

AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

**DEFENDING AGAINST OPPOSED PATTERNS OF  
RESTRAINT:  
CAN PAST CULTURAL LESSONS IN ARMED CONFLICT  
HELP US IDENTIFY, DEFEND, ADAPT, OR EXPLOIT  
NOTIONS OF RESTRAINT WITH NEW ADVERSARIES LIKE  
ISIS?**

by

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## **Abstract**

Can the United States military effectively apply present and past knowledge in armed conflict to identify patterns of restraint with new adversaries like the self-proclaimed Islamic State (ISIS)? Can the United States identify how these patterns might change after first contact and how might we defend them or exploit them without compromising our own notions? This research paper evaluates current events and identifies patterns of restraint in the United States and with ISIS. The research also incorporates historical case studies of Native American conflict in North America as well as contemporary case studies of regional insurgent or terrorist groups (i.e. Tamil Tigers and Chechen Separatists). This paper draws conclusions based on the case studies and provides recommendations on how the United States military should identify patterns prior to engagement in order to prepare for their effects, identify exploitable vulnerabilities, and protect friendly vulnerabilities.

## **Introduction**

### **Why Patterns of Restraint**

The United States military must effectively apply present knowledge as well as past cultural lessons in armed conflict to identify cultural patterns of restraint with new adversaries like the self-proclaimed Islamic State (also referred to as ISIS or ISIL). To do this successfully, those engaged in conflict must first identify the existing patterns of restraint. Past encounters, both contemporary and historical, will provide lessons on how these notions of restraint may change after first contact and as the conflict develops. If we can successfully identify these notions, we can then begin to understand how to defend against them, adapt to them, or exploit them to achieve the objective without compromising our own notions.

Patterns of restraint can differ vastly from culture to culture. In conflict, acceptable behavior, or rules of engagement, for one society may be vastly opposed to the traditional values of the opponent's culture. As conflict emerges, a change in tactics and notions of restraint occurs on both sides. Such tactics within asymmetric warfare can greatly affect the outcome of conflict based on the perceived cultural values and patterns of restraint in combat on both sides. The significance of comprehending what these notions are at the start of hostilities and how they may change is vital to understanding the opponent's true restraint.

### **Reciprocity and Rationality**

Concepts of reciprocity and a rational, mutual respect for similar norms motivate conflicting groups to respect the rules of conflict they choose. This is one reason why international treaties receive support from states. Reciprocity provides the basis for this respect and adherence to a pattern of restraint. We can expect rational opponents to retaliate in kind

based on their actions. If unequally matched, retaliation will be asymmetric and play to the strengths and weaknesses of the parties involved. This is the case between states with different economic and military capabilities, or with revolutionary movements, insurgencies, and terrorist organizations. The concept of reciprocity involves both competition and cooperation so long as all parties involved in conflict have an interest to avoid common costs and to obtain common benefits.<sup>1</sup> Reciprocity amongst rational actors provides a basis for codified patterns of restraint amongst almost any social structure. If antagonists do not appear to have similar cost or benefit concerns, as is the case with insurgent groups, terrorist organizations, and in irregular warfare, then the social structure becomes the common ground, specifically, their rational interaction with cultural roles, norms, active and inactive populations, and concepts of restraint. Maintaining these values serves to show legitimacy to the noncombatant population. Rational actors need not have similar values to their opponents, only logical outcomes based on their ideology.

### **Methodology and Limitations of the Study**

The research methodology is a qualitative analysis through case studies using primary and secondary source materials. Sources focus on primary source materials such as relevant historical accounts, interviews with subject matter experts, and current event articles from prominent news sources. Incorporating secondary source material from peer-reviewed sources provides background information and expands on arguments. Case studies serve as a basis to identify patterns, change in those patterns during conflict, and potential reasons for the change.

This research paper will focus on the research question. However, given the diversity of options in analysis of patterns of restraint and change, this paper will avoid expanding too broadly. Specifically, it will avoid extensive discussion of ethical or moral reasoning, individual

or group think acts, or a study of insurgency and asymmetric warfare. The analysis will touch on these topics as part of the exploration of patterns of restraint and how they may change, but only if germane to the discussion.

### **Case Studies Identifying Patterns of Restraint, Changes, and Reasons Why**

Case studies serve to help identify patterns of restraint, changes that occurred, and may allude to why the changes occurred. Framing historical examples in terms of the United States' involvement with another antagonist will provide a common thread and helps focus the analysis of the second party on a country, region, specific insurgent group, or specific terrorist organization. Contemporary examples focus on local insurgencies that were or are destabilizing a region, specifically the Tamil Tigers, Chechen separatists, and the Islamic State (ISIS). The United States interaction serves as a tie to provide one of the common threads for the analysis. Finally, people provide another common thread, specifically, identifying social groups that are disenfranchised, hopeless, mercenaries, or radicalized.

### **United States Patterns of Restraint**

Codified forms of restraint within the United States military are in the form of the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC), rules of engagement (ROE), standing orders, operating procedures, and international accords that limit the actions of service members in combat. Beyond the military, the United States also observes civil restraint through the rule of law. These adopted notions of restraint speak to the American culture of how one should conduct war. They underline cultural beliefs on morality and dictate how society should act in conflict. These ethical notions are a product of the United States population's belief system or religion, concept of community, and education.

