A Model for Terror: *The Islamic State*

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Introduction

The terrorist attacks that were carried out in Paris in November of 2015 and the attacks in Brussels in March of 2016 have reignited Western society's interest in and concerns about indiscriminate attacks by terrorist organizations. The November 2015 attack, which is being referred to as the “Paris Massacre,” left over 120 people dead.1 The March 2016 attack to Brussels metro and airport systems killed over 30 people.2 In addition to causing this appalling death total, the attacks shook confidence among Western citizens in their governments' ability to provide security. Therefore, the present circumstances call for immediate review of the terrorist organization responsible. The Islamic State is not going to disappear without a focused and effective strategy that identifies and combats its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, as an organization.

The attempt to define terrorism is an ongoing task with which numerous individuals, governments, and agencies continue to wrestle. Kingsley Okoro, author of *Religion and Terrorism: A Socio-Historical Re-Consideration* finds that terrorism is the “substrate application of violence or threatened use of violence intended to show panic in the society, to weaken or even overthrow the incumbent and bring about political change.”3 Paul Davis and Kim Cragin state, “Terrorism is the threatened use of violence for the purpose of inducing terror.”4 In any case, put very simply, terrorists use violence to advance their convictions and associated objectives.

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The group in question, the Islamic State, has aspirations that need to be identified and defined. “The jihadist group responsible for the insurgency calls itself the Islamic State, a term that reflects its aspirations of creating a caliphate – a state ruled by a single political and religious leader that crosses national borders.”\(^5\) The previous text, put out by the Congressional Digest, assists in illustrating the aspirations of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the current leader of the Islamic State, who works to insert himself as the leader of the Muslim world. In addition to seeking the rule of all political and religious matters within the territory of the Caliphate, the Islamic State has “the goals of expelling Western influence from Muslim countries and to kill U.S. citizens, civilian and military, and their allies everywhere.”\(^6\) The mission statement of the Islamic State, as well as its continued focus on injecting terror into the societies of otherwise secure nations, has motivated a number of nations to pursue the downfall of the organization. However, there is currently far too little coordination and force involved to destroy or even diminish the Islamic State. In fact, the Islamic State continues to expand its reach, grow the organization, and diversify its income streams. The often misguided actions of those who oppose extremist expansion in the MENA region, coupled with social, economic, and political factors fueling support for extremists, have allowed for the Islamic State to thrive.

When researching the organization in question, one will undoubtedly come across a slew of different names, all of which refer to the same Baghdadi-led group. In addition to the IS or the Islamic State, the group has also, at some point or another, in the last decade, been referred to as al-Tawid wal-Jihad in 2000, al-Qaida in Iraq or AQI in 2004, the Islamic State of Iraq or ISI in 2006, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria or ISIS in 2013, and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant or ISIL in 2013.\(^7\) ISIL actually began at the turn of the 21st century, when its founder, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, “sought out Osama Bin Ladin in Afghanistan and requested assistance in creating al-Tawid wal-Jihad, an organization that focused on overthrowing the Jordanian government.”\(^8\) Zarqawi later swore allegiance to al-Qaida in 2004, which created al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI). The U.S. successfully eliminated Zarqawi with a precision airstrike in 2006, which resulted in Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi taking over, and changing the organizations name to the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). Then in 2013, after of number of irreconcilable differences between Baghdadi and al-Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawarhiri arose, Baghdadi split from AQ, and took on the name the Islamic State

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\(^8\) Ibid.

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In an attempt to identify his polity as the caliphate of the Muslim world, which aligns the organizational name with the ultimate organizational goal.\(^9\)

The areas of operation (AOR) for the Islamic State currently include “The occupation of swaths of territory, stretching from the outskirts of Aleppo, Syria’s largest city, eastward beyond Tikrit, Saddam Hussein’s war-torn hometown in Iraq.” The Northeastern Syrian city of Raqqa is the capital of the Islamic States established caliphate.\(^10\) Although the majority of the action and focus currently take place in between Eastern Syria and Western Iraq, the groups influence and foothold reaches all along the Mediterranean Sea, from Turkey to Egypt. “The ultra-violent Islamic State terrorist group is expanding beyond Syria and Iraq and is establishing a foothold in Libya, which is becoming a safe haven for terrorists.”\(^11\)

