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A SACRED DEFENSE: IRANIAN DEFENSE POLICY IN THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR

John Arterbury

The Syrian civil war provides a complex challenge for Iranian security managers. Because of its close historic relationship with Syria and a need for strategic depth, Iran is deeply committed to preserving the rule of Bashar al-Assad's government, as Iran views the conflict as critical to its security interests in the Middle East. Iran has realized this commitment on the battlefield by offering multi-layered support to the Syrian government, ranging from the clandestine involvement of Iranian Special Forces to the deployment of state-backed Shia militias alongside conventional Syrian forces. Given the existential crisis still facing the Assad government and the high stakes for Iranian interests in the region, Iran is likely to maintain or even increase levels of support to the Syrian government in what has become Iran's largest and most lethal military engagement since the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s.

Introduction

The relationship between Iran and Syria constitutes one of the stronger and more persistent interstate bonds in recent Middle Eastern history. The alliance is a result of historic necessity, and keeping it intact is directly beneficial to the Iranian government from a strategic and ideological standpoint. Preserving this alliance is a cornerstone of Iranian foreign policy, and Iran's policies toward Syria are intended to sustain and grow these ties so long as the Assad dynasty or a favorable successor or alternative remains in control. The Syrian civil war represents a pivotal moment in relations between the two countries, and Iran has oriented its policies toward Syria in direct reaction to the conflict. In doing so, Iran has leveraged proxy forces such as the Lebanese Hezbollah and Iraqi Shia militias to help play a key role in supporting the Iran-Syria bridge.

To understand the dynamics of this relationship and how Iranian policy toward Syria is crafted, this paper will use a qualitative lens to explore how this relationship arose, how it relates to Iranian strategic interests, and how Iran's involvement in the Syrian civil war influences and embodies this relationship. Doing so will challenge the publicly held assumption that fear of the Islamic State is the chief driver of Iran's involvement in Syria, and will analyze the effect Iranian involvement has had on the direction of the war. Lastly, this essay will explore the implications of Iran's policies toward Syria going forward, as well as for the future of relations between the two nations more broadly.

Historic Context and Strategic Considerations

The lessons and experiences of the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s provide the basis of the Iranian government's foundational bedrock. The conflict was a formative experience for modern-day Iran's political and military elite, and the war's hardships etched themselves into the Iranian public's collective memory.¹ The Syrian government's stalwart support for the nascent Islamic Republic in Iran during this challenging era is not lost on Iran's modern-day leaders. Partly as a function of the Iraq-Syria Ba'athist split, Syria was one of the few nations to provide Iran with arms during the course of the war, in spite of the Soviet Union's support for Saddam Hussein.² This split stemmed from ideological differences in Ba'athism that bubbled to the surface during the 1960s as Syrian Ba'athists gravitated further toward the political left and away from pan-Arabism, and a deep personal antipathy between the administrations of Hafez al-Assad and Saddam Hussein expanded this divide.³ Syria demonstrated a substantial loyalty to the embattled revolutionaries, and relations between the Syrian Ba'athist regime and the Islamic Republic have held steady in subsequent decades as Iran has sought to maintain influence in the Arab world and Syria has worked to counterbalance Iraq.⁴

Good relations with Syria offer Iranian leaders substantial benefits and operational capacity. The country provides Iran a friendly intermediary for logistical support to Hezbollah, Iran's foremost ally in the Levant and primary mechanism to confront Israel, and as such remains

¹ Ray Taykeh, *Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009), 105-108.

² Gregory F. Gause, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010), 68.

³ John F. Devlin, "The Baath Party: Rise and Metamorphosis," *The American Historical Review* 96, no. 5 (1991): 1396-407.

⁴ Jubin Goodarzi, "Iran and Syria," *The Iran Primer*, August 2015, accessed February 28, 2016, <http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/iran-and-syria>.

central to Iran's Lebanon policy.⁵ The alliance has been mutually beneficial as well, since retaining Iranian support has helped Syria keep its role as kingmaker in Lebanon—at least until the 2005 Cedar Revolution—and friendly relations with Syria are integral in broadcasting Iran's antagonistic posture toward Israel. An Iranian ally in Syria also guarantees Iran a toehold in the eastern Mediterranean, further projecting Iranian influence. Close relations with Syria have also meant that Iran enjoyed a formidable counterbalance to Iraq in the years following the Iran-Iraq War, and although the security dynamic with Iraq has changed fundamentally, sustaining good relations with Syria ensures a regional ally similarly opposed to Gulf state aspirations.⁶ The fall of the Syrian government would create significant geopolitical instability and would sever Iranian ties to its allies in the Levant. For this reason, Iran is willing to pursue a policy of armed intervention to defend the integrity of the Syrian government as it faces an existential crisis triggered by the civil war.

Securing Sayyidah Zaynab: Iranian Policies of Intervention in the Syrian Civil War

Keeping the Iran-friendly Syrian government intact remains Iran's top priority in the country. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Force (IRGC-QF) led by Qassem Soleimani is the premier Iranian force operating in Syria, pursuing an active role in advising and supporting the Syrian government since at least May 2011.⁷ Serious Iranian military intervention in Syria began in 2012, as the Assad regime was buckling under sustained rebel assault. Intervention by Iran and its proxy forces likely helped save the regime from collapse.⁸ Under the aegis of Soleimani, Iran spearheaded the creation of the National Defense Forces in 2012, aggregating the myriad pro-government militias—known colloquially as 'shabiha,' or ghosts—and others into a Syria-wide part-time reserve force intended to mirror Iran's Basij Corps.⁹ Since early 2013, IRGC forces have played a substantive kinetic role in hybrid military campaigns against rebels across northern Syria in concert with the Syrian Arab Army.¹⁰ The IRGC also draws on its ties to Iraq's numerous Shia militias, which were first mobilized ostensibly under the aegis of protecting sacred Shia shrines in Syria, such as the Sayyidah Zaynab shrine in Damascus.¹¹

A key example of one such IRGC-linked militia is the Kata'ib al-Imam Ali, which entered the Syrian arena in 2014 and is led by veteran Iraqi Dawa Party member and longtime Quds Force associate Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis. Since these militias are composed of Iraqis and subject to Iraq's internecine power struggles, they are not fully under Iranian control nor do their

⁵ Hala Jaber, *Hezbollah: Born with a Vengeance*. (New York: Columbia UP, 1997), 47-56.

⁶ Jubin Goodarzi, "Iran and Syria," *The Iran Primer*, August 2015, accessed February 28, 2016.

⁷ Will Fulton, Joseph Holliday, and Sam Wyer, "Iranian Strategy in Syria," *Institute for the Study of War and the American Enterprise Institute*, May 2013, accessed February 28, 2016, <http://www.understandingwar.org/report/iranian-strategy-syria>.

⁸ Michael Eisenstadt, "Iran's Military Intervention in Syria: Long-Term Implications," *The Washington Institute*, October 15, 2015, accessed February 29, 2016, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/irans-military-intervention-in-syria-long-term-implications>.

⁹ Tom Cooper, "What's left of the Syrian Arab Army?" *War is Boring*, May 18, 2016, accessed May 19, 2016, <https://warisboring.com/whats-left-of-the-syrian-arab-army-eec39485df43#6spchgoxk>.

¹⁰ "Iran reportedly sending 4,000 troops to Syria, proposes front against Israel to protect Assad," *Haaretz*, June 16, 2013, accessed February 28, 2016, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.530043>.

¹¹ Abdelwahab Tomeh, "Iraqi Militia Forms to Protect Shiites in Region," *Al Monitor*, September 10, 2013, accessed February 27, 2016, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/politics/2013/09/iraq-shiite-leaders-pan-shiite-project.html>.

sizes, orientations, or compositions remain static.¹² They retain some level of autonomy and respond reflexively to developments in Iraq first and foremost.¹³ Concurrent with this, the IRGC has also backed the deployment of a special brigade of Afghan Shia fighters under the umbrella of Liwa Fatemiyoun. Recruited in part from refugee camps in Iran and from Afghan Shia diaspora communities throughout the country, Liwa Fatemiyoun is notionally independent from the IRGC but has shown close affiliation with the security organ, whether through funerals in Iran of fallen fighters that have been attended by IRGC personnel or by closely coordinating with IRGC fighters on the Syrian battlefield.¹⁴ According to a prominent Syrian loyalist website, members of Liwa Fatemiyoun arrived jointly with IRGC forces in the March campaign to retake the historic city of Palmyra from Islamic State forces, in concert with the Russian intervention.¹⁵ Importantly, this campaign represented the most widespread engagement of IRGC and IRGC-linked forces against the Islamic State in Syria to date. As a consequence of their deep involvement with the IRGC and the Syrian government, Iran-allied militias seem to enjoy a significant supply of new arms and materiel; fighters from Liwa Fatemiyoun have been seen with T-72 and T-90 tanks, the latter of which Russia only recently provided to the Syrian government and its allies.¹⁶

Lebanese Hezbollah involvement on Syria's frontlines began in early 2013 and was made fully public that spring, although Hezbollah is believed to have been aiding the Syrian government in an advisory role since at least 2012.¹⁷ Hezbollah has worked in tandem with the IRGC on the Syrian battlefield to achieve Iran's objective of supporting the Syrian government throughout the civil war.

Notably, however, IRGC forces have thus far not been used to relieve the far-flung outposts of Syrian government power in places like Deir ez-Zor, Qamishli, and Hasakah that the Syrian government keeps as part of its 'army in all corners' strategy.¹⁸ This suggests a strong level of military pragmatism on the part of the IRGC in conceptualizing and executing realistic

¹² Matthew Levitt and Phillip Smyth, "Kataib al-Imam Ali: Portrait of an Iraqi Shiite Militant Group Fighting ISIS," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, January 5, 2015, accessed February 27, 2016, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/kataib-al-imam-ali-portrait-of-an-iraqi-shiite-militant-group-fighting-isis>.

¹³ Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, "The Return of Iraqi Shi'i Militias to Syria," *Middle East Institute*, March 16, 2015, accessed February 28, 2016, <http://www.mei.edu/content/at/return-iraqi-shi-i-militias-syria>.

¹⁴ Philip Smyth, "Iran's Afghan Shiite Fighters in Syria," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, June 3, 2014, accessed February 28, 2016, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/irans-afghan-shiite-fighters-in-syria>.

¹⁵ Leith Fadel, "Iranian special forces arrive in Palmyra to help liberate the city," *Al-Madar News*, March 21, 2016, accessed March 24, 2016, <https://www.almadarnews.com/article/irgc-soldiers-arrive-palmyra-help-liberate-city>.

¹⁶ See for example: theOSINTblog, Twitter post, April 21, 2016, 1:27 p.m., <https://twitter.com/theOSINTblog/status/723035472621006848>; Rook, Twitter post, March 24, 2016, 6:43 a.m., <https://twitter.com/2Rook14/status/712786996775624704>; Louisa Loveluck and Roland Oliphant, "Russia sends its most advanced tanks to Syria frontline," *The Telegraph*, December 4, 2015, accessed February 28, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/12034237/Russia-sends-its-most-advanced-tanks-to-Syria-frontline.html>.

¹⁷ "Lebanon's Hizbollah Turns Eastward to Syria," *International Crisis Group*, May 27, 2014, accessed February 29, 2016, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iraq%20Syria%20Lebanon/Lebanon/153-lebanon-s-hizbollah-turns-eastward-to-syria.pdf>. I-ii.

¹⁸ Christopher Kozak, "An Army in All Corners' Assad's Campaign Strategy in Syria," *Institute for the Study of War*, April 2015, accessed March 1, 2016, <http://understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/An%20Army%20in%20All%20Corners%20by%20Chris%20Kozak%201.pdf>.

tactical and operational goals in pursuit of its grand strategy of securing the core of the Syrian regime, despite the human costs so far incurred.¹⁹ The IRGC's top-heavy battle doctrine, a tactical legacy of the trenches and killing fields of the Iran-Iraq War, has resulted in the loss of a disproportionate number of senior officers in combat operations.²⁰ Persistent rumors of an IRGC drawdown in Syria have so far not borne out.²¹

The Partisans Of Ali: Ideological Considerations in Iran-Syria Relations

The ruling Ba'ath party in Syria is notionally secular and pan-Arabist, which on the surface does not suggest a natural symbiosis with the Iranian theocracy.²² Despite this, the ruling Assad dynasty belongs to the country's Alawite minority and has disproportionately favored and empowered them over the past four decades.²³ Alawites have been variously described as unorthodox Shia or as Ali-focused Gnostics. Historically outside the purview of mainstream Shi'ism, Najafi scholars attempted to bring the Alawites into the orthodox Twelver Shia fold starting in the 1940s, and in the 1970s, Qom-based Musa al-Sadr spearheaded further efforts to mainstream the Alawite community.²⁴

While Alawism remains fundamentally different from the mainstream Shi'ism practiced by many Iranians, the secular Syrian government has ignored differences in theology while the Iranian government has stressed the shared Islamic heritage between Twelvers and Alawites. It is unlikely that the two actors see themselves as direct coreligionists *per se*, but strategic and historic considerations trump differences, allowing both nations to claim to fall under the broad umbrella of Shia Islam.²⁵ To solidify this, Iranian leadership has stressed the necessity of protecting Syria's popular Shia shrines and, in language echoing the Iran-Iraq war, the imperative of the 'sacred defense' of Syrian lands.²⁶ This logic is sometimes blended with deeper notions of Iranian identity, as suggested by Supreme Leader of Iran Ali Khamenei's statements that the ongoing wars in the Middle East are broader attempts to dethrone the Islamic Republic.²⁷ Religion has also played a key role in motivating foreign volunteers from the global Shia

¹⁹ Garrett Nada, "Iran's Growing Toll in Syria," *The Iran Primer*, Oct. 26, 2015, accessed March 1, 2016, <http://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2015/oct/26/iran's-growing-toll-syria>.

²⁰ David Barnett, "Senior IRGC official killed in Syria 'was no less than Mughniyah,'" *The Long War Journal*, February 16, 2013, accessed March 1, 2016, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/02/senior_ircg_official.php.

²¹ "IRGC pulls back in Syria," *NOW Lebanon*, April 15, 2015, accessed February 29, 2016, <https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/NewsReports/565123-iran-revolutionary-guards-reportedly-pull-back-in-syria>.

²² Jubin Goodarzi, "Iran and Syria," *The Iran Primer*, August 2015, accessed February 28, 2016, <http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/iran-and-syria>.

²³ Ayse Baltacioglu-Brammer, "Alawites and the Fate of Syria," *Origins: Current Events in Historical Perspective*, Ohio State University Department of History, January 2014, accessed February 28, March 2016, <http://origins.osu.edu/article/alawites-and-fate-syria>.

²⁴ Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, "Looking at Alawites," *The Levantine Review*, Fall 2012, accessed March 1, 2016, <http://www.aymennjawad.org/12686/looking-at-alawites>.

²⁵ Mehdi Khalaji, "Part 1: Iran-Syria religious ties," *The Iran Primer*, June 3, 2013, accessed February 28, 2016, <http://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2013/jun/03/part-i-iran-syria-religious-ties>.

²⁶ See for example: Arash Karami, "Iran defends its support for Syria, Iraq," *Al Monitor*, February 10, 2016, accessed February 28, 2016, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/02/iran-syria-iraq-shrine-khamenei-hezbollah.html>; Frederic Wehrey, "The Rise of the Pasdaran: Assessing the Domestic Roles of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps," *RAND Corporation*, 2009, accessed February 27, 2016, http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND_MG821.pdf. 23-24.

²⁷ Khamenei.ir, Twitter post, May 2, 2016, 12:07 a.m., https://twitter.com/khamenei_ir/status/726820253930496000.

community on behalf of the Assad government, whether from Iraq, Pakistan, or among the refugee Afghan Hazara community in Iran.²⁸ From the perspective of a Shia-dominated Islamist state such as Iran, the Syrian government falls firmly into the Shia-friendly camp, and keeping such an ally close in an era of heightened sectarianism is considered a vital national interest.²⁹ As such, Syria's rich Shia heritage and its Shia-friendly government augurs well for Iran-Syria relations.

In juxtaposition with Iran's Shia-friendly policies, the rise of the Islamic State from the bedrock of al Qaeda in Iraq and its subsequent expansion across wide swathes of Syria and Iraq has dramatically altered the Middle East's security architecture. Motivated by an ideology of 'takfirism' that declares all Muslims outside of its mandate to be apostates, Islamic State members harbor profound hatred for Shias who they consider to be idolaters, and reserve deep resentment for the government of Iran, which IS likens to the Safavid Empire of centuries past.³⁰ Fear of the Islamic State is widespread in Iran, and Iranian leaders are afraid of a situation in which an actor like the Islamic State might undermine the 'resistance axis' that Iran shares with Syria and Hezbollah.³¹ These fears also extend to the notion that the Islamic State may advance sufficiently far enough in Iraq to jeopardize some of the holiest Shia abodes.³² This widespread concern means that a military intervention against the Islamic State is deeply popular among the general Iranian public.³³

Nevertheless, from a purely logistical standpoint, it seems implausible that the Islamic State—which has never shared a border with Iran—could penetrate and seize territory in a Shia-majority country of Iran's size with a large standing army and robust domestic intelligence infrastructure. To do so would require transiting vast corridors of autonomous Kurdish territory in neighboring Iraq. Rather, the Islamic State's offensives in Syria and Iraq threaten the stability and durability of these respective governments and by extension Iran's ability to project power in the Middle East. Should the Islamic State raise its black flag over the shrines in Damascus or Karbala, the reverberations would be felt around the Islamic world, but they nevertheless would not threaten Iranian citizenry directly.

The possible collapse of the Syrian or Iraqi governments, however, does threaten Iran's strategic interests in a conventional sense, and it is in part for this crucial strategic consideration that Iranian policy has prioritized bolstering the Syrian government. Members of the Iranian government, including the Supreme Leader and President Hassan Rouhani's administration, have since at least 2014 couched the intervention in Syria in terms of combatting 'takfiris'—hardline Islamists who declare apostasy on others—using the term interchangeably to mean the Islamic

²⁸ Erika Solomon, "Shia fighters tip balance in Assad's favor in Syria," *Financial Times*, March 24, 2014, accessed February 28, 2016, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/2dfaf756-a9fa-11e3-8bd6-00144feab7de.html>.

²⁹ Scott Helfstein, "The Rise of Sectarian Populism," *The National Interest*, July 18, 2013, accessed March 2, 2016, <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/the-rise-sectarian-populism-8740>.

³⁰ Cole Bunzel, "From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State." *The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World*. March 2015, accessed February 2016, <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2015/03/ideology-of-islamic-state-bunzel/the-ideology-of-the-islamic-state.pdf>. 8-11.

³¹ Majid Rafizadeh, "Iran's fear of ISIS drowns it in regional quagmire," *Al-Arabiya*, July 18, 2014, accessed March 2, 2016, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/views/news/middle-east/2014/07/18/Iran-s-fear-of-ISIS-drowns-it-in-regional-quagmire.html>.

³² Dina Esfandiary, "'Iranians are Terrified': Iran's ISIS Nightmare," *The National Interest*, July 11, 2014, accessed May 19, 2016, <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/iranians-are-terrified-irans-isis-nightmare-10856>.

³³ "Many Iranians want military to intervene against Isis," *The Guardian*, June 27, 2014, accessed May 20, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/iran-blog/2014/jun/27/iran-isis-military-intervention>.

State as well as other Syrian rebels.³⁴ Yet the majority of Syrian rebels outside the Islamic State could not be accurately described as ‘takfiri.’ While some hardline jihadist groups—including al Qaeda’s Levantine franchise Jabhat al-Nusra and smaller, nominally independent jihadist groups like Jund al-Aqsa and the Turkistan Islamic Party—might satisfy this criteria, the bulk of Assad’s opponents—including Islamists like Ahrar al-Sham, Jaish al-Islam, and Afnan al-Sham, as well as Free Syrian Army banner groups like Jaish al-Nasr, Faylaq al-Sham, and Division 13—simply do not.³⁵ Thus, as a matter of practicality, the Islamic State has not been the primary target of the IRGC’s combat operations in Syria.

While the IRGC has been active against a constellation of Syrian rebel forces near Aleppo—ranging from quasi-secular outfits to hardline Islamists—it has seldom undertaken any substantive operations against Islamic State forces in Syria, with the notable exception of a handful of individual operations, such as the re-opening of the Aleppo-Hama highway following an Islamic State blitz and assistance in the recapture of Palmyra city and its ancient ruins.³⁶ Iranian forces have not been engaged notably in either Syria’s south or in Damascus city and its exurbs, nor have they deployed against the Syrian government as it attempts to wrest key oil and gas infrastructure away from the Islamic State. As such, Aleppo and its environs remain the locus of Iranian military intervention in Syria, and in this theater Sunni rebels pose the most intractable challenge to the Syrian’s government survival. Iran’s most vaunted victories in Syria in early 2016, for example, include the capture of wide swathes of rebel-held countryside south of Aleppo city, as well as the breaking of the rebel siege on the Shia villages of Nubl and al-Zahraa northwest of Aleppo.³⁷ Each of these campaigns was engineered by senior elements of the IRGC leadership, utilized Russian air support, received significant coverage in Iranian press, and was hailed as a major victory for the Syrian government, yet neither focused on the Islamic State.³⁸

Underscoring this disparity in force deployment, a Syrian government campaign beginning in late 2015 to break the Islamic State siege of Kuweires airbase east of Aleppo city evidently involved little IRGC involvement and was spearheaded almost exclusively by elite units of the Syrian army in tandem with Russian air support.³⁹ It was during this Syrian government offensive into Islamic State territory that IRGC forces were focused primarily on reclaiming Aleppo’s southern flank from non-Islamic State affiliated rebel factions.⁴⁰ Indeed, perhaps the single deadliest day for Iran and its allied forces in Syria occurred during the May

³⁴ For Iranian government use of ‘takfiri’ as a blanket epithet, see: “Iran Warns Takfiri Terrorists of Harsh Revenge in Syria Soon,” *Fars News Agency*, May 9, 2016, accessed May 19, 2016, <http://en.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=13950220000385>; “Takfiri terrorists will be buried in Syria and Iraq: Senior Iran official,” May 19, 2016, accessed May 19, 2016, <http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2016/05/19/466373/Iran-Takfiri-terrorists-Syria-Iraq-Mohsen-Rezaei>; Shahram Akbarzadeh and Dara Conduit, *Iran in the World: President Rouhani’s Foreign Policy*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 9.

³⁵ Jennifer Cafarella, “Syrian Opposition Guide,” *Institute for the Study of War*, October 7, 2015, accessed May 19, 2016, <http://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/syrian-opposition-guide>.

³⁶ “Iran News Round-Up – February 25, 2016,” *Critical Threats*, American Enterprise Institute, February 25, 2016, accessed February 28, 2016, <http://www.criticalthreats.org/iran-news-round-february-25-2016>.

³⁷ Amir Toumaj and Max Peck, “The IRGC’s involvement in the battle for Aleppo,” *The Long War Journal*, February 13, 2016, accessed May 19, 2016, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/02/the-irgcs-involvement-in-the-battle-for-aleppo.php>.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ “ISIL siege of Aleppo airbase 'broken by Syrian army',” *Al Jazeera*, November 10, 2015, accessed May 19, 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/11/isil-siege-aleppo-airbase-broken-syrian-forces-151110153254134.html>.

⁴⁰ “Syrian army captures village in Aleppo province: Monitor, state TV,” *Reuters*, November 13, 2016, accessed May 19, 2016, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsRio/166436.aspx>.

2016 loss of the town of Khan Tuman south of Aleppo to fighters of Jaish al-Fatah, a loose coalition of mostly hardline Islamist rebels unrelated to the Islamic State.⁴¹ The importance to Iranian security managers of combatting non-Islamic State groups has been reinforced after the loss of Khan Tuman, as senior advisor to the Supreme Leader Ali Velayati stressed that Assad's role as leader of the Syrian government is an Iranian 'red line,' suggesting that commitment to the Syrian government against its multifarious existential threats trumps combatting any one specific group.⁴²

Similarly, Hezbollah's involvement in Syria began almost a year before the provincial capital of Raqqa fell to the Islamic State, and its operations have mostly centered on reconquering rebel enclaves along the Syria-Lebanon border and shoring up the defenses of government-held cities in central Syria. When considering ideological motivation for Iran's policy toward Syria, Iran is driven to intervene more by Shia solidarity and regional strategic priorities in general, rather than specific opposition to the Islamic State. For some Shia observers, however, Iran's actions in Syria have already paid dividends for their coreligionists, as the IRGC's recent role in lifting the siege of the two Shia towns northwest of Aleppo illustrates.⁴³

Implications for the Future

Iranian support for Syria occurs at the intersection of the Iranian regime's ideological mantle and the country's strategic interests. On account of this juncture, it is highly likely that the Iranian government broadly and the IRGC specifically will remain loyal to the Assad regime in Syria for the foreseeable future. Maintaining an Iran-friendly Syria is key to Iran's regional strategic interests, as well as preserving ideological legitimacy of the state as the defender of Islam and an enemy of what it sees as Sunni extremism. As a result, elements of the Iranian security establishment are likely to remain deeply involved in operations in Syria so long as these threats persist. These elements will only be dissuaded from further involvement should the opportunity cost for deployment become unbearably high, but given the importance of Syria to Iran, this threshold is likely far beyond current levels of loss. The future role for Shia militias in Syria remains less clear. While they are subject to recall to Iraq should exigencies arise, they currently lack a clearly defined role in a future Syria. The entrenched presence of large numbers of Shia militia members in the southern Aleppo countryside, for example, raises more long-term questions about the return of the Syrian Sunni community to these areas should fighting subside.⁴⁴ Such a position could in theory further embed Iranian proxies into the fabric of Syrian political life.

⁴¹ Amir Toumaj, "IRGC, allies sustained significant losses in battle for Khan Touman," *The Long War Journal*, May 11, 2016, accessed May 19, 2016, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/05/irgc-allies-sustained-significant-losses-in-battle-for-khan-touman.php>.

⁴² "President Assad remaining in power Iran's redline: Iran official," *PressTV*, May 8, 2016, accessed May 19, 2016, <http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2016/05/08/464525/Iran-Syria-Velayati-Assad/>.

⁴³ Amir Toumaj and Max Peck, "The IRGC's involvement in the battle for Aleppo," *The Long War Journal*, Feb. 13, 2016, accessed March 1, 2016, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/02/the-irgcs-involvement-in-the-battle-for-aleppo.php>.

⁴⁴ Ed Blanche, "In Syria, some see Iran as an occupation force," *The Arab Weekly*, January 8, 2016, accessed February 27, 2016, <http://www.theArabweekly.com/?id=3261>.

More importantly, following a sustained ceasefire, it is likely that Iran will have a more direct say in Syria's internal affairs. Tehran seeks to maintain an Iran-friendly government in Damascus, and it has found a pliant and reliable ally in the Assad dynasty. The civil war has not only brought the two countries closer together, but it has put the Syrian state into Iran's debt and expanded opportunities for Iran within the country. In the relatively near future, members of the IRGC may begin pioneering reconstruction efforts and netting lucrative contracts in a stable Syria to deepen the Iranian footprint, should the Assad regime—or one like it—prevail. Inversely, should the Assad government fall and no friendly successor take its place, the IRGC would likely suffer a major setback as Iranian-Syrian relations would be set back a generation, especially if aggrieved Sunni Arabs retake the country's reigns. Despite this possibility, the Iran-Syria relationship currently remains steadfast, and it is likely that the Syrian civil war will be a watershed event with long-lasting ramifications on the relationship between the two states, much like the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s.

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ADDITIVE MANUFACTURING AND FUTURE FORCES: A REALISTIC LOOK AT THE PROMISE OF 3D PRINTING FOR THE MILITARY

Theresa Campobasso

A dwindling budget and desire to streamline the repair, maintenance, and supply timelines has led the Department of Defense (DoD) to show an increasingly large interest in additive manufacturing (AM) technology. While this technology does offer potential advantages to the DoD, military interest seems to be mostly focused on a rapid manufacturing capability as opposed to a rapid prototyping capability, which is a less realistic expectation based on the way that AM technology works. Many assessments ignore or gloss over some of the significant limiting factors of the technology that would prevent it from being used effectively in this manner, and are predicated on fundamental misconceptions about the time it would take to print a finished part. Capability estimates also frequently neglect to address the fact that 3D-printed parts are rarely in a usable finished state after they emerge from the printer. Military writers are quick to embrace the optimistic assumption that soldiers could effectively operate these printers—which are large and require special considerations for power and cooling, as well as a team of experts to safely operate them—easily in an austere environment. Less frequently discussed but also important are the considerations of standardization, testing, navigating intellectual property rights, and the issue of security of the digital blueprints used to print the parts. Though AM technology does in fact present many advantages that could positively impact the military, planners and strategists need to refocus their end goals from rapid resupply of parts to other uses in order to fully benefit from these advantages. Planners need to capitalize on AM's advantages in prototyping and customization with realistic plans based on an in-depth understanding of the technology, its limitations, and how and where it might be best suited to positively impact the force, instead of falling victim to vague, unrealistic plans that may lead to poor investments and disappointment or failure to meet unrealistic expectations. If the DoD invests in a technology that is ill suited to accomplish its goals, it may miss opportunities for AM to positively impact the future military.

“Imagine a soldier on a firebase in the mountains of Afghanistan. A squad is attacked by insurgents. The ammunition starts to run out. Is it worth waiting hours and risking the lives of helicopter pilots to drop it near you, or is it worth a more expensive system that can manufacture weapons and ammunition on the spot?”

–Dartmouth College business professor Richard D’Aveni (2013)¹

Thanks to reports, media stories, and quotes like Richard D’Aveni’s that laud the game changing advantages of additive manufacturing (AM), the Department of Defense (DoD) has invested millions in 3-D printers, supplies, and upkeep, according to federal contract records.²³⁴ Additive manufacturing (AM), the term used to describe the set of technologies that create 3D objects by adding accumulated layers of material, has garnered increasing interest from the US military. In the past two years, advocates of the technology in the military claim that it will accomplish everything from rapid resupply operations to feeding and clothing the future force with the touch of a button. Touted advantages include arbitrary yet attractive claims of “reducing energy use by 50 percent and reducing material cost by up to 90 percent compared to traditional manufacturing.”⁵ Another assessment promises savings in the billions of dollars, along with a “complete elimination” of the supply chain.⁶ By allowing AM propaganda to inform unrealistic expectations of this technology’s potential, military planners risk missing the practical ways AM can immediately and positively impact military logistics.

Methods of Additive Manufacturing

An understanding of the fundamentals of AM is necessary to identify the logical fallacies and misguided optimism inherent in quotes like D’Aveni’s. Currently, there are several major types of commonly used AM methodologies, each with their own advantages and limitations.

Stereolithography

This method is the first and oldest method of 3D printing. In this method, computer-aided design (CAD) software creates a digital blueprint of the object to be printed, and digitally cuts the design into very thin layers.⁷ The data for each layer is then sent to the printer, which uses a build platform submerged in a vat of resin. An ultraviolet (UV) laser traces a pattern on the

¹ Stuart Deutsch, "3D Printer Capabilities, and How the Media Blurs Reality with Science Fiction Fantasy." ToolGuyd. June 3, 2013. Accessed October 22, 2015. <http://toolguyd.com/tag/3d-printers/>.

² "Types of 3D Printers or 3D Printing Technologies Overview." 3D Printing from Scratch. 2015. Accessed October 22, 2015. <http://3dprintingfromscratch.com/common/types-of-3d-printers-or-3d-printing-technologies-overview/>.

³ "3-D Printing Goes from Sci-fi Fantasy to Reality." ABC13 Houston. June 2, 2013. Accessed October 25, 2015. <http://abc13.com/archive/9124362/>.

⁴ Matthew Lewis, Tom Seymour, and Jim Joyce. "3D Opportunity for the Department of Defense: Additive Manufacturing Fires up." Deloitte University Press. November 20, 2014. Accessed October 22, 2015. <http://dupress.com/articles/additive-manufacturing-defense-3d-printing/>.

⁵ Jon Drushal, *Additive Manufacturing: Implications to the Army Organic Industrial Base in 2030*. Carlisle: United States Army War College, 2013.

⁶ Drushal, *Additive Manufacturing*, 6.

⁷ "Software & Tools for 3D Printing | 3D Printing for Beginners." 3D Printing for Beginners. 2015. Accessed October 25, 2015. <http://3dprintingforbeginners.com/software-tools/>.

surface of the liquid resin, which cures and solidifies the pattern, and joins it to the layer below.⁸ The build platform adjusts in height as each layer is solidified, but because the resin is not thick enough to bolster overhanging printed designs, additional supports are needed as part of the design, which must be removed after the print is complete. The print time ranges from several hours for small parts to several days for larger items, but in addition to the printing time, there are post-processing steps necessary to achieve the finished product. Printed parts are immersed in a chemical bath, and then placed in a UV oven to finish curing.⁹ This method is widely used by manufacturers for prototypes and models of products, but is rarely (if ever) used to create a final product. The limited number of materials that stereolithography is compatible with, as well as the post-processing requirements and somewhat brittle end product make this method unlikely to be suitable for the types of uses that the military hopes for.

Fused Deposition Modeling (FDM)

In FDM, a 3D object is built layer by layer from the bottom up by heating and extruding a plastic filament.¹⁰ After the CAD design layers information is sent to the printer, thin spools of thermoplastic and support material are extruded through dual nozzles. The support material allows the thermoplastic to be printed into shapes with overhangs that would typically collapse before the plastic had time to cool and harden. After printing, the support material is cleaned off and removed. Raw FDM parts have visible layer lines, which can be removed through sanding, chemical treatment, or application of a finishing paint or coating.¹¹ Though this type of machine is compatible with production-grade thermoplastics, meaning that it can produce finished products of excellent mechanical, thermal and chemical qualities, it is still incapable of printing metals and other high-performance materials.¹² This method would be suitable for replacements of plastic military parts and equipment, but again, just as with stereolithography, it offers neither an extremely rapid solution, nor a universal one.

Selective Laser Sintering (SLS)

This method is very similar to stereolithography in that it uses a laser to fuse thin layers of material, but with SLS the material is powder instead of a liquid resin.¹³ A laser heats the layer of powder to just below melting point and fuses it with the layer below, and a roller moves across the print bed to lay down new powder after each layer is fused. This powder bed renders support structures unnecessary because the powder supports the structure during the print. Because leftover powder can be reused, there is very little waste in comparison with traditional manufacturing methods, which is a characteristic that the military and other potential customers find very desirable as a way to manage costs.¹⁴ SLS can be used with a wider variety of materials

⁸ "OBJEX UNLIMITED | Stereolithography (SLA®)." Objex Unlimited. July 8, 2014. Accessed November 02, 2015. <http://objexunlimited.com/3d-systems-printers/information-guides-white-pages/stereolithography-sla/>.

⁹ "Types of 3D Printers."

¹⁰ "FDM Technology." About Fused Deposition Modeling. March 6, 2013. Accessed October 17, 2015. <http://www.stratasys.com/3d-printers/technologies/fdm-technology>.

¹¹ "Types of 3D Printers."

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ "Direct Metal | Selective Laser Sintering Melting Machine | Lasercusing ." SPI Lasers. 2015. Accessed May 02, 2016. <http://www.spilasers.com/application-additive-manufacturing/selective-laser-sintering-and-melting/>.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

than the previously mentioned methods, including nylon, glass, aluminum, steel, and silver, but using metals require additional considerations. Because sintering compacts materials to form a solid mass through the heat of the laser, but without melting it to the point of liquefaction, the finished products are typically porous, which may not be appropriate for printing metal parts that have specific performance requirements or need to have a more solid structural integrity to withstand certain types of forces or pressures.¹⁵ SLS parts, regardless of the material used, emerge from the printer with a grainy surface finish, which is rough due to powder particle size, layer-wise building sequence, and the spreading of the powder by the roller mechanisms. The most common finishing techniques used today to remedy this roughness are hand polishing and abrasive flow grinding, which are highly effective, but very tedious and time consuming.¹⁶

Direct Metal Laser Melting (DMLM)

This method closely resembles SLS technology. A high-power laser beam fuses and actually melts metallic powders together. Unlike the SLS process, melting actually creates a pool where the materials can consolidate before reforming and hardening to create a new solid structure. Because metal melts at very high temperatures, the machine's high-powered laser requires specialized technicians to operate it.¹⁷ Additionally, this method of AM may require support structures, which must be removed by milling, drilling, polishing, or electro-polishing, which is an electrochemical treatment without mechanical impact required for fragile parts.¹⁸ One of the reasons melting may be chosen over laser sintering is that the final substance is not porous, which makes it more suitable for a greater range of applications. This method of printing is compatible with a wider variety of metals, including stainless steel, titanium, cobalt-chrome, and aluminum, but it is less suitable for some types of alloys because they may have different melting points.¹⁹ Surface roughness of these prints are removed by hand polishing, abrasive flow grinding, electro-polishing, shot-peening, and ultrasonic and vibratory finishing, all of which are relatively time intensive.

Misconceptions

When military planners discuss the use of AM to support future operations, the applications they describe rarely resemble the aforementioned technological processes. However, not all of these hypothetical future AM scenarios are as far-fetched as D'Aveni's ammo-printing fantasy. Military planners commonly cite a scenario in which a forward deployed unit, operating in austere conditions far from a dependable logistics chain, is able to simply 'print' a replacement part for a High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV or Humvee), which would theoretically reduce the time, energy, and money required to replace it.²⁰

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ J. A. Ramos, J. Murphy, K. Wood, D. L. Bourell, and J. J. Beaman. Surface Roughness Enhancement of Indirect-SLS Metal Parts by Laser Surface Polishing. Laboratory for Freeform Fabrication. University of Texas at Austin.

¹⁷ "Types of 3D Printers."

¹⁸ "Secondary Finishing Processes." Metal Additive Manufacturing- The Magazine & Online Resource for the 3D Printing of Metals. 2015. Accessed May 2, 2016. http://www.metal-am.com/introduction_to_metal-additive_manufacturing/Secondary.

¹⁹ "Direct Metal."

²⁰ Matthew, et al., "3D Opportunity for the Department of Defense."

A comprehensive understanding of AR technology, however, would reveal this scenario to be littered with false assumptions and misconceptions—most notably the time needed to print an item, the amount of post-production processing needed to bring an item into service, and the assumption that these printers (which are large and require special considerations for power and cooling, as well as a team of experts to safely operate them) could operate reliably in an austere and hostile environment.

The most prevalent misconception about the military applications of AM is the speed.²¹ Most estimates of 3D printing speed are only concerned with the build time, which refers to the time that the part is in the printer. However, many people fail to realize that build time is only one component of the total time for part completion, and it is also highly variable depending on the desired thickness of the CAD design layers. The thinner the layers, the more precise the print will be, but the longer it takes to print. This becomes problematic in a scenario where a military grade replacement is required quickly but also has to be built to exact specifications.²² Even if the print is being produced from an existing CAD file, preparing the machine to execute a print can be time consuming. Some steps may involve the machine's hardware, such as conducting calibration or safety checks, warming up the printer, or loading new materials into the printer. Other steps may involve the software or design, such as selecting the desired layer thickness or choosing the orientation of the design to determine which side is printed first. The time to create a job may take anywhere from a few minutes if the printer is already warm and ready to use, to several hours if it is not. After a part is built, it may have to drain or be de-powdered, binders may need time to harden, or chambers may have to cool. For some technologies, build time is effectively doubled because parts have to cool for nearly as long as they were building.²³ All of these implied steps are not necessarily taken into consideration when estimates of 'only a few hours' are tossed around. Print time estimates also frequently fail to account for any post-production processing that may be necessary, depending on the type of printing used and the level of precision that the part may require. The time lag can become worse if a specialized technician is needed for any of the steps.²⁴

Additionally, military planners' discussion of AM is teeming with claims that it will 'revolutionize' or 'eliminate' the supply chain as it exists today. Printing at the point of origin will, according to Colonel Drushal,

“[eliminate] the need for large warehousing requirements, thus reducing the millions spent on holding stocks for traditional supply production [...] Supply chain reductions will have enormous impacts on global transportation requirements. There will be a corresponding reduction in labor costs as entire workspaces will be filled with AM machines executing unmonitored, overnight builds.”²⁵

This statement incorrectly assumes that there is no supply chain associated with and no manpower required in the AM process. State of the art 3D printers still require raw materials and parts to function, and do not typically contain any 3D-printed parts. Therefore, any replacements would have to be ordered via a traditional supply chain, or brought with the deployed force and

²¹ Drushal, *Additive Manufacturing*, 6.

²² Cameron Coward, *Manufacturing with 3D Printers and CNC Mills*. Idiot's Guides: 3D Printing. Alpha Books.

²³ Winker, "The Truth about Speed."

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Drushal, *Additive Manufacturing*, 6.

stored, which negates the ability to completely eliminate the existing supply chain.²⁶ So while bags of powders and spools of plastics may replace the traditional parts that comprise today's supply chain, it will hardly be eliminated altogether. Additionally, the types of printers capable of creating military-grade metal parts are themselves complex machines requiring high temperatures, powerful lasers, and expert technicians to operate them. Complex machines often malfunction or fail with catastrophic consequences, and these printers are no exception. In 2014, a Direct Metal Sintering printer jam resulted in the death of two technicians, which illustrates the potential for harm if something goes wrong.²⁷ To mitigate these problems, the military would need to create a new occupational specialty to train technicians in AM processes, but it is unlikely that the system could be safely and responsibly left completely unmonitored. Lastly, different types of printers print different types of materials. To replace an entire spare part warehouse, how many different types of 3D printers would each military base or deployed outpost need? Of course each type of printer comes with its own raw materials and technicians, as well as space and energy requirements.

Standardization presents a challenge when creating 'military grade' parts because printer models vary by brand, even among printers of the same type. A CAD file sent to three different brands of FDM printers will vary slightly, even when printed with the same raw material. 3D printed parts are typically composed of countless micron-scale weld beads piled on top of each other. Even when alloys with well-known properties are used, the additive process produces a material with a much different 'microstructure,' endowing the manufactured part with different properties and behaviors than would be expected if the same part were made by conventional manufacturing. Moreover, parts made on different machines may be dissimilar enough from each other that current statistical qualification methods would not work. Accordingly, each 'new' material must be precisely understood—and the new process controlled—to ensure the required degree of confidence in the manufactured product.²⁸ Currently, no industry standards or testing methodology have been developed, though several organizations have begun discussing possible solutions.²⁹

A last area for concern is the issue of both intellectual property rights and security. The original manufacturers own the rights to every piece of equipment that the military does not design itself, including the CAD files that 3D printers use as a roadmap to make objects. Lieutenant Commander Michael Llenza says that the Pentagon "does not have a clear strategy" for how to handle the issue of intellectual property rights as an integral part of incorporating 3D printing technology.³⁰ Additionally, the issue of digital security is important in our modern era of hacking and cybersecurity concerns. If a digitally-stored CAD file is part of a classified weapons system, would it require a separate, specially classified 3D printer?

Though there are several areas where additional attention is needed to determine the best way to effectively incorporate AM technology into the future military, some research teams have identified practical uses for AM in the future Army that capitalize on AM's ability to create a relatively rapid, customizable solution, like printing medical models to aid with surgical

²⁶ Deutsch, "3D Printer Capabilities."

²⁷ Justin Dodd, "Two Dead After 3D Printer Jams While Printing Gun." Newslo. September 11, 2014. Accessed May 02, 2016. <http://www.newslo.com/two-dead-after-3d-printer-jams-while-printing-gun/>.

²⁸ "Boosting Confidence in New Manufacturing Technologies." Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA). May 29, 2015. Accessed May 02, 2016. <http://www.darpa.mil/news-events/2015-05-29>.

²⁹ Drushal, *Additive Manufacturing*, 8.

³⁰ Adam Clark Estes, "Marching into the Future of 3D-Printed War." Gizmodo. December 02, 2013. Accessed October 02, 2015. <http://gizmodo.com/marching-into-the-future-of-3d-printed-war-1474031297>.

procedures, printing basic tools that do not require post-processing, or printing wearable circuitry that could transmit signals about a soldier's body.³¹ These types of solutions may have a greater rate of success. However, if military leaders continue to operate under the assumption that AM will allow for a forward-deployed rapid manufacturing capability with reduced energy, cost, and timeline, then they likely run the risk of investing in technology that will not be able to deliver. Moreover, because "declining budgets won't allow for repeating past mistakes," pursuit of unrealistic uses of AM may close the door on opportunities to benefit the future military.³²

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³¹ "Top Ten Uses for Additive Manufacturing for Defense." Institute for Defense and Government Advancement. June 29, 2015. Accessed May 02, 2016. <http://www.idga.org/military-equipment-platforms/articles/top-ten-uses-for-additive-manufacturing-for-defe/>.

³² Sandra I Erwin, "Pentagon Rethinks Investments in Future Technology." National Defense Industrial Association. September 3, 2014. Accessed May 2, 2016. <http://www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/blog/lists/posts/post.aspx?ID=1591>.

**ANALYZING THE THREATS FROM NONSTATE ACTORS AND
INTERNAL CONFLICT TO ALGERIAN STABILITY:
A RISK ASSESSMENT**

Abigail Casey

The intent of this paper is to provide a risk assessment for one of the United States' most important counterterrorism partners in North Africa. Algeria has long been a bulwark against violent extremism in North Africa and is the linchpin of many regional security efforts. However, Algerian stability faces serious and compounding threats from extremist groups and internal discord. This is a significant regional security concern due to Algeria's important role as a Western security partner and broker of stability in the region. This paper examines the evolving jihadist environment in North Africa, focusing on the increased use of transnational trafficking networks by extremist groups and the dangerous dynamic between al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Various risk factors for domestic instability in Algeria are also evaluated, including the recent power struggles among the political-military elite and the purge of high-level military and intelligence officials. The paper concludes by arguing that the United States should place more emphasis on promoting internal stability in Algeria and ensuring that the upcoming power transition in the country does not result in a situation that could jeopardize Algeria's invaluable role as a regional security guarantor.

Introduction

The Department of Homeland Security defines risk assessment as “a process to identify potential hazards and analyze what could happen if a hazard occurs.”¹ Similarly, Bruce Hoffman emphasizes the importance of comprehensive threat assessments that evaluate the threat as it currently exists and is likely to evolve in the future.² Unfortunately, the Obama administration has displayed an inability in the past to conduct comprehensive assessments of how threats might evolve in the Middle East or how American actions might impact the development of those threats. For example, President Obama recently said that the “worst mistake” of his presidency was the failure to plan for the aftermath of Libyan president Muammar Gaddafi’s ouster in 2011.³ As the United States continues to refine its strategic plan for North Africa, it must engage in more rigorous threat assessments.

The intent of this paper is to provide a risk assessment for one of the United States’ most important counterterrorism partners in North Africa. This paper offers the central argument that Algerian stability faces serious threats from extremist groups and internal discord. Furthermore, because of Algeria’s key role as a Western security partner and broker of stability in the region, Algeria’s vulnerability to domestic instability is a regional security issue. The first section will analyze the jihadist environment in North Africa, focusing on al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The purpose of this section is to demonstrate how jihadists might exploit instability in Algeria. The next section will examine Algeria’s important role as a regional leader in counterterrorism initiatives and its value as a key security partner to the West. I will then demonstrate why it is reasonable to worry about the stability of Algeria, especially as President Bouteflika’s health worsens and indications of elite infighting increase. Finally, I will conclude by analyzing potential repercussions of an unstable Algeria and offer some recommendations for mitigating this eventuality.

Assessing the Threat From Islamist Extremists

Extremist groups have demonstrated a talent for capitalizing on instability in the region, successfully exploiting state failure in Libya, insurgency in Mali, and political turmoil in Egypt. To varying extents, extremist groups were able to expand operations, develop and grow trafficking networks, and generate new recruits in these countries. These groups, especially ISIS, then used their successes to bolster propaganda efforts. Analyzing the achievements of these groups, in particular AQIM and ISIS, in exploiting various levels of domestic instability can be instructive in assessing how they might attempt to target an unstable Algeria.

This section will cover several developing risk factors related to the North African jihadist environment. Jihadist groups are increasingly using transnational networks that run through Algeria to raise money and access weapons. AQIM has reemerged in force after a period of restraint and is engaged in a dangerous dynamic with ISIS that perpetuates increasing brutality and violence. ISIS seems determined to expand in North Africa and there is evidence it is targeting Algeria. Finally, it is likely that North Africa will experience an additional influx of

¹ “Risk Assessment,” *Department of Homeland Security*, <https://www.ready.gov/risk-assessment>.

² Audrey Kurth Cronin and James M Ludes, *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of a Grand Strategy*, (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004), 268.

³ “Obama Warns of IS Focus on Libya After Iraq and Syria Setbacks,” *The BBC*, April 14, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-36044439>.

jihadists in the coming months as ISIS loses territory in Iraq and Syria, which will put additional strain on the region's security forces.

Jihadist exploitation of illicit transnational networks to fund terrorism is pronounced in North Africa. Since the onset of regional instability in 2011, regional jihadist groups have increased their use of ancient trans-Saharan trading routes to traffic contraband, drugs, weapons, and people.⁴ For example, al-Mourabitoun, a faction of AQIM, has become a key player in the smuggling of cigarettes and cocaine. The emir of al-Mourabitoun, the notorious Mokhtar Belmokhtar, is known as 'Mr. Marlboro' because of his heavy involvement in cigarette trafficking.⁵ In fact, involvement in the market for illicit goods may actually be more lucrative for North African jihadists than the flashier kidnapping and ransom economy. According to the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, cigarette smuggling has provided the "bulk of financing" for AQIM.⁶

Algeria's centrality to many of the transnational networks that run through the Sahel and North Africa makes it vulnerable to the negative effect these networks have on state authority. In a pernicious cycle, illicit networks have thrived on state weakness while simultaneously contributing to the weakening of state authority.⁷ The rapid collapse of the Malian state in 2012 is partly attributed to the increased strength of these entrenched networks in quickly and inconspicuously moving weapons, money, fighters, and other equipment.⁸

The movement of weapons through North Africa and the Sahel using these trafficking networks has increased dramatically as a result of the conflicts in Mali and Libya. The fall of the Gaddafi regime opened the floodgates of sophisticated weaponry, including man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS), which are very dangerous in the hands of insurgents. MANPADS are simple to use, easily concealed, and have the capacity to down commercial airplanes.⁹ The United States has tried to get as many MANPADS as possible out of circulation, but there are about 10,000 MANPADS from Gaddafi's stockpile still unaccounted for.¹⁰ Additionally, the NATO intervention in Libya dumped even more weaponry and equipment into the region, and according to an Algerian government official, some of these weapons are now in the hands of terrorists.¹¹ To emphasize the severity of this threat: there are thousands of portable surface-to-air missiles that can shoot down a commercial jetliner missing in a region with strong transnational

⁴ Martina Lagatta et al, "Algeria's Underused Potential in Security Cooperation in the Sahel Region," *Directorate-General for External Policies of the European Parliament*, June 2013, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/briefing_note/join/2013/491510/EXPO-AFET_SP\(2013\)491510_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/briefing_note/join/2013/491510/EXPO-AFET_SP(2013)491510_EN.pdf).

⁵ Kathleen Caulderwood, "Drugs And Money In The Sahara: How The Global Cocaine Trade Is Funding North African Jihad," *International Business Times*, June 5, 2015, <http://www.ibtimes.com/drugs-money-sahara-how-global-cocaine-trade-funding-north-african-jihad-1953419>.

⁶ Jamie Doward, "How Cigarette Smuggling Fuels Africa's Islamist Violence," *The Guardian*, January 26, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jan/27/cigarette-smuggling-mokhtar-belmokhtar-terrorism>.

⁷ Lagatta et al, "Algeria's Underused Potential in Security Cooperation in the Sahel Region," *Directorate-General for External Policies of the European Parliament*.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Morgan Lorraine Roach and Jessica Zuckerman, "MANPADS on the Loose: Countering Weapons Proliferation in North Africa and the Sahel," *The Heritage Foundation*, November 5, 2012, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/11/manpads-countering-weapons-proliferation-in-north-africa-and-the-sahel>.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Yasmine Ryan, "Why the West is Backing Bouteflika," *Middle East Eye*, April 15, 2014, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/why-west-backing-bouteflika-1680893085>.

networks controlled by terrorists. This poses a significant threat not only to North African security, but to international aviation as well.

AQIM emerged from a period of relative restraint and increased the tempo of its operations in the summer of 2015, shattering the popular notion that it was on its last leg. In March 2016, AQIM claimed attacks in four different countries in less than a week, an impressive feat designed to display the group's organizational capabilities.¹² On March 19, AQIM conducted a rocket attack on an Algerian gas plant near Saleh in an attempt to target Western oil companies. It is possible that the group's recent uptick in attacks in Algeria is related to the worsening health of President Bouteflika—like a vulture, AQIM is circling a weakening target. However, AQIM's overall increase in operational tempo in North Africa is at least partly due to its rivalry with ISIS, and this should raise alarm bells.

The AQIM-ISIS rivalry is a dangerous dynamic that could lead to increased violence and more audacious attacks in the region. The inherent danger to regional security posed by two well-financed extremist groups attempting to outdo one another's use of violence should be obvious. AQIM is engaged in a textbook example of 'outbidding,' where one terrorist group uses increased violence to convince the public that it is stronger and more committed to the cause than other groups.¹³ It is not surprising that AQIM is feeling pressure to outperform ISIS, given the latter's rapid expansion into North Africa—AQIM understandably fears losing members or supporters to its more brutal and showy rival, and wants to demonstrate that it is more worthy of support than ISIS. As terrorism experts Barbara Walter and Andrew Kydd make clear, extremist groups are likely to be rewarded for being more militant, not less.¹⁴ It is therefore likely that ISIS will respond to this challenge with increased violence and demonstrations of its trademark shocking brutality.

