeda-and-saddam/?utm_term=.9c046f59d77b).

<sup>55</sup> Osama Bin Laden, "Osama Bin Laden's Fatwa 1996." 1996. Accessed December 10, 2016. [https://is.muni.cz/el/1423/jaro2010/MVZ203/OBL\\_AQ\\_Fatwa\\_1996.pdf](https://is.muni.cz/el/1423/jaro2010/MVZ203/OBL_AQ_Fatwa_1996.pdf),

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 4, “The inability of the regime to protect the country, and allowing the enemy of the Ummah - the American crusader forces- to occupy the land for the longest of years. The crusader forces became the main cause of our disastrous condition, particularly in the economical aspect of it due to the unjustified heavy spending on these forces. As a result of the policy imposed on the country, especially in the field of oil industry where production is restricted or expanded and prices are fixed to suit the American economy ignoring the economy of the country. Expensive deals were imposed on the country to purchase arms. People asking what is the justification for the very existence of the regime then? “

advantage of perception from the Islamic community before the U.S. decided to engage in Afghanistan and Iraq.

However, as stated, U.S. strategists did not implement a predominant information operations campaign along with its shock and awe strategy. Instead, as stated by Kagan, the U.S. “is entirely focused on persuading the enemy to surrender as quickly as possible rather than on creating the preconditions for political success after the ‘major combat operations’ are over. It shares that flaw with network-centric warfare that with the notion that destroying enough things of value will suffice to force any enemy to stop fighting.”<sup>57</sup> Iraq was intended to be a small-term operation, which would end in a matter of a few weeks. Therefore, the U.S. did not see the need to properly use IO as an effective method in the war. However, the U.S. soon discovered Iraq was not prepared to handle democracy as thought, but was a Pandora’s box of sectarian tensions.

### **Coalition Provisional Authority Orders 1 & 2**

The lack of cultural understanding and information operations prior to the invasion of Iraq left disparity towards how the Iraqi population would react to U.S. policy. The disparity led to U.S. occupation in Iraq lasting considerably longer than originally intended. The U.S. toppled Saddam’s regime in a matter of six weeks from the March 20, 2003 invasion to “Mission Accomplished”, the supposed end of major combat operations in Iraq on May 1, 2003.<sup>58</sup> From a conventional standpoint, the U.S. was

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<sup>57</sup> Kagan, *Finding the Target*, 344

<sup>58</sup> Kyle Chrichton, Gina Lamb, and Rogine Fisher Jacquette. "Timeline of Major Events in the Iraq War." Accessed December 10, 2016.

victorious against its enemy. However, even with the war against the Saddam's regime seen as a success, this did not stop the insurgency that soon emerged as a consequence of U.S. policies that lacked awareness of ethnic tension and cultural pressure points. The sectarian and cultural trigger points were soon ignited once the U.S. carried out certain policies through the Coalition Provisional Authority.

Soon after "Mission Accomplished", the objective focus was on the new Iraqi government. Through the need for a stable Iraq government came the Coalition Provisional Authority or CPA. Per Section one, article one of the CPA, "The CPA shall exercise powers of the government temporarily in order to provide for the effective administration of Iraq during the period of transitional administration, to restore conditions of security and stability, to create conditions in which the Iraqi people can freely determine their own political future, including by advancing governance and facilitating economic recovery and sustainable reconstruction and development."<sup>59</sup> The CPA was a U.S. controlled temporary government in charge of establishing a new Iraq democracy.

The CPA's first order came to be known as the de-Ba'athification of Iraqi society. According to section one, "On April 16, 2003 the Coalition Provisional Authority disestablished the Ba'ath Party of Iraq. This order implements the declaration by eliminating the Party's structures and removing its leadership from positions of authority

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[http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2010/08/31/world/middleeast/20100831-Iraq-Timeline.html?\\_r=2&#;/#time111\\_3262](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2010/08/31/world/middleeast/20100831-Iraq-Timeline.html?_r=2&#;/#time111_3262).

<sup>59</sup> "COALITION PROVISIONAL AUTHORITY REGULATION NUMBER 1." Accessed December 10, 2016.

[http://www.iraqcoalition.org/regulations/20030516\\_CPAREG\\_1\\_The\\_Coalition\\_Provisional\\_Authority\\_.pdf](http://www.iraqcoalition.org/regulations/20030516_CPAREG_1_The_Coalition_Provisional_Authority_.pdf).

and responsibility in Iraqi society. By this means, the Coalition Provisional Authority will ensure that representative government in Iraq is not threatened by Ba'athist elements returning to power and that those in positions of authority in the future are acceptable to the people of Iraq."<sup>60</sup> Beyond toppling Saddam's regime, the U.S. government also disbanded the Ba'athist party, which at the time controlled all the government and government related jobs.

The CPA was originally aimed at only the top most officials in the Ba'ath party.<sup>61</sup> However, this approach was soon abandoned for a more far-encompassing version when the new Ambassador of Iraq, Paul Bremer, was given guidance from the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, Douglas Feith, on the necessity of the CPA orders for Iraq's recovery.<sup>62</sup> At the time it was believed that de-Ba'athification was similar to the de-Nazification after World War II, and that ridding Iraq of a devious party was necessary for democracy to prevail.<sup>63</sup> Additionally, Ambassador Bremer at the time only believed that around one percent of the Ba'ath party members, or around 20,000 total, would be affected. Ambassador Bremer would later state that, "his order was applied in ways that he never intended, and that many more people were purged than he had envisioned under the original program."<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> "COALITON PROVISIONAL AUTHORITY ORDER NUMBER 1 DE-BA'ATHIFICATION OF IRAQI SOCIETY." Accessed December 10, 2016. [http://www.iraqcoalition.org/regulations/20030516\\_CPAORD\\_1\\_De-Ba\\_athification\\_of\\_Iraqi\\_Society\\_.pdf](http://www.iraqcoalition.org/regulations/20030516_CPAORD_1_De-Ba_athification_of_Iraqi_Society_.pdf).

<sup>61</sup> Andrew Terrill, *Lessons of the Iraqi De-ba'athification Program for Iraq's Future and the Arab Revolutions*, U.S. Army War College, 12

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 14

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 14

<sup>64</sup> Andrew Terrill, *Lessons of the Iraqi De-ba'athification*, 20



This significance in Order One is in the analysis of the Ba’athist party, as it pertained to Iraqi society. From an external standpoint, the Ba’athist party was a nationalist party where those loyal to both Saddam and the Iraqi state would join to promote Saddam’s cause.<sup>65</sup> However, as explained by Andrew Terrill with the Strategic Studies Institute, “... the justice of the de-Ba’athification order was not clear to many Iraqis. Joining the Ba’ath party in Saddam’s Iraq was a rational decision for anyone seeking to feed their family and live in conditions other than squalor and poverty. The best and most numerous jobs in Iraq are found in the government and in state-controlled enterprises such as the oil industry.”<sup>66</sup> The postulation was that individuals joined the Ba’ath Party because of their loyalty to Saddam and their country, however, in reality it was difficult for one to live outside of the party. As Terrill explains, “In Iraq, a non-Ba’athist primary school teacher would usually be paid the equivalent of U.S. \$4 per month, while a Ba’athist in the same position, doing the same work, would be paid around \$200 per month.”<sup>67</sup> This disparity applied to nearly all jobs in Iraq. Being a part of the Ba’athist party was based on necessity and not on political ideology. When the U.S. executed Order One many Iraqis perceived the order as punishment instead of justice.

The tension was only amplified with CPA Order Two, which in section three called for, “(1) Any military or other rank, title, or status granted to a former employee or functionary of a Dissolved Entity by the former Regime is hereby canceled. (2) All conscripts are released from their service obligations...”<sup>68</sup> CPA Order Two disbanded the

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 14

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 20, The reason for the necessity to work in the government was there is that Iraq does not have a strong private industry where one can make a decent living from.

<sup>67</sup> Andrew Terrill, *Lessons of the Iraqi De-ba'athification*, 21

<sup>68</sup> "COALITION PROVISIONAL AUTHORITY ORDER NUMBER 2 DISSOLUTION OF ENTITIES." Accessed December 10, 2016.

Iraqi military and, along with that, cancelled any pensions to military members who were affiliated to the Ba'ath party. The effect of this order was that soldiers of the Iraqi military, who had just suffered a severe loss and humiliation, were now ostracized and no longer had a job to occupy their time. Between 30,000-50,000 individuals were purged from the government as a direct result of CPA Orders one and two.<sup>69</sup> The result was a top to bottom gridlock of government functions. Schools did not have teachers to educate, all the way to Iraq's government, which now had no one experienced to run it.

Along with the bitterness from the Iraqi people based on the practical aspects of being a member of the Ba'ath party that the CPA overlooked, were the cultural dimensions that were ignored, and which played a major role in the Iraqi people's response to the CPA. Cultural dimensions such as how Iraqis identify themselves. The assumption at the time was that Iraq was a nationalist country.<sup>70</sup> However, this is an oversimplification. Iraq never unified to form a national identity, but merely appeared to be because of Saddam's oppression and the necessity for Iraqis to be a member of the Ba'ath party. Saddam's oppression acted as a lid on the pressure cooker, suppressing the sectarian tension between the Arab-Sunnis, the Shi'ites, and the Kurds.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, when Saddam was overthrown, it was as if lifting that oppression and allowing the sectarian schism to erupt into conflict.

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[http://www.iraqcoalition.org/regulations/20030823\\_CPAORD\\_2\\_Dissolution\\_of\\_Entities\\_with\\_Annex\\_A.pdf](http://www.iraqcoalition.org/regulations/20030823_CPAORD_2_Dissolution_of_Entities_with_Annex_A.pdf).

<sup>69</sup> Terrill, *Lessons of the Iraqi De-ba'athification*, 21, Some estimates go higher than 50,000.

<sup>70</sup> Wunderle, "Through the Lens of Cultural Awareness - Home | US." June 22, 2006. Accessed November 13, 2016. <http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/cgsc/carl/download/csipubs/wunderle.pdf>, 45, "Iraqis also have little sense that they are part of a cohesive society. At the conclusion of major combat operations (MCO) in Iraq, Iraqi civil structure was in disarray. Those who had government jobs were now unemployed. Because no one paid taxes, there was no investment in the community...because of this, there was little or no trust in the government, and society defaulted to a collective tribal system"

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

Moreover, the Sunni-Arabs, in particular, were susceptible to the backlash because the majority of the Ba'ath party had been, in fact, Sunni-Arab. The cultural shakeup caused by the invasion along with the release of sectarian tension was further enflamed when Sunni-Arabs witnessed the United States military forcing out Sunni-Arabs from power by the CPA, without fully understanding the motive behind the orders.<sup>72</sup> The outcome was, "many Sunni Iraqi Arabs considered 'de-Ba'athification,' to be synonymous with 'de-Sunnization,' a strong and deliberate effort to marginalize the role of the Sunni Arab community in Iraq's political future."<sup>73</sup> As Iraqi strategic culture explains, power and authority are a high value as is true with many patriarchal societies.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, the effects of the CPA were considered dishonorable and humiliating to the Sunni-Arabs. This blowback may have been mitigated if the U.S. had prioritized analysis of the cultural situation in Iraq, as well as messaging and influence to rally support for the orders.

The cultural-political dynamics that the CPA overlooked when integrated led to many of the estimated 50,000 Ba'athist members that had been disbanded seeking revenge for the humiliation.<sup>75</sup> Many of the former Iraqi military had money hidden, and contacts outside Iraq -primarily in Syria - who were willing and able to help the former Iraqi government members seek a vendetta. The result was an insurgency that devastated Iraq. This unintended and unexpected side effect of the de-Ba'athification resulted in the

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<sup>72</sup> Terrill, *Lessons of the Iraqi De-ba'athification*, 19-24

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 24

<sup>74</sup> Tuija Saarinen, "General Cultural Differences and Stereotypes: Kurdish ..." Accessed November 12, 2016. <http://wanda.uef.fi/tkk/liferay/projektit/monikko/translations/eng/Kurdilainen-perhe-ja-tapakulttuuri-eng.pdf>, 4

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 21, "Unfortunately, Bremer's estimate of 20,000 people being purged as a result of his order did not hold up. While exact numbers are impossible to obtain, most estimates place the number as at least 30,000 and possibly up to 50,000 individuals. A few estimates place it even higher..."

Iraq operation no longer being a small-scale operation as was intended for the campaign and created unnecessary chaos in the region.

As stated before, information operations hold a wide variety of methods to better understand the situation in a target area, and to enhance the influence of behavior in a conflict. Prioritizing the cultural characteristics and the psychology of a population may have benefited the U.S. by assuring messaging and policies are translated effectively. Information operations could have mitigated certain cultural triggers that led to the Iraqi insurgency or may have rallied support from Iraqis as the insurgency arose. Yet, as the interpretation was left to those affected by the CPA orders, the result was widely negative.

Additionally, de-Ba'athification continues in Iraq, which may still lead to many Arab-Sunnis resenting the current Iraqi government. In 2011 President Nouri al-Maliki forced 200 Sunni-Arabs from their jobs in the Iraq government.<sup>76</sup> The reason given for their banishment was that the individuals relieved of duty were members of the Ba'ath party. The significance behind this is that it demonstrates the potential for an adversary, such as the Islamic State, to use events and policies established by the U.S. to rally support for its agenda. As well, the continuation of de-Ba'athification could be seen as a continuation of the U.S. influence in Iraq against the Arab-Sunnis, which could lead to further resentment for the U.S.

Furthermore, similar to the strategic messaging prior to the invasion, the strategic messaging for the U.S. domestically was flawed, as well. Through the invasion to 2005

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<sup>76</sup> Terrill, *Lessons of the Iraqi De-ba'athification*. U.S. Army War College, X

miscommunications arose about the legitimacy of the U.S. involvement in Iraq began to escalate. As well, the lack of connections between Al-Qaeda and Saddam and the failure to uncover any weapons of mass destruction, which had been another key justification for the invasion, further divided the country.<sup>77</sup> This led to a major backlash in support for Operation Iraqi freedom internationally, as well as domestically. According to the Pew Research Center, it was during this time, between 2005 and 2006 the majority of the U.S. population's view of the Iraq war began to shift negatively against continuation.<sup>78</sup> U.S. news coverage began reflecting this negativity, which further reinforced the message that the United States was fighting an unjust war to the international community.<sup>79</sup> The effects of this anti-U. S. sentiment are still seen throughout the international community today, and these actions shifted the perception that the U.S. was not at war against Islam, even if U.S. policy vaguely stated it as such.<sup>80</sup> The disunity from U.S. domestic messaging as well as resentment abroad for the U.S. occupation in Iraq acted as counter-progressive towards the U.S. strategic objective in the region.

The backlash from both the international community and in Iraq may have been more damaging for the U.S. objective were it not for the U.S. adversary in Iraq, Al-Qaeda

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<sup>77</sup> Associated Press. "CIA's Final Report: No WMD Found in Iraq." April 25, 2005. Accessed December 10, 2016. [http://www.nbcnews.com/id/7634313/ns/world\\_news-mideast\\_n\\_africa/t/cias-final-report-no-wmd-found-iraq/#.WEyWjRsrKUL](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/7634313/ns/world_news-mideast_n_africa/t/cias-final-report-no-wmd-found-iraq/#.WEyWjRsrKUL). "in his final word, the CIA's top weapons inspector in Iraq said Monday that the hunt for weapons of mass destruction has 'gone as far as feasible' and has found nothing...after more than 18months, the WMD investigation and debriefing of the WMD-related detainees has been exhausted"

<sup>78</sup> Tom Rosentiel, "Public Attitudes Toward the War in Iraq: 2003-2008." Pew Research Center. March 19, 2008. Accessed December 10, 2016. <http://www.pewresearch.org/2008/03/19/public-attitudes-toward-the-war-in-iraq-20032008/>. Pew Research Center conducted a survey on three questions, and all demonstrate a trend of negativity towards the Iraq war that shifted to the majority of the U.S. population having a negative view in this time.

<sup>79</sup> Associated Press. "International Support Scarce for Iraq War." Fox News. January 30, 2003. Accessed December 10, 2016. <http://www.foxnews.com/story/2003/01/30/international-support-scarce-for-iraq-war.html>.

<sup>80</sup> "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America." March 2006. Accessed December 10, 2016. <https://www.comw.org/qdr/fulltext/nss2006.pdf>, 9, Refers to terrorism distortion of the war on terror.

in Iraq (AQI) making its own strategic mistakes which allowed the U.S. an opportunity for success. The AQI was an extension of the Al-Qaeda core that focused on brutal tactics and savagery.<sup>81</sup> The next section will show how opportunities led the U.S. to use information operations, and these opportunities had some success in winning the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people.

### **The Anbar Awakening and The Surge**

In the aftermath of the insurgency sparked by the CPA, came a period when information operations began to demonstrate some success in Iraq. The first was a controversial operation using anthropology in the war. Known as the Human Terrain System (HTS) program, the HTS program was established in 2005 when U.S. policymakers seeking methods to counter improvised explosive devices, “as part of an effort to examine the sociocultural fabric behind the IED’s human networks, a proof-of-concept program, the Cultural Preparation of the Environment, was created...”<sup>82</sup> The cultural preparation of the environment stimulated the desire for the U.S. to focus on sociocultural data on Iraq and Afghanistan. To handle this new tasking, the U.S. military recruited anthropologists to deploy to Iraq and Afghanistan to collect and analyze this data.