Baghdadi is skilled at the trade of marketing. In constantly rebranding his organization with a name that illustrates the groups increasing reach and power, he has sent a clear and illustrative message to the world, as well as to potential recruits. Recent estimates suggest that ISIL has access to up to 31,500 soldiers, which is a fifteen-fold increase on the numbers of AQI in 2011.\(^12\)

As previously alluded to, a strategy that disrupts current social, economic, and political factors is essential to combating the Islamic State. Some of the factors that the Islamic State capitalizes on results from events that have transpired, whereas other factors can be attributed to geography or the environment. The difference between these factors (precipitant and permissive) is important, as classifying them accordingly is vital in devising a plan of corrective action. Newman states that precipitant factors are those that “provide a window of opportunity, they determine leadership and organization, as well as shape the political agenda.”\(^13\) Precipitant factors, therefore, are events that help catalyze or trigger a change in behavior – a move toward violent action. Examples of these factors include the repression of a targeted group, the threatened disruption of the targeted group, and failed elections.\(^14\)

Newman found that permissive factors, on the other hand, provide a social

\(^9\) Ibid.


\(^13\) “Social Science for Counterterrorism: Putting the Pieces Together” (p. 13) (see footnote 4)

\(^14\) Ibid.
environment and widespread grievances that when combined with certain precipitant factors, result in the emergence of terrorist organizations and terrorist acts. Permissive factors, therefore, are the context in which the opportunity for terrorism is created. Examples of these factors are those that illustrate a lack of political opposition, economic inequality, social instability from modernization, and the cultural acceptance of violence. Consequently, the efforts of the U.S. and her allies need to address permissive factors of terrorism. In removing the opportunity for terrorism to succeed, one can be hopeful that less precipitant factors will arise.

Military power, intelligence operations, and law enforcement efforts alone will not solve the long-term challenge the U.S. faces – the threat of violent extremism. Instead we must look as well to the political, economic, and social factors that terrorist organizations exploit and the ideology that is their key instrument in pushing vulnerable individuals on the path towards violence.

The social factors that have played a role in perpetuating the existence of the Islamic State are vast. Aspects of social dynamics such as age, religion, unemployment, and environment uncover serious issues that are hopeless without intervention. One-third of the population in the MENA region is between the ages of 12 and 24 years old. The 200 million people that fall into this category have an unemployment rate of greater than 50 percent. Furthermore, “a number of studies on youth in the MENA region indicate that they suffer from a lack of participation at all levels, accompanied by an absence of a sense of belonging.” The Islamic State has capitalized on the discontent that the youth in their region have regarding their situation. The Global Terrorism Index cites that “high levels of group grievances are associated with high levels of terrorism.” The youth that reside in the lands of the Islamic State are therefore more prone to terrorist recruitment, as over a million young people are armed only with frustration.

Religion is often named as the most formidable element associated with terrorism. Kingsley Okoro notes that, “Amidst all diverse motivations of contemporary upsurge of terrorist attacks, religious motivations have been

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15 Ibid.
18 Ibid. (p. 342)
19 “Global Terrorism Index” (see footnote 12)
spotlighted as the major source of terrorism in the 21st century.”

In looking at historical tensions between the two major factions of Islam, one can see how this strain works in the favor of the Islamic State. “Islam has been divided between Sunni and Shit’ite since the Battle of Badr in 624 CE, which presented a bitter dispute between the Prophet Mohammad and Muslims in Mecca.” Whereas the Shi’ites believe that the leader of the religion should be in the bloodline of the Prophet Mohammad, the Sunnis believe that the leader should be chosen based on his piety and clear favor from Allah. This dispute over who inherits the role of political and religious leader has sparked terrible acts in the name of religion over the course of history. Sunni Muslims account for around 90 percent of the 1.6 billion Muslims worldwide. The Shi’ites, although greatly outnumbered, have leveled the playing field by leveraging relations with Shi’ite dominated Iran and their large oil resources.