A concept of reciprocity among rational actors drives the motivation for the United States adhering to the rules of conflict they choose. The United States military respects the LOAC for six reasons: may motivate the opponent to conform, may encourage surrender under known rules, protects against acts violating human rights, sets limits on war, reduces confusion, and promotes peace.<sup>2</sup> This concept provides a foundation for the United States military norms and patterns of restraint in conflict, especially when paired against a peer or near-peer opponent that has similar risk and cost, regardless of culture.

Looking through the history of war demonstrates and supports the reasons why the United States military respects the LOAC. Conflict has shaped the United States' concept of restraint through codified law. It shows the slow change in how the United States codified and enforced their norms of restraint. During the American War for Independence, most violations of these accepted norms occurred against civilian property or persons.<sup>3</sup> These changes in patterns of restraint were not tolerated and rules were reinforced with punishment through courts-martial. During the American Civil War, Union forces administered stiff penalty to any person that committed violations against non-combatants. While the baseline reason for this restraint was to support population reintegration post-conflict, it speaks to how the United States learned from previous conflict and changes in patterns of restraint after enemy contact. During the counterinsurgency operation in the Philippines at the turn of the nineteenth century, United States military forces engaged in irregular warfare with an opponent using brutal asymmetric tactics to counter the strength of the United States. When these two dissimilar patterns of restraint came into contact, some United States military leaders began to change and adapt their own notions of restraint by "permitting subordinates to commit war crimes."<sup>4</sup> The United States corrected this change in restraint, much like during the War of Independence, through courts-



martial punishment as part of the process to enforce their original restraints. After World War I, Germans accused of war crimes stood trial in the Supreme Court of Germany administered by Germans and as a result received sentence based on Germany's self-perceived notion of restraint and in many cases were acquitted.<sup>5</sup> This difference in codified patterns of restraint was reconciled after World War II when the Allies created a special International Military Tribunal to provide trials for war crimes.<sup>6</sup> This led to the Geneva Conventions which "marked the codification" of international patterns of restraint in conflict.<sup>7</sup> With this international standard setting the expectations for United States military restraint in conflict, violators were now prosecuted under UCMJ provisions that the global community could identify with their own notions of restraint, reinforcing the reason to respect the LOAC.

### **ISIS Patterns of Restraint**

The self-proclaimed Islamic State (also known as ISIS or ISIL) demonstrates clear patterns of restraint. They are evident through codified norms, enforcement through standardized punishment, and observed through their much-publicized actions. ISIS also demonstrates rational actions based on their own norms of behavior, more specifically they have predictable behaviors. These notions of restraint also appear to follow the concept of reciprocity in that they show restraint when the threat of retaliation would undermine their goals. Before discussing the potential patterns of restraint of ISIS, it is vital to frame this opposing force appropriately.

ISIS is a group exploiting cultural grievances and political turmoil in both Iraq and Syria to impose a rigid, literal religious view of Islam and hold territory in the region through military action and control of the population. They have established their own governance in occupied

territory to support their efforts and have declared their own caliphate to attempt to garner legitimacy as well as regional and global support. Their end-state is to firmly establish a regional caliphate without specified borders, govern the population under their strict ideology, and influence the global Islamic community under these values.

ISIS is not simply a terrorist group. Approaching it this way will overlook norms and notions of restraint that do not apply to global terror networks like al-Qaeda and unwittingly enable ISIS information campaigns against opposing forces. ISIS has demonstrated themselves as a highly organized and competent organization with specific leadership structure and goals. They are waging a hot revolutionary war while attempting to act with an orthodox pattern to insurgency warfare by overthrowing the existing order with intent to transform the entire region. A “hot revolutionary war” is when the insurgent engages in openly violent and illegal activity and is the opposite of a “cold revolutionary war” where the insurgent activity remains legal and nonviolent.<sup>8</sup> Cold revolutionary warfare exists before the transition from peace to war and commonly occurs through political reform or transformation. An “orthodox pattern” refers to insurgency warfare that seeks to overthrow the existing order with intent to transform the entire region and is the opposite of the “bourgeois-nationalist pattern” which focuses on blind and eventually selective terrorism to achieve near term objectives.<sup>9</sup> The ISIS orthodox pattern demonstrates long-term vision, planning, and organization. Once framed in this light, it “makes the beliefs and plans of ISIS a little more predictable.”<sup>10</sup>

Their patterns of restraint, at initial face value, show little regard for those entities that oppose their goals or are in conflict with their cultural and religious values. Specifically, they do not restrict themselves from killing, at any level, those that are diametrically opposed to them or their views. In addition, they do not restrict themselves from using this limited restraint to gain a

tactical advantage through information operations. They use public relations to promote internal and external support and as warnings to opposition. They also use sexual violence as a tool of coercion. However, these initial generalizations miss the underlining reasons and organization of their patterns of restraint.