ISIS has further inflamed tensions with AQIM by 'stealing' smaller groups from AQIM's umbrella. ISIS has managed to poach extremists from AQIM even in Algeria, AQIM's birthplace. For example, an Algerian group called *Jund al-Khilafah* (Soldiers of the Caliphate), switched allegiances from AQIM to ISIS in September 2014.¹⁵ ISIS's skill in recruitment of individuals and smaller extremist groups should not be underestimated. A significant number of new ISIS fighters are militants from non-ISIS affiliated Sunni groups in Libya that have decided to switch teams.¹⁶ This is significant because it emphasizes the ability of ISIS to penetrate into unfamiliar territory, establish a foothold, and rapidly dominate the jihadi environment.

Furthermore, ISIS has demonstrated a clear interest in expanding its reach in North Africa beyond its stronghold in Libya. According to the Institute for the Study of War, 'tyrannical expansion' is central to ISIS's global strategy of seizing control of destabilized countries while engaging in "all-out battle against the West."¹⁷ ISIS currently has a strong grip in northern Libya, northeast Nigeria, the western mountains of Tunisia, and parts of Egypt. While

¹² Caleb Weiss, "AQIM Claims Attack on Algerian Gas Plant," *Long War Journal*, March 19, 2016, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/03/aqim-claims-attack-on-algerian-gas-plant.php>.

¹³ Andrew Kydd and Barbara Walter, "The Strategies of Terrorism," *International Security* 31 no. 1 (summer 2006), 51.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹⁵ Jay Akbar, "The Terrifying Rise of ISIS," *The Daily Mail*, March 2, 2015, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2960463/The-terrifying-rise-ISIS-Map-shows-terror-group-s-tentacles-reach-Algeria-Afghanistan.html>.

¹⁶ Kellan Howell, "Top US General: ISIS Doubled Presence in Libya," *Washington Times*, April 7, 2016, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/apr/7/david-rodriquez-top-us-general-isis-doubled-presen/>.

¹⁷ Akbar, "The Terrifying Rise of ISIS," *The Daily Mail*.

ISIS is currently relatively weak in Algeria, it is not likely to remain weak for long.¹⁸ Recent months have shown indications that ISIS is attempting to strengthen its position in Algeria. For example, ISIS recently established lines of communication between its *wilayat* (governorate) in Libya and jihadist groups in Algeria and Tunisia.¹⁹ Additionally, on March 11, 2016, Algerian security forces discovered a tunnel crossing under the Algerian-Libyan border in Ghadames. They also found a large store of weapons (including MANPADS suspected to be from Gaddafi's stockpile) in northeast Algeria. According to analysis produced by the Institute for the Study of War, both of these discoveries indicate material assistance to Algerian-based local jihadist groups from ISIS's Libyan *wilayat*.²⁰

It is likely that North Africa will experience an influx of jihadists in the coming months as ISIS loses territory in Iraq and Syria. In April 2016, President Obama warned that ISIS fighters are increasingly heading to North Africa following the setbacks the militant group has suffered in Iraq and Syria.²¹ The commander of US Africa Command has confirmed that ISIS has doubled its presence in Libya over the past 12-18 months.²² According to the commander, the number of ISIS fighters in the country currently stands between 4,000 and 6,000. Many of these fighters are coming from other countries in northern Africa, but some are being sent from the Iraq and Syria theatre. In the past year or so, ISIS has sent its top religious and military officials to Libya—a clear signal that Libya and the wider North Africa theatre are becoming more important to the group.²³

Except for its border with Morocco, Algeria is encircled by safe havens for jihadist activity. AQIM is resurging in northern Mali after temporarily being beaten back by the French intervention. Southern Libya is “basically ungoverned space,” in the words of one analyst.²⁴ The western mountains of Tunisia that border Algeria have also become a safe haven for jihadist activity. Sahelian smuggling networks that run from northern Nigeria through Niger to Algeria make possible the movement of weapons and fighters into Algeria. Therefore, while Nigeria does not border Algeria, the instability in northeast Nigeria caused by the vicious Boko Haram insurgency does pose a threat to Algerian security. This threat is especially pertinent given the recent US military reports of greater collaboration between Boko Haram and ISIS.²⁵

The significant threats posed by jihadist groups in North Africa have pushed Algeria to take on a leading role in regional security and counterterrorism initiatives. The next section will examine the strategic value Algeria provides to buttressing regional security cooperation and how its relations with the West have improved due to the need for mutual security coordination.

¹⁸ Author's private conversation with Nathaniel Barr, a threat analyst at Valens Global, on April 20, 2016.

¹⁹ Harleen Gambhir, “ISIS's Regional Campaign: March 2016,” *Institute for the Study of War*, April 1, 2016, http://understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/ISIS%27s%20Regional%20Campaign%20MAR2016-01_23.png.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ “Obama Warns of IS Focus on Libya After Iraq and Syria Setbacks,” *The BBC*.

²² Howell, “Top US General: ISIS Doubled Presence in Libya,” *Washington Times*.

²³ Conversation with Nathaniel Barr, Valens Global, April 20, 2016.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Helene Cooper, “Boko Haram and ISIS are Collaborating More, US Military Says,” *New York Times*, April 20, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/21/world/africa/boko-haram-and-isis-are-collaborating-more-us-military-says.html?_r=0.

Algeria's Strategic Value in Regional Security and Counterterrorism

Algeria has historically been inward looking and uninterested in assuming an assertive role in North African security issues. However, over the past several years, Algeria has played an increasingly significant role in regional counterterrorism and security initiatives, earning it the title of North Africa's 'reluctant policeman.'²⁶ Algeria's reluctance was partly due to the attention its own domestic security issues demanded, as it had to contend with a violent insurgency in the 1990s and then guide the post-conflict transition to peace. It can also be attributed to the deep suspicion with which Algeria has historically regarded its neighbors, particularly Morocco (and to a lesser extent Mali). However, as demonstrated in the previous section, the pernicious and globalized threat of violent nonstate actors has forced the Algerian regime to actively engage in security cooperation with both its neighbors and Western countries.

Algeria is one of the best-equipped countries in North Africa and the Sahel to combat the violent Islamic extremism destabilizing the region. The country possesses one of the largest militaries in Africa and its vast oil wealth has permitted heavy spending on security. Algeria's credentials in combating Islamist terrorism are ironclad: the country survived over a decade of a vicious Islamist insurgency. Subsequently, it has probably the most experienced and skilled counterterrorism forces in the region.

Since its emergence as a major player in regional security, Algeria has been hailed as a 'critical bulwark' against the virulent jihadist movements in the region.²⁷ The regime has demonstrated a willingness to spearhead regional security initiatives and to offer training to its neighbors. For example, in 2010 Algeria hosted the inaugural meeting of a Joint Military Command consisting of Algeria, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger.²⁸ A 'Central Intelligence Cell' was also created to facilitate information sharing and increase coordination on security matters between the countries. In June 2011, Special Forces from Algeria, Mali, and Niger conducted their first joint exercises in the border region between the three countries. In December 2011, Algeria sent its superior military instructors to Mali for the first time to train and assist Malian security forces.

In addition to spearheading interstate military cooperation, Algeria has emerged as an "indispensable broker of stability" in the region.²⁹ In 2014, Algeria hosted and brokered talks between the Mali government and secessionist rebels. Algiers was widely praised for engineering the Accord of Peace and Reconciliation between the warring parties in Mali.³⁰ In Libya, the Algerian government supported United Nations negotiations and conducted its own

²⁶ Imad Mesdoua, "Algeria: North Africa's Reluctant Policeman," *The National Interest*, September 29, 2014, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/algeria-north-africa%E2%80%99s-reluctant-policeman-11364>.

²⁷ Carlotta Gall, "Who Runs Algeria? Many Doubt It's Ailing President Abdelaziz Bouteflika," *New York Times*, December 23, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/24/world/africa/suspicious-mount-that-ailing-president-abdelaziz-bouteflika-is-no-longer-running-algeria.html?_r=0.

²⁸ Laurence Aida Ammour, "Regional Security Cooperation in the Maghreb and Sahel: Algeria's Pivotal Ambivalence," *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*, February 2012, <http://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/archives/asb/ASB-18.pdf>.

²⁹ "Algeria and Its Neighbours," *International Crisis Group*, October 12, 2015, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/algeria/164-algeria-and-its-neighbours.aspx>.

³⁰ Marvine Howe, "Algeria Emerges From Obscurity as a Leading Mediator in War on Terrorism," *The Washington Report on Middle Eastern Affairs* 34 no. 6, September 2015.

behind-the-scenes diplomacy to bring warring factions to the table. Algeria has also played an understated but crucial role in supporting the peaceful power transition in Tunisia.³¹

Algeria has increased its engagement on security issues with Europe since the onset of regional upheaval in 2011. The European Union (EU) has increased attention and resources towards strengthening relations with Algeria over the past five years, spurred by the crisis in Mali and fears of increased migration to Europe through Algeria. Algeria is both a source and a transit country for migrants headed to Europe, and the EU wants to ensure cooperation of the Algerian government in managing migration.³² In addition, 20% of the EU's gas imports come from Algeria, giving the EU a strong economic incentive to work with Algeria to improve its security and stability.³³ At the second meeting of the Algeria-United Kingdom Counterterrorism Cooperation Committee in 2010, the head of the European Security Programme stated that the UK “has to develop sound partnerships with the best equipped countries in the field, like Algeria.”³⁴

The United States-Algeria strategic relationship has grown since September 11, 2001. In 2001, President Bouteflika visited President George W. Bush to offer counterterrorism expertise learned from Algeria's own experience with Islamist extremism.³⁵ In 2006, Donald Rumsfeld made the first visit by a sitting Secretary of Defense to Algeria to emphasize the strength of the ties. “We share intelligence. We cooperate in exercises,” Rumsfeld boasted of the relationship.³⁶ Working with strong partners on regional security is a fundamental tenet of the Obama administration's overall strategic approach to national security.³⁷ Algeria is a key partner in the United States' Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership interagency plan to combat extremism in the region. Algeria also hosted the International Conference on Deradicalization in July 2015 for 50 countries and international organizations.

Algeria has clearly emerged as a leader in counterterrorism and security cooperation in North Africa and the Sahel, and there is potential for the country to continue to grow into this role. However, Algeria's closed political system and internal methods of control make it a difficult partner for the West. Algeria is undeniably a police state that uses repression and fear to control its population. Some analysts have dubbed Algeria the “Pakistan of North Africa,” implying it is a somewhat distasteful partner the United States is forced to work with due to its geostrategic importance.³⁸

While Algeria is a multi-party democracy in name, the same president has been in power since 1999 and the past presidential elections were marred by credible accusations of fraud. The United States and other Western countries have begrudgingly worked with and supported the Bouteflika regime, as they have done in the past with numerous secular *de facto* Arab dictatorships in the name of security. However, the Arab Spring is a cautionary tale of seemingly

³¹ Youssef Cherif, “Tunisia's Foreign Policy: A Delicate Balance,” *The Atlantic Council*, March 23, 2015, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/tunisia-s-foreign-policy-a-delicate-balance>.

³² Susi Dennison, “The EU, Algeria, and the Northern Mali Question,” *European Council on Foreign Relations*, December 2012, http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR69_ALGERIA_MEMO_AW.pdf.

³³ “Algeria Country Update,” *European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity*, January 21, 2016, <http://www.europeanforum.net/country/algeria>.

³⁴ “Counter-terrorism: Algeria, Important partner for UK,” *Algeria Press Service*, November 29, 2010.

³⁵ Yasmine Ryan, “Why the West is Backing Bouteflika,” *Middle East Eye*.

³⁶ “In Algeria, Rumsfeld Welcomes Counter-Terrorism Cooperation,” *Voice of America*, February 12, 2006.

³⁷ Remarks by the President at the National Defense University, May 23, 2013, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/05/23/remarks-president-national-defense-university>.

³⁸ Kamal Daoud, “The Algerian Exception,” *New York Times*, May 29, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/30/opinion/the-algerian-exception.html>.

stable authoritarian regimes imploding from within and altering the regional security landscape. The West should therefore take seriously the multiple indicators of domestic instability in Algeria, as they cast doubt over the country's future ability to continue filling the role of 'regional policeman.' As such, the next section will examine the vulnerability of Algeria to political instability in light of recent economic, political, and security developments in the country.

Risk of Domestic Instability in Algeria

Algeria is one of the few Arab countries that have managed to essentially sidestep the Arab Spring. In a region beset by turmoil and change, Algeria has earned a reputation for being stable—an 'exception' to the Arab Spring. This stability has made it an attractive security partner for the West, as demonstrated in the previous section. However, recent developments have exposed the fragmented nature of Algerian politics and cast doubt on the potential for a smooth transition of power following the death of the ailing President Bouteflika.

This section will demonstrate that the risk of instability in Algeria is growing due to several key risk factors. These factors include growing public dissatisfaction with limited political reform, the increasing inability of the government to subsidize public submission, the worsening health of the president, and elite infighting. Public discontent that has been simmering for years coupled with recent economic and political developments could provide the opportunity for unrest in the country. In the words of one analyst, "the Algerian exception cannot last much longer."³⁹

Algeria is a democracy in name only. In reality, Algeria is an authoritarian rentier state relying on a combination of repressive policies and oil wealth-financed subsidies to appease the population. The government employs a large internal security apparatus to maintain public order, and keeps tight control of the domestic media.⁴⁰ Foreign media access is restricted, as is tourism. Although the country has a multi-party political system, political opposition is stifled. President Bouteflika is currently in the middle of his fourth five-year term, after modifying the Algerian Constitution to remove presidential term limits.

Algeria's economy and political system revolve around its vast hydrocarbon reserves. Algeria has the tenth-largest reserves of natural gas in the world, and oil and gas compose over 95% of Algeria's export earnings.⁴¹ The Algerian regime uses oil wealth to 'buy' support from key sectors and institutions. Instead of using oil money to fund development or diversify the economy, the government has used it to "turn citizens into clients."⁴² Because the government does not need to tax the population to raise revenue, it has no incentive to develop "a genuine political and social relationship" with the public.⁴³

Political reforms enacted by the regime in the wake of the Arab Spring were more of a stopgap than a serious attempt at political liberalization. Various social and political liberties continue to be repressed, and there is little opportunity to voice concerns to elected officials. Algerians, especially young Algerians, continue to feel politically disenfranchised. High levels of

³⁹ Daoud, "The Algerian Exception," *New York Times*, May 29, 2015.

⁴⁰ Claire Spencer, "Algeria: North Africa's Exception?" *Chatham House*, August 30, 2011, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/media/comment/view/177887#sthash.b4WB17fj.dpuf>.

⁴¹ "Algeria," *CIA World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ag.html>.

⁴² Daoud, "The Algerian Exception," *New York Times*, May 29, 2015.

⁴³ John Philips and Martin Evans, *Algeria: Anger of the Dispossessed*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 297.

corruption mark the government and economy.⁴⁴ The ethnic Berber community, which composes at least 15% of the population, is constantly and systematically marginalized. There is frustration with the current regime, but there is also deep disillusionment with the Algerian political system as a whole: what is the point of voting or pursuing change democratically in a *de facto* authoritarian state when the president can arbitrarily change the constitution to suit his own agenda? Algeria's younger generations are skeptical of political processes as an avenue for change,⁴⁵ which increases the possibility that frustrated youth will turn to other methods of pursuing change.

Low oil prices have recently caused the government to tighten its belt and cut government spending, further fueling public discontent. Algeria's public budget for 2016 calls for a 9% cut in expenditure, a 36% hike in gas prices, and higher taxes on electricity and car registrations.⁴⁶ These austerity measures exacerbate the already strained economic situations of many Algerian citizens. Algeria's economic system is marked by inequality and offers no future for many Algerians. Oil wealth does not trickle down to the average citizen, which is demonstrated by high unemployment, a long-term housing crisis, and a lack of development of public infrastructure. Since 2011, over 150 Algerian citizens have expressed their desperation over their economic situation via self-immolation.⁴⁷

The deteriorating condition of President Bouteflika is the most immediate risk factor. The widely held expectation is that Bouteflika will not survive his current term in office, which is scheduled to end in 2019. During the 2014 presidential election campaign, Bouteflika did not appear in public once.⁴⁸ He is almost eighty and has had two strokes in the past few years, causing some observers to wonder whether he is still fully in control of the country. His worsening health has clearly caused frantic maneuvering by various political actors attempting to consolidate power in preparation for the transition. Because there is no clear succession plan and numerous strong actors within the political and military elite, it is likely the situation will devolve into elite infighting.

Algeria has long been run by a political and military 'collective' known as *Le Pouvoir* (the power) that may be breaking apart, with serious implications for stability in the country.⁴⁹ Algeria's political system has been characterized as incredibly complex and "highly fragmented," with various individuals and institutions engaged in a constant process of bargaining.⁵⁰ For example, Bouteflika has managed to remain in power for so long by developing "tactical alliances" with influential individuals in the military and intelligence services.⁵¹ The military has been a major power broker since Algerian independence and used the 1990s civil

⁴⁴ "Country Report Algeria," *Verisk Maplecroft*, <https://www.maplecroft.com/about/news/country-risk-reports-algeria-april9.html>.

⁴⁵ "Algeria Summary," *National Democratic Institute*, <https://www.ndi.org/algeria>.

⁴⁶ "Algeria Overview," *The World Bank*, March 31, 2016, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/algeria/overview>.

⁴⁷ "Self-Immolation in Algeria Highlights Housing Crisis," *Middle East Eye*, February 12, 2015, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/self-immolation-algeria-highlights-housing-crisis-1849393264#sthash.QyWaG3GU.dpuf>.

⁴⁸ Daoud, "The Algerian Exception," *New York Times*, May 29, 2015.

⁴⁹ Gall, "Who Runs Algeria? Many Doubt It's Ailing President Abdelaziz Bouteflika," *New York Times*, December 23, 2015.

⁵⁰ Anna Jacobs, "Politics in Algeria Is About More than Just Who's President," *Muftah*, November 12, 2014, <http://muftah.org/politics-algeria-just-whos-president/#.VxOIJyMrI6U>.

⁵¹ Riccardo Fabiani, "The Changing Nature of the Algerian Political System and the Illusion of a Civilian Regime," *Jadaliyya*, August 6, 2015, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/22347/the-changing-nature-of-the-algerian-political-syst>.

war to amass even more power. Many observers of Algerian politics believe that the military and civilian regime ‘share’ power, in the sense that major decisions are not reached without the approval of military leaders.

However, there are recent indications that this delicate balance of power between the military and the civilian elite is unraveling. Bouteflika’s worsening health seems to have spurred his ‘inner circle’ to begin neutralizing potential threats in preparation for the transition. In 2014, this inner circle executed a shocking large-scale purge of the military and intelligence services. Officials deemed too powerful or ‘unsympathetic’ to the regime were removed and replaced by individuals loyal to the ruling clique.⁵² Some high-ranking generals were arrested, including the deputy head of the intelligence service responsible for counterterrorism. The most stunning development was the ‘retirement’ of Mohamed Mediene, who has served as the shadowy chief of intelligence since 1990. It is widely believed the inner circle fired him out of fear he would become a challenger for power or attempt to control the selection of the next president after Bouteflika’s death. “The recent moves could create dangerous confrontations in the country,” warned the editor of *el-Watan*, one of Algeria’s few independent newspapers.⁵³ These political shakeups show cracks in *Le Pouvoir*’s foundation and should raise concerns about near-term instability.

Alienating powerful and well-connected members of the military and intelligence service heightens the potential for conflict. In the post-Bouteflika transition period, these individuals may attempt to regain influence. The marginalization of Mediene is especially concerning. He known as “the faceless god of Algeria,” an allusion to the significant power he enjoys and the mystery that surrounds him (only two blurry photographs of him are known to exist, and he is rumored to receive visitors with his back turned).⁵⁴ A common Algerian saying is that the real president is not Bouteflika, but General Mediene.⁵⁵ Mediene led the intelligence service during the civil war, and it is likely he developed an extensive network with some unsavory actors, including Islamist extremists, during this time. He is perhaps the most dangerous man in the country, and Bouteflika’s inner circle has now given him an axe to grind.

Additionally, the relationships between important institutions responsible for internal security are showing signs of strain. Over the past few years, an “unprecedented tension” between the police force and the government has developed.⁵⁶ In October 2014, more than a thousand policemen staged a sit-in outside President Bouteflika’s office in Algiers.⁵⁷ The dissatisfaction of the internal security force is a significant indicator, because this institution is responsible for managing expressions of public discontent and keeping order. If the government is alienating the internal security force, individual officers or the institution as a whole might become more sympathetic to protestors and less likely to uphold the repressive state if widespread protests did break out.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Rana Jawad, “Behind The Ousting of Algeria’s Secretive Spy Chief, ‘General Toufik,’” *The BBC*, September 16, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-34268565>.

⁵⁴ Pooja Bhatia, “Mohamed Lamine Mediene, The Faceless God of Algeria,” *Ozy*, October 24, 2013, <http://www.ozy.com/provocateurs/mohamed-lamine-mediene-the-faceless-god-of-algeria/3294>.

⁵⁵ John Philips and Martin Evans, *Algeria: Anger of the Dispossessed*, 295.

⁵⁶ Howe, “Algeria Emerges From Obscurity as a Leading Mediator in War on Terrorism,” *The Washington Report on Middle Eastern Affairs*.

⁵⁷ Lamine Chikhi, “Algerian Police Stage Sit-In Outside President’s Office,” *Reuters*, October 15, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-algeria-security-idUSKCN0I410820141015>.

There has been low-level, widespread public discontent for years in Algeria, but the regime was strong, cohesive, and able to easily suppress demonstrations. However, there are clear indications that *Le Pouvoir* is fracturing and the regime is losing its iron grip on society amidst rising public discontent. Recent political and economic developments in the country heighten the risk of domestic instability, which has obvious implications for Algeria's ability to meet the jihadist threat and continue playing a lead role in regional security.

Conclusion: Implications and Recommendations

This paper has demonstrated some key risks to future Algerian stability in the near term: threats posed by jihadist groups and threats posed by Algeria's own fracturing regime. As discussed, Algeria is the linchpin of regional security efforts and is a crucial partner for the West. If Algeria falters, this will likely have serious repercussions for regional stability as well as European national and economic security. Losing Algeria as a strong and reliable partner would also be a blow to the United States' strategic approach in the region, which relies heavily on a strong Algeria to lead regional security efforts. As previously discussed, this is largely due to Algeria's large military, high military spending, and past experience fighting Islamist insurgencies.

Algeria's growing internal discord and elite infighting are already having a negative impact on Algeria's ability to conduct counterterrorism. The purges of high-level security officials were dangerous and shortsighted, as it likely provided an opportunity for jihadists to exploit a weakened Algerian security apparatus. Some of these officials, like Mediène, who ran the intelligence services for 25 years, have essentially built the country's counterterrorism capabilities up from the ground. Removing the officials with the most experience in counterterrorism will likely have serious implications for the country's counterterrorism abilities and institutional knowledge.

Instability or civil conflict in Algeria would have grave implications for the entire region, but the country that would be most negatively affected is Tunisia. Tunisia is among the most strategically important countries in the global fight against extremism and is critical to the West's hopes that an Arab country can peacefully transition to democracy and serve as a model in the Middle East. However, Tunisia is struggling with domestic terrorism and is the number one contributor of foreign fighters to ISIS. Algeria has thus far played an important role for the newly democratic Tunisia, offering counterterrorism training and advice and working to secure their mutual border.

If Algeria becomes embroiled in its own transition problems, it would not be able to continue playing a constructive role in Tunisian security affairs. To imagine a graver potential scenario, if Algeria was to experience elite conflict or domestic insurgency reared its ugly head again, Tunisian security would be compromised. The Mount Chambi region of Tunisia is already a terrorist safe zone, and Tunisia currently relies on Algerian security assistance in handling that threat. The potential scenario of relatively tiny Tunisia sandwiched between two massive countries (Libya and Algeria) that are unable to prevent use of their territory by terrorists or secure their borders with Tunisia is sobering.

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to present a comprehensive strategic approach for the United States in North Africa, some important recommendations for how the United States can mitigate regional instability can be drawn from this risk assessment. Firstly, greater attention must be paid to the use of illicit transnational networks by North African jihadist

groups. There is a lot of room for improvement in how the West and its regional security partners perceive and approach this problem. For example, regional law enforcement continues to be very weak, partly because Western security assistance is focused on regional militaries and counterterrorism agencies, not law enforcement. There is still a lack of understanding of how crucial contraband smuggling is to terrorist financing in North Africa, and therefore the issue does not receive adequate resources.⁵⁸

Most importantly, it is a national security imperative for the US and other Western countries to recognize the potential for conflict in the post-Bouteflika transition period and take steps to mitigate its effects. The US should use the leverage it has with Algeria as a provider of security assistance to pressure the Algerian government to democratize at the elite level and to support democratic movements at the grassroots level.⁵⁹ Because moderate opposition parties have been repressed since the establishment of Algerian democracy, the development of a vibrant civil society or political opposition will not happen overnight. Of course, US efforts to support and encourage democracy in Algeria at the elite or grassroots level are not a panacea. However, increasing funding to nongovernmental institutions with the capacity to strengthen democratic institutions and independent media in Algeria is a concrete step that can be taken. This argument is similar to one that has been made in respect to supporting Tunisia's transition—there should be less money and attention directed towards the military, and more towards building democratic institutions. The West also needs to encourage and incentivize Algeria to diversify its economy, ease restrictions on imports and foreign investment, and allow privatization of state-owned industries. The economy and the political system are dangerously dependent on the flagging hydrocarbon industry.

This risk assessment has been an exercise in analyzing potential 'hazards' to Algerian stability, examining the potential repercussions to regional security of an unstable Algeria, and offering a few recommendations for mitigating the likelihood of instability. This analysis has found that the threats posed by jihadist groups operating in North Africa are growing and these groups have the ability and desire to exploit an unstable Algeria. The likelihood of domestic instability in Algeria in the near term is high, due to elite infighting and the alienation of powerful figures amidst rising public discontent and economic strain. The United States should therefore alter its regional strategic approach in order to place more emphasis on promoting internal stability in Algeria and ensuring that the upcoming power transition in the country does not result in a situation that could jeopardize Algeria's invaluable role as a regional security guarantor.

About the Author

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⁵⁸ Doward, "How Cigarette Smuggling Fuels Africa's Islamist Violence," *The Guardian*.

⁵⁹ "US Relations With Algeria," *US Department of State*, May 8, 2014, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/8005.htm>.

INTELLIGENCE-POLICY RELATIONS IN THE 2014 UKRAINE CRISIS: FLAWED FORESIGHT OR NEGLECT?

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While there is a large body of literature about the civil-military relationship, not as much is written about the civil-intelligence relationship. However, intelligence is just as critical to the exercise of national power by orienting action and reducing ambiguity to allow the United States to seize opportunities and reduce threats. The intelligence-policy relationship is the link between accurate strategic intelligence and astute policymaker action. Intelligence, however, is not always prescient, and policymakers are not always incentivized to listen. While the Ukraine Crisis (2014) is an incomplete narrative, it demonstrates several dynamics in the intelligence-policy relationship, namely accurate but flawed strategic assessments, potential analytic biases, pre-committed policymakers, and limited outcomes. While the US interest in action is debatable, the intelligence-policy relationship undoubtedly influenced policymaker perceptions and outcomes for the United States.

After Russia's 2014 intervention in Ukraine, US lawmakers were livid about the US Intelligence Community's (IC) failure to anticipate Russia's aggression. Senator Saxby Chambliss (R-GA) of the Senate Intelligence Committee argued that whether it was, "a lack of intelligence gathering or whether there were some signs that analysts just didn't see [...] it's pretty clear that there was no indication that this was coming."¹ Representative Peter King (R-NY) of the House Intelligence Committee agreed that, "from everything I've seen, this was not anticipated," and President Obama's administration, "had been taken off guard."² Senator John McCain (R-AZ) was most blunt in his assessment that, "it's very clear that this whole operation took this administration and the intelligence community by surprise, but it shouldn't have."³ In contrast to Republican lawmakers, several intelligence representatives later argued the IC provided an, "accurate and timely picture of the unfolding crisis."⁴ On the surface, these claims are mutually exclusive, but a closer analysis of the US's policy-intelligence relationship demonstrates that both arguments have truthful elements.

How did intelligence accuracy or the policy-intelligence relationship affect US action in the Ukraine Crisis (from February-April 2014)? While many long-term intelligence assessments accurately described the dynamics for intervention, they lacked the specificity necessary to motivate policymakers' actions. Likewise, committed policymakers may have been unreceptive to the early assessments that Russia would pursue aggressive policies in its periphery. In the final days before intervention, accurate intelligence assessments did motivate policymaker action, but only mobilized limited US national power. Section 1 describes the conflict's dynamics that bear on intelligence assessments and subsequent US policy action. Section 2 assesses the intelligence provided to policymakers based on criteria for quality strategic intelligence. It also seeks to characterize cognitive bias that may have contributed to analytic shortcomings. Section 3 identifies the policymaker commitments that may have limited receptiveness to initial intelligence warnings. Section 4 discusses the Ukraine Crisis' implications for the greater policy-intelligence relationship.

Section 1: Ukraine Crisis Background

Russia's enduring interest in Ukraine, Vladimir Putin's nationalist aspirations, and Ukraine's own divisions were the most significant factors in the Ukraine crisis. Collectively, these factors indicated that Ukraine's lurch toward western integration would draw Russian 'negative policy' to maintain its strategic influence. While some factors undermined the chance of military intervention, there was little to eliminate the possibility.

After Yanukovich's ouster in February 2014, Russia began an unconventional warfare (UW) campaign in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. The proximate cause for the turmoil was the Euromaidan protests that began on November 21, 2013, after Yanukovich suspended EU Association Agreement (AA) talks with the EU. As protests intensified, Crimean officials made

¹ Senator Chambliss in Burgess Everett, "Why didn't the US know sooner?" (*Politico*, 3/5/14), available at: <http://www.politico.com/story/2014/03/unitedstatesbarackobamaukrainecrimearussiavladimirputin104264>

² Rep King in *Ibid*.

³ Sen McCain in Josh Rogin, "Exclusive: John McCain tells Obama How to Punish Putin" (*The Daily Beast*, 3/1/14), available at: <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/03/01/exclusive-mccain-tells-obama-how-to-punish-putin.html>

⁴ Todd Ebitz, CIA spokesman, in Mark Hosenball, "Ukraine Crisis: CIA, not Pentagon, forecast Russian moves—sources" (*Reuters*, 5/3/14), available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-intelligence-idUSBREA242I720140305>

pro-separatist gestures such as asking the Russian Presidium to annul Crimea's 1954 transfer to Ukraine and meeting with Russian Officials.⁵ After sizeable protests culminating in a bloody crackdown by state security forces in February 2014, Yanukovich fled to Russia. Russia mobilized along the Ukrainian border on February 26, and 'self-defense militias' supported by Russian *spetznaz* forces seized Crimean government buildings and airfields days later.⁶ By March 2, Russia's 'little green men' laid siege to Ukrainian Army garrisons, allowing Crimean leaders to hold a plebiscite and accede to the Russian Federation by the end of March.⁷ Less than a month later, Russian troops again backed revolts in Donetsk and Luhansk. During the next two years of conflict, Russia provided aid and military support to secure its interests, especially when separatists appeared on the edge of defeat (*See Figure 1 – Conflict Timeline*).⁸

Russia has a powerful strategic interest in Ukraine based on geopolitical advantage and historic security concerns. Geographic vulnerability and lessons from several land invasions influence Russia's aggressive strategy in its periphery.⁹ Since the Soviet Union's breakup, Russia has sought to ensure its security by maintaining influence over former satellite states like Ukraine. Russia has specific interests in Crimea, which provides strategic access to the Mediterranean through the Black Sea and a warm-water port.¹⁰ While other Russia port facilities exist, Sevastopol's Black Sea Fleet facility has the best regional location, size, and infrastructure.¹¹ These strategic considerations contributed to Russia's policy to incorporate Ukraine into its own Eurasian Union in the post-Soviet space. When Ukraine's 2004 Orange Revolution endangered this relationship by bringing pro-European Union Viktor Yushchenko to power, Vladimir Putin firmly condemned the protests alleging that CIA-controlled NGOs had instigated the unrest.¹² Later, when Euromaidan protests began over European integration, Putin offered Yanukovich \$15 billion in economic incentives to dissuade EU integration.¹³ Russia's strategic interests cause it to seek dominance over Ukraine with both positive and negative control policies.

Putin's nationalist brand also creates a powerful political attachment to Ukraine. Like many Russian officials, Putin has sought to redress the humiliation brought about by the Soviet Union's breakup. His first speech before the Duma as Prime Minister argued that, "Russia has been a great power for centuries and remains so. It has always had and still has legitimate zones

⁵ Peter Pomerantsev, "The Hidden Author of Putinism" (*The Atlantic*, 7/11/2014), available at:

<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/11/hiddenauthorputinismrussiavladsavsurkov/382489/>

⁶ IISS, "The Military Balance: Annual Assessment of Global Military Capabilities and Defence Economics" (IISS, 2015), 159-206.

⁷ Maksymilian Czuperski, John Herbst, Eliot Higgins et al, "Hiding in Plain Sight: Putin's War in Ukraine" (*The Atlantic Council*, 2015).

⁸ Maksymilian Czuperski, John Herbst, Eliot Higgins et al, "Hiding in Plain Sight: Putin's War in Ukraine" (*The Atlantic Council*, 2015).

⁹ Stratfor, "The Geopolitics of Russia: Perminant Struggle" (*Stratfor Analysis*, 4/15/2012), available at: <https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/geopolitics-russia-permanent-struggle>

¹⁰ Josh Cohen, "Will Putin Seize Crimea?" (*The Moscow Times*, 2/24/2014), available at: <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/opinion/article/willputinseizecrimea/495074.html>

¹¹ Steven Beardsley, "Analysts: Black Sea port in Ukraine still key to Russia's naval interests" (*Stars and Stripes*, 3/4/2014), available at: <http://www.stripes.com/news/analysts-black-sea-port-in-ukraine-still-key-to-russia-s-naval-interests-1.270904>

¹² George Friedman, "Perspectives on the Ukranian Protests" (*Stratfor*, 1/28/14), available at: <https://www.stratfor.com/weekly/perspectivesukrainianprotests>

¹³ Shaun Walker, "Vladimir Putin offers Ukraine Financial Incentives to Stick with Russia." (*The Guardian*, 18/12/13), available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/17/ukraine-russia-leaders-talks-kremlin-loan-deal>

of interest...we should not drop our guard in this respect, neither should we allow our opinion to be ignored,”¹⁴ Putin’s ability to advocate for Russian special status is a popular domestically and supports Putin’s high approval rating despite economic decline. Specifically in Crimea, many Russian officials cite the 1954 transfer to Ukraine as a historic mistake. An additional consideration in the case of Crimea is the 60% majority ethnic Russian population as the result of Soviet population transfer and pension policies.¹⁵ Russian nationalism—encompassed in an expansionist *novorussiya*—underpins the ideological justification for Russian interventionism and the legitimacy of Russian leaders seeking to restore Russian greatness through dominance in its periphery.

Ukraine’s own divisions over integration with the EU increased the chance for political chaos that could threaten Russian interests. The EU integration question is highly divisive in Ukrainian society along regional lines. The 2010 presidential election split the ethnically Russian east—overwhelmingly supportive of Yanukovich—and the ethnic Ukrainian west, which voted for opposition parties.¹⁶ Crimea’s ethnic composition and deep economic reliance on the Russian military strongly places it within the eastern half of Ukraine that identifies with Russian leadership. During earlier protests in 2009, the Deputy Speaker for the Crimean Parliament publically wished for Russia protection, “like [in] South Ossetia and Abkhazia,” referring to formerly Georgian territories now under Russian control. Further, with a high level of corruption and elite competition, the east-west split is difficult to resolve within the Ukrainian political system. Ultimately, the inability to resolve these divisions heightened eastern status concerns and resulted in political chaos around European integration.

While some factors reduced the possibility of Russian intervention in Ukraine, there was little to eliminate it outright. Shortly before the intervention, the Carnegie Moscow Center’s director argued that Russia had not instigated Ukrainian state violence against protestors and would gain little from a military intervention as it seeks to attract other post-Soviet states into a closer union.¹⁷ Indeed, the factors driving Ukrainian political chaos were largely internal, with Yanukovich needing to retain support from the pro-Russian east in the upcoming election. Further, the Kremlin ordered Duma members to stay out of Ukraine in late 2013, and the Russian Ambassador was largely silent throughout the crisis.¹⁸ Russia also appeared to be in a stable strategic position, with a long-term military lease over its Crimean fleet facilities. Crimea itself was relatively remote from the political struggle in Kiev, with a semi-autonomous status and its own parliament. Despite these facts, Russia has demonstrated willingness to intervene militarily in the 1992 Moldovan civil war and the 2008 Russo-Georgian war. Further, Russia’s strategic and ideological interests in preventing Ukraine’s western alignment increased its tolerance for more drastic options if influence failed. Notwithstanding some Russian status quo behavior, Russian military intervention remained a viable option to ensure its strategic interests in Ukraine.

¹⁴ Vladimir Putin quoted in BBC, “Vladimir Putin: The Rebuilding of ‘Soviet’ Russia” (*BBC*, 3/28/2014), available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-26769481>

¹⁵ A subsequent census after Russian intervention indicated up to 65% ethnic Russians. See Andrei Tsygankov, “The Strong State in Russia: Development and Crisis” (Oxford University Press, 2014), 167-178.

¹⁶ New York Times, “Ukraine Crisis in Maps: A Visual Guide to the Continuing Conflict” (NYT, accessed on 4/19/2016), available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/02/27/world/europe/ukraine-divisions-crimea.html>

¹⁷ Dmetri Trenin, “Why Russia Won’t Interfere” (NYT, 2/23/2015), available at:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/24/opinion/why%C2%ADrussia%C2%ADwont%C2%ADinterfere.html>

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Section 2: Intelligence Quality

Did the US IC provide quality intelligence to decision makers in the Ukrainian Crisis? Answering this question depends on the definition of intelligence quality. Quality intelligence reduces ambiguity and uncertainty in the policymaker decision process by being accurate, timely, and relevant.¹⁹ While the IC did provide some measure of warning to policymakers, compelling assessments came too late for policymakers to influence events actively. Major assessments before the crisis, such as the IC's 2014 Worldwide Threat Assessment, did highlight Russian interests in former Soviet states and Ukrainian instability, but did not indicate a crisis was imminent. In late February, however, specific assessment indicating a possible Russian military intervention motivated some US policy action. Based on policymaker statements, unified assessments were clouded by a disagreement between the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), even as Russian *spetsnaz* seized government buildings in Crimea.²⁰ Aspects of cognitive bias, which led analysts to conclude that Russia would not undertake a drastic intervention, may have undermined intelligence quality.

While intelligence quality is a highly subjective term, generally, it should aid policymaker's decisions by reducing uncertainty, ambiguity, and providing information. Sherman Kent, former director for the CIA's Office of National Estimates, argued that high-level intelligence ultimately allows the United States to seize opportunities and reduce threats through positive policy or defensive-protective measures.²¹ As national strategy intends to advance US interest in a changing world, this argument suggests that accurate intelligence describes the current world and its future course. Additionally, as DCI Robert Gates advocated, intelligence ought to answer questions that are relevant to the policymaker. Sometimes the IC performs a 'library' function by providing analysis of classified and unclassified information for policymakers who are not necessarily subject matter experts on an issue. Other times, the IC must mobilize intelligence resources to collect information for a policymaker's strategic needs.²² The necessity for relevance also implies a timeliness factor since national power is slow to mobilize—especially when the national strategy requires popular support. However, multi-variable challenges in providing predictive analysis suggest that even quality intelligence can struggle to describe future events with complete certainty. As these collective attributes highlight, strategic intelligence's quality is more related to its effect on policy decision-making than its overall accuracy.

While the US IC provided some timely and accurate strategic warning about Russian interests and Ukrainian instability, it is unclear whether these warnings were specific enough to warrant policymaker action. One month prior to Russian intervention and two months into the Euromaidan Protests, Director of National Intelligence (DNI) James Clapper provided his 2014 Worldwide Threat Assessment (WTA) to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.²³ In it, he accurately described Russia's campaign to prevent Ukraine from signing the AA due to its

¹⁹ Joshua Rovner, "Fixing the Facts: National Security and the Politics of Intelligence" (Cornell University Press, 2011), 3.

²⁰ Mark Hosenball, "Ukraine crisis: CIA, not Pentagon, forecast Russian move – sources" (*Reuters*, 3/5/2014), available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/usukrainecrisisintelligenceidUSBREA2421720140305>

²¹ Sherman Kent, "Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy" (*Princeton University Press*, 1951) Ch 1-5

²² Sherman Kent calls this the 'current reportorial' function; see Sherman Kent, "Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy" (*Princeton University Press*, 1951) Ch 1-5.

²³ DNI James Clapper, "Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community" (*Office of the Director of National Intelligence*, 1/29/2014).

strategic interest in Eurasian integration. Further, he noted that Ukrainian political developments would continue to focus on the AA, with Yanukovich increasingly relying on coercion and extralegal means to ensure reelection. While this does not explicitly acknowledge regime overthrow as a possibility, it correctly predicts the violent methods Yanukovich employed to disperse the protests.²⁴ However, the assessment also indicates that Russia would prioritize its bilateral relationship with the United States, implicitly constraining its behavior. In contrast, the ODNI's 2013 assessment directly questions Russia's interest in the US bilateral relationship noting that, "Moscow is more likely to focus its foreign policy efforts on strengthening its influence over states of the former USSR."²⁵ Since the WTA is a public document, it could be argued that it does not accurately depict the IC's classified assessment of the situation. Nonetheless, the WTA depicts only minor changes to the Ukrainian government and Russian activity in the region. Importantly, these limited changes would be unlikely to produce a strong policymaker reaction or the mobilization of significant national resources.

Earlier IC judgments also correctly describe Russia's strategic inclinations and policy but discount the possibility for military intervention. A February 2007 report (CR 2007-1) by the DNI's National Intelligence Council (NIC) argued that Russia would continue to seek great power status, probably by using increasingly aggressive measures in its periphery.²⁶ Further, Russia's structural economic weakness, kleptocracy, and discomfort with instability would result in increasingly authoritarian tendencies and external aggression. However, the group concluded that 'hard soft power' would stop short of military force even in the near abroad, where it seeks to maintain dominance due to Putin's own recognition of Russian military weakness. This, of course, was one year prior to Russia's military intervention in Georgia. An earlier NIC product (CR 2001-02) also noted Russia, "...drives to re-subjugate, though not reintegrate, the other former Soviet Union States."²⁷ Further, CR 2001-02 identified Russia's increasing willingness to intervene in the internal affairs of its periphery. Both of these reports combine, without attribution, the views of some US IC analysts with outside experts and therefore do not represent the express view of the IC. However, they can approximate some sentiment that could have gone into other classified assessments. Both NIC reports demonstrate awareness of the dynamics that would shape Russia's military intervention in Ukraine even while discounting its likelihood. Neither the DNI official assessment nor unofficial analyst musings strongly indicate that Russia was likely to use military power to secure its interests in the near abroad.

In late February 2014, however, some agencies apparently provided specific warnings of Russian military intervention based on intelligence officials' statements. Classified assessments were probably provided throughout the Ukrainian uprising beginning in November 2013, through mechanisms such as the President's Daily Brief (PDB). A DNI spokesperson confirmed a specific assessment on February 26 concluded, "Crimea was a flashpoint for Russian-Ukraine

²⁴ Robert McMahon, "CFR Backgrounder: Ukraine in Crisis" (*Council on Foreign Relations*, 8/25/2014), available at: <http://www.cfr.org/ukraine/ukrainecrisis/>

²⁵ DNI James Clapper, "Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community" (*Office of the Director of National Intelligence*, 3/12/2013).

²⁶ Fiona Hill, NIO for Eurasian and Russia, "*The Putin Era in Historic Perspective*" (*National Intelligence Council*, February 2007), CR 2007-01.

²⁷ National Intelligence Council, "*Russia in the International System*" (*National Intelligence Council*, June 2001), CR 2001-02.

military conflict.”²⁸ Additionally, he argues, the IC produced reports throughout the crisis that the Russian military was preparing for contingency operations in Ukraine that could occur with little warning.²⁹ A CIA spokesperson also later stated intelligence assessment throughout the crisis included, “possible scenarios for a Russian Military intervention in Ukraine.”³⁰ While the specific warning may have only come one day prior to *speznaz* actions in Crimea (*See Figure 1*), assessments that Russian military intervention was increasingly likely were sufficient to provoke policymaker action.³¹

Policymakers’ strategic communication just prior to direct Russian intervention demonstrates that the IC’s warnings motivated some policy action. Several policymakers made last-minute attempts to deter Russia through strategic communications relaying that the US would oppose military intervention or Ukraine’s breakup. One week before Russian intervention, US President Barack Obama called Putin to express the United States’, “interest in a whole Ukraine.”³² Two days later, National Security Advisor Susan Rice gave an interview in which she warned that Russian military intervention “would be a grave mistake.”³³ The same day, Secretary of State John Kerry called Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov to express US support for Ukrainian territorial integrity and reiterate the gravity of violating Ukrainian sovereignty.³⁴ While most communication came immediately after Yanukovich’s ouster on February 22, policymaker warnings clearly show awareness that Russian military intervention was likely even before Russian snap military exercises took place. Indeed, several senior Obama administration officials later recalled that Russian intervention was not a surprise based on IC assessments.³⁵ Critically, some intelligence assessments fulfilled their function by allowing policymakers to mobilize national power with reduced uncertainty.

While some IC assessments accurately predicted Russian intervention weeks before the event, others were clearly wrong in their assessments. Even as large Russian mobilization took place on the Ukrainian border, DIA analysts maintained that military intervention would not occur.³⁶ In response to snap military exercises, two unnamed US military intelligence officials stated that Russia was only re-positioning military assets to expedite its protection for Russian

²⁸ DNI spokesman Shawn Turner in Josh Gerstein, “DNI Defends U.S. Intelligence on Ukraine” (*Politico*, 3/5/2014), available at:

<http://www.politico.com/blogs/undertheradar/2014/03/dnidefendsusintelligenceonukraine184576>

²⁹ Mark Hosenball, “Ukraine crisis: CIA, not Pentagon, forecast Russian move – sources” (*Reuters*, 3/5/2014), available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/usukrainecrisisintelligenceidUSBREA242I720140305>

³⁰ DNI spokesman Shawn Turner in Mark Hosenball, “Ukraine Crisis: CIA, not Pentagon, forecast Russian moves—sources” (*Reuters*, 5/3/14), available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-intelligence-idUSBREA242I720140305>

³¹ Mark Galeotti, “Spetsnaz: Russia’s Special Forces” (*Osprey Publishing*, 2015), pp 49-51

³² Patrick Goodenough, “Susan Rice: Russian Military Intervention in Ukraine ‘Would be a Grave Mistake’” (*CNS News*, 2/23/2014), available at:

<http://cnsnews.com/news/article/patrickgoodenough/Susanricerussianmilitaryinterventionukrainewouldbegrave>

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ John Kerry on US DoS Official Blog, “Secretary Kerry Speaks with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov About Situation in Ukraine” (2/23/2014), available at: <https://blogs.state.gov/stories/2014/02/23/secretary-kerry-speaks-russian-foreign-minister-lavrov-about-situation-ukraine> and SkyNews, “Ukraine: US in Fresh Warning to Russia” (*SkyNews*, 2/26/2014), available at: <http://news.sky.com/story/1217514/ukraineusinfreshwarningtorussia>

³⁵ Mark Hosenball, Phil Stewart, Matt Spetalnick, “Exclusive: Congress Probing U.S. Spy agencies’ possible lapses on Russia” (*Reuters*, 8/10/2014), available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-intelligence-exclusive-idUSKCN0S20CZ20151008>

³⁶ Mark Hosenball, “Ukraine crisis: CIA, not Pentagon, forecast Russian move – sources” (*Reuters*, 3/5/2014), available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/usukrainecrisisintelligenceidUSBREA242I720140305>

facilities.³⁷ Several sources later confirmed the divergence between the DIA and CIA assessments.³⁸ House Intelligence Committee Chairman Rep. Mike Rogers (R-MI) cited the divergence in an ODNI assessment released to lawmakers on February 27 as he announced a probe into the IC's actions.³⁹ Despite some prescient warning, even February IC assessments after Russian mobilization clashed.

The divergence in IC assessments could be explained by analytic shortcomings. Some assessments must have discounted both macro-level factors and recent indicators—such as Russian official visits, Crimean statements, and Russian military exercises. Richards Heuer notes that the manner in which the human mind forms schema can cause past information and ideas to be favored over new ones.⁴⁰ As a result, intelligence can suffer from incrementalism, in which the past's precedent supports minor changes over sudden shifts in a system. This behavior could have led analysts to conclude Russia's mobilization on the Ukrainian border would not result in invasion, just as the previous year's six snap exercises had not.⁴¹

Another possible analytic shortcoming could have been mirror-imaging, in which analysts' assume that other actors follow the same 'rational' logic as one's own.⁴² This bias is evident in the same non-IC speculation that concluded that while Russia had the capacity to invade Ukraine, it would be 'irrational' strategically since it would jeopardize its great power status and regional influence by undermining international sovereignty norms and provoking balancing behavior by its neighbors.⁴³ Without raw assessments, there is little evidence that cognitive biases undermined IC predictions, but both incrementalism and mirror imaging could explain why certain predictions were flawed.

Section 3: Policymaker Pressure

While the IC's assessments were not unanimous, committed policymakers also undermined the effect of prescient assessments on US-Russian policy. In an ideal policy-intelligence relationship, policymakers and intelligence officials should have what Elliot Cohen calls an "unequal dialogue," where both parties express their views candidly and the final authority resides with the policymaker.⁴⁴ Instead, politicization or groupthink often undermines intelligence candidness, while domestic political pressure incentivizes policymakers to neglect intelligence findings. While there is no evidence for outright intelligence politicization—in which overt or tacit policymaker pressure alters intelligence contents—policymakers probably

³⁷ Laura Smith-Spark, "Russia flexes military muscle as tensions rise in Ukraine's Crimea Region" (2/26/2014), available at: <http://www.cnn.com/2014/02/26/world/europe/ukrainepolitics/>

³⁸ Mark Hosenball, "Ukraine crisis: CIA, not Pentagon, forecast Russian move – sources" (*Reuters*, 3/5/2014), available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/usukrainecrisisintelligenceidUSBREA2421720140305>

³⁹ Eli Lake, "Exclusive: Congress Probes Why Spies Got Putin's Invasion Wrong"

⁴⁰ Richard Heuer, "*The Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*" (Books Express Publishing, 2010), Ch 1-2

⁴¹ Laura Smith-Spark, "Russia flexes military muscle as tensions rise in Ukraine's Crimea Region" (2/26/2014), available at: <http://www.cnn.com/2014/02/26/world/europe/ukrainepolitics/>

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Alexander Motyl, "A Russian Threat to Ukraine?" (*World Affairs Journal*, 2/7/2014), available at: <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/blog/alexanderjmotyl/russianthreatukraine0>

⁴⁴ Cohen uses this model to describe the relationship between civilians and the military, but the term is equally applicable here see Eliot Cohen, "Supreme Command" (*Free Press Publishing*, 2012), Ch 7.

neglected intelligence that bespoke Russian aggression.⁴⁵ As a result, US policy did not mobilize resources to support policy aligned with many intelligence assessments.

The policy-intelligence relationship depends not only on intelligence accuracy but also on policymaker's willingness to change policy based on intelligence advice. Even accurate assessments can be undermined by negative pathological behavior such as politicization, excessive harmony, or neglect.⁴⁶ Politicization occurs when policymakers pressure intelligence officials to change assessments to support policy through either overt coercion or tacit pressure. Excessive harmony occurs when intelligence officials change assessments to support policymakers due to their desire to curry favor or please a superior.⁴⁷ Neglect occurs when policymakers ignore intelligence assessments or cherry-pick the results when it is convenient for policy. The risk for any of these pathologies increases when leaders are committed to policy. When leaders must convince a domestic audience to support a policy, the temptation to use intelligence's 'hidden knowledge' is at its strongest.⁴⁸ While intelligence has a window of opportunity to change uncommitted policymaker's minds, the opportunity diminishes when policymakers have already selected a course.

The United States' 'Russian reset' was the major policy initiative characterizing the US-Russian bilateral relationship prior to the Ukraine Crisis. After the low point in US-Russian relations brought about by the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, newly elected President Obama announced the Russian reset policy intended to correct the "dangerous drift" towards US-Russian animosity under President Bush.⁴⁹ Increasing bilateral ties—symbolized by Secretary of State Clinton and Foreign Minister Lavrov pressing a red 'reset' button in March 2009—enabled cooperation between Russia and the US on several foreign policy initiatives such as Iran sanctions, a new START treaty on nuclear weapons, and an agreement to allow US supplies to Afghanistan to go through Russia.⁵⁰ Official statements indicate that the reset policy was undertaken with divergent US-Russian interests in mind, such as human rights, Russia's Georgian intervention, and concerns over authoritarianism.⁵¹ With mostly pragmatic purposes and the noted divergences, US policymaker commitment to the reset would only slightly diminish policymaker's receptiveness towards intelligence warnings.

Intelligence assessments throughout the Russian reset period indicate continued IC concern over the potential for aggressive Russian military action. As noted earlier, the NIC's CR 2001-02 and CR 2007-1 both accurately describe Russia's structural weaknesses that favored authoritarian nationalism and aggressive policies in the near abroad. Further, DNI Dennis Blair's 2009 World Wide Threat Assessment noted the danger that an increasingly aggressive Russia would take advantage of Ukrainian structural weakness.⁵² Further, he noted Russian official statements about the possible military countermeasures in the event of Ukrainian or Georgian accession to NATO. His 2010 assessment describes continued regional aggression and reliance

⁴⁵ Joshua Rovner, "Fixing the Facts: National Security and the Politics of Intelligence" (Cornell University Press, 2011), 4-8.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Paul Pillar, "Intelligence, Policy and the War in Iraq" (*Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2006), pp 15-28

⁴⁸ Rovner, 11-13.

