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____ [Developing an Analytical Framework for English-Language Jihadist Propaganda] _____

Has been read by the undersigned. It is hereby recommended for acceptance by the faculty with credit to the amount of 3 semester hours.

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Approved by Dean of Security and Global Studies
DEVELOPING AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR
ENGLISH-LANGUAGE JIHADIST PROPAGANDA

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of

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by

Anna C. Stites

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of

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Charles Town, WV
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my mother, who really quite wishes I had written it under a different name, to my father, who says he always saw this coming, and to my stepmother, who is always willing to discuss fifteenth century Spanish royalty at the drop of a hat. Without the support and blessing of your brilliant, analytical, and creative minds, I would not be who I am today.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my professor, Philip V. Fellman, for his guidance and patience; my mother, father, stepmother, stepfather, brother, and sister, whom I love dearly (and who have learned more second-hand information about jihadist propaganda than they ever intended); my friends Jessica and Nick for their willingness to watch whatever I sent them and give excellent feedback; James D. for the vigorous middle-of-the-night debates; my tireless proof-readers, including Reiko T. and Steven Ringgold (consider the favor repaid!); my friend Kelly for taking the time to listen to me work through new concepts; and my supervisors B, P, and S, who have been infinitely patient with me as I have balanced my work and studies over the past few years.
DISCLAIMER REGARDING SOURCE OF RESEARCH MATERIALS

This study was completed using *only* open-source materials. Any formerly classified or sensitive documents, as applicable, were accessed only in their redacted, declassified and public domain forms. The author of this study *did not* utilize any documents or knowledge obtained through access to classified or sensitive sources in completing this project, and did not access WikiLeaks or use any sources obtained from WikiLeaks at any time during this study.
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

DEVELOPING AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR
ENGLISH-LANGUAGE JIHADIST PROPAGANDA

by

Anna C. Stites

American Public University System, October 5, 2014

Charles Town, West Virginia

Professor Philip V. Fellman, Thesis Professor

This study is a bifurcated project. In the first portion of the project, the traditional analytical framework for propaganda is viewed through the lenses of the history of Islam, the theoretical framework of radicalization, and the discipline of applied linguistics, and is then adapted into a new analytical framework tailored specifically toward analyzing English-language jihadist propaganda. This tailored analytical framework includes components regarding the context of the jihadist organization, an assessment of the propaganda, and an assessment of the organization as a threat, and is based in Open-Source intelligence (OSINT) collection practices. Next, in the second section of the project, the English-language propaganda of the Islamic State, including both written and video media, is analyzed using the framework developed in the first section. From that analysis, the author is able to draw conclusions regarding the context, propaganda practices, and potential threats posed by the organization, culminating in an example of the policymaker recommendations that can be derived from an intelligence analysis conducted using this framework.
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“It is only a matter of time before terrorists begin routinely using Twitter, Instagram, and other services in ongoing operations . . . Imagine how much more of a spectacle it would have been if the Mumbai attacks and hostage-takings had been live-tweeted alongside instantly uploaded pictures and video of the events.”


“In the first twenty four hours after [a jihadist propaganda video] was posted on YouTube [it] was viewed 56,998 times . . . A high-definition format, about one gigabyte in size, carries death and mayhem to the home and portable cinemas worldwide. [One month following the posting of the video], the YouTube video has been viewed 124,704 times.”

– Prucha 2014a.

“When I hear the words “al Qaeda”, I think of . . . a few hundred “varsity” players rather than 10,000 disenfranchised young boys firing guns in the air, toting black flags and posting YouTube videos. Only a few of the smartest survivors of the Syrian jihad will be a threat to the West in the future . . . [not] ISIS and other faltering groups.”


ISIL is a terrorist organization, pure and simple. And it has no vision other than the slaughter of all who stand in its way. In a region that has known so much bloodshed, these terrorists are unique in their brutality.

–President Obama, September 2014.
I. INTRODUCTION

Background

In the past two to three years, jihadists’ use of social media and online recruiting methods has grown from a mere novelty to a game-changing phenomenon. Groups such as the Islamic State, operating in Syria and Iraq, are no longer limited to posting dull videos of monotonous sermons or passing along written text or PDFs. Instead, they are now engaging in proactive, targeted, English-language media campaigns that draw in large numbers of Westerners through the process of radicalization and recruitment, engaging that target audience to the point where many travel into active war zones in order to participate in this new form of jihad that is equal parts war campaign and PR campaign. By voluntarily publishing these materials, jihadist groups unwittingly provide a breadth of information regarding their ideology, propagandists, capability, operations and intentions to those who are willing to examine them.

Inasmuch as the traditional methodologies of analyzing propaganda and terror recruitment materials are inadequate to fully exploit this new genre of Open-Source intelligence (OSINT), the use of applied linguistics, dialectology, author identification, and graphic design/video production analysis will be key to developing a framework through which to analyze these materials, both written and audiovisual. Such a framework would help glean information through OSINT sources, on a rolling basis, that would be difficult or impossible to gain through traditional Human intelligence or Communications intelligence tasking.

Purpose Statement

This Capstone seeks to identify and develop a framework for analysis of English-language jihadist recruiting propaganda.
Research Question

This study seeks to discern what information English-language jihadist propaganda can provide regarding the producers’ ideology, propagandists, capability, operations and intentions.

Relevance

While terror recruitment isn’t new, and even English-language jihadist recruitment isn’t new, the ways in which terror groups like ISIS are using social media to very successfully recruit large numbers of Westerners to their case is novel, and will have long-term consequences for American security both domestically and abroad. Learning about these terror groups’ ideology, propagandists, capability, operations and intentions will not only help illuminate their actions overseas, but will also help forecast the most likely threats to the homeland from these groups.
II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This study aims to develop an analytical framework for English-language jihadist propaganda. In order to accomplish that goal, the existing theoretical and analytical frameworks for propaganda will first be reviewed. Second, the history of Islam and a few pertinent details will be explored, along with the theoretical frameworks of radicalization and applied linguistics, including the sub-disciplines of dialectology, World Englishes, and computational linguistics. Next, areas for further exploration – beyond the scope of this study – will be addressed. Thereafter, in the Findings section of this paper, the traditional framework for propaganda analysis will be examined through the lenses of Islamic history, radicalization, and applied linguistics, in order to develop a new analytical framework specific to English-language jihadist propaganda. Finally, in the Analysis section of this paper, the Islamic State’s English-language propaganda materials will be analyzed using this new framework, as both a case study and as proof of concept.

Propaganda

Characteristics of Propaganda

In his essay “The Characteristics of Propaganda,” Jacques Ellul helped create an understanding of how propaganda is created and disseminated, and why it is effective (Ellul 1965). Ellul argued that while “propaganda is a technique rather than a science” it is nonetheless “a modern technique . . . based on one or more branches of science” (Ibid, 1). Ellul’s study of propaganda was divided into three parts: the external characteristics of propaganda, the internal
characteristics of propaganda, and categories of propaganda” (Ibid 3, 19, 31); a summary of the key points of those sections follows herein.

External Characteristics

First, Ellul believed that propaganda must, “address itself at one and the same time to the individual and to the masses,” a distinction that is important because it is inefficient to attempt to sway individuals on a one by one basis, but equally inefficient to apply propaganda only when a crowd is gathered (Ibid, 3-4). This means that, “an individual never is considered as an individual, but always in terms of what he has in common with others, such as his motivations, his feelings, or his myths” (Ibid). Likewise, when addressing a crowd, propaganda “must touch each individual in that crowd . . . [and] must give the impression of being personal” (Ibid, 5).

Next, Ellul argued that “propaganda must be total,” and that “the propagandist must utilize all of the technical means at his disposal – the press, radio, TV, movies, posters, meetings, door-to-door canvassing” (Ibid, 6). While Ellul was writing before the advent of the Internet, his emphasis on utilizing all available media to convey a propaganda message seems to indicate that he would have been a proponent of Internet usage, as well. At the time of this essay’s publication, Ellul argued that, “each usable medium has its own particular way of penetration – specific, but at the same time localized and limited; by itself it cannot attack the individual, break down his resistance, make his decision for him” (Ibid). For reasons that will be addressed in further detail in the section on jihadism and the Internet hereinbelow, these restrictions on the penetration of each individual medium may no longer apply in the post-Internet world. In Ellul’s conceptual sphere, “total propaganda” refers to propaganda that “tries to surround man by all possible routes, in the realm of feelings as well as ideas, by playing on his will or on his needs,
through his conscious and his unconscious, assailing him in both his private and his public life” (Ibid, 7).

With regard to the continuity and duration of propaganda, Ellul argued that it must be both continuous, “in that it must not leave any gaps, but must fill the citizen’s whole day and all his days” and lasting, “in that it must function over a very long period of time” (Ibid, 11). Regarding the (largely state-sponsored) propaganda which Ellul visualized, this meant that “successful propaganda will occupy every moment of the individual’s life: through posters and loudspeakers when he is out walking, through radio and newspapers at home, through meetings and movies in the evening . . . the individual must not be allowed to recover, to collect himself, to remain untouched by propaganda during any relatively long period” (Ibid). In the context of (non-state-sponsored) English-language jihadist propaganda, this goal is clearly unattainable.

As for organization of propaganda, Ellul believed that in order for (state-sponsored) propaganda to succeed, “an organization is required that controls the mass media” (Ibid, 13) – again, an unattainable goal when the propaganda concerned is issued not by a state, but rather by a non-state entity.

Internal Characteristics

Ellul’s breakdown of the internal characteristics of propaganda included knowledge of the psychological terrain, fundamental currents in society, timeliness, the effects of propaganda on the undecided, the relationship of propaganda with the truth, and the problem of factuality (Ibid, 19-31). With regard to psychological terrain, Ellul posits that, “the propagandist must concern himself above all with the needs of those whom he wishes to reach . . . whether it be a concrete need (bread, peace, security, work) or a psychological need” (Ibid, 20). When
leveraging needs, Ellul states that “the most common feelings, the most widespread ideas [and] the crudest patterns” may create the best leverage for propaganda; therefore, “hate, hunger and pride make better levers of propaganda than do love or impartiality” (Ibid, 21). In the context of jihadist propaganda – especially that which is currently leveraging the local populations of Iraq and Syria – these levers exist in abundance, at the ready disposal of would-be propagandists.

Ellul’s dissection of the fundamental currents in society is likewise illuminating. Ellul states that one of the “great psychological reflection[s] of social reality is the myth . . . [which is] a vigorous impulse, strongly colored, irrational, and charged with all of man’s power to believe . . . [and which] contains a religious element” (Ibid, 22). The collective myths of a society are those which comprise “man’s principal orientations: the myth of Work, the myth of Happiness . . . the myth of the Nation, the myth of Youth, the myth of the Hero” (Ibid). Clearly, then, propaganda that is able to leverage all of these myths would have a strong pull on its audience. As examined in further detail hereinbelow, the ability to leverage these myths is one of the strongest traits of contemporary English-language jihadist propaganda.

Under the umbrella of factuality and intentions, Ellul addresses a key aspect of falsehood: “that the propagandist naturally cannot reveal the true intentions of the principal for whom he acts: government, party chief, general, company director” (Ibid, 30). He argues that “propaganda never can reveal its true projects or plans or divulge government secrets” because to do so “would be to submit the projects to public discussion, to the scrutiny of public opinion, and thus to prevent their success” (Ibid).
Categories of Propaganda

For the purposes of this study, one of the most useful distinctions that Ellul makes within categories of propaganda is the distinction between vertical and horizontal propaganda (Ibid, 39). Ellul defines vertical propaganda as that which is “made by a leader, a technician, a political or religious head who acts from the superior position of his authority and seeks to influence the crowd below” (Ibid). Horizontal propaganda, on the other hand, is “made inside the group (not from the top), where, in principle all individuals are equal and there is no leader” (Ibid, 40). Unlike vertical propaganda, in horizontal propaganda, “the individual makes contact with others at his own level rather than a leader” (Ibid). Within the context of English-language jihadist propaganda, this distinction is helpful: unlike most state-sponsored propaganda that would merely be vertical, English-language jihadist propaganda tends to incorporate both vertical and horizontal aspects.

How to Analyze Propaganda

In her piece “How to Analyze Propaganda,” a chapter from her book Propaganda & Persuasion with Garth S. Jowett, author Victoria O’Donnell outlines the prevailing modern framework for propaganda analysis (O’Donnell 2012, Kindle Location 5772). She begins by defining propaganda as “a deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist” (Ibid, Kindle Locations 5781-5782). O’Donnell notes that while her analytical framework – described as “a 10-step plan of analysis” – is a “schema [that] makes it difficult to study propaganda in progress because the outcome may not be known for a long time,” there are benefits to studying “propaganda in progress [because this] enables the analyst to observe media
utilization and audience response directly in actual settings” (Ibid, Kindle Locations 5785-5787). Of particular note in O’Donnell’s introduction are her notes that “contemporary propaganda techniques differ from past techniques mainly in the use of new media,” and that “new technologies must be taken into account, for the forms of media and how they are used have always been significant in propaganda” (Ibid, Kindle Locations 5790-5791). From the publication of O’Donnell and Jowett’s first edition in 1986 to their fifth edition’s publication in 2012, this “new media” to which they refer has indeed taken root. O’Donnell’s analytical framework for propaganda – generally speaking – progresses through the following ten steps: “identification of ideology and purpose, identification of context, identification of the propagandist, investigation of the structure of the propaganda organization, identification of the target audience, understanding of media utilization techniques, analysis of special techniques to maximize effect, analysis of audience reaction, identification and analysis of counterpropaganda, and completion of an assessment and evaluation” (Ibid, Kindle Locations 5773-5776). These steps – with a focus on their relation to the analysis of English-language jihadist propaganda – are reviewed in additional detail hereinbelow.

Ideology and Purpose

O’Donnell cites Martha Cooper’s definition of ideology as “a coherent ‘world view that determines how arguments will be received and interpreted’ and which ‘provides the basis for determining what is good, bad, right, wrong, and so forth’” (Ibid, Kindle Locations 5803-5805). O’Donnell’s framework suggests that the “propaganda analyst looks for ideology in both verbal and visual representations that may reflect preexisting struggles and past situations, current
frames of reference to value systems, and future goals and objectives” (Ibid, Kindle Locations 5808-5810).

Context

O’Donnell explains the importance of the propaganda’s relationship to current context in that “propaganda is like a packet of seeds dropped on fertile soil; to understand how the seeds can grow and spread, analysis of the soil— that is, the times and events— is necessary” (Ibid, Kindle Locations 5827-5828). In essence, in order for propaganda to be well received, the propagandist must create it with an eye to its audience. With regard to this project, learning how the propagandist(s) came to understand both their audience and the audience’s context is helpful to understanding the propagandist(s) himself or themselves.

Identifying the Propagandist

O’Donnell proposes that the “source of propaganda is likely to be an institution or organization, with the propagandist as its leader or agent” (Ibid, Kindle Location 5840). While the propagandist’s identity is revealed in some cases, in others, “it is necessary to conceal the identity to achieve the goals set by the institution” (Ibid, Kindle Locations 5841-5842).

Structure

O’Donnell states that, “successful propaganda campaigns tend to originate from a strong, centralized, decision-making authority that produces a consistent message throughout its structure” (Ibid, Kindle Locations 5851-5852). This consistency is key in analyzing English-language jihadist propaganda.
A leader’s style “may include the mythic elements of the ideology, a charismatic personality, and/ or identification with the audience” (Ibid, Kindle Locations 5855-5856). Even the selection of media types used to publish propaganda should be considered as part of an organization’s structure, as “often . . . the organization owns and controls its own media,” as “whoever owns the media exercises control over the communication of messages” (Ibid, Kindle Locations 5861-5862). For a non-state entity such as a jihadist group, who cannot control or own media, the methods of communication selected help illuminate the areas in which the group perceives its own weakness and strength.

Of additional interest is O’Donnell’s choice to quote Hitler’s Mein Kampf in defining the difference between propaganda’s ability to attracting followers and members. Per the quote, “The task of propaganda is to attract followers; the task of party organization is to win members. A follower of a movement is one who declares himself in agreement with its aims; a member is one who fights for ‘it’” (Ibid, Kindle Locations 5864-5866). A trait that’s perhaps unique to jihadist propaganda is that there is, practically speaking, little difference between the two. One who declares himself in agreement with the jihadist group’s aims, and who supports or aids the group in any way, is likely to be subject to the same legal ramifications as one who becomes a full member. O’Donnell proposes that an analyst review how one becomes a member, and also,

“Is there evidence of conversion and apparent symbols of membership? Does new membership require the adoption of new symbols, such as special clothing or uniforms, language, in-group references, and/ or activities that create new identities for the membership? Do rituals provide mechanisms for conversion or transformation to new identities?” (Ibid, Kindle Locations 5867-5869).

In the context of this project, knowing what the signs of membership are helps identify those individuals who are transitioning from outside to inside a jihadist group.
Target Audience

O’Donnell argues that “the propaganda message is aimed at the audience most likely to be useful to the propagandist if it responds favorably” (Ibid, Kindle Location 5895). For jihadist groups, who lack control over the media they use to publish, the message must be crafted in such a way as to reach its target regardless of when and where it was initially disseminated.

Media Utilization Techniques

Per O’Donnell, “modern propaganda uses all the media available” (Ibid, Kindle Location 5917). Further, beyond traditional media, even “musical anthems and patriotic songs are forms of conditioning, for people walk around whistling these melodies and even sing their children to sleep with them” (Ibid, Kindle Locations 5929-5930). When reviewing “various messages coming from the same source via the media [these messages] need to be compared to determine any consistency of apparent purpose” (Ibid, Kindle Locations 5932-5933). Further, for an analyst to describe the propagandist’s “media usage alone is insufficient in drawing a picture of media utilization, for the analyst must examine the flow of communication from one medium to another and from media to groups and individuals” (Ibid, Kindle Locations 5933-5935). In applications like jihadist propaganda, where the media flow occurs outside of the control of the propagandist, an analyst should attempt to discern the path that the media takes from the propagandist to the audience.

Maximizing Effect

Analysts should be aware, O’Donnell suggests, that propaganda “must be evaluated according to its ends . . . [which] may be desired attitude states, but they are more likely to be
desired behavior states such as donating, joining, and killing” (Ibid, Kindle Locations 5968-5969). In order to elicit these end states, whether attitudinal or behavioral, propagandists are likely to create resonance by conveying messages that are “in line with [the audience’s] existing opinions, beliefs, and dispositions” (Ibid, Kindle Location 5971). They may also choose to “work through those who have credibility in a community— the opinion leaders” (Ibid, Kindle Locations 5997-5998). By leveraging the voices of those viewed as credible – and using them to convey the message – propagandists may stand upon the shoulders of that credibility without needing to invest in building their own from scratch.

Audience Reaction

In gauging the target audience’s reaction, O’Donnell suggests that, “the most important thing to look for is the behavior of the target audience” (Ibid, Kindle Locations 6089-6090). This is exemplified not only by the audience’s actions on behalf of the propagandist entity, but also in “the audience’s adoption of the propagandist’s language, slogans, and attire” (Ibid, Kindle Location 6092).

Counterpropaganda

In some cases, “counterpropaganda may become as active as propaganda itself” (Ibid, Kindle Location 6103). Even so, it may not be “clear to the public that counterpropaganda exists to oppose propaganda,” (Ibid, Kindle Locations 6103-6104), and it may therefore be important to gauge whether a counterpropaganda campaign may be successful, or even whether it is perceptible at all.
Effects and Evaluation

The final step in O’Donnell’s ten-step analysis framework is to determine the propaganda’s effects and whether the propagandist’s goals have been accomplished (Ibid, Kindle Locations 6107-6119). Increases in membership, adjustments in mainstream society, and other outcomes are all gauges of propaganda’s efficacy (Ibid).

Islam

Sects of Islam

Islam is a faith whose adherents believe that “Allah [God] selected Muhammad, a merchant from Mecca, as the last of the prophets following Adam, Moses, Jesus, and others, to deliver God’s message to mankind” (Mark 2003, CRS-1). Muslims believe that following Muhammad’s death in 632, a schism occurred between groups who differed on how following leaders, or Caliphs, should be selected (Ibid). Those who would become the Sunnis favored succession through election of a Caliph, the first of whom was abu Bakr (Ibid). Those who would become the Shias believed that Muhammad had selected his son-in-law, Ali ibn Abu Talib, to be his heir as Caliph, with future Caliphs being drawn from Muhammad’s bloodline through the children of Ali and Fatima, Muhammad’s daughter (Ibid, 2-2). In the first two centuries of Islam’s existence, bloody feuds and assassinations characterized the two sects’ selection of rival Caliphs (Ibid, 2). The terms Shia and Sunni are drawn from their original allegiances, with the word Shia “stemming from the term ‘shi’at Ali,’ meaning ‘supporters’ or ‘helpers of Ali,’” and the word Sunni meaning “followers of [the Prophet’s] customs [sunna]” (Blanchard 2009, 1).
**Muslim Demographics**

As of the most recent *Pew Global Religious Landscape* study, with data from 2010, 1.6 billion Muslims comprised 23% of the world’s population (Pew Research Center 2012, 9). Approximately “15% of the world’s . . . Muslims are Shia and 85% are orthodox Sunni” (primer, 2). The remaining, much smaller, sects include the Zaydis of Yemen; the Druzes of Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and Israel; the Alawites (mostly of Lebanon and Syria, “generally considered to be derived from Shiite Islam”); and the Alevis of Turkey (Blanchard 2009, 5).

The median age of Muslims worldwide is 23, the lowest of all world religious groups – a sign that Islam has “a large share of adherents in fast-growing, developing countries” (Pew Research Center 2012, 13). While there are roughly 5-6 times as many Sunnis as Shias, between 68-80% of Shias worldwide “live in just four countries: Iran, Pakistan, India, and Iraq” (Pew Research Center 2009, 1).

**Power Balance in Iraq**

In Iraq, approximately 67-75% of the population is Shia – a majority status shared only by Shias living in Iran, Azerbaijan, and Bahrain (Ibid, 10). In spite of Iraq’s strong Shia majority (a rarity worldwide, as noted above), it was historically ruled by its powerful Sunni minority until the “removal of the Sunni-dominated Saddam Hussein regime [in 2003] . . . ended centuries of Sunni political dominance” (Blanchard 2009, 2). Iraq has a nearly 99% Muslim population, and only 25-33% of that population is comprised of Sunnis (Pew Research Center 2009, 10; 29). As a result, following the 2003 regime change, “lingering Shiite resentment and Sunni fears associated with this shift have helped transform local and individual political or economic disputes into broader sectarian confrontations” (Blanchard 2009, 2).
Power Balance in Syria

Like Iraq, Syria’s population is almost entirely Muslim: as of 2009, 91.2% of Syrians were Muslim (Pew Research Center 2009, 29). Unlike Iraq, however, only 15-20% of Syria’s Muslim population is Shia – a relatively small minority. In recent decades, Syria has been ruled by the Assad family, members of the tiny Alawite sect that is peripherally related to (although separate from) Syria’s Shia minority (Blanchard 2009, 5). Prior to the Syrian civil war, the Assad regime used a “combination of patronage and intimidation to secure the allegiance of Syria’s cities” that targeted both “city-dwelling minority communities, such as Christians, Alawites, and other sects; and rich, urban elites” (Kilcullen et al 2014, 9). Following the beginning of the Syrian civil war, however, Assad’s regime “accelerated ethno-sectarian rhetoric to garner support,” pitting both “minority [religious] communities . . . [and] rich, urban-based elites” against the “mainly-Sunni rural districts” (Ibid). The contrast between the power balances in Iraq and Syria, then, is effectively one between a largely-Shia state traditionally ruled and subjugated by a small Sunni minority, and a largely Sunni state ruled by an Alawite leadership perceived to be associated with its small Shia minority. In both cases, the countries were primed for sectarian violence prior to the outbreak of civil war, and have maintained that agitated state since its commencement.