ISIS has codified norms and rules of war. Their ideology follows a strict medieval interpretation of the Koran, the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, and seeks to revive traditions that have been dormant for centuries.<sup>11</sup> Their campaigns and practices have demonstrated strict adherence to these norms. The Koran and Sharia Law serve as the ISIS equivalent to the United States' LOAC and the UCMJ. ISIS enforces these norms through the rule of law using strict Sharia. "[T]he application of Sharia in the caliphate and the expansion to contiguous lands are paramount."<sup>12</sup> Outside observers can see ISIS demonstrating these patterns. For example, ISIS subjects the Yazidis in northern Iraq to a strict application of Sharia law. ISIS fighters have divided captured Yazidi women and children amongst themselves as slaves and concubines in accordance with Sharia law as families of infidels.<sup>13</sup> This sexual violence "isn't just a physical indulgence or a manifestation of battlefield brutality; it's a deliberate, calculated strategy" and serves to justify their faith.<sup>14</sup> ISIS promotes this type of sexual violence and slavery in their literature "as a way to keep men from falling into adultery" and not conforming to this viewpoint would be "apostatizing Islam."<sup>15</sup> ISIS fighters do not reserve slavery as only a social punishment. It also serves economic purposes through human trafficking.<sup>16</sup> These economic practices as well as the other methods of funding the ISIS cause also serve as observable patterns of restraint. ISIS has strong financial capability beyond foreign donors. They seize and loot from occupied territory, impose taxes, and smuggle oil from facilities in Iraq and Syria.<sup>17</sup> Without revenue and a social organization to manage it, they could not carry out

enforcement and expansion operations, which further demonstrate their ability to act rationally based on their long-term goals. Sexual violence and economics are not their only observable patterns. Killing, subjectification, and how they go about doing it is a crucial tool that ISIS uses to enforce rule, punish violations, and promote their cause.

Under the extreme ISIS concept of “*takfiri* doctrine,” they are committing to a plan of purification by killing large numbers of people.<sup>18</sup> *Takfiri* for ISIS is the excommunication and purging of infidels, or *kuffar*. The group’s strict adherence to a prophetic methodology includes beheading, slavery, and crucifixion, all punishments specified in the Koran.<sup>19</sup> Nothing is selectively left out as evident by the fact that Christians in ISIS occupied territory can escape death by paying a tax, or *jizya* as referred to in Islamic law.<sup>20</sup> To members and supporters of ISIS, these actions are “policies of mercy rather than of brutality.”<sup>21</sup> They see these tactics as part of a greater information campaign in their war strategy to elicit fear in their opponents and avoid prolonged conflict. These actions also serve to demonstrate the resolve of ISIS and show them as a credible force in the region. ISIS chose to declare themselves a caliphate only after meeting the minimum criteria set forth in Islamic teaching and reinforced their resolve through “mass executions and public crucifixions” to remove any doubt about their conviction.<sup>22</sup> While the use of sexual violence, killing, and subjectification by ISIS may seem macabre to observers, their strict adherence to the medieval traditions demonstrates a level of commitment and continuity by ISIS to its norms, rules, and restraints making their behavior predictable.

The human element that composes ISIS ranks deserves attention before leading into possible changes in patterns of restraint and their reasons why. ISIS is primarily comprised of three social groups. As Graeme Wood wrote in *The New Republic*, these three groups are the “Psychopaths,” the “True Believers,” and the “Sunni Pragmatists.”<sup>23</sup> In the first group, the

“psychopaths,” comprise the hyper-violent foreign fighters along with the more practical indigenous fighters. The second group, the “true believers,” comprises of both foreign and indigenous people that may be disaffected and as a result, they identify with the ideology. The third group of pragmatists is the largest part of the ISIS population. This is the primary population of ISIS controlled territory. They are the source of ground combatants, logistics, and support. This group also includes the tribal sheikhs who support ISIS because it is practical to support the occupying force when there is no other option. The alliances within the third social group are subject to uncertainty and if another opposing force presents a better option this could sway their allegiance. In a military assessment of these local alliances, the tribal groups have historically been comfortable with secularism and if Sharia law were to replace tribal law, this may upset the alliance and cause internal struggle.<sup>24</sup>

Observing change in the notions of restraint for ISIS at this stage is difficult. ISIS is a relatively new group and has only been operating since January 2006 when it split from al-Qaeda, and then under Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi since April 2010, and finally as a self-proclaimed caliphate in July 2014.<sup>25</sup> In that time media reporting and military assessments allows for a rudimentary analysis of present patterns of restraint. However, engagement by Iraqi military forces, Free Syrian Army forces, and coalition partners in their counterinsurgency operations have only just started and observed changes in the parties are limited. Nevertheless, there have been some compromises in restraint observed through media reporting. For example, Iran backed Iraqi Shi’ite militias have conducted reprisal attacks that resulted in torture, rape, and group executions of Sunni Arabs thought to be sympathetic with ISIS. This reprisal is not surprising, in fact, military assessments have identified it as a source of friction inhibiting an effective counterinsurgency going so far as to recommending the establishment of Sunni national

guard units as one way to help avoid Sunnis being victimized and pushing them toward supporting ISIS.<sup>26</sup> ISIS is showing some signs of compromise in their social and religious ideology through their exploitation of women. ISIS is using marriage to serve their own purpose by allowing captured women to marry and divorce ISIS fighters multiple times a day for sex.<sup>27</sup> While ISIS deliberately uses this as a tool for control on both sides, this practice is merely a technicality that allows ISIS men to avoid punishment for adultery and fornication. Despite the change in restraint from their opponent, ISIS shows only a limited observable change in restraint and continues to adhere to a religious ideology and methodical application of historical views on the Koran and Sharia law.