⁴⁹ The White House Office of the Press Secretary, "U.S.-Russian Relations: "Reset" Fact Sheet" (6/24/2010), available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/thepressoffice/Usrussiarelationsresetfactsheet>

⁵⁰ The White House Office of the Press Secretary, *ibid*

⁵¹ Peter Baker, "Obama Tries to Reset Relations with Russia, but Work Remains" (NYT, 7/3/2009), available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/08/world/europe/08prexy.html?_r=0

⁵² DNI Dennis Blair before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, "2009 World Wide Threat Assessment" (*Office of the Director of National Intelligence*, 12/2/2009).

on military strength to dominate its periphery despite more cooperative policies with the US.⁵³ Even with the appointment of a new DNI in 2011, IC assessments about the potential for Russian military aggressiveness in its periphery changed little over the course of three years.

While the IC's conclusions should have warranted close surveillance of Russian activity, collection on Russia was under-prioritized by policymakers. According to media reports, IC prioritization occurs through the ODNI's National Intelligence Prioritization Framework (NIPF), which assigned a relatively low prioritization to intelligence collection on Ukraine and Russia before the crisis.⁵⁴ House Intelligence Committee Chairman Mike Rodgers specifically cited lack of concern over certain threats as the reason for prioritization in the intelligence posture.⁵⁵ The political motivation for this Republican lawmaker to criticize presidential foreign policy is apparent, but even Senate Intelligence Committee Chair Dianne Feinstein (D-FL) acknowledged that, "we have to better deploy our resources...[and] look at the priorities."⁵⁶ If under-prioritization occurred despite the ODNI's own assessment on potential Russian aggression, it would indicate some pathology in the intelligence-policymaker relationship.

Section 4: Implications

Without direct access to the IC's assessments on the likelihood of Russian military intervention, it is difficult to conclude that analysis shortcomings or problematic policy-intelligence relationship prevented the US from adequately responding to the Ukrainian crisis. Nonetheless, both appear to have had an effect on US policy based on the statements by both policymakers and intelligence officials. Policymaker efforts to enhance US-Russian bilateral relations probably reduced the effect that prescient intelligence assessments had on resource allocation or US policy. Likewise, analyst biases undermined specific warnings that could have compelled significant policymaker strategy. The Ukraine crisis illustrates that both intelligence quality and policymaker receptiveness are necessary conditions for informed policy action.

Intelligence quality remains critical for generating policymaker action. Although intelligence assessments accurately identified the dynamics that would lead to Russian intervention as Ukraine chaotically aligned with the West, they were not bold enough to generate much policy action. Given Russia's strategic interest, nationalism, and Ukraine's political intransigence, analysts should have assigned a higher probability to Russian military intervention. Analysts could apply techniques like Heuer's own 'Analysis of Competing Hypothesis' to identify less likely outcomes with existing evidence.⁵⁷ While it may be tempting for intelligence officials to make ambiguous predictions to avoid being wrong and losing influence with policymakers, this tendency undermines intelligence's overall effectiveness. Further, specific assessments make it more difficult for leaders to neglect intelligence findings as they can be damaging in the political future. Increasing intelligence quality through specificity makes it more difficult for policymakers to neglect intelligence and for senior intelligence officials to promote groupthink.

⁵³ DNI Dennis Blair before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, "2010 World Wide Threat Assessment" (*Office of the Director of National Intelligence*, 2/2/2010).

⁵⁴ Mark Hosenball, "Ukraine crisis: CIA, not Pentagon, forecast Russian move – sources" (*Reuters*, 3/5/2014), available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/usukrainecrisisintelligenceidUSBREA2421720140305>

⁵⁵ Rogers in Josh Gerstein, "Rogers: Earlier Ukraine Intel could have changed policy" (*Politico*, 3/5/2014), available at: <http://www.politico.com/blogs/undertheradar/2014/03/rogersearlierukraineintelcouldhavechangedpolicy184568>

⁵⁶ Feinstein in Mark Hosenball, Phil Stewart, and Matt Spetalnick.

⁵⁷ Heuer.

More clearly linking the IC's threat assessment to resource allocation could increase policymaker receptiveness to intelligence findings. If risks to US security interests were prioritized, this may lead to better allocation of strategic resources. The public document that currently fills this function, the National Security Strategy (NSS), is infrequently published, has little specificity, and is not clearly linked to intelligence assessments. In fact, the 2010 NSS emphasized the promises of cooperation with Russia while neglecting to address the WTA's concern over Russian use of military force noted that same year.⁵⁸ While it would be undesirable to publically articulate intelligence priorities for security reasons, resource allocation could better match the IC's assessment of risk.

Ultimately, intelligence quality and policymaker receptiveness will always be problematic. However, even shortcomings of both in the Ukraine case did not eliminate positive policy outcomes based on intelligence. US policymaker warnings about Russian intervention before the crisis primed the international community to reject Russian actions. While difficult to quantify, these warnings may have supported the wide consensus built around international sanctions and support for a more robust regional deterrence posture.

⁵⁸ Office of the President, "National Security Strategy" (*Office of the President*, May 2010), available at: https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf; and DNI Dennis Blair before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, "2010 World Wide Threat Assessment" (*Office of the Director of National Intelligence*, 2/2/2010), 30.

Figure 1: Ukraine crisis timeline highlighting key intelligence and policy events

Ukraine Conflict Timeline	
Time	Event
1991	Ukraine Independence from USSR
2008	Russo-Georgian War
Mar-09	Russian "reset" button pushed by SecState Clinton and ForMin Lavrov
21-Nov-13	Euromaiden Protests breakout after EU Association Agreement (AA) talks are suspended
29-Jan-14	DCI Clapper, testifies before Senate with US Intelligence Community Worldwide Threat Assessment
4-Feb-14	Head of Crimean Parliament asks for Russian Presidium resolution to annul the 1954 transfer of Crimea to Ukraine
17-21 Feb 14	Russian Officials including Vladislav Surkov meet with Crimea Officials
20-Feb-14	Dozens of protesters killed in Kiev by riot police
21-Feb-14	Obama calls Putin to express, "interest in whole Ukraine"
22-Feb-14	Pro-Russian Ukrainian President Yanukovich flees to Russia
23-Feb-14	Major protests begin in southeast Ukraine and Crimea; Alexei Chaly is proclaimed major of Sevastopol during protests
	Susan Rice (NSA) warns against Russian intervention
	SECSTATE Kerry calls FORMIN Lavrov to support Ukrainian sovereignty
26-Feb-14	Snap Russian Military Exercises on Ukrainian border
	IC assessment that Crimea is "an imminent military flashpoint"
	Kerry calls Lavrov to warns against Russian military intervention
27-Feb-14	Self Defense Militias and spetznaz seize ministry buildings in Crimea; Crimean Parliament elects pro-Russian Aksenov
	US SECDEF Hagel call to RUS DEFMIN Shoigu
	NATO SecGen Rasmussen, "We have no information indicating Russia intends to intervene militarily,"
	ODNI brief to Congress expresses divergent IC assessments
28-Feb-14	Belbek Military Airfield Seized, Simferopol Air Port Blocked, telephone services across Crimea cut
1-Mar-14	Sergei Aksenov, newly elected Crimean Prime Minister, asks for Russian intervention to establish 'peace and tranquility'
	Pres Obama call to Vladimir Putin to discuss the Crimean situation
2-Mar-14	"little green men" blockade UKR troops in barracks
14-Mar-14	DCI Clapper, US IC 'not caught off guard statement'

About the Author

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ASSESSING AND PRIORITIZING DOMESTIC TERRORISM THREATS: THE CASE FOR FOCUSING ON RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM

Colette Clark

As Islamic extremism dominates the headlines, America is grappling with a right-wing extremism problem of considerably greater magnitude and impact. This paper presents a background on the right-wing extremist violence and the propaganda that undergirds the spread of related ideologies. After exploring the similarities between right-wing extremist and Russian propaganda techniques, and the hindrances to policy action presented by media narratives and 2016 presidential election rhetoric, the paper outlines four policy proposals for combating the propaganda and recruitment of right-wing extremist groups and for reorienting US counterterrorism to focus on the greater domestic threat.

Introduction

The threat of another ‘homegrown’ terrorist attack in the United States is on the minds of many Americans.¹ While the average American pictures the horror of a radical Islamic extremist attack—by a “born-and-bred American *jihadi*”—US law enforcement is envisioning something much more likely: an attack by anti-government, right-wing extremists.² The threat of white supremacist, anti-federalist, and fundamentalist violence is grabbing the attention of local police but not national headlines—and more importantly, it is not garnering the resources and attention of national policymakers and domestic security professionals.

The current focus of domestic counterterrorism resources on combating Islamic extremism is misguided. A more effective counterterrorism policy would shift the focus of US counterterrorism to the threat of right-wing extremist violence. This shift would be proportionate to the amount of violence experienced at the hands of each respective cause, and would lessen the backlash from a policy currently controversially focused on a single religious minority group. Insofar as extremist propaganda is critical to understanding and countering relevant domestic threats, this paper will provide an analysis of the right-wing extremist threat, the tactics and strategies of right-wing extremist propaganda, and recommendations for changes in US policy.

Background

Right-wing extremist violence—a threat that overtook that of left-wing terror during the 1990s—is an umbrella term for a number of causes and groups operating in the United States.³ White supremacists make up the first of three main sub-groups.⁴ These racist groups include branches of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), neo-Nazi organizations, and Skinhead groups organized largely like gangs.⁵ The goals of all three white supremacist organization types are similar, and include the preservation or restoration of racial hierarchy, or the creation of a racially exclusive enclave defined by white authority.⁶ While KKK violence is often limited to vandalism, both neo-Nazis and Skinheads are known for mass casualty attacks.⁷ Anti-federalists, the second main sub-group, encompass local militias, ‘patriot’ groups, and those who identify as ‘sovereign citizen’ organizations.⁸ This set of causes is much younger than the white supremacists, with the

¹ Nick Gass, “Poll: Americans See Homegrown Jihadis as Top Terror Threat,” *Politico*, December 3, 2015, <http://www.politico.com/story/2015/12/poll-homegrown-terrorism-top-threat-216360> (online sources accessed April 24, 2016).

² Charles Kurzman and David Schanzer, “The Growing Right-Wing Terror Threat,” *New York Times*, June 16, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/16/opinion/the-other-terror-threat.html>

³ Dale L. Watson, Executive Assistant Director, Counterterrorism/Counterintelligence Division, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Remarks Before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (Washington, D.C.: February 6, 2002), available at: <https://www.fbi.gov/news/testimony/the-terrorist-threat-confronting-the-united-states>

⁴ Arie Perliger, “Challengers from the Sidelines: Understanding America’s Violent Far-Right,” *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*, November 2012, page 4, available at: <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/challengers-from-the-sidelines-understanding-americas-violent-far-right>

⁵ Val Burris, Emery Smith, and Ann Strahm, “White Supremacist Networks on the Internet,” *Sociological Focus* 33:2 (May 2000): 218-219; 231.

⁶ Pete Simi, “Why Study White Supremacist Terror? A Research Note,” *Deviant Behavior* 31:3 (2010): 253.

⁷ Perliger, “Challengers from the Sidelines,” 4.

⁸ Kurt Eichenwald, “Right-wing Extremists are a Bigger Threat to America than ISIS,” *Newsweek*, February 4, 2016, <http://www.newsweek.com/2016/02/12/right-wing-extremists-militants-bigger-threat-america-isis-jihadists-422743.html>

anti-federalist movement dating back largely only to the 1990s.⁹ Violence from these groups is often directed at law enforcement. The third sub-group is that of the fundamentalist, ‘Christian Identity’ movements. These groups incorporate religious ideals with the beliefs of white supremacists groups, “thus promoting ideas of nativism, exclusionism, and racial superiority through a unique interpretation of religious texts that focuses on division of humanity according to primordial attributes.”¹⁰ For these adherents, the Biblical war between light and darkness will manifest as a race war with Anglo-Saxons representing the chosen people. Like the white supremacists, mass casualty attacks are often associated with fundamentalists.

These three sub-groups and their own component organizations represent a domestic threat that manifests itself in support of somewhat differentiated causes. The organizational model of these groups, however, is largely similar. Right-wing extremists organize most frequently by using a model of leaderless resistance.¹¹ Such a system employs autonomous cells to operate independently of one another, yet in loose coordination toward a shared goal. In the age of online activism, right-wing extremism is becoming even more decentralized as individuals wary of the cost of associating with formal right-wing groups are leaving formal organizations and finding sympathetic voices and co-conspirators online.¹²

This leaderless resistance model often leaves the threat of right-wing extremist violence misunderstood, as the decentralized network is falsely equated with disorganization or even incompetence.¹³ Most strikingly, commentators and news organizations have historically characterized acts of right-wing extremist terror as acts unassociated with a broader movement, despite perpetrators sharing unmistakable ties to specific churches or group leaders who have professed violent right-wing goals.¹⁴ This dissociation is particularly anomalous given the lengths to which commentators will go in order to tie attacks to *Islamic* extremist organizations—the December 2015 shooting in San Bernardino, deemed an attack by the Islamic State based purely on a single Facebook post, being a potent example.¹⁵ These trends that downplay the ties between violence and a broader network of right-wing extremists cause research and resources for combating right-wing extremism to fall victim to a “consensus of irrelevance.”¹⁶

The reality is that right-wing extremist violence poses a much greater threat to the American homeland than Islamic extremism. A recent poll of nearly 400 local law enforcement agencies saw 74% list anti-government violence among the top three threats to their jurisdictions; in the same group, only 39% listed Islamic terrorism.¹⁷ Similarly, a 2014 study found that 50 fatalities had resulted from a total of 20 Islamic terrorist attacks in the years since

⁹ Perliger, “Challengers from the Sidelines,” 4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Bruce Hoffman, “Terrorism and WMD: Some Preliminary Hypotheses,” *The Nonproliferation Review*, 4:3 (Spring-Summer 1997): 52.

¹² Mark Potok, “The Year in Hate and Extremism,” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, March 9, 2015, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2015/year-hate-and-extremism-0>

¹³ Simi, “Why Study White Supremacist Terror?” 252, 255.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 158-160.

¹⁵ Greg Botelho and Ralph Ellis, “San Bernardino Shooting Investigated as ‘Act of Terrorism,’” *CNN* December 5, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/12/04/us/san-bernardino-shooting/>

¹⁶ Simi, “Why Study White Supremacist Terror?” 252.

¹⁷ Kurzman and Schanzer, “The Growing Right-Wing Terror Threat.”

September 11, 2001; meanwhile, right-wing extremists have averaged over 300 attacks *per year* and caused over 250 fatalities.¹⁸

Right-wing extremist violence is not just a persistent threat; it is also on the rise. In 2008, experts documented the existence of 42 anti-government militias; today, there are 276.¹⁹ The number of hate groups has also been on the rise; during the middle years of the Obama presidency, the number of hate groups peaked at numbers over 1,000, an almost 70% increase since 2000.²⁰ This increase has been attributed to the economic downturn of the Great Recession, the demographic changes that have resulted in part from undocumented immigration, and the ire provoked by the election of President Obama.²¹ Indeed, experts note that “it is hard to imagine something more alarming or infuriating for white supremacists than an African-American president.”²² The aims of the decentralized movement, its proven proficiency, and its demonstrated proliferation are all cause for the allocation of national-level resources and attention not yet focused on this pressing issue.

Role of Propaganda

As with any extremist organization, propaganda serves a multitude of purposes for right-wing extremists, including recruitment and the promotion of their cause. Right-wing groups now rarely spread their message to all white Americans; instead, they target populations undergoing a status crisis.²³ These include such crises as factory layoffs, interracial tensions in schools, or an increase in local displays of gay pride or feminism. Often, the recruits are young and impressionable, seeking answers to questions about communal changes that recruiters are poised to answer. Among potential youth recruits, group members are instructed to focus on isolated or ‘loner’ students, promising these teenagers a sense of belonging and a path to success.²⁴ Four methods of disseminating the right-wing extremist message are particularly pervasive: flyers, chat rooms, cloaked websites, and music.

The distribution of flyers to promote right-wing extremist causes is a decades-old method—popular in the 1980s and 1990s in schools and rock clubs—that persists today. The KKK distributes recruitment flyers in states as geographically disparate as California, Georgia, and New Jersey.²⁵ Recently, this tactic made headlines by way of a unique dispersal method: a notable computer hacker sent racist and anti-Semitic flyers to every publicly available printer he

¹⁸ Charles Kurzman, “Terrorism Cases Involving Muslim-Americans, 2014,” *Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security*, February 9, 2015, available at:

http://sites.duke.edu/tcths/files/2013/06/Kurzman_Terrorism_Cases_Involving_Muslim-Americans_2014.pdf;

Perliger, “Challengers from the Sidelines.”

¹⁹ Eichenwald, “Right-wing Extremists are a Bigger Threat to America than ISIS.”

²⁰ “SPLC Testifies to U.S. Senate About Rising Extremist Threat, Urges Vigilance,” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, September 19, 2012, <https://www.splcenter.org/news/2012/09/19/splc-testifies-us-senate-about-rising-extremist-threat-urges-vigilance> and Potok, “The Year in Hate and Extremism.”

²¹ Eichenwald, “Right-wing Extremists are a Bigger Threat to America than ISIS”; Simi, “Why Study White Supremacist Terror?” 262.

²² Simi, “Why Study White Supremacist Terror?” 265.

²³ Randy Blazak, “White Boys to Terrorist Men: Target Recruitment of Nazi Skinheads,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 44:6 (February 2001): 987-994.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 988.

²⁵ Eichenwald, “Right-wing Extremists are a Bigger Threat to America than ISIS.”

could access, many on college campuses.²⁶ These remotely-printed flyers represent a modern incarnation of this decades-old recruitment tactic.

Chat rooms are another means by which right-wing extremists spread their message. Just as is often discussed in the context of Islamic terrorist groups, chat rooms create a milieu of acceptability for extremist ideas.²⁷ By participating in online forums, individuals with extremist leanings are given the illusion that many others share their views.²⁸ This means of spreading propaganda is particularly important in areas where a low percentage of the population subscribes to right-wing extremist ideas.²⁹

Another useful means of attracting new followers from areas in which there is no established right-wing presence is the creation of cloaked websites. Rather than displaying their propaganda outright, these sites aim to draw a reader in on another pretense. Some are only distantly related to right-wing extremist causes, such as a site ‘cloaked’ to look like a Hurricane Katrina relief donation center.³⁰ Others are more pointed.

An illustrative example is “Martin Luther King: A True Historical Examination” (martinlutherking.org), a site hosted by Don Black, the host of the infamous racial extremist forum Stormfront.³¹ This type of site makes no overt claim to promote a white supremacist rewriting of history. Instead, language is carefully chosen so as to appear impartial or positive. To that end, pages are given titles such as “High Self Esteem of Many Slaves” and “Forgotten Black Voices.”³² In addition, special care is taken to include quotes or outside links that bolster the website’s credibility and normalize its message. In this case, racist quotes made by famous sports stars are featured alongside snippets of the long-discredited FBI investigation into Dr. King.³³ These ‘legitimizing’ features are an integral part of the websites’ ‘cloak.’ Said one viewer,

“I had expected a hate filled page with disgusting views and literature, and instead I found a site with knowledge and information that I had never in my life even heard of. It opened my eyes to how proud I should be to be White, and how we are so much more powerful and intelligent than any other race.”³⁴

Although some scholars state that ‘stumbling upon’ these types of websites is unlikely,³⁵ others report the ease in which a young person searching for civil rights information can find

²⁶ Alexandra Markovich, “Hacker Says He Printed Anti-Semitic and Racist Flyers at Colleges Across U.S.,” *New York Times*, March 28, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/29/nyregion/hacker-weev-says-he-printed-anti-semitic-and-racist-flyers-at-colleges-across-us.html?_r=1

²⁷ Ines Von Berh, et al., “Radicalisation in the Digital Era,” *RAND* (Santa Monica, CA: 2013), 27.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Burriss, Smith, and Strahm, “White Supremacist Networks on the Internet,” 232.

³⁰ Jessie Daniels, “Cloaked Websites: Propaganda, Cyber-racism and Epistemology in the Digital Era,” *New Media and Society* 11:5 (2009): 660.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 670.

³² *Ibid.*, 668.

³³ *Ibid.*, 668-670.

³⁴ Joseph A. Schafer, Christopher W. Mullins, and Stephanie Box, “Awakenings: The Emergence of White Supremacist Ideologies,” *Deviant Behavior* 35:3 (2014): 186.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 187.

themselves on the extremist site within minutes.³⁶ When ‘cloaked’ appropriately, these websites demonstrate a unique ability to draw unsuspecting readers into what appears to be a nuanced, widely-shared social position.³⁷

Finally, right-wing extremists also use a vibrant music scene to propagate their ideology and to bolster their legitimacy. This tool is particularly prominent among skinhead groups, who have numerous record labels with which to promote their ‘White Power rock’ music.³⁸ When combined, the dissemination of flyers, the operation of chat rooms and cloaked websites, and the promotion of right-wing extremist music provide the bedrock for the propagation of the right-wing extremist cause.

Familiar Themes

To those familiar with a history of propaganda campaigns directed against the US government, right-wing extremist tactics may sound familiar. Like the right-wing extremist leaders operating carefully-worded web pages that reexamine historical facts, Russian propagandists seek to insert confusion into an otherwise clear narrative—even if just for long enough to attract a few fence-sitting followers.³⁹ Russian propaganda surrounding such events as the 2008 invasion of Georgia was a classic example of this alternative narrative—the move was termed a ‘peace-keeping’ mission sent in response to a Georgian ‘genocide,’ a narrative inconsistent with reality but compelling enough to elicit sympathy from some.⁴⁰

The Russian propaganda medium *Russia Today* is known for pushing views that prey on this American fear that the mainstream media is presenting a doctored narrative. This means of seeding alternative ideas is based on the concept that all opinions deserve consideration.⁴¹ Western journalists, seeking to avoid bias and present a ‘balanced’ account, often fall into this well-laid trap and end up legitimizing information intended merely to obfuscate the truth.⁴²

Right-wing extremists share Russia’s same propaganda goal. “The goal . . . is to subvert putatively shared beliefs about previously agreed upon facts.”⁴³ This aim is achieved when readers have reactions along the lines of what one researcher documented: “[A]s I read through the material . . . I opened my eyes (finally) to what was really going on around me. . . . I now questioned everything I saw and heard in the media, and I came to the conclusion that we (the people) were being lied to constantly.”⁴⁴ Reacting to a cloaked site extolling the virtues of slavery, one 17-year-old said, “I can understand their view. There’s two sides to everything.”⁴⁵

This American concept of legitimacy in balance is just what Russian and right-wing extremist propagandists require in order to give their message a receptive audience. In order to

³⁶ Daniels, “Cloaked Websites,” 671.

³⁷ Schafer, Mullins, and Box, “Awakenings: The Emergence of White Supremacist Ideologies,” 186.

³⁸ Blazak, “White Boys to Terrorist Men,” 995.

³⁹ Mark Galleoti, “‘Hybrid War’ and ‘Little Green Men’: How It Works and How It Doesn’t,” *E-International Relations*, April 16, 2015, <http://www.e-ir.info/2015/04/16/hybrid-war-and-little-green-men-how-it-works-and-how-it-doesnt/>

⁴⁰ Peter Pomerantsev and Michael Weiss, “The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture, and Money,” *The Interpreter*, November 22, 2014, page 15, <http://www.interpretermag.com/the-menace-of-unreality-how-the-kremlin-weaponizes-information-culture-and-money/>

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁴² Blazak, “White Boys to Terrorist Men,” 32.

⁴³ Daniels, “Cloaked Websites,” 677.

⁴⁴ Schafer, Mullins, and Box, “Awakenings: The Emergence of White Supremacist Ideologies,” 190.

⁴⁵ Daniels, “Cloaked Websites,” 669.

understand the ways in which right-wing extremist violence is supported and propagated, US policymakers must take seriously the threat of these subversive, Russian-style false truths—and the threats that they promote to the American homeland.

Policy Barriers and Recommendations

There are a number of hindrances to countering right-wing extremist propaganda and the causes it supports. The first is the US legal system. Due to constitutional protections for free speech, most extremist right-wing activity (short of violence) is protected.⁴⁶ In addition, the counter-propaganda machines of the Departments of State and Defense and of the Intelligence Community are legally prohibited from engaging in action directed at domestic audiences.⁴⁷ With these restrictions, many traditional counter-propaganda tools lose their utility entirely. A second hindrance is the actions that right-wing extremists take in order to capitalize on those protections. Aryan activists in particular promote ‘concealment’ as a particular strain of activism intended to protect their group’s ability to survive long enough to fight an ultimate race war.⁴⁸ With no outward activism, right-wing extremists are very hard to spot.

A third hindrance is the conventional wisdom surrounding the nature of the domestic terrorism threat. The actions perpetrated by right-wing and Islamic extremist groups are often indistinguishable—the recent anti-federalist standoff in Oregon was characterized by talk of bloodbaths and martyrdom, themes that are easily associated with Islamic fundamentalists.⁴⁹ Yet, in the right-wing extremist context, analysts often gloss over ties to broader organizations; instead, “the media bends over backward to identify some psychological traits that may have pushed them over the edge.”⁵⁰ If right-wing extremist attacks are not labeled as a domestic counterterrorism priority—or even a counterterrorism issue—it will be difficult to marshal resources and attention toward the effort.

Fourth, and perhaps most alarming, are the impediments that will stem from contemporary presidential election rhetoric. After candidate Donald Trump made sweeping statements about minority segments of the American population, forums such as Stormfront began to “fulminate with praise” for the candidate.⁵¹ Skinhead groups appeared openly at Trump rallies, and a former KKK leader described the candidate as “pretty much in line with [the KKK’s] beliefs.”⁵²

These trends, while in some ways uniquely acute, draw on a recent history of political legitimization of right-wing extremist beliefs. The 2015 Army Special Operations Command training exercise in the southern United States termed ‘Jade Helm 15’ garnered the attention of militia groups who thought the exercise was a pretext for the federal government to invade and

⁴⁶ Dale L. Watson, Remarks Before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

⁴⁷ James Farwell, *Persuasion and Power: the Art of Strategic Communications* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2012): 32-33.

⁴⁸ Pete Simi and Robert Futrell, *American Swastika: Inside the White Power Movement’s Hidden Spaces of Hate* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2010): 4-5.

⁴⁹ Eichenwald, “Right-wing Extremists are a Bigger Threat to America than ISIS.”

⁵⁰ Scott Shane, “Homegrown Extremists Tied to Deadlier Toll Than Jihadists in U.S. Since 9/11,” *New York Times*, June 24, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/25/us/tally-of-attacks-in-us-challenges-perceptions-of-top-terror-threat.html>

⁵¹ Eichenwald, “Right-wing Extremists are a Bigger Threat to America than ISIS.”

⁵² Betsy Woodruff, “Skinheads Come Out in Full Force for Donald Trump in Pennsylvania,” *The Daily Beast*, April 26, 2016, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2016/04/26/skinheads-come-out-in-full-force-for-donald-trump-in-pennsylvania.html>

impose martial law in states such as Texas; certain Republican politicians pandered to this fear by acknowledging that federal authorities were untrustworthy and by instituting unnecessary oversight measures. This legitimization played into the hands of anti-government extremists, some of whom constructed bombs to be used on federal authorities.⁵³

These same domestic political pressures have already hindered efforts to devote more time and attention to the right-wing extremist threat. Anticipating the rise of the threat after President Obama's election, DHS officials put together an extensive assessment of the right-wing extremist movement. In 2009, this report was leaked to the press and became the subject of political vitriol, with conservative commentators terming it a 'hit list' aimed at conservatives and a Republican Congressman complaining of the "politicized work."⁵⁴ The result of this pressure was the withdrawal of the report and further limits on DHS resources for the right-wing extremist threat.

These actions that seemingly reflect support or tolerance for right-wing extremist ideologies make countering these groups even harder. In particular, fluctuations in public support for governments have been tied to corresponding fluctuations in non-state violence. If extremists find themselves operating in an atmosphere of legitimization, they may perceive there to be more leeway to conduct acts of violence.⁵⁵ In addition, certain counter-terrorism programs such as the development of incentives for confessions have been seen to only be effective when group members perceive their cause to be declining, rather than on the rise.⁵⁶

These barriers do not hinder all available policy tools. The first action that must be taken is to acknowledge that the United States has a truly *domestic* extremism problem that deserves the attention and funding at a federal level currently only enjoyed by Islamic extremism. Ignoring or mischaracterizing the problem of decentralized right-wing terrorism encourages the view that terrorism is an issue with roots outside the United States.⁵⁷ Such obfuscation also creates the normative space for political actors to pander to extremist anti-government views. The success of this policy shift can be measured by opinion polling that measures respondents' understanding of the domestic terrorism threat, by surveys of media coverage of right-wing attacks, and by careful observation of political rhetoric.

Second, programs designed to counter the right-wing extremist threat should be integrated with the many programs hyper-focused on the Islamic terrorism threat. As they are currently framed, US programs disproportionately—and, based on available statistics, unjustly—target American Muslim communities. Sting operations and community monitoring are controversial in their profiling, and as such run the risk of fostering anti-government sentiments among these otherwise well-integrated populations.⁵⁸ Rather than treat the American Muslim community as inherently susceptible to radicalization while minimizing the role of radicalization in other subsets of the population, programs for the countering of violent extremism should be

⁵³ Eichenwald, "Right-wing Extremists are a Bigger Threat to America than ISIS."

⁵⁴ Heidi Beirich, "Inside the DHS: Former Top Analyst Says Agency Bowed to Political Pressure," *Southern Poverty Law Center*, June 17, 2011, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2011/inside-dhs-former-top-analyst-says-agency-bowed-political-pressure>

⁵⁵ Bart Schuurman, "Defeated by Popular Demand: Public Support and Counterterrorism in Three Western Democracies, 1963–1998," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 36:2 (2013): 153.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 161-162.

⁵⁷ Simi, "Why Study White Supremacist Terror?" 252.

⁵⁸ Todd Helmus, Erin York, and Peter Chalk, "Promoting Online Voices for Countering Violent Extremism," *RAND* (Santa Monica, CA: 2013): 2

oriented around the understanding that any and all communities could be vulnerable.⁵⁹ The success of this recommendation can be measured by opinion polling of the American Muslim community and by engagement with Muslim leaders to gauge a lessening in sentiments of persecution.

Third, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should be empowered and funded to address right-wing extremism. This autonomy will be particularly key given the anti-governmental nature of many right-wing extremist groups. For instance, NGOs should engage with susceptible white communities—those undergoing a ‘status crisis’ such as the closure of a manufacturing plant or an influx of immigrants—to address the dangers of radicalization and provide resources for local leaders to begin community dialogues and spread awareness of warning signs.⁶⁰ The success of this recommendation can be measured by a decrease in right-wing extremist attacks. Public sentiments might also be measured by opinion polling or by electoral trends.

Finally, the US government should implement a counter-propaganda awareness program for both parents and students in middle and high schools nationwide. These trainings can be modeled off of those offered by some Muslim community centers, which highlight the Internet dangers of extremist recruitment as well as cyber-bullying and pornography.⁶¹ The success of this recommendation can be measured by a decrease in traffic to right-wing extremist websites and chat rooms.

Together, these four recommendations constitute a first step toward mitigating the impact of right-wing extremist propaganda, containing the threat of proliferating attacks, and supporting a much-needed sea change in the understanding of domestic terror in the United States.

Conclusion

Terrorism paralyzes societies because of its unpredictability—anyone, at any time, could fall victim to an attack on civilians in a public place. For most of the predominately white, non-Muslim population, the threat of Islamic extremism terrorizes, as these citizens understand themselves to be potential targets of radical Islamic ideologies. To most, right-wing extremist violence is scary, but it does not terrorize—the white American will, in all likelihood, not be a chosen target. This distinction between fear and terror is represented in media coverage of attacks and in contemporary analyses of perpetrators’ associations. No longer can we allow this distinction to guide policy. The US government must protect its citizens equally, regardless of race or association. As such, resources and attention must be allocated to the most violent threat—that of the violent right-wing extremist.

⁵⁹ William McCants and Clinton Watts, “U.S. Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism: An Assessment,” *Foreign Policy Research Institute* (December 2012): 3.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶¹ Helmus, York, and Chalk, “Promoting Online Voices for Countering Violent Extremism,” 2.

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THE ETHICS OF MILITARY INTERVENTION FOR NATIONAL SECURITY PURPOSES

William A. Douglas

Since the Cold War, much has been written about intervening militarily for altruistic humanitarian reasons; much less has been written about intervening due to self-interested concern for national security. At first thought it might seem that interventions of the latter type could not be morally justifiable. They are illegal unless authorized by the UN Security Council, which they seldom are. Security-motivated interventions risk igniting inter-state wars, which is one reason why intervention has been banned, from the Treaty of Westphalia right up through the UN Charter. Intervention can be done only by strong powers to weaker ones. It often can be done only on the basis of uncertain estimates of how much damage to the intervener's national security it can avoid. However, there may be mitigating circumstances that could be construed to justify national-security interventions. The intervened nation may not be an 'innocent' third party—it may be aligned with the intervener's great-power adversary. The 'Lesson of Munich' teaches that intervention often can be effective only when threats are still uncertain and distant, not clear and present. Intervention may provide the collateral benefit of deposing a repressive dictatorship. A counter-intervention may help a country to regain its sovereignty that the first intervener has violated. The traditional view favoring the presumption that intervention is unjustified is still valid. Whether a combination of mitigating circumstances can validate an exception to the presumptive rule is a matter of prudent judgment, case-by-case.

Since the end of the Cold War, a voluminous literature has grown up on the ethics of humanitarian intervention—the kind of altruistic intervention that states often should do, but are reluctant to do. Curiously, little has been written during this period about the ethics of military interventions done for reasons of national security—the kind of self-interested interventions that states often should not do, but are all-too-frequently desirous of doing.¹ This essay focuses on that latter type, and specifically on interventions employing military force (in the air, on the ground, or both). Examples from the Cold War period are interventions by the Soviet Union in East Germany (1953), Hungary (1956), and Czechoslovakia (1968); and by the United States in the Dominican Republic (1965), Grenada (1983), Panama (1989), and by proxy forces in Guatemala (1954) and Cuba (1961).

At first thought, it might appear that military interventions for self-interested reasons of national security can seldom be justified. First, because they are illegal under current international law unless authorized by the UN Security Council: such authorizations are rare. Since the Cold War, the Council's authorization of the use of "all necessary means" to deal with Afghanistan's harboring of al Qaeda in 2001 is the only example, whereas it has authorized force several times for humanitarian purposes (for example, Iraqi Kurdistan in 1992, Somalia in 1992, Haiti in 1994-5, Libya in 2011, and Ivory Coast in 2011). Even since the UN's adoption of the Responsibility to Protect doctrine in 2000, humanitarian interventions not authorized by the Security Council also remain technically illegal (such as those in Bosnia in 1995 and Kosovo in 1999). All actions that some might consider to be moral are not necessarily legal.²

A second concern about military interventions in general is that they can endanger international strategic stability, regardless of whether they have altruistic or self-interested motives. The 1648 Treaty of Westphalia banned outside intervention in the internal affairs of states for an important reason—such interventions can all too often produce inter-state wars. It was interventions by Catholic and by Protestant princes to stop oppression suffered by their respective religious co-believers in other states that eventually combined with the great-power rivalry between established Austria-Hungary and rising France to produce the Thirty Years War. Coming off that recent terrible experience, the framers of the Treaty of Westphalia felt that letting oppression within states continue was the lesser evil compared to risking inter-state warfare by intervening to try to end the oppression.

Today, military interventions undertaken to maintain or increase the intervening state's security can often produce a relative reduction in the security of other states. If sufficiently concerned by this shift, those states may counter-intervene, and the resulting crisis could well escalate into a full-scale inter-state war. Thus, such interventions can be viewed as not only illegal, but also involving risks so great that it would be immoral to take them.³

¹ Most post-Cold War writing on military intervention for national-security purposes has dealt with the practicalities, not the morality, of interventions. For example, the journal *Ethics and International Affairs* has had no article devoted to the topic since Michael Joseph Smith's 1989 essay "Ethics and Intervention" which covered both the humanitarian and national-security based types of intervention. Michael Joseph Smith, "Ethics and Intervention," *Ethics and International Affairs* (Vol. 3 1989).

² For a discussion of the current legal status of military intervention, see Lori F. Damrosch, "Changing Conceptions of Intervention in International Law", in Laura W. Reed and Carl Kaysen, eds., *Emerging Norms of Justified Intervention* (Cambridge, Massachusetts): American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1993).

³ See Mark R. Amstutz, *International Ethics: Concepts, Theories, and Cases in Global Politics* 4th edition (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 183, and Manfred Halpern, "The Morality and Politics of Intervention," in Kenneth Thompson, ed., *Moral Dimensions of American Foreign Policy* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 93.

A further reason for being dubious about the moral justifiability of military interventions for national security purposes is that the intervening power is doing to the intervened country exactly what the intervener is trying to lower the risk of being done to itself—being invaded and conquered, often with its government being deposed and replaced with one following foreign policies more acceptable to the intervener. (Examples are the Soviet Union’s intervention in Czechoslovakia and the US intervention in Grenada.) Trying to protect a country’s sovereignty and security is a worthy *motive* for action, but if the *means* of so acting are to violate another state’s sovereignty and security, how can the action be morally justifiable?⁴

It is especially disturbing that such military interventions often are not taken directly against a great power perceived as threatening by the intervener, but to a smaller country. When two major powers are engaged in a regional or global power struggle, with each trying to maintain a ‘correlation of forces’ within which it can feel secure, it is other countries on the receiving end of interventions, not the two major adversaries themselves. If a small injury to a third party can ward off a large threat to oneself, such an action might be defensible, but if it takes a large injury to the third party to prevent a small threat to oneself, then inflicting the large injury would be difficult to justify—and a military intervention is a very large injury to a nation’s sovereignty, while the threat to the intervener posed by the third party may be more than trivial, but less than major. (Limiting the means used in an intervention to air attacks, by drones or manned aircraft, rather than sending in ground forces, can in some cases provide a response more proportional to the severity of the perceived security threat.)

This dilemma is most acute for democratic countries contemplating intervening in another democratic country, thus violating its sovereignty in order to reverse policies of a government legitimized by the two countries’ shared principle of majority rule. As covert action scholar Gregory Treverton noted, “It is incongruous for the United States to overthrow an elected government” such as the Allende administration in Chile in 1973.⁵

If the right of countries to defend themselves were to include military interventions, another issue is that such a putative right would not be universally actionable—only great powers have the capability to avail themselves of the right in practice. They can do it unto others, but most of the others cannot do it unto them. How morally justifiable can the holding of a right be if only selective, not universal, utilization of the right is possible? (Of course, such conundrums also occur often in the domestic affairs of countries—you, Bill Gates, and I all share the right, when involved in a legal proceeding, to hire an entire team from one of the nation’s most successful, and expensive, law firms!) Still, there is a feeling of unfairness in distributing ‘rights’ to everyone that only some can use. Ernst Haas notes that in the 1949 Corfu Channel decision, the International Court Of Justice worried that the “alleged right of intervention...is reserved for the most powerful states, and might easily lead to perverting the administration of justice itself.”⁶

⁴ For a description of the fears of poor countries that the major powers might well misuse putatively humanitarian military interventions to restore the “old hegemonic order” that prevailed in the colonial era, see Virginia Gambia, “Justified Intervention? A View From the South”, in Laura W. Reed and Carl Kaysen, eds., *Emerging Norms of Justified Intervention*. See also: William V. O’Brien, *U.S. Military Intervention: Law and Morality*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1979) 22.

⁵ Gregory Treverton, *Covert Action: The Limits of Intervention in the Postwar World* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 205.

⁶ Ernst Haas, “Beware the Slippery Slope – Notes Toward the Definition of Justifiable Intervention”, in Laura W. Reed and Carl Kaysen, eds., *Emerging Norms of Justified Intervention*, 63. See also Haas’ admonitions on 64 and 68.

A third concern about national security-motivated military interventions is that the threat to the possible intervener's security posed by the third state is often neither large nor immediate. Thus decisions on whether to intervene depend on estimates as to the degree to which the prospective intervener's security will eventually be reduced if intervention is not undertaken.⁷ Making such estimates is more of an art than a science, so how can it be morally justified to take the huge step of invading another country only on the basis of uncertain presumptions about the action's necessity? Worse yet, decision-makers responsible for their nations' security may feel it prudent to make the worst-case assumption and intervene on the basis of being 'better safe than sorry,' thus increasing the risk of launching interventions that may later turn out to have been unnecessary.

Mitigating Circumstances

The above considerations all point to the conclusion that as a general rule military interventions for national security reasons are not morally justified. However, there are situations in which mitigating circumstances might justify intervening. First, the small country to possibly be intervened in is often not an *innocent* party—it is usually involved in the situation that concerns the prospective intervener, frequently in the sense that it is aligned in a regional or global power struggle with the possible intervener's great-power adversary, or if not already so aligned, posing a threat of realignment. Thus the power considering intervention has reason to be worried by the small country's foreign policy stance.

Whether that stance would constitute a mitigating factor that could help to justify an intervention would depend on the *degree* of the small country's alignment with the great power feared by the prospective intervener. If the small country merely shares an ideological affinity with the feared power, but is truly neutral in the power struggle between the two great powers, then such an affinity would not constitute much of a mitigating factor. (Example: Communist Yugoslavia's truly 'non-aligned' stance in the Cold War after Tito's break with the Communist USSR in 1948). If the small country is very much aligned with the feared power *politically* (voting with it in the UN, providing it with propaganda support, etc.), but is restricted from offering the feared power military bases on its territory, then this higher degree of alignment could contribute more to making an intervention justifiable. (Example: Cuba after the Kennedy-Khrushchev agreement that ended the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis.) In the worst case, if the small country were not restricted from offering military bases to the feared power, then this would certainly count as a substantial mitigating circumstance. (Example: Cuba before the Cuban missile crisis.)

A second possible mitigating factor stems from countries' understandable preference for dealing with emerging security threats while they are still small. Joseph Nye proposed submitting contemplated national-security interventions to a "clear and present danger" test.⁸ Unfortunately, such a test is not appropriate for decisions about intervening, because countries have good reason to try to deal with threats while they are still "unclear and future." This is the lesson of Munich regarding how to thwart a great power's expansionist efforts: "Stop 'em early!" An ounce of prevention is indeed worth a pound of cure—the longer one waits to block an expansionist effort, the more powerful the expander will become, and the higher will be the cost

⁷ For a similar view, see Joseph Nye, "Ethics and American Foreign Policy," in Robert J. Meyers, ed., *International Ethics in the Nuclear Age* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1987), 75.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 74-75.

in blood, money, and resources of blocking its expansion later. Many observers, knowing what we know now, argue that Britain and France should have launched a military intervention against Germany in 1936 when Hitler re-militarized the Rhineland, or at least in 1938 when he annexed the Sudetenland.⁹

Countries therefore try to deal with what they estimate to be threats to their security while they are still far and distant, not clear and present. (Citizens joining their countries' military forces are in effect making their lives available to be put at risk, as necessary, to fine tune the balance of power out at its margins, not just when enemy forces are already invading their territories.) Thus the need to act early, even though estimates of threats cannot be highly accurate, can be a mitigating factor contributing to the possible justification of the infliction of the large injury of intervention on smaller states that may not appear to present a clear and present danger to the intervener's security.

However, the need to "stop 'em early" does not mean that states must try to block each and every expansionist move by an aggressive power. A long-term power struggle among nations is like a baseball season—a team need not win every game to win the league championship. The lesson of Vietnam is that the lesson of Munich must be applied *selectively*, not automatically to every expansionist move by an adversary power. The defending power should take its stands against expansion at times and in places where it has the most advantages, not let the aggressor make those choices. Looking back, the US should probably have made its stand against Communist expansion in Southeast Asia at the borders of Thailand, not try to keep the southern half of Vietnam from being absorbed into the Communist sphere. Eventually the USSR did get a naval base at Cam Rhan Bay, but the Soviet Union lost the Cold War anyway. The United States over-estimated the importance of South Vietnam to US security, and looking back it can be argued that South Vietnam should not have been selected as a situation in which to apply the lesson of Munich.¹⁰

A third possible mitigating factor relates to situations in which a democratic country is contemplating intervention in a country ruled with an iron hand by an oppressive, corrupt dictatorship. Intervention, even if undertaken primarily for national security concerns, could then provide the collateral benefit of deposing the regime and facilitating its replacement by at least a less-repressive government, or in the best case, a democratic one. This collateral benefit's moral value would not be weakened by the fact that the intervention would be motivated primarily by the intervener's self-interested security concerns, and only secondarily by altruistic intentions of relieving the oppression being inflicted on the intervened country's citizens. Doing the right thing for the *wrong* reasons may be morally dubious, but doing the right thing for *other* reasons can be acceptable, if those self-interested 'other' reasons are morally legitimate—such as trying to ensure national security. Two rights do not make a wrong. Also, when self-interest and altruism both point to the same action, then self-interest may motivate a country to actually get done what altruism alone might not induce it to accomplish. Thus, deposing a repressive dictatorship can be a factor mitigating the general moral dubiousness of a military intervention for national security reasons, especially if the intervener is itself a democratic country. (Of course, if there is an estimated high risk that deposing the regime would cause state collapse into

⁹ See Manfred Halpern, "The Morality and Politics of Intervention," 90; Richard Betts, "Striking First: A History of Thankfully Lost Opportunities", *Ethics and International Affairs* (Spring 2003): 21; and Whitley Kaufman, "What's Wrong With Preventive War", *Ethics and International Affairs*, (2005, No. 3): 30.

¹⁰ For examples of such an argument, see Michael Joseph Smith, "Ethics and Intervention," 18, and James Chase, "U.S. Interventions Should Balance Moral and Practical Principles", in Paul Winters, ed., *Interventionism: Current Controversies* (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 1990), 212-213.

chaos, then the putative intervention might well provide neither altruistic nor national security benefits. Recent US experiences in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya provide cautionary examples.)

Counter-intervention is another candidate to provide a mitigating circumstance. It was first nominated by John Stuart Mill in 1859 and seconded, among others, by Michael Walzer in 1977, William F. O'Brien in 1979, and David Fisher in 1994.¹¹ If country A is intervened in by another power B, then country A has already had its sovereignty unjustifiably violated. If a third country C intervenes to counter B's intervention, then C's action might be viewed as *restoring* A's sovereignty, not violating it. This argument leads Walzer to comment that it may seem shameful *not* to counter-intervene, and Manfred Halpern to view counter-intervention as the easiest type of intervention to justify.¹² Thus country C could argue that its counter-intervention would be morally justifiable, even though its primary motive might be concern that country B's prior intervention in country A was affecting the regional or global correlation of forces in a way threatening to C's national security

However, any military intervention in general may also put international stability at risk, and this risk may be even higher for counter-intervention done out of national security concerns. What if the two intervening powers' armies come into direct conflict? If one power starts to prevail in the consequent local fighting, the other may well try to escalate the conflict to the regional level if it has more military capability relative to the other at that level. The risks of inter-state war resulting from counter-intervention put its moral justifiability in serious doubt.¹³

Fortunately, states are often reluctant to conduct counter-interventions that could result in inter-state wars. When one great power intervenes militarily in a country within a region in which the intervening state has clear conventional military superiority, other great powers often eschew counter-intervention as having high risks and low probabilities of success. Thus the NATO countries did not counter-intervene after the USSR intervened in Hungary in 1956 or Czechoslovakia in 1968, and the USSR did not attempt counter-intervention when the United States intervened at various places in its Caribbean Basin 'back yard.' (After the failed US attempt at a proxy-force intervention in Cuba at the Bay of Pigs in 1961, the USSR did not consider dealing with an anticipated subsequent US direct intervention by counter-intervening with its own forces to *defend* its Cuban ally, but misguidedly sought to *deter* such a US invasion by putting Soviet nuclear-tipped missiles on Cuban territory.) In many situations however, the degree of risk posed by counter-intervention is still high enough to off-set the argument in favor of the moral justifiability of counter-intervention on the grounds that it restores rather than violates the victim state's sovereignty.

An additional possible mitigating factor could be that the world's nations, acting multilaterally to maintain global strategic stability (presumably through the UN Security Council) might authorize military interventions that could *strengthen* global stability, unlike unilateral interventions or counter-interventions, which risk escalation to inter-state wars (as discussed above).¹⁴ Historian Marc Trachtenberg has noted that in Europe in the 1800s it was considered that military interventions to maintain a stable European balance of power were acceptable actions because the need for such stability outranked each state's sovereign rights. He suggested that today an analogous need for multilateral authorization of military interventions

¹¹ Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, (Basic Books, 2nd edition, 1977 and 1992), 87-90; David Fisher, "The Ethics of Intervention", *Survival, IISS Quarterly* (Spring 1994): 55; William V. O'Brien, *U.S. Military Intervention – Law and Morality*, 20-21, 82.

¹² Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, p. 97; Manfred Halpern, "The Morality and Politics of Intervention," 88.

¹³ William V. O'Brien, *U.S. Military Intervention – Law and Morality*, 35.

¹⁴ Lori F. Damrosch, "Changing Conceptions of Intervention in International Law", 92-93.

might be to block efforts at nuclear proliferation.¹⁵ If all or most of the great powers felt that it would be dangerous to allow what they viewed as a particularly dangerous regime (*i.e.*, ‘a rogue state’) to obtain nuclear weapons, they might well authorize military intervention to prevent such proliferation. If done through the UN Security Council, such interventions would be legal, and therefore more likely to also be moral. They would constitute a form of ‘preventive war,’ which has in recent times usually been characterized as immoral by many ethicists.¹⁶ However, as Whitley Kauffman has pointed out, the UN Charter set out the preventive use of force as one of the main purposes of the UN, and the Security Council is thus tasked with dealing with “*threats* to international peace and security.”¹⁷

Conclusion

If military interventions for national security purposes are generally not morally justifiable, for the reasons set out initially above, can some combination of the mitigating factors subsequently analyzed be enough to justify such interventions in at least some instances? Even if they do appear to provide sufficient justification, the military intervention should be only a last resort, after all less drastic ways to resolve the security threat have been exhausted, and the proposed intervention should have “reasonable prospects for success.”¹⁸

To make a judgment in a given case as to whether the various mitigating factors can justify intervention, the following check-list of factors can be helpful.

Is a Proposed Military Intervention for National Security Purposes Morally Justifiable?

Points to Consider:

(Answer ‘Yes,’ ‘Maybe/Somewhat,’ or ‘No’ to each question. The more ‘No’ answers there are, the less justifiable the proposed intervention is.)

- Is the country in which you propose to intervene of substantial weight in the world (or regional) power balance?
- Is the country geographically close to your borders?
- Is the country aligned politically with your great-power adversary?
- Is the country likely to give military bases to that power?
- Is the country governed by a repressive dictatorship?
- Has another outside power already intervened in the country?
- Is it probable that the intervention could obtain UN Security Council authorization?

¹⁵ Marc Trachtenberg, “Intervention in Historical Perspective”, in Laura Reed and Carl Keyesen, *Emerging Norms of Justified Intervention*, 16, 17, 27, 21, 27, 30.

¹⁶ Marie Slaughter Burley and Carl Keyesen, “Introduction”, in Laura W. Reed and Carl Kaysen, eds., *Emerging Norms of Justified Intervention*, 7.

¹⁷ Whitley Kauffman, “What’s Wrong with Preventive War?”, 33.

¹⁸ That military interventions inevitably usually fail, and thus are usually unjustifiable, is the thesis of Donald M. Snow’s book *The Case Against Military Intervention* (New York: Routledge, 2016). See especially 7-8, 66, 166-169, 177.

Questions derived from Just War Theory:¹⁹

- Would military intervention be a last resort, after less drastic options have been exhausted?
- Does the proposed intervention appear to have “reasonable prospects for success”?
- Comparing the estimated costs and risks of the intervention with the estimated benefit to the intervener’s national security, would the benefits be proportional to the costs and risks?

If most of the answers are ‘Yes,’ could that justify a given intervention? Maybe—in each case, it is a judgment call!²⁰ Today we should always still begin with the traditional ‘presumption in favor of non-intervention’ and then judge whether one or more mitigating circumstances justify making an exception to that general rule in a given instance.²¹

¹⁹ For discussions of Just-War Theory as applied to military interventions, see J.E. Hare and Carey B. Joynt, *Ethics and International Affairs* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982), 160, David Fisher, “The Ethics of Intervention”, 53-54; and William V. O’Brien, *U.S. Military Intervention: Law and Morality*, 37-38, 82-84.

²⁰ Richard N. Haass, in a discussion of the practical (rather than the moral) aspects of deciding whether to intervene, asserts that “there is no definitive set of rules, nor should there be”, and offers his own set of practical questions to use when deciding on a case-by-case basis. Richard N. Haass, *Intervention*, revised edition (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1999), 68-86.

²¹ For endorsements of such a presumption, see Michael Joseph Smith, “Ethics and Intervention,” 21, 26; Joseph P. Nye, “Ethics and American Foreign Policy”, 77; Robert E. Osgood, “Force In International Relations,” in Kenneth W. Thompson, ed., *Ethics and International Relations* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1985), 55-56; David Fisher, “The Ethics of Intervention”, 58; Lori F. Damrosch, “Changing Conceptions of Intervention in International Law”, 92; and William V. O’Brien, *U.S. Military Intervention: Law and Morality*, 15 and 18.

About the Author

Dr. William A. Douglas is an educator, trained in the field of International Relations, and specializing in democracy in developing countries, international ethics, and international labor affairs. He has lived and worked in Germany, Korea, Peru, and China, and has three decades of experience in developing, and teaching in, labor education programs throughout Latin America. He holds a B.A. in Political Science from the University of Washington, an M.A. from SAIS of Johns Hopkins, and a Ph.D. in Politics from Princeton University. He is the author of Developing Democracy, co-editor of Promoting Democracy, and author of a number of book chapters, as well as articles in such journals as Asian Perspective, Challenge, Pacific Affairs, Asian Survey, Freedom Review, International Organization, The Washington Quarterly, Human Rights Quarterly, and World Affairs. Dr. Douglas was the Interim Director of the SAIS International Development Program from 2001 through 2005, and was again Interim Co-Director of the Program in 2011-2012. As a Professorial Lecturer at SAIS since 1992, he has taught courses on International Ethics and on Labor In Developing Countries. He has also been a Professorial Lecturer for 32 years in Georgetown University's Liberal Studies Program, an M.A. program for mid-career adults. He has been a Fulbright Lecturer in Korea twice, in 1963 and 1980. He was the Fei Yi-ming Visiting Professor of Politics at the Hopkins-Nanjing Center, in 2009-2011. He is fluent in Spanish, and reads German.