The Sunni-majority areas in Iraq and throughout the Levant are plagued by religious animosity. Hundreds of thousands of people in both sects have perished in an attempt to defend their group’s beliefs. Capitalizing on the violence that manifests itself in anger, over religion, has been a true fuel to the fire that the Islamic State intends on keeping aflame. Crowley states, “A climactic war with the Shi’ites is exactly what ISIL wants.”

It appears that religious tensions are now fueling the war to which Crowley refers. Social factors outside of religion, however, have been identified as having a significant role with areas like the MENA region. Okoro claims “If jobs were available for the unemployed, the problem of religious politics in impoverished societies would quickly vanish.”

Whether one agrees or disagrees with Okoro’s view, unemployment is a factor that requires undivided attention in the larger effort to reduce the number of extremists. Unemployment is a social factor that hits nations, comprised of younger populations, with more force than areas that have a more diversely aged community of individuals. Zaalouk displays his understanding of this phenomenon in stating, “When young people are unemployed they are really marginalized, pushed into poverty, and manifest all the symptoms of low self-esteem, frustration, anger, and unrest.”

You do not have to posses a degree in Psychology to understand that a large group of individuals with low self-esteem, who are frustrated and angry, makes for an

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20 “Religion and Terrorism: A Socio-Historical Re-Consideration” (see footnote 3)

http://asianhistory.about.com/od/warsinasia/a/battleofbadr.htm


23 Ibid.

24 “Religion and Terrorism: A Socio-Historical Re-Consideration” (see footnote 3)

25 “A Human Economy: A Third Way for the Future of Young People in the Middle East and North Africa” (see footnote 17)
excellent recruiting target. Many of these young people are seeking to improve their
situations – to address their need for resources and pleasures that have been denied
to them. The Islamic State is capitalizing on this impressionable and desperate group.

Frustration-Aggression Theory, developed by Psychologist John Dollard and
associates, offers some interesting insights into the unemployment dilemma facing
individuals who occupy the area dominated by the Islamic State. The theory states,
“When there is a blockage of the attainment of ones personal and environmental
goals, aggression may be inevitable.” Akanni finds himself in agreement with
Dollard. “The absence of job opportunities in developing countries is responsible for
youth restiveness, resulting in disastrous consequences.” So, unemployment has
created a frustrated group of individuals prone to violence and they are one million
strong, in an area with an ongoing conflict. The equation is perfect for a violent group
of Sunni Fundamentalists. Between 2006 and 2011, unemployment in the MENA
region increased from 5 percent to almost 25 percent. In 2013, when the rest of the
world experienced a decline in terrorist acts, countries where the IS operates (Iraq,
Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Nigeria) saw terrorist incidents increase by as much
as 164 percent. Although it is difficult to defend the statement “unemployment
causes terrorism,” it is hard to ignore the trends and positive relationship displayed
between the two variables. To be clear, “a hungry man is an angry man.” When the
physical and psychological needs of an individual are not met, the individual will work
to satisfy the particular need or want. Unfortunately for those who oppose the Islamic
State, individuals seeking the satisfaction of needs often look to the terrorist
organization for this fulfillment.

The constant argument, “Is it nature or nurture?” comes into play here. How
much does one’s environment influence what that person becomes? A look into the
environment where the Islamic State operates is necessary. Some have concluded
that violence breed’s violence. Therefore it is not surprising that the Global Terrorism
Index states, “The most common context for the onset of terrorist violence is within
an ongoing conflict.” It stands to reason that the civil conflicts in Iraq and Syria have
acted as petri dishes for the type of transformation the Islamic State is after. The
organization has benefited directly from the environment in which it operates.
Vicarious Learning Theory, advanced by Psychologist Albert Bandura, states that
“Human-beings learn by observation and imitation, and therefore, when we observe

26 Akanni, A.A. “History of Terrorism, Youth Psychology and Unemployment in Nigeria,” (p. 65) Journal
of Pan African Studies, September 1, 2014.
http://eds.a.ebscohost.com.easydb.angelo.edu/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=50871302-cb95-4117-
a362-ad3753224236%40sessionmgr4005&vid=14&hid=4211
27 Ibid.
28 “Global Terrorism Index” (see footnote 12)
29 “History of Terrorism, Youth Psychology and Unemployment in Nigeria” (p. 73) (see footnote 26)
30 “Global Terrorism Index” (see footnote 12)
an individual being rewarded for a terrorist attack, there is a possibility we might want to exhibit such behavior believing that the same reward will follow our action.”  