The viewpoints of the United States through the National Security Strategy, dominant military assessments, and media seem to either miss or intentionally overlook the idea that ISIS is behaving rationally through set patterns of restraint and assume that the group is acting like a globally aligned terrorist organization such as al-Qaeda rather than as a regionally focused revolution. The United States interaction with ISIS has been limited but direct, focusing kinetic activity through airstrikes and non-kinetic through military advisors with the Syrian and Iraqi opposition forces. The United States views ISIS as a terrorist group and identifies it as such on the State Departments list of terrorist groups.<sup>28</sup> The United States also refers to both al-Qaeda and ISIS as having the same pedigree and takes it even further by demoting ISIS below al-Qaeda as the “jayvee team.”<sup>29</sup> A few military assessments do a better job of at least building on this notion by acknowledging that ISIS is not a global terrorist group, however, the official national policy sees it differently. “[Westerners] tend to see jihadism as monolithic, and to apply the logic of al-Qaeda to an organization [ISIS] that has decisively eclipsed it.”<sup>30</sup> The United States along with other western countries is guilty of mirror imaging, showing bias against the concept

that religious ideology can have such a hold on a radical organization and provides it structure. The United States also claims that ISIS distorts Islam for their purposes. Bernard Haykel, an authority on ISIS ideology, “regards the claim that the Islamic State has distorted the texts of Islam as preposterous, sustainable only through willful ignorance.”<sup>31</sup> The President of the United States told *The New Yorker* that ISIS was subordinate to al-Qaeda, stating that “[i]f a jayvee team puts on Lakers uniforms that doesn’t make them Kobe Bryant.”<sup>32</sup> This illuminates the western bias that ISIS is simply an offshoot of al-Qaeda with terror goals only, a mindset that undermines the ability to recognize patterns of restraint and exploit them.

ISIS demonstrates restraint, order, and the willingness to follow through with their doctrine. Their relationship with their audience requires a religious fervor to understand, but patterns of restraint are observable to internal and external audiences regardless of personal religious convictions. ISIS assumes moral authority based on the Koran and Sharia law, which puts them at odds with other Muslim nations and the western world but not with the population of those disenfranchised from their religious identity, regardless of nationality. ISIS has a different narrative between internal and external messaging, but both remain resolute around their ideology. This only aids with their credibility among supporters. It is this rational, call it even state like, behavior that allows their patterns of restraint to be easily identifiable and makes them resilient against change in restraint when faced with opposition.

### **Discussion of Historical and Contemporary Examples of Conflicting Patterns of Restraint**

The following case studies focus on a few examples of historical and contemporary conflicts where two groups with very different patterns of restraint came into contact. These case studies serve the purpose of providing a background on patterns of restraint, changes in

those patterns after conflict, and the reasons why. Common threads among the groups are state versus non-state actors or local insurgencies that have regional destabilizing effects. United States interactions and the interactions of disenfranchised social groups will serve as threads. This analysis is essential for evaluating the patterns of restraint and shifts amongst the groups.

### *Native American and Euro-American Conflict in the 1500-1800s*

Native American cultures exhibited a number of traditional patterns of restraint codified in similar ways to previous discussion. Wayne E. Lee's article "Peace Chiefs and Blood Revenge: Patterns of Restraint in Native American Warfare" focuses on North American native people from roughly the years 1500-1800 and provides a thorough analysis of these patterns. This is also the only source that the author if this paper could find on the topic of patterns of restraint in conflict outside of course elective discussion. Key influences to patterns of restraint were logistics, religion, culture, and social structure or leadership. Ceremony as part of the pre-conflict preparation served to temper the frequency of conflict as well as provide structure to it. Notably, tribes had three cultural leaders in the form of a peace chief (political), war chief (military), and religious leader. This system served to provide an informal checks and balances for tribal action. Another restraint was the success of the leaders. Often, measurable success was the only way to confer leadership status. Once in power, these leaders would not take on unnecessary risk that could jeopardize this status, showing an adherence towards the concept of reciprocity. Additionally, offensive and defensive warfare technology of the time served to balance and restrain forces, especially if leaders could not guarantee success. Finally, North American natives found restraint through deterrence of conflict by commingling their peoples. Specifically, trade with another tribe, emigration, or immigration would sometimes deter kin



from attacking kin.<sup>33</sup> Status and prestige of leaders and culturally imposed rules of engagement tie into patterns of restraint. Change to these patterns came because of Euro-American style of diplomacy and conflict upsetting the balance of leadership.

After contact with Euro-American colonists, change in patterns of restraint began to impact social stability. Native American tribal social structure often included a peace chief, war chief, and some form of religious leader. Euro-American leaders would often only deal with a western perceived concept of a single leader, usually the war chief, which would often undermine this system providing an undue balance of power to the war chief. When the European style of warfare came to North America, it threw these restraints and norms out of balance. Europeans would often be indiscriminate in their tactics, not following existing native norms or rules of engagement. For example, native tribes in North America would capture prisoners alive as proof of success and to potentially adopt them into the tribe as replacements for lost members. Europeans would not always abide by these norms and used scorched earth style tactics in engagements. These different patterns of restraint wore heavily on native cultures when they began compromising and adopting western restraints. This affected native social structures and brought them to a point of collapse.

### *The Pawnee Experience and Native-American Conflict*

An iconic reference to Native American warfare was the taking of scalps. While it may seem macabre at face value, this practice reveals a great deal about restraint in Native American warfare and illuminates a practice not culturally similar in the Euro-American experience. Scalping by the Pawnee was culturally significant and sometimes overshadowed by political and economic factors. For the Pawnee, scalping was akin to life power and the sacrificial burning of

scalps was a norm. For other tribes, scalping was simply a trophy and commodity. Both speak to social and ceremonial aspects of life. These rituals were the source of spiritual and social power as well as status. Other tribes attributed diplomatic and economic power to this practice. Rules of the war honor system dictated the importance of the scalp based on the tribe. It was not always the highest priority for honor and most of the time close enemy contact was higher in the war honor system. To this effect, the Pawnee planned war campaigns to achieve these honors. However, the sophisticated social structure of the Pawnee drove a logistical difference in war parties. They planned for two types of expeditions: one for horses (resources) and one for scalps (symbolic).<sup>34</sup> One involved combat and death while the other planned to avoid it. This demonstrates a clear pattern of restraint based on resource and spiritual requirements and highlights a mainstay in Pawnee social and religious daily life.