Jihad, Salafism, and Word Choice

The concept of jihad is one that is widely misunderstood. It’s oftentimes misconstrued in popular culture as “holy war,” and while that is a meaning of jihad, it’s certainly not the only meaning – nor even one with which a majority of Muslims would agree. Jihad means different things to different sects, and to different individuals. Traditionally, jihad can be defined as “the
‘effort’ or ‘struggle’ each Muslim faces in the everyday trials of life, such as the effort to get better grades in school, or the striving to achieve better results from a job, or the struggle to avoid sinful temptations” – a personal, internal, and generally non-violent concept akin to living a “Godly” or righteous life (Mark, CRS-4). That being said, jihad has also historically been “applied to warfare [and it] often was a rallying cry for the military spread of Islam in the seventh through tenth centuries” (Ibid). In the modern era, for the non-Muslim community, the use of the word “jihad” and the use of “jihadist” as a descriptor have come to refer almost exclusively to those attempting to wage a holy war. In this context, the use of “jihadist” has had a great deal of overlap with the concept of “Salafi jihadism.”

Salafis, also known as Wahhabis, are Sunnis that follow the teachings of a “movement that seeks to purify Islam of any innovations or practices that deviate from the seventh-century teachings of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions” (Blanchard 2008, CRS-1). Even among Salafis, an “advocacy of [violent] jihad is a relatively recent phenomenon and remains highly disputed within these groups” (Ibid, CRS-3-4). Salafism emerged from a history of “scholasticism, political quietism, and social programs” from the 1920s through 1970s to a new prominence in the 1980s in Saudi Arabia where “a new generation of Salafis began to agitate against the royal family, pushing for a more Islamic foreign policy and conservative social reforms” (McCants 2012, 6). Concurrently with this agitation, “the ascendancy of militancy within the wider Salafi community [can be dated] to the war of resistance against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan” (Blanchard 2008, CRS-4). That militant turn created “violent Salafist-inspired groups such as Al Qaeda [which] continue to advocate the overthrow of . . . regimes and the establishment of states that will sustain puritanical Islamic doctrine enforced under a strict application of shari’a or Islamic law” (Ibid). Even now, however, “the majority of
Salafi adherents do not advocate the violence enshrined in Bin Laden’s message” (Ibid). It has been argued that there exist “three major factions [of Salafis]: the purists, the politicos, and the jihadis” (Wiktorowicz 2006, 208). While the “purists emphasize a focus on nonviolent methods of propagation, purification, and education,” the politicos “emphasize application of the Salafi creed to the political arena,” and the “jihadis take a more militant position and argue that the current context calls for violence and revolution” (Ibid). To reiterate: only some Muslims are Sunnis, only a small number of Sunnis are Salafis, and only a minority of Salafis endorse the concept of militant jihad.

The history of Shia jihadism is more limited than Sunni jihadism, and for a specific reason. Shias believe that their Twelfth Imam was “taken into occultation by God in 874” and reappeared in 941 before disappearing once again in the “Great Occultation” (Moghadam 2003, 2). Shias further believe that this “Hidden Imam” is “alive and will eventually return as the Mahdi, ‘the one guided by God’ who will usher in the End of the Days ‘to fill the world with justice and equity’” (Ibid). Shia jihadism has historically been more limited than Sunni jihadism because “following the Occultation of the Twelfth Imam, Shi’i theory holds [that] no lawful expansionist jihad can be fought” (Ibid, 3). Nonetheless, there have been Shia groups in modern history that have sought to find loopholes in the “time-out [on jihad] as long as the Twelfth Imam is in his ghayba [concealment]” (Ibid). In 1980, for example, Iran’s Ayatollah Khomeini reportedly declared jihad against the non-Muslim world by saying the following to a “group of 120 Pakistani Army officers on a pilgrimage to the Iranian holy city of Qom:

“We are at war against infidels. That this message with you – I ask all Islamic nations, all Muslims, all Islamic armies and all heads of Islamic states to join the holy war. There are many enemies to be killed or destroyed. Jihad must triumph” (Bodansky 1993, 2-3).
Following Khomeini’s declaration of jihad, the Hezbollah-affiliated Islamic Jihad Organization carried out a series of terrorist attacks including the 1983 U.S. Embassy and Marine barracks bombings in Beirut (U.S. Department of State 2012). Taking these examples into account, however, modern militant Shia Islamism tends to be state-sponsored, and not as often associated with independent terror groups.

The type of English-language jihadist propaganda this framework is intended to address, on the other hand, most often comes from militant Salafist (and therefore Sunni) groups like al Qaeda and the Islamic State. Thus, for purposes of clarity, hereafter in this paper (unless otherwise specified) the words “jihad” and “jihadist” will be used to refer to military jihadism and the subset of violent Salafis who endorse it.

**Jizya and People of the Book**

Under Islamic tradition, Christians and Jews have historically been considered “People of the Book” – i.e., people of the “Old and New Testaments” – who are “accorded protection, respect, and consideration as the predecessors to the Muslims” (Mark, CRS-4). This concept is connected with that of the jizya tax historically levied by Muslim regimes upon certain non-Muslim monotheists, known as dhimmis (Arzt 2002, 25). The practice of dhimmitude entitled Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians the “freedom to practice their religion” and also, per the pledge of Muhammed [sic] “to the Christians of Najran and the neighboring territories . . . the security of God . . . for their lives, their religion, and their property” (Ibid, 25-26). In exchange for paying this tax, the dhimmis were required to “submit to Muslim rule” and acknowledge their status as second-class citizens (Ibid, 27). As protected dhimmis, “even in the most militant versions of jihad, [monotheists] were not to be attacked outright without first receiving a
summons (\textit{da’wah}) either to convert or to submit to the \textit{jizya} tax” (Ibid, 21). This provided monotheists faced with Muslim rule with three choices: the payment of \textit{jizya}, “conversion to Islam . . . [or death by] their defeat in war” (Ibid, 27).

Unlike \textit{dhimmis}, however, those considered to be “polytheists and idolators” were offered a different – and much less hopeful – set of three choices: “slavery, conversion to Islam, or death; no special communal contract allowed them to quietly or even humbly practice their religion” (Ibid).

Radicalization

\textbf{Traditional Radicalization and Recruitment}

In the context of this paper, the term “radicalization” is used to refer to the process by which an individual begins to embrace radical religious ideology. Perhaps the two best-known theoretical frameworks regarding radicalization are the Lofland-Stark theory developed as a result of research into the radicalization of members of Reverend Sun Myung Moon’s Unification Church (Sageman 2004, 126) and Marc Sageman’s “bunch of guys” theory, tracing the induction of individuals into militant Salafism (Ibid, 115). Additional frameworks useful for investigating traditional recruitment include Cottee’s theory of jihadism as a response to social strain, and the Rubicon theory of turning-point radicalization. A final subsection herein will examine jihad’s audience and the importance of terminology in both radicalization and jihad.

\textbf{Lofland-Stark Theory}

As a result of their study of “Moonies” from 1962-1963, John Lofland and Rodney Stark developed a “seven-step theory of conversion” consisting of the following steps:
“(1) Experience enduring, acutely felt tensions (2) within a religious problem-solving perspective, (3) which leads him to define himself as a religious seeker; (4) encountering the D.P. [Divine Principle] at a turning point in his life, (5) wherein an affective bond is formed (or pre-exists) with one or more converts; (6) where extra-cult attachments are absent or neutralized; (7) and, where, if he is to become a deployable agent, he is exposed to intensive interaction” (Ibid, 126).

The “pool of potential recruits” is defined by those “first three elements,” meaning that “prospective converts generally are ‘religious’ in the sense of imposing religious meanings on events . . . experienced considerable tension, [or] discrepancy between some imaginary, ideal state of affairs and the circumstances in which they actually saw themselves,” and tended to seek “the solution of this tension in religion, becoming religious seekers” (Ibid, 127). A potential recruit’s final conversion – the last step – “involved a chance encounter with someone involved with the movement, which escalated quickly into strong affective bonds, despite the fact that the prospective converts had strong reservations about the group’s doctrines” (Ibid). When the potential recruit lacked “strong countervailing outside ties . . . [and] such bonds developed, the prospective convert joined the group; when they failed to develop, he did not join” (Ibid).

“Bunch of Guys” Theory

Marc Sageman’s “bunch of guys” theory expands upon the Lofland-Stark theory by considering both how potential recruits might be predisposed toward radicalization and how their affective bonds with insiders develop. In his 2004 work Understanding Terror Networks, Sageman found that “not everyone is responsive to religious appeal,” and that “those receptive to a religious appeal accept the notion of an active supernatural dimension,” a hallmark of those with “an intimate familiarity with concepts of faith, as in a person raised in a religious household” (Ibid, 115). Since “present deep commitment to a religion . . . would bar the development of a new commitment,” and “people who are satisfied with their religion will not
seek a new more demanding sect,” the “Muslims most receptive to global Salafi ideology grew up with religion but either were no longer committed to it or already embraced Salafism” (Ibid).

Sageman further argues that, “people will not [usually] seek new religious or social affiliations except after some significant change that disrupts their social networks” (Ibid, 116). Following such a disruption, the radicals studied by Sageman found themselves drawn to Salafi Islam, which Sageman considers “one of the most communal of all religions, with many orchestrated shared rituals,” and which is “very strict in its code of conduct and prescribes various codes of appearance, dress, diet, and conduct, especially vis-à-vis gender roles” (Ibid). For those would-be adherents seeking a clear answer to their problems, Sageman argues that the “simplicity of [Salafism’s] interpretations [offers a] single solution devoid of ambiguity” (Ibid).

Ultimately, Sageman finds that when these individuals – predisposed to looking for answers in religion, and challenged by tension – formed “friendship groups . . . around [their] mosques,” these new groups each “became a ‘bunch of guys’” (Ibid, 115). The “interactivity among [these] ‘bunches of guys’ acted as an echo chamber which progressively radicalized them collectively to the point where they were ready to collectively join a terrorist organization” (Sageman 2008, 115-116). Inside this echo chamber, “this intensification of religious feelings and conversion to Salafi Islam . . . made the prospective mujahed’s religious affect, behavior, and thinking conform to that of his friends and kin . . . [which in turn] made him even closer to his social group” (Sageman 2004, 118).

Newly minted Salafis engage in “highly visible” behaviors like “growing one’s beard, dressing like a traditional Muslim, and giving up some of one’s pleasures” which are felt to be “sacrifices for God and the true community” (Ibid). Sageman posits that “only the most motivated and dedicated will be willing to bear the social, personal, and economic costs of
becoming a Salafist,” and as a result, “those who feel that society as a whole has the least to offer them are the most likely to join” (Ibid). As a result, “only [those] individuals with serious, albeit temporary distress, who feel that they have little to lose, would accept such severe upfront costs of joining,” because they are the ones most likely to “tolerate the strict regimentation and state of high tension with society that participation in the sect involves” (Ibid). It is in fact this sense of “hardship . . . [and its concomitant] emotional commitment to fellow members” which “fosters a sense of serenity, relieving the previous distress [by allowing a full] spiritual acceptance of sectarian beliefs” (Ibid).

Jihadism as a Response to Social Strain Theory

In his 2011 work “Jihadism as a Subcultural Response to Social Strain: Expanding Marc Sageman’s ‘Bunch of Guys’ Thesis,” published in the Terrorism and Political Violence journal, Simon Cottee examined Sageman’s radicalization framework through the lens of social strain theory. Cottee draws on “Robert K. Merton’s concept of social strain, according to which the social structure ‘exerts a definite pressure upon certain persons in the society to engage in nonconformist rather than conformist conduct,’” (Cottee 2011, 735). He then goes on to argue that “second and third generation Europeanized Muslim males” are subject to especially powerful social strains:

“They face systematic discrimination in the labor market. They are underrepresented in public and political life. They live in an atmosphere of hostility and distrust toward their cultural and religious background. And they are uprooted culturally: torn between the conflicting claims of two different cultures—that of their parents and the secular Western societies into which they were born or assimilated. Whereas the former identity is perceived as irrelevant to the uniquely late-modern circumstances and challenges they face in the West, the latter is experienced as precariously fragile, since it is constantly called into question by the enmity and exclusion they routinely experience in their everyday relations with the secular Western societies in which they live” (Ibid, 738).
Cottee believes that these social strains inform the way in which these young men seek relief, arguing that, “[the most recent wave of] jihadism can be described as a collective solution, devised by young westernized Muslim males, to resolve their twin problems of status-frustration and identity-confusion” (Ibid). Those who “come to feel these strains with especial vehemence, and for whom the cumulative weight of rejection and identity-conflict becomes intolerable” are most likely, in Cottee’s estimation, to feel that joining a “jihadist group” will satisfy their needs (Ibid). Such a group not only “[establishes] a set of status criteria in terms of which its members can more easily succeed,” but also “[provides] a set of values and subcultural style by means of which they can express their rejection of Western secular society—the source of their status frustration and identity conflict—and justify corrective retaliation against it” (Ibid).

Torn by both their perceived lack of status and their conflicted sense of identity, these men are strongly drawn toward the subculture of jihad. By becoming a member of “the jihadist subculture,” an alienated, conflicted young Muslim man “undergoes a radical transformation of self: he becomes a holy warrior, a soldier for Islam, a righteous brother” (Ibid, 739). In doing so, he “not only elevates himself in terms of status, but also at the same time refashions a formerly split self into a cohesive collective identity grounded in a long and prestigious . . . tradition—the tradition of the Prophet and his companions” (Ibid).

Rubicon Theory of Turning-Point Behavior

In 2011, authors Dominic D.P. Johnson and Dominic Tierney outlined their theory of turning-point behavior, referred to hereinafter as the Rubicon theory. Rubicon theory is so named, per Johnson and Tierney, for Caesar’s declaration to his army prior to crossing the Rubicon river in route to attacking Rome that continuing on their path would mean either victory
or death for treason against the Roman republic, with no chance of turning back (Johnson et al 2011, 7). Johnson and Tierney posit that “when people believe they have crossed a psychological Rubicon and perceive war to be imminent, they switch from . . . a ‘deliberative’ to an ‘implemental’ mind-set” (Ibid.) Before they reach a turning point, actors are in a “deliberative mind-set,” in which they “adopt a relatively objective approach to judgment and decisionmaking, weighing the expected utility of different options in an effort to make the best selection” (Ibid, 14). Having passed a turning point, however – a Rubicon moment – actors find themselves in an “implemental mind-set” in which they are “committed to the course of action that has been chosen or forced on them” (Ibid). Those in an implemental mindset are likely to double down; they “focus intensely on getting the task done and resist reconsidering decisions they have already made or contemplating other courses of action,” turning into “narrow-minded partisans of their plans of action” (Ibid, 14-15). In the context of terrorism, this means that when an individual feels that he or she has been pushed past a point of no return, they will commit to their current path with an unwavering faith in its success. Further, this applies not only to choices made by the subject, but also to Rubicon crossings “triggered . . . by the imposition of a course of action from some other source” (Ibid, 20). For purposes of radicalization, even if a Rubicon moment isn’t triggered by a subject’s own actions, this means that external forces – such as a government action – can trigger that moment, leading an ambivalent subject to commit fully to a radicalized path.

American vs. European Recruitment Differential

Cottee, in his examination of radicalization and jihadism as a response to social strain, found a distinct set of circumstances unique to American would-be recruits in contrast to
European would-be recruits. Cottee argued that, “Al Qaeda’s third wave consists largely of second and third generation Europeanized, lower-class Muslim males” because while “this group is deeply and unavoidably immersed in Western culture . . . the defining and widely advertised values and aspirations of that culture are systematically withheld from it, creating a deep reservoir of frustration and resentment” (Cottee 741). He finds that “Americanized Muslims, by contrast, are not subject to the same strains, and hence jihadi attacks and plots among this quarter, though not negligible, are comparatively few in number” (Ibid). This is because while “Americanized Muslims are no less immersed in Western culture than their European counterparts . . . they are far better placed in the social structure to achieve the rewards it has to offer” (Ibid). While “the ‘American Dream’ has generally worked well for Muslims in the United States, who are both better educated and wealthier than the average American,” young European Muslim men face an unemployment rate “about two to three times higher than the comparable unemployment rate in the ‘native’ population” (Ibid). Because of this differential, “for young Europeanized Muslim males, the appeal of the jihadist solution is clearly greater than for their Americanized counterparts” (Ibid). One possible extrapolation of this difference in circumstances is that an increase in Islamophobia and concurrent decrease in social status for young American Muslims could result in a rise in the potential American pool of recruits for radicalization, to a level commensurate with their European counterparts.

A separate theory on the differential between European and American jihadist recruitment and terrorist acts is that espoused by Brian Michael Jenkins in his 2011 work, “Stray Dogs and Virtual Armies: Radicalization and Recruitment to Jihadist Terrorism in the United States Since 9/11” (Jenkins 2011). Jenkins argued that when controlled for the differences in the size of their Muslim populations, Europe and America actually have comparable numbers of
radicalized individuals, as counted by arrests or prosecutions (Ibid, 7). The true difference, argues Jenkins, “is in the quality of activity” (Ibid, 8). While “most terrorist plots in the United States have not gone beyond the discussion stage,” Jenkins found, “Europe has suffered some spectacular jihadist terrorist attacks” (Ibid). He went on to suggest that, “the failed terrorist attempts and terrorist plots uncovered and foiled by authorities in Europe have also been far more serious than those in the United States” (Ibid). While that difference may indeed be inherent to the fact that European jihadists are more likely to attempt more serious acts of terrorism, this author would suggest that an alternative explanation might lie in the stage at which American authorities are likely to intervene in – and disrupt – American terror plots. If nothing else, this might embody a line of research that could be explored in the future, building upon Jenkins’s work.

**Online Recruitment and Use of Social Media**

The radicalization of potential jihadist recruits, however, is no longer limited to traditional methods. In the mid 2000s, a new movement emerged in which Internet and social media played an increasingly prevalent role in both radicalization and recruitment. Some of the most prominent pieces regarding this phenomenon come from Sageman and Cottee, along with others as set forth hereinbelow.

Sageman’s Leaderless Jihad

In 2008, Sageman published *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century*, intended to be an updated companion to his 2004 work *Understanding Terror Networks*. *Leaderless Jihad* was written with the explicit purpose of examining “the effect of this
communicative revolution on terrorism” (Sageman 2008, 115). Building on the “bunch of guys” theoretical framework, Sageman argued that, “the same process [of radicalization] is taking place online” (Ibid, 116). Sageman alludes to online forums as alternate refuges for those pushed out of “physical militant sites, like radical mosques,” by the “close [monitoring of] law enforcement authorities,” and argues that as a result of this shift, “the new forums have the same influence that these radical mosques played in the previous generation of terrorists” (Ibid).

Jihadi Media Consumption

Cottee theorized in 2011 that the manner in which “jihadis consume and actively recreate jihad-related images, movies and music” was an area deserving further research, as even “the most cursory examination of these websites reveals a subculture drenched in violent defiance, delighting in the breaking of taboos and the mocking of civilized norms” (Cottee, 744). Drawing on his theoretical framework of jihadism as a subcultural response to social strain, Cottee highlighted how jihadist media highlighted the subversive or delinquent aspects of its creators’ psyches, noting that:

“In this subterranean virtual world, it is entirely commonplace to see footage of smiling suicide bombers affectionately patting their explosives as they prepare to die for the cause. It is also commonplace to see, variously, photographs of young children dressed as suicide bombers; video compilations of suicide attacks on American forces in Iraq, scored with hip-hop beats and raps; footage of mutilated American soldiers; videos of ritualized beheadings; and endless video clips of jihadists in various conflict zones firing RPG’s and AK47’s, evidently the two preferred weapons of choice among jihadi fighters” (Ibid).

Evolving Use of the Internet

Beyond Sageman and Cottee, one of the earliest works to examine the novelty of Internet use in recruitment was Bailey and Grimalia’s 2007 piece entitled “Running the Blockade,” which
theorized that three separate groups were attempting to use the Internet to “[erode] the power of traditional Islamic authorities” and their censorship: “terrorist groups,” who were “uniting in an effort to ‘reform’ Islam and popularize what once was a minority message,” American-sponsored groups, and “independent media [which] is penetrating Islamic societies with critical religious thought” (Bailey et al 2007, 523). One of the key concepts therein was the theory that “as freedom of information emerges in the Middle East, the technologies that make it possible become a decisive weapon in the battle of ideas” (Ibid).

In 2009, George Michael’s piece on Adam Gadahn’s propaganda work for al Qaeda addressed some of the first widespread English-language jihadist propaganda (Michael 2009). Gadahn’s videos established a kind of template for audiovisual English-language jihadist propaganda efforts: a single man, sitting in front of a camera, in front of a plain or absent background, reciting the propagandist message (Ibid, 139). Gadahn’s early videos established several of the hallmarks of early English-language jihadist videos, among them a sermon or lecture to an English-speaking audience and the issuance of a series of demands that must be met in order for anti-American or anti-Western jihadist violence to cease – indeed, one of his videos was entitled simply “Legitimate Demands” (Bailey et al, 140; Gadahn 2007). Gadahn’s videos are also characterized by his habit of directly addressing not only his audience of potential recruits, but also those policymakers – past or present – whom he wishes to shame or accuse.

One example of such an attempt at public shaming occurred in his 2007 video, when he stated, “Bush, you thought you would be remembered by history as the president who waged a series of successful crusades against the Muslims. Instead, you will go down in history not only as the president who embroiled his nation in a series of unwinnable and bloody conflicts in the Islamic world, but as the president who sent the United States off on its death march towards its breakdown and disintegration” (Bailey et al, 140).
Certainly, no review of the online jihadist presence would be complete without a mention of Anwar Al Awlaki, the “prominent and ‘highly dangerous’ planner and trainer for ‘Al Qaeda and all of its franchises’” (Dean et al 2012, 9). As Gadahn’s predecessor and fellow al Qaeda member, Al Awlaki was a prolific jihadist and publisher prior to his death by drone strike in September 2011. Over 5,000 instances of Al Awlaki’s videos were posted on YouTube by 2010 (Ibid), and as a study performed one year following his death showed, those videos had been viewed “more than 3,000,000 times,” with “that number . . . [increasing] daily ever since” (MEMRI 2012).

Beyond YouTube, “traditionally, the online presence of a terrorist organisation consisted primarily of a website and possibly a private forum to facilitate jihadist discussions” – a system which effectively created “an ‘elitist community’ . . . with those people on the outside having difficulty accessing the community” (Dean et al, 6). As a result, Facebook became popular in that it “[allowed] terrorist organisations to avoid this issue” (Ibid). Later, Twitter rose to prevalence among online jihadist organizations due to “both its ability to send out instant messages to large numbers of people, and from the ability for people to follow particular topics as well as groups” (Ibid, 8).

In a 2013 panel produced by the New America Foundation’s National Security Program on “Online Radicalization: Myths and Realities” Peter Neumann argued that the Internet was bringing together like-minded individuals – and potential recruits from around the world, reasoning that, “You now have cases of violent extremism popping up in places where there isn’t really a physical community to speak of. Why? Because you can be part of an enormous, vibrant, active, exciting virtual community even when there is no physical community” (Neumann et al, 2013).
Author and analyst Aaron Y. Zelin has consistently been at the forefront of research into jihadist propaganda and media, not only collecting primary materials from jihadist websites, forums and social media to his website Jihadology.net, but also publishing academically. His pieces “Jihadis and the Use of the Terms Terror, Terrorist, and Terrorism: A Contextual and Semantic Understanding from Islamic Tradition” from the 2011 conference Re-Visioning Terrorism, his co-authored work on “The YouTube Jihadists: A Social Network Analysis of Al-Muhajiroun’s Propaganda Campaign” from Perspectives on Terrorism (2012), and his pioneering work “The State of Global Jihad Online: A Qualitative, Quantitative, and Cross-Lingual Analysis” published through the New America Foundation (2013) have helped establish the field of study, and have greatly informed this project and influenced this researcher’s academic development.