Furthermore, writer Richard Berrett finds that “there are a lack of attractive alternatives for local and foreign fighters who decide to join ISIL as a way to find identity, purpose, belonging, and spiritual fulfillment.” When the individuals in the MENA region see that others have acquired the intangibles that they desire, the environment and Vicarious Learning Theory heavily influence one’s decision to join the ranks of the Islamic State.

In seeking to determine the true role of the Muslim religion on the path to violence, researchers Anne Aly and Jason-Leigh Striegher utilized data collected from the first homegrown terrorist in Australia. In conducting their analysis of the information ascertained, Aly and Striegher find that the exposure to extremist proselytizing, more than any other independent variable of terrorism, is to blame. Aly states, “Sustained exposure to extremist ideologies and close interaction with radicalized individuals may be key triggers for the radicalization process.” A tumultuous environment rich with radicalized individuals pushes people from believer to violent actor. The four-step model (to radicalization) utilized by Aly and Striegher showcases that our surroundings and relationships play the largest role in determining whether or not an individual ever turns violent. Therefore, religion, in the case of the Islamic State, provides the necessary historical context for strained relations between the Sunnis and Shi’ites. The environment, on the other hand, produces the violent behavior that threatens the security of citizens worldwide and propels the Islamic State.

Social transformation is required if the Islamic State, and others like it, are to be defeated with any kind of permanence. Many would argue that a focus on what can be done is the only acceptable use of time invested. Therefore, in the MENA region, making an investment in infrastructure that creates jobs and provides the otherwise young and frustrated community with income and the hope of a better future is an obvious route to take. We must seek to utilize Vicarious Learning Theory in our favor. By illustrating that roads to success and fulfillment are reachable without resorting to the violent agenda of the Islamic State, and other terrorist organizations, global policing agents can provide the community at risk with legitimate means to acquire their needs and wants.

31 “History of Terrorism, Youth Psychology and Unemployment in Nigeria” (see footnote 26)


The economic factors in play with the Islamic State revolve around their streams of income, and the hopeless economic situation of the people in areas that the organization targets for takeover. With an average household income of less than $3,500 for those lucky enough to generate a salary, individuals in the MENA region are far from financially comfortable.\(^3^4\) Inequality is a factor that the average household income does not properly illustrate. Over eight million people in the region live on less than $1.90 per day.\(^3^5\) “Inequality retards development generally: slowing economic growth; resulting in health and social problems, including worsened education outcomes; exacerbating poverty and unemployment leading to severer social inequalities, especially among children; and generating social and political instability and conflicts as exemplified by the ‘Arab revolution.’”\(^3^6\) The ongoing conflict referred to earlier has displaced a number of individuals. Due to the large number of transients, who are without stable roofs over their heads, the Islamic State offers income and resources that legitimate avenues simply cannot match. There are over 5.2 million individuals in Iraq who are in need of humanitarian aid. Additionally, there are one million Iraqi refugees and nearly a quarter of a million Syrian refugees.\(^3^7\) Based on the diversified and impressive financial streams that the IS has created, or exploited, their fiscal health finds itself on the other end of the spectrum, when compared to the common individual in the region. When the dust settles and the reflection is clear, it is quite obvious that the economic situation that faces the everyday Iraqi citizen is daunting.

Saima Kayani states, “ISIL is believed to be the wealthiest militant group in the world. It relies on all kinds of sources of income including enslavement and selling of captured women, extortion, plundering, taxation, kidnapping, donations, and selling crude oil in the black market.”\(^3^8\) The Islamic State’s well-funded organization has its


\(^{35}\) Ibid.