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<sup>81</sup> M.J Kirdar. "Al Qaeda in Iraq." June 2011. Accessed December 10, 2016. [https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy\\_files/files/publication/110614\\_Kirdar\\_AlQaedaIraq\\_Web.pdf](https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/110614_Kirdar_AlQaedaIraq_Web.pdf), 2

<sup>82</sup> Christopher Sims, “The Human Terrain System: Operationally Relevant Social Science Research in Iraq and Afghanistan”, Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, 2015,23

The anthropologists were embedded with tactical elements and aided U.S. tactical leadership by providing a cultural or political understanding to improve communication with the Iraqi people.<sup>83</sup> The effect of the program was to improve the ability of U.S. troops to effectively navigate the human terrain of Iraq, and thereby to advance key U.S. objectives. As Christopher Sims with the U.S. Army War College best explains, “cultural misunderstandings and failure to understand how the society functioned in this area had the potential to turn neutral (or even supportive) groups of people against the coalition and to the other side of the insurgents.”<sup>84</sup> At its peak, the HTS program had embedded anthropologists with 28 teams in Iraq.<sup>85</sup> Having these teams assisted U.S. troops to ensure the conduct and behavior of the U.S. troops would avoid triggering undesired responses from the Iraqi people.

An example of the cultural benefits anthropologists contributed to U.S. troops occurred with the patriarchal aspects of Iraqi society. Iraqis value elders who are strong and authoritative, which to them are the traits of a leader.<sup>86</sup> Because of this, it was imperative that U.S. leader’s demeanor articulated this manner, and do conduct themselves authoritatively, which included avoiding such customs as leadership deliberating amongst each other when amongst Iraqi leaders. A leader discussing issues or taking opinions on tactics and options could be perceived as weak, therefore, not a person the Iraqis want to deal with. Key strategic cultural insights such as leadership

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 42

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 41

<sup>85</sup> Whitney Kassel, "The Army Needs Anthropologists." *Foreign Policy*. July 28, 2015. Accessed December 10, 2016. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/07/28/the-army-needs-anthropologists-iraq-afghanistan-human-terrain/>.

<sup>86</sup> John Pike, "Iraqi Lifestyle" *Lifestyle*. Accessed December 10, 2016. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/lifestyle.htm>.

emphasizing authoritative mannerism were crucial in winning the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people. The HTS endowed U.S. troops with that insight, as Christopher Sims further explains, “in actuality, the HTS embedded teams actually created the skill sets and practical experience that the program sought in the first place.”<sup>87</sup> Gathering strategic cultural intelligence such as this allows tactical units’ enhanced mobility throughout the human terrain, ultimately advancing U.S. strategy in part.

The success of the human terrain system demonstrates its necessity with any operation concerning winning the hearts and minds of a population. Additionally, “HTS is not simply a program for Iraq and Afghanistan, but a tool for all regions of strategic interest to the U.S. Army.”<sup>88</sup> Different cultures communicate in different ways. Knowing the human terrain in Iraq mitigates the chance of miscommunication, and helps ensure that the U.S. objective is met. Furthermore, programs such as the HTS adds value to any operation, more emphasis on such projects in conflicts such as the Iraq insurgency, or the conflict with the Islamic State and the foreign fighter issue, must be discussed.

Nevertheless, the HTS program received heavy criticism domestically, primarily among the academic anthropology community, who begrudged the concept of the U.S. “weaponizing anthropology” and believed that using anthropology in this manner violated the anthropologist code of ethics.<sup>89</sup> The resentment from the academic community was only made worse by the death of Paula Loyd, an anthropologist working

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<sup>87</sup> Sims, “The Human Terrain System”, 29

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 33

<sup>89</sup> Scott Jaschik, "Army Shuts down Controversial Human Terrain System, Criticized by Many Anthropologists." July 7, 2015. Accessed December 10, 2016. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/07/07/army-shuts-down-controversial-human-terrain-system-criticized-many-anthropologists>.



in Afghanistan who was set on fire by insurgents.<sup>90</sup> The brutality surrounding her death, and the reaction of her colleague who had promptly executed the terrorist, led to an even stronger backlash from the community. The HTS was ultimately shutdown on September 30, 2014. The reason given for the termination was the U.S. no longer saw the need for the program in either theater.<sup>91</sup> Abandonment of the HTS program may have negative consequences as the U.S. still has 8,400 troops deployed in Afghanistan and will stay in country until 2024.<sup>92</sup> The outcome of canceling the HTS program has yet to be seen although many have argued, including reports from the National Defense University, that canceling the program was a grave mistake.<sup>93</sup>

However, the HTS was not the only successful utilization of information operations during the Operation Iraqi Freedom. Another successful use of IO was the Sons of Iraq campaign (SOI). In 2006, stability in Iraq was scarce. Soldiers were facing multiple threats and daily attacks. However, at the same time as this, the AQI had also begun receiving opposition in the Anbar province of Iraq.<sup>94</sup> The leader of AQI was Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian who spent his teenage years until the end of his life as a “nationless freelance terrorist.”<sup>95</sup> Zarqawi was a foreign fighter, who moved to

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<sup>90</sup> "‘The Tender Soldier’ Tells Story Of Anthropologist Killed In Afghanistan." Hereandnow. August 4, 2013. Accessed December 10, 2016. <http://hereandnow.legacy.wbur.org/2013/09/04/tender-soldier-afghanistan>.

<sup>91</sup> Jaschik, "Army Shuts down Controversial Human Terrain System, Criticized by Many Anthropologists."

<sup>92</sup> Mark Landler, "Obama Says He Will Keep More Troops in Afghanistan Than Planned." The New York Times. July 06, 2016. Accessed December 10, 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/07/world/asia/obama-afghanistan-troops.html>.

<sup>93</sup> Whitney Kassel, "The Army Needs Anthropologists." Foreign Policy. July 28, 2015. Accessed December 10, 2016. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/07/28/the-army-needs-anthropologists-iraq-afghanistan-human-terrain/>.

<sup>94</sup> M.J. Kirdar, "Al Qaeda in Iraq." June 2011. Accessed December 10, 2016. [https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy\\_files/files/publication/110614\\_Kirdar\\_AlQaedaIraq\\_Web.pdf](https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/110614_Kirdar_AlQaedaIraq_Web.pdf), 8

<sup>95</sup> Teslik Lee Hudson. "Profile: Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi." Council on Foreign Relations. June 08, 2006. Accessed December 11, 2016. <http://www.cfr.org/iraq/profile-abu-musab-al-zarqawi/p9866>.

Afghanistan in 1989 to fight in the Soviet-Afghan war. It was in Afghanistan where Zarqawi began to resent the Al Qaeda objective in fighting “the far enemy” and wanted to focus on “the near enemy,” which to him were apostates.<sup>96</sup> By 2001, Zarqawi and what would later become AQI were operating in the al-Anbar province of Iraq, which is primarily Sunni-Arab, AQI’s primary source of recruitment and support.

The Anbar province is where much of the insurgency took place. This made the Anbar province, and with it the Sunni-Arabs, a key factor in the outcome of the Iraq war. However, the AQI had used several brutal tactics against its enemies, who were often fellow Muslims that the AQI determined were the enemy of Allah. These tactics included various methods of torture, the killings of entire families, and mass bombings.<sup>97</sup> The legacy that AQI left is carried on by its successor, the Islamic State.

The sheer violence of the AQI on fellow Muslims produced a backlash from the Anbar Province.<sup>98</sup> This backlash came to be known as the Anbar Awakening. The Anbar Awakening consisted of mainly Sunni-Arab tribes throughout the Anbar province setting aside differences, and uniting to defeat Al Qaeda in Iraq.<sup>99</sup> As well, the Sunni-Arab Muslims controlled support lines for the insurgency, as access routes for supplies and foreign fighters went primarily through the Anbar province.<sup>100</sup> Best explained by Kimberly Kagan with the Institute for the Study of War, “Anbar Province stretches west of Baghdad to Iraq’s borders with Syria and Jordan. Foreign fighters flow from those

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Kirdar, “Al Qaeda in Iraq”, 5

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 5

<sup>100</sup> Kimberly Kagan, “The Anbar Awakening: Displacing Al Qaeda from Its Stronghold in Western Iraq.” Accessed December 10, 2016.

<http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/reports/IraqReport03.pdf>, 3

borders toward Baghdad. The Euphrates River Valley constitutes the main line of communication in Anbar province... these lines of communication link the major towns of the western Euphrates with the cities of northern Iraq in which former Baathist regime elements and al Qaeda [AQI] once operated and still operate.”<sup>101</sup> The Anbar province held strategic value in both land and support for AQI and the insurgency. However, disregarding the value of the support of the population, Zarqawi continued his reign of terror in Iraq. Zarqawi was eventually killed north of Baghdad when U.S. forces launched a drone strike on a safe house<sup>102</sup>. The result of both AQI’s brutality and the death of Zarqawi provided an opportunity for General David Petraeus to conduct an information operation in the conflict, known as the Son of Iraq campaign.

As Kimberley Kagan goes on to say, the U.S. was able to exploit the resentment of AQI by forming the Sons of Iraq campaign alongside the awakening.<sup>103</sup> This was primarily done with the support of General David Petraeus, who at the time was the leader of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), which as stated before holds responsibility for military activities in the Middle East.<sup>104</sup> General Petraeus realized that motivating the Sunni-Arab tribes in the Anbar province to fight together with the U.S. would result in less U.S. casualties and would be more financially efficient than the strategy at the time.<sup>105</sup> This campaign attempted to shift the focus of the U.S. being as the invading enemy to U.S. forces aiding the Iraqi population to fight off insurgents.

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., Pages 3-4

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Kagan, “The Anbar Awakening: Displacing Al Qaeda from Its Stronghold in Western Iraq.”

<sup>104</sup> Greg Bruno, "Finding a Place for the ‘Sons of Iraq’." Council on Foreign Relations. January 09, 2009. Accessed December 10, 2016. <http://www.cfr.org/iraq/finding-place-sons-iraq/p16088>.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

The Sons of Iraq objective was for the U.S. military to seek out tribal leaders in the Anbar province and Baghdad to offer U.S. assistance in training and financing Iraqi militias in their effort to combat AQI. The result was, “By 2008, more than 95,000 citizens had joined the anti-al-Qaeda movement... roughly 80 percent of the forces are Sunni; 19 percent are Shiite. It is estimated that 91,000 [were] under contract with the coalition forces, each receiving the equivalent of \$300 in U.S. currency a month...”<sup>106</sup> The ability to influence such a high volume of individuals in a combat theater benefited the U.S. strategy in Iraq. The understanding of both key tactical and strategic issues, such as both AQI’s operations and conduct, as well as the Sunni-Arab tribal structure and social values can play a substantial role in the war on terror.

The Sons of Iraq campaign was largely successful in achieving its objectives. The campaign was a large demonstration how understanding the sociological mentality of a community and influence can work to the U.S. advantage. One article by the Institute for the Study of War argued, “On the whole, the Sons of Iraq program has been a major asset in the struggle to bring security to the Iraqi population... the Sons of Iraq program have allowed overstretched Coalition and Iraqi forces to accomplish more than they would have been able to otherwise on the security front.”<sup>107</sup> The significance behind the Sons of Iraq campaign is that it demonstrates how the U.S. does not need to focus on large conventional military operations to accomplish strategic objectives in the theater of war

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Fahrook Ahmed, “Sons of Iraq and Awakening Forces.” February 21, 2008. Accessed December 10, 2016. [http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/reports/Backgrounder 23 Sons of Iraq and Awakening Forces.pdf](http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/reports/Backgrounder%20Sons%20of%20Iraq%20and%20Awakening%20Forces.pdf), 13

but does need to comprehensively understand and take into account the psychological and sociological aspects of the population inside the theater of war.

Additionally, as this campaign was largely based on motivating local nationals to become engaged in counterinsurgency operations, the Sons of Iraq campaign demonstrates that certain societies may be motivated more by other aspects than purely political issues or the deterrence stemming from U.S. military dominance. Awareness of the temperament of the local nationals was more significant than assuming U.S. conventional forces would be sufficient to establish stability. This assertion is supported by the Institute for the Study of War's statement, "The Coalition successfully exploited this rift between the most radical insurgent groups and the tribal leaders and populations. Thus, they turned formerly passive supporters as well as some former insurgents into active supporters of the counterinsurgency effort."<sup>108</sup> The Sons of Iraq campaign motivated individuals in ways that U.S. conventional superiority could not.

At the same time as the Sons of Iraq campaign was showing success, however, media coverage of the war did not necessarily reflect progress. Akin to the CPA and the invasion, the media coverage, in certain ways, compensated for the lack of IO in theater. However, the information covered did not benefit the U.S. both domestically or abroad, but was comprised of negativity towards the U.S.<sup>109</sup> This, along with new misleading information and stereotypes, such as the U.S.'s involvement being solely oil driven,

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 1

<sup>109</sup> James Paul, "Media Coverage of Iraq." Media Coverage of Iraq. Accessed March 02, 2017. <https://www.globalpolicy.org/media-and-the-project-of-empire/media-coverage-of-iraq-8-40.html#2007>.

further pushed a negative message about the United States.<sup>110</sup> Global media coverage influences perspectives on an issue, especially if there is no competing message being given. The lack of strategic messaging or an effective IO campaign beyond inside Iraq allows opportunities for adversaries in the war of ideas. Although the U.S. managed some success in influencing towards combating the AQI in Iraq, the radical ideology behind AQI is not limited to border constraints. Therefore, the success in defeating Al Qaeda in Iraq does not mean AQI ideology is also destroyed.

The success in the Sons of Iraq campaign along with the HTS dealt a significant blow to both Al Qaeda in Iraq. The AQI was largely degraded after the surge and Anbar awakening and had the U.S. emphasized on destroying the ideology as a whole behind the organization, the ultimate result may have been a complete victory against AQI. However, history has shown this was not the case. The AQI ultimately appointed a new leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, and AQI mutated into the Islamic State that currently plagues Iraq today.<sup>111</sup> As well, the Al Qaeda core was degraded from both the U.S. victory over AQI and the effect of AQI's savagery had for the Al Qaeda image.<sup>112</sup> The lack of support AQI received in the Anbar province as a result of its brutality carried over to the Al Qaeda group as a whole. The success of the U.S. forced the Al Qaeda core to go underground. As with the AQI, had the U.S. taken advantage of this moment to mitigate radical ideology, the U.S. may have ultimately defeated Al Qaeda altogether. However, this

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<sup>110</sup> Antonia Juhasz, "Why the War in Iraq Was Fought for Big Oil." CNN. April 15, 2013. Accessed December 11, 2016. <http://www.cnn.com/2013/03/19/opinion/iraq-war-oil-juhasz/>. Article written 2013 still pushes the idea of the United States invading countries for resources.

<sup>111</sup> Sebastian Gorka, "ISIS, Religion, and Today's War", Performed by Dr. Sebastian Gorka. March 8, 2016. Accessed November 10, 2016. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z6r2Jw78\\_zg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z6r2Jw78_zg).

<sup>112</sup> Robin Wright, "U.S. Obtains Treatise By Bin Laden Deputy." The Washington Post. October 07, 2005. Accessed December 11, 2016. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/10/06/AR2005100601819.html>.

was not the case and Al Qaeda managed to return and currently holds more territory than ever before.<sup>113</sup> Although disbanded, Al Qaeda has taken the opportunity to rebrand its image post-U.S. occupation in Iraq and has begun to reemerge.

### **The Withdrawal Of U.S. Forces from Iraq**

Both campaigns continued until the withdraw of U.S. forces from Iraq, however, it began tapering off around 2009.<sup>114</sup> The decision to reduce these operations was based on multiple reasons, such as a new administration coming in, the end of the surge in Iraq, and a stronger focus in Afghanistan.<sup>115</sup> At this point in time, the focus shifted from winning the hearts and minds, or complete victory in the Global War on Terror, to rapid withdrawal. The quick withdrawal from Iraq had stark consequences for the U.S. and the Global War on Terror as well.

Much about the consequences of the withdrawal from Iraq stem from the training that the Iraqi population received during U.S. occupation. As has been revealed now, the Iraqi military personnel had not undergone enough time using U.S. equipment and training to become comfortable with many of the new technologies or methods they had been trained in. This left many of the Iraq military to abandon vehicles and military tactics, as they are not inclined or accustomed to making repairs or maintaining complex

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<sup>113</sup> Gorka, "ISIS, Religion, and Today's War".

<sup>114</sup> Kagan, "The Anbar Awakening: Displacing Al Qaeda from Its Stronghold in Western Iraq."

<sup>115</sup> Elisabeth Bumiller, "With Boots in Iraq, Minds Drift to Afghanistan." The New York Times. July 31, 2009. Accessed December 10, 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/01/world/middleeast/01memo.html>.

mechanical equipment.<sup>116</sup> Instead, they have resorted to the methods and technology they are familiar with, which is often inferior. Along with technology, the Iraqi people also did not have sufficient time to develop their society to the standards the U.S. had hoped for. The U.S. emphasis on equipment training over allowing time for the Iraqi population to become embedded with familiarization of the applications may have been the result of U.S. policy makers seeking to demonstrate the success of the operation domestically over long-term ramifications.

However, the Iraq war was not seen as any type of victory for the U.S. Both domestically and abroad, the Iraq war was often viewed as a loss for the United States, compared often to the war in Vietnam.<sup>117</sup> Whether Iraq was a victory for the United States or a disaster is still widely debated in the contemporary political arena, as it was in 2011 when the last of U.S. forces withdrew.<sup>118</sup> According to some observers, the outcome of the war in had a lasting strategic effect on U.S. credibility on a global scale.<sup>119</sup> Since Operation Iraqi Freedom, the U.S. has been more hesitant to proactively engage on issues in the Middle East. This could be due to fear of being seen as making similar mistakes as the U.S. had recently done.