Tracking Online Radicalization: the Jihadica Model

In May 2014, researchers Ali Fisher and Nico Prucha used the terrorism analysis website Jihadica.com as a platform to explore “the sophistication of the jihadist use of social media to disseminate their video content” and the structure “data networks” through which this content is disseminated (Prucha 2014a). Taking as an example the release of an Islamic State video entitled “Salil al-sawarim (Sas)” or “The Clanging of the Swords,” Fisher and Prucha tracked the spread of the video (initially posted on YouTube) across social media platforms by tracking the video’s title and connected hashtags as they appeared on Twitter (Ibid). In the first forty-eight hours following the posting of the video, the researchers “observed a total of 32,313 tweets carrying the name of the video,” corresponding to 56,998 viewings of the video within the first twenty-four hours (Ibid). Fisher and Prucha concluded that jihadist “information is shared through a resilient
and dispersed network . . . [and that this] network has sufficient interconnection and redundancy to continue to operate despite the current level of account suspensions” (Ibid). In analyzing how the video was shared, Fisher and Prucha mapped out “a network of 6,428 Twitter users and 19,601 edges,” resulting in the conclusion that “there are a number of different users that were prominent in different sections of the network” (Prucha 2014b). Instead of “the majority of the network orbiting one of a few influential accounts, in a series of hub and spoke structures,” they found that “this network has multiple interconnected hubs through which information flows in multiple directions” (Ibid). This type of structure “creates a level or redundancy providing the network with a degree of resilience that allows information to continue to flow in the event that some Twitter accounts may be suspended,” due to the fact that “the interconnected hubs provide a level of redundancy so there are a number of other pathways through which information can flow” (Ibid). A feature of these types of “distributed communications systems [is that they] need a relatively low level of redundancy for the majority of the network to maintain communication in the event of major network disruption” (Ibid).

In isolating “only those users who have at least one mutual connection – meaning they have mentioned someone who has also mentioned them,” Fisher and Prucha were able to identify “a core group of users” which “contains 165 Twitter accounts . . . including all of the top twenty five most mentioned users” (Ibid). The researchers found that the manner in which jihadist materials are distributed through social media platforms mean that “with the loss of the five most connected nodes . . . every remaining node would still be connected to this network,” and likewise that even “the removal of the five most important nodes” would result in “every remaining node . . . still [being] connected to the network” (Ibid).
Finally, Fisher and Prucha concluded that the release of this video “highlights the multiplatform zeitgeist which has become a feature of the Jihadist social media phenomenon,” and noted that,

“Accounts on one social media platform are used to reinforce the content on other social media platforms, creating mutually reinforcing connections across platforms. This means users could turn to Facebook or Google+ if a specific Twitter account is suspended to locate the replacement Twitter account. In reality most jihadists that take the propagation element of their activity seriously have back-up accounts already set up with users following their primary account directed to also follow the back-up in case of an account suspension” (Ibid).

This type of network redundancy, due to the distributed communications systems utilized by jihadists online, poses a dilemma for both the policymaker and the analyst. While it may seem advantageous from the policymaker’s perspective to suspend accounts of those involved in spreading jihadist propaganda online, such suspensions are not likely to prevent the spread of the materials, as the jihadists will still be able to communicate. Instead, such suspensions will prevent analysts from effectively tracking the online jihadist presence, the individuals who participate in sharing this media, and the response of potential recruits to propaganda products. The ability to track the response of potential recruits to the publication of propaganda materials – a massive, quick sharing of a new video, for example, or conversely identifying those accounts that un-follow propaganda distributors following the publication of a beheading video – would be incredibly valuable. Such an ability would potentially allow for an increased quality of threat discrimination, isolating those who are intrigued by the jihadist materials from those who indicate a willingness to join up with the group. Suspending the most visible accounts will not end those individuals’ communication, however – only the analysts’ ability to track it.
Jihad: An Act with an Audience

Jihad – returning to its earlier, paper-specific definition as action in furtherance of violent, militant Salafist ideology – is not an act performed in a vacuum. Instead, it is an act performed with a specific audience in mind. In his 2013 book *Terrorism and Communication: A Critical Introduction*, Jonathan Matusitz proposes that, “terrorists ‘speak’ through the actions they take,” and that “the set of interactions between terrorist and society represent a dialogue” (Matusitz 2013, 77). Matusitz states that, “terrorists take part in a dialogue with various audiences beyond their immediate target, both internal and external to the group,” and goes on to say that “the message may vary for each audience, even within the context of just one act” (Ibid).

Similar to Matusitz’s theory is that proposed by Jørgen Staun, who recounts that, “when non-state terrorism was invented in its modern form in the second half of the nineteenth century, it was understood as ‘propaganda by the deed’” (Staun 2009, 10). Staun believes that “some sort of violent act is committed or threatened of in order to send a signal to an audience, for example the public in a specific country,” and that this type of “sending a signal is an act of communication and should be studied accordingly” (Ibid).

It is important however, for the purpose of this study, to acknowledge that the “act” in question need not be a physical one, but may also take the form of propaganda itself. Just as an act of terror is calibrated by its perpetrators as a message – or communication – from its creator to its audience or audiences, the same can be said for jihadist propaganda. A 2006 evaluation of the “Analysis and Evolution of the Global Jihadist Movement Propaganda” was delimited only to include such “material . . . [that is] directed to an audience that goes beyond the domain of the terrorist organisation,” specifically, “propaganda [that] has been produced to be consumed by as many people as possible, distributed for easy access independent of inevitable and logical
language, material, or logistical barriers” (Torres et al 2006, 401). In establishing an analytical framework for English-language jihadist propaganda, this project will combine and extend the frameworks of Matusitz, Staun, and Torres to include propagandist works directed at audiences not only external but also internal. Further discussion on this division – and upon characterization of subdivisions therein – will follow in the “Findings” section of this paper.

Applied Linguistics

Background

The field of applied linguistics has been defined as “the academic discipline concerned with the relation of knowledge about language to decision making in the real world” (Davies 2007, 2). Alternatively, it has also been defined as “the theoretical and empirical investigation of real-world problems in which language is a central issue” (Ibid, 3). Main “areas of concern” for applied linguistics study include “language and education; language, work, and law; and language information and effect” (Ibid, 2).

One subfield of applied linguistics is forensic linguistics, which is “the stylistic analysis of statements made to the police by those accused of criminal activity” (Ibid, 103). While the field of forensic linguistics is arguably inapplicable to an intelligence- and terrorism-based analytical framework for jihadist propaganda (putting aside momentarily the question of whether terrorism should be handled under criminal or military systems of justice), it still comprises a body of knowledge with lessons to lend to analysis of jihadist propaganda. A forensic linguist reviewing a transcript of a suspect’s confession, for example, would assess it through “Careful judgment of the accused’s level of English proficiency,” in the case of a non-native English speaker, “as well as a thorough stylistic analysis of the transcripts so as to infer whether someone
at the proficiency level of the accused was likely to have made those statements and whether the transcript showed consistency of proficiency” (Ibid).

Second Language Acquisition

Within the field of applied linguistics, a sub-field of study is that of second language acquisition research, or L2A research (Birdsong 2004, 82). In L1A, or first language acquisition, “uniform [success]” in learning the language is expected, “with all normal children attaining full competence” (Ibid, 83). In second language acquisition, however, “the mature grammar may be incomplete vis-à-vis the target grammar, or it may diverge from it” (Ibid). In essence, non-native speakers of a language – or those speakers who have acquired it as a second language – are likely to have some aspects of their usage or grammar that diverge from traditional native-level fluency and usage. With regard to “non-native-like outcomes” for learners of a second language, “an L2 learner’s access to [certain grammar] principles is incomplete, that is, it is restricted to those principles that are [represented] in the learner’s L1” (Ibid, 85).

Dialectology

The field of dialectology is defined as “the systematic study of all forms of dialect, but especially regional dialect” (Crystal 2009, 143). Traditional dialectology focused on “regionally distinctive words (distinct in form, sense or pronunciation),” and recently the field of “structural dialectology” has sought “to show the patterns of relationship which link sets of forms from different dialects” (Ibid). Additional foci within dialectology include studies of “the nature of sociolinguistic variation, the processes of language change, the influence of standard varieties and of standardization . . . the understanding of language contact and dialect contact . . . new
dialect formation and language isolation” (Britain et al 2003, 1). With regard to dialects and immigration, “immigrants typically enter their new nation as underdogs [because] the power, under ordinary circumstances, belongs disproportionately to the [natives of that culture]” (Ibid, 102). One exception is where “the immigrants are empowered in some sense, as when skilled professionals are imported” (Ibid).

**World Englishes**

Braj Kachru developed the “three circles of English” model, which proposes that English speakers can be divided into the “inner circle” of countries where English is spoken natively (“like, most prominently, British or American English”), the “expanding circle” where English is historically taught as a second language (“for example, Japanese English”), and the “outer circle” or “expanding circle” of countries where English has not traditionally been taught or spoken (Wolf 2009, 2). The phrase “world Englishes” has been used, in applied linguistics, “mostly . . . to refer to the institutionalized second-language varieties of English spoken around the world, i.e., to what Kachru (1985) has called the “outer circle” of English, like Indian English or Nigerian English” (Ibid). The field of World English studies, then, focuses on “the differences between and the local identities of the various regional/national varieties of English” (Ibid, 3). Under the World Englishes umbrella, different academic approaches offer different tools and techniques for understanding and distinguishing between the various regional spoken and written dialects of English. The linguistic features approach, for example, which is an example of a sociolinguistic approach, “takes a micro-sociolinguistic focus on linguistic variation in and among the different varieties of English,” which is “rooted in the tradition of European dialectology and lexicography and variationist studies in general” (Ibid, 5). The “common errors
studies” approach, on the other hand, focuses on “variety-specific ‘mistakes,’” or those “forms that deviate from the standard of the native varieties” (Ibid, 11). Under the common errors studies approach, “World English varieties . . . [with] their peculiar features” are unique to their regions or locations (Ibid, 11). L2-speaker varieties from Hong Kong, Cameroon, or Nigeria, for example, would likely possess distinctive markers, or “errors” that would differentiate them both from inner-circle English and from other outer/expanding-circle varieties (Ibid, 11-12).

Idiolect, Stylometry, and Translation

As a result of the way in which people acquire language, each person “has their own distinct and individual version of the language they speak and write, their own idiolect” (Coulthard 2004, 431). An individual’s idiolect “will manifest itself through distinctive and idiosyncratic choices in texts,” and

“Every speaker has a very large active vocabulary built up over many years, which will differ from the vocabularies others have similarly built up, not only in terms of actual items but also in preferences for selecting certain items rather than others. Thus, whereas in principle any speaker/writer can use any word at any time, speakers in fact tend to make typical and individuating co-selections of preferred words” (Ibid).

This idiolect may include “not [only] the mere quantity of shared lexis” from one of an author’s texts to another, “but rather the fact that, in the case of some shared items, both texts have both selected them and then only used them once” (Ibid 435). These “‘once-only’ items,” or “hapaxes as they are technically labeled” are, “by definition, not central to the main concern of the text, otherwise they would have been used more frequently” (Ibid). Such hapaxes – along with other short unique word strings – can help identify a writer’s texts, as “the chances of two writers independently choosing several of the same words for single use are so remote as to be discountable” (Ibid).
The practice of stylometry was first defined as “a method of measuring [an author’s] stylistical affinities” (Lutoslawski 1897, 284). As what is arguably a sub-discipline under applied linguistics, “stylometric techniques can successfully identify unusual sub-styles and multiple narrators within a novel, can distinguish parodies from originals, and can illuminate the styles of multiple translations of a novel” (Hoover 2007, 175). Indeed, it has been found that even though “translated texts . . . tend to be grouped by the original author rather than by the translator . . . the most frequent words in a corpus of translations in no way maintain a one-to-one relationship with those in the original corpus” (Rybicki 2013, 61). This indicates that in addition to the use of applied linguistics to identify original authors of translated works, it may be possible to identify individual translators, inasmuch as they are likely to leave their own mark on their translations by way of drawing from their own idiolects in both their source and target languages.

**Corpus Linguistics**

Within the fields of applied and computational linguistics, a corpus (plural corpora) is “defined as any collection of texts (or partial texts) used for purposes of general linguistic analysis” (Meyer 2002, xii). More specifically, “in recent times, a corpus has come to be regarded as a body of text made available in computer-readable form for purposes of linguistic analysis” (Ibid). Examples of well-known Corpora include the Brown Corpus, a so-called “‘balanced’ corpus because it is divided into 2,000-word samples representing different types (or genres) of written English, including press reportage, editorials, government documents, technical writing, and fiction” and the Penn Treebank, which “consists of a heterogeneous collections of texts (totaling approximately 4.9 million words)” (Ibid). Another recent modern corpus is the “Corpus of Global Web-Based English (GloWbE),” a corpus “composed of 1.9
billion words from 1.8 million web pages in 20 different English-speaking countries,” which was “created by Mark Davies of Brigham Young University, and . . . released in 2013” (Davies 2013). The GloWbE Corpus, using computational linguistics, allows researchers to compare words or phrases against these twenty different English dialects, providing most-likely matches.
III. METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

Background

This project consists of two separate but connected sub-projects. First, the author will examine a series of theoretical frameworks and apply those to the traditional analytical framework for propaganda in order to develop a new analytical framework for English-language jihadist propaganda. Next, the author will utilize that newly developed analytical framework for English-language jihadist propaganda to analyze the propaganda of the Islamic State as both proof of concept for the framework and in an effort to determine what this particular group has revealed through the publication of its English-language propaganda.

Because this project consists of these two separate sub-projects, it will utilize two distinct methodologies: one for the first section, and one for the second. For purposes of clarity, those two methodologies will be discussed separately hereinbelow: developing an analytical framework, and analyzing the Islamic State’s English-language jihadist propaganda.

Open-Source Materials

As noted in the initial disclaimer, this study was completed using only open-source materials. Any formerly classified or sensitive documents, as applicable, were accessed only in their redacted, declassified and public domain forms. The author of this study did not utilize any documents or knowledge obtained through access to classified or sensitive sources in completing this project, and did not access WikiLeaks or use any sources obtained from WikiLeaks at any time during this study.
IV. DEVELOPING AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Methodology and Research Strategy

Introduction

Type of Study

The first portion of this study is qualitative, in that it is a “means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem,” and the research process for this project “involves . . . data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes” (Creswell 2008, Kindle Location 370). Specifically, the first portion of this study will be using George and Bennett’s case study “method of structured, focused comparison,” which is “‘structured’ in that the researcher writes general questions that reflect the research question and . . . [which] are asked of each case under study to guide and standardize data collection,” and which is “‘focused’ in that it deals only with certain aspects of the . . . cases examined” (George et al 2004, 67). The structured, focused case study method can be used either for multiple cases under study (as here) or may “apply equally to individual cases” (as in the second section of this study) and consists of a three-part structural framework combined with a focused approach (Ibid, 67-70).

The three-step structural framework of George and Bennett’s case study method requires first that “the investigator should clearly identify the universe – that is, the ‘class’ or ‘subclass’ of events – of which a single case or a group of cases to be studied are instances;” second that the researcher utilize “a well-defined research objective and an appropriate research strategy to achieve that objective” to “guide the selection and analysis of a single case or several cases within the class or subclass of the phenomenon under investigation;” and third, that the researcher’s “case studies should employ variables of theoretical interest for purposes of
explanation” (Ibid, 69). Finally, George and Bennett’s method stresses that “the study of cases be ‘focused’: that is, [that] they should be undertaken with a specific research objective in mind and a theoretical focus appropriate for that objective” (Ibid, 70). The first section of this study reviews four key topics (the traditional analytical framework for propaganda, the history of Islam, the theoretical framework of radicalization, and the theoretical framework of applied linguistics) as cases, in order to synthesize the lessons of each area into a coherent analytical framework tailored specifically to the task of analyzing English-language jihadist propaganda.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this section of the study is to develop an analytical framework specific to English-language jihadist propaganda.

Research Questions

The main research question for the first portion of this study is: What areas of traditional propaganda analysis need to be changed, updated, added, or deleted in order to create an analytical framework that is specific to the subject of English-language jihadist propaganda?

Research sub-questions for this portion of the study include:

(1) What is the traditional analytical framework for propaganda in general?

(2) What does the history of Islam have to offer to a tailored analytical framework for English-language jihadist propaganda?

(3) What does the theoretical framework of radicalization have to offer to a tailored analytical framework for English-language jihadist propaganda?
(4) Finally, what does the theoretical framework of applied linguistics have to offer to a tailored analytical framework for English-language jihadist propaganda?

Hypothesis

The author’s hypothesis is two-part: first, that certain areas of traditional propaganda analysis need to be changed, updated, added, or deleted in order to create an analytical framework that is specific to the subject of English-language jihadist propaganda, and second, that the history of Islam, the theoretical framework of radicalization, and the theoretical framework of applied linguistics all have important features to offer to a tailored analytical framework for English-language jihadist propaganda.

Independent and Dependent Variables

The four independent variables for this section of the study are the traditional framework for analysis of propaganda, the history of Islam, the theoretical framework of radicalization, and the theoretical framework of applied linguistics. The single dependent variable is the identification of which areas of traditional propaganda analysis need to be changed, updated, added, or deleted in order to create an analytical framework that is specific to the subject of English-language jihadist propaganda.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection for this portion of the study includes secondary materials only. First, four distinct areas of study were identified, each corresponding with an independent variable: the traditional framework for analysis of propaganda, the history of Islam, the theoretical framework
of radicalization, and the theoretical framework of applied linguistics. For each variable, the field of existing literature was then reviewed in order to extract the information relevant to developing an analytical framework tailored specifically to the task of analyzing English-language jihadist propaganda. This review and collection of data was carried out principally through the use of American Military University’s online library, using the ProQuest search tool Summon to find peer-reviewed academic journal articles. Additional data collection methods included referencing published works and textbooks and utilizing the Internet to search for open-source materials such as Congressional Research Service articles and other forms of media. Inasmuch as all data collected in this section was from secondary research sources only, no approval from the Institutional Review Board was necessary. The data collected for this section of the project is broken down by category below, with resources only mentioned in their first appearance, even if used in other sections.

Propaganda


Islam

For the study of the history of Islam, the data collected included several types of resources. Congressional Research Service reports utilized included “Islam: A Primer,” “The Islamic Traditions of Wahhabism and Salafiyya,” and “Islam: Sunnis and Shiites” (Mark 2003,

In discussing jihad, Salafism, Shia jihad, and word choice, resources included Will McCants’ 2012 essay on “A New Salafi Politics” from George Washington University’s Project on Middle East Political Sciences, Quintan Wiktorowicz’s 2006 article on the “Anatomy of the Salafi Movement” from Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, Assaf Moghadam’s article on “The Shi’i Perception of Jihad” from the Fletcher School’s Journal for Issues Related to Southwest Asia and Islamic Civilization, Yossef Bodansky’s book Target America: Terrorism in the U.S. Today, and the U.S. Department of State’s 2011 Country Reports on Terrorism 2012 update (McCants 2012, Wiktorowicz 2006, Moghadam 2003, Bodansky 1993, U.S. Department of State 2012). Inasmuch as Bodansky is acknowledged to be an unreliable narrator and resource, the author’s best efforts were made to limit the usage of Bodansky’s book to a single excerpt regarding an historic speech, the accuracy of which was then verified through cross-checking with various other sources. In discussing the Islamic concepts of jizya and the People of the Book, Donna Arzt’s 2002 article on “The Role of Compulsion in Islamic Conversion: Jihad, Dhimma and Ridda” from the Buffalo Human Rights Law Review was utilized (Arzt 2002).
Radicalization

In reviewing the theoretical framework of radicalization, the data collected was divided into sections on traditional radicalization and recruitment, the phenomenon of online recruitment and use of social media, and the concept of jihad as an act with an audience. Under the umbrella of traditional radicalization and recruitment, two main works utilized were Marc Sageman’s 2004 and 2008 books *Understanding Terror Networks* and *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (Sageman 2004, Sageman 2008). Additional resources included Simon Cottee’s article on “Jihadism as a Subcultural Response to Social Strain: Expanding Marc Sageman’s ‘Bunch of Guys’ Thesis” from the journal *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Dominic D.P. Johnson and Dominic Tierney’s article on “The Rubicon Theory of War: How the Path to Conflict Reaches the Point of No Return” from the journal *International Security*, and Brian Michael Jenkins’ essay on “Stray Dogs and Virtual Armies: Radicalization and Recruitment to Jihadist Terrorism in the United States Since 9/11” for Rand Occasional Papers (Cottee 2011, Johnson et al 2011, Jenkins 2011).

For the discussion on online recruitment and the use of social media, resources utilized included Timothy D. Bailey and Michael R. Grimailla’s article on “Running the Blockade: Information Technology, Terrorism, and the Transformation of Islamic Mass Culture” from the journal *Terrorism and Political Violence*, George Michael’s article on “Adam Gadahn and Al-Qaeda's Internet Strategy” from *Middle East Policy*, Adam Gadahn’s YouTube propaganda sermon entitled “Legitimate Demands,” an article titled “The Dark Side of Social Media: Review of Online Terrorism” by Geoff Dean, Peter Bell and Jack Newman in the *Pakistan Journal of Criminology*, a study on Anwar Al-Awlaki’s online propaganda presence a year after his death by the middle East Media Research Institute, and a 2012 panel produced by the New America

Finally, in reviewing the concept of jihad as an act performed with and to an audience, resources collected included Matusitz’s book *Terrorism and Communication: A Critical Introduction*, Jørgen Staun’s essay on “A Linguistic Turn of Terrorism Studies,” and an article from *Terrorism and Political Violence* on the “Analysis and Evolution of the Global Jihadist Movement Propaganda” (Matusitz 2013, Staun 2009, Torres et al 2006).

Applied Linguistics

Data Analysis

For this portion of the study, the traditional analytical framework for propaganda was viewed through the lenses of the history of Islam and the theoretical frameworks of radicalization and applied linguistics in order to determine what elements of that traditional analytical framework need to be changed, updated, added, or deleted in order to create an analytical framework that is specific to the subject of English-language jihadist propaganda. To do this, each of the ten steps outlined in O’Donnell’s analytical framework for propaganda were first examined in light of the history of Islam and the theoretical framework for radicalization, and next through the lens of the theoretical framework of applied linguistics. Once the elements of O’Donnell’s framework that translated well into an analytical framework tailored to English-language jihadist propaganda were identified, these elements were adjusted as necessary to reflect the particular realities of jihadist propaganda. Second, the tools of applied linguistics were used to augment O’Donnell’s updated steps. Third, these updated steps were divided into categories based on their common themes. Finally, the updated steps were augmented with new and additional steps, taking into account the specific nature of assessing a jihadist group.

Findings and Analysis

O’Donnell’s Analytical Framework for Propaganda

Ideology and Purpose

In her framework for analyzing propaganda, O’Donnell proposes that the analyst seek to identify the ideology it represents, the “coherent ‘world view that . . . provides the basis for determining what is good, bad, right, wrong, and so forth’” (O’Donnell, Page 291). She theorizes
that ideology “contains concepts about what the society in which it exists is actually like,” and 
“is also a form of consent to a particular kind of social order and conformity to the rules within a 
specific set of social, economic, and political structures” (Ibid). The “frames of reference” that a 
propagandist uses may leverage both the past, in the form of “preexisting struggles and past 
situations,” and the future, in the form of “future goals and objectives” (Ibid). By invoking 
“symbols of the past,” the propagandist “encourages people to apply previously agreed-on ideas 
to the current and future goals of the [group]” (Ibid).