This practice, the social structure surrounding it, and the spiritual significance for the Pawnee demonstrate how we can observe clear patterns of restraint in a practice that is culturally incompatible with western society yet based on rational behavior such as resource needs or spiritual rites. The Pawnee held on to this custom into modern times, transformed from physical scalps to modern headgear, as a spiritual rite of passage in their war honor system. This case shows how resilience in culture can overcome change in patterns of restraint and protect the social structure from compromise or outside influence.

### *The Iroquois and the Five Nations*

The Iroquois and the Five Nations practiced the “mourning-war,” a custom unique in the Euro-American experience. Participation in war was the benchmark in an Iroquois' experience and conferred status and success. The mourning-war was warfare stemming from a loss (death

by any cause) significant enough in the family and social group to drive the need to go to war, whether there was an antagonist or not. The conflict would result in prisoners for adoption by the grieving members to replace their lost family members. Those prisoners not adopted were ceremonially tortured and killed. These war tactics and culture were markedly different motives to the colonial Europeans.

The mourning-war began a devastating cycle when the Iroquois suffered losses from introduced diseases that ravaged populations in the 1600s. Around the same time, Europeans introduced new technology (e.g. muskets) to the Iroquois. With new technology effectively applied, the Iroquois and other Five Nations tribes suffered second order effects through greater fatalities and became dependent on Euro-Americans for supplies. The third order effect saw an increase in the mourning-war cycle. A concurrent war over the fur trade and economic factors exasperated these combat losses. Ultimately, this devastating cycle of conflict and adoption led to the decay of social (tribal) customs and the weakening of traditional restraints. The cycle of conflict continued without restraint in order to allow young men to show their worth in battle, part of the war honor system. The aftermath of almost a century of war along with the inclusion of the displaced Tuscaroras tribe into the confederacy brought the Iroquois back to traditional values and the traditional mourning-war.<sup>35</sup>

As seen through the Euro-American mindset, patterns of restraint take on practical, spiritual, and social concepts that relate to contemporary westerns ideas on some level, for example the concept of reciprocity within mourning-war. However, symbolic values, learned meanings, and pre or post conflict cleansing rituals are unique from western values. Patterns of restraint, in the case of the Iroquois, were in the form of a codified custom of warfare. Change in patterns of restraint stemmed from the introduction of new and socially disruptive technologies

that allowed more effective killing and as a result reduced the population more than the social structure could compensate for. New technology did not necessarily initiate the change, large scale killing as part of culture and conflict was already going on. The lethal effectiveness of new technology coupled with unchanged patterns of restraint in the employment of the new weaponry and the encouragement from European colonists was ultimate the disruptive cause. Had it not been for the infusion of a traditional ideology through the inclusion of the Tuscaroras to the Iroquois Confederacy, the change in patterns of restraint may have collapsed the fragile tribal social structures within the Five Nations. Understanding the value of these social patterns of restraint and Euro-American influence helps to understand how similar changes may occur in future engagements.

*Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, 1976-2009*

The Tamil people in Sri Lanka were an ethnic cultural group that sought independence. The movement sparked both a cold and hot revolution with an insurgency chiefly led by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), or Tamil Tigers. As with many groups under-matched compared to their opponent, they resorted to asymmetric warfare. While cultural, social, and religious factors played on both sides of this conflict, the Tamil Tigers goal was a secular independent state.<sup>36</sup> The Tamil Tigers were an organized force with a clear goal. They procured funding from controlled territory and through donor support from the local population and diaspora. As an insurgent group, the Tamil Tigers conducted a hot revolutionary war that transitioned back and forth from an orthodox pattern to a bourgeois-nationalist pattern over time as counterinsurgency operations continued. Moreover, the Tamil Tigers had a military organization, to include ground and sea forces.

The LTTE has some very distinct changes in patterns of restraint that terrorist groups and under-matched insurgencies globally have emulated. Research suggests that the Tamil Tigers invented the suicide vest and are the only terrorist group to have successfully assassinated two world leaders using this tactic.<sup>37</sup> They fully employed suicide tactics in both asymmetric military attacks and for political statements, carrying cyanide capsules visibly for use over capture. Perhaps more notable than the invention of the suicide vest was the Birds of Paradise. They were women LTTE members that served equally in combatant roles as their male counterparts.<sup>38</sup> This gender-neutral voluntary involvement is a unique social structure to LTTE and rare to other secular insurgent and terrorist movements.<sup>39</sup> The change in restraint, specifically the adaptation of gender roles, provided the Tamil Tigers with a powerful asymmetric weapon and ability to exploit gender bias weaknesses in Sri Lanka and India military counterinsurgency campaigns. However, the advantage met with conflict when the new tactic threatened to alienate supporters that did not agree with it. Why the change occurred is most likely due to “direct and indirect state repression.”<sup>40</sup> This pushed disenfranchised women toward an active role in the cause. Over the years, the LTTE changed their patterns of restraint and adapted those changes over the evolution of their movement. Ultimately, they were unsuccessful toward their goals due to military and government counterinsurgency efforts.