\(^{37}\) “CRS in Iraq,” Catholic Relief Services, November 22, 2015. http://www.crs.org/our-work-overseas/where-we-work/iraq?gclid=CjwKEAia7MWyBRDpi5TFqmm6hMSJAD6GLEA0LSvS4peAh4lz0HsjryBdr6Pim30lsFmDNhcqTDPxhoCGZDw_wcB

hooks in a number of illegal and morally unsavory business verticals. The economic health of the Islamic State is widely known, and something that the U.S. is targeting.

After the 9/11 attacks, the high-level U.S. government officials publicly declared that the fight against AQ financing was as critical as the fight against AQ itself. It has been presented as one of the keys to success in the fight against terrorism: if we choke off the terrorists’ money, we limit their ability to conduct mass casualty attacks. Therefore, it is essential that we identify where the money comes from and how vital each source of revenue is in the larger scheme of perpetuating terror.

Zachary Lamb, editor for the Council on Foreign Relations, provides some shocking information on how the Islamic State has benefited from crude oil sales in the black market. Lamb states that the terrorist group produces 44,000 barrels per day of crude oil in Syria and another 4,000 barrels of crude oil in Iraq, giving the Islamic State between one and three million USD per day in profits from oil sales alone.

The history and culture of the Middle East are rich as it has hosted civilizations for thousands of years. It is not surprising then that as many as 5,000 archeological sites are located in territory that ISIL controls. In his research, Keller finds that “ISIL is well organized to traffic in looted antiquities, that it devotes considerable administration and logistic resources to this activity, and that it profits from this activity.” There is not a solidified income or profit that researchers and open-source intelligence have identified, but most agree that the Islamic State has made several millions in profit since mid-2014 from the trafficking of looted antiques.

In addition to earning their operational capital from their own efforts, the Islamic State does not turn a cheek to the donations of governments, nations, and individuals who wish to assist the terrorist group. A 2002 CIA report cites that “AQ relied for its financing on a variety of donors and fundraisers, primarily in Gulf countries, and particularly in Saudi Arabia.” James Stavridis, former U.S. official and current dean of the Fletcher School of Diplomacy at Tufts University states,

These rich Arabs are like what 'angel investors' are to tech start-ups, except they are interested in starting up groups who want to stir up hatred. The individuals act as high rollers early, providing seed money. Once the groups are on their feet, they

41 Ibid.
are perfectly capable of raising funds through other means, like kidnapping, oil smuggling, selling women into slavery, etc.\textsuperscript{43}

The business of taxing individuals is normally reserved for legitimate governments, which in turn invest the taxpayer’s money into infrastructure and security for the taxed individual. The Islamic State, however, saw the opportunity that a system of taxation brought and used it to develop the necessary protocols to generate millions of dollars. A civilian living in the region stated, “The tax system was well organized. They took money from small merchants, petrol station owners, generator owners, small factories, big companies, even pharmacists and doctors.”\textsuperscript{44} Further, “ISIL has reportedly imposed specific taxes on the movement of goods in parts of Iraq where it operates, including a road tax of 200 USD in Northern Iraq and an 800 USD "customs" tax on trucks entering Iraq along the Syrian and Jordanian borders.”\textsuperscript{45}

Although there are a number of other business ventures from which the Islamic State profits the final major financing operation that will be covered is the group’s practice of extortion. The threat of force, without a doubt, is the key to successfully extorting money from businesses and corporations, who are defenseless against the violence and death promised by the Islamic State. “The AQ spin-off extorts money from businesses in Mosul for nearly eight million dollars per month.”\textsuperscript{46}

When everything is added up, ISIL made between a half a billion and over one billion dollars in 2014, with 75%-90% of their profits coming from oil revenues. “The group has amassed the wealth at an unprecedented pace from different sources than most terror groups. This poses a particular problem to the U.S. and its allies: We have no silver bullet, no secret weapon to empty ISILs coffers overnight.”\textsuperscript{47} Just as a smart investor, who plays the market and diversifies his portfolio to avoid the adverse effects of putting all of his eggs in one basket, ISIL too implements savvy business-minded practices.