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<sup>116</sup> "U.S.-supplied Equipment Abandoned by Iraqi Troops in Ramadi." CBSNews. May 19, 2015. Accessed December 11, 2016. <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/u-s-supplied-equipment-abandoned-by-iraqi-troops-in-ramadi/>.

<sup>117</sup> Dominic Tierney, "Why Has America Stopped Winning Wars", The Atlantic. June 2, 2015. Accessed December 11, 2016. <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/06/america-win-loss-iraq-afghanistan/394559/>.

<sup>118</sup> "Agreement Between the United States of America and the Republic of Iraq On the Withdrawal of United States Forces from Iraq and the Organization of Their Activities during Their Temporary Presence in Iraq." November 17, 2008. Accessed December 10, 2016. <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/122074.pdf>.

<sup>119</sup> Nicholas Burns, "Iraq War Damaged US Credibility." Harvard Kennedy School. December 21, 2011. Accessed December 11, 2016. <https://www.hks.harvard.edu/news-events/news/news-archive/iraq-war-damaged-us-credibility>.



Moreover, the lack of a strategic message in the withdrawal of Iraq allowed for messages of the U.S. losing the war to flourish without contradiction. This is in part, along with the confusion among the general population as to the U.S.'s true mission in Iraq, as well as the contentiousness surrounding the success of OIF. To date, many among the U.S. general population have negative opinions towards Iraq.<sup>120</sup> This creates conflict and resentment, even among the White House administration and Congress. However, instead of addressing some of the confusion in an effort to mitigate these issues, policymakers tend to not address it, perhaps not wanting to deal with the political complications it would create trying to inform the public. As well, the contention surrounding Iraq has been and still is used for political purposes, as was seen in the recent 2016 presidential election.<sup>121</sup> The result is has been inconsistent or a lack of information overall, which allows for more anti-American propaganda and information to fill in the gaps.

## **Conclusion**

When considering the necessity of information operations in Operation Iraqi Freedom it is best to perceive the war from the perspective that the U.S.'s regime change operations holds similarities to an insurgency against Saddam's regime. Because of the nature of insurgency or revolutionary warfare, information operations was needed equally if not more than all other aspects in such an operation. As Frederick Kagan explains,

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<sup>120</sup> Katie Reilly, "Donald Trump Again Said He Opposed the War in Iraq. It's Still Not True." September 26, 2016. Accessed March 02, 2017. <http://fortune.com/2016/09/26/presidential-debate-donald-trump-iraq-war/>.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

“insurgency and revolutionary war are terms that describe the political purpose of military undertakings... revolutionary wars (or insurgencies) are not duels, but triangular struggles. Two sides compete with one another in order to gain the support of the bulk of the population. The triangular nature of these conflicts helps explain why counterinsurgency efforts focused primarily on defeating the armed forces of the rebels generally fail, while successful examples normally involve positive efforts to win over the populations.”<sup>122</sup> Kagan goes on to contend that an insurgency’s objective is to both discredit the existing regime and to establish an alternative. For these reasons, the primary objective of any insurgency or regime change war is to win over the hearts and minds of a population.

Likewise, viewing the operation from this perspective sheds light on lessons learned for U.S. strategy. Kagan best exposes this saying, “successful revolutionaries do not, on the whole, wait until they have taken power or are on the verge of doing so before deciding what their new government will look like and how they will win the support of the population for it. On the contrary, the vision of the new order is frequently what motivate revolutionaries to fight in the first place.”<sup>123</sup> The United States viewed itself as a revolutionary power to the Iraqi people. Therefore, it was imperative from the beginning that the U.S. helped the Iraqi people to understand the new vision the U.S. had for Iraq, and why they should support it. Failure to communicate and influence the behavior in the country is what facilitated more conflict, and ultimately to an indecisive outcome.

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<sup>122</sup> Kagan, *Finding the Target*, 368.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 368-369

As the next chapter will show, the U.S. has yet to effectively utilize information operations in the Iraqi theater against the Islamic State, a similar enemy it fought in Iraq. The Islamic State's is currently conducting its own information operation through the use of propaganda and the Internet has given it a global reach and placed it as one of the most successful terrorist organizations in history.<sup>124</sup> As stated in the beginning of this paper, the Islamic State has been able to successfully use the terrorism tactic throughout Europe, and inside the United States. As well, the number of ongoing investigations of supporters of the Islamic State is increasing, doubling from 2015 to 2016.<sup>125</sup> This expresses that the U.S. is losing the war of ideas, despite its conventional might, and global reach. As the United States begins to seek new ways in defeating terrorism, whether globally or regionally, it must strongly consider how its actions are going to be viewed through the population it is affecting. Information operations and strategic communications are designed to do that.

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<sup>124</sup> Sebastian Gorka, "ISIS, Religion, and Today's War", Performed by Dr. Sebastian Gorka. March 8, 2016. Accessed November 10, 2016. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z6r2Jw78\\_zg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z6r2Jw78_zg).

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER THREE: THE ISLAMIC STATE

The lack of information operations and strategic communications throughout Operation Iraqi Freedom, along with the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq before the government was stable, left Iraq vulnerable. A weak Shia government, along with a marginalized Sunni-Arab population, created a suitable environment for organizations such as AQI's successor, the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) to wedge itself into the psyche of a new country looking for stability. From 2006 the AQI was heavily degraded from U.S. forces in the area. Yet, despite the organizations seemingly defeat and unpopularity, a man calling himself Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, claimed leadership of the organization in 2010. From there, Baghdadi inaugurated the restoration of the ISI's structure and resources to reform it.<sup>126</sup> This next chapter spotlights the Islamic State's amelioration, its ideology, its information operation, and current U.S. strategies against both the Islamic State and the foreign fighter's dilemma along with it.

### The Emergence Of The Islamic State

Throughout the drawdown in Iraq in 2009 to 2011 Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), which had received a major setback due to the killing of Zarqawi and the Anbar Awakening as discussed in the previous chapter, was in a state of decay. The successor of Zarqawi after his death in 2006, an Egyptian named Abu Ayub al-Masri, had not managed to rally the

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<sup>126</sup> BBC News, "What is 'Islamic State'?" BBC News. December 02, 2015. Accessed February 11, 2017. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29052144>.

same level of commitment or motivation from AQI or the surrounding population.<sup>127</sup> The Coalition forces, along with the Anbar Awakening had managed to cripple the majority of AQI support, and by 2008, “coalition and local security forces had killed 2,400 AQI members and taken 8,800 prisoners. By spring 2009, the U.S. was funding around 100,000 local Sunnis to fight AQI. The local fighters carried out a campaign against the group, assassinating members and warning others not to work with the group. By June, 2010, AQI had lost stable communication with AQ leadership, and 36 of AQI’s 42 leaders had been killed or captured. Through 2011, Coalition forces continued to coordinate efforts with tribal security forces, killing the majority of AQI’s leadership and leaving it in general disarray.”<sup>128</sup> Around this time the leaders of the then ISI, Abu Ayub al-Masri, and Abu Umar al-Baghdadi, were both killed in a joint U.S. -Iraqi raid on April 18, 2010.<sup>129</sup> Shortly after the killing of Masri and Baghdadi a new leader was appointed, who called himself Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

Baghdadi was born Ibrahim Awwad Ibrahim al-Badri in 1971 near Samarra.<sup>130</sup> From an early age, Badri was known for his devoted nature towards sharia law and the Islamic faith.<sup>131</sup> He led chanting sessions with neighborhood children, attended mosque lectures regularly, and enrolled at Saddam University in Iraq for Quranic Studies. During his Ph.D. program, Badri joined the Muslim Brotherhood, although not initially favoring

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<sup>127</sup> Daniel Cassman, "The Islamic State." The Islamic State | Mapping Militant Organizations. Accessed February 10, 2017. <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/1>.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> William McCants, “The believer: How Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi became leader of the Islamic State.” The Brookings Institution. September 1, 2015. Accessed February 11, 2017.

<http://csweb.brookings.edu/content/research/essays/2015/thebeliever.html>.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., “Early on, Ibrahim’s nickname was ‘The Believer.’ When he wasn’t in school, he spent much of his time at the local mosque, immersed in his religious studies; and when he came home at the end of the day, according to one of his brothers, Shamsi, he was quick to admonish anyone who strayed from the strictures of Islamic law”

the Jihadist side of the Muslim Brotherhood. However, Badri quickly fell in line with the more conservative side, feeling that any state that did not adhere to sharia law was an apostate (renounced religious faith).<sup>132</sup> By the time of the U.S. invasion in 2003, Badri was known for being angrily intolerant of un-Islamic behavior.

It did not take long after the U.S. invasion for Badri to mobilize an insurgency group. Named Jaysh Ahl al-Sunna, this group fought against the U.S. in the Anbar Province throughout the invasion till 2004.<sup>133</sup> However, by February 2004, Badri was arrested while in Fallujah. At the time Badri was not a well-known combatant by the U.S. coalition forces and was released after 10 months. However, Badri managed to leave from his incarceration with more connections and information to fight with the insurgency than before.<sup>134</sup> Soon after his release, Badri joined Al Qaeda in Iraq. From there, Badri's connections along with his education in Quranic verses accelerated his position near a top level in AQI. After the death of the then leaders, Masri and Abu Umar al-Baghdadi, Badri was appointed as interim leader.

During the time that Badri became the leader of the Islamic State in Iraq, multiple things occurred that allowed for the reemergence of this organization. First, was the quick withdrawal of U.S. and coalition forces from Iraq, as previously discussed. Second, was the fragile Shi'ite dominated government in Iraq, which further fueled sectarian

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> McCants, "The believer: How Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi became leader of the Islamic State."

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

tension.<sup>135</sup> Third, was the Arab Spring, which sparked a civil war in Syria.<sup>136</sup> These events fashioned a fertile environment for the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) to begin recruiting new followers in the region, who had deep seeded grievances with the affairs inside and surrounding Iraq.

However, instead of attacking the Iraqi government first, Badri focused attention on recruiting in Iraq to fight in Syria, where by 2013 the civil war had devastated the country. Badri realized an opportunity by changing the ISI to the Islamic State of Iraq and Al Sham (ISIS), Badri managed to expand ISIS's power in the region.<sup>137</sup> The significance in renaming the organization is that Al-Sham is a holy Islamic site in Syria, where, according to Islamic eschatology, a great apocalyptic battle between the West and Islam will be waged.<sup>138</sup> It was at the time of the rebrand that ISIS also separated itself from the Al Qaeda core, and began fighting on multiple fronts in both Syria and Iraq. By January 2014, ISIS had seized the Iraqi city of Fallujah, and by March had taken Mosul. It was in Mosul on June 29, 2014 that Badri, who had by then changed his name to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, proclaimed himself the Caliph of the Islamic State.<sup>139</sup>

Since its declaration, the Islamic State has continued to hold territory and promote its radical ideology both within its occupied territory and abroad. In addition to enforcing

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<sup>135</sup> Cassman, "The Islamic State." "In December 2012, Sunnis in Iraq began protesting the policies of the Shiite Maliki government in Anbar province. When Iraqi security forces invaded protest camps, Sunni attacks against Shiite targets increased; the civilian death toll in 2013 was double that of 2012. When Iraqi security forces attempted to clear a protest camp in Ramadi at the end of 2013, a local uprising drove the security forces out of much of Anbar Province, paving the way for later AQI expansion."

<sup>136</sup> Kelly McEvers, "Revisiting The Spark That Kindled The Syrian Uprising." NPR. March 16, 2012. Accessed February 11, 2017. <http://www.npr.org/2012/03/16/148719850/revisiting-the-spark-that-kindled-the-syrian-uprising>.

<sup>137</sup> Cassman, "The Islamic State"

<sup>138</sup> Nick Danforth, "There Is No al-Sham." Foreign Policy. June 27, 2014. Accessed February 11, 2017. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/06/17/there-is-no-al-sham/>.

<sup>139</sup> Cassman, "The Islamic State."

strict Sharia law inside its occupied territory, the Islamic State, “seeks to eradicate obstacles to restoring God's rule on Earth and to defend the Muslim community, or Umma, against infidels and apostate,” as one BBC article demonstrates.<sup>140</sup> In just a few short years the Islamic State has become a legitimate threat to what little stability the Middle East holds. Although there have been signs of the Islamic State beginning to fail, the emerging issue is how the Islamic State’s downfall will affect fighters wanting to join the Islamic State’s cause. At the time this thesis was written the fate of the battle of Mosul has still not been determined.

However, at the height of power, the Islamic State controlled an area roughly equal to the size of the United Kingdom.<sup>141</sup> The Islamic State continued the same ruthless methods as its predecessor. By 2014, the Al-Qaeda core disavowed the Islamic State because the savage tactics that the Islamic State was implementing towards fellow Muslims. The Al Qaeda core postulated that the Islamic State’s tactics were so brutal it risked losing the Muslim hearts and minds.<sup>142</sup> The organization's tactics, such as crucifixions, torture, and public executions created an international protest towards the Islamic State. Regional powers, such as Iran, Syria, and many of the elites in Saudi Arabia have condemned the organization, and many state actors have joined in to help eliminate it. Yet, despite this claim that the Islamic State is too radical or too savage, the organization grew immensely.

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<sup>140</sup> "What is 'Islamic State'?" BBC News. December 02, 2015. Accessed February 11, 2017. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29052144>.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Fawaz Gerges, "Islamic State: Can its savagery be explained?" BBC News. September 09, 2014. Accessed February 11, 2017. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29123528>.



In addition, the Islamic State has recruited heavily from both within the Middle East and abroad, including from the West to Muslims who may sympathize with the Islamic State's ideology. The recruitment of foreign fighters has been successful in the Islamic State through its massive propaganda campaign and the use of new technologies, such as social media. The Islamic State's ideology and information operations have allowed it to thrive in the Middle East, and inspire violence abroad.

### **The Islamic State's Ideology**

As best articulated by Major General Michael Nagata, former special operations commander of U.S. Central Command, "We do not understand the movement [i.e., the Islamic State], and until we do, we are not going to defeat it... We have not defeated the idea. We do not even understand the idea."<sup>143</sup> The Islamic State has managed to both keep dedicated to its brutality and hold a notable amount of territory. Much of the reasoning behind the Islamic State's success derives from its ideology appealing to supporters or suppressing resistance. The Islamic State's ideology has struck a nerve with those inside its occupied territory, and those abroad who are susceptible to the Islamic State's dogma. This ideology is not entirely unique to the Islamic State alone but is rooted in a dogma that may tempt those Islamists who no longer have the patience for the eventual time when Islam is the dominant religion again. The Islamic State calls for action, and its creed and actions have been seducing many who feel the contemporary international arena calls for both.

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<sup>143</sup> Cole Bunzel, "From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State." March 19, 2015. Accessed February 10, 2017. <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/The-ideology-of-the-Islamic-State.pdf>, 4

To understand how the Islamic State has been successful in radicalizing and mobilizing individuals abroad, the creed must be understood. As Cole Brunzel with the Brookings Institute states, “that [the Islamic States] ideology should be understood on two levels. The first is Jihadi-Salafism, the school of Islamic political thought to which the group belongs. The second level is the Islamic State’s hardline orientation within this school, which is to a large degree what separates it from al-Qaeda today.”<sup>144</sup> The first dimension of the Islamic State’s ideology is that it originated from severe interpretations of the Quran. This creed is one of complete conviction, in an attempt to create a “pure version” of the Islamic religion.<sup>145</sup>

The Salafist religion is a ultra-fundamentalist form of Sunni Islamism, which believes that a Muslim’s life should be centered around Sharia, or “the path”, of Islamic law and values.<sup>146</sup> Sharia law follows a strict set of moral laws and values that date back to the prophet Mohammad’s time.<sup>147</sup> However, where Salafist distinguish themselves beyond mainstream Islamism is that they believe the only true form of Islam is the one that was established at the time of the Prophet Mohammad.<sup>148</sup> The difference is where an Islamist will conduct its life according to sharia, a Salafist follows the law of sharia, “to

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 7

<sup>145</sup> Michael Weiss, "ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror." December 3, 2015. Accessed February 10, 2017. <https://ia902602.us.archive.org/19/items/IsisInsideTheArmyOfTerror/Isis-InsideTheArmyOfTerror-Akure.pdf>.

<sup>146</sup> Gul Tuysuz, "What is Sharia law?" CNN. August 16, 2016. Accessed February 11, 2017. <http://www.cnn.com/2016/08/16/world/sharia-law-definition/>.

<sup>147</sup> John Pike, "Military." Sharia Law. Accessed February 11, 2017.

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/intro/islam-sharia.htm>. “The word ‘Islam’ means ‘submission’ A ‘Muslim,’ therefore, is one who submits to the will of God. Shariah, frequently translated as "Islamic law," is neither a document nor a code in the strict sense, but rather an amalgamation of scriptural (Quranic) injunctions, sayings of the Prophet Mohammed, juridical rulings, and legal commentaries dealing with all aspects of social, economic and political life...”