#### *Chechen Separatists and the Black Widows, 1999-2011*

The Chechen separatist rebels were Muslim and saw the Russia government as oppressing their religion. The region of Chechnya tried to separate from Russia after the cold war. Two wars followed as a result. During the second Chechen war in 1999, Russian military forces overwhelmed the Chechen separatists and in 2000, Russian forces began

counterinsurgency operations. The local population considered these operations brutal and Chechen rebels continued insurgent and terrorist operations. Terrorist groups began to use Chechen women, or “Black Widows,” in suicide bombings starting in 2000 as a tactic with different religious and social motivations spurred by conflict. A profile of Chechen women suicide bombers shows a diverse group of disenfranchised, repressed, traumatized, widows from the Chechen wars, or religiously motivated participants.<sup>41</sup>

For Chechens and Russians largely, women taking on combatant roles are neither in line with their traditional gender roles nor in line with the traditional Chechen rules for vengeance. Revenge rules dictate avenging murder with murder and only males may avenge unless there are no males in the family to do it.<sup>42</sup> Women involved with the killing are a change in this pattern of restraint. Nevertheless, despite this difference, employing the Black Widows as an asymmetric warfare advantage in Russia effectively exploited traditional gender biases and penetrated weakness in Russian fronts. This is only capable through organization rather than straight terrorism. There existed a social structure, specifically leadership, within the Chechen separatists’ organizations that “capitalizes on the bombers’ grievances and channels them strategically.”<sup>43</sup> Without this leadership, the separatist movement employing this change in restraint could not function.

## **Analysis and Evaluation**

### **Groups That Changed Their Patterns of Restraint after Engagement or Contact**

All groups discussed have notable instances where they changed their notions of restraint by either adapting or compromising their original patterns of restraint. The Iroquois in North America compromised their traditional values in the mourning-war after the effects of the unrestricted use of war technology coupled with economic conflict began to decimate their social

structure. In addition, Euro-American meddling, both intentional through alliances and disputes among colonies and tribes and unintentional through diplomatic incompatibilities between war and peace leaders, further strained their existing patterns of restraint. For the Iroquois, it was the infusion of a traditional ideology from a new tribe that helped to realign the social structure back to a traditional path. Without this, the social organization would have collapsed and all notions of restraint would have been isolated to small tribal pockets. In the Native American case, this would have resulted in annihilation of their cultural values through expansion of dissimilar tribes, economic conflict, and the mention expansion of the Euro-American colonists.

The LTTE showed change in their patterns of restraint through the adaptation of gender-roles in asymmetric warfare. By capitalizing on the grievances and repression women experienced in Sri Lanka, the “Birds of Paradise” women combatants and suicide bombers were successfully able to exploit gender bias vulnerabilities in the counterinsurgency. However, supporters of the LTTE resisted this change. Some of the sympathetic Eelam Tamil population saw this change as a departure from traditional gender roles and this jeopardized their support and funding of the LTTE. Despite the potential of alienating their own population, the change allowed the LTTE to exploit their opponent’s weaknesses. However, the change also opened up a weakness that the counterinsurgency could have exploited, a narrative to the population on the exploitation of women.

Chechen separatist capitalized on the grievances women suffered and directed that human energy toward an organized suicide bombing campaign through the “Black Widows.” The Chechen model for women was different from the LTTE model. Women were not a part of everyday rebel action and men were still valued over women for direct action roles, unlike the LTTE where women served even in elite groups. However, the Chechen “Black Widows”

exploited the same gender bias vulnerability in the Russian camp effectively. They successfully drove fear into Russian forces through strategic employment. They suffered some losses from separatists' sympathizers that did not accept the gender role change, similar to the LTTE supporters. However, unlike in the Sri Lanka case, Russian forces exploited this vulnerability in population support. Nevertheless, it shows how an effective adaptation in patterns of restraint can still be unexpected by the opponent despite the historical precedent. It also shows that with effective organization and leadership, these adaptations in restraint can be effective over long periods, especially if the counterinsurgent camp does not adapt with them.

### **Comparisons with Case Studies and ISIS**

There are a striking number of similarities and a distinct difference between the LTTE and ISIS in patterns of restraint and organization. The Tamil Tigers were an organized force with a clear goal, much like ISIS. They procured funding from controlled territory and through donors like ISIS. As mentioned before, the Tamil Tigers transitioned back and forth from an orthodox pattern to a bourgeois-nationalist pattern of fighting over time as counterinsurgency operations continued. ISIS demonstrates a similar pattern, but they have not been operating as long as the LTTE had so it is entirely possible they will follow a similar trend. Moreover, the Tamil Tigers had a military organization, to include ground and sea forces, much like ISIS except the littoral assets. Perhaps the biggest difference in tactics, outside of the secular motives of the LTTE, is the use of gender roles. The LTTE gender-neutral voluntary involvement is a trait not shared by ISIS or by many state and non-state actors except Chechen Black Widows and Kurdish fighters, and these are usually for secular causes.<sup>44</sup> Exploiting gender roles with the Black Widows gave the separatists an advantage against Russian forces. This was only possible



with organization and leadership rather than simple acts of terrorism. As with the LTTE, without the Chechen separatist leadership, the exploitation of a new tactic (gender roles) would not have succeeded and adapting to this change in restraint would have been impossible. Organization, leadership, and long-term goals would appear to be key historical precedents of effective insurgencies. Adherence to traditional social roles, in this case gender, would also appear to be precedents for unanimous support of the active minority in the population.