The implications of this context – and this resonance – are clear when analyzing a jihadist 
group’s propaganda. Jihadist groups quite literally invoke the image of an idealized past of 
Islam, strength and prosperity in order to lead their members and followers toward the 
“imaginary, ideal state of affairs” that Lofland and Stark spoke of (Sageman 2004, 127). Jihadist 
groups, like cults, paint a picture for their converts wherein the victory of the group will 
guarantee the validation, unity, and “sense of serenity” (Ibid, 118) that its adherents seek. This 
resonance draws on very specific symbols of the past – a “cohesive collective identity grounded 
in a long and prestigious . . . tradition of the Prophet and his companions” (Cottee, 739). For an 
analyst studying a jihadist group, this is perhaps the most important element of the analysis.

Context

In O’Donnell’s framework, the “context in which the propaganda occurs” refers to “the 
climate of the times” (O’Donnell, 292). This includes not only “the events that have occurred” 
but also “the interpretation of [those] events that the propagandists have made” (Ibid). O’Donnell 
proposes that this includes not only the “expected states of the world social system,” but also “the 
historical background,” i.e., “what has happened to lead up to this point in time?” (Ibid). For a
jihadist group, this entails not only the group’s conceptualization of its position in that “long and prestigious . . . tradition” (Cottee, 739), but also its place in the modern society within it exists.

Identifying the Propagandist

O’Donnell’s framework revolves around the concept of “an institution or organization” as the “source of propaganda . . . with the propagandist as its leader or agent” (O’Donnell, 293). She acknowledges that the identity of the propagandist may be either openly revealed or concealed, and goes on to say that “when the propagandist is a person, it is easier to identify that person because propagandists usually have . . . ‘verbal compulsions’” (Ibid). In the context of jihadist groups, a propagandist’s identity may either be open, with his work attributed (such as the sermons of Adam Gadahn) or concealed, with his work unattributed (such as Azan magazine, and much of the materials produced by the Islamic State). When analyzing unattributed products and materials, those “verbal compulsions” of the propagandist can be exceptionally helpful, and the discipline of applied linguistics doubly so.

As discussed in the literature review, the concept of idiolect refers to each speaker’s “own distinct and individual version of the language they speak and write . . . [which] will manifest itself through distinctive and idiosyncratic choices in texts” (Coulthard, 431-432). In order to identify an author of unattributed propaganda, then, the analyst has a number of tools at his or her disposal that hinge on discerning a particular author’s – or speaker’s – idiolect. By identifying an author’s unique word choice – either his single-use hapaxes or those phrases and word strings which appear to be unique to his style – an analyst can then use stylometrics to assess several of the unknown author’s traits. Running those phrases against a corpus such as GloWbE, for example, can provide most-likely matches for which of the dialects of World English the author
speaks. Checking those phrases against the Internet through something as simple as a Google search can help discern whether they have appeared in other recent writings or speeches. Identifying conflicting profiles – for example, one set of materials likely written by a speaker of Pakistani English with faulty use of idiomatic phrases, while another set was written by a fluent speaker of American English – can help determine how many propagandists are working on a project, where they are likely from, and whether some are given more responsibility for the production of propaganda than others.

The same can be achieved, to a certain extent, when attempting to define a translator’s idiolect. It is likely, in the case of jihadist propaganda, that the originators of a large part of the propaganda – that is, the leaders of the group – may not speak English. Their drive for their works to be converted from their native language into English in order to reach a broader audience will necessitate the intervention of a translator, in addition to the original author. Although translators possess a certain degree of stylometric invisibility (Rybicki, 61), with a large enough sample of materials, a translator’s unique phrasings may identify his works as unique to himself, in addition to the original author.

Finally, even for those materials where authorship is attributed – usually to a pseudonym or nom de guerre – it may be helpful for the analyst to identify whether certain opinion leaders’ pieces are given more weight than others. Locating these key nodal points not only identifies whose word is given most weight – and who is therefore most likely to be close to the leaders – but also those points which would most quickly cripple the propaganda dissemination infrastructure if disabled. The use of Prucha and Fisher’s method of online tracking (the “Jihadica model” laid out in the literature review) can highlight which of these key nodal points,
if destroyed, would most effectively disable the network – or, alternatively, if monitored, would most effectively permit the analyst to document individuals within the pool of potential recruits.

Structure

O’Donnell’s definition of the “structure” of a propaganda organization is both helpful and unhelpful in the analysis of a jihadist group. Her concept of a “strong, centralized, decision-making authority that produces a consistent message throughout its structure” (O’Donnell, 293) is certainly of interest to the analyst working on a jihadist group’s propaganda, but does not sufficiently address that analyst’s needs. Instead of focusing only on the “goals and the means by which to achieve them,” or “how is entry into membership gained,” or even the culture, rituals, and formal rules of the organization (Ibid, 293-295), an analyst investigating a jihadist group may wish to review the various types of structures it exhibits by way of its various purpose-oriented facets. As an Islamic organization, for example, it is likely to have a self-declared Imam or Sheikh at its head. As a military organization, there may be one or more generals controlling the group. As a governing entity, if it has conquered any territories, it may be beholden to a self-declared Emir or Caliph. By identifying which individuals appear to occupy the highest position or positions in each of these power structures, and the relationships between these individuals, the analyst can identify which leaders are most likely to be making which decisions for the organization, and in turn profile those leaders to determine likely decisions.
Target Audience

In her analytical framework for propaganda, O’Donnell suggests that inasmuch as “a target audience is selected by a propagandist for its potential effectiveness . . . the propaganda message is aimed at the audience most likely to be useful to the propagandist if it responds favorably” (Ibid, 295). This limited view of an audience, however, proves insufficient when analyzing jihadist propaganda. For the jihadist propagandist, the potential audience encompasses not merely that group which is “most likely to be useful to the propagandist if it responds favorably” (Ibid), but rather a range of audiences. As Matusitz proposed in his work covered in the literature review section on radicalization, jihadists “take part in a dialogue with various audiences beyond their immediate target, both internal and external to the group” (Matusitz, 77).

For a jihadist propagandist, there exist both legitimate internal and external audiences. An internal audience might consist, for example, of the subjects of the group (if it holds any captured territories). External audiences, on the other hand, might consist of potential recruits (O’Donnell’s “most likely to be useful” group), potential allies, and even confirmed enemies. Further, within even a single propagandist work, “the message may vary for each audience” (Matusitz, 77). A violent act that is videotaped and published may be intended to scare or insult an enemy, for example, while simultaneously demonstrating to potential recruits that they could be joining a winning team. Likewise, a piece on internal non-military policing may attempt to assuage internal subjects’ fears while proving to potential allies that the group is capable of conducting civilized, reasonable governmental affairs.
Media Utilization Techniques

O’Donnell’s work on media utilization techniques is rooted in the concepts of a simpler time. With the advent of widespread Internet access, the practice of propaganda has gone from one in which propagandists might use such methods as “telephone, fax machines, direct mail, posters, meetings, rallies, door-to-door canvassing, handbills, buttons, billboards [and] speeches” (O’Donnell, 296) to one in which a propaganda video can balloon from a single online post to 56,998 views within twenty-four hours, and 124,704 views within a month – all from a single posting, and not counting additional re-posts (Prucha 2014a). A more modern approach to analyzing media utilization might include reviewing the format of the media, what was used to produce it (software or operating systems, for example), and even whether it is state-sponsored or state-sanctioned. A shrewd jihadist group, for example, might not limit their propagandist opportunities to officially branded (or “state-sponsored”) materials, but also expand their potential market saturation by allowing certain others to produce materials on their behalf, which will carry their preferred message (i.e., “state-sanctioned” materials), as well. The use of the word “state” in the terms “state-sponsored” or “state-sanctioned” here is not a judgment on or endorsement of the legitimacy of any jihadist group as a nation-state, but rather an acknowledgement that inasmuch as such a group operates in a state-like fashion, it may incorporate both official (state-sponsored) and third-party (state-sanctioned), in a fashion similar to what a legitimate government might do.

Maximizing Effect

O’Donnell’s concept of maximizing effect is one which requires some adjustment to apply to jihadist propaganda. Her idea of “desired end states . . . such as donating, joining, and
“killing” (O’Donnell, 299) is one that is perhaps best incorporated into the analysis of audience reaction, below. Likewise, her discussion of opinion leaders, or “through those who have credibility in a community” (Ibid, 300) more cohesively slots in with the concept of identifying the propagandists, discussed above.

Audience Reaction

An analyst’s measurement of audience reaction must necessarily be focused on the audience itself – that is, which audience or audiences the propagandist intended to target with a particular propagandist work. In jihadist propaganda, as discussed above, there are at least four potential audiences: the internal subjects, if any; the potential recruits; the potential allies; and the declared enemies. O’Donnell suggested that an analyst “look for . . . the behavior of the target audience,” as well as “the audience’s adoption of the propagandist’s language, slogans, and attire” (Ibid, 305). In this context, that could be expanded to include various metrics for gauging audience response for each of the potential audiences – a concept discussed in further detail in “effects and evaluations,” below.

Counterpropaganda

The topic of counterpropaganda is one that is likely to be at the forefront of an analyst’s mind when dealing with jihadist groups. If a jihadist group’s propaganda is successful in driving recruitment, for example, it is natural to hope that an effective deployment of counterpropaganda would counter, or even nullify, that recruitment. Nonetheless, the analyst should carefully review all extant counterpropaganda materials that target the jihadist group before gauging their efficacy. Sources for these materials could include rival jihadist groups, regional governments,
and even Western governments. Of special concern with counterpropaganda – especially black
counterpropaganda – is the risk that it will backfire if its source is revealed, and allow the jihadist
group to portray itself as a victim of baseless attacks.

Effects and Evaluation

As noted in the literature review, O’Donnell’s model proposes that an analyst gauge
“whether the purpose of the propaganda has been fulfilled” through the metrics of “growth in
membership . . . adjustments in mainstream society . . . [or] the adoption of the propagandist’s
language and behaviors in other contexts” (Ibid, 306). For an analyst gauging the effect of
jihadist propaganda on both internal and external audiences, however, different metrics – or
indicators – may be utilized. In gauging the effectiveness of the jihadist group’s propaganda with
regard to its internal subjects, indicators may include a reduction or increase in civil unrest, and
even whether the residents of controlled territories stay in place or flee as refugees.

In gauging the propaganda’s effectiveness with regard to potential recruits, indicators
may include online traffic, social media interaction, and active mobilization by those seeking to
travel to the jihadist group’s location and fight on its behalf. In gauging the propaganda’s
effectiveness with regard to potential allies, indicators may include other jihadist groups’ claims
of allegiance or common interest, nations’ willingness or unwillingness to join in alliances
against the group, and even nations’ tacit cooperation with the group through importing or
exporting resources from or to the group’s occupied territories. Finally, in gauging the
effectiveness of the propaganda on manipulating the sentiment and stance of its declared
enemies, the analyst may look to public declarations and military actions as prime indicators.
Analytical Goals for Jihadist Propaganda

O’Donnell’s framework for propaganda analysis should be both re-ordered and expanded in order to address the unique analytical needs of jihadist groups. The new analytical framework for jihadist propaganda should include the headings of context, propaganda assessment, and threat assessment, broken down as follows.

Under the heading of context, O’Donnell’s categories of “ideology and purpose,” along with “context” should be included, but adjusted to become the context subcategories of “ideology” and “socio-historical setting.”

Under the heading of propaganda assessment, O’Donnell’s category of “identifying the propagandist” should become the subcategory of “propagandists.” Her category “media utilization techniques” should become the category of “media utilization,” and her category of “target audience” should become the subcategory of “targeting.” O’Donnell’s categories of “audience reaction” and “effects and evaluation” should combine to create a new category, “campaign efficacy,” and her category “counterpropaganda” should become the final subcategory under the propaganda assessment heading.

Under the heading of threat assessment, O’Donnell’s category of “structure” should become the first subheading. The heading of threat assessment should further be fleshed out through the addition of subcategories addressing the jihadist group’s strategy, tactics, assets, and vulnerabilities.
Notes on the Framework

Strengths of the Analytical Framework

Data obtained from open-source intelligence, or OSINT, necessarily comes with certain limitations. Its reliability must be weighed, and it should always – when possible – be backed up by data obtained through the efforts of other intelligence collection disciplines. The traits of OSINT are not merely weaknesses, however, but can be strengths as well. OSINT may be less reliable than human intelligence (HUMINT) or signals intelligence (SIGINT) in many cases, and this is certainly true when it is derived from an opponent’s propaganda. A key strength of this analytical framework is that it does not rely on the honesty of the propagandists – instead, it assumes their (partial) dishonesty, and accounts for it. This is not achieved by taking the group’s propaganda at face value, but rather by treating it as one would an opponent in a poker game: what the group shows, how it shows it, and also what and how the group chooses to conceal all impart information. Taking advantage of this information grants the intelligence community both a swiftness of collection and a degree of inside access that may not be possible with HUMINT or COMINT, and without the tasking and investment of assets that traditional disciplines would require. By learning the jihadist group’s “tells” – to return to the poker metaphor – the analyst can discern more from the propaganda than the propagandists intended to reveal.

Process

This analytical framework is composed of three broad areas – context, propaganda assessment, and threat assessment – each of which has several subtopics in the form of questions. By addressing each of these topics and subtopics in turn, the analyst is able to map out the jihadist group. The categories of the framework, as well as their subtopics, are set forth below.
Conclusions

Analytical Framework for Jihadist Propaganda

Context

Ideaology. Is the group’s religious ideology Salafi/Wahhabi, Shia extremist, or some other militant Islamist ideology? What, and whom, do they cite in their materials: which Quranic chapters (suras) and verses (ayahs), which hadiths, and which modern figures?

Socio-Historical Setting. What are the demographics of the countries in which the group is involved and active? What is the history of other groups with whom they are involved in either an adversarial or allied manner? What is the history of the territories at play, either under the jihadist group’s control or subject to attack?

Propaganda Assessment

Propagandists. What dialect (if written or spoken) and accent (if spoken) do the propagandists have? Is there evidence of a common translator for those materials that have been translated from their original language? Who are the opinion leaders?

Media Utilization. Are the propaganda materials in a written, graphic, or video format? What software or operating systems were used to produce these materials? Which materials are state-sponsored, and which are state-sanctioned?

Targeting. What individuals or groups compose the group’s internal audience, i.e., the subjects of its controlled territories, if any? What individuals or groups compose its external audience, as its potential recruits, its potential allies, and its declared enemies?
Campaign Efficacy. What has been the response to the campaign from the internal targets (i.e., the subjects of the group’s controlled territories)? What has been the response to the campaign from the external targets (i.e., the group’s potential recruits, its potential allies, and its declared enemies)?

Counterpropaganda. What types of counterpropaganda have been published? Of these materials, what is effectively working as counterpropaganda? What types of counterpropaganda are proving ineffective?

Threat Assessment

Structure. What are the key individuals within the organization? What is its structure as a military force? What is its structure as an ideological entity? What is its structure as a governing nation-state, if it controls any territories?

Strategy. What are the long-term military goals of the jihadist group? What are its long-term geographical goals, if it is seeking to conquer territory? What are its long-term financial goals?

Tactics. What short-term or near-future actions does the group intend to carry out in order to achieve its long-term goals? Has it identified any military targets that it will attack in the near future? Are there any potential alliances or mergers with other groups?

Assets. What military assets (personnel, equipment, tactical expertise, or other) does the jihadist group possess? What financial assets (cash, liquid assets such as oil, seized property, or revenue streams) does the group possess? What infrastructural assets (water, power, communication, health care, or other) does the group possess, are they currently functioning, and if not, what type of investment would be required to restore them to a functioning state?
**Vulnerabilities.** Taking all of the previous metrics into account, what are the jihadist group’s weakest areas and vulnerabilities? What types of military intervention would prove most effective? What diplomatic measures or sanctions, if any, could weaken the group, or control its movement and reach? What counterpropaganda methods and materials would be most likely to turn the opinions of each of the four target groups against the organization? Is the group’s online presence vulnerable to Prucha and Fisher’s method of online tracking (the “Jihadica model), or do factors exist which would make it more difficult to track the group’s propaganda and identify its pool of potential recruits?
## Figure 1. Analytical Framework for English-Language Jihadist Propaganda

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<tr>
<td><strong>(1)</strong> Context</td>
<td><strong>(a) Ideology</strong></td>
<td>Salafi/Wahhabi, Shia extremist, or other? What and whom do they cite? • Which Quranic chapters and verses? • Which hadiths? • Which modern figures?</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>(b) Socio-historical setting</strong></td>
<td>Demographics of countries affected? History of groups involved? History of territories that are in play?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>(2)</strong> Propaganda Assessment</td>
<td><strong>(a) Propagandists</strong></td>
<td>What dialect and accent do they have? Is there evidence of a common translator? Who are the opinion leaders?</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>(b) Media Utilization</strong></td>
<td>Written, graphic, or video format? What software or operating systems used? State-sponsored or state-sanctioned?</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>(c) Targeting</strong></td>
<td>Internal: subjects of the controlled territory External: potential recruits External: potential allies External: declared enemies</td>
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<td><strong>(d) Campaign efficacy</strong></td>
<td>Response of the internal targets? Response of the external target groups?</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>(e) Counterpropaganda</strong></td>
<td>What’s out there? What’s working? What isn’t working?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>(3)</strong> Threat Assessment</td>
<td><strong>(a) Structure</strong></td>
<td>Key individuals: As a military force As an ideological entity As a governing nation-state</td>
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<td><strong>(b) Strategy</strong></td>
<td>Long-term goals of the jihadist group: Military, geographical, financial?</td>
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<td><strong>(c) Tactics</strong></td>
<td>Short-term actions to achieve those goals: Military targets in the near future? Alliances or mergers?</td>
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<td><strong>(d) Assets</strong></td>
<td>Military? Financial? Infrastructural?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>(e) Vulnerabilities</strong></td>
<td>Military intervention? Diplomacy and sanctions? Counterpropaganda? Online tracking (Jihadica model)?</td>
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V. CASE STUDY: ISLAMIC STATE PROPAGANDA
Methodology and Research Strategy

Introduction

Type of Study

Like the first section of this study, the second section is also qualitative in nature (Creswell 2008, Kindle Location 370), and follows George and Bennett’s case study “method of structured, focused comparison” (George et al 2004, 67). Unlike the first section of this study, however, in this section George and Bennett’s method will be used for approaching a case study of a single case: that of the Islamic State’s English-language jihadist propaganda.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this section of the study is to apply the analytical framework for English-language jihadist propaganda developed in the previous section to the propaganda of the Islamic State, in order to determine what information the Islamic State has revealed through the publication of its English-language propaganda.

Research Questions

Inasmuch as this section of the study is an application of the tailored analytical framework developed in the previous section to the materials produced by the Islamic State, the research questions are generated by that framework. To wit, this section of the study seeks to answer the following twelve questions, divided into the three categories of setting, propaganda assessment, and threat assessment:
(1) With regard to setting:
   (a) What is the group’s ideology?
   (b) What is the group’s socio-historical context?

(2) With regard to propaganda:
   (a) What can be discerned about the group’s propagandists?
   (b) What materials and/or media does the group use?
   (c) Who is the group targeting?
   (d) How effective is the group’s campaign?
   (e) What is the outlook regarding counterpropaganda?

(3) With regard to a threat assessment:
   (a) What is the group’s structure?
   (b) What is the group’s strategy?
   (c) What tactics will the group use to accomplish that strategy?
   (d) What assets does the group possess?
   (e) What are the group’s vulnerabilities?

Hypothesis

The author’s hypothesis is that by analyzing the propaganda materials published by the Islamic State, with limited use of outside non-propaganda materials for purposes of validating results, an analyst will be able to determine a great deal about the Islamic State’s ideology, socio-historical context, propaganda and propagandists, structure, strategy, tactics, assets, and vulnerabilities.
Independent and Dependent Variables

The independent variables for this section of the study are the materials produced by the Islamic State. The dependent variable for this section of the study is the analytical product produced by running those materials through the analytical framework developed in the previous section.

Data Collection Procedures

Primary and Secondary Research

The data collection for this portion of the study includes both primary and secondary research. The secondary research for this study primarily consists of published government documents and news media articles. The primary research consists of collecting written, graphic, and audio propaganda materials that were either state-sponsored or state-sanctioned as part of the Islamic State’s propaganda program (additional information regarding these materials follows hereinbelow). Although this is primary research in that it is an initial collection of data, and is not referencing other researchers’ work, it does not require Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. Per the guidelines of American Military University, “It is the policy of American Public University System (APUS) that all research involving human subjects must be conducted in accordance with accepted ethical and professional standards” (AMU 2014, 3).

American Military University’s Institutional Review Board is “charged with insuring that all such research is conducted in compliance with federal regulations regarding research with human subjects” (Ibid), and in so doing, refers to the Code of Federal Regulations, specifically 45 CFR §46, titled “Protection of Human Subjects.” 45 CFR §46.101 (a) states that the policy for Institutional Review Boards “applies to all research involving
human subjects,” and 45 CFR §46.102 (f) defines “human subject” as “a living individual about whom an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research obtains (1) Data through intervention or interaction with the individual, or (2) Identifiable private information.” 45 CFR §46.102 (f) further defines “private information” as:

“Information about behavior that occurs in a context in which an individual can reasonably expect that no observation or recording is taking place, and information which has been provided for specific purposes by an individual and which the individual can reasonably expect will not be made public (for example, a medical record). Private information must be individually identifiable (i.e., the identity of the subject is or may readily be ascertained by the investigator or associated with the information) in order for obtaining the information to constitute research involving human subjects” (45 CFR §46.102 (f)).

The primary research conducted for this study, although it may necessarily include personal information, does not meet the definition of “research involving human subjects” because it either (a) includes personal information of individuals who voluntarily produced and published media in order to further the propaganda campaign of the Islamic State, in which case it is not definable as “private information,” as such individuals intended for those media products to be made public; or (b) includes personal information of individuals who did not voluntarily engage in the production or publication of such propaganda materials, but who are no longer living (i.e., the victims of the Islamic State’s beheading videos and other execution videos). In both cases, the research, as conducted, does not involve human subjects per Federal Regulations, and therefore does not require Institutional Review Board approval.

The data collection for this portion of the study is delimited to those English-language propaganda materials, in both written or graphic and video formats, released from November 2013 to September 2014. This time frame was selected because it represents the time period from the Islamic State’s first seizure of its power base in Raqqa, Syria in November 2013 through the
conclusion of this study. The data collection of this study was further limited in terms of propaganda materials to the Islamic State’s English-language propaganda materials.

While the Islamic State’s propaganda campaign is both multilingual and multicultural, and many of its propaganda products are produced in a variety of languages, the data collection is limited to English for three reasons. First, aside from Arabic, English is the predominant language of the Islamic State’s propaganda campaign, with products generally translated into other languages only after initial publication in English. Second, the analytical framework developed in the first section of this study is specific to English-language resources, and would require adaptation (such as the identification of different corpora) in order to be applied effectively to non-English jihadist propaganda materials. Finally, as the researcher’s primary language is English, an analysis of the Islamic State’s non-English propaganda materials would perhaps best be conducted by a researcher able to do so in his or her dominant language.