My personal assessment to deal with the economic factors that perpetuate the Islamic State is simple. It is based on the facts provided, and there is no magic to how


\textsuperscript{47}“Regionalization of Political Violence: Arab Levant and Rise of Islamic State” (see footnote 44)
I arrived at my conclusion. If we cannot, as Kayani puts it, “empty ISILs coffers overnight,” we must look to the largest disruption that can be caused. In upsetting the production and sale of oil, those opposing extremist expansion in the MENA region can effectively reduce or eliminate almost 90 percent of the income that the Islamic State acquires annually. This is the best use of time and money – target production facilities and lines of communication utilized in the sale of crude oil.

The political factors that perpetuate the existence of the Islamic State are vast. Some are the result of history that precedes U.S. intervention, but most of the politics that play a part in helping the organization survive have been, at least in a small way affected by the United States of America. The invasion and occupation of Iraq occurred less than two years after the 9/11 attacks. In 2003, the Bush Administration made the decision to invade Iraq, under the assumption that Saddam was in possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). Regardless of the validity of the reason offered to invade Iraq, the Iraqi leadership put in place by United States officials has had a lasting impact on the citizenry of Iraq. De-Ba’athification, or the U.S.-led elimination of any individuals with loyalty to the Ba’ath party from the Iraqi government, created a political situation that increased the motivation and creed for terrorist organizations in Iraq.

The Bush administration did not just get rid of all of Saddam’s influence in government; they also rid the nation of an Army. The disbanding of the Iraqi Army may not have been avoidable, but the ramifications directly fueled the situation as it stands today. Hendawi and Qassim conclude, “Saddam’s former commanders, appalled by the U.S. decision to disband the Army, found their calling in the Sunni Insurgency.”

A.A. Akanni comments on the process of going from Iraqi Commander to Terrorist Executive. “For some people, the process of joining a terrorist organization is started after some dramatic change in life.” This precipitant factor, of losing one’s livelihood and having few prospects to positively effect change in one’s own life, illustrates how this political decision actually built the command structure that the Islamic State utilizes to gain territory, train recruits, and develop strategy at the highly professional level they are able to. The skill set of the lost Iraqi commanders is one thing, but their influence with the Sunni population is another problem altogether. “Many of the Saddam-era Officers have close tribal links to or are the sons of tribal leaders in their region, giving the Islamic State a vital support network as well as helping with recruitment.”

When speaking to geography earlier, I communicated that the Islamic State went from a presence in Jordan - to Iraq - to


50 “There’s One Major Reason why ISIS has been So Successful” (see footnote 48)
Afghanistan - to Syria - to the entire Levant region, as well as parts of Africa. These territorial gains are, without question, the result of experience implemented by the disbanded Iraqi commanders. In pairing terror tactics with military strategy, the political decisions made in Iraq completely backfired when they contributed to the creation of a multi-faceted and experienced IS Army that has disdain for the Iraqi and U.S. governments.

Getting back to the government, the U.S. continued to make decisions that would come to haunt it in the years to follow. In 2006, following much debate and an exhaustive search for leadership in Iraq, Nouri al Maliki was supported by the United States to assume the position of Prime Minister of Iraq. Maliki was a part of the Shi’ite dominated Dawa party, which had made him witness to extreme injustices of torture and murder, carried out by Saddam, against his closest family and friends. The discontent that Maliki carried for the Sunni faction, out of sheer exposure to political and social inequality over the course of his life, were hoped to have been a part of his past and not his future. The hope unfortunately faded and reality set in. Sarah Whitson states,

The highly sectarian government of Maliki installed by the U.S. and Iran – amplified the country’s division into warring Sunni and Shi’ite camps. Sunni grievances simmered and then exploded under Maliki’s rule, which effectively excluded meaningful political participation by Sunnis and fostered wide scale abuses against their community.\textsuperscript{51}