DYNAMIC STAGNANCY: AMERICA'S ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN MEDIATION ROLE IN A CHANGING MIDDLE EAST

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Amid the regional turmoil of today's Middle East, what role, if any, should the United States play in Israeli-Palestinian peace mediation? To answer this question, this paper begins by examining the regional context and the calculations that Middle East analysts use to gauge the degree of urgency of solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The analysis then shifts to exploring elements that have historically underlain previous successful Arab-Israeli bilateral negotiations, focusing on the Oslo Accords of 1993, before concluding that such conditions are not present in the dynamics of today's Israeli-Palestinian reality. While the traditional bilateral model of negotiations is no longer sufficient in today's stagnant Israeli-Palestinian reality, the United States cannot afford to be relegated as a 'manager' of the conflict. Rather, the Obama Administration should adopt the dynamic approach of issuing a set of updated parameters delineating the US vision for how the conflict can be solved, and if necessary bring them to the UN Security Council as a binding resolution. While not a panacea, the 'Obama Parameters' would prolong the viability of a two-state solution and act as a launching pad from which the administration taking office in 2017 can renew Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts.

*“The paradox of the American role is that it may be most important when an agreement is least likely.”*¹ – Dennis Ross

Introduction

Amid the chaos of the contemporary Middle East, Israeli-Palestinian peace appears a distant dream. While some posit that the era of American influence in the region is declining, this paper considers the question of what role, if any, the United States should play in a stagnant Israeli-Palestinian peace process as the Obama Administration draws to a close. The Middle East is of such high importance to US national interests that strategists must continue to explore stabilization strategies for a region experiencing unprecedented and transformative geopolitical shifts.

This paper begins by situating itself amid the regional dynamics of today’s Middle East. Following an exploration of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict’s urgency relative to other regional crises, the analysis shifts to examining the elements that have historically underlain previous Arab-Israeli breakthroughs, focusing on the Oslo Accords of 1993. After describing the role in which the United States currently views itself, the paper concludes by arguing for the Obama Administration’s advancement of an updated set of parameters delineating US views on the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Research for this paper was conducted between August 2015 and January 2016, and draws largely from first-hand accounts of current and former diplomatic practitioners and officials involved in previous Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. The author conducted over 20 personal interviews and focused much of the research on memoirs and diaries of former negotiators in an attempt to ground the paper’s ultimate proposal in established precedents and to construct a more wholesome understanding of the proper US role in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations amid a changing Middle East.

Regional Context

A refugee crisis sparked by civil wars in Syria and Iraq, the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and heightened Sunni-Shia tensions manifesting in proxy conflicts across the region are only some of the crises plaguing today’s Middle East. Some regional experts suggest these shifting dynamics mark the beginning of a Middle East equivalent of Europe’s 30 Years’ War.² Secretary General of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Saeb Erekat says, “What’s happening in the Arab world today...it’s exactly what happened in Europe in 1848...It took Europe 90 years for the dust to settle down. It will take Arabs 30 to 50 years.”³

Israel and the Palestinian Territories have also experienced relative volatility in recent months. Since Fall 2015, a wave of terror attacks across the area have led some to conclude there has been an onset of a “stabbing Intifada.”⁴ As of this paper’s writing, negotiations are under

¹ Dennis Ross, *The Missing Peace: The Inside Story of the Fight for Middle East Peace*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004), 772.

² Richard N. Haass, “The New Thirty Years’ War,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, July 21, 2014, <http://www.cfr.org/middle-east-and-north-africa/new-thirty-years-war/p33267>.

³ Saeb Erekat, “Dr. Saeb Erekat, PLO Secretary General at HaaretzQ Conference in New York,” Speech, HaaretzQ with New Israel Fund Conference, New York, NY, December 13, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AB0VRU3ROkE>.

⁴ Jeffrey Goldberg, “The Paranoid, Supremacist Roots of the Stabbing Intifada,” *The Atlantic*, October 16, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/10/the-roots-of-the-palestinian-uprising-against-israel/410944/>.

way among the current Israeli government to expand its coalition, which could potentially result in the appointment of a highly hawkish Israeli defense minister.⁵ While the wave of terror attacks is deeply concerning and the implications of a new coalition unclear, the question arises: How urgent is Israeli-Palestinian peace relative to the turmoil throughout the rest of the region?

Urgency

In qualifying the concept of urgency, former US negotiator Aaron David Miller describes, “It’s disincentives and incentives. That’s what determines urgency. And urgency is what drives leaders.”⁶ It is perhaps ironic then that those with the lowest degree of urgency and who find the status quo most sustainable are often current Israeli and Palestinian leaders. In what he describes as a strategy of “anti-solutionism,” Natan Sachs argues that Israel’s proclivity for “kicking problems down the road” today reflects “a belief that there are currently no solutions to the challenges the country faces and that seeking quick fixes to intractable problems is dangerously naive.”⁷ Former Israeli National Security Advisor Yaakov Amidror embodies this mindset saying,

“Those who will tell you ‘it’s easy...the solution is there and we just have to adopt it,’ do not understand the situation on the ground...The situation in the Middle East today cannot be solved. It’s an historic wave. It’s too wide, it’s too strong. It’s too deep. It’s something that people cannot change. You need time for that. If it is 50 years or 100 years, I don’t know, but you need time.”⁸

High-level members of the Israeli government including Defense Minister Moshe Yaalon likewise express the “anti-solutionism” modus operandi. Yaalon describes Israel’s current view toward peace with the Palestinians saying, “We shouldn’t be in a hurry... Let’s make progress... But slowly, slowly bearing in mind that at the end this entity, whatever it will be called... will be dependent on Israel.”⁹

For entirely different reasons, Palestinian Authority (PA) leadership in the West Bank appears to view the status quo as relatively favorable as well. This likely stems from a fear that entering negotiations, which in the past have failed to produce a Palestinian state, could further contribute to the PA’s perceived lack of legitimacy in the eyes of its public. Former US Middle East Special Envoy Dennis Ross says, “...[Palestinian President] Abu Mazen has decided...it’s too late for him to try to do anything... He’s made a choice that his legacy is going to be that he wasn’t a betrayer.”¹⁰

While Israeli and Palestinian leaders appear amenable to maintenance of the status quo, others have a different perspective. Founder of Terrestrial Jerusalem Danny Seidemann says of

⁵ Jonathan Lis and Barak Ravid, “Netanyahu Offers Hardliner Avigdor Lieberman Position of Defense Minister in Expanded Coalition,” *Haaretz*, May 18, 2016, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.720259>.

⁶ Aaron D. Miller, Interview by the author, Telephone audio recording, October 3, 2015.

⁷ Natan Sachs, “Why Israel Waits: Anti-Solutionism as a Strategy,” *Brookings*, October 20, 2015, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/articles/2015/10/20-israel-anti-solutionism-sachs>.

⁸ Yaakov Amidror, Interview by the author, Audio recording, Tel Aviv, December 27, 2015.

⁹ Moshe Yaalon, “A Conversation with Moshe Ya’alon, Israel’s Defense Minister,” Speech, Brookings Saban Forum 2015, December 4, 2015, <http://www.brookings.edu/events/2015/12/04-saban-forum-2015-israel-us-yesterday-today-tomorrow>.

¹⁰ Dennis Ross, Personal conversation, Washington, DC, January 27, 2016.

the status quo, “We are sipping cappuccino[s] on the edge of a volcano. The greatest threat to the Zionist enterprise is perpetual occupation and we’re very close to condemning ourselves to perpetual occupation.”¹¹ Members of the Obama Administration have also declared that the status quo is unsustainable, maintaining that the lack of Israeli-Palestinian peace damages Israel’s security, suppresses Palestinian national aspirations, and runs counter to US national interests.

The contrasting assessments over the urgency concerning resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are largely grounded in analysts’ different answers to two questions:

1. How many years are left until prospects for achieving a two-state solution no longer exist?
2. How central is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to broader regional peace and stability?

As the following section demonstrates, the fewer years one assigns to the first calculation and the higher centrality degree one assigns to the second, correlate with perceptions of urgency concerning resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict rising. By contrast, the more years one assigns to the first calculation and the lesser centrality degree one assigns to the second, correlate with senses of urgency decreasing. Both viewpoints require further examination.

Time Until the Two-State Solution is No Longer Viable

The two-state solution refers to the scenario whereby an end-of-claims agreement signed between Israel and the Palestinians would result in the creation of a State of Palestine in parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in exchange for peace with Israel. The longer a two-state peace agreement continues to elude negotiators, the sooner Israel must decide whether to annex the West Bank or unilaterally withdraw its military and civilian presence behind its security barrier to retain the country’s Jewish and democratic character. As President Barack Obama says:

“If the status quo is not resolved, because of demographics, because of the pressures and the frustrations that are going to exist in the West Bank, and certainly already exist in Gaza... over time, Israel is going to have a choice about the nature of the Israeli state and its character.”¹²

The question therefore hinges on the definition of “over time” and how soon the various stakeholders believe they must act. Opinions on this question run a wide spectrum beginning with those like former Israeli negotiator Avi Gil, who maintains that there is no “mathematical definition” for calculating this.¹³ Israeli historian Benny Morris agrees saying, “Nobody knows when that point is going to be and when you’re at the point you don’t know that you’re at the point.”¹⁴ Seidemann uses an analogy to illustrate this idea saying,

¹¹ Daniel Seidemann, Interview by the author, Audio recording, Jerusalem, December 29, 2015.

¹² Barak Obama, “US President Barak Obama Interviewed by Ilana Dayan on Israeli Television,” *Uvda Arutz 2*, June 2, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TA-1NI-5PX0>.

¹³ Avi Gil, Interview by the author, Audio recording, Jerusalem, December 30, 2015.

¹⁴ Benny Morris, Interview by the author, Audio recording, Washington, DC, November 30, 2015.

“The point of no return is sort of like crossing the Pacific Ocean on an ocean liner without sophisticated navigation equipment. You’re going to cross the... International Date Line...and it’s very consequential when you cross it because one side of the line is yesterday and the other side of the line is tomorrow...But you’re not going to know it when you cross it.”¹⁵

Others offer a more concrete time frame. Israeli Track II negotiator Yossi Beilin says, “In [the] period closer to five [years] than to ten, you will have the official statistics which will say that a minority of Jews is dominating a majority of Palestinians. It’s very close to it.”¹⁶ Former Head of IDF Coordination in Bethlehem and Hebron Lt. Col. Aviv Feigel puts a lengthier time on this period saying, “It will take one generation...Generation meaning 20-25 years. But you already can see it happening.”¹⁷ This wide-ranging time frame is paralleled in the diversity of analyses concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict’s centrality to broader regional peace and stability.

Centrality of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict to Regional Peace and Stability

The debate over the importance of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to regional peace and stability can be broken into three categories: 1) whether the Israeli-Palestinian issue is the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, 2) whether the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a primary cause of regional instability, and 3) the degree to which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a cause for Arab tensions with the western world.

Palestinians, especially those subscribing to a pan-Arab mentality, often posit that the Israeli-Palestinian issue lies at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Embodying this sentiment, Walid Khalidi writes, “To the Arabs, the Arab-Israeli conflict derives from the non-resolution of the Palestine Problem. The cause (the Palestine Problem) has to be seen to have been adequately addressed before the effect (the Arab-Israeli conflict) can be resolved.”¹⁸

Israelis seem to be split on the issue. Many vehemently disagree with the assertion that Israeli-Palestinian peace is the key to regional stability. Current Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spends an entire chapter of his 1993 book *A Place Among the Nations* critiquing “...the impression relentlessly presented to the media and the world... that all one [has] to do [is] to solve that Palestinian Problem, and there [will] be peace in the Middle East.”¹⁹ However, other Israelis place more weight on the potential effect resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could have on peace with Israel’s Arab neighbors. Former Israeli negotiator Gilead Sher says, “The very gist of the Arab-Israeli conflict is the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.”²⁰ In December 2015, Member of Knesset Tzipi Livni offered that, “In the end, the glass ceiling of the relations between Israel and the Arab world is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”²¹

As with Israelis, a wide degree of thought on the centrality of the Israeli-Palestinian issue to the broader Arab-Israeli conflict also exists among American regional experts. Illustrating the

¹⁵ Seidemann, Interview by the author.

¹⁶ Yossi Beilin, Interview by the author, Audio recording, Tel Aviv, December 27, 2015.

¹⁷ Aviv Feigel, Interview by the author, Audio recording, Tel Aviv, January 7, 2015.

¹⁸ Walid Khalidi, “Thinking the Unthinkable: A Sovereign Palestinian State,” *Foreign Affairs* 56, no. 4 (July 1978): 698.

¹⁹ Benjamin Netanyahu, *A Place Among the Nations: Israel and the World* (New York: Bantam, 1993), 92.

²⁰ Gilead Sher, Interview by the author, Audio recording, Tel Aviv, August 10, 2015.

²¹ Tzipi Livni, “How to Restore Order in the Middle East,” Panel, Brookings Saban Forum 2015, December 4, 2015, <http://www.brookings.edu/events/2015/12/04-saban-forum-2015-israel-us-yesterday-today-tomorrow>.

spectrum of this thinking, Dennis Ross wrote in 2004 that, "...the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict remains the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. There is no escaping the need to address it."²² However, in his 2015 book *Doomed to Succeed*, Ross acknowledges that, "...the hard truth is that [the Palestinians] are not a priority for Arab leaders."²³

In addition to the degree of centrality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to Arab-Israeli disputes, its effect on broader regional stability is also a contentious issue. Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi draws a connection with the appeal of terror groups and the continuation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict saying, "It is no secret that terror organizations use the Palestinian issue and the suffering of the Palestinian people as an excuse for their atrocious operations and in the propaganda they spread to recruit new members."²⁴ Saeb Erekat parallels Israeli-Palestinian peace with combating ISIS saying, "To defeat ISIS we need...democracy in the Arab world... and secondly peace between Palestinians and Israelis."²⁵

Many on the Israeli side think the exact opposite. Netanyahu writes, "Israel's friends and foes alike falsely [believe] the 'Palestinian Problem' to be synonymous with the 'Middle East Problem.' This perversion of truth is a monument to the success of the Arab propaganda machine, and it certainly [has] done great damage to Israel."²⁶ Moshe Yaalon echoes this message saying, "...although we hear again and again that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the core for instability in the region, I strongly deny it...The civil war in Syria or Iraq or everywhere [sic] is not because of [Israel]."²⁷

There is less unanimity over this question among the Americans. While Ross acknowledges degrees of connection between the Arab-Israeli and Palestinian conflicts he maintains, "...there is no linkage between solving [the Arab-Israeli conflict] and solving other conflicts in the Middle East."²⁸ Ross further writes,

"Of course, removing the Palestinian conflict as a moral issue for Israel and as a source of additional instability would be a good thing, but it would not stop one barrel bomb from being dropped in Syria, the reemergence of the sectarian conflict in Iraq, or the internal battle with the Islamists in Egypt. In other words, it would *not* be a game changer in the region."²⁹

The Obama Administration, meanwhile, has a different interpretation of the role of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the region's broader stability. After his first meeting with Netanyahu in May 2009, Obama said peace "...between the Palestinians and the Israelis... strengthens our hand in in the international community in dealing with a potential Iranian

²² Ross, *The Missing Peace*, 779.

²³ Dennis Ross, *Doomed to Succeed: The US-Israel Relationship from Truman to Obama* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 396.

²⁴ Maayan Groisman, "Sisi: The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Feeds International Terror Organizations," *Jerusalem Post*, February 29, 2016, <http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Sisi-The-Israeli-Palestinian-conflict-feeds-international-terror-organizations-446433>.

²⁵ Erekat, "Dr. Saeb Erekat."

²⁶ Netanyahu, *A Place Among the Nations*, 129.

²⁷ Yaalon, "A Conversation with Moshe Ya'alon."

²⁸ Dennis Ross and David Makovsky, *Myths, Illusions, and Peace: Finding a New Direction for America in the Middle East* (New York: Penguin Group, 2009), 316.

²⁹ Ross, *Doomed to Succeed*, 407.

threat.”³⁰ Obama’s first Special Envoy for Middle East Peace George Mitchell carries a similar message, writing,

“In the highly volatile Middle East, instability in one part of the region feeds instability in another part. Resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could make it possible for Israel and the Sunni-dominated monarchies to work together to combat their common foe: extremist forces across the region.”³¹

The third element of the debate surrounding the centrality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to regional peace and stability concerns the degree to which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a catalyst of the Arab world’s enmity toward the West. Some Palestinians and Arabs maintain the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a key element of broader Arab-western tensions. Shibley Telhami writes, “It boils down to mostly one issue: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which clearly remains the prism of pain through which many Arabs and Muslims see American foreign policy.”³²

Unsurprisingly, many Israelis disagree. Netanyahu embodies this sentiment writing, “...Arab antagonism directed at Israel...is in no way specific to the Jewish state. Rather, Arab enmity toward Israel and the Jews is merely a particular instance of far more generalized antipathies that would have existed even had Israel never been established.”³³ Ross agrees, writing that previous American assumptions of “...the need to distance from Israel to gain Arab responsiveness, concern about the high costs of cooperation with the Israelis, and the belief that resolving the Palestinian problem is the key to improving the US position in the region...[are] fundamentally flawed.”³⁴

The importance of understanding the calculations made surrounding the urgency of this conflict is critical because different interpretations manifest in different policy proposals for what the American role and actions should be in attempting peace efforts. Before examining these various proposals, it is first necessary to explore the elements that have historically constituted the underlying conditions for Arab-Israeli peace breakthroughs.

Conditions for Peace

Historically, three elements have often characterized the emergence of Arab-Israeli peace agreements:

1. Both sides feel a consequence for not acting
2. Leaders with a will for peace and legitimacy in the eyes of their citizenry exist on both sides
3. A level of trust is present between both sides’ leaders and among their publics

³⁰ “Remarks by President Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Press Availability,” *The White House*, March 18, 2009, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-obama-and-israeli-prime-minister-netanyahu-press-availability>.

³¹ George J. Mitchell, *The Negotiator: A Memoir* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 316.

³² Shibley Telhami, “It’s Gaza First at the US-Islamic World Forum,” *Brookings*, March 5, 2010, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2010/03/05-arab-israeli-conflict-telhami>.

³³ Netanyahu, *A Place Among Nations*, 124.

³⁴ Ross, *Doomed to Succeed*, 393.

The following section explains these elements and shows how the *lack* of their presence in today's context helps illustrate why an Israeli-Palestinian peace breakthrough has failed to occur in recent years.

Consequences for Not Acting

The Oslo process of the late 1990's arose as a partial result of the respective leaders and citizens' feeling that there would be consequences in the forms of violence and lost legitimacy for not acting. Oslo followed the First Intifada (1987-1991), which, in the words of Israeli academic Avraham Sela, "...reminded the Israeli public of the ongoing problem of the future of the territories and their inhabitants."³⁵ The First Intifada also incentivized Chairman of the PLO Yasser Arafat to enter negotiations, as he felt the uprising was undermining his leadership.³⁶

The current sentiment among Israelis and Palestinians does not reflect equivalent consequences of forgoing negotiations. While the First Intifada violence drove many Israelis to believe negotiations were the primary means by which to stop the violence, today's Israeli public has a different reaction to the recent wave of stabbings. Editor of the Israeli daily *Haaretz* Aluf Benn says, "Even a new wave of violence has not sparked a renewed interest or discussion of peace or negotiations."³⁷ Even if this sentiment were to suddenly change, the role of both sides' leaders in reaching or derailing an agreement is critical as well.

Leadership with Will and Legitimacy

Beyond the belief that there are tangible consequences for not entering negotiations, another element characterizing previous Arab-Israeli breakthroughs has been leaders on both sides possessing a deep conviction in peace and the political credibility in the eyes of their public. President Obama says, "...peace is possible if leaders and people are willing to summon the will and courage to break free from the patterns of the past and forge a new future."³⁸ Founder of J Street Jeremy Ben-Ami says, "Even the most determined presidents, with a clear understanding of what's in the best interests of what's involved, can't force intransigent politicians to resolve a conflict they don't want to resolve."³⁹ Beyond signing an actual agreement, leadership is also necessary for generating support for a peace agreement among the public.

Unfortunately, this leadership appears to be absent in today's Israeli and Palestinian political scenes. Israeli academic Menachem Klein says, "The circumstances create leaders, not the other way around...I don't see here the conditions that imposes [sic] the leaders to really lead."⁴⁰

³⁵ Avraham Sela, "The First Intifada: How the Arab-Israeli Conflict was Transformed," *Haaretz*, December 13, 2012, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/the-first-intifada-how-the-arab-israeli-conflict-was-transformed.premium-1.484677>.

³⁶ Dennis Ross, "Late 1970's and 1980's," Lecture, Georgetown University, Washington, DC, March 17, 2014.

³⁷ Aluf Benn, "Beyond Negotiations: Can the Peace Process be Unfrozen to Achieve More than 'Conflict Management'?" Panel, *HaaretzQ* with New Israel Fund Conference, New York, NY, December 13, 2015.

³⁸ Barak Obama, "US President Barak Obama's Address to the *Haaretz Q* with NIF Conference," Video Recording, *HaaretzQ* with New Israel Fund Conference, New York, NY, December 13, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b76hCTsaluk>.

³⁹ Juliet Eilperin, "Obama Takes Steps to Mend Relations with Speech at Adas Israel Synagogue," *Washington Post*, May 21, 2015, <https://goo.gl/x2vQyA>.

⁴⁰ Klein, Interview by the author.

Trust Between Leaders and Publics

Assuming that leadership with the necessary will and legitimacy to oversee a peace deal emerges, a degree of trust must also exist between the parties' leaders and population for negotiations to succeed. Throughout the Oslo process, trust developed between Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat. Today, there are many ways to characterize the relationship between Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas, but trust is not one of them. As former US Ambassador to Israel Martin Indyk says, referencing Oslo and the most recent round of negotiations from 2013-2014 of which he helped broker,

“The heart of the matter is trust... [Yitzhak Rabin] had the trust of the Israeli people, and the trust of Yasser Arafat... The point at which we came back into the process—Secretary of State [John] Kerry and myself as envoy was one in which both sides were already convinced they did not have a partner... And the leaders had also developed such a toxic relationship between them—the combination was deadly.”⁴¹

The trust deficit extends beyond the two sides' leaders. Dennis Ross describes a high degree of disbelief that also exists among Israeli and Palestinian citizens that undermines the prospects of an agreement.⁴² With such a dismal playing field and wide gaps existing between the parties, questions loom regarding any meaningful role the United States can still play in Israeli-Palestinian mediation.

Current US Role*Where the United States Sees Itself*

The fact that traditional conditions for peacemaking are not present in today's Israeli-Palestinian reality reflects what could be interpreted as a “strategic pause” in the current US approach to direct Israeli-Palestinian peace mediation. The pause is embodied by the decrease in President Obama's mentioning of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in his addresses to the UN General Assembly between 2009-2015, with most notably zero mentions of the words, ‘Israel,’ ‘Israeli,’ ‘Palestine,’ or ‘Palestinian,’ in his 2015 speech (*see Figure 1 in Appendix*). Furthermore, Obama said in June 2015 that for the remainder of his presidency, “I don't see the likelihood of a framework agreement. I don't see the likelihood of us being able to emerge from Camp David... and hold up hands...”⁴³ The lack of US belief in its ability to re-launch bilateral Israeli-Palestinian negotiations has had consequences for the US-Israel relationship.

Today's US-Israel Relationship

For a team that campaigned on messages of progress and optimism, members of the Obama Administration, including Samantha Power, Joe Biden, and John Kerry, have expressed

⁴¹ Danna Harman, “Martin Indyk Tells Israel Conference on Peace: Israelis Must Stop Playing the Victim,” *Haaretz*, November 12, 2015, <http://www.haaretz.com/peace/1.685792>.

⁴² Dennis Ross, Personal conversation, Washington, DC, September 2, 2015.

⁴³ Obama, “US President Barak Obama Interviewed by Ilana Dayan.”

frustration with the stagnancy of today's Israeli-Palestinian peace process. This frustration comes amid conspicuous personal tensions between Obama and Netanyahu. One of the clearest developments to sour the Obama-Netanyahu relationship occurred in March 2015 when, in an effort to vocalize his vehement opposition to the Iran deal, Netanyahu delivered a speech on the floor of the US Congress despite the Obama Administration's opposition. Today, some question whether the US-Israel relationship is at an unmatched low.⁴⁴ Israeli academic Yossi Shain says the Iran nuclear deal has caused an "unprecedented strain on the US-Israel relationship."⁴⁵

Others firmly disagree. Dennis Ross published a book in 2015 titled *Doomed to Succeed: The US-Israel Relationship From Truman to Obama* that highlights the enduring nature of US-Israel relationship through highs and lows.⁴⁶ Ross explains that there are precedents for low points of relations between Israeli prime ministers and American presidents but that there is a history of these relations repairing themselves.⁴⁷ He suggests this may be the case for the Netanyahu-Obama relationship. Referencing the tensions between Obama and Netanyahu surrounding the Iran deal, Ross says, "...we've seen this movie before. What we've just seen with Iran is not unprecedented...What is interesting...is in the aftermath of the president winning [a political fight with an Israeli prime minister], even though there's clear tensions...you actually see an improvement in the US-Israeli relationship."⁴⁸

Beyond disagreements over the Iran deal, another key development in the current US-Israel relationship was the Obama Administration's announcement that the United States has to "reevaluate" how it approaches defending Israel on the international stage.⁴⁹ This reassessment comes in light of comments by Netanyahu in the lead up to the March 2015 Israeli elections in which the Prime Minister suggested a Palestinian state would never be established under his watch. A clearer picture of what "reevaluate" entails came three months later when Obama said this could mean "foreign-policy consequences."⁵⁰ The President elaborated on these "foreign-policy consequences" the next month in an interview with Israel's Channel 2, hinting the United States may break precedent by not vetoing resolutions at the UN condemning settlement construction.⁵¹ In December 2015, Obama told Israel's President Reuven Rivlin that lack of progress with Israeli-Palestinian peace talks would make it difficult for the United States to keep defending Israel in the same fashion on the international diplomatic stage.⁵² Regardless of whether any of these developments are an indication of an unprecedented low level of relations between the countries, the Obama Administration has continued to reiterate its steadfast

⁴⁴ Dennis Jett, "Fix the US-Israel Relationship," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, October 2, 2015, <http://www.post-gazette.com/opinion/2015/10/02/Fix-the-special-relationship/stories/201509300044>.

⁴⁵ Yossi Shain, Personal conversation, Washington, DC, September 1, 2015.

⁴⁶ Ross, *Doomed to Succeed*.

⁴⁷ Dennis Ross, "Book Talk: Doomed to Succeed: The US-Israel Relationship from Truman to Obama," Lecture, Georgetown University, Washington, DC, October 5, 2015.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ "White House: US 'to reevaluate' backing for Israel at UN," *Ynet*, March 19, 2015, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4638988,00.html>.

⁵⁰ Jeffrey Goldberg, "'Look... It's My Name on This: Obama Defends the Iran Nuclear Deal,'" *The Atlantic*, May 21, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/05/obama-interview-iran-isis-israel/393782/>.

⁵¹ Obama, "US President Barak Obama Interviewed by Ilana Dayan."

⁵² Barak Ravid, "Obama Tells Rivlin: With No Peace Process, US at a Loss on How to Defend Israel Diplomatically," *Haaretz*, December 11, 2015, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.691246>.

commitment to Israel's security, with the President describing the US commitment to Israel's security as "sacrosanct" and "non-partisan."⁵³

Critiques of Current American Mediation Capacity

Even if the Obama Administration decided it was going to make another push for Israeli-Palestinian peace, which as demonstrated above appears highly unlikely, the three primary critiques outlining why the United States should *not* take on a major brokering role of the conflict in the foreseeable future are:

1. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not the biggest regional priority for US interests in such a turbulent Middle East
2. The United States cannot want peace more than the parties
3. Other international actors, and other paradigms beyond the traditional bilateral model are more suited than the United States for brokering talks

Other Regional Priorities

While Israeli-Palestinian peace was an obvious US priority in the Middle East a couple decades ago, over the past few years as waves of volatility have flooded across the region, American priorities have shifted. A US government official who chose to remain unnamed says that while the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains a regional priority for the United States, in reality, other issues are "crowding out" the peace process, notably Syria and anti-ISIL efforts.⁵⁴ Martin Indyk carries a similar message saying that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is "...not on their radar screen in the White House."⁵⁵

Supporting this analysis is the decrease in mentions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict between the Obama Administration's two National Security Strategies (NSS). The Administration's May 2010 NSS contained a total of 21 mentions of the words 'Israel' or 'Israeli' and ten mentions of the words 'Palestine' or 'Palestinian,' while its February 2015 NSS contained only five mentions of the former terms and two mentions of the latter (*see Figure 2 in Appendix*). The stark decrease in mentions of these words between the two strategies is indicative of what could be interpreted as the Obama Administration's de-prioritization of the conflict in relation to other issues of US national interest.

Even if the United States decided the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was its number one priority in the Middle East, there are those who argue America's sincere efforts will continue to be met with failure so long as the two parties themselves fail to establish sufficient desires for peace.

America Cannot Want Peace More Than the Parties

While in some negotiations, including the Dayton Accords, the United States has proven capable of successfully mediating between parties who are not particularly amenable to

⁵³ "Obama Reassures Jewish Groups on US-Israel Relationship," *Reuters*, August 28, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear-usa-idUSKCN0QX1M620150828>.

⁵⁴ Unnamed US Government Official, Personal conversation, August 21, 2015.

⁵⁵ Martin Indyk, Interview by the author, Audio recording, Washington, DC, October 21, 2015.

American involvement, Israeli-Palestinian negotiations have shown otherwise.⁵⁶ Chief Arabic-English translator for Presidents Clinton and George W. Bush, Gamal Helal says, “There is a myth...that somehow we, as the United States, can actually create a different reality all on our own...I don’t believe this is the case...the main responsibility is on the parties.”⁵⁷

That said, others believe that Middle East peace is of such key US national interest that placing the onus on the parties is an unproductive mindset. Yossi Beilin says that the United States “...has a role if the parties are not ready to do it themselves...In my humble view, peace in the Middle East is an American interest...and it is stupid to say ‘we cannot want peace more than the parties.’”⁵⁸ Ambassador Thomas Pickering rhetorically asks, “...how can a vital interest of the United States be trumped by the statement that peace has to mean more to the parties than it does to the US?”⁵⁹

Other Viable Mediators

Referring to America’s role in the Middle East, Martin Indyk posits that there is a “decline [of] American dominance in the region.”⁶⁰ Others agree, holding that different international actors are better placed to fill the void of a peace mediator than the United States.⁶¹ Danny Seidemann says that the next US administration,

“...should recognize that the period of American ownership of [Israeli-Palestinian] political processes is over; that the American monopoly over the exercise of power is over... if there is going to be any kind of forward movement on [the] Israel-Palestine [issue], it will not be primarily the result of an American-brokered deal between Israelis and Palestinians. It will be something else... It will be more multi-polar.”⁶²

From a multilateral perspective, some posit that Israeli-Palestinian peace should come amid a broader regional effort with other Arab actors.⁶³ National Security Advisor for President George W. Bush, Steve Hadley, says, “...an Israeli-Palestinian peace should be and needs to be...embedded in a broader Arab-Israeli reconciliation.”⁶⁴ Member of Knesset Yair Lapid advocates a regional proposal involving a summit hosted by Egypt in which Israel would declare its support of the Arab Peace Initiative (API) as a basis for future negotiations.⁶⁵

⁵⁶ See Richard Holbrooke, *To End a War* (New York: The Modern Library, 1998).

⁵⁷ Gamal Helal, Interview by the author, Audio recording, Washington, DC, January 20, 2016.

⁵⁸ Beilin, Interview by the author.

⁵⁹ Thomas Pickering, Lecture, Washington, DC, June 10, 2015.

⁶⁰ Indyk, Interview by the author.

⁶¹ Molloy, Interview by the author.

⁶² Seidemann, Interview by the author.

⁶³ Dennis Ross, “Preventing the Third Intifada: A Talk with Dennis Ross on Responding to Tensions in the West Bank and the Future of US-Israeli Relations,” Lecture, Georgetown University, December 7, 2015. Huberman, Interview by the author.

⁶⁴ Steve Hadley, “How to Restore Order in the Middle East,” Panel, Brookings Saban Forum 2015, December 4, 2015, <http://www.brookings.edu/events/2015/12/04-saban-forum-2015-israel-us-yesterday-today-tomorrow>.

⁶⁵ William A. Galston, “Yair Lapid on Israel’s Regional Challenges: Thinking Beyond the Current Government,” *Brookings*, June 9, 2015, <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/markaz/posts/2015/06/09-lapid-multilateral-talks-iran-bds-peace-coalition>.

Others staunchly object to this multilateral, regional approach. Tzipi Livni says, "...those Israelis telling you that you can reach an internal peace with the Arab world without the Palestinians, they tell lies."⁶⁶ Aviv Feigel agrees saying,

"No Arab leader... will force Abu Mazen to sign an agreement that Abu Mazen does not feel is perfect and agrees to sign from his own will. The pragmatic states in the Arab world...can support bilateral negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. They can be...the 'best man'...but they cannot sign instead [of the Palestinians] and cannot force [the Palestinians to sign]."⁶⁷

Some experts suggest the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be more effectively brokered through other international forums and heightened European involvement, which has already begun. France announced intentions to take a more active role in the peace process in June 2015.⁶⁸ In January 2016, France declared it would recognize a State of Palestine should the deadlock in negotiations fail to be broken,⁶⁹ and called for a French-led Middle East peace initiative in February 2016,⁷⁰ which is set to occur in May 2016.⁷¹ In November 2015, the European Union (EU) issued settlement-labeling guidelines.⁷² This move was immediately rebuked by Israel⁷³ and resulted in Netanyahu announcing Israel's temporary suspension of diplomatic dialogue with the EU,⁷⁴ to which the EU responded that it would still play a role.⁷⁵ Menachem Klein explains how the Europeans may be more appropriate mediators saying,

"European actors are more inclined to understand history here [and] religious sensitivities, much better than the United States...[which] has a...cultural barrier, [a] blindness on understanding...what's going on here on a small piece of land with so much history, so many religions. It's a problem for the United States. It thinks differently."⁷⁶

⁶⁶ Tzipi Livni, "Tzipi Livni, MK Zionist Union at HaaretzQ Conference in New York," Speech, HaaretzQ with New Israel Fund Conference, New York, NY, December 13, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EBx0XLYb_Qs.

⁶⁷ Feigel, Interview by the author.

⁶⁸ William Booth, "France Wants Bigger Role in Israeli-Palestinian Peace Efforts," *Washington Post*, June 21, 2015, <https://goo.gl/xHBY89>.

⁶⁹ "France to Recognize Palestine if Deadlock with Israel not Broken," *Jerusalem Post*, January 29, 2016, <http://goo.gl/9Yn4t1>.

⁷⁰ Barak Ravid, "France Presents Middle East Peace Initiative," *Haaretz*, February 16, 2016, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.703640>.

⁷¹ Herb Keinon, "France to Convene Mideast Summit in May, Without Israel or Palestinians," *Jerusalem Post*, April 21, 2016, <http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/France-to-convene-Israeli-Palestinian-summit-on-May-30-in-bid-to-relaunch-peace-talks-451967>.

⁷² Barak Ravid, "EU to Issue Settlement Product Labeling Guidelines Next Week, Senior Israeli Officials Say," *Haaretz*, November 2, 2015, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.683847>.

⁷³ Jodi Rudoren and Sewell Chan, "E.U. Move to Label Israeli Settlement Goods Strains Ties," *New York Times*, November 11, 2015, <http://goo.gl/xytQH0>.

⁷⁴ Itamar Eichner, "Netanyahu Suspends Diplomatic Dialogue with EU," *Ynet*, November 29, 2015, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4732577,00.html>.

⁷⁵ Gil Hoffman and Herb Keinon, "EU Insists it Will Play Role in Peace Process, Even as Israel Suspends Cooperation," *Jerusalem Post*, November 30, 2015, <http://goo.gl/S71JRC>.

⁷⁶ Klein, Interview by the author.

While some Israelis and many Palestinians look favorably on a heightened European brokering role, other American and Israeli experts worry that European actors would be less inclined to critique the Palestinian side as much as the Israelis—calling into question their ability to serve as trusted brokers for the Israelis.⁷⁷

With many questioning the fundamental American capacity to influence the situation and as the historical conditions underlying previous Arab-Israeli breakthroughs are not present in today's Israeli-Palestinian reality, a wide range of opinions exist as to what steps the US should now take.

Views of Steps the United States Should Take

Given the stagnancy of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, two broad categories of thought have emerged as to what the United States should do. On one side of the spectrum are those who believe the United States should continue its practice of trying to get the sides, especially Israel, to make forward movements toward peace by incentivizing them with a 'carrot' approach. On the other side are those who believe that because of both sides' intransigence, the United States must force the parties to an agreement by wielding a greater 'stick' in its approach.

Carrots

In a recently declassified email sent by Martin Indyk to George Mitchell in 2010, Indyk outlined his theory of how Netanyahu can be persuaded to make concessions favorable to a peace agreement. Indyk wrote, "Put your arm around Bibi [Netanyahu]...the purpose of embracing him is to nudge him forward...As his friend, paint a realistic picture of the strategic consequences of his negotiating tactics..."⁷⁸ Dennis Ross operates under a similar mindset, believing that the Israelis are most receptive to moving through American embracing. Ross writes, Israeli leaders "...are more responsive to those they perceive truly understand their concerns."⁷⁹

However, as the Obama Administration attempted to broker Israeli-Palestinian negotiations from 2013-2014, it developed the realization that no matter how much embracing they attempted of the Netanyahu government, the Prime Minister could not be moved on key issues. Reassessing the embracing theory expressed in his email five years earlier, Indyk said in October 2015 that, "Bibi has proved that he's not moveable with [the embracing] technique..."⁸⁰ To move someone like Netanyahu, Indyk now believes, "The only leverage that might work is the threat not to veto in the UN Security Council."⁸¹

Sticks

On a theoretical level, Yael Aronoff offers a political psychology-based argument demonstrating that, while certain political leaders with a "flexible cognitive system," among

⁷⁷ "Netanyahu: Sunni Arab States More Realistic About Israeli-Palestinian Conflict than EU," *Jerusalem Post*, January 21, 2016, <http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Politics-And-Diplomacy/Netanyahu-Sunni-Arab-states-more-realistic-about-Israeli-Palestinian-conflict-than-EU-442351>.

⁷⁸ Martin Indyk, Email to George Mitchell and Jeffrey D. Feltman, September 30, 2010.

⁷⁹ Ross, *Doomed to Succeed*, 402.

⁸⁰ Indyk, Interview by the author.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

other traits, are capable of shedding formerly-hawkish behavior and will enter peace negotiations, those without such traits, including Benjamin Netanyahu, "...will be motivated only by outside and internal pressure to make tactical foreign policy changes to appease this pressure."⁸² Guy Ziv, another scholar examining the motivations behind why formerly hawkish leaders undergo dovish shifts in their foreign policy, finds that Netanyahu has shifted his foreign policy preferences in the past as "...a tactical response to pressure from the United States."⁸³

On a practical level, many experts today agree the Netanyahu government can only be moved through pressure. Former US Ambassador to Israel Dan Kurtzer writes, "A fundamental change is required in the US approach to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict...Now is the time for a strong set of unilateral policy steps by the United States, in pursuit of a longer-term strategy of peacemaking."⁸⁴ Retired Israeli Brigadier General Ephraim Sneh says, the "US government could have a role if they were ready to...impose on the parties...to walk the extra mile...to bridge the positions."⁸⁵ While it appears unlikely the United States will ever have a capacity to truly impose peace on the parties, there are constructive independent actions it can still take to guarantee its national interests are upheld in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.⁸⁶ As Ross writes, "The United States cannot impose peace... But [it] can and must fashion diplomacy that meets the requirements and possibilities of the time."⁸⁷ One form this "diplomacy" can take in today's context is the Obama Administration's issuance in its last year of a set of updated US parameters stipulating how the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be solved.

Proposal: the Obama Parameters

While the United States is currently in no position to launch direct, bilateral negotiations, American foreign policy experts have suggested that the United States cannot afford to abandon Israeli-Palestinian mediation efforts.⁸⁸ The Obama Administration in its final months should issue a set of updated US parameters that delineate the American view of how the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be resolved in a manner that addresses both sides' core needs. The point at which the two-state solution becomes no longer viable likely falls somewhere between two years, as maintained by pessimists, and 20 years as maintained by optimists. Regardless, the window of opportunity for the United States to prolong two-state solution viability is rapidly shrinking, necessitating independent actions like parameters.

The 'Obama Parameters' would largely be based on the Clinton Parameters, which were published following the collapse of the Camp David negotiations in 2000 but then withdrawn as Clinton left office. Experts, including former US Ambassador to Israel Dan Kurtzer, have drafted sample parameters that could be used by the Obama Administration to outline US positions on resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict's key issues, including forms of a shared Jerusalem,

⁸² Yael S. Aronoff, "When and Why do Hard-Liners Become Soft? An Examination of Israeli Prime Ministers Shamir, Rabin, Peres, and Netanyahu," *Profiling Political Leaders: Cross-Cultural Studies of Personality and Behavior* ed. Ofer Feldman, and Lina O. Valenty, 185-201 (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2001): 199.

⁸³ Guy Ziv, "Simple vs. Complex Learning Revisited: Israeli Prime Ministers and the Question of a Palestinian State," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 9 (2013): 203.

⁸⁴ Daniel Kurtzer, "7 Steps to an Effective US Peace Policy," *The National Interest*, November 2, 2015, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/seven-steps-effective-us-peace-policy-14220>.

⁸⁵ Ephraim Sneh, Interview by the author, Telephone audio recording, January 1, 2016.

⁸⁶ James A. Baker III and Samuel Berger, "Forward," in *Pathways to Peace: America and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, ed. Daniel C. Kurtzer (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), x.

⁸⁷ Ross, *Missing Peace*, 800.

⁸⁸ Thomas Pickering, Lecture.

security guarantees for Israel, future borders of the two states, and compensation for Palestinian refugees.⁸⁹ Whether through a speech or published document, Obama would likely issue these parameters following the November presidential elections so as not to interfere with domestic political issues that could affect a democratic candidate's prospects at winning the election.⁹⁰

Such an independent US approach would have proven unnecessary had the Israeli government elected in March 2015 adopted policies that were more favorable to a two-state solution, or that at least did not actively undermine its prospects. In January 2015, Dennis Ross wrote, "If a new Israeli government after the [March 2015] elections is prepared to take a peace initiative and build settlements only on land that is likely to be part of Israel and not part of Palestine, there will be no need for a United Nations resolution..."⁹¹ Unfortunately, the elected Israeli government proved unwilling to take this peace initiative or make its settlement policies consistent with a two-state outcome, and is unlikely to do so in the foreseeable future especially if a new far Right coalition is formed. As Ross writes,

"...with the narrow-based rightist coalition that emerged from the March 2015 election, it is hard to imagine Israel's government adopting any such initiative. If Prime Minister Netanyahu does not broaden the government and make a different approach possible, Israel will find it difficult to blunt the delegitimization movement... The [Obama] administration might even support a UN Security Council resolution on parameters for settling the conflict."⁹²

This reality is the ultimate rationale for the issuance of the Obama Parameters. A key element of the strategy underlying their publication would be an emphasis on their issuance as part of a broader US effort to establish an environment for ending the stagnancy that plagues today's Israeli-Palestinian peace process. This proposal is a combination of the carrot and stick approach and rooted in the belief that the United States must do more than just be relegated to managing the conflict, as some would argue is the country's proper role today.⁹³

Diverse sets of experts advocate the issuance of the Obama Parameters, including Dan Kurtzer/Scott Lasensky and Ami Ayalon/Gilead Sher.⁹⁴ Even those like Aaron David Miller, who question the ability of the United States to do anything at the moment other than manage the conflict, see value in the notion of laying out a US framework. Miller writes, "Above all, the United States must keep a credible negotiating process alive...This may mean outlining American ideas publicly on what elements should guide negotiations...to reaffirm the feasibility and desirability of a two-state solution..."⁹⁵

⁸⁹ For an example of a potential set of updated parameters see: Daniel C. Kurtzer, "Parameters: Possible Terms of Reference for Israeli-Palestinian Negotiations," in *Pathways to Peace: America and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, ed. Daniel C. Kurtzer (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012): 209-214.

⁹⁰ Personal conversation with an American government official, August 21, 2015; Uri Zaki, Interview by the author, Audio recording, Tel Aviv, December 31, 2015.

⁹¹ Dennis Ross, "Stop Giving Palestinians a Pass," *New York Times*, January 4, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/05/opinion/stop-giving-palestinians-a-pass.html>.

⁹² Ross, *Doomed to Succeed*, 406.

⁹³ Miller, Interview by the author.

⁹⁴ Daniel C. Kurtzer and Scott B. Lasensky, *Negotiating Arab-Israeli Peace: American Leadership in the Middle East* (Washington: United States Institute of Peace, 2008): 80-81; Ami Ayalon and Gilead Sher, "US, International Community Should Take Lead on Two-State Solution," *Al-Monitor*, May 6, 2015, <http://goo.gl/sOvwEX>.

⁹⁵ Aaron D. Miller, *The Much Too Promised: America's Elusive Search for Arab-Israeli Peace* (New York: Bantam Books, 2008), 384.

One of the primary critiques offered by skeptics of the parameters is that the parties will most certainly reject them.⁹⁶ Added to this, even if the Obama Administration did not withdraw the parameters after leaving office, there is nothing that would prevent the administration taking office in 2017 from nullifying them.⁹⁷ In anticipation of either an Israeli or Palestinian rejection of the parameters, or to prevent a future administration from renouncing the parameters, the Obama Administration has the option of turning the parameters into a UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution.⁹⁸

While current presidential candidates, including Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, have said they are opposed to unilateral action at the UNSC on the Israeli-Palestinian peace front, Sachs points out that, ironically, "...future presidents, Republicans and Democrats alike, might like to...have their hands tied a little bit because...a [binding] framework might allow them to take positions that are politically slightly harder but which they actually support."⁹⁹

Netanyahu remains steadfast in his opposition to a UNSC resolution saying, "A [UN] Security Council resolution will only convince the Palestinians they can stab their way to a state," referring to this past year's wave of Palestinian stabbing attacks.¹⁰⁰ Israel's Ambassador to the US Ron Dermer echoes this message as well.¹⁰¹ For the United States to successfully execute a strategy of bringing the Obama Parameters to the UNSC, it would have to work to gain international support from Arab countries as well as other members on the Security Council, especially Russia, which has threatened its veto of previous US-backed efforts at the UNSC.¹⁰²

A foreseeable point of contention in attempting to gain support from these actors could be these states seeking stipulations in the parameters that go beyond Israel's bottom lines on security and land issues.¹⁰³ On settlements for example, international actors often fail to differentiate between Israel's block settlements, which are slated to become part of Israel through territorial 'land swaps' in an eventual peace deal, and its isolated settlements east of the security/separation barrier that will never become part of Israel and actively undermine prospects of a two-state outcome. A realistic and balanced set of parameters adopted by the UNSC would commit both Israel to operating in ways conducive to the two-state solution and the international community to standing by a framework agreement that addresses Israel's security needs and realities on the grounds.

Regardless of whether the parameters take the form of a UNSC resolution, presidential speech, or published document, another point skeptics of the parameters offer is the risk of advancing a US framework too early. While Ross accepts the idea of parameters in principle, he writes with David Makovsky that how the United States plays the role of a broker "...should be shaped by...where the parties are in the process. Presenting American ideas too early can

⁹⁶ Huberman, Interview by the author.

⁹⁷ Natan Sachs, Interview by the author, Audio recording, Washington, DC, February 25, 2016.

⁹⁸ Forms of this strategy are supported by experts including Ami Ayalon/Gilead Sher, Amnon Reshef, Dan Kurtzer/Scott Lasensky, Danny Seidemann, Thomas Pickering, Yair Hirschfeld, and Yossi Beilin.

⁹⁹ Ryan T. Beckwith, "Read Hillary Clinton's Speech to AIPAC," *Time*, March 21, 2016, <http://time.com/4265947/hillary-clinton-aipac-speech-transcript/>; Sarah Begley, "Read Donald Trump's Speech to AIPAC," *Time*, March 21, 2016, <http://time.com/4267058/donald-trump-aipac-speech-transcript/>; Sachs, Interview by the author.

¹⁰⁰ Barak Ravid, "Netanyahu Tells AIPAC He Expects Obama to Veto Any Palestinian UN Resolution," *Haaretz*, March 22, 2016, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.710344>.

¹⁰¹ Ron Dermer, Personal conversation, Washington, DC, March 1, 2016.

¹⁰² Jo Becker, and Scott Shane, "Hillary Clinton, 'Smart Power' and a Dictator's Fall," *New York Times*, February 27, 2016, <http://goo.gl/LiCWXS>.

¹⁰³ Ross, "Stop Giving Palestinians a Pass."

preempt what the parties must do on their own, both to invest in the negotiations and to reveal to us what really matters to them.”¹⁰⁴ However, the difference today from when Ross and Makovsky were writing in 2009 is that the United States does not run the risk of preempting the actions the sides must take because the current parties will never take *any* forward-moving steps on their own. Ross says his “...position on this issue [of parameters] is evolving” and that “Parameters can make sense provided done in a way that is credible.”¹⁰⁵ Natan Sachs summarizes the short-term difficulties and long-term benefits of parameters saying,

“In the short term...there are many reasons not to go for it. When you set out goal posts like that in clear language...you are necessarily pushing the sides to explain exactly what it is wrong with all the details...If it’s all very public then of course they will have to take the maximalist position...However, if you judge that you’re not going to have serious negotiations in the near term...then...in the long term you might want to set out clear parameters that lay the groundwork for future administrations and for future parties outside the U.S.”¹⁰⁶

Building on Sachs’ latter point, this paper’s research demonstrates that serious bilateral negotiations appear unrealistic in the foreseeable future, justifying a parameters approach. The unofficial framework established by the last US parameters under President Clinton, while officially withdrawn, became important references for subsequent Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. While Obama does not have Clintonian levels of trust among Israelis, Obama Parameters that were not withdrawn as the Administration transitions out could still resonate with both Israeli and Palestinian publics. Ami Ayalon says a US-backed UN Security Council resolution based on Obama Parameters “...would be a revolution. If this happens...the Israeli political map will change...this will also occur on the Palestinian side.”¹⁰⁷

The parameters would likely be met with initial skepticism both from the Israeli government and public. As such, Obama should accompany the announcement of the parameters with messaging that reassures Israelis of his steadfast commitment to Israel’s long-term security. Dan Rothem says that following the publication of the parameters, Obama should stage “... a public diplomacy blitz that includes...ultimately a presidential visit...go[ing] up to the Knesset and [giving] the speech that nobody’s ever given the [Israeli] public in which you really connect with the Zionist vision...[and] you reinforce the legitimacy of Jewish presence [in Israel].”¹⁰⁸

While far from being a panacea, the Obama Parameters could break through the stagnant fog hovering over both sides’ publics, reignite a desire for entering negotiations, and ultimately establish an important launching pad for the next administration’s pursuit of the ever-tantalizing issue of Israeli-Palestinian peace.

¹⁰⁴ Dennis Ross, *Statecraft: And How to Restore America’s Standing in the World* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 283; Ross and Makovsky, *Myths, Illusions, and Peace*, 135.

¹⁰⁵ Dennis Ross, Personal conversation, Washington, DC, November 13, 2015; Ross, Personal conversation, January 27, 2016.

¹⁰⁶ Sachs, Interview by the author.

¹⁰⁷ Ami Ayalon, Interview by the author, Audio recording, Haifa, January 6, 2015.

¹⁰⁸ Rothem, Interview by the author.

Conclusion

Amid a period of stagnancy in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, the United States must find the proper balance of incentivizing the parties to move forward and pressuring them should they step backward. Both excessive empathy and excessive force are unwise. Commenting on President Clinton, Aaron David Miller writes, “We needed the president to dish out ‘tough love.’ Instead the tough part got dropped.”¹⁰⁹ While ‘tough’ may not have been Clinton’s strength, ‘love’ was not Obama’s.¹¹⁰

As Obama was to learn, tough love without empathy is interpreted as just toughness by Israelis and cost the President credibility in the eyes of this public, something current presidential candidates are taking active steps to avoid.¹¹¹ However, even if Obama had developed a higher level of trust among the Israeli public, it remains questionable whether the United States could have launched more successful negotiations given the lack of will and the trust deficit that exist among the parties. As the traditional bilateral negotiation paradigm appears unrealistic in today’s context, one of the most productive actions the Obama Administration can take in its final months is the publication of the Obama Parameters, which, while subject to rejection by the next administration taking office in 2017, would not be withdrawn like the Clinton Parameters and, under the right circumstances, could be published as a UNSC resolution.

While this analysis has focused largely on the independent steps the United States can take, it should also be noted that there are productive actions that can be independently implemented by Israelis and Palestinians. Israel should stop building outside the settlement blocks in territory that is not set for annexation as part of land swaps, consider unilateral steps for withdrawing from territory east of the security/separation barrier, and condemn acts of Jewish terror. Likewise, Palestinian leadership must take further steps to prepare its public for peace with Israel and work vigorously to end the most recent wave of terror attacks. While Israeli-Palestinian peace appears farther away than ever, the United States too must act with determination in spite of setbacks and dynamism in the face of stagnancy.

¹⁰⁹ Miller, *The Much Too Promised Land*, 311.