Types of Materials

The Islamic State’s English-language propaganda materials can be categorized according to two separate schemes. The first scheme separates these materials by whether they are state-sponsored or state-sanctioned. State-sponsored materials are those produced directly by the Islamic State by its media branch; state-sanctioned are those materials produced by third parties (either external media groups or individual members within the Islamic State organization) that are not directly endorsed by the Islamic State, but that are tolerated, promoted, and otherwise published with the Islamic State’s approval.

The second scheme identifies the propaganda materials by media type, whether written and graphic or in video format. Because the data collection and analysis procedures used in this
study are common among all materials of the same media type (whether state-sponsored or state-sanctioned), this categorization scheme has been used herein to organize the methodology of this project.

Written and Graphic Propaganda

Written and graphic propaganda materials reviewed for this study fall into both state-sponsored and state-sanctioned categories. State-sponsored materials include issues 1-3 of the *Islamic State News*, issues 1-4 of the *Islamic State Report*, and issues 1-3 of *Dabiq* magazine (Islamic State 2014a-2014j). State-sanctioned Twitter and Tumblr feeds active during the time of this study included the Tumblr account of Umm Layth and the Twitter account of Umm Khattab, both female Islamic State members, as well as Twitter accounts under the names of Dawla_Newsmedia, Islamic_State, and ISIS_Media_Hub, all of which (with the exception of Umm Layth) have been suspended prior to the publication of this study (Umm Layth 2014, Umm Khattab 2014, Anonymous 2014a-2014c).

Video Propaganda

Video propaganda materials reviewed for this study likewise fall into both state-sponsored and state-sanctioned categories. State-sponsored video products of note include episodes 1-8 of the MujaTweets series, the video “Oh Soldiers of Truth Go Forth,” the video “Let’s Go For Jihad,” the video “There Is No Life Without Jihad,” the video “The End of Sykes-Picot,” the video “Those Who Were Truthful With God,” the video “Eid Greetings From the Land of the Caliphate,” the video “A Message to America” which included the beheading of James Foley, the video “A Second Message to America” which included the beheading of Steven
Sotloff, the video “A Message to the Allies of America” which included the beheading of David Cawthorne Haines, the video “Another Message to America and Its Allies” which included the beheading of Alan Henning, the trailer and full-length videos entitled “Flames of War,” and two episodes showing captive British journalist David Cantlie entitled “Lend Me Your Ears” (Islamic State 2014k-2014ee). State-sponsored video products of note include five parts of a video series produced by VICE News on the Islamic State (VICE News 2014a-2014e).

Third-Party Non-Propaganda Materials

Third-party (non-propaganda) materials were used to validate the efficacy of the analytical framework by confirming or disproving the findings produced by analyzing the Islamic State’s English-language jihadist propaganda. These materials will be referenced as needed in the Findings and Analysis section of the second section of this study.

Data Analysis

The data collected for this portion of the study was first separated into categories as noted above, then analyzed as set forth in the following paragraphs.

Written and Graphic Propaganda

Written and graphic propaganda materials in the form of news, reports, or magazines were first reviewed for visual markers and unique characteristics, and then distilled into text-only format. These text-only files were then hand-coded to identify unique word usage and phrases. Those unique words and phrases were then analyzed through use of the “Corpus of Global Web-Based English (GloWbE),” as discussed in the literature review hereinabove (Davies 2013). The
results of this analysis are then tabulated by most likely country of origin and most common nearby words, showing how often that unique word or phrase appears in twenty different worldwide dialects of English (Davies 2014). Highlighted charts from this process are included in the Findings and Analysis portion of this section of the study, and referenced in the Table of Figures. Ideally, a document analysis expert would be available to review these materials, but one was not available for this study. Finally, the text and images contained in these state-sponsored and state-sanctioned written and graphic materials was reviewed to see what information it offered in regard to answering the twelve research questions set forth hereinabove.

Video Propaganda

First, each of the video products was viewed once all the way through in order to ensure researcher familiarity with the material. Next, the video products were subscribed into a text-only format. Highlighted transcripts from these video products are included in Appendix A. These transcripts were then hand-coded to identify unique word usage and phrases, and analyzed using the GloWbE corpus in the same process identified above. Selected videos were reviewed by video production experts (a technical director and a video editor) in order to distill information regarding the producers’ operating systems, software, use of film equipment, and editing style. Findings from those individuals are included, with minimal editing, in Appendix B. Finally, these state-sponsored and state-sanctioned video products were reviewed to see what information they offered in regard to answering the twelve research questions set forth hereinabove.
Third-Party Non-Propaganda Materials

These materials were used to validate the efficacy of the analytical framework by confirming or disproving the findings produced by analyzing the Islamic State’s English-language jihadist propaganda. Additionally, these materials were used to explore the presence and efficacy of counterpropaganda targeted at the Islamic State.

Findings and Analysis

Context

Ideology

The Islamic State is a jihadist Salafist organization. The ideology of its members revolves around their interpretation of a specific hadith, according to which the Prophet Muhammad prophesized that,

“There will be prophethood for as long as Allah wills it to be, then He will remove it when He wills. Then there will be khilafah on the prophetic methodology and it will be for as long as Allah wills, then He will remove it when He wills. Then there will be biting kingship (i.e. rulers who would do whatever it takes to hold onto their power) for as long as Allah wills, then He will remove it when He wills. Then there will be oppressive kingship for as long as Allah wills, then He will remove it when He wills. Then there will be khilafah on the prophetic methodology” (Islamic State 2014g, 3).

Throughout its propaganda works, the Islamic State returns to this concept. It was called out in a highlighted box in the fourth issue of the Islamic State Report, citing the entire passage once more before declaring, “Then there will be khilafah on the prophetic methodology [Reported by Admad]” (Ibid). It was captioned at the end of the video “The End of Sykes-Picot” (Islamic State 2014u, 15:00). It was featured in the first issue of Dabiq magazine (Islamic State 2014h, 18). The Islamic State’s main goal is to establish a Caliphate (Khilafah), or Islamic empire that will rule the world under Sharia, or Islamic law.
In their video “Flames of War,” the Islamic state quotes deceased al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) Emir “Shaykh Abu Mus’ab Az-Zarqawi” in saying that,

“No, by Allah, da’wah has never been a road lined with roses and sweet basil. The price of da’wah is heavy. And the price of bringing principles to the land of reality is a lot of torn limbs and blood. And the light of dawn will not be lit in this darkness except by the mujahidin and shuhada” (Islamic State 2014dd, 19:00-19:20).

This selection both highlights the Islamic State’s roots in AQI by quoting its deceased self-declared Emir and indicates the Islamic State’s willingness to achieve its goal of establishing a Caliphate through mujahidin (jihadist fighters) and shuhada (martyrs killed in holy war).

Later, the video quotes the Islamic State’s own spokesman “Shaykh Abu Muhammad Al-‘Adnani” in saying, “As for us, then we’ve never fought a single day for the sake of land. Rather, we only fight to bring back the Khilafah and to establish the shari’ah of Allah. We fight in order to rule the entire world with Allah’s revelation. (Ibid, 30:46-30:58). Here, the Islamic State is seeking to distinguish itself from secular regimes that it implies have only sought power for the sake of money and land.

In an excerpt of his speech given on July 4, 2014 at the Great Mosque in Mosul, Iraq, Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (credited as “The Khilafah, Ibrahim Ibn ‘Awwad al-Qurashi al-Husayni”) lectures Mosul residents, stating that,

“So this is the basis of the religion. A book that guides, and a sword that aids. Indeed your brothers the mujahidin were blessed with victory by Allah . . . and were blessed with consolidation after long years of jihad and patience and fighting the enemies of Allah. Allah guided them and strengthened them to establish this goal. Therefore, they rushed to announce the Khilafah and appoint an imam. This is an obligation upon the Muslims, an obligation which was abandoned for centuries, and disappeared off the face of the earth. So many Muslims were ignorant of it, and they are sinful for abandoning it. It is always obligatory upon them to establish it. So now they have established it, to Allah is all praise and from Him are all blessings. I was burdened with this great matter. I was burdened with this trust, this heavy trust. I was appointed as a leader for you” (Ibid 39:36-40:46).
This ideology – a Salafist drive to create a Caliphate, informed by modern Salafist ideologues’ doctrines and guided by a handpicked selection of hadiths – is what drives the Islamic State.

Socio-Historical Setting

Demographics of Countries Affected

Iraq is a rarity in the Islamic world – a predominantly Shia country, but one that was governed for most of recent history by a Sunni-led regime (Pew Research Center 2009, 1; Blanchard 2009, 2). Following the 2003 invasion of Iraq and subsequent removal of Hussein’s government, Iraqi Sunnis and Shias have been in constant conflict, with some Shia groups visiting upon Sunnis the same types of violence and injustice that were visited upon Shias under the Sunni regime (Blanchard 2009, 2). Syria, on the other hand, is a Sunni-majority country traditionally governed by an Alawite family, thrown into a brutal civil war in 2011 that further multiplied its sectarian conflicts (Pew Research Center 2009, 29; Blanchard 2009, 5).

History of Groups Involved

The Islamic State, in its modern form, grew out of al Qaeda’s presence in Iraq. Following the Spring 2010 elimination of al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI)’s former joint leaders, “Abu Omar al-Baghdadi and . . . Abu Ayyub al-Masri, who were killed in an American and Iraqi raid near Tikrit,” a statement circulated online named Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as the new leader of the group (Shadid 2010). When the Syrian civil war began a year later, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi worked with al Qaeda central leaders to “set up a Syrian offshoot” of AQI intended to “bring down the Assad regime,” which would later be known as Jabhat al-Nusra, or the al-Nusra Front.
In 2012 and 2013, al Baghdadi led a revitalized AQI in a campaign he called “Breaking the Walls,” which culminated in July 2013 in simultaneous attacks on prisons in Taji and Abu Ghraib, resulting in the escape of “more than 500 inmates” (Al-Salhy 2013).

In April 2013, al-Baghdadi announced that AQI and the Syrian offshoot he had helped create, Jabhat al-Nusra, would be merging, and that he would lead the “new combined entity [which] would be called the Islamic State of Iraq and the Sham (ISIS)” (Joscelyn 2014). The leader of Jabhat al-Nusra, Abu Muhammad al Julani, strongly and publicly disagreed with that plan, announcing that he – and Jabhat al-Nusra – would remain independent, answering only to al Qaeda core leadership, specifically Ayman al Zawahiri (Ibid). Zawahiri was thereafter forced to intervene, “[issuing] a ruling on May 23 [in which he] dissolved Baghdadi’s ISIS and said its operations should be confined to Iraq” (Ibid). Less than a month later, al-Baghdadi publicly rejected Zawahiri’s edict and “wrested [control of the Syrian city of Raqqa] from the rebels, including Nusra, who had won it in March” (Abouzeid).

In a last-ditch effort to resolve the differences between the two groups, the following winter Zawahiri and al Qaeda central leadership sent in a mediator, Abu Khalid al Suri (Joscelyn 2014). Al Suri was unable to broker a peace between the warring groups, and on January 16, 2014, he released a statement in which he “blasted ISIS and blamed the group for the infighting” (Ibid). On February 3, al Qaeda central leadership publicly disavowed ISIS and al-Baghdadi, a first in the organization’s history; twenty days later, al Suri was killed in a suicide bomb that Jabhat al-Nusra attributed to ISIS (Sly 2014; Baker 2014).

Over the winter and spring of 2014, ISIS used the city of Raqqa as a living laboratory for experiments in military conquest, local governance, a brutal imposition of Sharia law, and even the administration of jizya (Walsh et al 2013; SITE 2014). In June 2014, ISIS steamrolled back
into Iraq, capturing Mosul, Tikrit, and Al-Qaim, as well as a large swath of northern Iraq within three weeks, resulting in over 1,300 deaths and the flight of an estimated 1.2 million refugees (CNN 2014; Dickinson 2014).

The group has gone through a number of name changes, from al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) to the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Shams (greater Syria) or the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or even the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). On June 28, 2014, the first day of Ramadan, the group declared itself a Caliphate, “proclaimed Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as the first ‘caliph of Islam’ in this new era,” and dropped the geographic indicators in its name to become simply “the Islamic State” (Suleiman 2014).

There are some signs that the relationships between the Islamic State and al Qaeda – or at least the al-Nusra Front – may be changing. In October 2014, following the declaration of an American-led alliance against the Islamic State, a spokesperson for the al-Nusra front indicated that the group might be willing to work with the Islamic State against their “[now]-common enemy: the ‘crusaders' coalition’” (Lister et al 2014).

Propaganda Assessment

**Propagandists**

Dialect and Accent

The dialects and accents of Islamic State propagandists vary from piece to piece. In the written works, it can be especially easy to pick out the non-native English speakers. Word choice errors such as “Maliki’s forces humiliated while Islamic State stockpiles on war booty” (Islamic State 2014c, 3) indicate unfamiliarity with verb usage. The corpus GloWbE, in a search, found 2,086 uses of the word “stockpile” out of the total corpus, comprising an average of 1.11 uses per
million words used, with peaks occurring in Kenyan, American, Tanzanian, Pakistani, and Canadian dialects of English.

Figure 2: GloWbE Search, “Stockpile”

A search for the word “Stockpiling” likewise revealed relatively common usage, with 978 total uses and an average of 0.52 uses per million words used, with peaks occurring in American, Singaporean, Sri Lankan, Ghanaian, and Australian dialects of English (Figure 3).

Figure 3: GloWbE Search, “Stockpiling”

The phrase “pile on” garnered 747 total uses and an average of 0.40 uses per million words used, with peaks occurring in American, Canadian, and British English (Figure 3).

Figure 4: GloWbE Search, “Pile On”

The phrase “piling on” garnered 1213 total uses and an average of 0.64 uses per million words used, with peaks occurring in American, Singaporean, and Canadian English (Figure 5).
The phrase “stockpile on,” however, garnered a meager three uses in American English and single use in Pakistani English (Figure 6).

Finally, the phrase “stockpiling on” – the one used by the Islamic State propagandists – garnered three American uses, two British uses, and a single Singaporean use (Figure 7).

Another idiosyncratic use in the early publications was the use of the phrase “tank hunters do their stuff in Al-Malahimah” (Islamic State 2014b, 6). Native English speakers fairly frequently might choose to say that someone is “doing their thing,” as shown in a GloWbE search that found 312 total uses, featuring peaks in Jamaican, South African, Nigerian, Kenyan, Canadian, and Australian English dialects (Figure 8).
The word choice of “doing their stuff,” however, garnered a slim 25 uses in the entire GloWbE corpus, with peaks occurring in Malaysian, Kenyan, Australian, and Ghanaian English dialects (Figure 9).

Simultaneously with those early publications of the Islamic State News, which were rife with unusual (or simply erroneous) word choices, the Islamic State was publishing the Islamic State Report, which featured rich, fluent English detailed in what appears to be an American English dialect. A public-interest piece featuring an interview with the “Head of the Islamic Police, Wilayat ar-Raqqa,” for example, included an introduction that declared,

“They are men who’ve shouldered the responsibility of the people’s safety and security. They’ve tackled many difficulties, carried many burdens, and become accustomed to sleepless nights, all for the sake of spreading safety and security across the wilāyah” (Islamic State 2014e, 7).

A subsequent issue of the Islamic State Report featured a multi-page history lesson-cum-soapbox piece on the history of the Sykes-Picot agreement that reads nearly like a history textbook:

“SMASHING THE BORDERS OF THE TAWAGHIT. It was 98 years ago that the Allies of WWI forged a secret agreement to carve up the territories of the Muslim lands. This arrangement, referred to since as the Sykes-Picot agreement, mapped out parts of the Middle East and designated them as being under the influence or control of either France
or the United Kingdom in anticipation of the subsequent conquest of the region. The negotiations took place over the course of a few months and the agreement was finalized in May of 1916. The French were represented by Francois George-Picot, and the British by Mark Sykes, hence the name ‘Sykes-Picot.’ The agreement would be formed with Russian approval. The areas of Iraq, Sham, and some neighboring regions were divided into four sections. The two parties would each have both a territory where they exercised direct control, and an adjacent territory over which they maintained influence. A fifth region in the area of Palestine was cared out as an international zone” (Islamic State 2014g, 2).

If the Islamic State had access to a propagandist writer with that level of English fluency in the early months of their propaganda effort, it seems likely that he or she would have caught the typos and erroneous word choices of the Islamic State Report’s copy writer within minutes, if allowed to proofread his work. Instead, the two (or more) writers were apparently isolated in terms of both geography and communications, pushing out three and four issues of their respective publications without any visible interaction or overlap before coming together to publish the first issue of Dabiq, and seemingly staying together – or at least in communication with each other – for the publication of the second and third issues of Dabiq thereafter.

Common Translators

Due to the phenomenon of a translator’s relative stylistic invisibility, it can sometimes be difficult to determine whether the same translator has been responsible for multiple translations, even when drawing from the same source material or author (Rybicki 2013). Nonetheless, certain idiosyncratic phrases can help identify the work of translators. Of special interest in the works of the Islamic State is the phrase “hit the last nail in [the] coffin,” which appears twice in the Islamic State’s propaganda works. The first time was in an English-language translation of a June 2013 audio message released by al-Baghdadi prior to his first public appearances, in which he was translated and later captioned as saying,
“We have now trespassed the borders that were drawn by the malicious hands in the lands of Islam in order to limit our movement and to confine us inside them. And we are working, Allah permitting, to eliminate them (borders). And this blessed advance will not stop until we hit the last nail in the coffin of the Sykes-Picot conspiracy” (Zen 2014).

The grandiose rhetoric regarding eliminating borders and the reference to “the Sykes-Picot conspiracy” both sound like typical markers of al-Baghdadi’s propaganda, but the verb choice – to “hit” the last nail in the coffin, as opposed to “driving” the last nail into the coffin, or “hammering” the last nail into the coffin – is an unusual one. This isn’t simply a qualitative assumption; it is a provable quantitative assertion. Searches of the GloWbE corpus reveal that the phrase “drive a nail” occurs with a frequency of 0.02 times per million words with 38 total occurrences, the phrase “hammer a nail” occurs with a frequency of 0.02 times per million words with 40 total occurrences, and the phrase “hit a nail” occurs with a frequency of 0.01 times per million words with only 19 total occurrences (Figures 11-12).
Likewise, an Internet search can be performed using Google as a corpus to search for these word strings, a technique employed by Coulthard in his study of idiolects (Coulthard, 441). The phrases “hit the final nail in the coffin” and “hit the last nail in the coffin” have about 59,200 and 29,800 results respectively, for a combined total of approximately 89,000 results.

**Figure 13: Google Search, “Hit the Final Nail in the Coffin”**

![Google Search, “Hit the Final Nail in the Coffin”](image13)

**Figure 14: Google Search, “Hit the Last Nail in the Coffin”**

![Google Search, “Hit the Last Nail in the Coffin”](image14)

Next, the phrases “drive the final nail in the coffin” and “drive the last nail in the coffin” have about 150,000 and 1,080,000 results respectively, for a combined total of approximately 1,230,000 results.

**Figure 15: Google Search, “Drive the Final Nail in the Coffin”**

![Google Search, “Drive the Final Nail in the Coffin”](image15)
Finally, the phrases “hammer the final nail in the coffin” and “hammer the last nail in the coffin” have about 97,500 and 15,400 results respectively, for a combined total of approximately 112,900 results.

These results are interesting when viewed in light of the speech read by James Foley just prior to his videotaped execution (Islamic State 2014x). Foley stated, in full, that:

“I call on my friends, family, and loved ones to rise up against my real killers, the US government. For what will happen to me is only a result of their complacency and criminality. My message to my beloved parents: save me some dignity, and don’t accept any meager compensation for my death from the same people who effectively hit the last nail in my coffin with their recent aerial campaign in Iraq. I call on my brother John, who is a member of the US Air Force; think about what you are doing. Think about the lives you destroy, including those of your own family. I call on you, John, think about who made the decision to bomb Iraq recently, and kill those people, whoever they may have been. Think, John, who did they really kill? And did they think about me, you, our family, when they made that decision? I died that day, John. When your colleagues
dropped that bomb on those people, they signed my death certificate. I wish I had more time. I wish I could have the hope of freedom and seeing my family once again, but that ship has sailed. I guess, all in all, I wish I wasn’t American” (Ibid; full video transcript attached in Appendix A).

For the most part, Foley’s speech codes as an American dialect of English. The idiomatic phrase “that ship has sailed” is common in American English, with its use in American dialects of English far outpacing its use in the rest of the world (Figure 19).

**Figure 19: GloWbE Search, “That Ship Has Sailed”**

Likewise, the sentence “I wish I had more time” can comfortably be considered as a reasonable statement from a speaker of American English (Figure 20).

**Figure 20: GloWbE Search, “I Wish I Had More Time”**

Per the analysis above, however, odds are more than fifteen to one against someone electing to use “hitting” over “driving” or “hammering” in the context of putting nails into coffins: 1,230,000 Google results for “driving the final/last nail in the coffin,” plus 112,900 Google results for “hammering the final/last nail in the coffin” equals a total of 1,342,900 combined results, against the mere 89,000 Google results for “hitting the final/last nail in the coffin” (Figures 13-18). Simply put, with more than fifteen-to-one odds against selecting this particular word combination, its use is unusual.
Further, for those cases in which an American is making the selection – per the GloWbE findings above – the odds are more than two to one against that American selecting a phrase incorporating the words “hit the nail” (with 11 results in an American English dialect from the GloWbE Corpus) as opposed to selecting a phrase either incorporating the words “drive the nail” (with 16 results) or “hammer the nail” (with 10 results), resulting in odds of 27:11 that an American would choose one of the other phrases (Figures 10-12).

Given these odds, it seems extremely unlikely that Foley, an American, would have voluntarily selected both the American-styled phrases reviewed above and the distinctly un-American choice of “hit the last nail in my coffin.” More likely, Foley’s speech was drafted by a spokesman for the Islamic State, which in and of itself is not surprising. Further, the concept that Foley would have been prohibited from deviating from the speech that was drafted for him is not surprising; his captors would certainly have wanted to prevent him from delivering any coded messages in his final words. The speechwriter’s quirk in verb choice, then, would have stood as it was written.

The useful information that can be derived from an applied linguistical analysis of the Islamic State’s propaganda is twofold. First, the repeated unusual word choice of “hitting the last nail in [a] coffin,” within the narrow context of the Islamic State’s English-language propaganda efforts, could indicate that the same translator who translated al-Baghdadi’s June 2013 speech into English could have been tasked with drafting Foley’s final speech. If this is the case, then this individual – with a high level of fluency in English and an almost – but not quite – perfect grasp of the American English dialect – would likely have close contact with al-Baghdadi, in that he has not only translated at least one prior speech, but is also working closely enough with the
Islamic State leader to draft prisoner speeches for which al-Baghdadi would have the final approval rights.

Second, that individual – if there is a single individual who both translated the June 2013 audio address and drafted Foley’s final speech – is not the captor who appears in Foley’s beheading video, as well as the other beheading videos. That captor is British not only in audible dialect, but in his word selection as well, choosing the strongly British “amongst” over the American “among,” the British-favored “effectively” over the American “in effect,” and so on (Appendix A; Figures 21-24).

**Figure 21: GloWbE Search, “Amongst”**

**Figure 22: GloWbE Search, “Among”**

**Figure 23: GloWbE Search, “Effectively”**

**Figure 24: GloWbE Search, “In Effect”**
The potential translator and speech-drafter would not have made those choices. The captor visible on the film is not the same individual who translated al-Baghdadi’s June 2013 speech, nor is he the one who drafted or translated Foley’s final speech. The speech patterns of that translator, however, do appear to potentially match the word choices of the audibly American-accented narrator and on-screen jihadist who appears in the feature-length Islamic State propaganda video entitled “Flames of War” which was released in September 2014 (Islamic State 2014bb). A further, detailed analysis of the word choices used by that individual in the Flames of War video, compared against a corpus of known or likely translations, as well as against a corpus of World English dialects, would help discern that individual’s identity.