<sup>148</sup> Rashid Dar, and Shadi Hamid. "Islamism, Salafism, and jihadism: A primer." Brookings. July 28, 2016. Accessed February 11, 2017. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2016/07/15/islamism-salafism-and-jihadism-a-primer/>.

the letter.”<sup>149</sup> Salafists are the “ultraconservatives” of the Islamic world. As David Kirkpatrick with the New York Times stated, “the Islamic State disdains other Islamists who reason by analogy to adapt to changing context...”<sup>150</sup> The Islamic State follows the most stringent of Salafi beliefs, and in addition to having low tolerance if any for the infidel [nonbeliever] or Shi’ites, the Islamic State has more resentment towards Sunni Muslims who do not join the Islamic State. The Islamic State’s disdain for unsupportive Sunni Muslims was seen with the Jordanian pilot Muath al-Kaseasbeh, who was shot down in Syria and burned alive by the Islamic State.<sup>151</sup> As Sebastian Gorka, a current Whitehouse advisor and expert in irregular warfare stated in a lecture on the Islamic State that Kaseabeh was burned alive instead of beheaded because he was a Sunni Muslim who went against the caliphate. In the reasoning of the Islamic State, Kaseabeh should have known better because he was a Sunni.<sup>152</sup> In the Islamic State, Kaseabeh was seen as a traitor, and burning him alive was following sharia law punishments for traitors.

Further implications of how the Islamic State practices Salafism emanates from the consideration of where the Islamic State controls the territory, as well as whom could be susceptible to its message. The Islamic State controls territory inhabited by a major Arab-Sunni population.<sup>153</sup> Even with the Arab-Sunni population in the Islamic State occupied territory exceeds 10 million individuals the Islamic State has managed to be

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> David Kirkpatrick, "ISIS' Harsh Brand of Islam Is Rooted in Austere Saudi Creed." The New York Times. September 24, 2014. Accessed February 11, 2017.

[http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/25/world/middleeast/isis-abu-bakr-baghdadi-caliph-wahhabi.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/25/world/middleeast/isis-abu-bakr-baghdadi-caliph-wahhabi.html?_r=0).

<sup>151</sup> Ishaan Tharoor, "A year ago, ISIS burned a Jordanian pilot to death. His family is still anguished." The Washington Post. February 4, 2016. Accessed February 11, 2017.

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/02/04/a-year-ago-isis-burned-a-jordanian-pilot-to-death-his-family-is-still-anguished/?utm\\_term=.f2a80cb5bbc1](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/02/04/a-year-ago-isis-burned-a-jordanian-pilot-to-death-his-family-is-still-anguished/?utm_term=.f2a80cb5bbc1).

<sup>152</sup> Gorka “ISIS, Religion, and Today's War”

<sup>153</sup> "Islamic State and the Crisis in Iraq and Syria in Maps." BBC News. November 2, 2016. Accessed November 13, 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27838034>.

successful in its domination. The significance in this is it appears as though the Arab-Sunni population is allowing itself to be controlled by the Islamic State's government. This could suggest a general acceptance within the Arab-Sunni culture in Iraq of more radical philosophy.

Additionally, the allowance by the Arab-Sunnis for the Islamic State to control inhabited territory may also demonstrate that Arab-Sunni sects in Iraq culturally identify with their ethnicity and religion over a state government.<sup>154</sup> The strategic effect of this is the longer the Islamic State maintains an ideological influence in the region, the more likely younger generations of Iraqis will carry on that same philosophy and violence. Additionally, the Iraqi and Syrian government will have increasing little influence in the area as Iraqi Sunni-Arabs do not separate church and state, but view all political decisions through a religious lens. As well, the ramifications of this will affect both the culture in the Middle East and the state sovereignty in the region.

As Samuel P. Huntington, a former NSC member and Harvard professor of political science hypothesized the new global conflict, "will be cultural."<sup>155</sup> His thesis may prove true as much of what is happening in the Middle East has more to do with cultural conflict than with conventional issues, such as state sovereignty or resources. To the West, the principle actors in global affairs are the nation states. This concept is relatively new, being only a few centuries old originating from the Treaty of Westphalia.<sup>156</sup> Since the adoption of the treaty, the West has shifted attention towards international relations being conducted by state actors and has acquired the philosophy of

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<sup>154</sup> Bernard Lewis, "Roots of Muslim Rage." 4 (2002): 10. Print, 18

<sup>155</sup> Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" Foreign Affairs Vol. 72, No. 3 (1993): 22. Print, 1

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 1

separating church and state. However, the majority of the Islamic community in the Middle East, does not perceive governance or international affairs in the same manner. Bernard Lewis, a historian and former professor at Princeton in Near Eastern Studies, has stated, regarding politics in the Middle East, “God is in principle the sovereign, the supreme head of the Islamic state—and the Prophet and, after the Prophet, the caliphs are his vicegerents—then God as sovereign commands the army.”<sup>157</sup> To the Islamic community in the Middle East the land is governed by the Islamic god and by the dogma of the Quran. When a Middle Eastern inhabitant has an issue with the governing body or defies a law, it is often looked at by the society as that citizen defied his or her religion. Similarly, when an outside culture involves itself in Middle Eastern affairs, through diplomacy or military interaction, those actions are not seen by the Islamic community as simply the interaction among state actors, but intervening with a religion.

Overlooking the cultural sensitivities in the Middle East has led to ill views of the U.S. in the region. As Lewis stipulates, “The Muslim has suffered successive stages of defeat. The first was his loss of domination in the world, to the advancing power of Russia and the West. The second was the undermining of his authority in his own country, through an invasion of foreign ideas and laws and ways of life and sometimes even foreign rulers or settlers, and the enfranchisement of native non-Muslim elements.”<sup>158</sup> Further intervention from foreign cultures could cause a “stand your ground,” temperament from the Islamic community, which allows groups such as the Islamic State to rally support as they fight off outside forces. It is important to understand the impact that historical events have had in the Middle East and with Muslims globally.

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<sup>157</sup> Lewis, "Roots of Muslim Rage", 18

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 19

The Islamic State's conviction can entice a quest for revenge from both Muslims living under the Islamic States rule, as well as those susceptible to being charmed by the Islamic States rhetoric. The Islamic State is at the core of its bearing an Islamist movement. Although many Islamists have negative views towards the Islamic State, there can be no denying that the Islamic State is acting in accordance with certain Quranic teachings, such a submission to Allah and Allah being a part of everyday life.<sup>159</sup> As stated before, many of the types of violence used by the Islamic State directly come from Quranic verses, and how Islamic leaders treated adversaries. Therefore, consideration on how Islamists perceive the Islamic State, as well as looking into the ideology the Islamic State is preaching is of the utmost importance.

However, the establishment of the caliphate is not the only task on the Islamic State's agenda. The second main ideological dimension of the Islamic State deals with its goal, which goes far beyond the establishment of a caliphate to an apparent glorious apocalyptic battle between the true believers and the West.<sup>160</sup> As has been stated in multiple Islamic State propaganda videos and text the Islamic State believes, "...that the armies of Rome [the West] will mass to meet the armies of Islam in northern Syria; and that Islam's final showdown with the anti-Messiah will occur in Jerusalem after a period of renewed Islamic conquest. The Islamic State has attached great importance to the Syrian City of Dabiq, near Aleppo... the Islamic State's propagandists drool with anticipation of this event, and constantly imply that it will come soon", as an article by Graeme Wood with the Atlantic states.<sup>161</sup> The Islamic State preaches a final battle in

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<sup>159</sup> Pike, "Military."

<sup>160</sup> Graeme Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants." The Atlantic. March 2015. Accessed February 12, 2017. <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980/>.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

which the true believers will be victorious against the Western nonbelievers, which will result in a global Caliphate in the post-apocalyptic world. These messages, such as an apocalyptic battle between the Western crusaders and the true believers, while holding a territory, has had a seductive effect from foreign fighters abroad, whom desire a fight on a biblical scale, generates motivation to join.<sup>162</sup> To combat this seduction, the U.S. must implement a multispectral strategy targeting all aspects of the Islamic State. Currently, the U.S. is focused on dismantling the Islamic State's territory, but the ideology behind it must also be addressed and overcome. Overcoming the ideology ensures that the radical ideology behind the Islamic State dies with it and does not reemerge in ten years as another extremist group with the same agenda.

### **How the Islamic State Differs from Al Qaeda**

The Islamic State has long since cut the umbilical cord with Al Qaeda and has evolved into a separate entity unto itself. This is important to acknowledge when considering the foreign fighter issue and how the Islamic State is doing so well in recruiting, and because the policies targeting Al Qaeda may not work regarding the Islamic State. The Islamic State embraces many characteristics that are vastly different from the Al Qaeda core, and therefore, constructing policies aimed at the defeat of the Islamic State ought to appreciate the differences.

The first principal difference between the Islamic State and Al Qaeda is who the organizations view as their target. Al Qaeda from the beginning has been concerned with

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<sup>162</sup> Lisa Blaker, "The Islamic State's Use of Online Social Media." 2015. Accessed March 3, 2017. <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1004&context=mca>.

the far enemy, meaning the United States.<sup>163</sup> As Daniel Byman, an expert on foreign policy and the Middle East stated in his testimony before the Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence of the House Committee on Homeland Security, “Building a caliphate was more of a long-term goal than an immediate objective’. The AQ core’s goal was first to fight the ‘far enemy’ and then eventually in the long-term would establish a caliphate.”<sup>164</sup> Al Qaeda’s goal of attacking the U.S. along with its strategic patience for the caliphate indicates Al Qaeda is more of a threat against the U.S. homeland.

Divergent from Al Qaeda, the Islamic State does not look at the U.S. as its primary objective. The Islamic State’s primary focus has been in the Middle Eastern region. This has been true of the Islamic State even when it was still under the Al Qaeda name. As Daniel Byman explains again, “Yet even in its [The Islamic State’s] early days the group bickered with the Al Qaeda leadership. Zawahiri and Bin Laden pushed for a focus on U.S. targets while Zarqawi (and those who took his place after his death in 2006 from a U.S. air strike) emphasized sectarian war and attacks on Sunni Muslims deemed apostates, such as those who collaborated with the Shi’a-led regime.”<sup>165</sup> This demonstrates that from the beginning, the Islamic State was more focused on its region and apostate regimes. The result of this is that Al Qaeda may be more of a threat to the U.S. homeland, but the Islamic State’s agenda will be destabilizing in the Middle East, in which the U.S. has a substantial investment.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Daniel L Byman, "Comparing Al Qaeda and ISIS: Different goals, different targets." Brookings. July 28, 2016. Accessed February 12, 2017. <https://www.brookings.edu/testimonies/comparing-al-qaeda-and-isis-different-goals-different-targets/>.

<sup>164</sup> Gorka, “ISIS, Religion, and Today's War”

<sup>165</sup> Byman, "Comparing Al Qaeda and ISIS: Different goals, different targets."

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.



Recognizing the Islamic State's main agenda also means that although the Islamic State has inspired attacks inside the United States, most notably San Bernardino, CA and Orlando, FL, these are not the planning and coordination of the Islamic State as much as opportunities seized from individuals radicalized. This understanding affects U.S. policy when considering that those watching the Islamic State with interest may form the opinion that the Islamic State is handling regional matters, or the U.S. is forcing its presence on Islamic matters. Those who are susceptible to join the Islamic State may be persuaded further to join if the message being shown is of the Islamic State focused on regional affairs, and then watching the U.S. conduct air strikes in defense of the U.S. The message becomes distorted and could push individuals further towards the Islamic State's ideology.

Along with the difference in targets between Al Qaeda and the Islamic State is the difference centered around when the caliphate should be established. The Islamic State's objective is for the caliphate to be realized now, and it has succeeded in constructing it.<sup>167</sup> There is no more waiting for a caliphate to emerge. The caliphate can be seen on a map. This is significant for two main reasons. First, it is significant because no terrorist organization has ever done this before.<sup>168</sup> All other terrorist groups, from the Muslim Brotherhood to Al Qaeda have continued with the message of fighting and defeating the enemy first, and then the caliphate will eventually be established. In this sense, the Islamic State has done what no other terrorist group has done before, which alone is significant.

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<sup>167</sup> Gorka "ISIS, Religion, and Today's War"

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

The second significant factor in this is how enticing having a tangible caliphate looks to foreign fighters and potential converts who see the Islamic State making this stand.<sup>169</sup> A fully established caliphate affects those who are impatient towards Islam's resurgence of the power and status it once had. Having the caliphate now is rallying a call to action to all the Muslims on a global scale. To those who have watched the Middle East be influenced by so-called "apostates" or the West, strategic patience has not paid off. Instead, potential foreign fighters abroad are witnessing an organization claim what no other group has claimed before. It further pushes the message that the time to act is now, and the Islamic State's caliphate requires the help from the true believers. This may have had a tangible impact on those who are inclined to join such a cause.

### **The Islamic State's Use of Propaganda**

The Islamic State's accomplishment in rallying support from outside its occupied territory emanates largely from its information operations campaign, which could potentially be destructive to U.S. foreign policy if a counter operation is not executed properly. Although the Islamic State is not the first group to use this strategy, the Islamic State has used social media far more successfully than any other terrorist organization in history.<sup>170</sup> Currently, the Islamic State is losing territory. However, the loss of territory does not necessarily deter veteran foreign fighters whom may scatter after the end of the Islamic State, nor does losing territory necessarily correlate to a loss in the ideology of the Islamic State. The longer the Islamic manages to continue pushing its propaganda, the

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Alberto M. Fernandez, "Here to stay and growing: Combating ISIS propaganda networks." October 2015. Accessed February 10, 2017. [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/IS-Propaganda\\_Web\\_English.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/IS-Propaganda_Web_English.pdf).

more likely the messages carried through the Islamic State will continue long after the Islamic States defeat.

The Islamic State began its own social media campaign in 2012 with a “36-minute video titled ‘The Expedition of the Prisoners, #1,’ released in January by the group’s Al-Furqan media outlet. This video was a collection of clips of varying technical quality from Arab and Western broadcast media and is clearly intended for the Iraqi Sunni audience. It begins with the American ‘crusaders’ handing over Iraq to the Iranian...”<sup>171</sup> The timing of this video being released roughly a month after the last of U.S. and coalition forces withdrew from Iraq is not a coincidence. The end of Operation Iraqi Freedom and New Dawn departed leaving Iraq comprised with a weak government and sectarian tension. Furthermore, the audience the Islamic State sought out was the same individuals the Islamic State currently has control over, which is the Iraqi Arab-Sunni community.<sup>172</sup> This video reached out to the hearts and minds of a culture, which as shown in chapter two, lost much of its sense of identity when CPA orders one and two cast out the Arab-Sunni tribe. The Islamic State capitalized on Iraqi Arab-Sunni’s vulnerability.

From the 2012 video, the Islamic State in Iraq released several more “Expedition of the Prisoner” videos, which comprised of crude clips taken from other news sources and spliced together. These videos showed the U.S. offering Iraq to the Iranians while arguing that the Iraqi Sunni’s were, “... raised for many years by the *mujahedeen*, and ‘only by the barrage of bullets and the spilling of blood’ will the injustice and humiliation

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 4

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 13

come to an end.”<sup>173</sup> However, it was not until 2013 that the Islamic State began heavily investing in a social media campaign as well as focus on improved quality propaganda videos.<sup>174</sup> Additionally, by this time the Islamic State had discontinued the hijacking of video clips from other media sites and began filming self-made propaganda videos. The Islamic State propaganda aimed to show four distinct messages: the current situation of Arab-Sunnis being killed; motivating viewers to come join the cause; demonstrating that the Islamic State is the legitimate caliphate; and showing that the Islamic State will be victorious in its agenda.<sup>175</sup>

Once the caliphate was established in 2014, the propaganda clips communicated beyond images of beheadings and violence often seen in the U.S. media, to promote the benefits of living in the Islamic State’s caliphate. Much of how the Islamic State attempted to define itself and still tries to convey, was by how well Islamic State citizens lived inside the caliphate. As Mr. Alberto Fernandez with the Brookings Institute shows, the Islamic State even went as far as to, “releasing Arabic-language propaganda about corruption and human rights abuses by the Iraqi government to English and German-language propaganda focused on changing the hearts of men. As one expert noted about ISIS songwriting, ‘The Islamic State’s nasheeds are not defense at all. They are about a hope to change the world forever.’”<sup>176</sup> Messages are conveyed, making a difference in the world and appealing to those who are seeking something greater than themselves plays a key role in recruiting for the Islamic State, as this thesis will discuss in chapter four.

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<sup>173</sup> Fernandez, "Here to stay and growing: Combating ISIS propaganda networks.", 5

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 6, “ISI propaganda underwent a transformation in the year 2013 as the Syrian civil war escalated and ISI became ISIS. The major elements of what would become the ISIS brand of propaganda, including a focus on Syria, high quality production values, an emphasis on social media networks and an appeal to a wider, pan-Islamic and non-Arabic speaking audience, all become more salient.”

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 11-12. The publishing describes the four messages as, urgency, agency, authenticity, and victory.