¹¹⁰ See: “Netanyahu At War,” Documentary, *PBS Frontline*, January 5, 2016, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/netanyahu-at-war/>.

¹¹¹ Hillary Clinton, “How I Would Reaffirm Unbreakable Bond with Israel—and Benjamin Netanyahu,” *The Forward*, November 4, 2015, <http://goo.gl/5fN8w0>.

Appendix: Figures Created by the Author and List of Interviews and Consultations

Figure 1

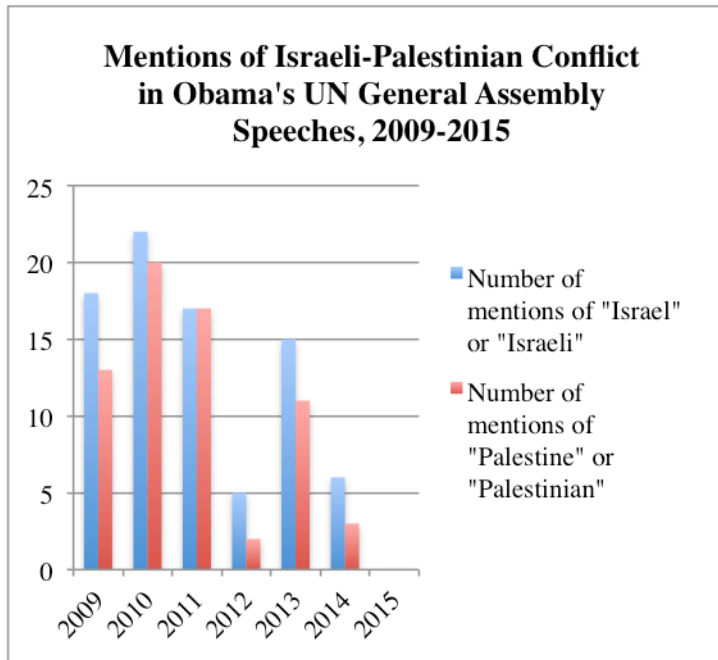
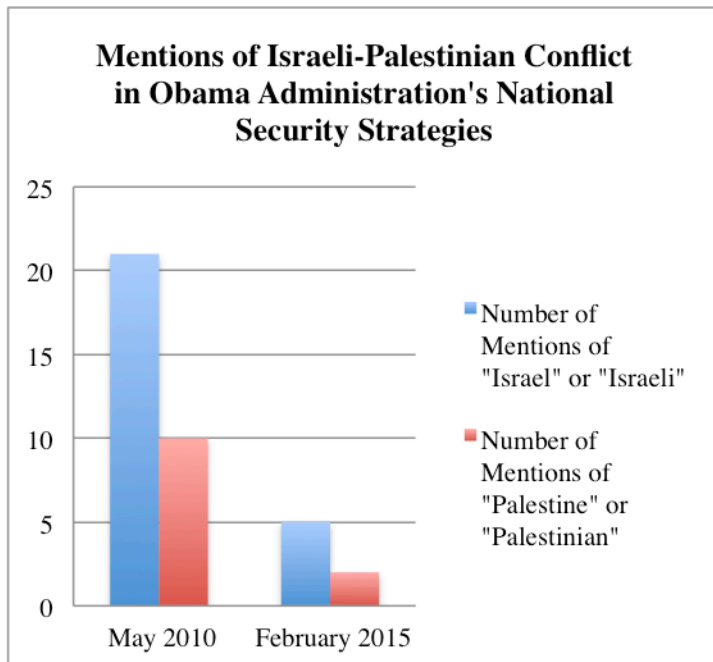


Figure 2



Interviews and Consultations

<p><i>Aaron David Miller</i></p> <p><i>Alon Sachar</i></p> <p><i>Ami Ayalon</i></p> <p><i>Avi Gil</i></p> <p><i>Aviv Feigel</i></p> <p><i>Benny Morris</i></p> <p><i>Daniel Seidemann</i></p> <p><i>Dan Kurtzer</i></p> <p><i>Dan Rothem</i></p> <p><i>David Makovsky</i></p> <p><i>Dennis Ross</i></p> <p><i>Ephraim Sneh</i></p> <p><i>Gamal Helal</i></p>	<p><i>Gilead Sher</i></p> <p><i>Koby Huberman</i></p> <p><i>Martin Indyk</i></p> <p><i>Menachem Klein</i></p> <p><i>Mike Molloy</i></p> <p><i>Natan Sachs</i></p> <p><i>Peter Beinart</i></p> <p><i>Ron Dermer</i></p> <p><i>Uri Zaki</i></p> <p><i>Yaakov Amidror</i></p> <p><i>Yossi Beilin</i></p> <p><i>Yossi Shain</i></p>
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About the Author

Elijah Jatovsky graduated from Georgetown University's Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service in May 2016. Post-graduation, he is working as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Nicaragua. His paper was written as part of a Georgetown University Institute for the Study of Diplomacy research fellowship and was advised by Ambassador Dennis Ross.

WHY THE UNITED STATES NEEDS A NATIONAL POLITICAL WARFARE CENTER AND REGIONAL EMBASSIES

Kyle Johnston

To meet the complexities of the contemporary operating environment, the United States needs to reform an antiquated national security enterprise that compartmentalizes agency capabilities and authorities. The United States needs to establish a National Political Warfare Center (NPWC) and regional US embassies to pursue national security objectives before a moment of crisis requires large-scale military intervention. This entails developing not only a national level headquarters with significant executive authority, but empowering regional chiefs of mission that develop strategy, synchronize interagency efforts, and direct political warfare. These organizations can be established by presidential executive order, but they need to be codified by legislation to develop enduring capabilities.

“The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.” –Sun Tzu

Competition and Conflict in the Information Age

On October 27, 2015, the US Navy destroyer *USS Lassen* passed by the Subi reef in the South China Sea to demonstrate the United States’ commitment to freedom of maritime navigation in the western Pacific and dispute Chinese territorial claims around artificially created Chinese islands. As expected by national security experts, the China’s People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) shadowed the ship at a safe distance, and according to US navy officials, behaved professionally and in accordance with international norms.¹ More provocatively, however, a group of merchant and fishing vessels circled and crossed the *Lassen’s* bow, challenging US presence and legitimacy in the region. These vessels, and their crew, are what Dr. Andrew Erickson of the US Naval War College recently described as “little blue men”—government controlled militias that achieve PLAN objectives without attribution to the Chinese government.²

The recent employment of “little blue men” to harass the *USS Lassen* is not an aberration from People’s Liberation Army (PLA) strategy. In March, 2009, several Chinese fishing vessels “shadowed and aggressively maneuvered in dangerously close proximity to *United States Naval Ship (USNS) Impeccable*, in an apparent coordinated effort to harass the US ocean surveillance ship while it was conducting routine operations in international waters.”³ In conjunction with the *Impeccable* incident, the Pentagon lodged a formal complaint with Beijing in 2009, citing multiple occasions of aggressive tactics in international waters. Although these maritime militias are advancing Chinese strategic interests, the Peoples Republic of China denies any involvement with their activities.⁴

The United States is not the only target of China’s maritime militia. In 2010, a Chinese fishing boat rammed two Japanese coast guard patrol ships near the disputed Senkaku islands in the East China Sea. The subsequent detention of the fishing boat’s captain by Japanese authorities resulted in inflamed international tensions, anti-Japanese demonstrations in China, and threats of economic warfare by the Chinese government.⁵ The Chinese skipper was eventually released without charge, deescalating the economic and diplomatic tensions between the two nations. The outcome, however, led many to claim that the Japanese acquiesced to the equivalent of Chinese bullying. The seemingly advantageous outcome for the Chinese begs the

¹ *Defense News*, “China’s ‘Little Blue Men’ Take Navy’s Place in Disputes,” November 2, 2015, accessed November 8, 2015, <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/naval/2015/11/02/china-lassen-destroyer-spratly-islands-south-china-sea-andrew-erickson-naval-war-college-militia-coast-guard-navy-confrontation-territorial-dispute/75070058/>; and *The Diplomat*, “Little Blue Men Doing China’s Dirty Work in the South China Sea,” November 5, 2015, accessed November 8, 2015, <http://thediplomat.com/2015/11/little-blue-men-doing-chinas-dirty-work-in-the-south-china-sea/>; and James Kraska, “China’s Maritime Militia Upends Rules on Naval Warfare,” *The Diplomat*, August 5, 2015, accessed November 8, 2015, <http://thediplomat.com/2015/08/chinas-maritime-militia-upends-rules-on-naval-warfare/>.

² *Defense News*, “China’s ‘Little Blue Men’ Take Navy’s Place in Disputes,” November 2, 2015, accessed November 8, 2015, <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/naval/2015/11/02/china-lassen-destroyer-spratly-islands-south-china-sea-andrew-erickson-naval-war-college-militia-coast-guard-navy-confrontation-territorial-dispute/75070058/>

³ *CNN*, “Pentagon Says Chinese Vessels Harassed US Ship,” accessed November 8, 2015, http://www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/03/09/us.navy.china/index.html?_s=PM:POLITICS#cnnSTCText.

⁴ *CNN*, “Pentagon Says Chinese Vessels Harassed US Ship,” accessed November 8, 2015, http://www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/03/09/us.navy.china/index.html?_s=PM:POLITICS#cnnSTCText.

⁵ *The Guardian*, “Japan-China row escalates over fishing boat collision,” accessed November 8, 2015, available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/sep/09/japan-china-fishing-boat-collision>.

question of whether or not PRC officials saw this event as a validation for their use of proxies to assert force and advance their interests without repercussion.

In addition to using unattributed forces in the physical environment, China aggressively pursues its interests in the cyber domain. According to estimates from a 2014 McAfee report prepared for the Center for Strategic and International Studies, cyber crime costs the United States an estimated 100 billion dollars annually.⁶ China is directly associated with much of this cyber crime, and despite a September 2015 agreement between China and the United States, China continues to be linked to dozens of attacks targeting US intellectual property and trade secrets.⁷

The most notable cyber attack directed at the United States national security enterprise was the 2014 hack of the Office of Personnel Management that resulted in the loss of over 22 million personnel files. Official policy fails to clearly articulate how to define cyber attacks, but “US officials have characterized the OPM breaches as traditional espionage—spying to help a foreign government, in this case, build databases on US government employees and officials.”⁸ This should be of grave concern to national policymakers because, “such information can help foreign governments recruit spies and blackmail employees for information.”⁹ Cyber attacks and cyber crime hurt US economic interests, threaten national security organizations, and undermine existing international norms.

Like China, many states will increasingly turn to indirect approaches like the employment of “little blue men” and cyber crime to pursue strategic objectives and challenge international norms while avoiding direct conflict with the United States. The term ‘little blue men’ is actually an adaptation of the state-sponsored Russian militia, the ‘little green men,’ that seized Crimea and invaded eastern Ukraine in 2014. The employment of proxy forces is not new, but global digital sharing, and the diffusion of cheap, lethal technologies, exponentially enhances the capabilities and strategic effectiveness of these groups. The use of proxies, surrogates, and cyber attacks as unattributed tools for foreign governments challenge our existing response mechanisms within the United States national security enterprise.

In these ambiguous environments that create tension between previously demarcated spheres such as diplomacy, economic competition, and military conflict, US policymakers face difficult decisions: How do we respond appropriately? What are the right tools to deter or counter non-state and state sponsored naval, ground, air, or cyber militias? How do we employ these tools without escalating the conflict? These questions demand an instrumental response by a clearly identified US agency. In the space between conflict and diplomacy, at the geographic intersection of many nations and ungoverned spaces, we continue to struggle with planning and orchestrating a comprehensive US strategy that forwards US interests without erupting into armed conflict. With many agencies ostensibly responsible, yet none clearly assigned as the

⁶ “Net Losses: Estimating the Global Cost of Cybercrime: Economic impact of cybercrime II,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, June 2014; accessed May 19, 2016, <http://www.mcafee.com/us/resources/reports/rp-economic-impact-cybercrime2.pdf>.

⁷ Ken Dilanian, “Chinese cyberattacks on US companies continues despite cyberagreement,” PBS Newshour, October 19, 2015; accessed May 19, 2016, <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/making-sense/despite-cyberagreement-chinese-cyberattacks-u-s-companies-continue/>

⁸ Ellen Nakashima, “Chinese government has arrested hackers it says breached OPM database.” *The Washington Post*, December 2, 2015; accessed May 16, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/chinese-government-has-arrested-hackers-suspected-of-breaching-opm-database/2015/12/02/0295b918-990c-11e5-8917-653b65c809eb_story.html.

⁹ *Ibid.*

primary accountable agency, this significant and rapidly growing liminal sphere of conflict has been met with confused and conflicted responses. US chiefs of mission and geographic combatant commanders leverage all the tools at their disposal, but there is no synchronizing agency at the regional or national level to coordinate efforts, develop strategy, recommend policy, and direct operations in an undefined space of competition and conflict.

The US counters to Chinese aggression in cyber space and the South China Sea are reactive and tactical, and recent reports suggest a major disconnect between policymakers and the senior leaders within US Pacific Command (PACOM).¹⁰ PACOM's responses to Chinese actions are limited almost entirely to demonstrations of force by naval ships or multi-lateral military exercises. The State Department issues stern condemnations and the White House responds to cyber attacks with simultaneous veiled threats and olive branches. Unsurprisingly, China's activities continue; they coordinate all the elements of their national power to pursue their strategic interests. They have assessed the weaknesses in the US national security enterprise, and exploited those weaknesses through a combination of attributed and unattributed means. China has effectively subdued the United States without fighting.

This paper is not exclusively about US-China relations, nor do I make any assertion that China is adversarial, friendly, or on an inevitable trajectory towards conflict with the United States. Instead, I offer China as a microcosm for how states pursue their strategic interests and how the current trends in the global environment challenge existing organizations and authorities in the United States government. The current national security structure is not responsive or flexible enough to navigate the contemporary operating environment. It is time for the United States to reorganize its national security enterprise to reflect the realities of competition and conflict in the information age.

The Contemporary Operating Environment—Gray, Hybrid, Unconventional, Unrestricted

A range of descriptors has emerged in the post-9/11 era that attempts to capture the complexity of the contemporary operating environment. In 2010, the Quadrennial Defense Review introduced the term 'gray area' as a descriptor for the operating environment, stating that "the future strategic landscape will increasingly feature challenges in the ambiguous gray area that is neither fully war nor fully peace."¹¹ Last year, in his 2015 testimony before the House Armed Services Committee, the former commander of United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), US Army General Joseph Votel, expanded upon this idea. He rebrands the term as the 'gray zone' to describe the nature of emerging threats, stating,

“Actors taking a ‘gray zone’ approach seek to secure their objectives while minimizing the scope and scale of actual fighting. In this ‘gray zone,’ we are confronted with ambiguity on the nature of the conflict, the parties involved, and the validity of the legal and political claims at stake.”¹²

¹⁰ David Larter, “4-star admiral wants to confront China. White House says not so fast,” *Navy Times*, April 6, 2016. Accessed May 10, 2016: <http://www.navytimes.com/story/military/2016/04/06/4-star-admiral-wants-confront-china-white-house-says-not-so-fast/82472290>.

¹¹ United States Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review 2010*, 73

¹² Joseph L. Votel, *Posture Statement of USSOCOM to House Armed Services Committee*, March 18, 2015.

In a subsequent white paper, US Navy Captain Philip Kapusta of the USSOCOM Directorate of Strategy, Plans, and Policy, expands on this concept describing conflict in the gray zone as,

“Competitive interactions among and within state and non-state actors that fall between the traditional war and peace duality. They are characterized by ambiguity about the nature of the conflict, opacity of the parties involved, or uncertainty about the relevant policy and legal frameworks.”¹³

Although the term gray zone is new to the special operations community, it is only a recent addition to an extensive lexicon that permeates current discussions among national security consultants and scholars.

In a 2007 Potomac Institute for Policy Studies publication, Frank Hoffman, a retired United States Marine Corps Lieutenant Colonel and Senior Research Fellow at the National Defense University, introduced the concept of ‘hybrid warfare.’ Hoffman argues that conflict is too complex to be categorized as big or small, conventional or unconventional. Instead, he states, “Future contingencies will more likely present unique combinational or *hybrid* threats that are specifically designed to target US vulnerabilities.”¹⁴ In a later publication in *Joint Forces Quarterly*, he explains that,

“The evolving character of conflict that we currently face is best characterized by convergence. This includes the convergence of the physical and psychological, the kinetic and nonkinetic, and combatants and noncombatants. So, too, we see the convergence of military force and the interagency community, of states and nonstate actors, and of the capabilities they are armed with. Of greatest relevance are the converging modes of war. What once might have been distinct operational types of categorizations among terrorism and conventional, criminal, and irregular warfare have less utility today.”

The nature of warfare in the 20th century will be defined not by a location on the spectrum of violence, but by conflict that spans the entire spectrum of criminality, terrorism, cyber, irregular, unconventional, and conventional conflicts.

Retired US Army Special Forces Colonel and Associate Director of the Georgetown Security Studies Program, Dave Maxwell, argues that there is one overarching term that defines the range of conflicts between and among states: ‘unconventional warfare.’¹⁵ In a 2014 article published in the *Small Wars Journal*, Maxwell describes unconventional warfare, writing,

“Unconventional warfare at its core is about revolution, resistance, and insurgency (RRI) combined with the external support provided to a revolution, resistance, or insurgency by either the United States or others (who may or may not have interests aligned with the United States and may in fact be opposed to the United States and our friends, partners, and allies). This is a type of warfare that is timeless, timely, and something that we can expect to occur

¹³ Philip Kapusta, “The Gray Zone.” (McDill Air Force Base: USSOCOM, 2015), 1.

¹⁴ Frank G. Hoffman, “Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars,” (Arlington, VA: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, December 2007), 7

¹⁵ Dave Maxwell, “Do We Really Understand Unconventional Warfare?” *Small Wars Journal*, October 23, 2014; accessed May 15, 2016: <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/do-we-really-understand-unconventional-warfare>

over time in the future. It is both political in nature and at times violent—even as violent as conventional warfare in some cases.”¹⁶

Maxwell also argues that US “policymakers really do not understand the nature and conduct of unconventional warfare.”¹⁷ This lack of understanding, and the ambiguous nature of unconventional warfare, prevents the US government from developing effective counter strategies. Unconventional warfare requires long-term preparation, engagement, and understanding of the environment before crisis occurs. These variables are difficult to quantify and assess, and as a result policymakers have difficulty responding strategically.

The US special operations community refers to actions by the United States in the time and space before the onset of declared conflict as ‘phase zero’ operations. The term ‘phase zero’ entered security lexicon following the publication, “New Thinking at USEUCOM: The Phase Zero Campaign,” in the October 2006 edition of *Joint Forces Quarterly (JFQ)*. In this article, USEUCOM Deputy Commander Charles Wald explained,

“The US European Command (USEUCOM), headquartered in Stuttgart, Germany, is fighting a new kind of campaign in the global war on terror... These dangers require new thinking and a new understanding of the differences between theater security cooperation (TSC) and traditional warfighting... the command is fighting the war on terror using a new approach, focusing of terrorism’s longterm, underlying conditions. This deliberate strategy of engagement is called Phase Zero, but in truth it is much more than just a new phase of systematic campaign planning; it is a new form of campaign in and of itself.”¹⁸

Following the publication of this *JFQ* article, the Special Operations community adopted the term ‘phase zero’ as a relevant descriptor of regular operations, actions, and activities (OAAs) conducted by USSOF during Theater Security Cooperation (TSC) events.¹⁹ These events are bi- and multi-lateral events that progress the objectives laid out in the geographic combatant commander’s Theater Campaign Plan (TCP) and the chief of mission’s Integrated Country Strategy (ICS) to enhance partner force capacity and interoperability, shape the operational environment, prevent the escalation of armed conflict, and promote US interests.

Successful phase zero operations also serve to develop infrastructure in order to offer a gambit of policy options if armed conflict does erupt and increased military intervention is required. The integration of USSOF, American diplomats, and multiple agencies is the new reality in the post-9/11 national security environment. Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton observed that for this type of environment, “we need Special Operations Forces who are as comfortable drinking tea with tribal leaders as raiding a terrorist compound. We also need diplomats and development experts who understand modern warfare and are up to the job of

¹⁶ Dave Maxwell, “Do We Really Understand Unconventional Warfare?” *Small Wars Journal*, October 23, 2014; accessed May 15, 2016: <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/do-we-really-understand-unconventional-warfare>

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Charles Wald, “New Thinking at EUCOM: The Phase Zero Campaign,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, October 2006, 72-73.

¹⁹ The US special operations community differentiates between “phase zero” operations that support theater campaign plans and integrated country strategies and “phase 0” of the six phases of military operations listed in *Joint Publication 3-0: Joint Operations*. The former does not necessarily precede conventional military operations and can be a campaign in unto itself, the later is designed to set the conditions for contingency planning and follow-on operations.

being your partners.”²⁰ Secretary Clinton’s remarks reflect the need for foreign policy executioners who can understand and operate across the spectrum of competition and conflict.

The Chinese describe actions in these environments as ‘Unrestricted Warfare.’ In a 1999 publication, two People’s Liberation Army officers, Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, explore how nations can defeat a technologically-superior adversary. In addition to advocating that nations like China leverage international law, or ‘lawfare,’ and economic warfare to promote interests, they describe the operating environment as “omni-directional,” stating,

“In terms of beyond-limits warfare, there is no longer any distinction between what is or is not the battlefield. Spaces in nature including the ground, the seas, the air, and outer space are battlefields, but social spaces such as the military, politics, economics, culture, and the psyche are also battlefields. And the technological space linking these two great spaces is even more so the battlefield over which all antagonists spare no effort in contending.”²¹

These Chinese strategists do not constrain the pursuit of their strategic interests by individual legislative, budgetary, or executive authorities. They describe the contemporary operating environment as space that requires implementing all the tools of national power.

A common theme among all these descriptions of the contemporary operating environment is that actors deliberately seek ambiguity and act across the spectrum of competition and conflict. This ambiguity, and the lack of delineation between armed conflict and competition, presents real challenges to the hierarchical nature of the United States national security structure. In these complex environments—gray, hybrid, unconventional, and unrestricted—US agencies act in line with their executive, budgetary, and legislative authorities, and their organizational capabilities.

US foreign policy and military action abroad are codified in law under the Code of Laws of the United States of America (USC). Two of these titles, Title 10 and Title 22, are critical to understanding the hierarchical constraints of the current national security structure. USC Title 10 describes the role, functions, and authorities of the Armed Forces of the United States. Of specific relevance is *Section 164: Commanders of combatant commands: assignment; powers and duties*, which establishes and outlines all the responsibilities of combatant commanders, specifying that a commander,

“is responsible to the President of the United States (POTUS) and Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) for missions assigned; gives direction to subordinate commands; prescribes the chain of command to commands and forces; organizes the commands and forces; employs forces within that command; and assigns command functions, and approves internal organization.”²²

²⁰ Hillary Clinton, “Remarks at the Special Operations Command Gala Dinner,” May 23, 2012; accessed May 4, 2016; <http://www.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2012/05/190805.htm>

²¹ Liang Qiao and Xiangsui Wang, *Unrestricted Warfare: China's Master Plan to Destroy America* (Panama City, Panama: Pan American Pub., ©2002), 177.

²² United States Special Operations Command. *SOCOM 2020: The Global SOF Network*. (McDill Air Force Base: 2014), 3; and USC. Title 10, *Armed Forces*; accessed March 26, 2016, <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/USCODE-2011-title10/pdf/USCODE-2011-title10-subtitleA-partI-chap6-sec167.pdf>.

This section provides the legislative authority for combatant commanders, including geographic combatant commanders like USPACOM and functional combatant commanders like USSOCOM, to execute military activities and engagements with foreign partners.

USC Title 22: *Foreign relations and intercourse*, describes the responsibilities and authorities for conducting foreign relations. *Chapter 32: Foreign Assistance, Subchapter II: Military assistance and sales (subsections 2301-2349bb-6)* of Title 22, provides the legal authority for the Department of State (DoS) to fund a variety of foreign programs in support of US interests. These programs include Military Assistance, Foreign Military Sales (FMS), Economic Support Fund (ESF), International Military and Education Training (IMET), and Antiterrorism Assistance (ATA).²³ Although the DoS is the designated lead agency for administering these programs, the DoD is often the lead agency in executing any foreign assistance funded activity related to defense or security.

While these authorities are distinct, the executioners of foreign policy and phase zero operations must find ways to synchronize interagency capabilities and authorities to achieve effects at the tactical level. Navigating this bureaucracy, however, is difficult, slow, and potentially dangerous for those military officers and diplomats loosely interpreting legislative authorities in the pursuit of mission accomplishment. When mistakes are made, the easy scapegoat is a soldier or diplomat working outside the confines of their authority. The hard reality is that current organizational structures and authorities force its actors on the frontline of foreign policy to develop ‘gray’ interpretations of the law to succeed in a ‘gray’ environment. This is an organizational and authority problem, and is incongruent with the realities of the contemporary operating environment.

Contemporary Support for a National Political Warfare Capability

The current national security structure is antiquated and must evolve to meet the threats of the 21st century. Nearly 70 years ago, the father of the US containment strategy during the Cold War, George Kennan, described the conduct of US policy outside of armed conflict as political warfare, stating,

“Political warfare is the logical application of Clausewitz’s doctrine in time of peace. In broadest definition, political warfare is the employment of all the means at a nation’s command, short of war, to achieve its national objectives. Such operations are both overt and covert. The range from such overt actions as political alliances, economic measures (as ERP), and ‘white’ propaganda to such covert operations as clandestine support of ‘friendly’ foreign elements, ‘black’ psychological warfare and even encouragement of underground resistance in hostile states.”²⁴

The US national security enterprise needs to re-familiarize itself with Kennan’s principles and develop the capabilities to execute political and unconventional warfare in the contemporary operating environment.

²³ USC Title 22, Chapter 32, subchapter II; accessed March 26, 2016; <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/22/chapter-32/subchapter-II>

²⁴ George Kennan, “Policy Planning Staff Memorandum,” Department of State, (May 4, 1948); accessed March, 3rd 2016; <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114320>

Several recent publications advocate support for a national political warfare capability. In 2013, influential foreign policy scholars Max Boot and Michael Doran argued that since the end of the Cold War, the United States has lost the capability to synchronize the instruments of national power and effectively pursue US interests abroad. The United States is in a long-term struggle for influence against its adversaries and among populations, and while the US military and intelligence communities are extremely effective at lethal targeting, there is no “political strategy to capitalize on these short-term gains.”²⁵ In order to remedy this deficiency, the authors recommend some initial steps for developing a political warfare capability.

First, Boot and Doran state that the President should create a strategic interagency body within the State Department and appoint a highly regarded director for political warfare to be located in the National Security Council. They argue that the counterterrorism enterprise established after 9/11 provides a good model for political warfare. In order to ensure this strategic interagency organization maintains real relevance, the authors argue that the President would have to direct cabinet level directors and secretaries to create specialty assignments and avenues within their organizations for political warfare. Without promotion potential and career incentives for individuals inside the DoS, DoD, and CIA, an effective interagency political warfare capability would never get off the ground.²⁶

Carole House, a graduate student in the Georgetown Security Studies Program, proposes a similar concept in a 2016 *Small Wars Journal* article. She recommends the establishment of an ‘Office of Unconventional Warfare’ located within the State Department and responsible to the Secretary of State. House states that, “a strategic hub of unconventional and political warfare expertise within the State Department and integrating all crucial US government capabilities under it provides the greatest hope for the United States to attain global unconventional supremacy.”²⁷ House goes on to recommend a detailed structure for the office of unconventional warfare that includes a National Security Council coordinator, interagency representatives, operational directorates, and regional headquarters.²⁸ Her recommendation for a flexible, interagency structure is necessary to synchronize and direct all the elements of national power towards strategic policy objectives set forth by the President.

The literature in support of political warfare extends to the special operations community. In 2015, the United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) published a 33-page white paper entitled “SOF Support to Political Warfare.” The authors of this white paper go beyond simply arguing that the United States needs to establish a political warfare capability; they describe how US Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) are ideally suited to support political warfare,

²⁵ Max Boot and Michael Doran, “Political Warfare: Policy Innovation Memorandum No. 33,” Council on Foreign Relations; June 2013; Accessed February 18, 2016: <http://www.cfr.org/wars-and-warfare/political-warfare/p30894>.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Carol House, “Proposal of an Unconventional Warfare Strategy to Dominate the Human Domain,” *Small Wars Journal*, March 7, 2016; accessed May 23, 2016; <http://www.smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/proposal-of-an-unconventional-warfare-strategy-to-dominate-the-human-domain>.

²⁸ Carol House, “Proposal of an Unconventional Warfare Strategy to Dominate the Human Domain,” *Small Wars Journal*, March 7, 2016; accessed May 23, 2016; <http://www.smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/proposal-of-an-unconventional-warfare-strategy-to-dominate-the-human-domain>.

“SOF are unique in the Department of Defense, suited to integrate Political Warfare’s activities across the JIIM [joint, interagency, intergovernmental, multinational] spectrum. Army Special Operators have a proven track record of bridging indigenous forces, local populations, Joint Force components, US agencies, and coalition partners needed for an effective Political Warfare response to hybrid warfare.”²⁹

This white paper reflects growing sentiment within the special operations community that special operations can be best utilized outside the traditional confines of armed conflict, supporting indirect approaches, political warfare, and phase zero operations in gray, hybrid, unconventional, and unrestricted spaces.

In a 2016 *Joint Forces Quarterly* article, four senior officers in the special operations community—including the former commanders of both USSOCOM and USASOC—support the proposition for developing a national political warfare capability. These authors argue that not only is this capability necessary, it is rooted in history, writing,

“President Eisenhower once considered appointing a National Security Council (NSC)-level director of unconventional or non-military warfare, with responsibilities including such areas as ‘economic warfare, psychological warfare, political warfare, and foreign information.’ In other words, he saw the need for an NSC-level director of political warfare, someone to quarterback the habitually interagency effort. This need still exists to achieve unity of effort across all aspects of national power (diplomatic, information, military, and economic) across the continuum of international competition.”³⁰

Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has retreated from the use of political warfare as a tool to pursue US interests and counter adversarial influence. The United States is responding to new technologies, the frenetic pace of globalization, and unparalleled access to information with old paradigms and methodologies. The national security enterprise should reinvigorate effective tools from past conflicts with reorganized structures to address these challenges.

Precedent for Change: Evolution of the United States National Security Structure in the Twentieth Century

The current national security enterprise was born from the need to improve the coordination and effectiveness of the military services after World War II. President Harry S. Truman signed the National Security Act of 1947 into law on July 26, 1947, formally unifying the military services. This comprehensive reform established the National Security Council, merged the War and Navy departments into the National Military Establishment headed by the secretary of defense, recognized the United States Air Force as an independent service, and codified statutory requirements for the Central Intelligence Agency under the Director of Central Intelligence as the nation’s first peace-time intelligence agency. The scale of the change mandated by the 1947 National Security Act was monumental, and the United States Congress

²⁹ United States Army Special Operations Command, “SOF Support to Political Warfare: White Paper,” (Fort Bragg, NC: March 10, 2105) 11.

³⁰ Joseph L. Votel, Charles T. Cleveland, Charles T. Connett, and Will Irwin, “Unconventional Warfare in the Gray Zone,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Vol 80, 1st QTR, 2016, 108

passed three amendments to the act between 1947 and 1958 that further strengthened and centralized the civilian control over the Pentagon, and renamed the NME to the Department of Defense.³¹

The most notable change to the National Security Act followed the tragedy of 1979 Iranian hostage rescue mission, *Operation Eagle Claw*. The executive report documenting the event cited failures in mission planning, operational command and control, and interoperability across the joint force. This failure revealed that modern warfare required an integrated and interoperable joint force. In the thirty years since Goldwater-Nichols, globalization and the information age have fundamentally altered how individuals and societies interact, yet the United States national security architecture has changed little. It is time for a national reorganization on the scale of Goldwater-Nichols that reflects the contemporary operating environment.

The changes to the national security enterprise since World War II were not easy, and service chiefs and senior military officials resisted these changes. Two former instructors from West Point's Department of Social Sciences claim that this resistance is rooted deep in organizational cultures. Citing the two most substantial reforms since Vietnam, the implementation of the All-Volunteer Force in 1973 and the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986, the authors argue that, "In both cases, most uniformed leaders in the services opposed the changes on the grounds that they would erode the effectiveness of their forces or the quality of the people in their service."³² In the post-9/11 national security environment, deeply embedded cultural resistance to change endures, and policy makers, senior leaders, and scholars continue to reiterate Meese and Wilson's observations.

In a 2009 *Foreign Affairs* article, then-Secretary of Defense Robert Gates commented on the DoD's reluctance to accept counterinsurgency and stability operations as a fundamental responsibility, saying,

"Apart from the Special Forces community and some dissident colonels, however, for decades there has been no strong, deeply rooted constituency inside the Pentagon or elsewhere for institutionalizing the capabilities necessary to wage asymmetric or irregular conflict—and to quickly meet the ever-changing needs of forces engaged in these conflicts."³³

Secretary Gates' implicit frustration with the defense community's resistance to change resonates today with current Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter. A May 15, 2016 article in the *Military Times* captured this deeply embedded resistance, stating that "internal Pentagon drama is strangling Defense Secretary Ash Carter's signature initiative" to reform the military's mid-twentieth century personnel system.³⁴

³¹ Michael J Meese and Isaiah Wilson III, "The Military: Forging a Joint Warrior Culture," in *The National Security Enterprise: Navigating the Labyrinth*, ed. Roger Z George and Harvey Rishikof (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 117-118; See also, United States Department of State, Office of the Historian, Bureau of Public Affairs. "History of the National Security Council, 1947-1997;" accessed May 16, 2016, <http://fas.org/irp/offdocs/NSChistory.htm>.

³² Meese and Wilson III, 135.

³³ Robert Gates, "A Balanced Strategy: Reprogramming the Pentagon for a New Age," *Foreign Affairs* (January/February 2009).

³⁴ Austin Wright and Jeremy Herb, "Military Reform effort claims latest casualty;" *Politico*, April 18, 2016; accessed May 16, 2016, <http://www.politico.com/story/2016/04/defense-pentagon-brad-carson-222064>.

Organizational culture and stifling bureaucracy coupled with the contemporary political climate and fiscal environment will make potential changes to the national security enterprise daunting. But the contemporary operating environment is complex and ambiguous, and US agencies are neither responsive nor flexible enough to respond to the speed of gray-hybrid-unconventional-unrestricted threats in the information age. Regardless of the challenges, it is time for a national reorganization on the scale of Goldwater-Nichols that reflects the complexity of the contemporary operating environment.

Recommendation for Change: Establish a National Political Warfare Center and Regional US Embassies

The United States needs to establish a National Political Warfare Center (NPWC) and regional US embassies (REMB) that align the interagency to execute coherent policy and strategy. This entails not only a national level headquarters with significant executive authority, but regional commands that develop strategy, synchronize interagency efforts, and direct political warfare. These organizations can be established by presidential executive order, but they need to be codified by legislation.

Like in the Boot and Doran model, the Director of the NPWC should maintain a seat in the National Security Council and the NPWC should reside organizationally within the State Department. The NPWC reporting chain should be to the President and Secretary of State, similar to the Director of the National Counterterrorism Center, who has a dual line of reporting to the President and the Director of National Intelligence. The Boot and Doran framework addresses the national level enterprise required to establish a political warfare capability, but it does not go so far as to identify the connectivity of that national level headquarters to the executioners of policy in the field. The National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC) model, while helpful for understanding how the director of a NPWC would communicate up and out, fails to provide a good model for how the NPWC would direct down and orchestrate political warfare activity. USSOCOM is designated as a functional combatant command with responsibilities to lead the global war on terrorism and provide direct connectivity for the Director of NCTC to operational units. In the case of political warfare, no singular agency exists, as the nature of political warfare requires all the elements of national power—diplomatic, informational, military, and economic (DIME). In this respect, the Boot and Doran model does not go far enough. To synchronize the policy to regional and tactical operations, the President needs to establish regional embassies (REMB), led by an ambassador-at-large who serves as a regional chief of mission (RCOM).

Just as the United States Ambassador is the chief of mission, a regional US Ambassador-at-large should coordinate the US mission in a geographic region as the chief of mission. This organization should be organized similar to an existing embassy country team, with representatives from each US agency acting as the RCOM's executioners of policy. In order to facilitate organizational synergy, the major agencies involved in foreign policy and national security would need to align their bureaus and structures to support the REMB. Currently, the DoD's geographic combatant commands, the department of state's regional bureaus, and the CIA's mission centers are not aligned in parallel structures. This needs to change.

The primary mission of the REMB would be to develop and execute a regional strategy that ties ends, ways, and means to national policy, but would not involve the normal consular affairs executed by US embassies abroad. The ways and means of the REMB would include all

the traditional elements of diplomacy and statecraft, political warfare, overt and covert operations, and “the employment of all the means at a nation’s command, short of war, to achieve its national objectives.” Each REMB would look different, organized to reflect the nature of the geographic operating environment.

An argument can be made that a REMB would undermine the traditional role of the United States Ambassador as the President’s representative and chief of mission in a foreign country. This argument should not be overstated. Regional embassies would not negate the United States embassies and country teams that execute diplomacy in over 190 countries across the globe. The mission of these diplomats is fundamental to the execution of US foreign policy and should not change. A regional embassy that synchronizes efforts across multiple country teams and leverages the interagency would empower, not undermine, a country team’s efforts. The US ambassador and country team would remain the primary executioners of foreign policy, with support from a RCOM that has immense interagency authority and resource capacity.

Due to the size and resources of the DoD, the geographic combatant commands are the logical hub around which to establish a REMB. The geographic combatant commanders must still maintain their roles and legislated Title 10 authorities, but they should also assume a primary responsibility as the principle military advisor to the regional chief of mission for all foreign engagement and political warfare activity. To contain creeping bureaucracy and burdensome hierarchies, measures should be taken to limit procedural hurdles that allow flexible, responsive political warfare activity.

The vignette in the South China Sea provides a great example of how the United States can leverage an interagency organization to conduct a political warfare in conjunction with a trans-regional strategy and achieve national interests. The current academic and policy debate on China revolves around whether to take an adversarial or ameliorative orientation. This binary view of the relationship, and the often referenced Thucydides Trap, overlooks the reality of the interconnected relationships and tensions between the United States and China.³⁵ Much like the description of hybrid or gray zone conflicts, this binary view of war or peace does not reflect the reality of conflict in the contemporary operating environment. In many circumstances, the United States will have interests that align with China. In others, the United States will compete directly. As such, a regional embassy would be ideally positioned to understand these competing interests and leverage the capabilities and authorities of the entire national security enterprise in pursuit of US interests.

An NPWC, with a regional embassy in the Pacific theater, would integrate the strengths of the interagency to counter Chinese strategy, as opposed to react to Chinese tactics. Even a cursory reading of geopolitics, philosophy, and military theory of the Chinese—Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War*, Mao Tse-tung’s *Little Red Book*, or Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui’s *Unrestricted Warfare*—provide the United States with a guidebook to attack Chinese strategy and deter actions that counter US interests. China needs access to ports in the Indian Ocean and overland routes to South Asia and the Middle East to maintain their economic viability. China must also maintain economic growth, transition to a more consumer-based economy, develop sustainable energy for clean air and water, and tackle corruption in order to maintain internal stability.

When China violates international norms in the South China Sea, the NPWC could effectively wage a legal warfare campaign through regional alliances to disrupt Chinese

³⁵ The Thucydides’s Trap refers to the Greek historian’s description of when Athens challenged Sparta in Greece, and the fact that in 12 of the past 16 cases when a rising power confronts an established, ruling power, the result has been armed conflict.

infrastructure in places like Gujarat, Baluchistan, or Colombo. When China threatens Tibetan sovereignty, the REMB could support anti-Chinese political parties and popular sentiment in Myanmar and Bangladesh to disrupt the development of oil transit infrastructure through Southeast Asia. If China conducts a cyber attack against the United States government or steals military technology, arguably an act of war, the NWPC and the REMB could threaten support to resistant movements amongst the Uighur populations in Western China. When the communist party expresses incendiary anti-American rhetoric, the informational and cyber capabilities of the NWPC and REMB could stoke popular unrest through an influence campaign targeting the corruption of senior PRC officials and their inability to provide clean air and water. All of these low-visibility, clandestine, or covert activities could be supported by overt diplomatic, informational, military, and economic maneuvering at the regional and national levels. In this way the United States can synchronize all of the assets of national power to achieve its strategic objectives—this is political warfare.

Currently, neither the PACOM commander nor any of the chiefs of mission have the capabilities or authority to execute this kind of campaign; this rests within the National Security Council. As a result, response to Chinese aggression is delayed and disjointed. Empowering a Director of Political Warfare and senior regional ambassadors-at-large with the authority and permission to coordinate strategic preemption and response is necessary to effectively operate in the contemporary operating environment. A NPWC and a REMB could leverage local and cultural understanding with a broad range of authorities and capabilities to counter China's actions with countervailing and counter-value threats that strike at the heart of Chinese strategy for regional hegemony.

The introduction of new technologies always challenges existing tactics, strategies, and internal processes in warfare and diplomacy. Just as the industrial revolution and the nuclear age forced changes in US strategy and tactics, the technologies emerging in the information age require the United States to adapt. US policy-makers must embrace this fact. Viewing the environment as increasingly complex externalizes the challenges to US national security. Understanding that conflict among and between states continuously evolves, on the other hand, mandates perpetual review and adaptation of internal processes, strategies, and tactics. The former allows complacency, the later demands action and change.

30 years have passed since the legislative changes reorganized the Defense Department to fight as a joint force. That structure served the DoD well since its inception, but is inadequate to navigate the speed and complexity of the contemporary operating environment and must change. The US needs to establish a National Political Warfare Center and regional embassies to execute political warfare in the contemporary operating environment.

About the Author

Kyle Johnston is a Special Forces Officer and Irregular Warfare Scholar at the United States Army Command and General Staff College. The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the United States Army Command and General Staff College, the United States Army, or any other governmental agency. Excerpts of this paper appear in the author's unpublished Master's thesis, "Implications for US SOF and the Interagency in Phase Zero: Case Studies in the Pacific Theater, 2000-2014," United States Army Command and General Staff College, June 2016.

CONDITIONED TO KILL: THE SOCIOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL MECHANISMS FOR OVERCOMING INHIBITIONS TO LETHAL VIOLENCE

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Whether an individual is a terrorist, criminal, soldier, or bureaucrat, they must partake—consciously or, more often, subconsciously—in a similar set of psychological and sociological mechanisms that enable them to perpetrate lethal violence. Contrary to popular belief and media portrayals, the majority of people who perpetrate acts of lethal violence, terrorists for example, are ‘normal’ people, not psychopaths or sadists. Those individuals who carry out lethal violence and do not suffer from a psychological disorder operate within particular moral frameworks that are unique to the group identity with which they associate. Individuals must undergo a series of psychological processes that enable them to carry out lethal violence, including ‘morality shifting’ and moral disengagement from their enemy or target. The process of morality shifting, which acknowledges the fluidity of the concept of morality, allows individuals to continuously justify escalating violence as long as it is carried out in protection of group identity. Similarly, moral disengagement processes, like dehumanizing and distancing the ‘enemy,’ conditioning and training, dispersing responsibility, and downplaying the negative consequences of violence allow individuals to overcome inhibitions to kill. By operating within a particular moral framework and conducting these processes, perpetrators of lethal violence come to see their actions as highly moralized, whereby killing becomes not only necessary, but the right thing to do in response to a perceived threat. This article seeks to explore the theoretical framework of these concepts and how they apply to three case studies: the Nazi bureaucrat Adolf Eichmann, American soldiers fighting in the ‘war on terror,’ and members of al Qaeda and other terrorist groups that target innocent civilians. The individuals within these case studies are operating in vastly different societal and cultural contexts and ascribe to different identities. However, they use many of the same psychological and societal strategies to overcome inhibitions to kill. When an individual is entrenched within a particular group identity and moral framework, viewing him or herself as undergoing similar processes to ‘the enemy’ can prove difficult. Nevertheless, if an individual or society wishes to try to understand why others carry out lethal violence, starting with an examination of their own identity formation process and moral framework—and the psychological and social mechanisms for overcoming killing that go along with these—would do much to advance their comprehension and illuminate implications for national security.

Introduction

The general public often perceives of lethal violence as the actions of troubled, immoral individuals. Some violence is committed by individuals deemed to be mentally unstable, identified as sadists, psychopaths, or sociopaths. However, the vast majority of violent acts cannot be explained by mental instability or defect. In the case of soldiers, society views the killing of ‘the enemy’ as admirable and heroic, and they are actively encouraged through training and rhetoric. In the case of criminals and terrorists, murder is seen as abhorrent and unfathomable. However, those who kill—with the minority exception of those who do suffer from a psychological condition—have to overcome similar psychological and sociological obstacles in order to carry out lethal actions. Contrary to popular belief and media portrayals, the majority of those who perpetrate lethal violence are ‘normal’ people, not psychopaths or sadists.¹ Therefore, it is useful to not only examine why individuals are psychologically and socially able to commit violent acts, but also how that violence is perceived or received differently across varying social and cultural contexts, and why. Whether individuals are terrorists, criminals, soldiers, or bureaucrats, they must partake—consciously or, more often, subconsciously—in a similar set of psychological and sociological mechanisms that enable them to perpetrate lethal violence. In one form or another, Nazi bureaucrats like Adolf Eichmann, American soldiers fighting in the ‘war on terror,’ and members of al Qaeda and other terrorist groups that target innocent civilians operate within alternate moral frameworks of group identity and participate in moral disengagement from their enemy or target. Acknowledging that all humans who kill others go through similar processes is not an argument for the morality or immorality of any particular group of perpetrators or their actions. In contrast, this paper argues that those who carry out lethal violence believe their own actions to be moral, even if others do not.

Methodology

For decades, scholarship on the psychology and sociology of violence has either focused on personality profiles, indicating the belief that those who commit lethal violence are in some way ‘abnormal,’ or the ‘banality of evil,’ a term coined by Hannah Arendt in her study of Nazi psyche.² In more recent years, however, broad explorations of lethal violence and specific explorations of terrorist violence have advanced to include other types of explanations that rely less on individual profiles or collective responsibility, and more on discussions of ‘normal’ human behavior and decision-making processes. These scholarly advances use interdisciplinary approaches, drawing from the fields of sociology, psychology, anthropology, terrorism studies, history, and others, which this article makes efforts to do as well. There is no simple or finite explanation for why individuals commit acts of lethal violence, as the following theoretical discussion and case studies exemplify. Accordingly, no exploration of this question should be confined to one discipline.

In addition to drawing from a wide array of source material, this article includes discussions of various categories of individuals facing differing societal contexts. The article will briefly touch on the psychology behind ‘abnormal’ individuals, and their inhibitions to

¹ Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008): 64.

² Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Books USA Inc., 1964).

undertaking violent behavior. However, the exploration of this is minimal, as scholarship on the subject widely shows that most individuals who commit lethal violence are rational and relatively ‘normal.’ Therefore, the article instead focuses on dissecting how individuals are able to overcome inhibitions to killing by examining the psychological and sociological processes that individuals undertake, particularly within a group identity context. Lastly, the article seeks to demonstrate how these processes are exemplified in the world through several brief case studies. An examination of non-terrorist criminals who carry out lethal violence is beyond the scope of this research, but the theoretical and case study analysis presented here generally applies to criminals as well.³ Thus, the experiences of bureaucrats, soldiers, and terrorists are all addressed in some fashion, with the underlying emphasis on the theory that, although individuals in these categories may face exceedingly different societal and cultural contexts and subscribe to different identities, they use many of the same psychological and societal strategies to overcome inhibitions to kill.

Defining ‘Normal’

When confronted with shocking acts of violence, societies tend to attribute that violence to the mental instability or abnormality of the perpetrator in order to make the violence easier to comprehend. The minority of cases are, in fact, attributable to this type of explanation, and can be categorized by variations of psychosis or behavioral problems most commonly defined as psychopathic, sociopathic, or sadist. These psychological labels or profiles are not particularly useful for explaining lethal violence on a broad scale, as only around three percent of the global population suffers from psychotic symptoms that result in a worldview not based in reality.⁴ However, psychological problems do explain a small minority of cases and therefore deserve a brief exploration.

In these cases, perpetrators of violence are not guided by a moral compass, but rather act in opposition to societal and intrinsic morality structures. In evidence of this fact, sadists—those who derive pleasure from inflicting harm on others—have to overcome “physical and emotional distress” while committing violence.⁵ For sadists, the “pleasure or satisfaction” that is derived through violence is conditioned over time.⁶ Therefore, the more a person commits violence against others, the more he or she feels pleasure from it. Sadism is just one example of a psychological profile that is often used to describe those who commit seemingly unthinkable violence against others. However, most violent crimes, even the killing of others, are not unthinkable but rather highly moralized. Rational people who view their actions as good or necessary within a particular moral structure commit these crimes.

Morality within the Group Identity Context

The concept of morality is complex and directly influences why and when individuals kill others and how they overcome inhibitions to doing so. The public often conceives of morality as a fixed notion that is universally accepted by all ‘normal’ human beings. However, morality is

³ Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: A History of Violence and Humanity* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2011), 596.

⁴ Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, 64.

⁵ Roy F. Baumeister and W. Keith Campbell, “The Intrinsic Appeal of Evil: Sadism, Sensational Thrills, and Threatened Egotism,” *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 3, no. 3 (1999): 212.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 212-213.

“less of an absolute than we would like to think.”⁷ What is considered moral to one community, society, or individual, may be perceived as immoral or wrong to another. When violence is committed, either by criminal individuals, terrorists, or mass murderers, the media often portrays the perpetrators as unthinkably immoral. In reality, only a very small number of perpetrators suffer from psychological defects. One study of convicted Islamist terrorists cited the number who exhibited psychosis at less than one percent; this is roughly two percentage points lower than the global population.⁸

This percentage points to the assertion that those who commit lethal violent actions are not ‘crazy,’ but markedly normal. Rather than enjoying violence for the sake of it, almost all perpetrators truly believe that their actions are not only justified, but also moral. Despite abundant evidence through testimonials collected from criminals and terrorists that they believe their actions to be right, the public writ large and the academic community have been slow to alter the ways they see and study violence. If societies are to ever be successful in curbing lethal violence, they must shift their understanding of how and why individuals, whether acting by themselves or as part of a group identity dynamic, kill. The concept of “virtuous violence” is key to explaining not only the reasons why an individual might be compelled to kill, but also how the individual reached a point where killing was not only acceptable, but also “morally right or even obligatory.”⁹

While violence is committed through individual action, its perpetrators often act on behalf of communities or groups with which they identify and feel the need to protect. According to psychology scholars Stephen Reicher, S. Alexander Haslam, and Rakshi Rath, there are certain steps that outline an individual’s path towards committing lethal violence in defense of an identity ‘ingroup.’ The most important step and one which all individuals—not just those who commit violent acts—constantly undertake throughout their lives is association with an ingroup based on “shared identification.”¹⁰ Identification can be manifested through many categories, including but not limited to religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, and ideology.

Group identity is not necessarily fixed for any given individual, but is fluid depending on the situation at hand. For example, an individual may feel an affiliation with two identities that are not mutually exclusive. The individual’s expression of each identity will manifest differently depending on the nature of the situations that arise throughout the individual’s life. For example, the individual might associate more strongly with one identity at a political event, but with another when discussing the perceived mistreatment of his or her religious group. Often identity association becomes most visible when a community with which someone identifies is threatened, either symbolically or physically. Identity with an ingroup generally results in the exclusion of members that do not belong, or are considered part of the ‘outgroup.’ The constant flux of identity formation exemplified by these steps happens to all human beings, and in and of itself is not an indicator that individuals will carry out any violent act.

However, as Reicher and his colleagues suggest, the potential for violence becomes increasingly plausible when ingroup identity formation combines with (1) the perception of existential danger from the outside; (2) heightened perception of the ingroup as “uniquely

⁷ Bernhard Leidner and Emanuele Castano, “Morality Shifting in the Context of Intergroup Violence,” *European Journal of Social Psychology* 42, no. 1 (2012): 82.

⁸ Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, 64.

⁹ Alan Page Fiske and Tage Shakti Rai, *Virtuous Violence: Hurting and Killing to Create, Sustain, End and Honor Social Relationships* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015): xxii.

¹⁰ Stephen Reicher, S. Alexander Haslam, and Rakshi Rath, “Making a Virtue of Evil: A Five-step Identity Model of the Development of Collective Hate,” *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 2, no. 3 (May 2008): 1326.

virtuous;” and (3) the characterization of violence against nonmembers as protecting the virtue of the ingroup.¹¹ This process not only makes violence between identity groups more likely, it also increases the glorification and celebration of violence as a means of protection against perceived existential threats. The identity formation process is often used to explain violence or atrocity on a massive scale, in the forms of genocide or crimes against humanity, but it is also applicable at the individual level. Contrary to popular opinion, group identity does not “obliterate [individual] human identity, human choice, and human agency” or encourage a follow the herd-type attitude, rather it empowers individuals to take action in adherence to the group’s moral framework.¹² “Violence itself [becomes] a social act,” one in which individuals engage to prove to other members of the ingroup, and perhaps themselves, that they do in fact ‘belong.’”¹³

The human tendency to self-identify with various groups—and sometimes commit violence in defense of these identity groups—is not only caused by the desire to belong, but also points to a larger search for meaning and significance. Historian Roger Griffin describes the concept of a ‘nomos’ as a constructed worldview developed very much in tandem with group identity formation. When this nomos is threatened by outside forces, or even from within, an individual’s identity and “suprapersonal meaning and value” are also directly threatened.¹⁴ For example, al Qaeda militants that carry out suicide operations do so in an effort to not only defend against perceived threats to their larger Muslim nomos, but also ascribe meaning to their individual lives and deaths. Violence in defense of a group or worldview is not necessarily a selfless act, but can be a response to a personal existential threat that is intertwined with fear of death and the search for higher meaning.