**Media Utilization**

Written and graphic

Written and graphic propaganda products produced by the Islamic State include the *Islamic State News*, the *Islamic State Report*, and later the combined magazine entitled *Dabiq* (Islamic State 2014a-2014j), each of which will be explored in more detail throughout this section. Written and graphic propaganda products produced by others but apparently sanctioned by the Islamic State include Twitter and Tumblr accounts such as the now-suspended @Dawla_Newsmedia, @Islamic_State, and @ISIS_Media_Hub accounts, all for recruiting, and the female-run @UmmKhattab_Twitter account and Umm Layth tumblr account (Anonymous 2014a-2014c, Umm Layth 2014, and Umm Khattab 2014).
The Islamic State’s willingness to accept and seemingly sanction accounts like Umm Khattab’s shows a shrewd understanding of how social media works. While it is certainly possible that people follow these accounts out of sheer curiosity, that interest allows these propagandists access to an even broader audience.

In order to ensure maximum audience engagement, female bloggers like Umm Khattab intentionally pepper their accounts with a certain degree of spectacle, telling readers that “democracy and communism can go to hell” (Figure 25) and criticizing British policies toward members of the Islamic State with a level of scorn and drama that would be at home in any gossip magazine (Figure 26).

At other times, the same accounts mock British and American politicians: following President Obama’s declaration that the Islamic State “is not Islamic,” Umm Khattab asked whether Mufti (Islamic Scholar) Obama just “made takfir” on her (accused her of being a false Muslim or apostate (Figure 27). In the same stretch of time, these bloggers devote their time to avid recruitment and voicing messages of support to al-Baghdadi and the fighters of the Islamic State (Figure 28).
Other female bloggers likewise alternate between recruitment efforts in the form of picturesque, idyllic views (Umm Layth 2014, Figure 29) and snappy cultural in-jokes (Umm Haritha 2014, Figure 30), both of which would be right at home on any Facebook or Pinterest feed, if not for additional notes such as “maybe i get shahada [martyrdom]” (Figure 29), revealing that the blogs’ authors have different concerns than their potential audience.

**Figure 29, Umm Layth account**

**Anonymous asked:** Heard ur a sporty girl ;)

**Answer:**

Yh u heard right *anon*.
i walk up and down the stairs once a week.
AND
I drink DIET pepsi.

— 1 week ago

**Figure 30, @bintladen account**

Other accounts focus strictly on recruitment, attempting to pitch the Islamic State as a constantly victorious battle-ready organization filled not only with members who the potential audience is supposed to think are just like you – they play with their tablets and snuggle with their kittens (Figure 31), but who also represent what the Islamic State hopes to portray as a diverse and vibrant cross-section of the global community, represented by a picture of a “tiger gradient” showing a variety of tigers (Figure 32).
For those disaffected with their lives in Western society, Islamic State propagandist bloggers offer up commentary on American racial tensions, presenting discussions on “the Militarization of U.S. Police” and declaring, “No doubt Ferguson is a war zone?” (Figure 33). For those interested in technology and playing with new toys, bloggers show images of the Islamic State’s use of drones (the small, commercially available kind) to carry out reconnaissance missions (Figure 34).

Distinctly less-official but still popular accounts such as @ISILCats (titled “Islamic State of Cat”) use comedy and Internet memes for the purpose of both recruitment and political reach, combining jihadist and Islamic terminology with Internet memes to achieve portmanteaus like...
“mewjahid” – a combination of a cat’s “mew” sound and the word “mujahid,” singular of “mujahideen,” and which refers to a jihadist fighter (Figures 35 and 36).

Figure 35, @ISILCats                      Figure 36, @ISILCats

Additionally, there have been reports that following mass suspensions of Islamic State accounts by the Twitter and Tumblr messaging platforms, the Islamic State has at least partially migrated its social media distribution platform to Diaspora* (the asterisk is a portion of the name), a decentralized social network (Warren 2014). The beheading video of James Foley appears to have been posted initially on Diaspora* before being forwarded to other social media networks and YouTube (SITE Staff 2014). Diaspora* staff released a statement addressing the Islamic State’s migration to the platform on August 20, 2014, stating that,

“diaspora* is a completely decentralized network which, by its nature, consists of many small servers exchanging posts and messages. There is no central server, and there is therefore no way for the project's core team to manipulate or remove contents from a particular node in the network (which we call a "pod"). This may be one of the reasons which attracted IS activists to our network...

However, because this is such a crucial issue, we have also accumulated a list of accounts related to IS fighters, which are spread over a large number of pods, and we are in the process of talking to the podmins of those pods. So far, all of the larger pods have removed the IS-related accounts and posts. This includes a high-volume account on JoinDiaspora.com which was apparently used as a main distribution channel” (Diaspora* 2014).
The decentralized nature of Diaspora* - along with other, similar decentralized messaging and social media platforms – allows the Islamic State an unprecedented ability to disseminate their message, and should be subject to further academic and intelligence study and review.

Video

The video propaganda products of the Islamic State showcase both a surprising breadth of skill and variety of styles. An analysis of selected videos by film production experts (a technical director and an assistant editor) is attached hereto as Appendix B. The specific videos that target each potential audience segment will be examined in further detail in the targeting section of this analysis.

One note of interest with the beheading videos specifically is that while they are unquestionably violent and brutal in nature, none of the four videos posted as of the date of this paper actually show the moment of the beheadings (Islamic State 2014x-2014aa). Each of the videos follows the same formula, in which they show a news clipping, show the hostage speaking, show the captor speaking, and then cut away just as the captor starts to saw at the victim’s neck, returning with a wide pan showing the victim’s severed head presented on top of their back (for three of the victims) or torso (for Steven Sotloff).

The fade to black between the beginning of the knife cut and the presentation of the body allows for two possibilities: first, that the victims were killed by beheading; or second, that they were killed in some other way and that their heads were removed after their death. Death by gunshot, for example, would both be quicker for the victims and less traumatic for the captor shown onscreen, which would give the Islamic State two reasons to use such a method. The use of a small caliber round (especially if it entered through the victim’s mouth and exited out of the
back of his head) would not be visible following the removal of the victim’s head and the body’s subsequent staging, as the angle at which the pan occurs obscures the back of the victim’s head in all four cases. The sawing motion of the knife in each case is shown for several lateral strokes before the video cuts, but no blood is visible during those frames in any of the four videos.

Those two possibilities each lead to further conclusions. If the victims were all beheaded, then the Islamic State propagandists have made a conscious decision – in all four cases – not to show the beheading as it occurs. This decision would not have been accidental. It could have made in an attempt to avoid showing the incompetence of the executioner, but that does not appear likely. Even if the first beheading had gone wrong due to the executioner’s incompetence, the Islamic State could have procured other victims for the executioner’s practice prior to the second, third, and fourth videos, or even had him practice butchering sheep or camels, as the September 11th hijackers were rumored to have done. Further, A drawn-out and painful beheading would further degrade and humiliate the victim’s body, would traumatize and further victimize the victim’s family, and would make a clear statement of the Islamic State’s ruthlessness, cruelty, and barbarism toward its victims. The forced speeches, visible initial sawing motions, and post-beheading body staging and presentation already aim to accomplish these goals, and so the airing of the even-more-grotesque spectacle of a flawed and incompetent beheading would seem to further those goals, if those were in fact the main goals of the videos.

Instead, the Islamic State was presented with the option to show that level of brutality to the world, and chose not to do so. Those potential recruits who might be drawn to the brutality and gore of a beheading video will still find that in these videos, especially in the post-death staging of the corpses. Those potential recruits who would be turned away by an explicit demonstration of the Islamic State’s brutality, however, were provided with a slightly more
sanitized version, lacking in the visual that might have pushed them over the edge and prevented their recruitment. To be clear, while much has been said about the Islamic State’s blatant displays of cruelty and gore, from public executions to crucifixions to displaying enemies heads’ on poles, the decision *not* to show the moment of these four victims’ beheadings demonstrates that there are limits to the violence that the Islamic State will choose to publish as propaganda.

In the event that the second possibility occurred – i.e., that the victims were killed by some means other than beheading, and the heads were then removed from their bodies in order to stage the video’s display, that would indicate that the Islamic State captors showed a certain degree of mercy in the manner of their executions, that they were concerned about the traumatic effect that carrying out the beheadings might have on their British spokesperson, or some measure of both.

In either set of circumstances, the choice not to air the moment of the beheading was a conscious decision made by Islamic State leaders, and merits further study.

**Targeting**

**Internal: Subjects of the Controlled Territory**

To the extent that the Islamic State is operating as a nation-state and exercising control over the territories it has occupied, the organization has taken steps to sway its subjects’ opinion through the use of propaganda. These subjects were initially the citizens of the Islamic State stronghold of Raqqa, Syria that the organization took over in Summer 2013 (Abouzeid). As of October 2014, these subjects additionally include citizens in broad swaths of Syria and Iraq under Islamic State control. Examples of propaganda efforts targeted at these citizens include the public square chanting, singing, and call to prayer demonstrations highlighted in the “Eid Greetings
External: Potential Recruits

The pool of potential Western recruits, per Sageman’s and Cottee’s radicalization theories, is largely composed of Westernized Muslims who are first- or second-generation immigrants and who are experiencing social strain as a result of the alienation they feel as a result of their status as immigrants, as Muslims in Western society, or both. The Tumblr and Twitter feeds are a key propaganda channel for these potential recruits, including those Tumblr and Twitter blogs run by women and aimed at recruiting women. Recruiting and propaganda videos aimed toward young Western Muslims look like music videos (such as “Oh Soldiers of Truth Go Forth”), like trailers for first-person shooter video games (like “Let’s Go For Jihad”), like slightly-longer Vines (MujaTweets 1-8), or even like round-table discussions regarding all the reasons why someone might not participate in hijrah (immigration) and jihad, followed by explanations as to why those reasons should be ignored, like the “There Is No Life Without Jihad” video (Islamic State 2014k-2014). The development of a feature-length video showcasing the ideology and military tactics of the Islamic State, entitled “Flames of War,” was also likely an attempt to appeal to this group of potential recruits (Islamic State 2014dd).

A second ground of potential recruits draws from non-Western countries and areas. Among those regions, both the Republic of Chechnya (home of Islamic State assistant leader Omar al-Shishani) and the north African country of Tunisia, with up to “hundreds of Chechens who have been among the toughest jihadi fighters in Syria” and approximately “2,400 young
men [who have left Syria to flock to] the Jihadist cause” with a “further 8,000 men detained by authorities who are trying to leave for the battlefields of the east” (Mroue 2014; Cordell 2014). The dynamics of this group of potential recruits, however, will not be examined in great detail in this study because, due to their presence in non-Western countries, these potential recruits are less likely to speak English and therefore less likely to be influenced by the English-language jihadist propaganda materials which are the focus of this study.

External: Potential Allies

The Islamic State’s potential allies include other jihadist groups, non-jihadist Salafist Muslims, and even countries that might seek to ally themselves with the Islamic State, given the right set of circumstances. The Islamic State has attempted to craft its propaganda message to reach each of these groups. Other jihadist groups might follow any of the Islamic State’s written or video products, but perhaps might be most likely to keep up the Islamic State’s Twitter, Tumblr, or Diaspora* feeds.

Non-jihadist Salafist Muslims – those who share the Islamic State’s desired end state, but disagree about the methods which the Islamic State uses to bring that end state about – may be swayed by the Islamic State’s written propaganda materials, like *Dabiq* magazine (Islamic State 2014h-2014j), which uses a pedagogic method combining extreme Salafist teachings and modern issues to attempt to push those potentially amenable individuals further toward radicalization. The David Cantlie news-report format series (Islamic State 2014cc; 2014ee) is likewise aimed at that particular audience subset.

Finally, the Islamic State remains alert to the potential for developing alliances with friendly governments. Its early publication of the *Islamic State Report* attempted to portray the
Islamic State’s occupied territories as a great place to live, work, and raise a family, with fresh produce in markets, religious teaching centers, an effective and honorable police force, and abundant harvests from which the government would take the zakah, or Islamic religious charity tithe, to provide for the poor and needy (Islamic State 2014d-g). In contrast to the graphic, tabloid-style violence evidenced in the early issues of the *Islamic State News* (Islamic State 2014a-c), the *Report* seemed to be the Islamic State’s attempt to establish itself as an actual country worthy of respect, and not just a terrorist group. During July through September 2014, however, those two product lines converged into *Dabiq* magazine, which ended up shifting the message away from either of the two former target groups.

External: Declared Enemies

The clearest evidence of the Islamic State’s targeting of its declared enemies through its propaganda campaign lies in its decision to produce and publish the four beheading videos (Islamic State 2014x-aa). These videos are quite literally an attempt to open a dialogue between the Islamic State and those nations that have declared war on it. Each one opens with a brief clip of a governmental press conference or news broadcast, continues by using the victim to deliver a message, involves a statement of demands by the onscreen captor, shows that the victim has been killed, and then presents another potential victim, whose life is associated with the next set of demands. These videos are associated with back-channel attempts to negotiate; each of the victims’ families or home governments appears to have received messages from the Islamic State regarding conditions for possible release.

If the Islamic State simply wanted to punish and horrify its enemies, it could do so by killing all foreign hostages at the same time, or by showing the moment of death of each of the
victims. Instead, it has developed a method of propaganda that ensures that its message remains at or near the top of the twenty-four hour news cycle.

Further, there is some evidence that the Islamic State’s attempts to negotiate are genuine. On September 18, 2014, the first John Cantlie video was released, in which the Islamic State prisoner said regarding future videos,

“And I’ll show you the truth behind what happened when many European citizens were imprisoned and later released by the Islamic State, and how the British and American governments thought they could do it differently to every other European country. They negotiated with the Islamic State, and got their people home, while the British and Americans were left behind” (Islamic State 2014cc, 2:25).

Two days later, on September 20, 2014, forty-six Turkish hostages were freed by the Islamic State (Turcan 2014). A couple of weeks later, it was revealed that those Turkish hostages – consulate personnel who had been captured by the Islamic State – were released in exchange for Turkey releasing 180 members of the Islamic State; the Turkish prisoners were released on September 20, and the Islamic State members were released in groups, over the following week (Ozay 2014). This indicates that not only was Turkey’s careful impartiality upon the declaration of the Coalition an intentional act, but also that it was rewarded by the Islamic State through the release of Turkish prisoners. The timing of Cantlie’s video – released by the Islamic State two days prior to the Turkish prisoners being turned over to Turkey, and more than a week before the final Islamic State members were released by Turkey – indicates both the Islamic State’s confidence in the process and also (possibly) a coded proof-of-life message, in which the Islamic State was communicating to Turkey that it intended to honor the terms of deal.
Campaign Efficacy

Response of the Internal Subjects

The response of the Internal Subjects of the Islamic State has largely been a product of the circumstances they encountered prior to Islamic State occupation. In both Iraq and Syria, those most likely to stay – and not flee – were the Sunnis who felt most likely to be treated favorably by the Islamic State. Many of these civilians share no part of the Islamic State’s Salafist ambitions of establishing a Caliphate, but they are very, very tired. The Sunnis within Iraq have lived as a distrusted and frequently abused minority for more than a decade following the end of Saddam Hussein’s regime. The Sunnis within Syria have spent the past several years surviving a civil war waged by a government that they perceive to Alawite or at best Shia, and which is either unconcerned with their well-being or actively bent on their destruction. Both groups have become accustomed to enduring extremes of violence and hardship; they have lived through suicide bombs and chemical weapons, riots and snipers, invasions and rebel fighting, famine and drought; power outages and a near-complete lack of health care.

The basic psychological principle of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs addresses five levels of needs that drive humans, with a structure that can be visualized as a pyramid:

Maslow classifies all of human striving as an attempt to fill one of 5 needs. The first need he labels as physiological, such as air, water, and sufficient calories and nutrients to live. The second need is safety, such as safety from assault, from murder, and from chaos. The third need is belongingness and love, including friends, a family, a community, and ‘having roots.’ The fourth need is esteem, where a person is valued as a wise decision-maker, has a certain status and confidence. The fifth need is self-actualization, where each individual makes maximum use of his or her individual gifts and interests, ‘to become everything that one is capable of becoming.’

Maslow arranges these 5 needs in hierarchy, where their fulfillment follows a fixed sequence. The physiological needs are filled first. (When they are mission, almost all effort goes to filling these more basic needs.) Once these are nearing complete satisfaction, effort is allocated to the next level of the hierarchy – safety. Once safety is
nearing satisfaction, effort is allocated to the next level, and so on for each of the higher needs” (Hagerty 1999, 249-250).

Additionally, an individual’s ability to satisfy these needs has been shown to have a direct impact on his or her psychological health, as tracked by measures including “belief in an external locus of control”:

“Students reporting a strong belief in internal control had substantial satisfaction of physiological, safety, belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization needs. Students reporting a strong belief in chance control had little satisfaction of these needs. Students with a strong belief in control by others had little satisfaction of their physiological, safety, and esteem needs” (Lester et al 1983, 83-84).

For the Sunni residents of Iraq and Syria, the last several years have been lived in a constant state of lack of control: at best, events occur by chance; at worst, those events have been controlled by others. Their psychological health has been poor, according to these measures, and their ability to satisfy even the most basic needs has been frustrated by the realities of living in a war zone.

The fact that Sunni civilians living under Islamic State control have largely been accepting of their new status should not, however, be conflated with the erroneous concept of those civilians agreeing with the Islamic State’s goals or methods. Simply put, Sunnis in Iraq and Syria are, for the time being, willing to go along with whatever the Islamic State is selling, so long as it comes with food on the table, a roof over their heads, running water, functioning electricity, and the chance to – essentially – take a breather, rest, and recoup. It will not be until they have had a chance to do so that the noncombatant Sunni civilians of Iraq and Syria will be willing to pose any serious resistance to Islamic State occupation.

Support for this belief can be found in an account of life under Islamic State rule in Manbij, Syria - a “small city in Aleppo of about 100,000 (pre-war) under exclusive Islamic State
Citizens of Manbij have watched as the Islamic State has grown stronger, and report that,

“the trappings of statehood appear stronger every day. The IS public administration includes several types of police, courts and administrative bodies. The group provides services and undertakes development projects. IS collects taxes in the form of zakat and redistributes some of the money to the poor. Among the recipients of the aid are internally displaced persons, who now account for at least half of the city’s population. Recently, IS has begun shipping fuel from fields it recently captured in Dayr al-Zawr province and selling it at fixed discounted rates in Aleppo” (Ibid).

Further, those citizens go on to evaluate the Islamic State’s system of governance, noting,

“A key part of IS’ ability to govern is that the system is comprehensive. IS focuses on policing, on its harsh version of justice, and on public administrative functions. Courts are fast and efficient. The administration can move quickly to repair water lines or fix electricity towers, all in full coordination with the Islamic Police and IS fighters. Everything is coordinated and the different parts of the administration are linked, share information, and generally seem good at working together” (Ibid).

These citizens “agree that IS has provided badly needed security and stability to the city,” and that when the Islamic State “consolidated eastern Aleppo province after the January 2014 fighting with other brigades, it brought an end to the lawlessness and insecurity that was common when IS shared the administration with other rebel groups” (Ibid). This has resulted in a citizenry that is “grateful; not necessarily to the IS, but just generally for the situation” (Ibid).

In an October 2014 interview, a female defector who had worked as an enforcer for the Islamic State in its all-female brigade asked herself, “How did we allow them to come in [to Syria]? How did we allow them to rule us? There is a weakness in us” (Damon et al 2014b). This acceptance of the Islamic State by Iraqi and Syrian civilians should not be interpreted as weakness, but rather as a survival instinct. Any plan for the elimination of Islamic State control of territories in Syria and Iraq that does not take the Sunni civilians’ needs into account will not work, or at the very least will not be able to count on the cooperation of those citizens.
Response of Potential Recruits

The best measure of the effectiveness of the Islamic State’s propaganda outreach on its pool of potential recruits would be the number of individuals who have taken up arms in favor of the Islamic State, either those from within Iraq and Syria or those from outside countries.

In the third issue of Dabiq magazine, an opinion article attributed to al-Baghdadi discusses the broad background of recruits to the Islamic State, saying that,

“if you were to go to the frontlines of ar-Raqqah, al-Barakah, al-Khayr, Halab, etc., you would find the soldiers and the commanders to be of different colors, languages, and lands: the Najdī, the Jordanian, the Tunisian, the Egyptian, the Somali, the Turk, the Albanian, the Chechen, the Indonesian, the Russian, the European, the American and so on. They left their families and their lands to renew the state of the muwahhidīn in Shām, and they had never known each other until they arrived in Shām! I have no doubt that this state, which has gathered the bulk of the muḥājirīn in Shām and has become the largest collection of muḥājirīn in the world, is a marvel of history that has only come about to pave the way for al-Malhamah al-Kubrā (the grand battle prior to the Hour).” (Islamic State 2014j, 6-7).

While there has undoubtedly been a sizeable influx of recruits, the exact numbers are in question. An estimate attributed to the CIA states that “the terror group that calls itself the Islamic State "can muster between 20,000 and 31,500 fighters across Iraq and Syria” (Sciutto et al 2014), whereas “the UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights” estimates that “The number of IS fighters has passed 50,000 in Syria, including 20,000 non-Syrians,” and an additional source “Jazeera that the group also had 30,000 fighters in Iraq” (Al Jazeera 2014). The exact number of recruits or active fighters would best be verified through the use of traditional intelligence collection doctrines, and will therefore not be explored in greater detail herein.

Response of Potential Allies

There has not been any explicit show of support from any potentially allied nations as of October 2014. Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan’s June 2014 statement that, “No one should
expect me to provoke ISIS” (Idiz 2014) and Turkey’s initial refusal to cooperate with Coalition action, as well as its exchange of Islamic State members for Turkish hostages, should not be viewed as an indication of any fondness toward the Islamic State, but rather as a pragmatic decision to stall for time in order to protect a large group of Turkish citizens.

The response from other jihadist groups, however, has been powerful. In late June 2014, a spokesman for al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) declared the group’s support for the Islamic State, stating that, “My group wants to build friendly ties with ISIS. You are dearer to us than our tribe and family, and you will always have our support” (Yess 2014). In July 2014, a senior leader of the Filipino jihadist group Abu Sayyaf swore an oath of allegiance to the Islamic State (Ressa 2014). In August 2014, a senior leader of the Indonesian jihadist group Jemaah Islamiyah did the same (Laia et al 2014). In October 2014, the Pakistani Taliban issued a statement saying that the organization stands with the Islamic State, and that “We are with you, we will provide you with Mujahideen . . . and with every possible support” (Al Arabiya 2014). Even hard-and-fast enemy Jabhat al-Nusra has considered a softening of its stance against its one-time parent organization and ally, staying that it may be willing to work with the Islamic State against their “[now]-common enemy: the ‘crusaders’ coalition’” (Lister et al 2014).

Response of Declared Enemies

The Islamic State’s enemies have responded both with military action and with rhetoric. The Coalition air strikes and support of Iraqi ground troops has been a strong beginning, if not sufficient for a victory. The Islamic State’s enemies have also attempted to wage a war of words, however, with limited success. In addition to President Obama’s declaration that the Islamic State “is not Islamic,” other countries have also spoken out against the Islamic State’s name.
In mid-September 2014, Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius stated in a press release that, “This is a terrorist group and not a state. I do not recommend using the term Islamic State because it blurs the lines between Islam, Muslims and Islamists. The Arabs call it ‘Daesh’ and I will be calling them the ‘Daesh cutthroats’” (Nasr 2014). What Foreign Minister Fabius perhaps failed to realize is that the phrase “Daesh” or “Da’ish” is simply a shorter version of the words “Dawlah Islamiyyah” – with “Dawlah” translating “State,” and “Islamiyyah” translating to “Islamic.” The first two syllables of “Da” and “Is” combine to create a convenient short form of the group’s preferred name, in Arabic, and have been used broadly throughout the Arabic world. While some Western reports have claimed that the name sounds pejorative in Arabic, its use can be observed in many of the Islamic State’s propaganda videos. In order to avoid calling the Islamic State by the name “the Islamic State,” the French Foreign Minister has declared that it should instead be called “the Foreign State” in Arabic.