<sup>176</sup> Fernandez, "Here to stay and growing: Combating ISIS propaganda networks, 10

In addition to the messages which are broadcasted stands the question of how often the messages are propagated through the Internet. The Islamic State's utilization of social media sights such as Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook contribute to the Islamic State's global influence.<sup>177</sup> At the height of the Islamic State's usage of social media, there were nearly 40,000 tweets posted per day in support of the Islamic State.<sup>178</sup> Additionally, in 2015 the Islamic State released upwards of 38 new items per day, including 20-minute propaganda videos, full-length documentaries, photo essays, audio clips, and pamphlets, in multiple languages.<sup>179</sup> The assistant director of the FBI's counterterrorism division at the time, Michael Steinbach, concluded in 2015 the Islamic State, "... now has direct access into the United States like never before."<sup>180</sup>

This continuous information operation of the Islamic State generated a systematic effect on individuals throughout the world. As Mark Lowenthal, an expert on intelligence and national security, stated propaganda is, "used to support individuals or groups friendly to one's own side or to undermine one's opponents."<sup>181</sup> The intent of the Islamic States employment of social media is to rally support from outsiders and undermine the West and apostate regimes. The use of information operations has shown success. It is estimated that around 30,000 foreigners, not from Syria or Iraq, have joined the Islamic State. This number includes roughly 3,400 fighters from Western countries.<sup>182</sup> Out of that

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<sup>177</sup> "Islamic State propaganda and the mainstream media." Lowy Institute. Accessed February 12, 2017. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/islamic-state-propaganda-and-mainstream-media>.

<sup>178</sup> Faisal Irshaid, "How Isis is spreading its message online." BBC News. June 19, 2014. Accessed February 12, 2017. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27912569>

<sup>179</sup> "Why ISIS Is Winning the Social Media War." Wired. Accessed February 12, 2017. <https://www.wired.com/2016/03/isis-winning-social-media-war-heres-beat/>.

<sup>180</sup> Ray Sanchez, "ISIS exploits social media to make inroads in U.S." CNN. June 5, 2015. Accessed February 12, 2017. <http://www.cnn.com/2015/06/04/us/isis-social-media-recruits>.

<sup>181</sup> Mark M. Lowenthal, *Intelligence: from secrets to policy*. Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2000, 235.

<sup>182</sup> Faisal Irshaid, "How Isis is spreading its message online." BBC News. June 19, 2014. Accessed February 12, 2017. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27912569>.

3,400 from western countries, around 200 have been from the U.S. The realization of the extent of the Islamic State's information operations campaign calls for the U.S. to institute its own information operations as a primary campaign. The Islamic State has been allowed to recruit and promote its agenda while at the same time to ridicule, and undermine the U.S.

### **Current U.S. Methods Against The Islamic State**

Similar to Operations Iraqi Freedom, the U.S. has not prioritized information operations to combat the Islamic State. Instead, the U.S. continues to implement conventional warfare operations, mainly in the form of air strikes and capture-kill missions by special operations forces. The U.S. is currently leading a coalition that is conducting a major airstrike campaign against the Islamic State. As of February 7, 2017, U.S. coalition forces had led over 18,185 air strikes at a cost of \$10.9 billion.<sup>183</sup> The air strikes are focused on confirmed Islamic State targets in an attempt to disrupt, degrade, and defeat the Islamic State.<sup>184</sup>

Additionally, the U.S. has sent many advisors and special operations into the surrounding region in an effort to train opposition forces. The U.S. trained force has relied on volunteer efforts from those inside the Islamic State controlled territory and surrounding area. According to the Pentagon, the U.S.'s goal in recruits was to be 5,000 by the end of 2015.<sup>185</sup> However, that goal was not reached. As a *New York Times* article

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<sup>183</sup> "U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE." United States Department of Defense. Accessed February 12, 2017. [https://www.defense.gov/News/Special-Reports/0814\\_Inherent-Resolve](https://www.defense.gov/News/Special-Reports/0814_Inherent-Resolve).

<sup>184</sup> "National Military Strategy." February 1, 2015. Accessed February 10, 2017. [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015\\_national\\_security\\_strategy.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy.pdf).

<sup>185</sup> Helene Cooper, "Few U.S.-Trained Syrians Still Fight ISIS, Senators Are Told." *The New York Times*. *The New York Times*, 16 Sept. 2015. Web. 11 Nov. 2015.

shows, “Defense officials said that only 100 to 120 Syrian fighters were in training right now.”<sup>186</sup> Furthermore, the fighters that were willing to be trained did not fight against the Islamic State afterward. Some estimates show as little as 4 or 5 U.S. trained fighters have stayed in to battle the Islamic State, at the expense of the tens of millions of dollars the U.S. spent funding the training program.

The Obama administration was optimistic, as stated in a Pentagon statement on July 6th, 2015, on how recruiting local militias in the area would be effective in time.<sup>187</sup> President Obama stated that patience is key for more recruits to join the cause and that these methods were a long-term strategy against the Islamic State. However, training a militia does not ensure progress on the psychological battlefield, which is where the Islamic State is largely active. Continuing to ignore these issues could hinder recruiting willing and able fighters against the Islamic State, and could ultimately create strategic consequences.

As stated before, understanding what the Islamic State is and how it conducts itself is essential to appreciate the effect such a strategy has on those who are susceptible to its message. Foreign fighters migrate from all corners of the planet, meaning the Islamic State is reaching individuals from multiple culture and backgrounds. The next chapter discusses how foreign fighters become radicalized and what drives radical individuals towards the decision to travel to support the Islamic State or produce violence

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[http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/17/world/middleeast/isis-isil-syrians-senate-armed-services-committee.html?\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/17/world/middleeast/isis-isil-syrians-senate-armed-services-committee.html?_r=2).

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Missy Ryan, “‘This will not be quick,’ Obama says of campaign against the Islamic State.” The Washington Post. July 06, 2015. Accessed March 03, 2017.

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/obama-makes-rare-visit-to-pentagon-for-update-on-islamic-state-operations/2015/07/06/1c5d1728-23e7-11e5-aae2-6c4f59b050aa\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.118dbad86521](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/obama-makes-rare-visit-to-pentagon-for-update-on-islamic-state-operations/2015/07/06/1c5d1728-23e7-11e5-aae2-6c4f59b050aa_story.html?utm_term=.118dbad86521).

outside the Islamic State's boundaries.



## CHAPTER FOUR: FOREIGN FIGHTERS AND THE RADICALIZATION PROCESS

*“To fit in with the change of events, words, too had to change their usual meanings. What used to be described as a thoughtless act of aggression was now regarded as the courage one would expect to find in a party member; to think of the future and wait was merely another way of saying one was a coward; any idea of moderation was just an attempt to disguise one’s unmanly character; ability to understand a question from all sides meant that one was totally unfitted for action. Fanatical enthusiasm was the mark of a real man...” ~ Thucydides (5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.)<sup>188</sup>*

The principle strategy for the U.S. against the Islamic State has been to degrade and destroy the Islamic State’s control over territory through the use of force.<sup>189</sup> The current objective of the U.S. towards the foreign fighter recruitment dilemma is to delegitimize the Islamic State by taking back Islamic State occupied territory, making the caliphate less attractive to individuals susceptible to being persuaded by the Islamic State’s propaganda. This would kill the issue at the source and the Islamic State would lose support. Support or compliance with the Islamic State is how the caliphate has managed to hold wealth and territory.

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<sup>188</sup> Waller, *The Public Diplomacy Reader*, 283

<sup>189</sup> Cheryl K. Chumley, "State Department on Islamic State: We can't win 'by killing them' - need to get them jobs." *The Washington Times*. February 17, 2015. Accessed February 12, 2017. <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/feb/17/marie-harf-state-department-on-islamic-state-cant-/>.

The financial, territorial, or strategic assistance from outside the Islamic States occupied territory is essential for the caliphate to be destroyed. Furthermore, discrediting the organization would create difficulty for the Islamic State to control territory as well as a population. Delegitimizing the Islamic State has been considered by U.S. leadership as a priority, however, the U.S. has not engaged the psychological aspects to successfully delegitimize the caliphate. Delegitimizing an organization requires a full spectrum utilization of psychological, sociological, and political strategies and tools. Yet, U.S. psychological strategies such as strategic communication and information operations have been neglected throughout this operation.<sup>190</sup> Instead, the radical ideology driving individuals to commit terrorism has prospered. As one FBI document in 2011 stated, “Modern Islamist extremism emerged in the middle of the last century, but, in its beginnings, was limited to the Middle East. That dramatically changed in the aftermath of the assault on 9/11 when the threat Islamist terrorism posed to countries in the Western world became apparent.”<sup>191</sup> Radicalized individuals now have a global reach to proliferate disorder. This in nature is a psychological issue that conventional military operations alone cannot defeat. Because of this, future U.S. policy must strongly consider proactive and successful policies that engage the psychological aspects of this conflict.

The Islamic State’s strategy has shown much progress in radicalizing and mobilizing foreign fighters. According to estimates, the Islamic State, at its peak, had nearly 40,000 foreign fighters join in the defense of the caliphate from all corners of the

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<sup>190</sup> Gorka, “ISIS, Religion, and Today's War”

<sup>191</sup> Ryan Hunter, and Daniel Heinke. "Perspective: Radicalization of Islamist Terrorists in the Western World." FBI. September 08, 2011. Accessed February 12, 2017. <https://leb.fbi.gov/2011/september/perspective-radicalization-of-islamist-terrorists-in-the-western-world>.

globe.<sup>192</sup> The significance of this, as explained in a lecture with Dr. Sebastian Gorka, is that the number of foreign fighters supporting the Islamic State is around two-thirds of the foreign fighters joined the mujahedeen in Afghanistan during the entire Soviet-Afghan war.<sup>193</sup> Furthermore, not only has the Islamic State managed to recruit and mobilize a large volume of foreign support but has recruited such an amount in only two years.

Moreover, fighters have become motivated to join the Islamic State from all corners of the planet - from Tunisia, Jordan and Saudi Arabia to Belgium, Australia, and Denmark.<sup>194</sup> Even in the U.S., there have been nearly 250 individuals who were motivated to join the Islamic State. This signifies the Islamic State is not nearly an isolated problem over there but is a global issue with global consequences. The Islamic State is reaching individuals on a personal level and radicalizing them to the point where it would be worth giving up a life to join in a cause that many were not born into. This suggests that the conflict is not merely regional, ethnic, and religious, but psychological. It is the psychology of individuals that are targeted by the Islamic State, therefore, it is the hearts and minds of individuals that the U.S. must focus efforts.

As an FBI document on the radicalization process articulated, the U.S. is only beginning to study the radicalization phenomenon. As the article states, "... more art than science. Radicalization, especially of Islamist extremists, only recently has become a serious research topic of law enforcement organizations, intelligence agencies, and

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<sup>192</sup> Gorka, "ISIS, Religion, and Today's War"

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> "Foreign Fighters In Iraq And Syria -- Where Do They Come From?" RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty. Accessed February 12, 2017. <http://www.rferl.org/a/foreign-fighters-syria-iraq-is-isis-isil-infographic/26584940.html>.

academia. Yet, data still are not extensive and have resulted mainly from shared analysis of executed or prevented terrorist attacks.”<sup>195</sup> Although winning the hearts and minds is not an exact science, and any true psychological strategy cannot be accomplished with insubstantial understanding of the psychology pertaining to the conflict.

The process for an individual progressing from frustration with a political issue to deciding to commit violence is imprecise. As Lisa Curtis, an expert on terrorism and the middle east explains, “There is no single explanation for what drives a person to embrace extremism, as the process is driven by a complex mix of triggering events and personal and environmental factors. Former CIA case officer Patrick Skinner maintains that those fighting for ISIS can be subdivided into three main categories: ‘the Psychopaths, the Pious, and the Pragmatists.’”<sup>196</sup> This thesis focuses on the individuals who do not suffer from psychological disorders as psychopathy, sociopathy, schizophrenia, or other disorders that influence an individual into committing violent acts without an allegiance to the Islamic State but justify violence in the organization’s stead. Once psychological outliers are eliminated, there are three main themes that compel an individual into radicalization process: religious motivation, disenfranchisement, and the wanting to be a part of something greater than oneself. These three themes encapsulate the inspiration for the majority of the foreign fighters that are coursing into the Islamic States occupied territory.

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<sup>195</sup> Hunter, "Perspective: Radicalization of Islamist Terrorists in the Western World"

<sup>196</sup> Lisa Curtis, Luke Coffey, David Inserra, and others. "Combatting the ISIS Foreign Fighter Pipeline: A Global Approach." January 6, 2016. Accessed February 10, 2017. <http://www.heritage.org/middle-east/report/combatting-the-isis-foreign-fighter-pipeline-global-approach>.

## Religion

Religion is one of the single greatest factors in the conflict against both the Islamic State and the foreign fighter recruitment. Religion is a primary identifier for individuals, especially in the Arab and Muslim world.<sup>197</sup> As previously stated, much of the Islamic State's rhetoric is contrived from the Salafists religion. Although the Islamic State is not representative of the Salafist sect of Sunni Islam, the organization utilizes religious doctrine effectively. Much of the language established by the Islamic State is designed to not only connect with extremist Salafi groups, but Sunnis whom do not have a fundamentalist view of Islam, and persuade those persons to flee the apostate regimes and join the true caliphate.

Religion is a core factor in this conflict, and, as with any cultural conflict, it partitions communities as well as populations abroad. As Ryan Hunter and Daniel Heinke with the FBI state, "The idea of 'us'—the ummah (community) or ummah al-mu'min in (the community of the believers)—defending against 'them'—the nonbelievers conducting an alleged war against Islam—secures a strong bond among the followers while alienating them from Western citizens."<sup>198</sup> Cultural triggers can supersede international norms, such as peaceful diplomacy, especially to those who do not identify with a nationally or agree with international arrangements as many Arabs do. Arabs view statehood through a religious lens, as previously discussed. The consequence of this perceptual lens is the Middle East does not generally separate church and state matters but considers them one in the same.<sup>199</sup> This framing of the situation also can put

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<sup>197</sup> Wunderle, "Through the Lens of Cultural Awareness - Home | US.", 44

<sup>198</sup> Hunter, "Perspective: Radicalization of Islamist Terrorists in the Western World."

<sup>199</sup> Lewis, *Roots of Muslim Rage*, 18

individuals in positions where they may feel obligated to carry out certain religious duties, such as jihad.<sup>200</sup> As stated before, the Islamic State's rhetoric is aimed at Sunni Islam and promotes the idea that it is the responsibility of all Sunnis to join in this holy cause.

An example of the extent that the Islamic State's promotes its image based on of religious doctrine to motivate those of the "Ummah" to enlist in its objective emanates from the name of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi himself. As previously stated in chapter three, Baghdadi was born Ibrahim Awwad Ibrahim al-Badri in Samarra in 1971.<sup>201</sup> However, Badri changed his name to Baghdadi because of the significance holds with Sunni Islam. Abu Bakr was the father-in-law of the Prophet Mohammad and was the first caliph, in the eyes of the Sunni's, after the death of the Prophet Mohammad.<sup>202</sup> By changing his name to Baghdadi, Badri conveyed to the Sunni Muslims that he is a legitimate Caliph of a new caliphate and the rightful leader of Sunni Muslims. As Sebastian Gorka stated regarding this, "it would be as if someone changed their name to George Washington in the United States", Americans would grasp the significance of the gesture."<sup>203</sup> All aspects of the Islamic State are saturated with religious doctrine and metaphors.

Furthermore, religion remains one of the largest reasons for individuals to travel to the Islamic State. As noted in a DOD document, "About 20% of the homegrown terrorists examined in one study had a spiritual mentor, a more experienced Muslim who

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<sup>200</sup> Michael J. Waller, *Fighting the War of Ideas Like a Real War*. Institute of World Politics Press, 2007, 65. As will be discussed in Chapter five, the meaning of jihad is to struggle towards being righteous in the eyes of Allah.

<sup>201</sup> McCants, "The believer: How Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi became leader of the Islamic State."

<sup>202</sup> Gorka, "ISIS, Religion, and Today's War"

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

gave specific instructions and direction during the radicalization process. Such a mentor might be associated with a mosque or be accessed via the Internet. The mentor keeps the radicalization process on track. About a quarter of the terrorists in one study had a perceived religious authority who provided specific theological approval for their violent activity.”<sup>204</sup> Through religious messages and verses, recruiters for the Islamic State are able to motivate individuals in fulfilling the organization’s agenda. Understanding, and promoting counternarratives to these verses would benefit the U.S. against the Islamic State’s religious propaganda. By overlooking weaponized religious ideology, the U.S. is limiting itself in establishing an efficacious psychological campaign towards preventing or deter individuals from migrating to the Islamic State occupied territory or striking in their homeland based on religious influences.

## **Disenfranchisement**

Beyond the religious demeanors exists the alienation of Arabs and Muslims outside the Middle East. Lack of assimilation between cultures has been an ongoing issue, primarily in Europe and Eurasia, but the United States increasingly has been following the same trend. The estrangement stems from a culture clash as individuals from the Arab and Muslim regions immigrate into a non-Muslim territory. To preserve the culture of the host country, in areas such as Europe and Russia is the host governments have legislated laws and procedures to keep said country’s culture unaltered as the migrant population arrives. Examples of this include the “burqa bans” that have

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<sup>204</sup> "The Radicalization Process." Radicalization. Accessed February 12, 2017.  
<http://www.dhra.mil/perserec/osg/terrorism/radicalization.htm>.

been happening throughout Europe.<sup>205</sup> From France and Germany to Belgium and Denmark, the burqa has been made illegal in many parts of those countries for a variety of reasons.

Whether the ban is for the benefit of the Muslim equality in the area or to preserve European customs is irrelevant, but the impact those bans have affected Muslim culture negatively inside those countries. These bans leave the minority Muslim community feeling ostracized in their new environment. As well, many individuals who wore such garments may not be new immigrants, but second or third generation immigrants. The negative effects for those born in the host country, identify with their nationality of the host country, and then secluded for beliefs may provoke fanatic reactions through such actions.