Furthermore, an individual’s violent conduct can be seen not only as a way to increase his or her own sense of belonging or meaning within a group, but also as a method for regulating social relationships with those outside the group who can become the targets of violence. In attempting to regulate social relationships, “only those who are included in the group are within the scope of moral concern.”¹⁵ This regulation manifests in a collective desire for revenge in response to a perceived violation of the ingroup. The desired violent response is then carried out either in individual or collective contexts.

Morality Shifting as an Individual and Group Process

The identity formation process is key to understanding how individuals not only justify killing others, but also genuinely view it as the right thing to do. A moral framework is defined by a group’s worldview and historical context. Individuals who ascribe to a particular ingroup may view that group’s moral framework as universally applicable, but history has shown this not to be the case. For example, one group may view violence as acceptable only under particular terms, like combatant-on-combatant violence in wartime, whereas another group may view violence against noncombatants or civilians as acceptable under certain conditions. In both

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 1329.

¹³ Jeffrey S. Murer, “Understanding Collective Violence: The Communicative and Performative Qualities of Violence in Acts of Belonging,” in *Criminological Approaches to International Criminal Law*, eds. Illias Bantekas and Emmanouela Mylonaki (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 288.

¹⁴ Roger Griffin, *Terrorist’s Creed: Fanatical Violence and the Human Need for Meaning* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 29.

¹⁵ Fiske and Rai, *Virtuous Violence*, 18.

contexts, the violence perpetrated by members of each group is viewed as necessary and moral in order to protect the threatened nomos.

In the current context of the ongoing ‘war on terror,’ two particular moral frameworks are often juxtaposed and oversimplified. On the one hand, the Just War framework highlights the traditional concept of accepting and justifying violence during wartime between combatants.¹⁶ On the other hand, the alternative “Islamic conception of *jihad*” moralizes other methods of violence that correspond to a perceived (or real) threat against the global Muslim ingroup, even if many members of the ingroup do not support these methods.¹⁷

While alternate moral frameworks are often seen in contrast to one another, they are similar in what they show about group formation and action. In both cases, one group’s members argue that the other’s actions are immoral and threaten the safety of their own identity. When viewed through their respective moral frameworks, both would be correct. This can be extrapolated far beyond these two typical tropes as moral frameworks are constantly in flux and are not limited to this simplified binary. In general, groups are able to transform lethal “violence into a moral action” by “attaching certain cherished political goals and moral principles to an otherwise brutal activity.”¹⁸ For example, the American military seeks to justify violence perpetrated during wartime as efforts to uphold ‘American values’ that are perceived to be threatened by outside forces.

Maintaining moral certitude within an ingroup framework is not static. Moral frameworks often evolve with the actions and rhetoric of the ingroup in a process known as “morality shifting,” whereby individuals “can maintain a moral image of the ingroup” despite changes in or escalation of violent behavior.¹⁹ Violent or aggressive actions or words are qualified as “fostering the strength and well-being of the ingroup” rather than denigrating others.²⁰ However, the term “morality shifting” can be somewhat misleading. The term, put forth by psychologists Bernhard Leidner and Emanuele Castano, implies an active change in perception of the ingroup’s actions. However, the theory can be applied to the concept of virtuous violence more generally. As a group’s rhetoric or action radicalizes, individuals may grow more entrenched in defending the group from outside threats using violence.

Moral Disengagement to Overcome Inhibitions

Alternate moral frameworks explain why individuals view their own violent actions as moral or justified, while others outside of their ingroup or nomos view those same actions with horror or incomprehension. Viewing lethal violence through this structure is helpful, but it is not the only available framework. Psychologists and sociologists that explore why individuals commit violence also focus heavily on the concept of moral disengagement as a method of making lethal violence more acceptable.

In order for individuals to perpetrate violence that conflicts with their “moral standards,” they must undergo a process of moral disengagement that allows them to avoid normal “self-

¹⁶ For more on Just War Theory see: Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, 4th edition (New York: Basic Books, 2006).

¹⁷ M.S. Wallace, “Fighting the Good Fight? Legitimizing Violence in a World of Contested and Contingent Moral Frameworks,” *International Politics* 49, no. 6 (2012): 674.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 672.

¹⁹ Leidner and Castano, “Morality Shifting in the Context of Intergroup Violence,” 82.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

regulatory mechanisms.”²¹ The concept of moral disengagement assumes that there are, in effect, some universal moral standards that individuals must overcome in order to kill. Whether this is true or not is difficult to prove, particularly when operating in a world where multiple overlapping moral frameworks exist and are constantly evolving and changing. However, one possible indication that moral disengagement is often not completely successful is the physical revulsion or remorse that many perpetrators of violence feel immediately after killing another human being, even if the rhetoric of their ingroup tells them that their action was indeed moral.²² Not all those who kill experience a negative reaction, but the phenomenon is widespread enough to suggest that killing another human being is somehow unnatural, if not necessarily immoral within a particular ingroup context.

Regardless of which ingroup an individual ascribes to or what cultural or social situation they operate in, those who commit violent acts go through similar moral disengagement steps that include, but are not limited to: dehumanizing and distancing the ‘enemy,’ conditioning and training, dispersing responsibility for violence, and downplaying the negative consequences of violent actions. By initiating these “social and psychological maneuvers,” individuals are able to avoid the moral “self-regulatory mechanisms” that would ordinarily prohibit them from killing, such as a guilty conscience.²³ For example, in cases of genocide or state terrorism (in Nazi Germany, for one), the subjects of violence were dehumanized, often compared to bugs or vermin, and blamed for their persecution. In addition, perpetrators of violence, particularly violence on a massive scale, often seek to “minimize their role in causing harm” through “diffusion of responsibility” to the larger community.²⁴ By claiming to just be following orders or following the crowd, individuals are able to stem self-regulation of their violent actions.

Reconciling Moral Disengagement and Alternate Moral Framework Approaches

At first glance, the theories of alternate moral frameworks and moral disengagement can seem conflicting. Yet most scholars who research and write on the topic of violence use them in conjunction with one another to describe how individuals are able to overcome inhibitions to kill. The natural question that arises is: If an individual ascribes to an ingroup ideology, and therefore the ingroup’s moral framework, why would he or she need to undergo moral disengagement in order to commit violence? If an individual truly believes that violence against another is justified and moral, why would moral disengagement processes, like dehumanization of the enemy or distancing oneself from responsibility for violence, be necessary? And yet, there is significant evidence across different societies and cultures—as outlined in the case studies below—that alternative moral frameworks coexist with moral disengagement processes. In essence, those who kill believe they are right in doing so, but also feel the need to somehow excuse their violence.

One relatively straightforward explanation would be to assume that those who commit violence do not genuinely believe that what they are doing is moral, they simply say they do. Psychologists and scholars will never be able to read people’s thoughts and determine with

²¹ Albert Bandura, “Moral Disengagement in the Perpetration of Inhumanities,” *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 3, no. 3 (1999): 193.

²² Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 1996), 236-237.

²³ Bandura, “Moral Disengagement,” 194.

²⁴ *Ibid.*; Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, 685.

certainty whether an individual does believe killing within a particular context is moral or not. However, the above analysis suggests that individuals do moralize their violent actions.

A further exploration of this seeming discrepancy reveals that the two frameworks actually complement each other and points to the need for flexibility and fluidity when examining complex topics like identity formation. The creation of an alternate moral framework can itself be seen as a method of moral disengagement. The prevalence of both further suggests that identity formation is not static. While an individual may identify with a particular ingroup and ascribe to that group's moral framework in some contexts, he or she may also identify with another ingroup and its alternate moral framework in other situations. Therefore, an individual's framework might be murky or fluid, resulting in the need to perform moral disengagement processes in order to kill.

Case Studies

The following brief case studies illuminate how individuals use the mechanisms outlined above in order to overcome inhibitions to kill, even when operating within strikingly different contexts.

The Nazi Context—Revisiting the 'Banality of Evil' and the Role of Authority

The 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann for his role in the Nazi deportation and execution of Jews during the Holocaust set in motion a scholarly debate on the motivations and responsibility for violence. In her provocative book on the trial, Hannah Arendt problematizes the conventional notion that those who commit violence are 'evil.' Instead, Arendt argues that Eichmann's actions do not represent a "case of moral let alone legal insanity," but rather his allegiance to his cause and desire to advance in his career.²⁵ In short, he was a normal individual who had knowingly and enthusiastically committed the actions of which he was accused, but was not inherently evil or sadistic. In this case, Eichmann was not accused of directly killing anyone, but rather overseeing and orchestrating the deportation of hundreds of thousands of Jews to concentration camps and purposefully transporting them to their deaths.²⁶

Arendt's analysis of the arguments put forth during the trial illustrates her theory on the 'banality of evil,' whereby an individual can partake in violence not necessarily out of any hatred for their victim(s), but as a willing cog in part of a larger machine. Whether Eichmann had "done his best to make the Final Solution final was therefore not in dispute;" however, Arendt asserts that this fact in and of itself does not indicate "proof of his fanaticism, his boundless hatred of Jews."²⁷ Since Arendt's work was published, there has been continued disagreement over whether Eichmann was in fact a fanatical Nazi ideologue, and whether this would affect the validity or usefulness of the 'banality of evil' approach.

In addition, some have questioned whether the 'banality of evil' approach has been too heavily conflated with Stanley Milgram's study of authority's role in influencing violent behavior.²⁸ Milgram's findings from his 1974 psychological study purportedly show that

²⁵ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 25-6.

²⁶ "Adolf Eichmann," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Holocaust Encyclopedia, accessed March 1, 2016, <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007412>.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 146.

²⁸ Reicher, Haslam, and Rath, "Making a Virtue of Evil," 1316.

individuals are likely to perform potentially lethal actions when an authority figure is encouraging them to do so, and when their victim is both physically and emotionally distanced from them. Some assert that Arendt and Milgram's arguments that individuals "simply doing their jobs, and without any particular hostility on their part, can become agents in a terrible destructive process" have been oversimplified.²⁹ This debate is outside the scope of this article, but Arendt's discussion of the 'banality of evil' and Milgram's findings as they relate to moral disengagement processes and group identity formation warrant further scrutiny here.

The moral disengagement mechanisms of diffusion of responsibility and cultural and physical distancing are evident in both Arendt's account of Eichmann's actions and Milgram's study. Eichmann justified many of his actions as the workings of a much larger, bureaucratic machine over which he had little control. In order to be successful in his career, he had to obey orders. Eichmann was able to overcome any inhibition he might have experienced by "becom[ing] obsessed with the process of doing [his] job."³⁰ He was one of many to contribute to the Nazi cause, thereby he alone could not be held responsible for his actions, or so his defense argued in the trial. The results of Milgram's study—that the majority of participants administered what they thought were lethal-level shocks to fellow participants—disturbed and surprised the general public and many in the field of psychology. In his analysis of the findings, Milgram asserts that the participants underwent a number of adjustments that made the administering of the shocks easier. Most notably they sought to maintain a "relationship with the experimenter [authority figure]," and thereby reduce their own accountability for their actions.³¹

In addition to moral disengagement processes, alternate moral frameworks also play a role in explaining the actions of the individuals in question, particularly Eichmann and other Nazi perpetrators of violence. While Eichmann invoked the diffusion of responsibility as a mechanism for coping with his actions, there is significant evidence that indicates both he and other Nazi perpetrators fervently believed the Nazi ideology was a moral "truth," which promised to "rescue old-fashioned values of honor and dignity from the materialism, degeneracy, and cosmopolitanism of modern life."³² In short, the majority of Nazis who played a role in the Holocaust were operating within a *nomos* and moral framework in which "the road to Auschwitz was paved with righteousness."³³

The American Soldier and Dehumanization of the Enemy

Within American society, the violent actions of its soldiers are often perceived of as honorable and patriotic. While society usually views killing in the context of war as positive, or at least necessary, soldiers must still undergo significant moral disengagement processes in order to overcome their inhibitions to killing other human beings. A soldier's allegiance to his unit serves the dual purpose of dispersing and decreasing individual accountability for killing and "developing a sense of anonymity" within the group atmosphere.³⁴ Therefore, when a soldier kills, he feels he is doing so in protection of his comrades (accountability) and as part of something larger than himself (anonymity).

²⁹ Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View* (London: Tavistock Publications Ltd., 1974), 6.

³⁰ Reicher, Haslam, and Rath, "Making a Virtue of Evil," 1315.

³¹ Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*, 7.

³² Claudia Koonz, *The Nazi Conscience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 2.

³³ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁴ Grossman, *On Killing*, 151.

In addition to moral disengagement processes that rely on the group dynamic of the military, soldiers also go through disengagement processes aimed at making the enemy seem less than human, and thus easier to kill. For example, soldiers in the American military use terms to dehumanize their enemies. The terms ‘gook,’ ‘kraut,’ ‘camel jockey,’ ‘towel head,’ and ‘rag head’ are just a few examples of derogatory names that soldiers in the military have used, and continue to use in current conflicts, in order to culturally distance themselves from and degrade their enemies, and thereby justify and moralize the act of killing.³⁵

Soldiers’ views of their actions and society’s support of them are key for understanding the moral framework under which they operate and perform. Dehumanization of the enemy does not occur in a vacuum within an insular military institution, but rather reflects the larger society’s ingroup identity and mentality. Many individuals who identify with the American ingroup interpret the attacks on 9/11 and subsequent terrorist threats as existential threats to the American nomos. In order to protect against this perceived threat, soldiers feed off of politicians’ rhetoric, classifying enemies as ‘evil’ rather than rational beings with political motives.³⁶ Despite participating in these moral disengagement mechanisms, many soldiers report experiencing physical revulsion immediately after killing, undergoing a conscious rationalization process of their actions, and suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) long afterwards.³⁷ Therefore, even when operating in a framework in which they are told their actions are just, many soldiers still struggle to completely disengage themselves from the notion that killing is somehow unnatural.

Terrorist Violence—Al Qaeda’s Messaging and Appeal

Similar to soldiers in any society, individuals who perpetrate terrorist violence operate within an ingroup identity framework that allows them to see their actions as moral and necessary for the protection of their nomos. Al Qaeda’s operatives are inculcated into a unique Islamist worldview where enemies are dehumanized as infidels. An examination of al Qaeda’s public discourse reveals the importance of morality shifting within its moral framework. As al Qaeda’s attacks have grown in size and viciousness, the leadership continuously evaluates the escalating violence as a “necessary response in the face of an existential threat” against the Muslim nomos.³⁸ This type of morality shifting is key within the al Qaeda worldview not only for justifying attacks against civilians in general, but also against Muslim civilians specifically. By defining its actions within a particular moral framework, al Qaeda leadership regulates the social relationships between its ingroup and the outside world. According to this framework, if a Muslim is not actively involved in furthering al Qaeda’s mission, he or she becomes “treacherous” and vulnerable to attack alongside non-Muslims.³⁹

Much of the scholarship surrounding the psychology of terrorist violence emphasizes the important role that personal relationships and friendships play in helping overcome inhibitions to killing.⁴⁰ However, this argument is applicable well beyond the personal level. Al Qaeda and

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 161.

³⁶ George W. Bush, “State of the Union Address” (Speech, Washington, DC, January 29, 2002), accessed February 29, 2016, <http://edition.cnn.com/2002/ALLPOLITICS/01/29/bush.speech.txt/>.

³⁷ Grossman, *On Killing*, 236.

³⁸ Donald Holbrook, *The Al Qaeda Doctrine: The Framing of Evolution of the Leadership’s Public Discourse* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 83.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁴⁰ John Horgan, *The Psychology of Terrorism* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 50.

most other terrorist groups cite the mistreatment of their identity group at large as a main motivator for violence. Prior to carrying out the 2004 Madrid train bombings, one of the terrorists involved in the operation recorded his thoughts in a martyr video. On this video, the operative invoked the memory of Muslim humiliation at the hands of outsiders during the Crusades. He blamed his soon-to-be victims for a long history of deeds that threatened his ingroup's nomos, and as a result, was able to distance himself from his victims enough to overcome his inhibitions to kill them.⁴¹

Following this same line of reasoning, al Qaeda and other Islamist terrorist organizations use camaraderie with fellow Muslims who are suffering around the world as a powerful mechanism for promoting group solidarity and moralizing lethal violence.⁴² The leadership's rhetoric strengthens the bonds of members who may have little in common beyond their religious identity and institutes a framework of "vicarious poverty," whereby the suffering of one member of the ingroup is an existential threat to all.⁴³ In doing so, terrorist organizations are able to appeal to—and recruit—followers from a wide array of backgrounds, nationalities, and socio-economic statuses.

Conclusion

The above case studies are drawn from drastically different contexts, yet they are striking in their similarities in terms of how individuals overcome inhibitions to kill. The "courage to kill and die is not innate," rather it is "apathy to violence that has to be cultivated and channeled to a target."⁴⁴ This "apathy to violence" is possible only when individuals, as active members of collective group identities, are able to view violence within the context of a specific framework that moralizes and justifies it. Nazi bureaucrats like Adolf Eichmann, American soldiers fighting in the 'war on terror,' and members of al Qaeda and other terrorist groups have operated within widely different ideologies and worldviews. Most would argue that they have very little in common, yet all have viewed their actions as moral and just. This illustrates the wide applicability of alternate moral frameworks among different societies, cultures, and ingroups. In addition, the moral disengagement mechanisms that individuals within these contexts have used, like calling targets vermin or other dehumanizing names, diffusing responsibility and accountability for violence among ingroup members, and blaming victims for the violence is remarkably similar in nature.

The similarities in identity formation and moral disengagement mechanisms across cultural and social contexts become clear when viewed through an academic lens. However, when an individual is entrenched within a particular group identity, nomos, and moral framework, viewing him or herself as undergoing similar processes to 'the enemy' can prove difficult. Nevertheless, if an individual or society wishes to try to understand why others carry out lethal violence, starting with an examination of their own identity formation process and moral framework—and the psychological and social mechanisms for overcoming killing that go along with these—would do much to advance their comprehension. This, in turn, will help shift the conversation on violence away from the familiar 'us' versus 'them' dichotomy, which often

⁴¹ Scott Atran, *Talking to the Enemy: Violent Extremism, Sacred Values, and What It Means to Be Human* (London: Penguin Books, 2010), 45.

⁴² Holbrook, *The Al Qaeda Doctrine*, 56.

⁴³ Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, 48.

⁴⁴ Atran, *Talking to the Enemy*, 27.

serves to further entrench ingroup identities and provide perceived justification for escalated violence.

Changing the way societies and individuals think and talk about lethal violence not only serves the purpose of broadening comprehension among the wider population, but also has implications within the field of national security and policy. In order to prevent or appropriately respond to violence, particularly terrorist violence, a society must first understand how and why those who carry out such violent acts do so. Attempts to understand lethal violence are abundant. However, these attempts often fall short of examining the similarities between the psychological and sociological mechanisms used by an individual's own ingroup and that of 'others.' In doing so, these discussions miss the crucial opportunity to analyze how violence perpetrated by the ingroup illuminates that perpetrated by a perceived outgroup. If a policy set to counter lethal violence has any hope for success, it must first acknowledge that violence perpetrated by one particular group or individual is not carried out in a vacuum, but is intricately related to juxtaposed moral frameworks and universally applicable moral disengagement mechanisms.

About the Author

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LOVE IN THE TIME OF TERROR: FROM BREAKING THE SPELL OF THE RED ARMY FACTION TO DISPELLING THE ALLURE OF AL QAEDA

Ashley Rhoades

The story of the rise and fall of one of Europe's most infamous terrorist organizations, the Red Army Faction (RAF), is a fascinating one that holds many lessons for modern counterterrorism. Despite its relatively small size, the revolutionary 'Baader-Meinhof Gang' managed to remain in existence through the 1990s, when its torrid love affair with terrorism finally ended at the hands of the West German counterterrorism apparatus. This paper charts the life cycle of the RAF, noting its distinct characteristics, modus operandi, and strategy for avoiding the countermeasures levied against it. In conjunction with this case study, this paper also examines the efforts undertaken by the West German government, intelligence community, and law enforcement agencies to combat the scourge of the RAF. To evaluate the success of these countermeasures, this article covers the reforms to the police and intelligence communities (including the creation of GSG 9, one of the first elite counterterrorist forces in existence) the drafting of anti-terrorist legislation, and specific tactics employed during the West German counterterrorism campaign. This paper then concludes with a discussion of the parallels between the RAF and al Qaeda (AQ), and the lessons that can be drawn from and applied to their respective counterterrorism campaigns. Although the RAF operated in an entirely different time, context, and environment than AQ—the former framed by the Cold War, the latter by the War on Terror—there are numerous similarities between the two organizations that, if recognized, could provide useful context for formulating strategies for the current US campaign against al Qaeda and its affiliates. By examining and understanding the similarities between the RAF and AQ and its affiliates (or former affiliates, in the case of the Islamic State), those engaged in counterterrorism efforts can learn valuable lessons about how to defeat these oddly analogous groups.

Historical Background and Context

The story of the rise and fall of one of Europe's most infamous terrorist organizations, the Red Army Faction (RAF), is a fascinating one that holds many lessons for modern counterterrorism. The original RAF was born out of a revolutionary youth movement comprised of students from the Free University of West Berlin.¹ At its helm were Andreas Baader and Gudrun Ensslin (Baader's girlfriend at the time), who started the group in response to the police shooting of student Benno Ohnesorg at a 1967 protest against the Shah of Iran's visit to West Germany.² Originally known as the 'Baader-Meinhof Gang,' after iconic members Andreas Baader and Ulrike Meinhof, the group later assumed the title of 'Red Army Faction.'³ Left-wing ideologues and supporters believed that the death of Ohnesorg was symptomatic of a larger theme of excessive police and state-perpetrated violence, and that they had a duty to overthrow this oppressive West German government, which they alleged was saturated with and tainted by former Nazis.⁴ On a broader level, operating in an environment of economic success and prosperity in 1960s Germany, the RAF railed against capitalism, perceived Western greed and shallowness, and "the socio-economic inequities endemic in the modern industrialized capitalist state."⁵ As such, the RAF's declared enemy was the West German state and its accompanying security forces, which these radicals believed intended to eradicate them all. Therefore, they believed they had to meet this anticipated and actual violence with violence of their own in self-defense.⁶ The RAF's 'theory of victory' was that by launching attacks and employing widespread violence, the group could provoke the state into using excessive force and repressive tactics against it, thus fueling the anger of the populace and causing them to rise up against the government.⁷

Throughout its tenure as an active terrorist group, the Red Army Faction engaged in overt acts of terror—such as bombings, kidnappings, the murder of prominent German politicians and businessmen, and attacks on members of the US military stationed in West Germany—while also delving into the realm of the criminal with activities such as robbing banks.⁸ While there were other, more lethal terrorist groups operating in West Germany, the Red Army Faction assumed an iconic status because of its high profile members and its many propagandistic publications.⁹ The RAF was most active from 1970 to 1979, during which time it committed 31 of its eventual 34 murders, 163 kidnappings or hostage scenarios, and 25 bombings.¹⁰ In terms of organizational responsibilities, from 1972-onwards, the RAF operated on four levels: "the commando, prisoners, resistance, and sympathizers or political supporters. [The commando level was]

¹ Tom Parker, "Fighting an Antaeon Enemy: How Democratic States Unintentionally Sustain the Terrorist Movements They Oppose," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 19:2 (2007): 155, DOI: 10.1080/09546550701246809.

² *Ibid.*, 156.

³ Stefan Aust, *Baader-Meinhof: The Inside Story of the RAF*, trans. Anthea Bell. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 36-37.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁵ Bruce Hoffman, "Putting German Terrorism in Perspective: An American Response," *GHI Bulletin* 43 (Fall 2008): 61, accessed May 2, 2016, <http://www.ghi-dc.org/files/publications/bulletin/bu043/59.pdf>.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁷ Karin Bauer, ed., *Everybody Talks About the Weather... We Don't: The Writings of Ulrike Meinhof*, trans. Luise Von Flotow. (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2008), 88.

⁸ Aust, *The Inside Story*, 60.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁰ "Red Army Faction: A Chronology of Terror," *Deutsche Welle* (DW), accessed May 2, 2016, <http://www.dw.com/en/red-army-faction-a-chronology-of-terror/a-2763946>.

responsible for carrying out the lethal terrorist operations of the RAF, [while] major ideological pronouncements of the RAF originated from the imprisoned RAF members.”¹¹

In its opening act, the RAF focused on attacking “property which represented either German capitalism or American militarism,” but then, in the period following the arrest of its founding leaders, shifted its focus to “attacks against specific persons who represented established pillars of West German society.”¹² In 1968, Baader and Ensslin orchestrated and executed the group’s first attack, placing explosives in a department store.¹³ The attack proved to be fairly amateur in effect, causing minimal damage and resulting in the arrest of Baader, Ensslin, and two of their conspirators.¹⁴ The RAF first surfaced on the public’s radar in September of 1970, when it robbed three Berlin-based banks and simultaneously published a communiqué announcing its rationale behind the attacks.¹⁵ As the group rose in prominence and capabilities in 1972, it conducted attacks against US military installations, police headquarters, and publishing houses of news outlets it deemed too conservative or to be at odds with their leftist ideology.¹⁶ The group’s most well-known attack was the kidnapping and subsequent murder of Hanns Martin Schleyer, a prominent businessman who the RAF declared was “a member of the SS during the Nazi regime, [and who] was, like many Nazis in all levels of society, back in office with all his honor intact.”¹⁷

Even with all this activity, the RAF only killed roughly as many people as it had members, with its core membership staying constant at around 36 members who, in turn, perpetrated attacks that resulted in about 34 casualties over nearly 30 years.¹⁸

Evaluating the Enemy: Identifying the Red Army Faction’s Vulnerabilities, Strategic Advantages, and Centers of Gravity

Before analyzing the government’s counterterrorism campaign, it is essential to understand the strengths, potential weaknesses, and *modus operandi* of the group so that the countermeasures wielded against it may be evaluated in the proper context.

Ideology and Strategic Concepts

The members of the Red Army Faction romanticized their use of terror and their perceived role in the ‘revolution,’ but in reality, these militants were often devoid of coherent ideological justification for their violence. Indeed, “Although they labeled their actions proletarian, many people doubted the veracity of their political motivations. Their protest

¹¹ Dennis A. Pluchinsky, “Germany’s Red Army Faction: An Obituary,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 16:2 (1993): 136, DOI: 10.1080/10576109308435925.

¹² Kevin G. Horbatiuk, “Anti-Terrorism: The West German Approach,” *Fordham International Law Journal* 3(2), 1979: 170, accessed May 2, 2016, <http://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/ilj>.

¹³ Parker, “Fighting an Antaeon Enemy,” 155.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 158.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹⁷ “‘The Urban Guerilla is History...’ The Final Communiqué from the Red Army Faction (RAF),” translation of April 1998 document, accessed May 2, 2016, <http://germanguerrilla.com/1998/03/01/the-urban-guerrilla-is-history/>.

¹⁸ Assaf Moghadam, “Failure and Disengagement in the Red Army Faction,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 35:2 (2012): 156, DOI: 10.1080/1057610X.2012.639062.

movement was decidedly negative and offered no alternative to the democratic order. They had no base of support among the working class. Their ideology was, at best, abstract.”¹⁹

In the vein of dramatizing and romanticizing terrorism, Ulrike Meinhof and the other core members of the initial Baader-Meinhof gang subscribed to the idea of terrorism as theater, often engaging in ‘performance terrorism.’²⁰ This entailed the use of evocative methods such as hunger strikes, the image of the sexualized, empowered female militant, suicide, and other ‘propaganda of the deed.’²¹ In fact, the RAF was exceptional in that it engaged in the first use of suicide terrorism in the modern world.²² Unlike al Qaeda and many religiously-aligned terrorist groups, the RAF did not use suicide terrorism to try to inflict as many casualties as possible or to ensure that the target in question was successfully and undeniably attacked, but rather as a psychological tool to instill fear in the West German psyche and to create a spectacle that would draw the attention of others to their cause.²³ The RAF was also unusual among terrorist groups in that it dispelled the standard image of terrorist groups being male-dominated organizations with women relegated to support roles or denied membership entirely.²⁴ In fact, the women of the RAF not only held leadership positions, but often demonstrated themselves to be much fiercer and more dedicated than the men.²⁵

Relationship with the Press—Throwing Stones at Glass Houses

The RAF’s relationship with the press and the media was complicated. Ulrike Meinhof herself was a former journalist for the German magazine *konkret*, a left-wing publication.²⁶ In one of her many writings, entitled “The Urban Guerilla Concept,” she seeks to dispel the negative stereotypes and misinformation that the press had purportedly been spreading about the Red Army Faction. She fires back at the media, saying that they have lied and distorted the RAF’s actions and message in order to try to undermine and punish the group.²⁷

Although terrorist groups have historically relied on the press to publicize their message and draw attention to the cause through the ‘glass house effect,’ Meinhof seems to resent the press coverage the RAF received, claiming that the group never sought to “grab the headlines” with its actions, anyway.²⁸ Of course, this resentment may stem from the fact that the RAF at first tried to approach the press to use it as a vehicle to convey its message, but found that the journalists it trusted did them a disservice by portrayed the group in a negative light.²⁹ As Meinhof laments, “they want to portray us as being stupid, untrustworthy, clumsy, or even crazy. They are attempting to set others up against us. They are just a bunch of hangers-on. We want

¹⁹ Horbatiuk, “The West German Approach,” 173.

²⁰ Leith Passmore, *Ulrike Meinhof and the Red Army Faction: Performing Terrorism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 12.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 38-40.

²² Hoffman, “Putting German Terrorism in Perspective,” 53.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Patricia Melzer, *Death in the Shape of a Young Girl: Women's Political Violence in the Red Army Faction*, New York: NYU Press, 2015, 33-36.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁶ Aust, *The Inside Story*, 14.

²⁷ Ulrike Meinhof, “The Urban Guerilla Concept,” trans. of April 1, 1971 document, accessed May 2, 2016, <http://germanguerilla.com/1971/04/01/the-urban-guerilla-concept/>, 1.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁹ Karin Bauer, ed., *Everybody Talks About the Weather...We Don't: The Writings of Ulrike Meinhof*, trans. Luise Von Flotow. (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2008), 61.

nothing to do with these wind-bags for whom the anti-imperialist struggle only takes place in coffee houses.”³⁰

Meinhof clearly understood the importance of narrative, and another reason she lashed out at the press was that she claimed they had knowingly spread mistruths about RAF missions in order to undermine and weaken the group’s justification for its violent actions. The example Meinhof gives is that the media and the state spread the misinformation that Baader had only a few months left in prison when the RAF broke him out of jail. In reality, she maintains, Baader had around 34 months left.³¹ Meinhof also claims that she would not have gone ahead with the escape attempt had she known that an innocent civilian would be killed as collateral damage.³² Such rhetoric reflects the RAF’s struggle to paint itself as a group of morally-justified combatants, forced to take up arms against an oppressive regime.³³

International Connections and External Support

The RAF, although largely constrained to domestic attacks, was international in its aspirations. The RAF militants were before their time in that they chose to network and align themselves with other terrorist groups and to “put together mixed commandos of operatives from different countries.”³⁴ Interestingly enough, although the RAF was largely spurred on by the Vietnam War at the outset, once the war concluded, the RAF did not dissipate; instead, it searched for another ‘grievance framework’ or cause to champion³⁵. The RAF elected to focus on Palestine as “the new framework to carry on the struggle [in Germany].”³⁶ Accordingly, the terrorists traveled to Jordan and other camps under Palestinian control, where they received paramilitary training that would heavily influence the design and execution of future RAF operations.³⁷ Moreover, this relationship between the RAF and Palestinian terrorist groups—namely the PLFP and Al-Fatah—“marked a milestone in the history of terrorism since it was probably the first time that one terrorist group had trained another.”³⁸ Beyond training, these German and Palestinian terrorist groups actually engaged in operations together, such as the “1975 seizure of the OPEC ministers’ conference in Vienna, the 1976 hijacking of an Air France flight to Entebbe, Uganda, and the hijacking of a Lufthansa flight to Somalia in 1977.”³⁹ They even collaborated on the infamous 1972 Munich Olympics attack, with members of the German groups providing logistical support to the Palestinian operatives. In turn, Al-Fatah provided the RAF with weapons.⁴⁰ This external support proved to be crucial to the prolonged survival of the RAF.

³⁰ Ulrike Meinhof, “The Urban Guerilla Concept,” 2.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, 3.

³³ Bowman H Miller, “Terrorism and Language: A Text-Based Analysis of the German Case,” *Terrorism* 9(4) (1987): 374, accessed May 2, 2016, DOI: 10.1080/10576108708435639.

³⁴ Hoffman, “Putting German Terrorism in Perspective,” 62.

³⁵ Hans Josef Horchem, “The Decline of the Red Army Faction,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 3(2) (1991): 61, accessed May 2, 2016, DOI: 10.1080/09546559108427104.

³⁶ Hoffman, “Putting German Terrorism in Perspective,” 62.

³⁷ Meinhof, “The Urban Guerilla Concept,” 3; Parker, “Fighting an Antaeon Enemy,” 176.

³⁸ Hoffman, “Putting German Terrorism in Perspective,” 62.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ J. Smith and André Moncourt, *The Red Army Faction: A Documentary History. Volume I: Projectiles for the People* (Oakland: PM Press, 2009), 47.

In the 1980s, the RAF attempted to create an umbrella organization, in the style of the PLO, that would synthesize the efforts of various European terrorist groups into one united, “anti-imperialist front of Western European guerillas.”⁴¹ Because of the changing geopolitical landscape in Europe, however, these efforts to unite with groups such as Direct Action in France and the Red Brigades in Italy failed.⁴²

Assessing the Design and Implementation of Government Countermeasures—Successes, Failures, and Potential Pitfalls

Although by some modern measures the casualties inflicted by the Red Army Faction seem low, the group’s high profile and strategic choice of targets allowed it to successfully spread terror throughout West Germany. The West German government had to act to combat the blight that was the Red Army Faction—not only did the RAF inflict terror and violence upon West German citizens, but the RAF also posed a direct threat to the government, as it constantly sought to undermine the power and legitimacy of the ruling establishment.⁴³ Accordingly, the West German government embarked on a series of measures to combat the terrorist threat.

Reforms to the Police and Intelligence Communities and the Creation of the Counterterrorism Unit

Since the RAF operated almost entirely underground, with operatives eschewing employment in normal jobs and engagement in everyday social interactions, the West German government struggled with the issue of incomplete or completely absent information regarding the terrorists’ plots, movements, and whereabouts.⁴⁴ Apart from the occasional lucky break—in one instance, an inside informant gave away the location of the RAF safe-house at 89 Knesebeck Street, which led to Mahler’s arrest—the West German intelligence apparatus had no real means to collect reliable information on the RAF.⁴⁵ Recognizing this as a dire issue, the West German government made a concerted effort to expand and improve its intelligence agencies’ collection and analytic capabilities.⁴⁶ Thereafter, the Federal Criminal Police Office of Germany (known as the *Bundeskriminalamt*, or the BKA) swelled its ranks and implemented concrete, decisive measures to fight the RAF.⁴⁷ In the early stages of their counterterrorism efforts, before the West German law enforcement and intelligence communities had access to surveillance technology, they relied heavily on the use of human intelligence to fill in the gaps in their knowledge.⁴⁸ They also put together the Bonn Security Group, an investigative body that was tasked with “an extensive examination of the entire philosophy of the RAF.”⁴⁹ The director of the Group, Alfred

⁴¹ Hoffman, “Putting German Terrorism in Perspective,” 63.

⁴² Horchem, “The Decline of the Red Army Faction,” 64.

⁴³ Aust, *The Inside Story*, 20.

⁴⁴ Smith and Moncourt, *Projectiles for the People*, 22.

⁴⁵ Meinhof, “The Urban Guerilla Concept,” 4.

⁴⁶ John Catherine, “West German Law Enforcement Intelligence Analysis and Reaction to the Red Army Faction,” *Small Wars Journal*, March 1, 2013, accessed May 2, 2016, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/west-german-law-enforcement-intelligence-analysis-and-reaction-to-the-red-army-faction>, 5.

⁴⁷ Moghadam, “Failure and Disengagement,” 158.

⁴⁸ Catherine, “West German Law Enforcement,” 3.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

Klaus, pored over original material produced by the RAF in order to understand the terrorists' mindsets and goals. Other organizations followed suit; as one author describes,

“the West German internal intelligence service, Bundesamt fuer Vassungsschutz (BfV), also studied the culture of the radical left. BfV investigators made extensive use of open source intelligence collection by examining the speeches, theses, and brochures of prominent leftist leaders, students, and political agitators. Ulrich Wegener, the founder and first commanding officer of the GSG 9, also analyzed terrorism from this target centric perspective. Wegener studied theories on guerilla warfare, political motives, methods of operation, strategies, and tactics.”⁵⁰

Moreover, the government adapted to the amorphous, clandestine nature of the RAF terrorist threat by creating GSG 9, one of the first elite counterterrorist forces in existence.⁵¹ With the BKA focused on gathering and analyzing information, the *Bundesgrenzschutz Gruppe 9* (GSG 9), a special counterterrorist unit, was tasked with the “tactical execution of West Germany's anti-terrorist measures.”⁵² GSG 9 was remarkable in its high-speed deployment capabilities—it relied on advanced and tailored technology such as state-of-the art helicopters and specially-engineered vehicles that afforded them rapid mobility and response times should an RAF threat or attack arise.⁵³

Other police reforms included the creation of two new divisions of the Federal Border Police in May of 1975, which were called the *Staatschutz* (Special Branch) and *Terrorismus* (Suppression of Terrorism).⁵⁴ The mission of the *Terrorismus* was to “prevent further acts of terrorism via a careful investigation of terrorist activity, and to apprehend terrorists wanted under warrant and bring them to trial.”⁵⁵ These organizations all worked together to combat the RAF threat and were able to report their findings and recommendations directly to the West German government and policymakers.⁵⁶ Following the escalated events of 1977, the government “took this coordination at the national level one step further when [Chancellor Schmidt] formed his ‘crisis staff,’ a bifurcated staff consist[ing] of the Kleine Lage (Small Group) and a Higher Level Group.”⁵⁷ Other measures included the creation of ‘B/M’ or ‘fusion centers,’ which “brought together federal and state police forces to coordinate and cooperate in gathering information about the RAF.”⁵⁸ Data mining was also an important countermeasure that allowed the West German intelligence community to collect and process information to identify patterns of terrorist activity.⁵⁹

Together, these reforms and streamlining measures allowed for quick action and implementation of counterterrorist measures, without getting mired in the innards of bureaucracy.

⁵⁰ Catherine, “West German Law Enforcement,” 5.

⁵¹ Hoffman, “Putting German Terrorism in Perspective,” 63.

⁵² Horbatiuk, “The West German Approach,” 167.

⁵³ Parker, “Fighting an Antaeon Enemy,” 161.

⁵⁴ Horbatiuk, “The West German Approach,” 167.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁵⁶ Horbatiuk, “The West German Approach,” 167.; Catherine, “West German Law Enforcement,” 4.

⁵⁷ Horbatiuk, “The West German Approach,” 170.

⁵⁸ Hoffman, “Putting German Terrorism in Perspective,” 55.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

Legal Reforms and the Drafting of Anti-Terror Legislation

In the nascent stages of the Red Army Faction's reign, the West German government was operating under an *ad-hoc* approach to counterterrorism, as the German legal code did not contain specific language regarding terrorist activity.⁶⁰ Deciding legal reform was entirely necessary, the West German government sought to enact a series of laws that would discourage terrorist activity and bolster manpower and authority for its police forces. These legal reforms facilitated the trial and detention process for convicted terrorists, as well as broadened the range of options for dealing with suspected terrorists.

In one of the first legislative initiatives, the government offered terrorists immunity from prosecution if they turned themselves in and agreed to be witnesses for the state.⁶¹ This yielded valuable information that led to Baader, Meinhof, Ensslin, and other prominent members of the RAF being captured in the summer of 1972.⁶² Although the infamous trials of the RAF leadership did not begin until May of 1975, the government made extensive preparations, with “a special court and prison complex [being] constructed in Stammheim for the trial of Baader and his accomplices.”⁶³

In 1976, the government declared the establishment of terrorist organizations illegal.⁶⁴ Although this *diktat* seems fairly obvious—after all, who would think that engaging in terrorist behavior was legal?—it reflected an effort by the West German government to incorporate anti-terrorism laws into their legal code, thus laying the groundwork for further, more strident countermeasures down the line. Section 129a of the German legal code, which is still in effect today and is entitled “Forming terrorist organisations,” specifies that it is illegal for anyone to form or participate in an organization “whose aims are directed at the commission of murder...genocide...a crime against humanity...a war crime...or crimes against personal liberty.”⁶⁵ The subsequent passages also criminalize support of any organization that aims to undermine the German government or its Constitution.⁶⁶

Moreover, having witnessed the dubious relationships between the defense attorneys and certain members of the Red Army Faction during their trials that was tantamount to “active collaboration between defense attorneys and their terrorist clients,” the state also passed legislation allowing for the monitoring of correspondence between attorneys and their terrorist clients, as well as the ability for the state to deem attorneys unfit to represent these RAF operatives at their trials.⁶⁷ Under the 1977 Contact Ban legislation, the government was permitted to “temporarily isolate imprisoned terrorists and to prevent all contact with the outside world, including written and oral communication with counsel, for a specified period of time if, due to terrorism, ‘there is a present danger to life, limb or liberty.’”⁶⁸ These, of course, were controversial measures, as they ostensibly infringed on lawyer-client confidentiality and the right

⁶⁰ Moghadam, “Failure and Disengagement,” 159.

⁶¹ Horchem, “The Decline of the Red Army Faction,” 63.

⁶² Smith and André Moncourt, *Daring to Struggle, Failing to Win: The Red Army Faction's 1977 Campaign of Desperation* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2008), eBook, EBSCOhost collection, 46.

⁶³ Parker, “Fighting an Antaeon Enemy,” 170.

⁶⁴ Horbatiuk, “The West German Approach,” 179.

⁶⁵ Translation of German legal code, accessed on May 2, 2016, at http://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch_stgb/englisch_stgb.html.

⁶⁶ Horbatiuk, “The West German Approach,” 180.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁶⁸ Horbatiuk, “The West German Approach,” 167.

to an attorney, but the state argued that these measures were necessary to ensure transparency, the application of due process, and to cut down on corruption.

In the wake of this anti-terror legislation, the West German government also strengthened the capacity of its law enforcement to combat the RAF by passing regulations that increased police powers. Most importantly, these laws provided for heightened search and seizure measures. One such measure granted police the authority to set up traffic checkpoints to inspect and search vehicles and verify the identity of commuters to screen for RAF militants or supporters; this amended law also gave the police the right to hold for questioning suspected terrorists picked up through this screening process for a limited time period.⁶⁹ Another legal change gave judicial approval for police to search entire apartment complexes for suspected RAF members, rather than having to obtain warrants for each individual unit. Granted, there were still some restrictions in place to protect civil liberties, such as limiting the police to searching only “for the wanted person” and prohibiting them from “[disturbing] personal effects, open[ing] drawers, or look[ing] through files.”⁷⁰

Policy Changes

The government also attempted more informal policies such as one that mandated all government employees to swear an oath of loyalty to the government and essentially disavow the ideology and leftist rhetoric of the RAF.⁷¹ In this manner, the government hoped to weed out any RAF supporters—whether active or latent—within the establishment. However, this policy was not only unpopular, but also ineffective, leading the German government to forsake this countermeasure after only a short time.⁷²

Following a failed policy of negotiating with the RAF terrorists when the group took hostages—which sometimes resulted in the release of the victims, but largely backfired in that it prompted the RAF to take additional hostages in future instances and escalate to more ambitious demands as the government appeared to be following a strategy of appeasement—Chancellor Helmut Schmidt opted to halt this practice in 1975.⁷³ His resolve was tested when six RAF militants stormed the West German embassy in Sweden, taking several diplomats hostage and demanding the release of several of their ‘comrades’—which included several of the RAF leadership—who were serving long prison sentences.⁷⁴ Schmidt refused to negotiate with the terrorists or concede to their demands, prompting them to execute two of the diplomats and detonate a bomb in the embassy.⁷⁵ While not an optimal result, the government was able to coordinate the extradition of the surviving four terrorists (two had been killed at the embassy by their own explosion) back to West Germany, where the terrorists were put on trial and subsequently imprisoned.⁷⁶ This refusal to negotiate not only prevented the terrorists in this specific instance from achieving their goals, but also sent a signal to other active RAF militants that the government’s posture had changed, and that hostage-taking may not be an effective

⁶⁹ Catherine, “West German Law Enforcement,” 5.

⁷⁰ Horbatiuk, “The West German Approach,” 171.

⁷¹ Smith and Moncourt, *Daring to Struggle, Failing to Win*, 76.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 79.

⁷³ Parker, “Fighting an Antaeon Enemy,” 166.

⁷⁴ Smith and Moncourt, *Projectiles for the People*, 99.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁷⁶ Parker, “Fighting an Antaeon Enemy,” 173.

tactic in the future. Accordingly, as it entered the late 70s, the RAF began to rely less on kidnappings to try to extract concessions from the government.⁷⁷

Evaluating the Impact of Government Countermeasures

At the outset, the West German police enjoyed few successes in their attempts to quell the RAF threat; though they did manage to arrest six RAF members in October of 1970, this did little to deter the group, which struck back against the police in sporadic episodes of gunfights over the next year.⁷⁸ The longevity of the RAF seemed to defy logic—the West German counterterrorism measures and CT forces enjoyed many successes against the group, the RAF was losing support from the local population, it was becoming increasingly isolated, and yet the group managed to survive into the 1990s.⁷⁹ Terrorism expert Bruce Hoffman argues that this continued success past the point of perceived possibility is due in part to the RAF's ability to learn from its mistakes and adapt to measures being implemented against it by the government.⁸⁰ This learning effect became stronger with each of the three generations of the RAF, as the younger members capitalized on their ability to examine the pitfalls of their predecessors and the measures used against them to come up with effective solutions and improvements going forward.⁸¹ The RAF was no easy group to defeat, and took the collection and application of lessons learned seriously. Explaining the extent to which these RAF operatives went to ensure their survival, Hoffman stated,

“Having learned about the techniques used against them by authorities through testimony presented against them by law enforcement personnel in open court, the Red Army Faction was consistently able to undertake the requisite countermeasures to avoid detection. For example, learning that the German police could usually obtain fingerprints from the underside of toilet seats or the inside of refrigerators, surviving RAF members of the third generation began to apply a special ointment to their fingers that prevented fingerprints after drying, thus thwarting identification and incrimination.”⁸²

That said, the West German government and police forces also proved themselves to be learning organizations. Through this cycle of adaptation and counter-adaptation between the state and the terrorist forces, the RAF managed to hang on despite the countermeasures being enacted against it.⁸³

Although the imprisonment of its leadership following the 1972 amnesty rule dealt a blow to the RAF, Baader, Meinhof, and their associates continued to lead from prison through their communications and publicity stunts like the hunger strikes, spurring on the activities of the new generation of the RAF.⁸⁴ Nonetheless, with its leadership distanced and the 1976 wave of

⁷⁷ Parker, “Fighting an Antaeon Enemy,” 174.

⁷⁸ Aust, *The Inside Story*, 152.

⁷⁹ Horchem, “The Decline of the Red Army Faction,” 68.

⁸⁰ Hoffman, “Putting German Terrorism in Perspective,” 64.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁸² Hoffman, “Putting German Terrorism in Perspective,” 64.

⁸³ Moghadam, “Failure and Disengagement,” 157.

⁸⁴ Passmore, *Performing Terrorism*, 159.

anti-terror legislation making operations more difficult for the group, the RAF did suffer from disunity, and some members fractured off into other groups, such as the 2nd of June Movement.⁸⁵

Determined to remain relevant, the remaining RAF core lashed out with a series of attacks in 1977. Much to the leadership's chagrin, the dwindling successes of these antics precipitated the RAF's demise, as West German law enforcement grew more and more successful at thwarting the RAF's actions. After the government refused to acquiesce to the RAF's demands to release the imprisoned members of the group from custody, "PFLP-SOG terrorists hijacked a German airline and flew it to Mogadishu, Somalia...in a gesture of solidarity. German Special Forces units (GSG9) were able to recapture the Lufthansa aircraft and rescue the hostages. When news of GSG9's success broke in the Stammheim jail, Baader, Ensslin, and Raspe all committed suicide, an event which prompted a dramatic decline in RAF activities, further reinforced by continued police successes against the group."⁸⁶

Rather than having a deterrent effect upon the remaining and prospective membership of the RAF, however, these suicides helped fuel the dwindling embers of the RAF's revolutionary spirit.⁸⁷ The last living leadership of the group spun these suicides to their advantage by claiming that Baader, Ensslin, and Raspe did not commit suicide, but rather were murdered by the state in a government conspiracy.⁸⁸ Indeed, part of the group's resilience over the years stemmed from what the German Federal Prosecutor General Alexander von Stahl called "the myth of the prisoners," a phenomenon in which the theatrics of the imprisoned RAF members—hunger strikes, protests, incendiary publications, and even suicide—inspired and sustained the remaining members of the RAF who had not yet been captured.⁸⁹ In a 1992 interview, Stahl explained, "We have always known that the path to the RAF led not only through its ideology. The myth of the prisoners was far more essential. We received confirmation of this from the statements of the ex-RAF terrorists who were arrested in the GDR, almost all of whom joined the RAF because of the alleged inhuman conditions of imprisonment, and for the goal of liberating the prisoners."⁹⁰

In order to counter this narrative and possible source of recruitment once and for all, Minister of Justice Klaus Kinkel—who asserted that "without the prisoners, there would no longer be a RAF"—launched the 'Kinkel Initiative' in January of 1992, which provided for the "premature release [of] certain imprisoned RAF members who were seriously ill or who had served long prison sentences."⁹¹ This move, while controversial, did take the wind out of the sails of the remaining RAF, as it removed a source of supposed grievance, weakened the RAF's justification for continued violence, and allowed the RAF to spin the release of select prisoners as a victory for the group.⁹²

Results of Reforms and Potential Pitfalls

Over time, these sweeping reforms to West German legislation and the intelligence community, coupled with the formation of a dynamic counterterrorism unit, resulted in a severe

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Parker, "Fighting an Antaeus Enemy," 170.

⁸⁷ Smith and Moncourt, *Daring to Struggle, Failing to Win*, 97.

⁸⁸ Pluchinsky, "An Obituary," 140.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Pluchinsky, "An Obituary," 138.

⁹¹ Pluchinsky, "An Obituary," 139.

⁹² Passmore, *Performing Terrorism*, 76.

decline in RAF terrorist activity and membership.⁹³ Indeed, the already-small cadre of RAF operatives was drastically reduced by the early 1980s, as most of the group had either been jailed or killed by West German law enforcement and the counterterrorism division.⁹⁴

One area of concern in mounting this more rigorous counterterrorist campaign was that the actions of the police and associated forces would be viewed negatively in the public eye.⁹⁵ The Red Army Faction consistently sought to paint a narrative of police brutality and government-perpetrated abuse of the people; thus, the government had to tread carefully to make sure it did not inadvertently strengthen the RAF narrative. With stronger, more sophisticated methods of intelligence gathering in place, however, it became easier for the West German government to target their operations in a more specific, ‘smarter’ fashion, such that they did not disrupt the lives of ordinary citizens or unduly infringe upon their liberties.⁹⁶

Although Baader and his gang had initially taken up arms in response to what they perceived to be police and state brutality, the West German law enforcement soon realized the error of its ways, and adopted a much more constrained, proportional response so as not to add fuel to the RAF narrative.⁹⁷ Conversely, the RAF lost support as it continued unabated with its use of violence against the backdrop of an increasingly unclear justification, thus alienating a large portion of its would-be support base.⁹⁸

As former British counterterrorism official Tom Parker explains,

“By keeping the emphasis on conventional law enforcement tactics, the state—despite the evocative anti-fascist ‘grievance frame’ to which the RAF consciously appealed—was able to maintain a posture of moral legitimacy during its struggle with the RAF which appeared convincing to the vast majority of the German people. Ultimately it was the RAF that was to become discredited in the eyes of its client constituency on the left. In the words of the former head of the Hamburg security service (LfV), Hans Josef Horchem: ‘The state reacted with firmness and with flexibility. Overreaction was avoided. The terrorists were unable to mobilize fresh recruits to fight on their side as a result of exploitation of any behavioral errors on the part of the police authorities and other organs of the state.’”⁹⁹

Other Factors Contributing to the Defeat of the Red Faction Army

Ultimately, while the domestic law enforcement actions and policies implemented by the West German government and counterterrorism unit were instrumental to the dissolution of the Red Army Faction, the group’s own strategic missteps coupled with a shift in the geopolitical environment also played a quintessential role in the group’s demise. These key contributing factors that skewed the counterterrorism campaign against the Red Army Faction in favor of the government were a) the end of the Cold War and collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, b) German reunification, which meant that the RAF lost their safe haven in East Germany, and c)

⁹³ Horchem, “The Decline of the Red Army Faction,” 68.

⁹⁴ Smith and Moncourt, *Projectiles for the People*, 160.

⁹⁵ Parker, “Fighting an Antaeon Enemy,” 158.

⁹⁶ Catherine, “West German Law Enforcement,” 5.