Many find that the acts committed against the Sunni community, on behalf of the newly constructed government, were the result of too many memories. Ali Khedery, a man with nearly a decade of experience in Iraqi politics, commented, “With Hussein’s criminal excesses still fresh in their minds, Iraq’s new Shi’ite Islamist leaders concocted retribution schemes against Sunnis, resulting in horrifying episodes of torture, rape, and other abuses.”\textsuperscript{52} The situation with Maliki, which the U.S. created or at the very least supported, made political ties between Sunni and Shi’ite groups impossible. Khedery illustrates just how corrupt the situation became with the following: “There is not much “Democracy” left when one man and one party with close links to Iran control the Judiciary, Police, Army, Intelligence Service, Oil Revenue, Treasury and Central Bank.”\textsuperscript{53}

Winning the hearts and minds, or at least the peaceful neutrality, of the population one aims to govern and influence is not a goal – it is the goal. Without the


\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
support of the citizenry, political moves and initiatives are for naught. This goal, in Iraq, was sorely underachieved. As opposed to winning the support of the population, the U.S. backing of a Shia-led government legitimized the Islamic State for the Sunni population.\textsuperscript{54} Instead of the murderous terrorists and insurgencies being labeled and treated what they were in fact, “Sunnis welcomed ISIS fighters as liberators from sectarian oppression of government forces.”\textsuperscript{55} As discussed earlier, when a group of people is ostracized and left without representation, feelings of hopelessness may be too much to overcome. “The takeover of Sunni majority areas in Iraq is not merely a result of ISIS strength but of the Sunni community’s feelings of disenfranchisement and disenchantment.”\textsuperscript{56} There are two options left for the oppressed and voiceless. They can assume the fetal position and slowly die, or they can find a way to effect change. I do not condone taking up arms with the likes of the Islamic State, but I also refuse to encourage inaction with such circumstances.

Low, or lost, confidence in one’s government can have devastating consequences. In conducting a case study of Islamic Fundamentalism in Indonesia, Putra and Sukadbi were able to identify findings germane to the topic at hand. The duo concluded “a violent act that is associated with terrorism maybe conducted when it is morally justified and considered relevant.”\textsuperscript{57} So based on the disenfranchise of an entire religious sect of Islam in Iraq, one could see the parallels. What is interesting is that “when the use of a peaceful way is still possible, Islamic Fundamentalists may think that an act of terrorism is irrelevant.”\textsuperscript{58} Therefore, some will find that the appointment of Maliki and the appointment of exclusively Shi’ite representation in the Iraqi government play the largest roles in supplying the Islamic State with vital resources. From experienced leadership to the motivation necessary to commit horrible acts, Putra and Sukadbi find that this political situation of “no other means to accomplish a reasonable end” is paramount in understanding how to dissuade terrorism. Berrett agrees: “For so long as governance in so many countries (MENA) fails to meet the expectations of the people, there will be a steady flow of hopeful recruits to the ranks of ISIL; and many others who lack the means or

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\textsuperscript{55} "Why the Fight Against ISIS is Failing" (see footnote 51)

\textsuperscript{56} “Regionalization of Political Violence: Arab Levant and Rise of Islamic State” (see footnote 38)


\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
opportunity to travel may be tempted to follow its directives within their own countries.”

My recommendations for combating these political factors are influenced by Putra, Sukabi, and Berrett. All find that offering a legitimate and realistic path toward desired ends combats terrorism – it takes the motivation to radicalize away from the community. Therefore, developing trust in government is the only route worth transiting.

Clausewitz states, “Military action is equivalent to the political object. The action will diminish as the political object diminishes.” These historic words from “The Master” give the U.S. something to seriously ponder. As the military action in Iraq has gone from “Invasion,” to “Surge,” to “Withdrawal,” one may find it easy to gauge the public’s lack of enthusiasm for conflict in the Middle East. As was seen with the unsuccessful efforts in Vietnam, Americans have a hard time justifying the presence of their sons and daughters in foreign countries, without significant confirmation of benefit to the American people. Therefore, Clausewitz elegantly phrases how the American public has influenced military intervention in the Middle East. It is not politically popular to utilize conventional military force because of the cost in terms of lives lost and capital spent. Drew and Snow comment, “Vital interests stress a lack of willingness to compromise and an interest in which the country would go to war for.”