The vulnerability to becoming radicalized is exacerbated when one considers the segregation in the same countries. Many areas in France, such as the Paris slum projects les Banlieues, have created secluded communities in the country, marginalizing Muslim individuals further. As Philip Rucker with the *Washington Post* discussed in an article examining Islamic communities inside France, "Crime is high. Work is scarce, and young people who can't find it linger on the streets."<sup>206</sup> The environment stresses young Muslims, having no outlet to focus the resentment and anger. The result is a frustrated individual susceptible to the manipulation of an Islamic State recruiter.

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<sup>205</sup> "The Islamic veil across Europe." BBC News. January 31, 2017. Accessed February 12, 2017. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-13038095>.

<sup>206</sup> Philip Rucker, "How the rise of American-style segregation is feeding division in Europe." The Washington Post. December 2, 2015. Accessed February 12, 2017. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/12/02/how-the-rise-of-american-style-segregation-is-feeding-division-in-europe/?utm\\_term=.55e75b290b45](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/12/02/how-the-rise-of-american-style-segregation-is-feeding-division-in-europe/?utm_term=.55e75b290b45).



Furthermore, as senior associate with the *Atlantic* magazine, Heather Horn, discussed regarding a recent survey conducted concerning racism in Eastern Europe and Western Europe,

According to the 2005-09 World Values Survey, 14 percent of Poles and 24 percent of Hungarians would not want an immigrant or foreign worker as a neighbor. In France, however, the figure stands at an extraordinary 36.5 percent. The most recent World Values Survey, conducted between 2010 and 2014, did not poll Hungary or France. But it showed that the proportion of Germans objecting to a foreign neighbor (21 percent) matched that in Romania (21 percent) — and was three times higher than in Poland (7 percent) ... Twenty-seven percent of Britons and a full 69 percent of Italians had a negative view of Muslims, while 30 percent of Germans disliked Turks. Western Europeans, in other words, may appear more tolerant when talking in the abstract, but are as intolerant as Eastern Europeans when it comes to attitudes toward specific groups. The “cultural gap” may just be that Western Europeans are more polished in the language of tolerance, while in reality being equally intolerant.<sup>207</sup>

As the racism is still considerable throughout Europe, the radicalization through disenfranchisement could lead to more problems long-term. Racism may contribute further to terrorist attacks as the massive refugee migration into Europe, along with the demographics in both Europe and Russia suggesting a population boom for Muslim citizens and a population decline for traditional European/Eurasian nationalities.<sup>208</sup> Sectarian tensions may be further exasperated when factoring in groups such as the Islamic State’s unchallenged dialogue about the evil West and trying to show the strength of Islam.

Studies on the radicalization process suggest, “... that the quest for significance is aroused under three conditions: perceived significance loss (humiliation suffered by self

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<sup>207</sup> Kenan Malik, “IS Eastern Europe Really More Racist Than the West?” November 3, 2015. Accessed February 10, 2017. [https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/04/opinion/who-invented-fortress-europe.html?\\_r=1](https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/04/opinion/who-invented-fortress-europe.html?_r=1).

<sup>208</sup> "People in the EU – statistics on demographic changes." People in the EU – statistics on demographic changes - Statistics Explained. June 2015. Accessed February 12, 2017. [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/People\\_in\\_the\\_EU\\_%E2%80%93\\_statistics\\_on\\_demographic\\_changes](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/People_in_the_EU_%E2%80%93_statistics_on_demographic_changes)

or by one's group, dealing a blow to one's social identity); perceived threat of significance loss should one shirk the demanded mission..."<sup>209</sup> Perceived alienation and humiliation from the West leads to resentment and further conflict. As research from the FBI shows these factors result in,

Discontent seems to serve as the prerequisite of the radicalization process... This discontent may be based on individuals' actual experiences or those of other people within their community, or it may result from the normal process of identity formation among young people. These latter feelings of uncertainty of oneself during adolescence and early adulthood are common and well-known in developmental psychology, but after individuals feel rejected by society, these emotions can lead to a deep identity crisis and cause one to search for a new purpose of life. Some Muslim-born individuals may link experiences of disadvantage or nonbelonging to their faith and judge them to be an expression of cultural and religious discrimination.<sup>210</sup>

As will be further explored in the recommendations chapter, to effectively combat radical extremism, societies in Europe and the United States will need to readdress certain cultural traits that may be hindering cohabitation and assimilation, as well as diplomacy with Islamic communities abroad.

### **Greater Than Oneself**

A third component of the radicalization process centers on particular difficulties the current U.S. generation specifically is struggling with, which may lead to the generation being susceptible to the Islamic State's propaganda. The vulnerability the generation is facing stems from the desire for the pursuit of importance and the desire to

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<sup>209</sup> Arie W. Kruglanski, and Michelle J. Gelfand. "Motivation, Ideology, and the Social Process in Radicalization." Association for Psychological Science. Accessed February 12, 2017. <http://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/motivation-ideology-and-the-social-process-in-radicalization#.WHUvbxsrKUI>.

<sup>210</sup> Hunter, "Perspective: Radicalization of Islamist Terrorists in the Western World."

be a part of something historic. Research conducted by the Department of Defense on the radicalization process argues,

A violent act may be seen as a way to succeed at something that makes a difference. The absolutist, "black and white" nature of most extremist ideologies is often attractive to those who feel overwhelmed by the complexity and stress of navigating a complicated world. Without struggling to define oneself or discern personal meaning, an individual may choose to define his or her identity simply through identification with a cause or membership in a group ... Many prospective terrorists find in a radical extremist group not only a sense of meaning, but also a sense of belonging, connectedness, and affiliation. One researcher argues that 'for the individuals who become active terrorists, the initial attraction is often to the group, or community of believers, rather than to an abstract ideology or to violence.'<sup>211</sup>

This may be especially true of the new "Millennial" generation in the U.S., who are constantly seeking a grander purpose. As Karl Moore, a writer on leadership for *Forbes* magazine states Millennials are, "... constantly seeking purpose in what they do for a living... money is important and they do enjoy making it, however, they long to be part of something bigger than themselves."<sup>212</sup>

The analysis about the current U.S. generation suggests the quest for greatness many young and impressionable Muslims, or even non-Muslims, are seeking could be found in the Islamic State. The quest to be a part of a larger movement may have been a contributing factor to the Boston bombings in April of 2013. The bombers, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev and Tamerlan Tsarnaev, had no clear ties to the Islamic State or terrorism, yet were radicalized through the organization's information operations.<sup>213</sup> The brothers

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<sup>211</sup> "The Radicalization Process."

<sup>212</sup> Karl Moore, "Millennials Work For Purpose, Not Paycheck." *Forbes*. October 03, 2014. Accessed February 12, 2017. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/karlmoore/2014/10/02/millennials-work-for-purpose-not-paycheck/#9a5acd55a225>.

<sup>213</sup> Michael Cooper, Michael S. Schmidt, and Eric Schmitt. "Boston Suspects Are Seen as Self-Taught and Fueled by Web." *The New York Times*. April 23, 2013. Accessed March 04, 2017. [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/24/us/boston-marathon-bombing-developments.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/24/us/boston-marathon-bombing-developments.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0).

managed to become radical and trained through the Internet and managed to evade suspicion throughout the planning process of the attack. The significance of this attack is that as the Islamic State enables radical behavior through its information operations, the more likely attacks will continue.

The even greater significance behind this is that the Millennial generation was also born and raised in an environment where the U.S. and the Middle East were in constant conflict.<sup>214</sup> This could create even further divide among cultures and give the Islamic State more room to operate in the psychological domain. When considering these factors, along with the global reach through the Internet, the need for the U.S. to invest in a psychological strategy has never been more necessary. The Islamic State has been using this cultural rift as a recruiting tool to pull those willing to listen into further estrangement from the West. As stated in a 2016 publication by the Heritage Foundation, “ISIS’s unprecedented success in recruiting fighters from around the world is largely due to its ability to convince impressionable young Muslims of a civilizational struggle between Islam and the West, making it the duty of all Muslims to join the war.”<sup>215</sup>

Beyond the Millennial generation in the U.S. the pursuit to join a higher cause is still relevant in the international arena. So much so, that many in the policymaking community cannot accurately distinguish between motives, such as religion being the driving behind radicalization, or if religion is a farce masking another motive. Agencies

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<sup>214</sup> Christopher Jusuf, “Millennials and the war of our time.” The Hill. February 04, 2016. Accessed February 12, 2017. <http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/homeland-security/263296-millennials-and-the-war-of-our-time>. As Christopher Jusuf states, “The Global War on Terror now stretches into the majority of the lifespans of anyone under 30 years old without a foreseeable end in sight. Hypothetically, a child born after 9/11 will be eligible to be sent to Afghanistan in just 4 years. Make no mistake about it; the struggle against radical Islamic extremism is the war of our time”

<sup>215</sup>Curtis, "Combatting the ISIS Foreign Fighter Pipeline: A Global Approach."

and organizations having managed to question foreign fighters as to their reasoning behind supporting the Islamic State have received unclear justifications. As one publishing from the Brookings Institute demonstrates, “Overall, security officials believe that the decision to go fight in a foreign conflict is usually less an act of religious commitment than of young male rebellion and thirst for adventure [greatness]. One intelligence official notes that many recruits ‘just want to fight in Syria’ but are vague on why.”<sup>216</sup> Although religion plays a significant role in radicalizing foreign fighters, the Islamic State’s ability to motivate individuals beyond religious reasons suggests future U.S. policies and strategies ought to involve counter methods for those seeking purpose as well.

### **Mobilizations And The Islamic State’s Pipeline**

Although once an individual chooses to join a terrorist organization such as the Islamic State the individual is radical and dangerous, further radicalization and the true strategic danger emerges once these radical dissenters arrive in the Islamic State’s territory. Once under the Islamic State’s authority, the new recruits are molded through psychological and physical training into the Islamic State’s ideal soldier. Recent findings in Mosul have discovered training facilities oriented towards shaping an individual’s behavior. Training manuals centered on guerrilla warfare tactics along with religion doctrines supporting the Islamic State’s perception have been found at Islamic State training facilities in both Arabic and Russian, which are the most commonly spoken

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<sup>216</sup> McCants, "The believer: How Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi became leader of the Islamic State.", 5

languages among those who migrate into the Islamic State.<sup>217</sup> Terrorist training camps are not unique to the Islamic State, but the significance is in how successful the camps are at indoctrinating and training fighters. Just as the mujahedeen training and radicalized individuals that created Al Qaeda, and Al Qaeda training recruits that now fight for the Islamic State, the continuous pattern suggests the current recruits in the Islamic State's influence will become the new terrorist group after the Islamic State.<sup>218</sup> The point of reaching those vulnerable to joining the Islamic State before they enter the training phase is crucial because once recruits enter the pipeline, there is a significantly lower chance of deradicalizing those individuals.

The evidence behind this claim stems from the characteristics of the radicalization process that have been previously described. The religious aspect, the disenfranchisement, and the seeking a greater purpose are all answered once the individual enters the Islamic State's training. As Daniel Byman and Jeremy Shapiro from the Brookings Institute demonstrate, "Training camps give recruits a sense of mission and focus, helping them develop an *esprit de corps*."<sup>219</sup> Once the recruit enters the pipeline, the answers he or she seeks are found. This creates a solid bond between the training the recruits have received, along with a sense of fulfillment. Connecting with potential foreign fighters before they mobilize is a decisive factor in the war on future terrorism.

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<sup>217</sup> Loveday Morris, and Mustafa Salim. "Found at an Islamic State training camp: bunk beds, weapons manuals, steroids." The Washington Post. December 3, 2016. Accessed February 12, 2017. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/found-at-an-islamic-state-training-camp-bunk-beds-weapons-manuals-steroids/2016/12/03/9fab92c8-b818-11e6-939c-91749443c5e5\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.dc72311d3f0b](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/found-at-an-islamic-state-training-camp-bunk-beds-weapons-manuals-steroids/2016/12/03/9fab92c8-b818-11e6-939c-91749443c5e5_story.html?utm_term=.dc72311d3f0b).

<sup>218</sup> McCants, "The believer: How Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi became leader of the Islamic State" 5, Thomas Hegghammer, director of terrorism research at the Norwegian Defense Research Establishment, points out that "the majority of al-Qaida operatives began their militant careers as war volunteers, and most transnational jihadi groups today are by products of foreign fighter mobilization."

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 5

Beyond the training phase, foreign fighters become indoctrinated to the Islamic State's ambitions, and it becomes exponentially difficult to reverse the process. As well, by that time the fighter is actively participating in the Islamic State's war, and therefore, the issue of preventing the fighter from being radicalized becomes extraneous. As Daniel Byman explains again, "Many foreign fighters who go to a war zone are young and ideologically unformed, and the combatant groups see converting them to their worldview as part of their mission: training camps emphasize teaching 'true' Islam and the duty of jihad as well as weapons training. Individuals may enter the war with no intention of attacking at home, but their views change and come to encompass a broader set of goals. As one official succinctly put it, 'They come back fucked up.'<sup>220</sup> The veteran fighters return to a sedentary lifestyle desiring the same sense of purpose and satisfaction they had with the terrorist organization and become the catalyst for the next war.

### **Veteran Foreign Fighters Returning Home**

A foreign policy strategy regarding the foreign fighter dilemma in many ways is less germane once a foreign fighter reaches the training centers of a terrorist organization, but reemerges once the conflict is over by the undertakings of the now veteran foreign fighter. A portion of the fighters move to another conflict, such as Chechnya, or may decide to return to their home countries. The scattering of veteran fighters poses a variety of problems for the host countries of those individuals because the possibility of the veteran fighter beginning the recruitment process over again. Additionally, often the

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 6

original problems that radicalized the fighter in the first place are still there, leaving the veteran fighter with opportunities to recruit. As well, the now battle-hardened foreign fighter has the motivation and the knowledge on how to go about establishing a new organization. As explained again by Daniel Byman,

... the fighters return to their home countries in the West and keep the circle turning. Returned foreign fighters have gained in status—obtained a sort of ‘street cred’—that makes them able to recruit and radicalize others. Sympathizers admired returnees from Iraq and Afghanistan, giving them the prestige to convince others to enter the fray. In the final step, the returned fighters begin to plot terrorist attacks in their homeland. Slowly, they turn their attention away from the foreign struggle that took them abroad and begin to focus on perceived injustices at home: insults against Islam from their country’s politicians and opinion leaders, support for the forces oppressing Muslims abroad, or the daily prejudices faced by Muslims in America and especially Europe.<sup>221</sup>

Foreign fighters returning home pose a strategic threat as they arm and motivate a new generation of terrorists. As well, fighters may establish new terrorist cells within Europe or the United States. Furthermore, as foreign fighters are not only experienced in combat but often end the war with a well-established network along with fellow veteran foreign fighters, financing and resources available to the veteran foreign fighter are plentiful. Much like cancer reaching the bloodstream and infecting the rest of the body, veteran foreign fighters spreading outside the conflict zone after the Islamic State is defeated could have a global impact.

### **Lone-Wolf Attacks**

Although lone-wolf attacks are distinct from foreign fighters, both are subject to radicalization triggered by the Islamic State. Therefore, lone wolves should be considered

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<sup>221</sup> McCants, "The believer: How Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi became leader of the Islamic State.", 6-7



as part of the problem to effectively understand how information operations can be beneficial to the U.S. For this section, a lone-wolf attack only regards those who have been radicalized by the Islamic State. The distinction is important, especially in the United States, where there has been a rise in lone-wolf attacks that are racially or politically motivated, as well as a result of a mental illness.<sup>222</sup> However, even when considering outliers, attacks from radical Islamist groups have been on the rise steadily. These attacks originated in popularity with Al Qaeda in the late 1990s, and the number of attacks has more than doubled since 2010, going from just eight in the 2000s to 20 in 2016.<sup>223</sup> Additionally, not only are the number of attacks increasing, but also are becoming deadlier overall. This could mean that the method is considered effective by the Islamic State and its sympathizers, and therefore, create a greater emerging threat.

Returning foreign fighters may create inspiration throughout their community to perform attacks. As Ryan Hunter and Daniel Heinke research with the FBI's counterterrorism division reason, "In the majority of cases, extremists become radicalized in large part through intensifying social interaction with other people with shared beliefs. Such a relationship then results in a mutual push toward violence. Sometimes, a spiritual leader will goad individuals to take such actions. The 'lone wolf/lone offender' has served as the rare exception. However, in recent years, prominent attacks in the United States and Europe were carried out successfully by individuals with few ties to other extremists, highlighting the threat posed by radicalized persons who are relatively

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<sup>222</sup> Katie Worth, "FRONTLINE." PBS. July 14, 2016. Accessed February 12, 2017. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/lone-wolf-attacks-are-becoming-more-common-and-more-deadly/>.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., Data was collected by the Federal Bureau of Investigation to study lone-wolf attacks.

alone.”<sup>224</sup> The credibility veteran fighters receive amongst the community they inhabit allow for individuals to idolize and conform to extremist perceptions.

Developing a comprehensive strategy towards combating the lone-wolf dilemma is as complex as understanding it. Although nearly 40% of lone-wolf attacks are carried out by those with mental illness, the threat posed by those radicalized or supporters of the Islamic State’s cause establishes the need to discredit radical behavior.<sup>225</sup> Individuals are radicalized through a range of information operations tactics inciting individuals to a tipping point. Understanding the psychology of the tipping point, and developing psychological methods to curb this behavior will be necessary as these attacks continue to happen.