⁹⁷ Pluchinsky, “An Obituary,” 139.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁹⁹ Parker, “Fighting an Antaeon Enemy,” 172.

the general dissolution of the socialist state system and the shift away from communism throughout Europe.¹⁰⁰

While the group did not formally disband until 1998, it is apparent that the changes in the international order in 1992 had a profound effect on the group, for “in April 1992, the Red Army Faction...sent a communiqué to the media announcing that it was willing to suspend, conditionally, its terrorist campaign in Germany. The RAF had unilaterally declared a cease-fire with the German state, asking for reconciliation and a de-escalation of the conflict with the state. Subsequent RAF communiqués issued in June and August 1992 reinforced the basic points of the April communiqué.”¹⁰¹

Put simply, the RAF lost legitimacy and relevance as it moved further away from the context in which it arose and fell prey to its own strategic errors. One major flaw in the strategy followed by the Red Army Faction is its lack of continuity in cause and narrative. Throughout its existence, the group jumped from cause to cause in an effort to adapt itself to the changing times.¹⁰² While its overarching ideals remained the same—anti-Americanism, anti-Imperialism, anti-government—its specific goals were not articulated in a coherent, consistent manner, packaged instead within superficially compelling but ultimately empty rhetoric.¹⁰³ Thus, the group appeared to validate the claims of its critics that it was simply a gang of thugs and nihilist murderers that reveled in violence. Towards the end of the group’s reign, the democratic revolutions in Eastern Europe in 1989 disrupted the narrative of the RAF and severely undermined its ability to garner support.¹⁰⁴ In its final throes, the RAF called its endeavors to reinvent themselves in the 1990s an “unrealistic proposal,” saying,

“We wanted to transform a concept which had arisen from the 1968 movement into a new, social revolutionary and internationalist concept in tune with the 1990s. This was a time when we sought for something new, but—weighed down by the dogmas of the past years—we did not go radically enough beyond the old concept. So we made the same mistakes which all of us made after 1977: We overestimated the support for this continuity of our conception of struggle. Fundamentally, the danger exists of discrediting armed struggle when it is maintained without explaining how it concretely advances the revolutionary process and leads to a strengthening of the liberation struggle.”¹⁰⁵

In light of these failures to remain relevant in changing times and to sustain the energy needed to fight the government’s continued countermeasures, the RAF released a communiqué announcing their official dissolution on April 20, 1998.¹⁰⁶ In an authenticated, eight-page document faxed to Reuters, the RAF declared, “The urban guerrilla in the form of the RAF is now history.”¹⁰⁷ Admittedly, the group was nowhere near apologetic for its actions, saying, “We stand by our history. The RAF was the revolutionary attempt by a minority of people to resist the

¹⁰⁰ Horchem, “The Decline of the Red Army Faction,” 65; Moghadam, “Failure and Disengagement,” 178.

¹⁰¹ Pluchinsky, “An Obituary,” 135.

¹⁰² Smith and Moncourt, *Daring to Struggle, Failing to Win*, 52.

¹⁰³ Jeremy Varon, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), eBook, EBSCOhost collection, 111.

¹⁰⁴ Horchem, “The Decline of the Red Army Faction,” 66.

¹⁰⁵ “The Final Communiqué from the Red Army Faction (RAF).”

¹⁰⁶ “Red Army Faction: A Chronology of Terror.”

¹⁰⁷ “The Final Communiqué from the Red Army Faction (RAF).”

tendencies in this society and contribute to the overthrow of capitalist conditions. We are proud to have been part of this attempt.”¹⁰⁸

Connecting the Dots: Applying Lessons from the West German Government’s Campaign Against the Red Army Faction to the US Campaign Against Al Qaeda

Writing in 2008, Hoffman remarked, “It is sobering to think what a challenge this handful of people presented to the West German state, whose security services were rather more adept than many of the security, intelligence, and police forces that terrorists are arrayed against throughout the world today.”¹⁰⁹ Indeed, the campaign against the Red Army Faction was no easy feat by the West German government, but the correct synthesis of approaches and the changing geopolitical context yielded a government victory that could perhaps be replicated in the counterterrorism campaigns we wage today.

By examining and understanding the similarities between the Red Army Faction and al Qaeda (AQ) and its affiliates (or former affiliates, in the case of ISIS/IS), those engaged in counterterrorism efforts can learn valuable lessons about how to defeat these oddly analogous groups. Although the Red Army Faction operated in an entirely different time, context, and environment than al Qaeda—the former framed by the Cold War, the latter by the War on Terror—there are similarities between the two organizations that, if recognized, could provide useful context for formulating strategies for the current US campaign against al Qaeda and its affiliates.

On the surface, the only similarity these groups appear to share is their use of terror. After all, the RAF was orders of magnitude smaller than al Qaeda in terms of its membership, and confined the bulk of its operations to West Germany.¹¹⁰ Al Qaeda, on the other hand, not only has a large membership base with supporters from and in countries across the globe, but its pursuit of a ‘far enemy’ strategy has also led the organization to operate, or at least seek to operate, in a wider international theater.¹¹¹ Moreover, AQ packages itself as being part of a broader ‘global jihadist’ movement, whereas the RAF, while ideologically connected to other leftist movements throughout Europe, was not able to exploit these connections to attract followers to their cause in the way that AQ has managed to do. Furthermore, while both groups have strong ideological roots, the RAF was distinctly secular in nature, while al Qaeda is, of course, deeply grounded in its interpretation of Islamic theology and sharia law. As Hoffman wryly notes, the RAF may have also been zealously devoted to its cause(s), but “the God that it worshipped was a particularly idiosyncratic interpretation of Marxism, or perhaps Stalinism.”¹¹² Finally, al Qaeda has been a far more destructive group than the RAF in terms of pure carnage, as it is responsible for a still-mounting death toll in the thousands—compared to the RAF’s seemingly paltry 34—and extensive damage to property and civil liberties.

However, moving past these differentiating factors, the RAF and AQ are remarkably similar. Both the RAF and AQ, in the style of most terrorist groups, were future-oriented, “constantly grasping for that distant but imperceptibly close point in time when they will triumph over their enemies and attain the ultimate realization of their destiny.”¹¹³ Nonetheless, neither of

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*; Parker, “Fighting an Antaeon Enemy,” 179.

¹⁰⁹ Hoffman, “Putting German Terrorism in Perspective,” 59.

¹¹⁰ Horbatiuk, “The West German Approach,” 177; Hoffman, “Putting German Terrorism in Perspective,” 54.

¹¹¹ Hoffman, “Putting German Terrorism in Perspective,” 59.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

these groups have been able to develop a concrete vision for how this desired future will actually materialize, instead relying heavily on grandiose but ultimately empty rhetoric.¹¹⁴

In another parallel, the combatants of the RAF and al Qaeda both “see themselves as reluctant warriors cast on the defensive forced to take up arms against an aggressive, predatory enemy.”¹¹⁵ Evidence of this purported reluctance can be seen in the writings of Meinhof herself, who sought to combat the image of the RAF as a brutal, senseless force of violence and mayhem.¹¹⁶ In “The Urban Guerilla Concept,” for instance, she is keen to set the record straight: the RAF did not use violence and weapons unless it was necessary, even against its sworn enemies, the police. In her mind, the use of violence was a self-defense mechanism against police and government brutality, a last rather than first resort.¹¹⁷ Al Qaeda leadership, too, while somewhat less reluctantly, justifies their use of violence by declaring that the United States, and the West in general, is waging “a predatory aggressive war on Muslims worldwide,” forcing Muslims to fight back.¹¹⁸ In short, both groups, like many other terrorist groups throughout history, assessed the conditions surrounding them and concluded that they had no option but to respond with violence in order to achieve their goals.¹¹⁹ Moreover, al Qaeda leadership has been notorious for issuing “threats, warnings and entreaties to their enemies, giving them the opportunity—at least propagandistically—to repent and to mend their ways.”¹²⁰ In this manner, the group can justify its violence further by stating that it offered non-violent alternatives to its enemy, but the enemy declined to halt its violent aggression, thus backing AQ into a corner where it must use violence. Even though these overtures are overwhelmingly extended for propaganda purposes, the gesture still adds an extra element of legitimacy to the group in its narrative of being ‘reluctant warriors.’ Through a series of communiqués, press releases, and other writings, Meinhof, too, painstakingly painted the RAF as a group of idealists who tried hard to achieve change by nonviolent means, but, seeing no results, were forced to resort to armed, organized resistance.¹²¹

The RAF and al Qaeda both shared the idea that violence was useful not only in achieving progress in the struggle against their enemy, but in attaining and retaining popular support. In other words, “both share a firm belief in the didactic power of violence to rally the masses, the main constituency in their self-appointed quest.”¹²²

In terms of demographics, the leadership of the RAF and al Qaeda came from similar backgrounds economically and socially—they were financially sound or even well-to-do, and fairly educated. These “educated and disgruntled children of the bourgeoisie” seemed to be attracted to joining these terrorist organizations based on the supposedly exciting, even glamorous lifestyles these groups promised to provide.¹²³ In the case of the RAF in particular, those who joined saw an opportunity not only to actively address and attempt to ameliorate what they perceived to be the biggest problems of society, but to do so in a way that would garner

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.; Miller, “Terrorism and Language,” 378.

¹¹⁵ Hoffman, “Putting German Terrorism in Perspective,” 60.

¹¹⁶ Meinhof, “The Urban Guerilla Concept,” 3.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹¹⁸ Hoffman, “Putting German Terrorism in Perspective,” 59.

¹¹⁹ Bauer, *Everybody Talks About the Weather*, 241.

¹²⁰ Hoffman, “Putting German Terrorism in Perspective,” 60.

¹²¹ Bauer, *Everybody Talks About the Weather*, 243.

¹²² Hoffman, “Putting German Terrorism in Perspective,” 61.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 61; Aust, *The Inside Story*, 44.

them fame and importance.¹²⁴ In a similar fashion, those that are offered the opportunity to become a martyr under the banner of jihad are promised all manner of worldly spoils that, ironically, they would not be permitted to enjoy while on earth (*i.e.* the glut of virgin women that would purportedly await them in paradise).¹²⁵

Moreover, both the RAF and AQ took exception to the Western way of life, particularly the perceived transgressions of the United States. For instance, albeit for different reasons, the leadership of the RAF and al Qaeda have both cried out against the evils of capitalist, ‘corporate America’ and the supposed Western preoccupation and obsession with luxury and material goods.¹²⁶ Another cause of grievance for the two groups was American military dominance and its alleged imperialist tendencies throughout the globe, as exemplified by American interventions in conflicts and places that these groups saw as beyond the bounds of acceptability. The RAF initially focused on protesting the Vietnam War, while al Qaeda has decried the Euro-American drawing of the borders of the Middle East under the Sykes-Picot Act, their unyielding support of Israel, and the several military interventions in the Middle East.¹²⁷

In order to incite worldwide wrath against their enemies, the RAF sought to join up with other terrorist organizations to create a unified, leftist resistance, in the same manner that al Qaeda, literally ‘the base’ or ‘the foundation’ in English, seeks to serve as the launching point for the global jihad movement.¹²⁸ Further, the RAF and AQ did not rush blindly into any situation or engage in spontaneous violence; rather, they executed some of the most fastidiously planned attacks in terrorist history.¹²⁹ For instance, Hoffman points to the 1989 assassination of the German banker Alfred Herrhausen as being one of the most cunningly and carefully planned terrorist attacks ever, on par with the level of planning that went into al Qaeda’s 9/11.¹³⁰

Finally, one of the key elements of the RAF’s downfall was its loss of a safe haven in the form of East Germany.¹³¹ Al Qaeda, too, relies heavily on external support and safe havens such as Pakistan, for its survival.¹³²

Given these myriad parallels between the two groups, it is worth asking whether the same countermeasures that resulted in the successful defeat of the Red Army Faction could be applied to the fight against al Qaeda and its affiliates. Unfortunately, the local governments and law enforcement apparatuses in the countries that are plagued by the al Qaeda and ISIS scourges do not have nearly the same capacity or willingness to defeat these groups as the West German government and counterterrorism units did. Moreover, AQ and ISIS have surpassed the levels of power and influence that the RAF ever exerted over West Germany, no matter how much it terrorized her people. Therefore, treating these groups as issues of domestic law enforcement is not a viable option. However, AQ and its affiliates do have vulnerabilities that can be exploited, in the same manner they were with the RAF. The first course of action, which the United States has already tried to an extent, would be to eliminate AQ’s safe havens, particularly Pakistan, which historically has provided AQ with key enabling factors such as sanctuary, money,

¹²⁴ Smith and Moncourt, *Projectiles for the People*, 28.

¹²⁵ Hoffman, “Putting German Terrorism in Perspective,” 63.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 64; Aust, *The Inside Story*, 59.

¹²⁷ Hoffman, “Putting German Terrorism in Perspective,” 64; Smith and Moncourt, *Daring to Struggle, Failing to Win*, 75.

¹²⁸ Hoffman, “Putting German Terrorism in Perspective,” 64.

¹²⁹ Parker, “Fighting an Antaeon Enemy,” 176.

¹³⁰ Hoffman, “Putting German Terrorism in Perspective,” 63.

¹³¹ Parker, “Fighting an Antaeon Enemy,” 178; Pluchinsky, “An Obituary,” 155.

¹³² Hoffman, “Putting German Terrorism in Perspective,” 63.

organizational assistance, and intelligence. Secondly, while the United States alone cannot change the geopolitical context of the region or turn the tide of history, it can work on disrupting the narratives of AQ and its affiliates by discrediting the framework of grievances under which they operate and eliminating the group's *raison d'être*. While the historical context surrounding AQ and ISIS may not be as favorable to the US counterterrorism campaign as it was for the West German government when fighting an increasingly irrelevant RAF, there are valuable lessons to be gleaned from comparing the weaknesses of the two groups and the effective exploitation of these by the German government.

Conclusion

The case of the Red Army Faction provides a useful study of both successful terrorism and counterterrorism strategies. While the countermeasures enacted by the West German government against the Red Army were carefully designed with a clear understanding of the group in mind and were, for the most part, impressive and efficient in their application, it is also important to keep in mind that had it not been for external pressures, the internal failures of the group, and the changing tides of history, it is possible that the Red Army Faction may have survived even these strident countermeasures. Still, its successful defeat at the hands of a Western government provides useful lessons that can be applied to the fight against the organizations that terrorize the world today.

About the Author

Ashley Rhoades just completed her M.A. in the Security Studies Program at Georgetown University, graduating in May 2016. She holds a B.A. Honors in Political Science and a minor in Art History from Stanford University. Ashley spent two terms of her undergraduate career studying at Oxford University, where she studied security issues such as terrorism, ethnic conflict, and substate violence. Her prior professional roles include working as a research assistant at Stanford focusing on the Arab-Israeli conflict, as a litigation paralegal for a firm in DC, and as a media associate for a United Nations-affiliated start-up. Most recently, Ashley completed an internship at the National Defense University with the Chief of Staff of the Army's Operation Iraqi Freedom Study Group. Ashley has worked in various capacities for the Georgetown Security Studies Review (GSSR) throughout her studies at Georgetown, serving as Editor-in-Chief during her final semester of the program. This issue of the GSSR represents Ashley's last endeavor as the Editor-in-Chief of the publication.

NIGERIA AND BOKO HARAM: A FIGHT THAT CANNOT BE WON ON THE BATTLEFIELD ALONE

Sam Rosenberg

Boko Haram, a Nigerian jihadi group, recently surpassed the Islamic State as the world's deadliest terrorist group, responsible for at least 15,000 deaths in Nigeria and the surrounding countries of Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. The Nigerian state and neighboring countries launched coordinated military efforts against Boko Haram in 2015, largely dislodging the group from the northeastern Nigerian towns it controlled. Recently, the effort stalled, and Boko Haram responded with a new wave of violence, including mass shootings and suicide bombings. Boko Haram represents a resilient and adaptive threat to the region and, if left unchecked, to the West. Regional authorities, however, lack comprehensive policies to counter Boko Haram, treating the group nearly exclusively as a security threat and neglecting the organization's political and religious aspects. Changes must be made to the Nigerian armed forces and to regional security units, but policymakers must also redress the political and religious grievances as well as the state deficiencies that gave rise to Boko Haram in the first place. The United States can assist by helping to professionalize regional militaries, exploiting internal group dynamics, improving inter-country coordination, and incentivizing funding for counter-Boko Haram operations. No matter the steps taken against the group, tactical success must not be confused for strategic victory, and the international community should be prepared for a long, arduous fight against the group.

Boko Haram, a Nigerian jihadi group, recently surpassed the Islamic State as the world's deadliest terrorist group, responsible for at least 15,000 deaths in Nigeria and the surrounding countries of Niger, Chad, and Cameroon.¹ The Nigerian state and neighboring countries launched coordinated military efforts against Boko Haram in 2015, largely dislodging the group from the northeastern Nigerian towns it controlled. Recently, the effort stalled and Boko Haram responded with a new wave of violence, including mass shootings and suicide bombings. Boko Haram represents a resilient and adaptive threat to the region and, if left unchecked, to the West. Regional authorities, however, lack comprehensive policies to counter Boko Haram, treating the group nearly exclusively as a security threat and neglecting the organization's political and religious aspects.² Changes must be made to the Nigerian armed forces and to regional security units, but policymakers must also redress the political and religious grievances as well as the state deficiencies that gave rise to Boko Haram in the first place. The United States can assist by helping to professionalize regional militaries, exploiting internal group dynamics, improving inter-country coordination, and by incentivizing funding for counter-Boko Haram operations. No matter the steps taken against the group, tactical success must not be confused for strategic victory and the international community should be prepared for a long, arduous fight against the group.

Tension between Sufism and Salafism shaped Boko Haram's rise to power. Northern Nigeria traditionally has been a stronghold of Sufism, a sect of Islam strongly opposed by Salafis. In 1978, however, followers of Abubakar Gumi, a senior Muslim cleric, established *Jama'at Izalat al Bid'a wa-Iqamat al-Sunna* to spread anti-Sufism throughout the region.³ Known as Izala, the group sparked infighting between Sufis and Salafis. Gumi's death in 1992 largely divided the Izala and allowed younger preachers to build audiences outside the movement. One such rouge preacher was Muhammad Yusuf, who, in 2002, founded the group that would become known as Boko Haram.⁴

Boko Haram—which roughly translates to 'Western education is forbidden'—did not initially seek to overthrow the Nigerian government, but aimed to establish Shari'a law in northeast Nigeria.⁵ The group's ideology centered around three main tenets. First, the group espoused 'religious exclusivism,' opposing all other theologies, including rival sects within Islam.⁶ Second, the group vehemently opposed Western influence. Spokesmen for the movement often insist that the group's name refers not just to education, but also "to social and political ills that allegedly result from Western domination of Nigerian state and society."⁷ Finally, Boko

¹ Boko Haram's ranking as the world's deadliest terrorist group can be found here: *Global Terrorism Index*, Institute for Economic and Peace, accessed 25 April 2016, p. 4, available from <http://static.visionofhumanity.org/sites/default/files/2015%20Global%20Terrorism%20Index%20Report.pdf>. The casualty count comes from: Alex Thurston, "The Disease is Unbelief: Boko Haram's Religious and Political Worldview," *The Brookings Project on Relations with the Islamic World*, No. 22, January 2016, accessed 25 April 2016, 5, available from http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2016/01/boko-haram-ideology-thurston/brookings-analysis-paper_alex-thurston_final_web.pdf.

² Thurston, "The Disease is Unbelief," 5.

³ The name translates to 'The Society for the Removal of Heretical Innovation and the Establishment of the Prophet's Model.' Thurston, "The Disease is Unbelief," 10.

⁴ Thurston, "The Disease is Unbelief," 10.

⁵ Seth Kaplan, "How Inequality Fuels Boko Haram," *Foreign Affairs*, accessed 3 May 2016, available from <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/africa/2015-02-05/how-inequality-fuels-boko-haram>

⁶ Thurston, "The Disease is Unbelief," 5.

⁷ *Ibid.*

Haram rejected democracy, seeking instead “to impose the Salafi creed and a strict interpretation of Islamic law on civilians.”⁸

In 2003, Boko Haram expanded from Maiduguri—the movement’s ideological birthplace—into Yobe State, where members established a second base of operations near the Nigeria-Niger border and, according to reports at the time, amassed large quantities of weapons and equipment.⁹ On December 23, 2003, Boko Haram launched its first major attack, seizing control of police stations in Geiam and Kanamma and raising the flag of the Afghan Taliban in victory over several buildings.¹⁰

In 2009, the focus and intensity of Boko Haram operations shifted and, for the first time, the Nigerian state came under direct attack. In July, clashes broke out between Boko Haram and the police over new, local mandates.¹¹ Yusuf responded by ordering the group to attack government targets and security forces. The uprising spread steadily, reaching Borno, Yobe, and Kano, and perhaps parts of two other Nigerian states. Eventually, regional security forces overwhelmed the group and brutally crushed the uprising.¹² At least 1,100 people died in the crackdown, including Yusuf, who was killed while in police custody.¹³ The apparent extrajudicial killing went viral on social media, further inflaming tensions in the region.¹⁴ Boko Haram retreated underground, re-emerging in 2010 under a new leader, Abubakar Shekau, who previously served as Yusuf’s deputy.¹⁵

Shekau expanded the group’s ideology beyond religious exclusivism and hatred for Western influence, positioning the movement as a victim of state aggression and the sole representative “for a larger, and aggrieved, Muslim constituency.”¹⁶ Under Shekau, Boko Haram significantly stepped up attacks both in terms of frequency and lethality.¹⁷ In May 2011, the group set off a series of bombings to protest the presidential election of Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian from southern Nigeria. Months later, Boko Haram struck the Abuja UN building, the group’s first foreign target.¹⁸ In 2014, the group shocked the world when it kidnapped over 200 girls from Chibok in Borno State, provoking widespread calls for action against the militants.¹⁹ Boko Haram nevertheless continued its offensive, seizing the villages of Baga and Doron Baga in Borno State, killing as many as 2,000 people and delaying national elections for six weeks.²⁰ Estimates at the time put Boko Haram’s territory at nearly 12,000 square miles, which is equivalent to three percent of Nigeria.²¹

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Boko Haram, “Mapping Militant Organizations,” Stanford University.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ One such mandate required motorcyclists to wear helmets, a provision that irked many Boko Haram fighters. Seth Kaplan, “How Inequality Fuels Boko Haram,” *Foreign Affairs*.

¹² Boko Haram, “Mapping Militant Organizations.”

¹³ Thurston, “The Disease is Unbelief,” 11.

¹⁴ John Campbell, “Boko Haram: Origins, Challenges and Responses,” Norwegian Peace-building Resource Centre, accessed 3 May 2016, available from http://www.peacebuilding.no/var/ezflow_site/storage/original/application/5cf0ebc94fb36d66309681cda24664f9.pdf.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Thurston, “The Disease is Unbelief,” 17.

¹⁷ Boko Haram, “Mapping Militant Organizations.”

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Kaplan, “How Inequality Fuels Boko Haram,” *Foreign Affairs*.

²⁰ Boko Haram, “Mapping Militant Organizations.”

²¹ Nathaniel D.F. Allen, Peter M. Lewis, and Hilary Matfess, “Down, Not Out,” *Foreign Affairs*, accessed 3 May 2016, available from <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/nigeria/2015-06-18/down-not-out>.

The African Union responded to the crisis in February 2015, endorsing a regional military coalition to combat Boko Haram and prevent the spread of the movement outside of Nigeria.²² One month later, Boko Haram pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, establishing the group as the Islamic State's West Africa Province.²³ In late 2015, Nigerian president Muhammad Buhari reported significant progress against Boko Haram, claiming the group had been dislodged from Adamawa and Yobe State and that Nigeria had "technically" won the war against the group.²⁴

However, some experts contend that Buhari's declaration of victory is premature.²⁵ In the first two weeks of February 2016, Boko Haram fighters killed over 260 people in a wave of attacks, including a suicide bombing at a displaced persons camp in Dikwa, Borno State. Although Nigerian and regional security forces succeeded in blunting the group's momentum, Boko Haram remains far from defeated. In fact, the group will likely respond to regional military efforts by returning to urban terrorist tactics and attacks on 'soft' targets.²⁶

Maintaining pressure against Boko Haram requires changes in Nigerian armed forces and an overall reconsideration of government strategy. First, the Buhari administration should moderate its public statements about the fight against Boko Haram. Managing expectations is key to maintaining long-term, popular support for most any counterterrorism operation. Furthermore, internal conflicts seldom end decisively or quickly. The fight against Boko Haram will require a long-term approach that is unlikely to produce decisive victory, despite Buhari's own recent statements to the contrary. In fact, Buhari's assertion that Boko Haram is "technically" defeated likely reduced the state's credibility and exacerbated public frustration.²⁷

Second, Buhari should reinvigorate the Multinational Joint Task Force he established with regional partners in March 2015. The group consists of 8,700 troops from Nigeria, Benin, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger and is designed to limit Boko Haram's ability to exploit the region's porous borders. Funding constraints and logistics issues, however, have stymied full deployment of the task force.²⁸ To limit further Boko Haram activity in the region, the international community should ensure full funding of the task force's \$700 budget and allocate additional intelligence, logistics, and training assets.²⁹

Key to bolstering the task force is improving Nigeria's own security establishment, which is the *de facto* leader in regional efforts to combat Boko Haram. President Buhari made significant progress in this respect since taking office a year ago. He replaced the heads of the army, navy, and air force, and he moved the army's base of operations from Abuja to Maiduguri, which improved coordination and brought senior commanders closer to the fight. The Nigerian government should continue these reforms and fully mobilize for an effective counterinsurgency effort. Nigerian defense officials should focus future efforts on improving coordination between

²² Boko Haram, "Mapping Militant Organizations."

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Jigmei Bhutia, "Nigeria: Buhari Claims 'Technical' Victory Over Boko Haram," *International Business Times*, accessed 4 May 2016, available from <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/nigeria-buhari-claims-technical-victory-over-boko-haram-1534775>.

²⁵ Hilary Matfess, Peter M. Lewis, and Nathaniel D.F. Allen, "Unbroken Boko Haram," *Foreign Affairs*, accessed 3 May 2016, available from <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/nigeria/2016-03-21/unbroken-boko-haram>.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Allen et. al, "Down, Not Out," *Foreign Affairs*. According to the Congressional Research Service, Buhari later tempered his statements, stating that Boko Haram had been "degraded" rather than "technically defeated."

²⁸ Allen et. al, "Down, Not Out," *Foreign Affairs*.

²⁹ According to a report in Newsweek, the task force is \$450 short of budget. Conor Gaffey, "Boko Haram: West African Force Still \$450 Million Short of Budget," *Newsweek*, accessed 4 May 2016, available from <http://www.newsweek.com/boko-haram-west-african-force-still-450-million-short-budget-422463>.

security services and on conducting more strategically-focused operations against Boko Haram, such as targeting the group's international logistics routes.³⁰

Beyond the official military response, several local communities in the region formed informant networks and vigilante security groups to help bolster village security. Similar local measures in Iraq and Afghanistan proved effective, but also presented a unique challenge to strong, central governance. In Nigeria, these *ad hoc* groups have had some positive impact, but they are also often easy prey for retaliatory attacks by Boko Haram. Furthermore, local NGOs made accusations that the groups are recruiting children and committing some of the same atrocities as government forces, such as extrajudicial killings.³¹

If the Nigerian government continues to rely on local groups, officials should work to institutionalize the relationship. A five to ten year plan should be developed that includes a path through which local groups can eventually be incorporated into federal security forces. Proper training and equipment should be provided as well. Uniforms, equipment, and payment are all key elements in maintaining discipline and accountability within security forces, especially local groups. Furthermore, such measures may help reduce poverty and joblessness, both factors that can potentially give rise to instability and insurgency. Finally, Nigeria can look to Cameroon for guidance on how to work with local security groups. Recently, Cameroonian officials instructed their own local defense groups to focus only on monitoring their villages and to refrain from more complex activities such as landmine removal.³²

As the past 15 years suggest, military efforts alone may be insufficient in defeating violent, substate, militant organizations like Boko Haram. Governments must address the political grievances and state deficiencies that give rise to insurgencies and allow movements like Boko Haram to flourish. As suggested previously, Boko Haram is largely the by-product of intra-Muslim competition and grievances against the state. Therefore any strategy to defeat the group must address the political and religious dimensions of Shekau's movement.

The Buhari government must work to reduce civilian casualties and government abuses. Collateral damage during government security operations and allegations of corruption help fuel Nigeria's insurgency and add credence to Boko Haram's narrative. They also complicate international investment, and, according to the Congressional Research Service, "they dampen donor interest in deepening security cooperation."³³

Officials should start by empowering prosecutors to hold offenders accountable and by encouraging reconciliation for past conflicts. Key in this regard is addressing human rights violations that have befallen Boko Haram. The Nigerian government should bring to justice the killers of Muhammad Yusuf and end the torture and extrajudicial killings of suspected fighters. Government officials that have engaged in these practices should be prosecuted. Moreover, captured Boko Haram fighters should receive fair trials and fighters still at large should be afforded the opportunity for reintegration and reconciliation. Offers of open dialogue should be extended to any member of Boko Haram without preconditions. While it is unlikely such measures would motivate senior leaders to leave the group, mid-level commanders and core fighters may be more malleable.³⁴

³⁰ Lauren Ploch Blanchard, "Nigeria's Boko Haram: Frequently Asked Questions," Congressional Research Service, accessed 4 May 2016, available from <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R43558.pdf>, 9.

³¹ Blanchard, "Nigeria's Boko Haram: Frequently Asked Questions," 11.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Blanchard, "Nigeria's Boko Haram: Frequently Asked Questions," 10.

³⁴ Thurston, "The Disease is Unbelief," 25-26.

Nigerian officials should also expand government outreach to a wider range of Muslim voices. Authorities should engage Sufis, judges, scholars, and media-savvy religious officials to incorporate their views regarding Boko Haram. Policymakers should avoid overly simplistic solutions such as “the idea that Sufism is the antidote to Salafi-jihadism,” and they should refrain from vilifying non-violent Salafis. In fact, the Nigeria government would likely be well-served by offering protection to Salafi leaders who speak out against Boko Haram.³⁵

Lastly, the Buhari administration must develop a long-term investment plan for the unstable and poverty-stricken areas in the northeast from which Boko Haram emerged. Admittedly, proper reconstruction and investment in the communities, villages and lives that have been destroyed by Shekau’s group will likely take years, if not generations. However, initial efforts must be taken now if Nigeria and regional partners are to have any long-term impact on Boko Haram.

Although Boko Haram is locally and regionally focused, the United States has been and should continue to be an active and important partner in the fight against the group.³⁶ The United States can bolster regional efforts against Boko Haram in several ways. First, American officials should encourage Nigeria and other regional security forces to professionalize, highlighting the need for ethics training, detainee operations, and professional officer and noncommissioned officer corps. If security forces in the region continue to violate human rights and fail to earn the respect of the population, no amount of American military advisors, money or equipment will help in defeating Boko Haram.

Second, US policymakers should work with regional partners to improve counterterrorism cooperation between Nigeria and its neighbors. With at least four countries and as many security forces involved in the fight against Boko Haram, all with varying degrees of capabilities, it should be no surprise that military efforts against the group are often disjointed and uneven. The United States is well positioned to improve and synchronize coordination efforts, most notably with communication assets, advisors, and joint training exercises.

Third, American security officials should work to exploit internal fissures and foster intra-movement rivalries within Boko Haram. Similar tactics showed promise in Iraq against both Sunni insurgent groups and Shia militias. Perhaps exploiting divisions inside Boko Haram would prove equally advantageous.³⁷

Finally, the United States should incentivize and expand economic and military aid to the region. Taking into account funds from both the State Department and the Department of Defense, total Boko Haram-related counterterrorism funding is expected to reach more than \$400 million in 2016.³⁸ While helpful, these funds do not appear to be tied to incentives and they do not respond to either positive or negative developments on the ground in the region. For example, accusations of detainee abuse or reports of extrajudicial killings on the part of the

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

³⁶ Five members of Boko Haram have been named ‘Specially Designated Global Terrorists,’ and Nigeria remains one of the top recipients of US foreign aid, occupying a strategically-important position on the African continent. Nigeria remains Africa’s largest economy and, with nearly 180 million inhabitants, it is also the continent’s most populous country.

³⁷ In early 2012, a splinter faction known as Ansaru emerged from the wider Boko Haram movement. The group’s leaders, some of whom allegedly had ties to al Qaeda, disputed Shekau’s leadership and his interpretation of Islamic Law. In 2013, Shekau purged the group, killing a number of Ansaru operatives and allowing others to reintegrate into Boko Haram. Still others went to work with rival jihadist groups in the Sahel region.

³⁸ Blanchard, “Nigeria’s Boko Haram: Frequently Asked Questions,” 1.

Nigerian government do not seem to result in a corresponding decrease in US funding, an important omission.

Recent operations against Boko Haram, while effective in temporarily blunting the group's momentum, are ultimately incomplete because they treat the group nearly exclusively as a security threat, discounting the movement's religious and political dimensions. A more complete strategy should incorporate these considerations. Moreover, the United States should assist regional partners in coordinating security efforts, exploiting internal group dynamics, and incentivizing economic and military aid to the region. No matter what steps are taken, Boko Haram will likely remain a resilient and potent threat for years to come. The international community should not confuse recent tactical success against the group with strategic victory, and it must be prepared for a long, arduous fight against the movement on and off the battlefield.

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HACKING IN THE NAME OF ISIS: SHOULD AMERICANS FEAR A CYBER DOOMSDAY?

Sarah Sheafer

While the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and pro-ISIS hacking groups lack the capabilities necessary to carry out high-level cyberattacks, limited success with low-level attacks will inflate their notoriety, enabling them to attract talent and advance their capabilities. It is not entirely clear whether ISIS intends to focus its attention on developing advanced cyber capabilities. However, it will likely encourage pro-ISIS hacking groups to enhance their skills and seize opportunities if it comes across tech-savvy recruits. Evidence suggests pro-ISIS hackers are already working toward the development of their capabilities. Considering the vulnerability of critical infrastructure, US government officials should consider this a future threat with significant risk.

Introduction

On April 4, 2016, four pro-ISIS hacking groups merged to form the United Cyber Caliphate (UCC). In its announcement of the merger over Telegram and Twitter, the group declared the United States its target and said President Barack Obama “should afford all the consequences,” ending with “#Expect the Islamic state #SOON.”¹ The UCC announcement comes just one year after the Obama administration’s Executive Order creating a new, targeted authority for the US government to better respond to malicious cyber actors operating beyond the reach of existing authorities.²

The United States recently opened a new line of combat against ISIS: cyberattacks. The military’s six-year-old Cyber Command leads the new campaign alongside more traditional weapons. Its goal is to disrupt the ability of ISIS to spread its message, attract recruits, circulate orders, and conduct day-to-day functions such as paying its fighters.³ In light of the United States “dropping cyberbombs,” news organizations have now turned their attention to pro-ISIS hacking groups like UCC, but how serious of a threat do they pose? Could these groups successfully block US cyberattacks or bring down US critical infrastructure as they have expressed?

While the answer is “no,” their limited capabilities should not be disregarded. Limited success will inflate their notoriety, enabling them to attract talent and grow their capabilities. While attacks conducted by ISIS supporters, such as those on CENTCOM and *Newsweek* Twitter accounts, illustrate low capability and are attacks on targets of opportunity, the interplay of rising hacker skills and the vulnerability of US infrastructure makes this a future threat of significant risk. In addition, the UCC merger shows a willingness to adapt in order to increase effectiveness and acquire support. The advancement of ISIS’s and its supporters’ capabilities will likely depend on the recruitment of tech-savvy jihadists.

It is not entirely clear whether ISIS intends to focus its attention on developing advanced cyber capabilities, such as Junaid Hussain’s attempt to launch a digital division from Syria before his death. The terrorist organization, however, will likely encourage pro-ISIS hacking groups to enhance their skills and seize opportunities if it comes across tech-savvy recruits. As a result, it is important to analyze the pro-ISIS cyber landscape, focusing on groups like UCC and their intent to develop advanced cyber capabilities.

It is important to note, however, the difficulty in attribution. Reports indicate that not all of these self-proclaimed pro-ISIS hacking groups actually support ISIS. Some are a ruse by other entities without affinity for ISIS’s ideology. For example, the cyberattack on French TV company TV5Monde in April 2015 may have been the work of state-backed Russian hackers, pretending to be a pro-ISIS hacking group in a false flag operation.⁴ It is not entirely clear which

¹ Gilad Shiloach, “ISIS Hackers Respond to US Cyberattacks With Threat,” *Vocativ*, April 27, 2016, accessed April 30, 2016, <http://www.vocativ.com/313259/isis-hackers-respond-to-u-s-cyberattacks-with-threat/>.

² “Executive Order—‘Blocking the Property of Certain Persons Engaging in Significant Malicious Cyber-Enabled Activities,’” The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, April 1, 2015, accessed April 30, 2016, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/04/01/executive-order-blocking-property-certain-persons-engaging-significant-m>.

³ David E. Sanger, “US Cyberattacks Target ISIS in a New Line of Combat,” *The New York Times*, April 24, 2016, accessed April 30, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/25/us/politics/us-directs-cyberweapons-at-isis-for-first-time.html?_r=0.

⁴ Phil Muncaster, “Russia Pegged for ‘Cyber Caliphate’ Attack on TV5Monde,” *Infosecurity Magazine*, June 10, 2015, accessed May 19, 2016, <http://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/russia-pegged-cyber-caliphate/>.

entities among the many pro-ISIS hacking groups are genuine ISIS supporters, but it is important to discuss these groups even if they cannot always be linked directly with ISIS.

This paper focuses primarily on the assortment of pro-ISIS hacking groups, arguing that certain indicators illustrate their intent to develop more advanced capabilities. While intent does not equal capabilities, these efforts suggest a growing pro-ISIS community of hackers expected to expand. In particular, the UCC merger suggests a higher interest and willingness among ISIS supporters in coordinating and elevating cyberattacks.

Limitations in Carrying Out High-Level Attacks

Before discussing ISIS and its supporters' abilities, it is important to distinguish between low, medium, and high-level attacks and what capabilities they require. The damage caused is often in direct proportion to the level of investment. Terrorist organizations currently lack the independent scientific and technological infrastructure necessary to develop cyber weapons that cause significant damage. They are also constrained by their inability to collect high quality intelligence necessary for these operations.⁵ In order not to overstate the current threat posed by groups like ISIS, it is important to outline the obstacles to overcome between levels of attack.

The majority of cyberterrorist attacks occur at the most basic level. Such an attack often takes place on an organization's gateway, namely Internet sites through direct attacks, denial of service, or website defacement. While these low-level attacks can incite fear or disrupt daily life, they do not cause substantial or lasting damage. One of the most popular terrorist cyberattacks is website defacement, which damages a victim's image through malicious messages and propaganda on its homepage.⁶ Denial-of-service (DoS) is another low-level attack intended to prevent access of information and services such as email, websites, or online bank accounts. The most common DoS attack occurs when an attacker 'floods' a network with information by overloading the site's computer server with requests to view the webpage. An attacker can conduct a similar attack on an email account by sending many, or large, email messages to expend an email service's data quota. An attacker may utilize multiple computers to launch such an attack, which is known as distributed denial-of-service (DDoS).⁷ Another method is through attacks on Domain Name System (DNS) servers, which route Internet traffic. This type of attack directs people seeking access to a specific webpage or service to another site, causing theft of information, denial of service to customers, or business damage.⁸

The next level of attack requires additional technological sophistication in order to target an organization's information and computer systems. This can be done by obtaining access to the organization's computers through employees or other means. While these attacks do not cause physical destruction, they generate significant damage to virtual services such as banks, cellular services, and email by erasing information or slowing down activity for prolonged periods of time.⁹

⁵ Gabi Siboni, Daniel Cohen and Aviv Rotbart, "The Threat of Terrorist Organizations in Cyberspace," *Military and Strategic Affairs* 5, no. 3 (December 2013), accessed April 30, 2016, <http://www.inss.org.il/uploadImages/systemFiles/The%20Threat%20of%20Terrorist%20Organizations%20in%20Cyberspace.pdf>.

⁶ Siboni, 8-9.

⁷ "Security Tip (ST04-015)—Understanding Denial-of-Service Attacks," Department of Homeland Security, US-CERT, February 6, 2013, accessed April 30, 2016, <https://www.us-cert.gov/ncas/tips/ST04-015>.

⁸ Siboni, 8.

⁹ Siboni, 9.

The highest level of attack affects an organization's core operational and operating systems. These types of cyberattacks have the potential to cause WMD-like effects. Modern critical infrastructure facilities use computer hardware and software to monitor and control equipment. In 2009, the Department of Homeland Security's Aurora Project revealed vulnerabilities inherent in these SCADA systems after simulating a cyberattack on a power generator's control system that ceased operations.¹⁰ A cyberattack on a nuclear, gas, or chemical facility near a population center could cause physical damage to property and death through the release of hazardous materials into the air. One in three US schoolchildren attends a school within dangerous proximity to a hazardous chemical facility.¹¹ An attack on an electrical, water distribution, or waste facility could create serious environmental and humanitarian crises.

It is common knowledge that malware exists with the ability to disrupt control systems as illustrated by the Stuxnet worm, which disabled and destroyed hundreds of Iranian nuclear enrichment centrifuges in 2010. Terrorist organizations, however, do not currently possess the capability or have arrangements with those capable of developing a Stuxnet-type worm. The only countries with expertise for developing this malware are the United States, Israel, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, China, and Iran.¹²

In order to obtain the capabilities necessary to conduct such a high-level attack, a terrorist organization would need to assemble a team of experts to create a virus capable of harming specific SCADA systems. This would require a great deal of time and money. Instead of building cyber weaponry, a terrorist organization would likely try to purchase the malware. Cybercriminals already sell root kits, hacking lessons, and guides to malware on the Internet.¹³ This market is growing thanks to social networks and forums that allow anonymous communications between buyers and traders.¹⁴

This method of acquisition still does not address another obstacle in conducting high-level attacks: intelligence-guided capabilities. The Stuxnet worm requires a removable device, such as a thumb drive. Terrorist groups would not only need to identify their targets' operational systems, but also acquire an inside source for the malware's implementation. Since some facilities use isolated internal networks, which are not accessible through the Internet, any attack on these networks would require major effort and intelligence.

Regarding operational systems connected to the Internet, terrorists would need information to map its target's computer setup, understand which computers are connected to the Internet, and know which operating systems and protective software programs are installed and what authorizations are required.¹⁵ The publications of 'white hat' hackers, however, have made

¹⁰ "Challenges Remain in DHS' Efforts to Security Control Systems," Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General, August 2009, accessed April 30, 2016, https://www.oig.dhs.gov/assets/Mgmt/OIG_09-95_Aug09.pdf.

¹¹ "Kids in Danger Zones: One in Three US Schoolchildren at Risk from Chemical Catastrophes," Center for Effective Government, September 2014, accessed April 30, 2016, <http://www.foreffectivegov.org/blog/one-three-interactive-map-report-show-kids-danger-chemical-catastrophes/>.

¹² Paul K. Kerr, John Rollins and Catherine A. Theohary, "The Stuxnet Computer Worm: Harbinger of an Emerging Warfare Capability," Congressional Research Service, December 9, 2010, accessed April 30, 2016, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R41524.pdf>.

¹³ Steven Bucci, "Joining Cybercrime and Cyberterrorism: A Likely Scenario," *Cyberspace and National Security: Threats, Opportunities, and Power in a Virtual World* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2012), 64-65.

¹⁴ Aditya K. Sood and Richard J. Enbody, "Crimeware-as-a-Service—A Survey of Commoditized Crimeware in the Underground Market," *International Journal of Critical Infrastructure Protection* 6, no. 1 (March 2013), <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1874548213000036>.

¹⁵ Siboni, 12.

intelligence gathering easier. For example, one white hat hacker compiled a list of 1.3 billion IP addresses in use through a ramified network of robots. For some, he published technical data such as the type of open gates and requests to which these addresses respond.¹⁶ Such material is freely available to anyone with an Internet connection.

ISIS Hacker Recruitment and Cyber Efforts

As stated earlier, terrorist organizations like ISIS do not have the technological or intelligence-guided capabilities to conduct a high-level attack. This does not mean they are not working toward that point, however. While the degree to which ISIS intends to focus its attention on developing these capabilities is unclear, several recent events suggest the group has at least some interest and would not waste an opportunity to capitalize on tech-savvy recruits.

Junaid Hussain represents the group's most recent cyber initiative. A hacker from Birmingham, England, Hussain traveled to Syria in 2013 to join ISIS. He became a hacktivist after watching videos of children killed in Kashmir and Palestine when he was 15 years old. His early cyber efforts involved defacing websites to raise awareness of issues around the world and leaking information about organizations he deemed corrupt.¹⁷ Previously known as "TriCk," the UK hacker became famous after he released personal details about former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair obtained by hacking into the email account of a staffer in June 2011. The information leaked included Blair's National Insurance number—similar to the US Social Security Number—as well as the addresses and phone numbers of personal contacts.¹⁸

After his arrest and release from prison, Junaid took on the name Abu Hussain al-Britani and left for Syria. For about a year, Hussain utilized his position as an ISIS member to recruit hackers and cultivate a 'Cyber Caliphate' from Raqqa. In August 2015, Hussain died in a drone strike. Despite his background, Hussain's cyber efforts were still unsophisticated largely because he was unable to provide the ISIS cyber initiative with a network of advanced hackers. Many of his prior contacts were unsympathetic to his increasingly radical ideology.¹⁹

Under Hussain's leadership, however, ISIS's cyber prowess gained notoriety. The Cyber Caliphate—ISIS's hacking unit established in summer of 2014—achieved two 'wins' after compromising the Twitter and YouTube accounts of the US Central Command (CENTCOM) and *Newsweek* in January 2015. Following Hussain's death, Cyber Caliphate's name changed to the Caliphate Cyber Army (CCA). It is unclear, however, whether the same hackers involved in Hussain's former team rebranded or if entirely different actors assumed the group's identity, since there was no official statement.²⁰

After Hussain's death, Siful Haque Sujan became one of ISIS's top hackers. A 31-year-old from Bangladesh, Sujan had lived in the United Kingdom since 2003, where he studied computer system engineering at the University of Glamorgan. Once again, however, ISIS's cyber

¹⁶ Internet Census 2012, Carna Botnet, <http://internetcensus2012.bitbucket.org/paper.html>.

¹⁷ Eduard Kovacs, "Hackers Around the World: It's No TriCk, He's Among the Best in the UK," Softpedia, February 18, 2012, accessed April 30, 2016, <http://news.softpedia.com/news/Hackers-Around-the-World-It-s-No-TriCk-He-s-Among-the-Best-in-the-UK-253652.shtml>.

¹⁸ "Hackers claim breach of Tony Blair's personal details," CNN, January 25, 2011, accessed April 30, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/europe/06/25/uk.blair.hacked.report/>.

¹⁹ Laith Alkhouri, Alex Kassirer and Allison Nixon, "Hacking for ISIS: The Emergent Cyber Threat Landscape," Flashpoint, April 2016, accessed 30, 2016, https://www.flashpoint-intel.com/home/assets/Media/Flashpoint_HackingForISIS_April2016.pdf, 4.

²⁰ Alkhouri, 4, 8.

initiative faced a setback after Sujan died in a drone strike in Raqqa on December 10, 2015.²¹ With the death of both Hussain and Sujan, the status of ISIS's hacker recruitment and cyber efforts is unclear.

The Pro-ISIS Cyber Landscape

While ISIS's hacking efforts have been quiet as of late, this is not the case for the assortment of pro-ISIS hacking groups. Before discussing the UCC merger, it is important to note the inconsistency in branding and unorganized nature of these groups.

In addition to the CCA, another group known as the Islamic State Hacking Division (ISHD) emerged in early 2015. According to Flashpoint, a Deep and Dark Web data and intelligence firm, the Cyber Caliphate likely inspired the group and was loosely affiliated with it because of its link with Junaid Hussain.²² The group gained notoriety after a data dump in August 2015, which Hussain attributed to the ISHD in a tweet saying, "NEW: US Military AND Government HACKED by the Islamic State Hacking Division!" Kosovan Ardit Ferizi, however, stole the personal data of more than 1,000 US service members and passed the information along to Hussain. Known as Th3Dir3ctorY, Ferizi is the leader of a group of ethnic Albanian hackers from Kosovo known as Kosova Hacker's Security (KHS).²³ While this incident illustrates ISHD's lack of capabilities and reliance on outside expertise, it is important to note because it illustrates how ISIS could employ cybercriminals.

Another pro-ISIS group emerged shortly after ISHD, tweeting its first official statement on September 20, 2015. Calling itself the Islamic Cyber Army (ICA), the group urged "all supporters hackers to join us and work with us to target Crusader alliance electronically...hurry up to support your ISLAMIC STATE." The ICA then announced it intended to target the "Crusader" coalition's banks, airports, and nuclear bases. Despite these statements, the group lacks sophistication and has resorted to low-level attacks on easy targets, regardless of relevance. For example, the ICA claimed credit for defacing the website of Azerbaijani bank Amrahbank on September 10, 2015.²⁴

On April 10, 2015, Rabitat al-Ansar (League of Supporters) claimed credit for data dumping personal information of Americans. For years, the group supported ISIS by spreading propaganda as a part of a larger media collective called 'The Media Front for Assistance to the Islamic State.' It remains unclear how the group obtained the personal information. It may have gathered the data from open sources as opposed to hacking systems.²⁵ Rabitat al-Ansar is an interesting case because it is unclear whether the group claimed the data dump for propaganda reasons or if it actually intends to conduct similar attacks in the future.

While there are numerous other pro-ISIS hacking groups, one more is worth noting because it is part of the UCC merger and illustrates the prominence of social media hacking.

²¹ William Watkinson, "ISIS: Cardiff businessman turned Daesh hacker killed in US air strike," *International Business Times*, December 31, 2015, accessed April 30, 2016, <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/war-isis-cardiff-businessman-turned-top-daesh-hacker-killed-us-air-strike-1535469>.

²² Alkhouri, 6.

²³ Ellen Nakashima, "US accuses hacker of stealing military members' data and giving it to ISIS," *The Washington Post*, October 16, 2015, accessed April 30, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/in-a-first-us-charges-a-suspect-with-terrorism-and-hacking/2015/10/15/463447a8-738b-11e5-8248-98e0f5a2e830_story.html.

²⁴ Alkhouri, 9-11.

²⁵ Alkhouri, 12-13.

Calling itself the Sons Caliphate Army (SCA), it emerged in early January 2016. The SCA appeared to be closely affiliated with CCA, as the two groups consistently shared each other's statements. SCA claimed credit for hacking more than 15,000 Twitter and Facebook accounts. It also released a video with the message, "To Mark and Jack, founders of Twitter and Facebook, and to their Crusader government, you announce daily that you suspended many of our accounts, and to you we say: is that all you can do? You are not in our league. If you close one account, we will take 10 in return and soon your names will be erased after we delete your sites."²⁶

The SCA, CCA, and two other groups—Ghost Caliphate Section and Kalashnikov E-Security Team—joined forces on April 4, 2016, calling themselves the United Cyber Caliphate (UCC). In the wake of Hussain's death and the emergence of numerous groups, the merger may be part of an effort to simplify ISIS hacker recruitment efforts.²⁷ UCC claimed its first attack on April 5, which involved the website defacement of the Indonesia Embassy in France. According to Flashpoint, while the unified group still lacks sophisticated skills, the growing relevance of other groups like Kalashnikov E-Security Team joining demonstrates how the UCC is placing emphasis on educating the online jihadi community on encryption and other technology such as VPNs, proxies, and website vulnerabilities.²⁸

An Evolving Threat?

The merging of pro-ISIS hacker groups in April 2016 suggests a higher interest and willingness in coordinating and advancing cyberattacks. If the main goal of these groups had been merely propaganda, the decentralization and incoordination would not have mattered. All the groups were capable of website defacement and the spreading of pro-ISIS messages without unification. The merger suggests the UCC intends to develop its cyber capabilities to conduct more advanced attacks. By pooling effort, skill, and knowledge, the unified group could achieve more. The groups may have also merged in order to enhance hacker recruitment efforts. If it assumes an image of leadership in the pro-ISIS cyber landscape, tech-savvy recruits may be drawn to the group because it sees the UCC as legitimate.

Pro-ISIS hacking groups may also have interest in developing more advanced cyber capabilities in an effort to combat recent US cyber efforts and those made by the group Anonymous. The loosely associated network of hacktivists declared 'war' on ISIS after the November 2015 Paris attacks. Launching an #OpISIS campaign, Anonymous has exposed alleged ISIS supporters on Twitter and sent the geo-location of these accounts to security agencies in Europe and the United States.²⁹ The group has also accused the former Cyber Caliphate of faking most of its cyberattacks by releasing public information and claiming it stole it through hacking or taking credit for attacks carried out by others.³⁰

²⁶ Alkhouri, 15-16.

²⁷ Sean Gallagher, "As US drops 'cyber bombs,' ISIS retools its own cyber army," *Ars Technica*, April 28, 2016, accessed April 30, 2016, <http://arstechnica.com/information-technology/2016/04/as-us-drops-cyber-bombs-isis-retools-its-own-cyber-army/>.

²⁸ Alkhouri, 18.

²⁹ Jagmeet Singh, "Paris attacks: Anonymous declares 'war' on ISIS under banner of OpParis," *International Business Times*, November 16, 2015, accessed May 1, 2016, <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/paris-attacks-anonymous-declares-war-isis-1528882>.

³⁰ Joshua Philipp, "Hackers Trace Locations of ISIS CyberCaliphate, Say Their Cyberattacks Are Fake," *Epoch Times*, November 12, 2015, accessed May 1, 2016, <http://www.theepochtimes.com/n3/1898608-hackers-trace-locations-of-isis-cybercaliphate-say-their-cyberattacks-are-fake/>.

While the degree to which ISIS intends to focus its attention on advancing its cyber capabilities is unclear, the new US cyber campaign might push it in this direction. Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said, “We’re trying to both physically and virtually isolate [ISIS], limit their ability to conduct command and control, limit their ability to communicate with each other, limit their ability to conduct operations locally and tactically.” While the United States intends to disrupt ISIS operations via cyberspace, the domain serves a dual-purpose: intelligence collection. Implants placed in networks to allow for ‘listening in’ can be used to manipulate data or shut down a network. Once an implant is used to attack, ISIS will likely adapt, finding more secure communication channels that are harder to penetrate or decrypt.³¹ Adapting to a more aggressive US cyber campaign could push ISIS toward the advancement of its cyber capabilities—ones that are offensive as opposed to merely defensive.