**Counterpropaganda**

**What Has Been Published**

Examples of propaganda materials or campaigns against the Islamic State include both official and third party efforts. The State Department’s “Think Again Turn Away” campaign, one of the few official efforts, seeks to dissuade potential recruits and has a presence on Twitter, Tumblr, Facebook, and YouTube. The criticisms and counterpropaganda of other Islamic statesmen and leaders are widespread. Finally, Unofficial and third-party counterpropaganda campaign efforts include crowd-sourced investigative journalism site Bellingcat’s use of social media to geolocate Islamic State training camps (Bellingcat 2014), the July 2014 hoax claim that the Islamic State had ordered female genital mutilation be carried out against all women in Mosul
(Spencer 2014), and a variety of comedic materials intended to lampoon the Islamic State (Alfred 2014, Loonwatch 2014, Kaufman 2014, Elghossain 2014).

What Is Working

The types of materials most likely to work against the Islamic State are those that take away the two things its leaders prize most: their operational security and their dignity (OPSEC). The Bellingcat approach is effective because it denies the Islamic State the opportunity to practice effective OPSEC. While the Islamic State voluntarily posts its training videos to social media, it certainly did not intend for those videos and photographs, like Figure 38, to be used in constructing detailed maps of its training locations, such as in Figure 37 (Bellingcat 2014).

**Figure 37: Bellingcat**

**Figure 38: Bellingcat**

The humor-based approaches are likewise effective. A play on words turning Da’ish into the rhyming word Ja’hish (“ass”) along with re-resigned logos is simple, catchy, and hard for the Islamic State to quash: addressing the materials means acknowledging them, which would be a sign that the counter-propagandists have relevancy, and have therefore won (Loonwatch 2014; Figures 39-40).
The creation of map of the Islamic State’s structure that “Lebanese satirist Karl Sharro” describes as a play on CNN’s map of “the anatomy of ISIS” likewise seeks to degrade the group through humor, dividing it into sections including a “non-existent advisory council,” groups of “British foreign crazies,” and “the ‘let’s pretend we’re a real state’ department” (Kaufman 2014; Figure 41).

**Figure 41: “ISIS Anatomy”**
The Onion-style parody website NOW wrote a satirical article in which the Islamic State decided to hold off on its invasion of Palestine after it “cancelled its initial invasion of Lebanon on account of ‘crazy traffic, bro,” and then was later unable to figure out “Who the fuck do we overthrow around here?” The article was printed with an accompanying picture of al-Baghdadi staring down a Palestinian meeting table with a sense of confusion, and intimates that the Islamic State’s biggest downfall is not its brutality but its lack of capability (Elghossain 2014; Figure 42).

Likewise, the Twitter post mocking al-Baghdadi for the seemingly expensive watch he wore during his sermon in the Grand Mosque in Mosul (Alfred 2014; Figure 43) works by making light of the Islamic State, and not by treating it seriously. The Islamic State cannot respond to this type of counterpropaganda without legitimizing it, and therein lies its power.

What Is Not Working

The State Department’s Think Again Turn Away campaign, however, is failing for the same reason that the third-party campaigns are succeeding. The humorous counter-propaganda campaigns work precisely because they refuse to take the Islamic State seriously. The Think Again Turn Away campaign, however, takes the Islamic State very seriously, even creating a
video that (sarcastically) urged viewers, “Run, don’t walk to ISIS Land. Where you can learn useful news skills for the Ummah. Blowing up mosques! Crucifying and executing Muslims! Plundering public resources! Suicide bombings inside mosques!” (Ernst 2014). The false recruitment video was edited together using only clips from the Islamic State’s real propaganda videos.

The problem with this approach is twofold. First, it creates the possibility that at best it will offend those viewers who are likely not in the pool of potential recruits to begin with; at worst, those viewers who are in the potential pool of recruits will become curious about the video clips’ source and want to investigate further, driving them to track down the Islamic State’s own propaganda products. Further, the Think Again Turn Away campaign has made a habit of engaging in back-and-forth dialogue with jihadists. The director of the SITE Intelligence Group notes that “This outreach by the U.S. government is not only ineffective, but also provides jihadists with a stage to voice their arguments—regularly engaging in petty disputes with fighters and supporters of groups like IS” (Katz 2014). Allowing the Islamic State jihadists and propagandists a chance to interact with State Department employees in full view of Internet onlookers not only legitimizes them by acknowledging their original propaganda works, but also provides them a chance to control the message with snappy comebacks such as, “loooool you dont know about shariah.. [you] better think again and turn away..” (Ibid).

Next, the Muslim leaders and statesmen who have spoken out against the Islamic State have not been particularly successful as counter-propagandists. A series of these speeches were included in the feature-length video “Flames of War,” with the Islamic State’s response following each (Islamic State 2014dd). As with the speeches from President Obama and Prime Minister Cameron that have been featured in the beheading videos (Islamic State 2014x-2014aa),
the Islamic State has shown that it is very comfortable using other groups’ statements against
them in its own propaganda.

Finally, the use of hoaxes – such as the July 2014 claim that the Islamic State had decreed
that it would perform female genital mutilation on all women in Mosul – are entirely ineffective.
While such claims will initially generate public outcry, their falsity will eventually be discovered,
at which point the Islamic State will only have further ammunition in its effort to paint its
opponents as liars or apostates. The Islamic State has certainly committed a sufficient number of
horrible acts that imaginary ones do not need to be created in order to attempt to sway public
opinion against the group.

Threat Assessment

Structure

As a Military Force

As a military force, the Islamic State appears – per its propaganda – to answer to both al-
Baghdadi and al-Shishani. References to al-Shishani’s fighting group abound in Tumblr and
Twitter posts (Umm Layth 2014). Of special note with al-Shishani is his connection with Dokka
Umarov, the deceased leader of the Chechen Black Widows (Paraszczuk 2013). While al-
Shishani himself does not appear to have had any involvement with the Black Widows, it is
entirely possible that the jihadist Chechen ideological underpinnings allowing for female
martyrdom may be part of al-Shishani’s personal playbook. Umm Layth noted in a Tumblr post
on June 9, 2014 that, “Sheikh Omar Shishani has been quite clear on his answer and has
emphasized that there is nothing for sisters as of yet. No amalia istishihadiya (martyrdom
operations) or a secret sisters katiba” (Umm Layth 2014). This clarification – that “there is
nothing for sisters as of yet” merits additional scrutiny over time, in an effort to ensure that local or allied forces operating within Islamic State-controlled areas are not caught by surprise when the organization does begin to use female suicide bombers. Even without further indicators that the Islamic State may be considering this shift, existing security protocols should be re-examined to ensure that women are screened as thoroughly as men when entering secure or sensitive areas (with additional female screeners hired as necessary), and to ensure that those charged with ensuring the safety of local or allied assets do not fall victim to training scars by discounting women as potential threats.

As an Ideological Entity

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’s status as the ideological leader of the Islamic State is certain. His July 4, 2014 sermon at the Grand Mosque in Mosul credited him as “The Khilafah, Ibrahim Ibn ‘Awad al-Qurashi al-Husayni,” and included an assertion that “So now they have established [a Caliphate], to Allah is all praise and from Him are all blessings. I was burdened with this great matter. I was burdened with this trust, this heavy trust. I was appointed as a leader for you” (Islamic State 2014dd, 39:36-40:46).

As a Governing Nation-State

Non-propaganda sources have reported at length upon the Islamic State’s internal governing structure, such as CNN’s “Anatomy of ISIS” tree, the one upon which Sharro’s parody was based (Thompson et al, 2014). The Islamic State’s own propaganda, however, focuses on local – and not high-level governance, including sections on the collection and distribution of zakah, the charity tithe (Islamic State 2014e), the “Office of Consumer Protection” (Islamic State
2014d), the “Islamic Police (Islamic State 2014e), the aid distribution networks (Islamic State 2014a), the implementation of hudud, or Islamic punishments (Islamic State 2014b), and even the “Office for Non-Muslim Affairs,’ for the Christians who are still here,” charged with collecting the jizya (VICE News 2014d).

Strategy

The Islamic State has very clearly and very publicly communicated its strategy, or long-term goals. In the first issue of Dabiq, the Islamic State outlined what it says has “always been the roadmap towards Khilafah for the mujahidin,” a five-step plan composed of hijrah (immigration of Muslims to the lands the Islamic State seeks to conquer), followed by jama’ah (congregation), the destabilization of taghut (secular rule), the achievement of tamkin (consolidation), and then the attainment of khilafah (Islamic State 2014h, 20).

Figure 43

Tactics

Military Targets

The Islamic State has also discussed the cities and locations it will target during step three of its strategy. In the first issue of Dabiq, the Islamic State explains that the name of the magazine “is taken from the area named Dabiq in the northern countryside of Halab (Aleppo) in Sham. This place was mentioned in a hadith describing some of the events of the Malahim (what is sometimes referred to as Armageddon in English),” and goes on to say that, “One of the greatest battles between the Muslims and the crusaders will take place near Dabiq” (Islamic State
The magazine further explains the requirements for beginning the time of Malahim, stating that,

“Abu Hurayrah reported that Allah’s Messenger (sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam) said, ‘The Hour will not be established until the Romans land at al-A’maq or Dabiq (two places near each other in the northern countryside of Halab). Then an army from al-Madinah of the best people on the earth at that time will leave for them. When they line up in ranks, the Romans will say, ‘Leave us and those who were taken as prisoners from amongst us so we can fight them.’ The Muslims will say, ‘Nay, by Allah, we will not abandon our brothers to you.’ So they will fight them. Then one third of them will flee; Allah will never forgive them. One third will be killed; they will be the best martyrs with Allah. And one third will conquer them; they will never be afflicted with fitnah. Then they will conquer Constantinople’” (Ibid).

Once those events have occurred, and “the Hour is established,” then a series of battles are, per Islamic State ideology, slated to occur in places within Shām and its vicinity, such as al-Ghūtah, Damascus, Dābiq (or al-A’maq), the Euphrates river, and Constantinople (which is near Shām), as well as Baytul-Maqdis (Jerusalem), the gate of Lod, Lake Tiberius, the Jordan river, Mount Sinai, and so on. And he (sallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam) linked this blessed land with many of the events related to al-Masīh [the Messiah], al-Mahdī [the final Islamic ruler before Armageddon], and the Dajjāl [the Antichrist]” (Islamic State 2014j, 9).

The Islamic State specifically believes that, “According to the hadith, the area [Shams] will play a historical role in the battles leading up to the conquests of Constantinople, then Rome (Islamic State 2014h, 5). The group noted in the first issue of Dabiq that, “Presently, Dabiq is under the control of crusader- backed sahwat [apostates], close to the warfront between them and the Khilafah,” and asked “May Allah purify Dabiq from the treachery of the sahwah and raise the flag of the Khilafah over its land” (Ibid). This prophesy, involving “an infidel horde flying 80 banners meets a Muslim army at the Syrian town of Dabiq in an apocalyptic battle,” was a favorite touchstone of deceased former AQI leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who declared, “The spark has been ignited in Iraq, and its flames will grow until they burn the Crusader armies in Dabiq” (Al-Atrush 2014).
Potential Alliances or Mergers

The Islamic State’s goal of *tamkin*, or consolidation, would certainly involve alliances or mergers with as many other jihadist groups as possible. The existing alliances or pledges of loyalty that the Islamic State has procured from for al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the Filipino jihadist group Abu Sayyaf, the Indonesian jihadist group Jemaah Islamiyah, and the Pakistani Taliban show that the Islamic State has taken major steps toward this goal (Yess 2014, Ressa 2014, Laia et al 2014, Al Arabiya 2014). The softening between the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra is an additional sign pointing toward a possible future alliance or merger (Lister et al 2014). If the Islamic State were to expand in power sufficiently to have reach outside of the Middle East, it seems likely that it would attempt to formalize its already-friendly relationships with Boko Haram and al Shabaab in order to bring them into the Islamic State.

Assets

Military

The exact type and number of military assets possessed by the Islamic State, like the exact number of its recruits or active fighter, would best be verified through the use of traditional intelligence collection doctrines and visual document analysis experts, and will therefore not be explored in greater detail herein. Highlights of the military assets featured in Islamic State propaganda, however, include Grad rockets and tanks (Islamic State 2014h, 23),
explosives and trained demolitions experts (Islamic state 2014u), and *ghanima* (war booty) seized by the Islamic State in Syria (Anonymous 2014a).

Financial

The Islamic State’s chief financial asset is its access to oil. The third issue of the *Islamic State Report* noted that, “Mosul is also important economically, considering there are oil fields and refineries in the area, as well as pipelines for transferring oil to Sham and Turkey” (Islamic State 2014e, 2). As of October 2014, a Treasury Department official estimated that “We think probably they make around $1 million per day,” leading “Matthew Levitt, director of the Stein Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy in Washington, D.C. [to call] ISIS ‘the best-financed group we've ever seen’” (Bronstein et al 2014).

Infrastructural

The Islamic State’s two biggest infrastructural assets are also its two biggest vulnerabilities: electricity and water. The Islamic State considered the Mosul dam to be important for electricity (Islamic State 2014e, 2), and its loss has been felt. While early reports from Syrian cities noted that “The administration can move quickly to repair water lines or fix electricity towers, all in full coordination with the Islamic Police and IS fighters” (Goha’s Nail 2014), more recently bloggers like Umm Layth have been less optimistic about electricity, stating in April 2014 that,

“You can have electricity most of the time or you can rarely have it - it just depends upon your circumstance - but you have to be prepared for not having your mobile charged or their not being light (alhumdulilah for battery powered lights and candles) and maybe
even learn how to wash your clothes by hand since you really cannot depend on the washing machine here” (Umm Layth 2014).

The Islamic State’s water supply is also crucial for its survival. Life in Syria and Iraq has always pivoted – geographically and economically – around the availability of water, and that is certainly true in the case of the Islamic State. Following Turkey’s decision to essentially slow the flow of the Euphrates river down to a trickle in order to prevent water from reaching Syria (al-Masri 2014), the little amount of water that is left is subject to even more contention that usual, with the Haditha dam being of particular interest to both sides.

In President Obama’s statement on August 18, 2014, he said that, “If [the Haditha] dam was breached, it could have proven catastrophic, with floods that would have threatened the lives of thousands of civilians and endangered our embassy compound in Baghdad” (Cunningham 2014).

There have been some concerns that the Islamic State would destroy or breach the dams in its possession in order to cause death and property damage downstream from those dams:

“In April, Islamic State jihadists controlling the Fallujah dam in western Anbar province closed its gates, in a move that some Iraqi officials say was meant to slow the flow of water to the Shiite-dominated provinces in the south. But the subsequent buildup of water at the Fallujah dam ended up flooding an irrigation channel in a Sunni area nearby, sending a wave of water into homes, schools and farmland. The deluge — which also swept away livestock and sent residents scrambling for makeshift rafts — ended up affecting as many as 40,000 people, aid workers said” (Ibid).

That flooding incident, however, appears to have been decidedly more accidental than intentional:

“[ISIS] realized after closing the dam gates—which resulted in a rise in water levels behind the dam—that if the closure continued, they will be besieged twice, once by the armed forces, and the second by rising water, and if they had to withdraw, they would drown, which in turn forced them to reopen the floodgates” (Pipes 2014).
Having learned a lesson regarding dam upkeep following the incident with the Fallujah dam, the Islamic State was particularly careful when it managed to take the Mosul dam. Although there were concerns due to the fact that the Haditha dam requires “‘extraordinary engineering measures’—namely constant grouting operations—to fill in the holes and "maintain the structural integrity and operating capability of the dam," as of August 9, 2014, the Islamic State’s (brief) control over the dam involved “[taking] over the repair works, [and] even bringing in its own engineers to conduct grouting” (Ibid).

Vulnerabilities

Military Intervention

Air strikes are necessary in order to forestall the Islamic State’s progress, but on their own will not be sufficient to do so. This is for two reasons. First, military intervention consisting solely of air strikes will only be successful if it is able to degrade the Islamic State’s capabilities by effectively targeting their military and infrastructural assets. Due to its composition and structure, the Islamic State simply may not offer enough targets for air strikes. Air strike targets from September 28-29, 2014 included “an armored vehicle, an anti-aircraft artillery transport vehicle and an airfield in northwest Syria near Aleppo,” as well as “an empty school and an abandoned military base that ISIL left about four months ago” (NightWatch 2014). This type of “tank plinking” may be an indicator that “the Coalition is running out of targets” (Ibid). Tank plinking is an air strike tactic that originated during the 1991 Persian Gulf War when “battlefield preparation” was unable “to meet the proposed attrition target of 50% prior to the start of the ground war” (Clancy 2007, 153-154). Tank plinking takes advantage of the fact that “since the sand of the desert cooled faster than the military equipment dug in among the dunes, the vehicles
and artillery tended to show up as ‘hot spots in the aircraft’s FLIR targeting systems,” by using this increased visibility to “hunt artillery and armor targets” (Ibid, 154). If Coalition forces have been forced to result to tank plinking this early in an air strike campaign, this is likely an indicator that the Islamic State is effectively denying the Coalition any easy targets. A recent defector supported this, claiming in an interview on September 29, 2014 that, “ISIS was well prepared for Coalition air strikes, moving their fighters and equipment. They almost entirely emptied out the headquarters. Some equipment they hid in civilian neighborhoods. Some they hid underground” (Damon et al 2014a, 0:48).

Second, air strikes on the Islamic State are likely to be frustrated by the group’s use of human shields. An Islamic State fighter from Raqqa was interviewed by CNN on September 29, 2014 when, “with permission from his Emir, he traveled closer to the border with Iraq to be able to access the Internet for this interview” (Ibid, 1:05). The fighter indicated that “since the Coalition air strikes in Syria . . . [the Islamic State] banned all communications from Raqqa” (Ibid). Speaking on behalf of the Islamic State, he said,

“We’ve been ready for this for some time. We know that our bases are known because they’re tracking us with radars and satellites. So we had backup locations. They thought they knew everything, but thank God, they don’t know anything. And God willing, we will defeat the infidels” (Ibid, 1:33).

This use of outside news organizations for propaganda is a calculated step. It indicates that al Baghdadi is willing to lift a blanket communications ban – a protective practice, given the air strikes – on a case-by-case basis in order to allow individual members of the Islamic State to publicize their ability to withstand Coalition air strikes, and to recruit at the same time. Al-Baghdadi’s willingness to allow Islamic State spokespeople to not grant an interview to western news organizations over Skype (in this case, CNN) but also to be interviewed by a female reporter (speaking through a male interpreter, but without attempting to conceal the fact that she
is leading the interview) indicates his level of comfort with bending his own rules in order to ensure maximum dissemination of his message. This type of interview is, without a doubt, propaganda.

Further, outside sources support the spokesman’s assertion that the Islamic State “had backup locations,” as well as the defector’s assertion that assets were hidden “in civilian neighborhoods” (Ibid). A “field commander of [the Kurdish] People’s Protection Units (YPG)” asserted that the Islamic State’s commanders are making tactical decisions in light of their belief that “the Pentagon is desperate to avoid civilian casualties” (Palmer 2014).

One civilian witness in Raqqa stated that, “days before [the air strikes], militant fighters in Raqqa melted away among the city’s civilians,” and that “they are taking apartments in civilian buildings, so you have six flats full of Daesh fighters, and four flats of ordinary people” (Salama 2014). He asserts that,

“While continuing to run the city, which it took over last year, ‘Isis moved all their women and children to the suburbs and to safe places, while their fighters began sleeping in the flats which they took from the citizens of Raqqa – Christians and people who have fled and people with more than one flat. They are using people as human shields by staying with them’” (Palmer).

In May 2013, the White House outlined a series of criteria that must be met in order to utilize deadly force against a terrorist threat “outside areas of active hostilities,” (White House, 2013). This policy declaration was made in part to respond to concerns about civilian casualties in drone strikes, and stated that,

“The following criteria must be met before lethal action may be taken:
1. Near certainty that the terrorist target is present;
2. Near certainty that non-combatants will not be injured or killed;
3. An assessment that capture is not feasible at the time of the operation;
4. An assessment that the relevant governmental authorities in the country where action is contemplated cannot or will not effectively address the threat to U.S. persons; and
5. An assessment that no other reasonable alternatives exist to effectively address the threat to U.S. persons” (Ibid).

In October 2014, National Security Council spokeswoman Caitlin Hayden stated that those restrictions “apply only when we take direct action 'outside areas of active hostilities,' as was noted at the time,” and that “that description—outside areas of active hostilities—simply does not fit what we are seeing on the ground in Iraq and Syria right now” (Acosta et al, 2014). This decision to not apply the “rules meant to temper the civilian death toll from unmanned U.S. drones . . . in the fight against terrorists in Iraq and Syria” (Ibid) may permit air strikes even in the presence of the Islamic State’s human shields, this presents the possibility of turning public sentiment entirely against the United States and Coalition action.

Diplomacy and Sanctions

It would be difficult to sanction an entity that has not been recognized as a state, and with whom the United States has no (official) trade. Nonetheless, the diplomatic relations – or at least negotiations – with the Islamic State does appear to be a possibility, given Turkey’s success in securing the release of the Islamic State’s Turkish hostages.

Counterpropaganda

As discussed in the propaganda analysis section hereinabove, there are certain types of counterpropaganda that are effective against the Islamic State, and others that are either ineffective or dangerous. Knowing the difference between the two, and observing its limitations, will help prevent providing the propagandists of the Islamic State with an even broader platform for their message.
Online tracking (*Jihadica Model*)

Unfortunately, the Islamic State’s online social media presence is difficult if not impossible to track as of October 2014. The practice of aggressively shutting down and suspending Islamic State social media accounts on Tumblr and Twitter does not prevent those individuals from spreading their message (Prucha 2014b); it simply prevents analysts from tracking the propagandists and their interaction with the pool of potential recruits. Ceasing this suspension policy would hopefully end the flight of Islamic State members and potential recruits to platforms like Diaspora*, and would eventually allow for detailed tracking of most-likely recruits in a way that is not possible at present.

**Conclusions**

**Policymaker Recommendations**

Air Strikes, Civilian Casualties, and Public Opinion

While the heightened restrictions on civilian casualties may not apply to air strikes conducted on the Islamic State within Syria and Iraq because those areas are not outside “areas of active hostilities” (White House 2013), a great deal of caution should still be used in carrying out these air strikes. One of the enduring images of the Syrian civil war has been that of the bodies of children killed by nerve agents during the Ghouta chemical attack. If Coalition forces attack aggressively in civilian areas, having notice of the Islamic State’s practice of using human shields, and having preemptively declared these attacks acceptable as they are not covered under the previous restrictions, public opinion within Syria – and possibly the Muslim community worldwide – will swing violently against the United States and its Coalition allies. If the bodies
of children killed in air strikes are shown and attributed to the Coalition’s actions, the Islamic State will be able to make the argument that the Coalition’s practices are as barbaric as those of the Assad regime. This must be prevented. A return to the increased oversight and caution requirements of the *U.S. Policy Standards and Procedures for the Use of Force in Counterterrorism Operations Outside the United States and Areas of Active Hostilities* would help avoid this, as would a limitation on tank plinking and careful review and approval of air strikes carried out in civilian areas. In this case, the benefits of increased targeting are outweighed by the need for target denial.