## **Conclusion**

Understanding the radicalization process for foreign fighters is essential to realizing the U.S. lacks a psychological component in its strategy to combat both the foreign fighter issue and the Islamic State. Information operations and strategic communication must play a vital role in any strategy to:

- a. Effectively combat the Islamic State’s own information operations campaign that is currently successful in radicalizing individuals, both in its occupied territory and abroad; and,
- b. Further prevent the next generation of Islamist terrorist groups that will just begin the cycle over again.

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<sup>224</sup> Ryan Hunter, Daniel H. "Perspective: Radicalization of Islamist Terrorists in the Western World." FBI. September 08, 2011. Accessed February 12, 2017. <https://leb.fbi.gov/2011/september/perspective-radicalization-of-islamist-terrorists-in-the-western-world>.

<sup>225</sup> Katie Worth, "FRONTLINE." PBS. July 14, 2016. Accessed February 12, 2017. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/lone-wolf-attacks-are-becoming-more-common-and-more-deadly/>.

Although radicalized individuals may not pose the most severe threat currently to the United States or its allies from a conventional standpoint, the festering of this issue will continue to increase as it has, along with the continuation of interconnectivity among nations, leading to long-term generational conflicts if not handled properly. Strategically, the Islamic State and the foreign fighter issue create a destabilization in the international arena and disunity among nations. The next chapter proposes insights and recommendations that best utilize information operations to create an effective psychological strategy towards both the Islamic State and potentially radicalized individuals.

## CHAPTER FIVE: RECOMMENDATIONS

*“...perceptions are just as important as reality.” ~ Michael Waller<sup>226</sup>*

Information operations would strategically benefit the U.S. against adversaries such as foreign fighters and the Islamic State. The use of IO must be full spectrum, employing all dynamics of IO discussed in chapter one. From using strategic communications to push the U.S. message, to electric and cyber warfare, to covert action on multiple fronts and inside terrorist controlled territory as well as economic action, straining the Islamic State’s ability to obtain money, all instruments of psychological warfare must be used. An information operations campaign allows the U.S. to control the information in the region, awarding the U.S. to the psychological initiative. Additionally, integrating IO into the core of a strategy would have a positive effect with domestic lone-wolf attacks. Alleviating radicalization abroad creates less propaganda and anti-Western ideology, leading to less influence on the Internet, creating fewer chances for individuals to develop a radicalized behavior. Psychological strategies require years of constant implementation for success. IO is not a tactical solution, but a grand strategy for the global war on terror. Although, it is easier to continue capture-kill missions and airstrikes, however, this does not address the root of the problem of radicalization, nor solve it.

The quote by Michael Waller from the beginning of this chapter demonstrates that how societies interpret U.S. strategies are as significant as the intentions of the U.S. Therefore, it is as important for the U.S. to generate an environment in which populations

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<sup>226</sup> Waller, *The Public Diplomacy Reader*, 34

understand information in perspectives that best support U.S. strategic objectives. Simply put, being right is not what matters, but being perceived as right is equally important. Delegitimizing the Islamic State, curbing radical behavior, and promoting the U.S. agenda in a successful manner all must be derived from a psychological standpoint.

When considering how information operations can successfully be applied, it is best to view IO as the lens which all forms of U.S. defense tools and communications are funneled through. All aspects of how the U.S. conducts itself and connects with potential Islamic State supporters and beyond are channeled through a psychological strategy. Using IO as the process to which strategy is considered fuses all U.S. operations regarding the Islamic State and foreign fighters towards a single objective in this conflict. Conventional tactics, such as airstrikes or troop deployment are still relevant, but through the lens of IO only. Airstrikes and capture-kill missions, or full-scale ground deployments must be done with the planning and training that assists the psychological strategy. This eliminates any possibility of another blowback from the targeted population.

However, before an effective strategy can be devised, it is this author's belief that certain issues must be addressed and rectified domestically first. Many of the recommendations of this thesis are focused on fundamental bureaucratic and cultural changes that must be made for IO to thrive. The U.S. does not currently have a culture that nurtures psychological strategies as will be discussed in the next section. Therefore, in addition to U.S. policy makers prioritizing information operations, bureaucratic modifications must be made as well.

## **Synchronizing The Department Of State And The Department Of Defense**

As fundamental as it may appear, information operations and strategic communications have vastly different definitions depending on the agency or organization. Michael Waller, who is seen as a subject matter expert on strategic communications, has stated on the issue, “Like any art form, a real definition of public diplomacy is subjective, and can be the source of lively and often bitter debates.”<sup>227</sup> Although discussing public diplomacy, specifically, the concept is similar with all aspects of information operations and strategic communications. However, information operations and strategic communications conduct similar strategic psychological processes, therefore, should be considered as part of the same issue instead of separate systems. Therefore, a unifying definition is necessary for psychological strategies.

Michael Waller has consistently suggested the term “psychological strategy,” which he defines as, “...the comprehensive orchestration of the implied and explicit information associated with and the use of the national elements of power (diplomatic, economic, and military) so that coherent, consistent messages, meanings and themes are conveyed in ways that shape and influence understanding of and support for U.S. beliefs, values, and national security policies.”<sup>228</sup> A definition such as Michael Waller’s encompasses the full spectrum of information operations, military operations, and strategic communications and focuses all applications regarding an issue in a single objective. A psychological strategy is a grand strategy towards radicalized behavior regarding the Islamic State and terrorism.

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<sup>227</sup> Waller, *The Public Diplomacy Reader*, 19

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 304

Establishing a more robust definition leads to the inevitable admission for a stronger nexus between the Department of State and the Department of Defense, the government's two largest suppliers of information operations and strategic communications. Much of the dysfunction in information operatives is based in the contemporary bureaucratic environment not only lacking espousal towards IO, but also a consistent miscommunication or setback through the U.S. diplomatic side or through the national defense branch of the United States government.<sup>229</sup> The divide between U.S. agencies produces a situation where both departments attempt to push its single sided agendas and policies, which may clash with other departments. The result is conflicting messages or a lack of a message from the U.S. abroad. Therefore, a psychological strategy requires the U.S. to better coordinate departments to create a more fluid environment.

To provide context on the significance of synergy between departments is the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act. Although the Goldwater-Nichols Act modified multiple deficiencies within the DOD, one outstanding section of the legislation was aimed, "to improve joint officer management policies, otherwise to enhance the effectiveness of military operations and improve the management and administration of the Department of Defense, and for other purposes."<sup>230</sup> The result of the Goldwater-Nichols Act was stronger harmonization between military branches in joint operations. This outcome was

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<sup>229</sup> Lorelei Kelly, "Unbalanced Security: The Divide between State and Defense." *Unbalanced Security: The Divide between State and Defense*. March 28, 2007. Accessed March 05, 2017. [http://fpif.org/unbalanced\\_security\\_the\\_divide\\_between\\_state\\_and\\_defense/](http://fpif.org/unbalanced_security_the_divide_between_state_and_defense/).

<sup>230</sup> Barry Goldwater, and William Flynt Nichols. "GOLDWATER-NICHOLS DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE REORGANIZATION ACT OF 1986." October 1, 1986. Accessed February 10, 2017. [http://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/dod\\_reforms/Goldwater-NicholsDoDRoordAct1986.pdf](http://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/dod_reforms/Goldwater-NicholsDoDRoordAct1986.pdf). Page 100 STAT 992.

more effective and successful U.S. military operations.<sup>231</sup> As the Goldwater-Nichols Act created stronger collaboration among military branches, a similar action between the DOS and DOD is required. Collaboration could be managed in a variety of ways, such as creating new legislation merging the DOS and DOD in top priority fields, such as information operations. Although successful legislation is a considerable feat to accomplish, especially in the contemporary political environment, the result would allow more cooperation between the two departments. However, legislation requires a considerable amount of time to pass, approve, and fund as well as time for department cultural to assimilate. The longevity of legislating allows more time for the foreign fighter dilemma to rankle.

Another approach would be to establish a nexus organization between the DOD and DOS that oversees and coordinates information operations and strategic communications among the departments to ensure cooperation. The nexus would likely be a joint organization with the purpose of coordinating and executing information operations and strategic communications in the most efficient manner. Similar challenges as merging the DOD and DOS would also be for this nexus organization, as well as the nexus organization having the ability to enforce policies properly using DOS and DOD resources. This would be amplified as the contemporary political climate calls restrained funding and political challenges. As well, a nexus organization would require

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<sup>231</sup> Thomas T. Lopresti, "THE JCS SYSTEM BEFORE AND AFTER GOLDWATER-NICHOLS." May 1991. Accessed February 10, 2017. <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a236888.pdf>, 1, "This [Goldwater-Nichol Act] has subsequently resulted in a more efficient and effective system for conducting strategic and operational planning, providing sound military advice to the National Command Authority, developing national military strategy from flows the requisite force structure, and supervising both the peacetime and wartime operation of this country's fighting organizations".



congressional approval to establish, which has the same hindrances as merging aspects of the DOS and DOD altogether.

The merging of key dynamics within the DOS and DOD for a psychological strategy, while necessary, may prove inadequate due to the deliberately slow moving nature of the U.S. government in the seemingly fast pace environment in which radicalization lives. Democracy as a principle is a slow process, as it should be, to remain steady and considerate. However, the conundrum of the necessity for an adaptable strategy versus a democracy's need for stability creates a paradox for a successful psychological strategy. Therefore, the solution for the U.S. enactment of a psychological strategy may lie in the privatization of it, where constraints are fewer and adaptation is necessary for success.

### **Privatize Full Spectrum Information Operations**

A second consideration extends beyond government's participation in the psychological strategy. Although the U.S. government conducting its own IO and strategic communications will always necessary, there are also many hindrances that come with the U.S. being the sole conductor of IO on behalf of itself. Therefore, privatizing a psychological strategy could benefit the U.S. in this matter. As of now, the private sector provides support only for any such operation, but do not conduct independent operations for the U.S.<sup>232</sup> However, a private organization would be more efficient and effective if it were to conduct all varieties of information operations that

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<sup>232</sup> Wilson, "Information Operations and Cyberwar: Capabilities and Related Policy Issues", 13, Publishing demonstrates private sector providing support role such as ensuring private computer servers are secured.

were defined in chapter one. A private company could better ensure operations evolved and adapted to the pace of the contemporary environment.

A private company would be superior in conducting information operations for three primary reasons: current budgetary constraints hinder progress; along with the slow and inflexible budget process; too much oversight and politics create an ineffective situation where proper information operations are ignored or gridlocked. As seen in chapter two, the U.S. is its own worst enemy with regards to a psychological strategy. Therefore, as the need for information operations is considerable in the effort against the Islamic State, the foreign fighter threat, and the national security regarding lone-wolf attacks, the most beneficial consideration would be for the private sector to take over IO.

The budgetary constraints the U.S. federal government are limited along with the tendency for the U.S. to deprioritize information operations create an environment where information operations cannot flourish. Moreover, the U.S. handling its own information operations obstructs the operation due to inflexible and often resources purchased from a lowest bidder approach.<sup>233</sup> These factors hinder such information operations as propaganda videos, which has been seen with the State department abysmal attempt at creating an anti-Islamic State clip.<sup>234</sup>

In addition to budgetary constraints is the budgetary process itself. The budget process through Congress requires nearly a full year to be completed if conducted

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<sup>233</sup> Bob Lohfield, "Will low-price contracting make us all losers?" Washington Technology. June 4, 2012. Accessed February 12, 2017. <https://washingtontechnology.com/articles/2012/06/04/lohfeld-low-price-technically-acceptable.aspx>.

<sup>234</sup> "America's most graphic anti-Islamic State video." The Washington Post. May 7, 2015. Accessed February 12, 2017. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/posttv/national/americas-most-graphic-anti-islamic-state-video/2015/05/08/531f2ae4-f502-11e4-bca5-21b51bbdf93e\\_video.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/posttv/national/americas-most-graphic-anti-islamic-state-video/2015/05/08/531f2ae4-f502-11e4-bca5-21b51bbdf93e_video.html). Coverage of the State Department shows that it took approximately a decade to come up with a counter-narrative. Also, showed that the department budget for these videos were around \$5 million annually.

efficiently, which it rarely is.<sup>235</sup> When legislation cannot be agreed upon, the budget is suspended with continuing resolutions until a compromise can be met. Continuing resolutions create turmoil for strategies such as IO leading to agencies not keeping pace with an adversary that does not have such restraints. The result is a frail and irrelevant operation and strategy, which is ignored by a target audience and less support from policymakers.

U.S. computer network operations and cyber security in the rapid change in the cyber domain reflect the concerns of the U.S. ability to modernize efficiently. With a yearlong budget process, as well as budget hindrances and purchasing inadequate technology, the result is that U.S. cybersecurity is slow and unable to successfully conduct its mission.<sup>236</sup> The outcome is that U.S. national cybersecurity is vulnerable to attack. However, it has been suggested that the solution to U.S. cybersecurity is for the U.S. to delegate that national security priority to private industries who are unrestrained by U.S. bureaucracy.<sup>237</sup> The result would be more flexibility to keep pace with the constantly changing cyber environment, as well as a more capable pool of employees wishing to serve their country, but don't want a low federal salary.<sup>238</sup> The result may be overall better U.S. cybersecurity.

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<sup>235</sup> "Time Table of the Budget Process." Budget.House.Gov. Accessed February 12, 2017. <http://budget.house.gov/budgetprocess/budgettimetable.htm>.

<sup>236</sup> Daniel Wiser, "Privatizing Cybersecurity." Washington Free Beacon. June 4, 2013. Accessed February 12, 2017. <http://freebeacon.com/national-security/privatizing-cybersecurity/>.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> Ellen Nakashima, "Federal agencies, private firms fiercely compete in hiring cyber experts." The Washington Post. November 13, 2012. Accessed March 05, 2017. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/federal-agencies-private-firms-fiercely-compete-in-hiring-cyber-experts/2012/11/12/a1fb1806-2504-11e2-ba29-238a6ac36a08\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.c5d1ae3824bd](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/federal-agencies-private-firms-fiercely-compete-in-hiring-cyber-experts/2012/11/12/a1fb1806-2504-11e2-ba29-238a6ac36a08_story.html?utm_term=.c5d1ae3824bd). "A technical whiz with two years' NSA experience and a security clearance might have started at NSA at \$60,000 but could easily command \$100,000 in the private sector firms also located along the parkway, industry officials said"

For the same reasons, privatizing U.S. information operations and strategic communications could benefit U.S. strategy. Information operations planning requires both the ability to react quickly to an opponent operation and proactively conduct a U.S. information operations. As well a private company such as Booz Allen Hamilton or Lockheed Martin can more effectively bring in quality personnel and resources needed to create effective information operations. This ensures any operation is done with the highest quantity of messages sent in the highest quality possible, and avoiding another “ISIS land” fiasco from the State Department.

Additionally, just as covert operations have been continuously moving to special operations because of too much government oversight, as stated in chapter one, similar oversight hindrances also restrain Joint Special Operations Command from fully implementing covert operations. Oversight issues, such as not conducting operations due to the political ramifications obstruct a strategy’s chance for success. Therefore, allowing private industry the ability to conduct covert action independently, while would still require a level of oversight, could be beneficial for the U.S. because of the clandestine nature of information operations.

As well as the oversight, private organizations have the ability to withhold factors that the U.S. cannot avoid. A private company does not have to release financial records, for example.<sup>239</sup> Also, as the primary mission for covert operations would be extensive overseas living in hostile areas, as well as the risk of being captured or killed, it would be more productive for a strategy if the individual were not affiliated with the U.S.

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<sup>239</sup> Sheila Coronel, and Gerard Ryle. "Revealing the Secret World of Private Companies." International Consortium of Investigative Journalists. October 11, 2012. Accessed March 05, 2017. <https://www.icij.org/resources/revealing-secret-world-private-companies>.

government. Ensuring that any operative overseas be done in a covert manner mitigates blowback, such as the Islamic State killing Americans, which may rally support from foreign fighters. This is most effective by private contracting companies that conduct operations the U.S. government does officially acknowledge.

However, as stated this recommendation does not deny the need for oversight. To privatize IO and mitigate potential corruption or misuse, there would need to be a level oversight done to uphold both quality of products, and confirm the company is following U.S. ethical and legal obligations. Such oversight would likely need to be made by the NSC, along with certain Congressional oversight to ensure checks and balances between government branches. The recommendation for Congressional oversight would include the “gang of eight”, who are informed of presidential findings.<sup>240</sup> This ensures that any private organization acts in accordance with U.S. law and abides by U.S. policy.

### **The Message To Send**

In addition to the bureaucratic and domestic cultural issues that need to be resolved at domestically for a psychological strategy to be a success, begs the question: what would an information operation look like? This next section attempts to establish an example of how the U.S. uses information to influence an environment so individuals vulnerable to join the Islamic State or commit terror attacks are prevented from doing so.

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<sup>240</sup> Loch J. Johnson, and James J. Wirtz, *Intelligence and National Security: The Secret World of Spies: an anthology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008, 281, “ According to the 1991 Intelligence Authorization Act... any department or agency of the United States Government that intends to undertake a covert mission must ensure that two requirements are met: 1) that the action be conducted pursuant to a written presidential finding that it is important for U.S. national security; and 2) that the congressional intelligence committees are notified of the action as soon as possible after the finding has been issued and before the operation begins”

The primary objective of an operation directed at the Islamic State is to both delegitimize the Islamic State and the terrorist tool as well.