While such a shift is only speculative, other evidence suggests ISIS and its supporters are already looking to take the offensive. On Internet forums, ISIS supporters exchange hacking knowledge and discuss potential cyber doomsday scenarios such as triggering a lethal radiation release at a nuclear power plant.³² FireEye CEO David DeWalt said that ISIS may already be shopping for malware and other tools. He said, “We’ve begun to see signs that rebel terrorist organizations are attempting to gain access in cyber weaponry.”³³ On Telegram—a secure communication app—ISIS supporters exchange more than instructions on how to make suicide belts and Molotov cocktails. Supporters established a channel in November 2015 dedicated to “publishing courses of hacking and programming languages for the supporters of the Caliphate on the Internet.” While the forum does not contain information or hacker material required to carry out high-level cyberattacks, it demonstrates a growing desire to wage advanced cyberwarfare.³⁴

Besides mere discussion and exchange of hacker knowledge, ISIS supporters have already tried to attack US critical infrastructure. According to US officials, pro-ISIS hackers have tried to penetrate computers that regulate the electricity grid. While such actors have been unsuccessful, FBI Director James Comey expressed concern, saying, “I see them already starting to explore things that are concerning, critical infrastructure, things like that... The logic of it tells me it’s coming, and so of course I’m worried about it.”³⁵ The likelihood of a successful cyberattack against a large portion of the US energy grid is extremely low. Much of the grid is not uniform, and it operates with different types of machines and software. This could change, however, as more facilities shift to autonomous systems with machines communicating directly with one another.³⁶

Vulnerabilities in US infrastructure may also entice ISIS and its supporters to develop more advanced cyber capabilities. In “Cyberterrorism: The Sum of All Fears?” Gabriel Weimann

³¹ Sanger

³² Joseph Marks, “ISIL Aims to launch cyberattacks on US,” Politico, December 29, 2015, accessed May 1, 2016, <http://www.politico.com/story/2015/12/isil-terrorism-cyberattacks-217179>.

³³ Daniela Guzman, “National Intelligence Agencies Wary of Cyberterrorism as ISIS Builds a ‘Digital Caliphate,’” Association of Certified Financial Crime Specialists (ACFCS), September 25, 2014, accessed May 1, 2016, <http://www.acfcs.org/national-intelligence-agencies-wary-of-cyberterrorism-as-isis-rises-as-a-digital-caliphate/>.

³⁴ Shane Dixon Kavanaugh, “ISIS Hackers Sharpen Skills Used For Cyber Terror In Secret Forum,” Vocativ, December 28, 2015, accessed May 1, 2016, <http://www.vocativ.com/264640/isis-hackers-sharpen-skills-used-for-cyber-terror-in-secret-forum/>.

³⁵ Marks

³⁶ Jeff Stone, “ISIS Hackers Love to Threaten the US, But Don’t Expect Them to Turn Off the Lights Quite Yet,” *International Business Times*, November 16, 2015, accessed May 1, 2016, <http://www.ibtimes.com/isis-hackers-love-threaten-us-dont-expect-them-turn-lights-quite-yet-2186750>.

discusses the attraction of cyberterrorism for terrorists, writing that “the variety and number of targets are enormous.” Critical infrastructures are vulnerable to cyberattacks because the computer systems and infrastructures that run them are highly complex, making it impossible to eliminate all weaknesses. The more a country becomes technologically developed, the more vulnerable it becomes.³⁷

According to a July 2014 Unisys research study titled “Critical Infrastructure: Security Preparedness and Maturity,” alarming security gaps exist in the world’s critical infrastructure. Partnering with the Ponemon Institute, Unisys surveyed 599 global IT and IT security executives at utility, oil, gas, alternative energy, and manufacturing organizations in 13 countries, including the United States. Their results show a concern for the security of industrial control systems (ICS) and supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA) systems, which monitor and control the processes and operations for critical infrastructure functions. Nearly 70% of critical infrastructure managers surveyed reported at least one security breach in the last 12 months that led to the loss of confidential information or disruption of operations. 78% surveyed said a successful attack on their systems is at least somewhat likely within the next 24 months.³⁸ Despite reported vulnerabilities, organizations have been slow to upgrade network security and patch ICS and SCADA systems. The same study revealed that less than 30% of security practitioners surveyed reported that cybersecurity was a top priority for their firms.³⁹

In addition to vulnerable infrastructure, ISIS and its supporters may try to advance their cyber capabilities for other intuitive reasons. Unlike other forms of terrorism, ISIS could conduct a cyberattack remotely, finding it easier to strike the United States from afar. While advancing cyber capabilities takes a great deal of time and effort, it requires less psychological investment, physical training, and risk of mortality than more conventional forms of terrorism. ISIS may find recruitment and retainment easier for this reason. In addition, it will be easier to recruit tech-savvy radicals as technology advances and the next generation of terrorists grows up in a digital world.⁴⁰

There is also a psychological component to a cyberterrorist attack that is appealing. Many Americans depend on digital devices, and even low-level cyberattacks have psychological effects. In a recent case, hackers defaced a Michigan church website with pro-ISIS propaganda. The 15-year-old who discovered the hack said everyone was “pretty freaked out...One of my friends said they didn’t think a lot of people were going to show up today, and then the doors opened during service and they said like six people turned around and were getting freaked out.”⁴¹ The Michigan church incident is only one example of the numerous cases.

While the reasons listed above are incentives for ISIS and pro-ISIS hacking groups to recruit tech-savvy radicals, the task may not be so easy. As illustrated by Hussain’s unsuccessful attempt in recruiting members of his former cyber community, many established hackers have no interest in ISIS’s ideology. However, some may develop an interest like Hussain, who started off

³⁷ Gabriel Weimann, “Cyberterrorism: The Sum of All Fears?” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 28: 129-149 (2005), <https://www.princeton.edu/~ppns/Docs/State%20Security/Cyberterrorism%20-%20sum%20of%20all%20fears.pdf>.

³⁸ “Critical Infrastructure Security,” Unisys, <http://www.unisys.com/insights/critical-infrastructure-security>. The full study can be found here:

https://www.hunton.com/files/upload/Unisys_Report_Critical_Infrastructure_Cybersecurity.pdf.

³⁹ “Breaking down old and new threats to critical infrastructure,” Trend Micro, July 23, 2014, accessed May 1, 2016, <http://blog.trendmicro.com/breaking-down-old-and-new-threats-to-critical-infrastructure/>.

⁴⁰ Weimann

⁴¹ “Islamic State Hacks Into Michigan Church’s Website,” The Clarion Project, April 27, 2016, accessed May 1, 2016, <https://www.clarionproject.org/news/islamic-state-hacks-michigan-churchs-website>.

as a hacktivist. Sujan is another case in point. Even if ISIS fails to attract advanced hackers, its recruitment of somewhat tech-savvy radicals will become a concern as their skills develop over time. Already the United States has witnessed interest from young tech-savvy ISIS supporters. In August 2015, 17-year-old Ali Shukri Amin from Manassas, Virginia was sentenced to 11 years in prison for providing information on Bitcoin and encryption to potential ISIS recruits.⁴² ISIS also believes it can attract tech-savvy recruits. In its eBook *Black Flags from Palestine: Magic, Deception & War*, ISIS discusses future wars, predicting that tech geeks will be among the new converts in an impending cyberwar.⁴³

Regarding the employment of cybercriminals, some might say ISIS will be unable to hire advanced hackers without affinity for its ideology. While this may be the case for some, it will not be for all cybercriminals. Already, ISIS has attempted to hire cyber mercenaries. In January 2016, the terrorist organization reached out to Indian hackers, offering \$10,000 to hack into government websites and extract sensitive documents. It is believed that many have already accepted the offer.⁴⁴ This is one example of how ISIS will try to use monetary compensation for the employment of cybercriminals who may not share a similar ideology. It would be a mistake to dismiss ISIS's recruitment of even somewhat tech-savvy radicals and cybercriminals.

A Future Threat

While ISIS and its supporters are far from obtaining the capabilities necessary to carry out a high-level cyberattack, their intent should not be ignored. As stated previously, US critical infrastructure is vulnerable and with the proliferation of advanced malware and expertise, ISIS will find ways to buy cyber weaponry and recruit tech-savvy radicals. History shows that terrorist organizations are highly agile and innovative and will employ all means necessary in achieving their goals. Cyber weaponry may become just another tool in their arsenal as Comey indicated when he said, "Destructive malware is a bomb. Terrorists want bombs."⁴⁵ While many have brushed the cyberterrorist threat aside, Navy Admiral Michael Rogers, head of US Cyber Command, has described it as one of his top three concerns. "It would not be difficult," he said. "It's about recruiting the right people with the right focus. It would certainly not be beyond their ability if they made that decision."⁴⁶ With the UCC merger and proliferation of low-level attacks, notoriety among the pro-ISIS cyber community may attract new tech-savvy recruits without much additional effort from ISIS. Hacking in the name of ISIS is a future threat of significant risk.

⁴² David Kravets, "Jihadist US teen gets 11 years for blog, tweets about crypto and Bitcoin," *Ars Technica*, August 29, 2015, accessed May 21, 2016, <http://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2015/08/jihadist-us-teen-gets-11-years-for-blog-tweets-about-crypto-and-bitcoin/>.

⁴³ Bridget Johnson, "How ISIS Plans to Destroy Israel," *PJ Media*, April 16, 2015, accessed May 21, 2016, <https://pjmedia.com/blog/how-isis-plans-to-destroy-israel/>. The full eBook can be found here: <https://www.scribd.com/doc/261781777/eBook-Black-Flags-From-PALESTINE-Full>.

⁴⁴ Rishabh Banerji, "ISIS Offering \$10,000 To Indian Hackers To Steal Sensitive Data From Government," *India Times*, January 26, 2016, accessed May 21, 2016, <http://www.indiatimes.com/news/india/isis-offering-10-000-to-indian-hackers-to-steal-sensitive-data-from-government-249853.html>.

⁴⁵ Marks

⁴⁶ Hope Hodge Seck, "ISIS May Try to Launch Cyberattacks against US, NSA Chief Warns," *Defense Tech*, April 5, 2016, accessed May 1, 2016, <http://www.defensetech.org/2016/04/05/isis-may-try-to-launch-cyberattacks-nsa-chief-warns/>.

About the Author

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THE NEW VENEZUELAN EXCEPTIONALISM? ABSENCE OF ARMED INSURGENCY FROM 1989-2016

Wesley Stukenbroeker

For much of the second half of the 20th Century, scholars wrote of the ‘exceptionalism’ of Venezuela’s protracted democratic stability in a region of military dictatorships. Yet even as many withdrew that label following Hugo Chávez’s Bolivarian Revolution, the country has not faced an armed insurgency since the late 1960s. This research, a case study of Venezuela from 1989 to 2016, explores why Venezuela has not faced a sustained armed insurgency despite economic mismanagement, endemic corruption, political repression, and the widespread availability of firearms. An examination of social spending, political reform, charismatic leadership, and mano dura repression reveals that each of these explanations were instrumental in preventing insurgency formation at various points of the Venezuelan story. The political and economic conditions during the collapse of the Punto Fijo political order in the late 1980s and early 1990s were ripe for a guerrilla insurgency, but the government bought itself time with heavy-handed repression of widespread protests. While Chávez’s 1992 attempted coup failed for tactical reasons, it propelled him to fame and united the discrete leftist movements behind him. In accordance with his charisma and socialist ideology, Chávez gradually made the crucial decision that he could win power through existing political institutions rather than armed rebellion. Upon taking power in 1998, Chávez used a combination of social spending and political reform to maintain and expand his support. Enjoying massive oil revenues, the Bolivarian government built its vision for 21st Century Socialism around the social missions, which sustained its electoral popularity until oil prices began to fall—even as the economy broke down in other areas. Similarly, the frequent elections and creation of community councils have given the Bolivarian government legitimacy in the eyes of the majority of its people. Throughout his time in office, Chávez outmaneuvered a diversity of opponents—largely in the upper and middle classes. However, these groups were weak, divided, and poorly positioned to organize an armed insurgency. The middle class frequently used street protests, but the urban environment and Chávez’s tight control of the military meant conditions were not favorable for guerrilla war. After nearly being overthrown in 2002, Chávez enhanced his mano dura counterinsurgency capabilities by writing a new military doctrine and increasing troop levels. Maduro has continued Chávez’s policies, but lacks the oil revenues and charisma of his predecessor. Crime, government repression, and chronic shortages of basic goods triggered renewed protests in 2014, but Maduro has used Chávez’s base to cling to power. As economic conditions continue to deteriorate, however, the Bolivarian Revolution is unlikely to survive.

For much of the second half of the 20th Century, scholars wrote of the ‘exceptionalism’ of Venezuela’s protracted democratic stability in a region of military dictatorships.¹ Yet even as many withdrew that label following Hugo Chávez’s Bolivarian Revolution, the country has not faced an armed insurgency since the late 1960s. My research, focusing on the period from 1989 to 2016, addresses the following question: *Why has Venezuela not faced a sustained armed insurgency despite economic mismanagement, endemic corruption, political repression, and the widespread availability of firearms?* I posit four hypotheses to explain the lack of violence.

1. **Social Spending:** Redistribution of oil revenues to social services and subsidies for the most impoverished have bought the support of the lowest class.
2. **Political Institutions:** Participatory democratic institutions like referenda and local public planning councils have created peaceful channels for political mobilization.
3. **Charisma:** Hugo Chávez’s charisma, leftist ideology, and revolutionary brand appealed to the segment of society that would have been best positioned to mobilize an insurgency.
4. **Mano Dura:** Venezuelan governments have suppressed the formation of an insurgency using heavy-handed (*mano dura*) policies.

This research represents a case study of Venezuela from 1989 to 2016. While much has been written about the Bolivarian political experiment, this paper sheds new light on the opposition’s tactical and strategic failures.

A Brief History of the Venezuelan Opposition

Venezuela has long been a favorite case for studying regime change. After democratizing in 1958, the country faced a decade of armed insurgency from leftist guerrillas. In the 1970s, Venezuela unexpectedly became a stable democracy before steadily unraveling in the 1980s and 1990s.² In 1998, the Venezuelan government transformed into a system of competitive authoritarianism which still exists today.³ This section outlines the past quarter century with emphasis on the strategies and tactics used by opposition forces.

1958-1989: Punto Fijo Democracy

When the last military dictator, Perez Jimenez, fled Venezuela in 1958, the two primary parties—*Acción Democrática* (AD) and *Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente* (COPEI)—signed the *Punto Fijo* pact which set the framework for four decades of ‘managed’ democracy, with AD and COPEI alternating in power and sharing its spoils.⁴ But the so-called Fourth Republic had a tumultuous first decade. A young, left-wing segment of AD was inspired by the 1959 Cuban Revolution to team with the Venezuelan Communist Party to

¹ See Steve Ellner and Miguel Tinker Salas, “The Venezuelan Exceptionalism Thesis: Separating Myth from Reality,” *Latin American Perspectives* 32, no. 2 (March 2005): 5-19. Also Thomas Ponniah and Jonathan Eastwood, *The Revolution in Venezuela: Social and Political Change Under Chavez*, (Boston: Harvard University Press 2011): 11-16.

² Ryan Brading, *Populism in Venezuela*, (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2013): 2.

³ Javier Corrales and Carlos A. Romero, *US-Venezuela Relations Since the 1990s: Coping With Midlevel Security Threats*, (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2013): 67.

⁴ Tarver, *Venezuelan Insurgency*, 35-40; Iain Bruce, *The Real Venezuela: Making Socialism in the 21st Century*, (London: Pluto Press, 2008): xv.

overthrow the government.⁵ Shock brigades started out burning vehicles and blocking roads, but attacks grew deadlier as the Fidel Castro regime provided arms and training.⁶ However, the urban terrorism backfired when the population stood behind Betancourt, and the 1963 election results demonstrated a clear rejection of insurgency.⁷ Guerrillas in the rural areas did not fare well in the fighting.⁸

After the insurgency crumbled in the late 1960s, Venezuela did not suffer from the armed conflicts, extreme nationalism, or economic collapse so common among its neighbors.⁹ Fueled largely by oil revenues, the country had a general feeling of privilege and political stability.¹⁰ Consistently high levels of voter participation surpassed the turnout in even mature democratic systems.¹¹ From 1958 to 1988, socialist candidates never received more than 3% of the vote.¹² This stability began to unravel in the 1980s. Politically, the *Punto Fijo* elites set themselves up for failure by alienating the urban poor.¹³ There was also growing discontent and isolated acts of violence from university and secondary school students.¹⁴ Radical activists in the *23 de Enero* neighborhood in Caracas formed a revolutionary movement and children of former communists began to reconstruct cells of the *Bandera Roja* guerilla organization.¹⁵ The primary driver of the unraveling, however, was economic. AD and COPEI practiced a model of import substitution and government intervention which enhanced regime legitimacy and popularity.¹⁶ But when Carlos Andrés Pérez assumed the presidency in February 1989, turbulent oil prices had pushed Venezuela's foreign debt to nearly \$35 billion.¹⁷ Pérez's young Minister for Trade and Industry, Moisés Naím, helped implement a package of neoliberal shock policies that privatized state business and cut social services.¹⁸ While the economy generally reacted favorably, these reforms were "grossly out of step with popular expectations fed by decades of pervasive state intervention subsidized by oil exports."¹⁹

On February 27, bus passengers in Caracas discovered fares had doubled and began spontaneous protests. Within hours, Maracay, Valencia, Barquisimeto, Ciudad Guyana, and Merida were overcome with widespread looting. This rebellion was followed by days of brutal military repression.²⁰ When the National Guard refused to enter the slums, the government

⁵ Tarver, *Venezuelan Insurgency*, 67-69.

⁶ 74-75.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 93, 104.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 75-76.

⁹ Jennifer L. McCoy and David J. Myers, *The Unraveling of Representative Democracy in Venezuela*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004): xi.

¹⁰ Ellner et al., 5-8.

¹¹ Julia Buxton, *The Failure of Political Reform in Venezuela* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2001): 3.

¹² Miguel Tinker Salas, *Venezuela: What Everyone Needs to Know*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015): 118.

¹³ McCoy et al., 28.

¹⁴ Michael Derham, *Politics in Venezuela: Explaining Hugo Chávez*, (Oxford: Peter Lang AG, 2010): 246.

¹⁵ Carlos Martínez, Michael Fox, and Jojo Farrell, *Venezuela Speaks! Voiced from the Grassroots*, (Oakland: PM Press, 2010): 17.

¹⁶ Ellner et al., 6.

¹⁷ Pérez was forced to implement austerity measures and take a \$4.5B loan from the IMF, which during his first term he had called "genocide workers in the pay of economic totalitarianism"; Richard Gott, *Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution*, (London: Verso, 2005): 54; H. Michael Tarver and Julia C. Frederick, *The History of Venezuela*, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2005): 140-141.

¹⁸ Moisés Naím, *Paper Tigers and Minotaurs: The Politics of Venezuela's Economic Reforms*, (Washington D.C.: The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1993).

¹⁹ Naím, 11.

²⁰ Gott, 43.

turned to the military. Soldiers moved into the shanty towns and shot “anything that moved”—total casualties are estimated at 3,000.²¹ After these so-called *Caracazo* riots, the *Punto Fijo* system lost its legitimacy.²²

1992-2000: Coup and Bolivarian Revolution

In 1975, Hugo Chávez graduated from the military academy, receiving his sword of command from the hands of Pérez—the man he would attempt to overthrow 16 years later.²³ In 1982, Chávez recruited other officers and lecturers at the military academy to create a cell within the army named the *Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario – 200* (MBR-200).²⁴ Chávez schemed with longtime leftist Douglas Bravo to construct a civil-military movement with the long-term aim of preparing an insurgency.²⁵ But while leftist parties like *Movimiento al Socialismo* (MAS) and *La Causa R* (LCR) sought to democratically displace AD and COPEI, Chávez felt his best chance was to stage a coup.²⁶

The *Caracazo* riots convinced MBR-200 to accelerate its plans, and the ensuing orders to fire on civilians (as well as the mysterious death of an MBR-200 conspirator) turned many soldiers against their leadership.²⁷ In August 1991, Chávez was transferred to Maracay to command a parachute battalion. Finally in command of his own troops, he prepared to take action.²⁸

On February 4, 1992, units loyal to Chávez simultaneously attacked the defense ministry, the military airport, and the *Miraflores* presidential palace. But the attacks were repelled. Unknown to Chávez, the conspiracy had been betrayed to military leadership by a captain at the military academy.²⁹ Chávez also failed to gain control of the radio and television stations.³⁰ During the attempt, 14 soldiers died, 50 were wounded, and more than 1,000 were detained.³¹

Chávez surrendered but asked to speak on television so conspirators in other parts of the country might also surrender peacefully. His appearance lasted just over a minute, but turned him from an unknown colonel into a national figure. He took personal responsibility and said that the movement had been defeated *por ahora* [for now].³² In a highly corrupt society, Chávez’s acceptance of responsibility captivated public interest.³³ Chávez used his time in prison to renew his contacts with MAS and LCR.³⁴ In 1993, Pérez was removed from power on

²¹ Brading, 47; Gott, 45.

²² Salas, 123.

²³ Gott, 38; After graduation from the military academy, Chávez was assigned to a counterinsurgency squadron in his home state, although he did not see combat against what remained of the leftist insurgency; Salas, 123-124.

²⁴ 200 represents the 200th birthday of Bolívar in July 1983; Gott, 38.

²⁵ Gott, 58-62.

²⁶ Derham, 257-258.

²⁷ Gott, 44-46.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.

²⁹ Gott, 63-65.

³⁰ Moises Naim, *Paper Tigers and Minotaurs: The Politics of Venezuela’s Economic Reforms*, (Washington D.C.: The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1993): 100.

³¹ Gott, 69; In November, an admiral launched a second coup which included bombing the *Miraflores* Palace from the air, but this failed as well; Gott, 71.

³² Gott, 67-68.

³³ Miguel Tinker Salas, *Venezuela: What Everyone Needs to Know*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015): 123.

³⁴ Gott, 122.

charges of corruption. With the strength of old parties crumbling, Chávez helped Rafael Caldera of COPEI win the 1993 election, and earned his release on Palm Sunday in 1994.³⁵

Although already the symbol of opposition to the *Punto Fijo* model, Chávez was initially uncertain about participation in future elections, believing the electoral system to be corrupt and weighted against newcomers.³⁶ Early in 1997, however, his popular support grew and relations with MAS and LCR strengthened.³⁷

Buoyed by protest votes, Chávez took power in December 1998 with 56% of the vote.³⁸ Fearing US intervention, one of Chávez's first moves as president was to strengthen his control of the armed forces.³⁹ Eager to prove that he was not a dictator, Chávez held five elections in the first two years.⁴⁰ The most significant was a referendum on a new Constitution, which made several significant changes. These included extending the presidential term from five to six years, allowing two consecutive terms, allowing voters to hold a recall election halfway through the term, abolishing the bicameral legislature, and establishing the National Electoral Council to oversee elections.⁴¹

2002-2003: Coup and Oil Lockout

Unlike traditional leftists, Chávez did not rely on political parties or trade unions for support. He mobilized support by appealing to peasants and shantytown inhabitants.⁴² In his first year, Chávez suffered several major defections from his coalition, but none of his opponents had sufficient political backing to mobilize support.⁴³ Nonetheless, white elites, senior generals, conservative businessmen, oil executives, and media moguls grew into a burgeoning opposition which developed its own plans for a coup by the end of 2001.⁴⁴

The driving force behind the opposition was the passage of 49 decree laws, which threatened the interests of the economic elites.⁴⁵ Chávez pushed through land reforms that prohibited holding more than 5,000 hectares and gave the government power to redistribute idle or unproductive landholdings. Further, he passed a hydrocarbons law that increased oil royalties and insisted that the state oil company (*Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A.*, PdVSA) have a 51% stake in all joint ventures with foreign companies.⁴⁶

Chávez's popularity had soared to 80% in 2001, but after the passage of the 49 decree laws it plunged to nearly 30%.⁴⁷ In April 2002, Chávez used his legal powers to fire and retire a

³⁵ Gott, 121-124.

³⁶ H. Michael Tarver and Julia C. Frederick, *The History of Venezuela*, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2005): 149

³⁷ Gott, 134.

³⁸ Julia Buxton, *The Failure of Political Reform in Venezuela* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2001): 2; Derham, 259.

³⁹ Derham, 260-261.

⁴⁰ Gott, 145-146

⁴¹ Salas, 138.

⁴² Gott, 211.

⁴³ Two significant defections were General Guacipuro Lameda (the boss of PdVSA) and Luis Miquilena (a chief civilian advisor); Gott, 201, 207-208.

⁴⁴ Brading, 69; Gott, 219.

⁴⁵ Iain Bruce, *The Real Venezuela: Making Socialism in the 21st Century*, (London: Pluto Press, 2008): xvii-xviii.

⁴⁶ Gott, 220.

⁴⁷ Ponniah et al., 42.

number of executives from PdVSA. Opposition leaders used this breach of meritocratic procedure as a banner to rally support against the administration.⁴⁸

On April 11, led by opposition leaders who took advantage of existing frustrations, nearly a million protesters headed towards a concentration of Chávez supporters outside *Miraflores Palace*.⁴⁹ Nineteen people were killed in a chaotic confrontation near the Llaguno Bridge. When television networks accused the government of responsibility, Chávez issued a conditional resignation and allowed himself to be captured.⁵⁰ With the vice president in hiding and the National Assembly disbanded, opposition leader Pedro Carmona proclaimed himself provisional president.⁵¹ As word spread that Chávez had not officially resigned (his conditions had not been met), many soldiers and *Miraflores* staffers deemed Carmona illegitimate. Less than two days after the coup began, Carmona was arrested for violating the Constitution.⁵²

The failed coup was a major setback for the opposition, but unrest continued with massive protests in the cities followed by the poor coming down from the surrounding hills to demonstrate their support for Chávez. While it could turn out strong protests, the opposition lacked a policy program and a leader.⁵³

On December 2, 2002, the opposition called a general strike designed to collapse the economy and force Chávez to resign. But the armed forces were now behind Chávez, since the generals implicated in the coup had been forced to retire. More importantly, the April coup reminded the poor that they had a government to defend and they were now willing to mobilize against the opposition.⁵⁴ Strike leaders also failed to calculate that many employees would willingly return to work and the strike fizzled out by February 2003.⁵⁵

After the collapse of the oil strike, a confident Chávez laid off 18,000 PdVSA managers, administrators, and technicians.⁵⁶ He used his ability to mobilize the poor to intensify the radicalization of his socialist agenda.⁵⁷ He was also emboldened by the election of other regional leftist leaders including Lula da Silva in Brazil and Nestor Kirchner in Argentina.⁵⁸

2004-2007: Elections, Elections, Elections

While the Bolivarian government pushed its ‘Socialism for the 21st Century’ agenda and consolidated power in the executive, three new groups tried to mount a formidable opposition against Chávez. First, a new student movement challenged the government’s decision not to renew RCTV network’s broadcast license (a punishment for the April 2002 coup).⁵⁹ Second, a group of former MAS parliamentarians abandoned the Bolivarian project. Third, General Raúl

⁴⁸ Ponniah et al., 45-53.

⁴⁹ While unclear the US participated in the 2002 coup, there is evidence the CIA had foreknowledge and did not warn the Chavez government. Daniel Charles Hellinger, *Global Security Watch: Venezuela*, (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2012): 90; Bruce, xvii-xviii; Gott, 223.

⁵⁰ Ponniah et al., 43-45; Gott, 225-237.

⁵¹ Ponniah et al., 45-53.

⁵² Gott, 225-237.

⁵³ Carmona was a businessman, but not a politician; Gott, 242-243.

⁵⁴ Gott, 249-253.

⁵⁵ Salas, 160.

⁵⁶ Bruce, xix.

⁵⁷ Gott, 254.

⁵⁸ Salas, 144.

⁵⁹ Carlos Martinez, Michael Fox, and Jojo Farrell, *Venezuela Speaks! Voiced from the Grassroots*, (Oakland: PM Press, 2010): 165-166.

Baduel, the officer who had organized Chávez's return from the 2002 coup, defected from the government as it radicalized.⁶⁰

The opposition next pursued a strategy straight out of Chávez's 1999 Constitution: a recall referendum. After months of wrangling over whether the opposition had gathered sufficient signatures, the recall referendum was approved for August 2004.⁶¹ The opposition tried to coalesce under an umbrella organization called *Coordinadora Democrática*, but Chávez used the opportunity to mobilize as many as three million new voters and won nearly 60% of the vote.⁶²

Emboldened again, Chávez strengthened his control of the judiciary by enlarging the Supreme Court from 20 to 32 justices. He also passed a new media law to regulate the behavior of radio, television, and newspapers.⁶³ In December 2005, the opposition inexplicably boycotted parliamentary elections, giving Chávez supporters a clean sweep of the National Assembly.⁶⁴

Nonetheless, discontent over corruption, bureaucracy, crime and personal insecurity threatened Chávez's 2006 re-election campaign.⁶⁵ Prior to the election, Chávez consolidated his support by establishing a new party (*Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela*, PSUV), while the opposition remained weak and divided under new leader Manuel Rosales. Chávez took a commanding 63% of the vote, and was elected to his second six-year term.⁶⁶

In 2007, a Bolivarian commission recommended the greatest constitutional changes since 1958, including increasing the presidential term to seven years, eliminating the term limit, and ranking presidentially-appointed *consejos comunales* above elected officials at sub-national levels.⁶⁷ The new terms were put to a referendum in 2007, but were defeated as the opposition successfully framed it as an attempt to extend Chávez's control and abolish private property.⁶⁸

2009-2016: Chávez and Beyond

Despite the failure of the 2007 constitutional referendum, Chávez won a 2009 referendum allowing him to stand for re-election indefinitely.⁶⁹ Throughout his final full term, he continued to face opponents on both ends of the political spectrum.⁷⁰ On the left, he was criticized for a slow pace of change, corruption, bureaucracy, consolidation of power, and a lack of space for open debate. On the right, Chávez was challenged by an array of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international organizations, labor federations, and members of the Catholic Church. They criticized his leadership style, inclusion of the military in politics, takeover of PdVSA, and crackdown on freedom of the press.⁷¹

⁶⁰ Brading, 81-83.

⁶¹ Gott, 260-261.

⁶² In a further setback for the opposition, after the recall election, a member of the assembly published a list of those who signed the petition and many were dismissed from government or denied contracts; Salas, 161-163; Gott, 262-263.

⁶³ Gott, 264-265.

⁶⁴ Bruce, xx.

⁶⁵ Ponniah et al., 132.

⁶⁶ Ponniah et al., 145.

⁶⁷ Corrales et al., 85.

⁶⁸ Bruce, 73-75.

⁶⁹ Brading, 7.

⁷⁰ Salas, 200-201.

⁷¹ Salas, 200-201.

This opposition remained a formidable force, but lacked political organization.⁷² Opponents resorted to a media war by appealing to allies abroad and labeling the government as authoritarian and repressive. In January 2009, the broad coalition of right-leaning Chávez opponents created another new party (*Mesa de la Unidad*, MUD) which brought together leading opposition parties under a lawyer-turned-politician named Henrique Capriles.⁷³

Bolstered by state resources and state-controlled media, Chávez was elected president for a fourth time in October 2012 by a margin of 54% to 45%. However, he was unable to attend his inauguration and died of cancer in March 2013. His named successor, Vice President Nicolás Maduro, assumed a caretaker role, but according to Venezuelan law had to be re-elected.⁷⁴ Prior to this April 2013 election, Maduro had little domestic political experience and had never run a national campaign, but he beat Capriles by a margin of 1.49%.⁷⁵

On February 12, 2014—Venezuelan Youth Day—university students and conservative groups took to the streets driven by skyrocketing inflation. Subsequent protesters targeted universities, medical facilities, transportation hubs, and regional offices of the electoral commission. When clashes between pro-government forces and Venezuelan students turned violent, gunfire injured eight and killed 22-year-old local beauty pageant winner Genesis Carmona. This incident went viral, triggering a string of additional protests in which at least 43 others were killed.⁷⁶

These protests revealed the extent to which the opposition remains divided. Led by Leopoldo Lopez (former mayor of Chacao) and Maria Corina Machado (founder of an NGO), the movement represents a direct challenge to the more moderate Capriles. These protests took place in the middle- and upper-class neighborhoods of Caracas, but did not spread to other urban areas.⁷⁷ Maduro later arrested Leopoldo Lopez, General Angel Vivas, and two other opposition mayors.⁷⁸ The *Unión de Naciones Suramericanas* (UNASUR) initiated a government-opposition dialogue in April 2014 but talks broke down. In February 2015, the government arrested the mayor of Caracas, Antonio Ledezma.⁷⁹

The situation today is worsened by rampant crime and corruption. Caracas leads the world with a rate of 120 annual homicides per 100,000 residents.⁸⁰ According to a 2009 estimate, there are between nine and 15 million illegal weapons in Venezuela—roughly one for every two people.⁸¹ Writes one author,

“Whether it’s the complicity of the Venezuelan military with drug trafficking organizations or the use of the state owned oil and natural gas company as a vehicle to

⁷² Gott, 245-248.

⁷³ Salas, 200-201.

⁷⁴ Maduro had joined the Chavez movement in 1992 effort to free him from jail. Prior to becoming vice president, he was Minister for Foreign Affairs; Salas, 206-210.

⁷⁵ Salas, 206-210.

⁷⁶ Joseph M. Humire, “Venezuela: Trends in Organized Crime,” in *Reconceptualizing Security in the Americas in the Twenty-First Century*. Ed. Bruce M. Bagley, Jonathan D. Rosen, and Hanna S. Kassab, 133-145 (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015): 141; Mark Sullivan, “Venezuela: Background and US Relations,” *Congressional Research Service Report*, April 2015, 1.

⁷⁷ Salas, 212-214.

⁷⁸ Sullivan, 1.

⁷⁹ Sullivan, 1.

⁸⁰ Simeon Tegel, “Venezuela’s capital is the world’s most murderous city,” *USA Today*, January 29, 2016.

⁸¹ “Guns and Money,” *The Economist*, July 7, 2014.

launder the billions of dollars in illicit revenues, it is clear that Venezuela has become a haven for organized crime syndicates from throughout the world.”⁸²

Examination of Hypotheses

From 1989 to 2016, opposition movements tried to overthrow the Venezuelan government through a series of coups, a national strike, a recall election, and various political efforts. Why was no significant effort made to organize an armed insurgency? This section explores four hypotheses for the lack of insurgency: social spending, political institutions, charisma, and *mano dura* suppression.

Social Spending

Venezuelan governments have relied on petro-funded social programs since the discovery of oil in the 1920s. In the 1940s, Venezuela became the largest global oil exporter.⁸³ In 2007, oil represented 90% of export income, 50% of public revenues, and 30% of GDP.⁸⁴ The steady stream of oil revenue has fed historical perceptions of privilege—one 2001 survey found 82% of Venezuelans believed their country was the richest in the world.⁸⁵ Many of these profits are redirected to the public.⁸⁶ In the mid-2000s, increasing oil revenues released huge sums of money to innovative new social programs known as “missions.” These programs cover many areas including:⁸⁷

- **Literacy:** One of the most successful literacy programs in history, the *Robinson I* mission has taught more than 1.5 million adult Venezuelans to read and write.⁸⁸
- **Education:** The *Simoncito* mission provides preschool for more than a million children, while the *Sucre* mission provides free higher education.
- **Job Training:** The *Vuelvan Caras* mission trains thousands of adults in technical skills, allowing them to set up their own co-ops.
- **Healthcare:** The *Barrio Adentro* mission provides free, direct access to medical care in the poorest neighborhoods.
- **Food:** Subsidized *Mercal* food markets sell products at discounted rates.⁸⁹

Chávez’s opponents criticized the creation of missions and deemed them (pejoratively) populist, but during the 2004 election campaigns, even the opposition leaders were obligated to admit that they would maintain spending on these projects.⁹⁰

While these programs have built goodwill for the government among the least well-off, Venezuela continues to face massive inequality.⁹¹ In 2015, the top 10% of the population

⁸² Humire, 134.

⁸³ Bruce, 49.

⁸⁴ Tarver et al., *The History of Venezuela*, 14; Bruce, xiii.

⁸⁵ Jennifer L. McCoy and David J. Myers, *The Unraveling of Representative Democracy in Venezuela*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2004): xi.

⁸⁶ Rafael Uzcategui, *Venezuela: Revolution as Spectacle*, (Tucson: Sharp, 2010): 14.

⁸⁷ Martinez et al., 21-22.

⁸⁸ Bruce, 19.

⁸⁹ Martinez et al.

⁹⁰ Gott, 259.

received half the national income while 80% earned minimum wage or less.⁹² Described more vividly, “Caracas has a stark divide between the rich who live behind tall walls and private security guards and the youthful poor who survive by organizing their own gangs. The middle class, sandwiched in between, live in constant fear of losing their property or their lives.”⁹³ Despite this inequality, the missions have helped symbolically elevate the poor in Venezuelan society.⁹⁴

While social programs are a cornerstone of the Bolivarian project, the description of Chávez merely “buying” the support of the poor to fend off insurgency is a bit simplistic. Supporters of the government view the spending as an investment in social change and argue they have helped increase social mobility.⁹⁵ Many missions fit into a long history of community action and self-reliance and are intricately tied to participatory democracy, which will be discussed next.⁹⁶

Political Institutions

The Bolivarian years featured two seemingly paradoxical trends: the consolidation of power within the executive branch and the decentralization of power to local community councils. These trends weakened the political opposition while strengthening support from the urban poor, or *chavistas*.

As noted, the 1999 constitution strengthened the executive by extending the term and limit. And while Chávez’s 2007 constitutional reform referendum failed, many of the reforms were attained anyway.⁹⁷ Chávez also eliminated the traditional system of proportional representation of delegates to a constituent assembly in favor of a majoritarian system.⁹⁸ He staffed the national electoral monitoring body and judicial system with loyalists, ended subsidies to trade unions, and sent state-appointed supervisors to schools.⁹⁹

The decentralization trend derives from what is often described as participatory politics, and was a direct reaction to 33 years of *Punto Fijo* democracy. While the *Punto Fijo* system was exceptionally stable, there was no other avenue of political participation except party membership and voting.¹⁰⁰ Fear of losing power (and economic or patronage benefits stemming from it) led to strong internal party discipline.¹⁰¹

Upon coming to power in 1998, Chávez introduced participatory democracy. A key feature of such a political system is frequent elections. Since 1998, Venezuela has undergone 20 separate contests to elect or reelect the president, governors, members of the national assembly,

⁹¹ Uzcategui, 60.

⁹² Gott, 173. Poverty statistics are heavily disputed. For example, the Bolivarian government originally reported a 10% rise in poverty during Chavez’s first five years, but later changed the report to indicate poverty had fallen by 4.5%; “Democracy in Venezuela,” Hearing, Committee on International Relations House of Representatives, November 17, 2005, 7.

⁹³ Gott, 20.

⁹⁴ Ponniah et al., 7.

⁹⁵ Bruce, 38; Martinez et al., 1-8.

⁹⁶ Bruce, 26-27.

⁹⁷ Ponniah et al., 9-10.

⁹⁸ Corrales et al., 70-71.

⁹⁹ Corrales et al., 70-71.

¹⁰⁰ Further, because the parties shared power, they had nearly indistinguishable policy positions; McCoy et al., 35-36.

¹⁰¹ Derham, 212-214.

mayors, members of local city councils, and reforms to the constitution.¹⁰² As is frequently highlighted by his supporters, Chávez achieved repeated electoral successes throughout the course of his presidency, and admitted defeat when it occurred.¹⁰³ One US official testified,

“The Venezuelan electoral system is actually quite good in terms of the mechanical process. What the government has done is used a variety of means, gerrymandering, massive use of public funds, trumped-up charges against key opposition people, a systematic undermining of the independence of the media to tilt all the electoral ground in its favor.”¹⁰⁴

Two other components of participatory democracy are citizen assemblies and communal councils.¹⁰⁵ The first cultural committees to emerge were the land committees (CTUs) in 2001, which helped 90,000 families legalize their ownership. Local leaders would start with a small project like procuring a pick-up truck and move on to more ambitious ones like building an electricity grid.¹⁰⁶ The initial land census also looked at water, building problems, acute poverty, and health needs. The urban land committees became a template for the community councils, which were designed to be the heart of the transition to 21st Century Socialism.¹⁰⁷ By 2007, there were more than 25,000 Communal Councils.¹⁰⁸

The new politics altered the way Venezuelans thought about government—“suddenly everything was open for debate as ordinary citizens had a stake in determining the direction of their country.”¹⁰⁹ Another author observed,

“A whole section of Venezuelan society, the poor in general but in particular the urban poor of the Caracas hillsides, several millions of people who had been buried in silence, obscurity, and neglect, have suddenly ‘emerged’ from the shadows and established themselves as actors, as protagonists both of their own individual stories and of the nation’s collective drama.”¹¹⁰

A 2009 *Latinobarómetro* survey found on a scale of 1 (not democratic) to 10 (democratic), Venezuelans rated their democracy a 7, when the average for Latin America was 4.3.¹¹¹ This further supports the assertion that participatory institutions helped build support around the government rather than the opposition.

¹⁰² Salas, 200-201.

¹⁰³ Derham, 235.

¹⁰⁴ John Smith of the US Department of Treasury; “Deepening Political and Economic Crisis in Venezuela: Implications for US Interests and the Western Hemisphere,” Hearing, Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Transnational Crime, Civilian Security, Democracy, Human Rights, and Global Women’s Issues, March 17, 2015.

¹⁰⁵ Ponniah et al., 104-113

¹⁰⁶ Bruce, 85.

¹⁰⁷ Bruce, 35-37.

¹⁰⁸ Bruce, 140.

¹⁰⁹ Martinez et al., 4.

¹¹⁰ Bruce, 22.

¹¹¹ Hellinger, 36.

Charisma

‘Great Man’ theory suggests individuals shape history in decisive ways through their charisma, wisdom, and agency.¹¹² There is strong evidence that Hugo Chávez himself precluded the formation of an armed insurgency in Venezuela from 1989 to 2013 by winning the support of the disgruntled masses and accumulating power through peaceful means.

Venezuela has a long history of *caudillismo* [cult of the strong man]. For more than half of the 20th Century, Venezuela was governed by civilian and military strong men defined by a charismatic personality.¹¹³ Chávez did not emerge from a vacuum—he was “an heir to the revolutionary traditions of the Venezuelan left.”¹¹⁴ Throughout his rise, he recognized the urban poor were ripe for mobilization by an energized political movement.¹¹⁵ Chávez so embodied a political insurgency that his opponents were labeled ‘counter-revolutionaries.’¹¹⁶ Said one Chávez supporter: “We are not *chavistas* here. We are revolutionaries.”¹¹⁷

Equally remarkable was that Chávez achieved the Bolivarian Revolution without an insurgency. Said Jose Vicente Rangel, a friend of Chávez: “He knows the word is much more powerful than the gun. He failed when he used the gun, and triumphed when he had access to the media. He spent ten years preparing a *coup d’etat* that failed militarily; the single minute they allowed him to appear on television was enough to conquer the country.”¹¹⁸

Chávez’s greatest asset was his legendary charisma. He was known for his beaming grin and ability to radiate confidence and optimism. He was a master of the surprise gesture and the rhetorical flourish, often with a considerable sense of theater.¹¹⁹ His ‘*por ahora*’ slogan, red beret, and imagery of Bolívar, established Chávez as the *Comandante*, or leader.¹²⁰

Chávez also embraced military élan and the legitimacy it gave his presidency. The Bolivarian movement organized itself in emulation of military structures and demanded that popular-participation organizations have military-type training. Although civilian attire would have been appropriate, Chávez attended many official ceremonies in military dress.¹²¹ The first thing the opposition did during the 2002 coup was take away Chávez’s military uniform.¹²² He also purchased the unwavering support of the military by frequently increasing their wages.

Chávez frequently invoked a litany of role models, including Jesus Christ, Simón Bolívar, and Che Guevara.¹²³ He created a weekly TV show called *Aló Presidente*, a marathon six-hour broadcast which included “a strange mix of chat-show, phone-in, distance learning and tele-evangelism.”¹²⁴ It highlighted the work of farming or cattle cooperatives, communal

¹¹² Dan Byman and Kenneth Pollack, “Let Us Now Praise Great Men: Bringing the Statesman Back In,” *International Security* 25, no. 4 (Spring 2001): 107-146.

¹¹³ Uzcategui, 144.

¹¹⁴ Gott, 16

¹¹⁵ McCoy et al., 47.

¹¹⁶ Uzcategui, 74.

¹¹⁷ Gott, 238.

¹¹⁸ Gott, 23.

¹¹⁹ Gott, 28.

¹²⁰ Brading, 50.

¹²¹ Uzcategui, 145.

¹²² Ponniah et al., 62.

¹²³ Bruce, 4.

¹²⁴ Bruce, 7.

production units, and neighborhood associations.¹²⁵ Direct contact with the people allowed Chávez to speak without his message being distorted by intermediaries.¹²⁶

Mano Dura

As in many Latin American countries, there are numerous examples of government ‘heavy-handed’ tactics against opposition movements. Many Venezuelans have harrowing memories of the 1960s insurgency and the government reaction when thousands of people were tortured, disappeared and assassinated by security forces.¹²⁷ Similarly, the violent government reaction to *Caracazo* was viewed as a warning to the poor not to cause more trouble. It worked for some time, perpetuating a climate of fear, hopelessness, and political apathy.¹²⁸ One of Chávez’s first decisions as president was to order the armed forces to carry out a broad civic action program called Plan Bolívar 2000, which brought the military into a wide range of domestic security and development activities.¹²⁹ He also undermined the traditional military hierarchy by promoting his friends. Writes one author: “The degree of politicization and civil-military conflict is unprecedented in Venezuela’s recent democratic history. Since the election of Chávez, the role of the armed forces has expanded rapidly, deemphasizing external defense in favor of internal missions.”¹³⁰

In the years prior to the 2002 coup, Chávez developed *Círculos Bolivarianos*, small armed groups charged with defending the revolution in local neighborhoods.¹³¹ These networks were crucial for fighting back against the coup. Chávez subsequently redefined them as community-based organization, which made them eligible for financial support from the government. They provided Chávez with important mechanisms to maintain and mobilize support for the regime.¹³²

After winning the recall referendum in 2004, Chávez further expanded his domestic security. He developed a new military doctrine to prepare the country against “an asymmetrical war,” created a force of two million urban reservists to support the “maintenance of internal order,” and increased the number of Cuban technical advisers from 20,000 to 50,000. The government also reformed the criminal code to ban acts of disrespect against public officials, aggressively prosecuted citizens who participated in the April 2002 march, and targeted more than 800 private properties for expropriation in 2005.¹³³

In addition to efforts to control the media, Chávez and Maduro went to great pains to limit space for civil society and free speech. University autonomy was recognized in the 1999 constitution but remains contentious. The *Movimiento 13 de Marzo* (M-13) is an anti-Chávez student organization based at the Universidad de Los Andes which has regularly taken to the streets with firearms and Molotov cocktails. Since 2007, the right-wing student movements under the name of *Movimiento Estudiantil Venezolano* have led protests against the

¹²⁵ Salas, 168.

¹²⁶ Derham, 266.

¹²⁷ Martínez et al., 15-16.

¹²⁸ Gott, 45.

¹²⁹ McCoy et al., 52.

¹³⁰ McCoy et al., 51.

¹³¹ Corrales et al., 70-71.

¹³² McCoy et al., 48.

¹³³ Corrales et al., 77.

government.¹³⁴ Nonetheless, there are also leftist student groups that work with the government to fight back against these groups.¹³⁵

Findings

There is little doubt that oil-funded social programs for the poor have been a necessary condition for Venezuelan stability for most of the 20th Century. Nonetheless, the political and economic conditions of the late 1980s and early 1990s were ripe for a guerrilla movement similar to those in other Latin American states. The steady collapse of the *Punto Fijo* political order introduced a transition period highly vulnerable to the development of an insurgency. Rising tensions culminated in the *Caracazo* riots, which were brutally subdued by *mano dura* government policies. This repression bought the government more time to continue their economic modernization, but only widened the gap between the aristocracy and the poor.

Chávez and fellow conspirators showed patience by waiting until 1992 to strike. While the coup failed for a number of tactical reasons—poor planning, coordination, and communication—it served an important role of uniting the discrete leftist movements behind Chávez. In accordance with his charisma and socialist ideology, Chávez gradually made the crucial decision that he could win power through existing political institutions rather than an armed rebellion. Thus, the Bolivarian Revolution was the insurgency that would have been expected, but the unique circumstances of Venezuelan politics meant Chávez was able to achieve the revolution through political means rather than protracted warfare.

Upon taking power in 1998, Chávez used a combination of social spending and political reform to maintain and expand his support base. Recognizing the importance of oil revenues, the Bolivarian government built its vision for 21st Century Socialism around the missions, which sustained its electoral popularity until oil prices began to fall—even as the economy broke down in other areas. Similarly, the frequent elections and creation of community councils have given the Bolivarian government legitimacy in the eyes of the majority of its people.

Throughout his time in office, Chávez had to outmaneuver a diversity of opponents—largely in the upper and middle classes. But these groups were weak, divided, and poorly positioned to organize an armed insurgency. Many in the upper class simply left Venezuela for the United States or other Latin American countries.¹³⁶ The middle class frequently used street protests, but their urban environment and Chávez's tight control of the military meant conditions were not favorable for guerrilla war. After nearly being overthrown in 2002, Chávez enhanced his *mano dura* counterinsurgency capabilities by writing a new military doctrine and increasing troop levels. Maduro has continued Chávez's policies, but lacks the oil revenues and charisma of his predecessor. As will be discussed in the final section, the next chapter of Venezuelan politics is rapidly unfolding.

Implications

What is the significance of these findings? This final section discusses the future of Venezuela and lessons for counterinsurgencies.

¹³⁴ Martinez et al., 236, 237.

¹³⁵ Martinez et al., 237

¹³⁶ From 2005 to 2010, the number of Venezuelan residents abroad jumped from 378,000 to 521,000; Pedro Pablo Peñaloza, "Number of outgoing Venezuelans on the rise," *El Universal*, January 13, 2014.

Future of Venezuela

In the run-up to the collapse of the *Punto Fijo* system, one author wrote,

“Venezuelans witnessed the scarcity of basic necessities among the poorest segments of society, massive hoarding and shortages of food items, a disproportionate increase in public transportation fares and gasoline prices, and police strategies for security that appeared to be based more on repression than on prevention. Added to this list were an institutional inability to prevent widespread abuse and a failure by the government to provide a rapid response to the situation.”¹³⁷

As noted in the introduction, the situation today is quite similar. In addition to the world’s highest inflation rate, the country faces massive shortages of food, medicine, and consumer goods due to currency and price controls, expropriations, and smuggling. The chairman of the largest domestic food producer said if the government does not seek aid to import food, it “will cause grave harm to ordinary Venezuelans.”¹³⁸ In addition, Venezuela has the second highest murder rate and is the ninth most corrupt country in the world.¹³⁹

Maduro attributes the country’s problems to “economic war” waged by speculators and foreigners. Only recently has he discussed taking common-sense measures such as raising the price of state-retailed gasoline, now below \$0.01 per gallon, and altering the currency exchange rate in which the US dollar is worth 150 times more on the black market than at the official rate.¹⁴⁰

As economic conditions deteriorate further, unrest will likely grow. Maduro will continue funding social missions to retain the support of the poor until he no longer can, but it is increasingly likely the opposition will take back power, thereby ending the Bolivarian Revolution. Without Chávez’s charisma, Maduro’s PSUV party may also splinter.¹⁴¹ The major question is whether this transition can be achieved peacefully. Maduro is up for a presidential election in 2018, but the opposition will seek a recall referendum in 2016.¹⁴² Even if the opposition is voted to power peacefully, it will face the exceedingly difficult task of reforming an economy which has been mismanaged for so long. As the Pérez administration learned, efforts to open the economy will be fought tooth-and-nail by the masses of people who are culturally and ideologically opposed to neoliberal economic policies. Chávez’s disestablishment of the political system will create serious challenges for Maduro’s successors.

Lessons for Counterinsurgency

This paper has argued that no single hypothesis can explain the lack of insurgency in Venezuela from 1989 to 2016. In fact, the absence of insurgency is less a result of structural or

¹³⁷ Tarver et al., *The History of Venezuela*, 142.

¹³⁸ “Prepare for the worst: Venezuela is heading toward complete disaster,” *The Washington Post*, February 11, 2016.

¹³⁹ “Global Study on Homicide: 2013,” United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2013; “Corruption Perceptions Index 2015,” Transparency International, 2015.

¹⁴⁰ “Prepare for the worst: Venezuela is heading toward complete disaster.”

¹⁴¹ Sullivan, 17.

¹⁴² The National Assembly recently approved new rules to speed up the process of requesting recall referendums; Justin Cosgrove, “Venezuela Congress approves new referendum rules,” *Jurist*, April 21, 2016.

systemic factors than a series of events driven by the decisions of key players—namely Hugo Chávez. Nonetheless, the following lessons emerge:

- *Social programs are an effective way to earn support from the socioeconomic classes most likely to start an insurgency.* As is well understood in countries like Saudi Arabia, citizens are less inclined to join insurgencies when they perceive their government is providing tangible benefits in the form of subsidies, education, or healthcare.
- *Local governance institutions allow citizens to feel more engaged in democracy.* In conjunction with social programs, greater local autonomy can dis-incentivize insurgency formation. Chávez implemented these reforms while consolidating power at the federal level.
- *Frequent elections are a good way to build government legitimacy.* Many dictators use elections to score political points, but Chávez understood the importance of frequent and (relatively) fair elections. He even welcomed the 2004 recall election and was able to mobilize millions of new voters to defend his mandate.
- *Mano dura policies often backfire, but strong domestic security capabilities can be a deterrent to insurgency formation.* Centuries of counterinsurgency suggest that heavy-handed tactics generally build popular support for the insurgency. Chávez never faced a mature insurgency, but his post-2002 military reforms helped convince the opposition that insurgency was unlikely to succeed.
- *Revolutionary political change can be achieved peacefully if led by a strong leader under favorable economic and political conditions.* While it is challenging to apply rigorous scientific method to factors like leadership and charisma, this case demonstrates the ability for a single individual to lead a relatively peaceful transition to a radically different ruling ideology.

About the Author

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