### **Discussion of Issues, Counter-Arguments, and/or Challenges**

#### *Lack of Real Information on the Islamic State's Cultural Group Identity or Patterns of Restraint*

There is a large amount of material on current events through mainstream news sources providing a glimpse into the self-proclaimed Islamic State's (ISIS) patterns of restraint. However, this information derives largely from interviews with internally displaced populations, supporters from outside, some ISIS members, military operations, and, most dubiously, the ISIS public affairs campaign. Research for this paper focused largely around western news sources and unclassified military sources, but even those sources at some point had to use potential propaganda material from ISIS to answer questions. Ultimately, the evaluation that ISIS is showing distinct patterns of restraint and behaving rationally (predictably) based on these patterns is an assessment based on unclassified news and military reporting from an author that is unable to "see it for himself." This trust in reporting has with it the inherent challenge of misevaluating the true group identity and patterns of restraint. Only further development and a continuing military and diplomatic engagement within the region will illuminate if this evaluation is accurate.

*U.S. Military or International Efforts towards Addressing ISIS*

The United States' desired military end-state with ISIS is for a coalition to "degrade, and ultimately destroy, [ISIS] through a comprehensive and sustained counterterrorism strategy."<sup>45</sup> These broad objectives outlined by the President of the United States in his speech given in September 2014 reflect the desired United States national end-state as outlined in the *2015 National Security Strategy*. The President's strategy to achieve this end-state is four-fold: airstrikes, support to ground forces, counterterrorism (CT) capabilities, and humanitarian assistance.<sup>46</sup> The military objectives are to protect U.S. forces and humanitarian missions, enable offensive forces, support Iraqi and Kurdish forces (with training, intelligence, and equipment), support Iraq's efforts to stand up National Guard units, provide military assistance to Syrian opposition forces, improve intelligence, interdict funding, counter-the-ideology, and counter the flow of foreign fighters. The military end-state therefore is a region where ISIS is unable to influence population centers, denied sanctuary, and its supporters reconciled.

*Exploiting Patterns of Restraint without Compromising Our Own Values*

To degrade and ultimately destroy an ideology is ludicrous in modern society. This would require the complete elimination (annihilation warfare) of the ideology, which is impossible. You cannot suppress an idea. There will always be an active minority in the population that empathizes with the ideology. Elimination of the active minority would require high resources, potential moral compromises, and a long-term commitment that could disenfranchise the population's neutral majority and possibly bring them around to the cause you are trying to eliminate.

Exploiting patterns of restraint and a belief system is therefore a tricky proposition. It can easily lead to a moral compromise and a radical departure from one's own patterns of restraint. However, if a study of the opponent's patterns of restraint and ideology prior to engagement is accomplished, this will identify vulnerabilities. Coupling this with historical and contemporary knowledge of how other similar groups responded to conflict and change can help identify how the new adversary may change after contact and if both sides have new vulnerabilities after that change. Reciprocity assumes similar risk and cost between conflicting parties, but perhaps this concept also applies to mismatched opponents when exploiting vulnerabilities in ideology and the narrative. Risk and cost are incurred when change to accepted norms occur. This runs the risk of alienating supporting populations or providing vulnerability for opponents to exploit. If this is true, the most likely way to exploit enemy patterns of restraint is to exploit it when it changes and their risk is highest.

### **Recommendations**

This paper concludes that the United States military needs to identify patterns of restraint prior to the start of hostilities in order to prepare for their effects, identify vulnerabilities that could be exploited, and protect friendly vulnerabilities that the opposing force could exploit. Recommendations with the ISIS conflict include exploiting changes in leadership, gender roles, and social structure.

Exploiting change in leadership is a potential opportunity. ISIS is basing their leadership selection on a strict ideology. As mentioned before, ISIS has chosen to declare a caliphate and named Baghdadi the caliph. Baghdadi claims direct descent from the Prophet Muhammed, a prerequisite for the role in ISIS beliefs. Attacking this claim or removing him from power can

induce instability in the core leadership culture of the organization. This situation can have an adverse effect should another caliph of suitable lineage ascend to the position. According to ISIS beliefs, there will only be twelve caliphs before the apocalypse, with Baghdadi as the eighth.<sup>47</sup> Removing one leader may allow ISIS to use this belief as a recruiting and propaganda tool. However, if the group's leadership elite compromises and ascends someone that is not a claimed descendent of the Prophet, this could be used to disorganize ISIS and reduce the active population and external supporters.

Exploiting change in gender roles is a potential opportunity. As demonstrated in the LTTE and Chechen case studies, gender roles and changes within them present instability with the active population. ISIS adheres to strict gender roles. Women have no place in direct action roles. In fact, ISIS fighters fear women combatants, as is evident with Kurdish women fighters.<sup>48</sup> While it may not be feasible to create an all-female ground force to conduct an assault, information operations and selective deployment of such units may garner high operational effectiveness in coalition ground efforts. Additionally, ISIS exploits marriage to serve their own purpose by allowing captured women to marry and divorce ISIS fighters multiple times a day for sex.<sup>49</sup> While ISIS deliberately uses this practice as a tactic for control of members and the population, this practice simply capitalizes on a Sharia technicality that allows ISIS men to avoid punishment for adultery and fornication. Information operations campaigns aimed at exploiting these actions would serve to stem the international and regional support for ISIS and destabilize their organization and goals.