First, before successful proactive information operations can be designed to defeat the Islamic State, or prevent factions or individuals from using the terrorism tactic, the U.S.'s primary objective must be repairing its credibility from the global war on terror. As shown in chapter two, this U.S. unsuccessfully implemented IO or strategic communications, and the result was the further escalation of the conflict. Therefore, the operation described will not be necessarily to end the conflict but to shape the environment to provide an opportunity in which a solution can be found. As the war of ideas is a generational conflict, a final solution may not be realized in the near future, yet the U.S. must begin sooner rather than later as the more the U.S. denies this issue, the worse the conflict may become.

A successful operation needs to begin with operational security (OPSEC). Information operations are clandestine and covert in nature, and therefore, it is imperative that the U.S. conducts itself with discretion. Utilizing OPSEC to conceal what must be concealed, and public affairs to publicize what should be publicized is the beginning of the U.S. controlling information abroad. Beyond this, as this conflict is largely based on cultural disputes and religious ideology, the U.S. must begin to understand both the strategic culture and the ideology of the Islamic State to establish a sound strategy. This is best done through intelligence collection.

For this thesis, one sample of useful intelligence allocates cultural aspects of many inside the Islamic State's occupied territory and surrounding areas, which is that many in the Arab culture find the U.S. to be heathens and evil. Not only because of how

the U.S. comes off in the press but from entertainment media which is widely popular both inside the Middle East and globally.<sup>241</sup> However, despite the popularity of U.S. entertainment there is a strong clash of culture in much of U.S. movies and music, such as excessive drinking and partying, violence, and promiscuity (especially among women).<sup>242</sup> This has led to a cultural backlash.

A method to mitigate this cultural resentment is through the use of covert action, CIA resources, SOF, and through the use of computer network operations to cut off certain Internet sites and transmissions as well as preventing the trafficking of U.S. entertainment that could create misleading ideas about western civilization. This would require the jamming of certain Internet stream websites and bootleg websites that individuals in the target area might download. Furthermore, the only U.S. entertainment that would be allowed through to the targeted area would be material that was approved by the President, cabinet members, and the National Security Council.

In addition to the CNO campaign, there would need to be U.S. operatives in the targeted area mitigating the flow of information. This would best be done through covert action units in the targeted area as well as the surrounding countries where plagiarized material may be smuggled. Operatives on the ground would seek to verify that U.S. cinema was not reaching the Iraqi general public, and if discovering new channels for bootleg material to flow through, report back along with means to cut off the information.

The purpose of this operation is not to solve the culture clash and radical ideology, but to mitigate certain cultural trigger points that could create the “us vs. them”

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<sup>241</sup> Yenni Kwok, "Hollywood movies in Arab countries: A love and hate relationship." CNN. April 23, 2014. Accessed February 12, 2017. <http://www.cnn.com/2014/04/23/world/meast/middle-east-hollywood-films-censorship-survey/>.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

distinction. As well, the purpose of this is not to deny cultural merging as globalization progresses, but allow time to fend off culture shock, and promote culture assimilation. In many ways, the Internet sheds light on the different cultures that individuals did not have access to before. This has created a cultural backlash and “nativism” globally, which could lead to further radicalization.<sup>243</sup> Mitigating that nativist mentality and curbing radical behavior could be done effectively through such an operation.

Further utilization of other certain covert action operations would be to the detriment of the Islamic state. The benefit of covert action is that it is unknown who is committing the acts. This works for the U.S. because it won't be seen as the West imposing on Islam. The use of Propaganda, Economic, and Paramilitary covert action could present the U.S. with a tactical advantage, and because of the covert nature, there is minimal time for the adversary to prepare for it. If done properly covert operations could have a positive effect on those inside the Islamic State controlled territory. Covert propaganda would further benefit such an operation. This would best be done by a false flag operation, meaning that the individuals conducting the operation do not allow anyone to know they are American. That way any messaging that is broadcast on a social media site, or newspaper, or video message, is not seen as American propaganda, but information from a potentially credible source. Sources are perceived credible if the individuals consuming the message believe the messenger to be one of “us”. Establishing oneself in a state which harbors protentional foreign fighters may not be difficult considering the majority of foreign fighters migrate in from approximately 34 countries,

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<sup>243</sup> Benjamin Knoll, "UNDERSTANDING THE —NEW NATIVISM: CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES FOR IMMIGRATION POLICY ATTITUDES IN THE UNITED STATE." Spring 2010. <http://ir.uiowa.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1717&context=etd>.



which provides the U.S. with options.<sup>244</sup> However, there are specific countries that would be important to consider, such as Tunisia, where between 7,000-8,000 foreign fighters have joined the Islamic State.<sup>245</sup> Other Muslim populations to consider would be Russia, Jordan, France, Turkey, Germany, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia.<sup>246</sup>

The objective of covert propaganda is to upload massive quantities of messages and propaganda to flood the Internet with information that directly contradicts or undermines the Islamic State. More so, considering the religious nature of the Islamic States messaging, the most significant propaganda would be demonstrating how the Islamic State is un-Islamic and does not abide by sharia law. The mass quantity of messages such as this would cause confusion and hesitation to those who may be debating joining the Islamic State, or conducting violence on the Islamic State's behalf.

Furthermore, cultural aspects of the Arab world, especially in Iraq should be taken into account when designing propaganda. One such cultural aspect is the Islamic honor system. Arabs, especially Iraqi Sunni-Arabs who are inhabiting the Islamic State dominated territory, have high regard for honor, reputation, and status.<sup>247</sup> Iraqi Sunni-Arabs place much attention on how they are seen by others and make sure their reputation is intact when making decisions. Understanding and spinning the international conversation about the dishonor the Islamic State is bringing to the Ummah (Islamic

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<sup>244</sup> Lisa Curtis, "Combatting the ISIS Foreign Fighter Pipeline: A Global Approach." January 6, 2016. Accessed February 10, 2017. <http://www.heritage.org/middle-east/report/combatting-the-isis-foreign-fighter-pipeline-global-approach>. 34 countries where 100 or more foreign fighters have joined the Islamic State.

<sup>245</sup> Yaroslav Trofimov, "How Tunisia Became a Top Source of ISIS Recruits." The Wall Street Journal. February 25, 2016. Accessed February 12, 2017. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-tunisia-became-a-top-source-of-isis-recruits-1456396203>.

<sup>246</sup> Curtis, "Combatting the ISIS Foreign Fighter Pipeline: A Global Approach" The vast majority of foreign fighters and lone-wolf attacks have been in these countries.

<sup>247</sup> John Pike, "Life Style." Military. Accessed November 13, 2016. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/lifestyle.htm>.

community) and by directing focus on how the Islamic State leadership have no status or power in the world could further hesitation among potential foreign fighters.

In addition, in Arab and Islamic culture, it is common for the husband and father to be the patriarch of the family and community.<sup>248</sup> This is crucial when considering the high command of authority Baghdadi must impose on his organization. He must be seen as having all the answers and the true decision maker of the caliphate. Individuals imitating members of the Islamic State and spreading messages in mass quantities stating, “Baghdadi is just a puppet of the Saudi regime,” which the Islamic State has deemed an apostate, or “Baghdadi doesn’t make the decisions” could undermine Baghdadi and the Islamic State’s credibility.

Simultaneously, as the U.S. broadcasts propaganda through international media outlets to create confusion and hesitation amongst the Islamic State, further special operations must be considered in the attempt to create disorder and chaos in the Islamic State. An operation such as this would be best done with special operations forces continuing to perform capture-kill missions along with disrupting opportunities for the Islamic State to gain further financial help outside its occupied territory. The disruption of the Islamic State’s outside finances will become more of a salient issue for the organization as it loses territory and the ability to tax those in its area of operation, which has been seen in 2016 when the Islamic State began to lose territory.<sup>249</sup> However, as the Islamic State loses territory, Baghdadi may seek alternative means of financing the

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<sup>248</sup> Tuija Saarinen, "General Cultural Differences and Stereotypes: Kurdish ..." Accessed November 12, 2016. <http://wanda.uef.fi/tkk/liferay/projektit/monikko/translations/eng/Kurdilainen-perhe-ja-tapakulttuuri-eng.pdf>.

<sup>249</sup> David Francis, "Report: Islamic State Annual Revenue Down Nearly 30 Percent." Foreign Policy. Accessed February 12, 2017. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/04/18/report-islamic-state-annual-revenue-down-nearly-30-percent/>.

organization, which would be necessary for the Islamic State to survive, or to continue its war in the region. Therefore, cutting finances as well as hunting down figurehead leadership is a requirement for an information operation against the Islamic State.

### **The Role Of Strategic Communications**

Defusing potential foreign fighters also requires a fully coordinated strategic communications strategy. This communications strategy must target core issues among veteran and potential foreign fighters to prevent further radicalization or support of the Islamic State. This is best accomplished by using targeted dialogue aimed at the Islamic State's ideology and methods. As stated before, the Islamic State views itself as the legitimate caliphate in which all Muslims must support and defend. This means that delegitimizing the Islamic State is key to resolving this conflict. However, currently the U.S. is using key phrases and terminology that supports the Islamic State's rhetoric, and therefore must be changed to create the desired effect.

The first is to abandon identifying Badri by his desired name, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Abu Bakr was the father-in-law of the Prophet Mohammad, and was the first Caliph after the death of Mohammad, according to Sunni Islam.<sup>250</sup> As Gorka argues, Badri chose this name to send a message to the Sunni Muslims that he is the rightful Caliph of the new caliphate, that the Islamic State is a legitimate caliphate, and it is the Sunni Muslims responsibility to join. The U.S. using the name Baghdadi to describe Badri does not diffuse radicalization, nor does it delegitimize the Islamic State, but creates more conflict.

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<sup>250</sup> "Abu Bakr al-Siddiq." Islamic History. Accessed February 12, 2017. <http://islamichistory.org/abu-bakr-al-siddiq/>.

In a similar context, if members of the Christian faith heard a man call himself Saint Peter, and assert himself as the leader to restore the Christian faith to its pure form and heard everyone identifying him as Saint Peter, there would be an innate attachment to that individual from the Christian community. The connection would be formed, even if one was not in support of his cause. As well, those who consider themselves devoted Christians would have a stronger emotional attachment to the conflict, leading to aggression and radicalization. Therefore, identifying Badri as Baghdadi creates further conflict.

Moreover, from a strategic communications perspective the U.S. government, along with the U.S. media must cease associating Badri with the Caliph. The association would be halted by the U.S. no longer calling Badri “Baghdadi”, which would disseminate to the U.S. public. Altering the dialogue would aid in the U.S. message in the mainstream and global media that the U.S. is not at war with the Islamic community. This would not generate short-term benefits, but in time would aid in the U.S. message of the Islamic State being the enemy of Islam, and would change the perspective in the long-term.

In addition, another term creating a rift between cultures is the word “jihadist.” The term jihadist does not accurately describe U.S. adversaries but further establishes the U.S. is at war against Islam, that the Islamic State is the caliphate, and that committing terrorist attacks is in support of Islam. The reason the word jihadist aids the Islamic State’s information operations campaign and hinders the U.S. is because the word jihad, from which the word “jihadist” is derived, means, “... the true meaning of jihad - which refers to the noble human ‘struggle’ or ‘endeavor’ to realize God’s will for a just and

merciful society on earth - from those who would willfully abuse it”, according to Michael Waller.<sup>251</sup> Jihadist could be interpreted as simply as being a wholesome Muslim and supporting the cause of trying to keep a moral Muslim society. This creates distortion as to the U.S. objective when the U.S. claims to be fighting jihadists. It could also lead to the misunderstanding that the U.S. is at war against individuals trying to be virtuous by their religion, or at war against Islam entirely. The miscommunication may further resentment and aid in the Islamic State’s IO campaign, which frequently states that the U.S. and the West are at war with Islam, and that all jihadists must come to help fight. This furthers the “us vs them” ideology and the cultural divide. However, if the U.S. does not address the Islamic State or its supporters as jihadists, then what word best fits to rebrand the organization?

Using Quranic terminology to encompass the Islamic State, foreign fighters, and terrorist activity, promote hesitation to those who may be persuaded by their propaganda. Waller defines the word “Hirabah” as “an act of terrorism, a subversive act inflicted by an individual or a gang or individuals, breaking the established norms of peace, civic laws, treaties, agreements, moral and ethical codes...”<sup>252</sup> The word hirabah fully depicts the adversary of the U.S., and hirabah describes this adversary in a way that cannot be distorted. The hirabah are the violent extremists against Islam, which the U.S. is combating.

Labeling the Islamic State and the foreign fighters for what they are is a subtle tactic, however, it is essential nonetheless. As Waller argues, “if they heard ‘hirabah’ instead of ‘jihad,’ if they heard ‘murder’ instead of ‘martyr,’ if they heard they were

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<sup>251</sup> Waller, *Fighting the War of Ideas Like a Real War.*, 65

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 68

bound for hell not heaven, they might not be so quick to sign up to kill themselves and a handful of so-called ‘infidels’ along the way.”<sup>253</sup> Murderer does not sound as romantic or as sacrificial as martyr. These simple changes in how we approach the foreign fighter dilemma and radicalization could substantially affect funding, and recruiting for the Islamic State.

The final task of strategic communications in assisting this psychological strategy is for the U.S. government and U.S. media to demonstrate how the Islamic State is not fighting the West but is, in fact, killing fellow Muslims. While the Islamic State does broadcast this message themselves by stating that the Muslims it killed are not real Muslims, there is no counter-narrative to this message. The U.S. strategy could benefit by countering this narrative in demonstrating how the victims of the Islamic State are the real jihadists trying to live their lives in peace and not chaos. This narrative, along with the other two dialogue changes previously addressed will shift the ideological environment against the Islamic State, and create indecision in foreign fighters whom debate joining and fighting for the Islamic State.

## **Conclusion**

*“The wound of words is worse than the wound of swords” ~ Arabian proverb<sup>254</sup>*

Information operations are not the solution to the problem, but the beginning towards discovering that solution. As this thesis aims to demonstrate that the lack of a U.S. policy using information operations and strategic communications as its center point

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 69

<sup>254</sup> Waller, *The Public Diplomacy Reader*, 283

for any strategy against the Islamic State and the foreign fighters currently supporting them has enabled further violence. The Islamic State may lose the battle of Mosul. The Islamic State may be defeated militarily in the near future, or retreat largely underground as Al Qaeda did. Yet, the defeat of the Islamic State does not resolve the foreign fighter problem, but simply passes the problem to the next generation of American's to see a new terrorist organization emerge. The current U.S. strategy is no solution, but a stalling tactic until a solution can be made. Until that solution is realized, groups such as the Islamic State and foreign fighters are becoming deadlier, more knowledgeable and interconnected to resources that enable them to inflict damage abroad.

This was seen recently as troops fighting in Mosul discovered chemical weapons and ballistic missiles capable of delivering chemical weapons.<sup>255</sup> A recent discovery in the battle of Mosul confirmed the Islamic State has both chemical weapons such as mustard gas, as well as Russian-made surface to air missiles capable of reaching 60,000 feet.<sup>256</sup> Technologies such as the SA-3 launchers are perceived to be sophisticated technology only available to state actors. The escalation of technology proliferation by non-state actors such as the Islamic State may continue as core elements involving the radicalization of individuals is neglected.

Furthermore, a U.S. psychological strategy would provide assistance for the U.S. in reestablishing credibility in the international arena. The global war on terror along with events such as the "red line" over Syria's use of chemical weapons in its civil war not

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<sup>255</sup> "US confirms IS used chemical rocket in attack on troops in Iraq." BBC News. September 23, 2016. Accessed February 12, 2017. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-37447822>.

<sup>256</sup> "ISIS has three surface-to-air missile launchers in Syria, US officials say." Fox News. December 15, 2016. Accessed March 06, 2017. <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2016/12/15/isis-has-three-surface-to-air-missile-launchers-in-syria-us-officials-say.html>.

being backed has resulted in the United States' credibility being questioned.<sup>257</sup> Lack of credibility could result in allies questioning U.S. commitments as well as hinder future allies from being made. The overall consequence of U.S. credibility suffering is the U.S. having less a diplomatic role in international relations.

However, reestablishing U.S. credibility and undermining U.S. adversaries' credibility can be accomplished with the use of information operations and strategic communications through a psychological strategy. The U.S. prioritization of cultural and psychological dynamics in the war on terror allows the U.S. to understand an enemy and successfully defeat that enemy. As former Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army general Gordon Sullivan once said, "information is the currency of victory on the battlefield."<sup>258</sup> The understanding of information in a conflict will result in victory or defeat for the U.S. Therefore, future success in the war of ideas will depend on the value the United State places on information. Yet, the longer the U.S. continues to fail to acknowledge the psychological dilemma in the conflict against the Islamic State and the foreign fighters, the more likely the U.S. will repeat the conflict with another terrorist group in the future. Therefore, the contemporary U.S. policy will determine the length of the wars against radicalization. As this war is already generational, the necessity for the U.S. to emphasize a psychological strategy will continue to escalate as the war continues.

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<sup>257</sup> Greg Jaffe, "The problem with Obama's account of the Syrian red-line incident." The Washington Post. October 04, 2016. Accessed March 06, 2017. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2016/10/04/the-problem-with-obamas-account-of-the-syrian-red-line-incident/?utm\\_term=.b3f9b4ca23b3](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2016/10/04/the-problem-with-obamas-account-of-the-syrian-red-line-incident/?utm_term=.b3f9b4ca23b3).

<sup>258</sup> Eric Naef, "IWS Information Operations / IWAR Chapter." IWS Information Operations / IWAR Chapter. Accessed March 06, 2017. <http://www.iwar.org.uk/iwar/>.





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