The Islamic State, Kurds, and Turkey

Since its June 2014 push back into Iraq, the Islamic State has engaged in a push-and-pull relationship with Iraqi (and now Syrian) Kurds. While it has been violent and bloody, it has not taken the form of an all-out slaughter.

In martial arts, when facing multiple opponents, one is frequently encouraged to “stack” those opponents. Stacking involves manipulating the parties’ positions so that the fighter can use one opponent to block the other’s access, allowing the fighter to engage with a single opponent at a time. The second opponent is forced to go through the first to reach the fighter, allowing the fighter to conserve energy. If possible, the fighter would prefer to have the opponents fight each other, allowing the fighter to incur the least amount of damage possible.

The Islamic State’s actions from June through October 2014 have been consistent with a fighter stacking his opponents. The Islamic State’s initial skirting of Kurdish territory followed by repeated incursions over the border of the semiautonomous region have caused Iraqi Kurds to
procure outside support, swell their fighting ranks, and obtain additional arms and military
resources.

While Kurdish nationalist sentiment has been somewhat quieted in recent decades by the
1999 capture of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan and the creation and acceptance of the Kurdish
Semiautonomous Region in Iraq, there is still a sizeable Kurdish population within the borders of
Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Iran that would prefer statehood to absorption within those other states.

Inasmuch as they share two of the Islamic State’s (i.e., Iraq’s and Syria’s) largest land
borders, the countries of Turkey and Iran theoretically stand to lose a great deal if the Islamic
State succeeds in its goals. The most effective way for the Islamic State to “stack” their
opponents, then – including the Kurds, Turkey, and Iran – would be to cause sufficient conflict
between the Kurds, Iran, and Turkey that a new push for Kurdish nationalism arises. This would
cause both Turkey and Iran to turn inward, forcing them to focus on maintaining the integrity of
their own territories, and would allow the Islamic State a much freer reign to expand within Iraq
and Syria. All that would be needed to precipitate such a nationalist push would be for the Kurds
to be armed and equipped to fight, and for some type of atrocity to occur that is so horrific that
the Kurds feel that their only chance at safe haven is through the formation of an independent
Kurdish state.

The Islamic State appears to have crafted such a situation. Turkey’s decision to close its
borders in the face of the conflict between Syrian Kurds and the Islamic State in Kobani, Syria in
early October 2014 could push the Kurds to a boiling point (Letsch 2014). The Syrian Kurds are
trapped with a wall of Turkish troops behind them and the Islamic State approaching from the
front, with nowhere to run (Ibid). As of October 8, 2014, the Turkish government is observing
the situation from a close distance, refusing to intervene, refusing to allow Syrian Kurdish
refugees entry into Turkey, and refusing to allow Turkish Kurds entry into Syria to protect their peers. With Pentagon spokesman Rear Adm. John Kirby acknowledging that “U.S. airstrikes ‘are not going to save’ the key Syrian city of Kobani from being overtaken by ISIS, and stating that, “I think we all should be steeling ourselves for that eventuality” (Yan et al 2014), the odds of the Islamic State succeeding in its attempt to stack its opponents look ever-more viable.

Defining the Terms of Engagement

In combating the Islamic State, it is important to be conscious of not only where the allied Coalition is engaging the group, but how. It is impossible to defeat an enemy that is actively seeking martyrdom by simply creating more martyrs. Instead, a dual-pronged approach would combine both aggressive military action and an aggressive plan to neutralize the Islamic State’s radical ideology. The Islamic State has proclaimed to its followers, allies, and potential recruits that it is following the “prophetic methodology” that will bring about the creation of khilafah and the end of days. Thus far, its military successes and rapid territorial spread have allowed al-Baghdadi to present the image that God is on the Islamic State’s side, and that its ideology and methodology are the only true interpretation of Islam.

Instead of selecting targets solely based upon traditional military target selection, it would be possible to also select targets based upon the Islamic State’s own strategy, and to turn its ideology against itself. If “The Hour will not be established until the Romans land at al-A’maq or Dabiq (two places near each other in the northern countryside of Halab)” (Islamic State 2014h, 4-5), then those two locations should be the first targeted for a ground invasion, and should be thoroughly reinforced and carefully held – regardless of tactical value.
Coalition military successes that directly contravene the Islamic State’s “prophetic methodology” will force the Islamic State to take one of two actions in response. If the Islamic State attempts to adjust course mid-war by suddenly denying the value of those cities and claiming that they aren’t entirely necessary, then it will be forced to acknowledge that its ideology was not God-given, but man-made, leading to a large-scale disillusionment and egress from its ranks. If the Islamic State clings to its methodology, but loses both locations to the “apostate” military Coalition, then it will be forced to admit that is has been defeated according to the prophetic standards, it will be acknowledging that God is not on its side, likewise leading to a large-scale disillusionment and egress from its ranks. Forcing the Islamic State to public commit to its own ideology, and then defeating it – by engaging on its own ideological turf – will do more to disempower the Islamic State than any number of purely military victories.

Semantics: Naming the Islamic State

Attempting to engage in a semantics war regarding the naming of the Islamic State will not be helpful. The Islamic State is not the first jihadist group to choose a grandiose title. In the past, victories have been won not by refusing to call those groups what they want to be called, but instead by engaging them on issues with substance.

An attempt has been made to classify the Islamic State as “not Islamic” (President Obama 2014). This statement appears to have been crafted in order to diminish the Islamic State’s prestige, assure Muslims worldwide that their religious identity has not been conflated with this terror group, and convince the American public that the Islamic State’s ideology and goals are not those of our potential Islamic allies. All three of these goals are valid and necessary, but this approach is fundamentally flawed.
Claiming that the Islamic State “is not Islamic” is incorrect. The Islamic State is Islamic. It is Islamic, then Sunni, then Salafi, and then militant jihadist. The Islamic State is just as much an Islamic organization as Westboro Baptist Church is a Christian one; the Islamic State represents mainstream Muslims just as much as the “God Hates Fags” organization that pickets veterans’ funerals represents mainstream Christians. It is not necessary to try to prove that the Islamic State isn’t Muslim in order to demonstrate that Islam is a religion of peace; it isn’t. Islam is a religion of peace, and of war, and of both, just as is Christianity, and Judaism, and most of the other faiths in the world. The Muslim community worldwide does not need to be condescended to in order to be included; the American community does not need to be lectured to in order to see the value in having Muslim allies. Acknowledging that the Islamic State represents only a small, violent sect of Islam – and does not remotely speak for all Muslims – is sufficient. All three goals could be accomplished, instead, through the issuance of a simple statement along the lines of, “It doesn’t matter what this group wants to call themselves. They will be forgotten by history. The efforts of America and our allies, working together with faithful Sunnis and Shias worldwide, is what will be remembered.”
LIST OF RESOURCES


APPENDIX A:

SELECTED TRANSCRIPTS OF ISLAMIC STATE PROPAGANDA VIDEOS

Islamic State First Beheading Video

James Wright Foley (American Citizen)

Caption: Obama authorizes military operations against the Islamic State effectively placing America upon a slippery slope towards a new war front against Muslims

President Barack Obama: Good evening. Today I authorized two operations in Iraq. Targeted air strikes to protect our American personnel, and a humanitarian effort to help save thousands of Iraqi civilians who are trapped on a mountain without food and water, and facing almost certain death. Let me explain the actions we're taking, and why. First, I said in June, as the terrorist group ISIL began an advance across Iraq, that the United States would be prepared to take targeted military action in Iraq if and when we determined that the situation required it. In recent days, these terrorists have continued to move across Iraq, and have neared the city of Erbil, where American diplomats and civilians serve at our consulate, and American military personnel advise Iraqi forces. To stop the advance on Erbil, I directed our military to take targeted strikes against ISIL terrorist convoys, should they move toward the city. We intend to stay vigilant, and take action if these terrorist forces threaten our personnel or facilities anywhere in Iraq, including our Consulate in Erbil, and our Embassy in Baghdad. We're also providing urgent assistance to Iraqi government and Kurdish forces so they can more effectively wage the fight against ISIL.
Foley: I call on my friends, family, and loved ones to rise up against my real killers, the US government. For what will happen to me is only a result of their complacency and criminality. My message to my beloved parents: save me some dignity, and don't accept any meager compensation for my death from the same people who effectively hit the last nail in my coffin with their recent aerial campaign in Iraq. I call on my brother John, who is a member of the US Air Force, think about what you are doing. Think about the lives you destroy, including those of your own family. I call on you, John, think about who made the decision to bomb Iraq recently, and kill those people, whoever they may have been. Think, John, who did they really kill? And did they think about me, you, our family, when they made that decision? I died that day, John. When your colleagues dropped that bomb on those people, they signed my death certificate. I wish I had more time. I wish I could have the hope of freedom and seeing my family once again, but that ship has sailed. I guess, all in all, I wish I wasn’t American.

Captor: This is James Wright Foley, an American citizen of your country. As a government, you have been at the forefront of the aggression towards the Islamic State. You have plotted against us and gone far out your way to find reasons to interfere in our affairs. Today, your
military Air Force is attacking us daily in Iraq. Your strikes have caused casualties amongst Muslims. You are no longer fighting an insurgency. We are an Islamic Army, and a state that has been accepted by a large number of Muslims worldwide. So effectively, any aggression towards the Islamic State is an aggression towards Muslims from all walks of life who have accepted the Islamic Caliphate as their leadership. So any attempt by you, Obama, to deny the Muslims their rights of living in safety under the Islamic Caliphate will result in the bloodshed of your people.

(Captor begins to cut Foley; video cuts; displays dead body)

Caption: Steven Joel Sotloff.

Captor: The life of this American citizen, Obama, depends on your next decision.
President Barack Obama: The United States of America will continue to do what we must do to protect our people. We will be vigilant and we will be relentless. When people harm Americans anywhere, we do what’s necessary to see that justice is done, and we act against ISIL standing alongside others.

Caption: A SECOND MESSAGE TO AMERICA

Sotloff: I am Steven Joel Sotloff. I’m sure you know exactly who I am by now, and why I am appearing before you, and now it is time for my message. Obama, your foreign policy of intervention in Iraq was supposed to be for the preservation of American lives and interests. So why is it that I am having to pay the price of your interference with my life? Am I not an American citizen? You’ve spent billions of US taxpayers’ dollars and we’ve lost thousands of our troops in our previous fighting against the Islamic State. So where’s the American people’s interests in reigniting this war? From what little I know about foreign policy, I remember a time when you could not win an election without promising to bring our troops back home from Iraq, and Afghanistan, and to close down Guantanamo. Here you are now, Obama, nearing the end of your term, and having achieved none of the above, and deceivingly marching us, the American people, into a blazing fire.
Captor: I'm back Obama, and I'm back because of your arrogant foreign policy towards the Islamic State, because of your insistence in continuing your bombings in Amerli, Samarra and the Mosul dam, despite our serious warnings. You, Obama, have yet again, through your actions, killed yet another American citizen. So just as your missiles continue to strike our people, our knife will continue to strike the necks of your people.

(Captor begins to cut Sotloff; video cuts; displays dead body.)

Caption: David Cawthorne Haines (British)

Captor: We take this opportunity to warn those governments who’ve entered this evil alliance of America against the Islamic State to back off, and leave our people alone.
**British Prime Minister David Cameron:** We will stick to the very clear foreign policy and the very clear strategy that we have, which is to work with the new Iraqi government, to help make sure that the Kurds get the arms they need, to fight off, uh, these brutal, uh, extremist militants, to work with our allies, and as I’ve said, to use everything that we have – our aid, our diplomacy, and our military prowess – to make sure that with allies, we do everything we can to put the pressure on Islamic State, this appalling organisation.

**Caption:** A MESSAGE TO THE ALLIES OF AMERICA

**Caption:** David Cawthorne Haines

**Haines:** My name is David Cawthorne Haines. I would like to declare that I hold you, David Cameron, entirely responsible for my execution. You entered voluntarily into a coalition with the United States against the Islamic State, just as your predecessor Tony Blair did, following a trend amongst our British Prime Ministers, who can’t find the courage to say no to the Americans. Unfortunately, it is we, the British public, that in the end will pay the price for our Parliament’s selfish decisions.

**Captor:** This British man has to pay the price for your promise, Cameron, to arm the Peshmerga against the Islamic State. Ironically, he has spent a decade of his life serving
under the same Royal Air Force that is responsible for delivering those arms. Your evil alliance with America, that continues to strike the Muslims of Iraq, and most recently, bomb the Haditha Dam, will only accelerate your destruction. And playing the role of the obedient lapdog, Cameron, will only drag you and your people into another bloody and unwinnable war.

(Captor begins to cut Haines; video cuts, displays dead body.)

Caption: Alan Henning (British)

Captor: If you, Cameron, persist in fighting the Islamic State, then you, like your master Obama, will have the blood of your people on your hands.
British Newscaster: A seven-hour long debate in the British Parliament has culminated in a landslide approval of UK strikes on Islamic State positions in Iraq. All three major parties backing the initiative, and the bombings could be unleashed any moment now.

Caption: ANOTHER MESSAGE TO AMERICA AND ITS ALLIES

Caption: Allen Henning (British)

Henning: I am Alan Henning. Because of our Parliament’s decision to attack the Islamic State, I, as a member of the British public, will now pay the price for that decision.

Captor: The blood of David Haines was on your hands, Cameron. Alan Henning will also be slaughtered, but his blood is on the hands of the British Parliament.

(Captor begins to cut Henning; video cuts, displays dead body.)

Caption: Peter Edward Kassig (American)

Captor: Obama, you have started your aerial bombardment in Sham, which keeps on striking our people, so it’s only right we continue to strike the necks of your people.
APPENDIX B:

SELECTED ANALYSES OF ISLAMIC STATE VIDEOS

BY VIDEO PRODUCTION EXPERTS

First Video: “O Soldiers of Truth Go Forth”

**Nick H. (Technical Director):** This video was probably produced using After Effects. This opinion is derived from the use of the spotty “film burn” effect, the poor quality of the masking, and the audio-driven scaling effect. Additionally, the file metadata shows that HandBrake 0.9.5 2011010300 was used to encode the MP4 from its source. This is clearly not the original file, but it shows that a Mac was used at some point in the process. It is also an indicator that the producer of the file probably did not use Final Cut, because Compressor would almost certainly have been used if the file was produced in Final Cut. As Adobe has trouble working with MP4 files, Handbrake is a good choice for use with After Effects.

**Jessica T. (Assistant Editor):** It is possible that the first two videos were edited together by the same person, as they share a number of traits in common. Both of the first two videos probably incorporate some footage taken from cell phone cameras or flip cameras.
Second Video: “Let’s Go For Jihad”

**Nick H. (Technical Director):** This video was produced using After Effects, with a 99.9% certainty. After Effects uses a multisinusoidal pattern with a random seed for the fake camera shake effect, which has a distinctive (i.e., amateur-looking) appearance. Additionally, the text crawls on the bottom of the screen have motion blur. Few editing suites have motion blur on text crawls as an option, and it is therefore one of the first things people like to play with in After Effects for motion graphics. With regard to a purchasing paper trail, unfortunately Adobe is some of the most-often stolen software. However, the person who made this video has obviously watched the tutorials at http://www.videocopilot.net, and also definitely downloaded the Optical Flares plugin that is available at that site. This plugin is somewhat less commonly pirated, as it is not very expensive, and is easy to identify because it is very frequently used and incorporates a distinctive style of “chroma hoops.”
Third Video: “There Is No Life Without Jihad”

**Nick H. (Technical Director):** This video could have been produced using any editing suite, but the introduction was most likely created using either After Effects or Photoshop with a masked blur on the stills (something that can also be done in Photoshop). The straight-line shadow along the bottom indicates that it was shot outside, under a tent. In the event that these first three videos were all created by the same person, it was someone who cares enough to put in a lot of effort (obtaining a copy of After Effects, obtaining plugins, and watching tutorials to learn how to apply the effects) but who lacks any real creative constant. These three videos are “copy/paste razzle-dazzle” effects that don’t quite match the tone of the piece. The person who created these was most likely someone within the organization who has a failed background in music or entertainment, or someone very young. As a whole, these three videos seem more like someone’s hobby or plaything than a real or official message with purpose and feeling.

**Jessica T. (Assistant Editor):** Because this video incorporates so much less razzle-dazzle, it feels like a different person than the person who produced the first two videos may have produced it. The majority of the cross fades and the fades to black feel like they are about one second in length, which is the default length of the transition if it is put on the cut and then not adjusted. There is a blur crossfade transition near the end that stands out. It seems likely that if same person who produced the first two videos produced this one, then more of the transitions would have been like that one, and they all would have been quicker.
The lighting does indicate use of a tent or something similar, as that would soften the light. A regular type of tent that doesn’t have sides to it would be effective; this is frequently used for behind-the-scenes interviews on movie sets. It does not appear that any lighting equipment was used. This video was clearly shot with two cameras on tripods, operated by one or two people. These two camera operators are not used to tripods, and likely not used to being camera operators, as indicated by the slight jerkiness at the beginning of almost every camera move. The quality of the footage is fairly good, but not distinctive enough to point to a specific camera model. This video was most likely shot with “pro-sumer” quality cameras, meaning that they are relatively high quality but still commercially available. It is possible to obtain relatively good cameras these days for relatively cheap; this video does not look quite as high quality as it would if it were footage from a high-end professional camera. Because there is no jiggle to the image when the camera jerks, it is definitely nicer than a cell phone camera or a flip camera. It is possible that is was produced with a Go Pro camera or a DSLR, which both have good form factor in that they are small but high quality. Both types of cameras are popular right now. It is difficult to know how much of the fuzziness in this video should be attributed to the cameras with which it was shot, and how much should be attributed to the way it was compressed to upload it to the Internet.

The audio quality is fairly high. Only one person speaks at a time, and it looks as though they might have one and only one lav (lavalier) microphone. There is a small black clip with a white extension visibly attached to the clothing of whoever is speaking (visible at 2:25 and 7:55, for example). This might either be a lav microphone attached with white tape or a white clip.
**Fourth Video: James Wright Foley Beheading**

**Nick H. (Technical Director):** The "video interference" over the Obama footage is rather hard to pin down. There are too many different ways to produce those lines to narrow it down to a single type of software or plugin. However, the ghosting effect is somewhat interesting, as not many tutorials that are available mention how to make this effect look decent. This points in the direction of a packaged effect, most likely targeted at After Effects, as that is the editing suite where people that develop plugins are most likely to earn money doing so. Unfortunately, this interference does not narrow down the software possibilities very much. It is not likely that the interference is real; however, if it is real, the somewhat regular frequency would suggest that the interference was caused by a nearby electric motor such as a refrigerator compressor or some kind of water pump, which would both likely be large enough to interrupt the signal.

The title wipe is the most easily identifiable part of this video. It could be produced by either Final Cut or After Effects/Premiere, based on the "inner glow" that animates only over the word "message" for emphasis. The font is the most striking aspect, however: the rather long, angled serifs (the tails on the ends of the strokes) that overlap between the “M” and the “E” in “America” are distinctive. Without additional expertise in fonts, it is difficult to name this particular font. The variable kerning (spacing between letters) and font size again suggest that this was produced in After Effects/Premiere, since these can all be controlled easily by typing and selection in those suites. The James Foley footage was shot with no fewer than two cameras, but possibly with three. The front, the 3/4 close-up, and the 3/4 wide shots all crossfade gracefully, with only subtle color balance changes. The 3/4
close-up is not certain to have come from a different camera than the 3/4 wide shot, but it is likely that it did, as there would usually be noticeable blocking if footage was digitally blown up by that much.

Jessica T. (Assistant Editor): As the technical director said, the “video interference” or grey lines over the Obama footage is most likely an effect, and not real interference with the video source. The “TV lines” over the footage is an effect too, and a relatively common one. Most editing software suites should have something that would create this look. It is not clear where they are obtaining the footage from, but the source material seems to be pretty clean under the effects (i.e., there does not appear to be any blocking or other video artifacting/visual artifacts). The “Bad TV” effect, which appears to be turning on and off, does not look like the standard effect available in Final Cut Pro; however, there are effects packages available for most video editing suites, so Final Cut cannot be entirely ruled out as the software that they are using. In terms of production value, the TV lines (and not the grey “interference” lines) are part of a look used in a lot of movies when the editors want to make something look as though it is on TV. It is possible that the creators of this video are going for the TV effect partly because it is what is done in the movies; however, this has the effect of making the audience feel further away from Obama and closer to what occurs later in the video. The later portions of the video feel as though they are not “on TV” and that makes them seem even more real.

With regard to the microphones, James Foley is wearing a lav mic, and his captor must be wearing a lavaliier too. The audio for both men is very clear, even though you can hear some wind noise when the wind picks up as the captor starts to speak.
Fifth Video: Steven Joel Sotloff Beheading

**Nick H. (Technical Director):** This video uses the same “video interference” effect as the Foley beheading video, but without the ghosting effect. This could have been produced by any software-editing suite. The title wipe is different from the Foley video, and much more hurried. The font is basic, blocky, and does not match the overall style of the piece, nor the font used in the preceding one. This video could have been used by a different person, using a template. Unfortunately, there is not much that can be identified from the software editing effects used in this video. It looks like there were only two cameras used to obtain the footage for this video. One of those cameras may not be the same as the cameras used in the Foley video; while this opinion cannot be qualified through any measurable rubric, it “looks” different in a way that is due to more than simply the color balance.

**Jessica T. (Assistant Editor):** This video has the same effects added to the Obama footage as before, although the grey interference lines were not used this time. The audio static might be real, but might be an added effect. It appears more likely that the static is real and inherent to the source or means used to obtain the footage. In the later part of the video, lavalier microphones are used again. The audio for the captor is worse in this video, possibly because the lab is too close to his mouth under the fabric around his face. There is a good amount of wind/noise interference in the part where the captor is speaking, but this does not appear to be wind so much as some fabric rustling, which could be due to the microphone being completely covered by his clothing. While at first it appeared that the captor’s lines were looped (i.e., that his lines were recorded later and added to the video in
post-production), this does not appear to be the case because there is so much rustling, and the producers of this video clearly know how to get good audio. No lighting was needed for this video or the Foley video, as they were both shot in the middle of the day, and it was very sunny for both.
Sixth Video: David Cawthorne Haines Beheading

Jessica T. (Assistant Editor): This video used the same “Bad TV” turn-on and turn-off and lines of resolution effects as were used in the last two videos. There is a very quick glitch at 01:07:16 where the whole screen darkens. It is not clear what caused this, but it is something that happened during post-production, perhaps either a render error or a graphic element that was accidentally left over the video for that frame. As with the prior two videos, the lavalier microphone is removed from the victim for the section where his captor speaks. This may be for the practical concern of not wanting to damage the lav microphone during the beheading itself. However, the video cuts between each section, so it seems like the microphone could be left where it is while the captor is talking, and then removed from the victim prior to the beheading; this makes it more likely that they only have a single lavalier mic, and are moving it from the victim to the captor between sections.
Seventh Video: "Flames of War” Trailer

Jessica T. (Assistant Editor): This video looks like it was produced using After Effects, based upon the flames and the motion effects. There was a great deal of digital artifacting at the end of the video, which looks unintentional, as though something went wrong at some point when it was being transferred. It does not seem like the kind of thing that the video creator would intentionally choose to release in that condition. Also, there is some artifacting that occurs in one of the transitions near the end, which does not look like an effect. It was either damaged footage that was intentionally used, or – inasmuch as there is so much artifacting at the end of the piece – it could have occurred whenever the artifacting at the end was introduced.