The U.S. decision to participate in the Iraq War, over what was communicated to be a step in eliminating WMDs, which Saddam possessed and intended to use, has left a terrible taste in the mouth of the American people. The vital interest that Drew and Snow alludes to never came to fruition. Many feel that the sacrifices made and lives lost were in vain. Hence, America is presented with combating a non-state aggressor, and she is reluctant to commit her full resources in response. The lack of popular support for war in Iraq, or the MENA region for that matter, is alarming. As WMDs were not found, or at least reported on in a fashion parallel with the resources dedicated to the effort of unveiling them, the American patience for sending troops to Iraq and the Levant dissipated. The lack of support can be seen clearly in the manner in which the U.S. currently employs its assets on adversaries in the areas in question.

Airstrikes may have taken out Zarqawi and they may have disrupted operations for the Islamic State, to a degree, but are the benefits of the aerial attacks worth the cost or risk they present? Do we gain enough from successfully eliminating targets of interest, or is the risk of adding fuel to the citizenry’s fire, from unavoidable collateral damage, too much to continue down this path? As of April of 2015, “the total cost of operations related to ISIL, since kinetic operations started on August 8,


2014, is 2.11 billion USD and the average daily cost is 8.6 million USD.”61 The 16,000 airstrikes conducted and the excess of two billion USD spent has left our enemy strong enough to continue to disrupt national security, most recently in Paris, San Bernardino, and Brussels. Airstrikes rely on ground support to work in conjunction with their execution. The United States public’s discontent with placing ground forces in the Middle East, however, has put the job of ground forces in the hands of the less “fit for the job” Iraqi and Afghan forces. The lack of coordination, skill, and determination by those on the ground, paired with collateral damage from airstrikes, has improved the situation for the Islamic State, as opposed to successfully deterring it. Every time a child is killed, or a building is destroyed, or a non-combatant is injured, the Islamic State is able to utilize the event and swing it in their favor. Airstrikes help the Islamic State to “prove” their propaganda and drive an even deeper wedge between the West and the citizens of the Middle East.

Strategist and scholar B. H. Liddell Hart said, “Whereas strategy is only concerned with the problem of winning the war, Grand Strategy must take a longer view for its problem is the winning of the peace.”62 In order to win the peace, the U.S. must alter the ways she employs her means. Iraq is a constant reminder of the insight offered by Hart. The United States will continue to fail at defeating the Islamic State if she carries on with the airstrike campaign she is currently waging. Winning the peace against the Islamic State may be accomplished in a manner offered by Lord Richards, former Chief of Defense Staff – Britain’s most senior soldier.

Ultimately you need a land army to achieve the objectives we’ve set ourselves – all air strikes will do is destroy elements of ISIS, it won’t achieve our strategic goal. The only way to defeat ISIS is to take back land they are occupying which means a conventional military operation. The only way to do it effectively is to use Western armies but I do understand the political resistance.”63

Reform and transformation of policy are needed if eliminating the Islamic State stands a chance at becoming a realistic outcome. In identifying the social, economic, and political factors that have shaped and continue to perpetuate the Islamic State, as well as the misguided actions of those who oppose extremist expansion in the MENA region, one can begin to devise a plan of attack. A keen focus on targeted objectives and an insatiable thirst for acquiring worthwhile returns on investment are paramount. Providing infrastructure and creating jobs combats the dangerous and frustrated group of young adults, who are over two million strong in the MENA region.

A focus on the elimination of oil excavation and distribution, for sale on black markets, will cut off nearly 90 percent of the Islamic State’s annual income. Increasing the confidence of the citizenry in their own government is a challenging goal, but one that will be required if the public is expected to allow the region to heal. Airstrikes are a juice not worth their squeeze. U.S. intervention must look to ground forces that can recapture lands swallowed by the Islamic State and their band of former Iraqi commanders. Failing to secure the buy-in of the American people is not something that military action can sustain. If military tempo and action are to increase, so must the political object. Therefore, granting the American public true insights and securing their support will be necessary in aligning military action with the direction of our Grand Strategy. The aspects of the solution are all or nothing. This is a multifaceted problem that requires a multifaceted approach.