Finally, exploiting change in social structure is a potential opportunity. As discussed with the Native American case studies, an influx of different cultures into a single social group can influence and potentially decimate the traditional values of the original group. The ISIS

ranks primarily come from Iraqi and Syrian population centers. However, minority populations of foreign fighters bring different cultural values and have the potential of bringing change to existing patterns of restraint. This point in time will be difficult to pinpoint without knowledge of specific actions and the ability to see the cultural shift. How, when, or if this change has already occurred, it provides vulnerability for coalition forces to exploit through information operations and support of the population.

## **Conclusion**

Cultures, once faced with an antagonist exercising different cultural views, will either adapt their own patterns of restraint or take extraordinary efforts to enforce the original norms. Even more so if the balance of power is unequal and the conflict trends towards asymmetric warfare. The concept of reciprocity typically applies to peers or near peers in conflict with similar risk and cost concerns. Reciprocity does not naturally apply to mismatched opponents, as is the case with insurgencies and terrorist groups. However, when faced with a single aspect such as an organized pattern of restraint, the concept of reciprocity absolutely applies. This can be a single point of contention between opponents. Patterns of restraint between two parties, regardless of state or non-state, peer or near-peer, will only change if the group is not organized, lacks leadership, and lacks long-term goals. The only exception to this is when a change in restraint results in a strategic improvement for the cause and even this induces risk toward the cause. Change in restraint is vulnerability. It shows a weakness in the social and moral structure of the group. Those groups that adapt to change must transition quickly or risk exploitation. Those groups that do not adapt will either internally unravel or their opposition will overwhelm them. In all cases, it is vitally important to recognize patterns of restraint in order to identify

change when it does happen, on both sides. Change in patterns of restraint will risk alienating active and inactive populations, giving the opportunity for the antagonist to exploit the vulnerability. The most advantageous way to exploit enemy patterns of restraint is to take the advantage when the antagonist's risk is highest, during the period when they change their values.



## Endnotes

1. Frei, "The Regulation of Warfare: A Paradigm for the Legal Approach to the Control of International Conflict," 622.
2. *Law of Armed Conflict Deskbook*, 9.
3. Ibid, 171.
4. Ibid, 172.
5. Ibid, 172.
6. Ibid, 172.
7. Ibid, 172.
8. Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, 47.
9. Ibid, 33 & 43.
10. Wood, "The Secrets of ISIS," 17.
11. Wood, "WHAT ISIS REALLY WANTS. (Cover story)," 83.
12. Ibid, 90.
13. Ibid, 83.
14. Melchior, "The Rape of the Yazidis," 21.
15. Ibid, 21.
16. Ibid, 22.
17. Terrill, "Understanding the Strengths and Vulnerabilities of ISIS," 17.
18. Wood, "WHAT ISIS REALLY WANTS. (Cover story)," 82.
19. Ibid, 83.
20. Ibid, 83.
21. Ibid, 88.
22. Wood, "The Secrets of ISIS," 17.
23. Wood, "The Org Chart of Evil," 9.
24. Terrill, "Understanding the Strengths and Vulnerabilities of ISIS," 20.
25. Terrill, "Understanding the Strengths and Vulnerabilities of ISIS," 20, & Wood, "WHAT ISIS REALLY WANTS. (Cover story)," 80.
26. Terrill, "Understanding the Strengths and Vulnerabilities of ISIS," 21-22.
27. Content synthesized from an off-record discussion with a special operations U.S. general officer on the topic.
28. U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Terrorist Organizations*.
29. *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 9, & Wood, "WHAT ISIS REALLY WANTS. (Cover story)," 80.
30. Wood, "WHAT ISIS REALLY WANTS. (Cover story)," 80.
31. Ibid, 83.
32. Ibid, 89.
33. Lee, "Peace Chiefs and Blood Revenge: Patterns of Restraint in Native American Warfare, 1500-1800," 701-741. This section recounts Lee's facts and insights and is useful to build analysis for the research conclusions.
34. Logt, "'The Powers of the Heavens Shall Eat of My Smoke': The Significance of Scalping in Pawnee Warfare," pages 71-104. This section recounts Logt's facts and insights and is useful to build analysis for the research conclusions.

35. Richter, "War and Culture: The Iroquois Experience." pages 528-559. This section recounts Richter's facts and insights and is useful to build analysis for the research conclusions.
36. Roberts, "Tamil Tigers: Sacrificial Symbolism and 'Dead Body Politics'," 22.
37. Pickert, "A Brief History of The Tamil Tigers," para 1.
38. Weinberg and Eubank, "Women's Involvement in Terrorism," 35.
39. Ibid, 35.
40. Gowrinathan, "Why Do Women Rebel? Understanding State Repression and Female Participation in Sri Lanka," 39.
41. Abdullaev, "Unraveling Chechen 'BLACK WIDOWS'," 20.
42. Kurz and Bartles, "Chechen Suicide Bombers," 534.
43. Abdullaev, "Unraveling Chechen 'BLACK WIDOWS'," 20.
44. Weinberg and Eubank, "Women's Involvement in Terrorism," 35.
45. Obama, "Statement by the President on ISIL," para 9.
46. Ibid, para 10, 11, 13, 14.
47. Wood, "WHAT ISIS REALLY WANTS. (Cover story)," 87.
48. Content synthesized from an off-record discussion with a special operations U.S. general officer.
49. Ibid.





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