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To counter ISIL, in November 2014, President Obama set forth a comprehensive whole-of-government strategy, comprised of nine lines of effort, with four main objectives. The purpose of this strategy was not only to degrade and defeat ISIL, but also to ultimately facilitate effective governance in Iraq & stabilize the region. With a combination of a fragile Iraqi government & the instability in the region, a large and growing body of literature suggest that the current strategy is unsuccessful and/or is not the appropriate strategy to defeat ISIL thereby leaving the organization as a credible threat. This thesis shows that the counter-ISIL strategy, set forth by President Obama, is the appropriate strategy to combat the insurgency of ISIL, & is successful within its given constraints. An analysis of the U.S. & Partner Nations' ability to shrink ISIL's core, decrease its amount of controlled territory, & the destruction of its infrastructure reveals the success of the strategy. Military planners face the challenge of fighting non-state actors on multiple fronts, in various phases of war, while preparing for regional peace & stability. Understanding the U.S. counter-ISIL strategy & appreciating its effectiveness provides planners the framework to shape future operations and contingencies.

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**NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY
JOINT FORCES STAFF COLLEGE
JOINT ADVANCED WARFIGHTING SCHOOL**



**United States Counter-ISIL Strategy: Appropriate and Successful, but Needs
Adjustments**

By

Ronald K. Booker

Lieutenant Colonel, United States Air Force

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This paper is submitted to the Faculty of the Joint Advanced Warfighting School in partial satisfaction of the requirements of a Master of Science Degree in Joint Campaign Planning and Strategy. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Joint Forces Staff College or the Department of Defense.

This paper is entirely my own work except as documented in footnotes. (or appropriate statement per the Academic Integrity Policy)

Signature: Ronald K Booker

21 April 2017

Thesis Advisor:

Signature: Gregory Miller
Gregory Miller, PhD

Approved by:

Signature: Mike Bennett
Mike Bennett
Committee Member

Signature: Ch Rogers
Christopher Rogers, Colonel, Army
Director, Joint Advanced Warfighting School

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Abstract

In 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) emerged on the world stage when it defeated Iraqi forces and captured the city of Mosul. The emergence of ISIL surprised world leaders by the level of violence and capabilities of the organization. To counter ISIL, in November 2014, President Obama set forth a comprehensive whole-of-government strategy, comprised of nine lines of effort, with four main objectives. The purpose of this strategy was not only to degrade and defeat ISIL, but also to ultimately facilitate effective governance in Iraq and stabilize the region. With a combination of a fragile Iraqi government and the instability in the region, a large and growing body of literature suggest that the current strategy is unsuccessful and/or is not the appropriate strategy to defeat ISIL thereby leaving the organization as a credible threat. This thesis shows that the counter-ISIL strategy, set forth by President Obama, is indeed the appropriate strategy to combat the insurgency of ISIL, and is successful within its given constraints. An analysis of the U.S. and Partner Nations' ability to shrink ISIL's core, decrease its amount of controlled territory, and the destruction of its infrastructure reveals the success of the U.S. counter-ISIL strategy. Military planners of today and the future face the challenge of fighting non-state actors on multiple fronts, in various phases of war, while preparing for regional peace and stability. In a complex strategic environment, facing adversaries of this nature requires the use of all elements of national power. Understanding the U.S. counter-ISIL strategy and appreciating its effectiveness provides planners the framework to shape future operations and contingencies.

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: The Counter-ISIL Strategy	5
The Strategic Environment	5
Nine Lines of Effort	10
Critiques.....	15
Chapter 3: CORDS - A Case of Interagency Success	20
Chapter 4: Assessing the Counter-ISIL Strategy.....	28
Chapter 5: Recommendations	34
Integration of Lines of Effort.....	34
Goldwater Nichols for Interagency.....	36
Assessment.....	38
Chapter 6: Conclusion.....	40
Appendix: Figures	42
Bibliography	43
Vita.....	51

Table of Figures

Figure 1. Unconventional End State: Interagency Regional Center	42
Figure 2. Intermediate Approach: Collocation	42

Chapter 1: Introduction

“Unity is strength ... when there is teamwork and collaboration, wonderful things can be achieved.” Mattie Stepanek

Non-state actors and regional instability are threats to U.S. national interests. To combat these threats, the U.S. engaged in a whole-of-government strategy in Afghanistan, Iraq, and now Syria. Considering the emergence of more non-state actors, the whole-of-government strategy will be used in future wars and conflicts to ensure security of the homeland and U.S. allies against the threats of non-state actors, and to maintain regional stability. To gain appreciation for the whole-of-government strategy, this thesis assesses the current U.S. counter-ISIL strategy, and provides a historical context of the whole-of-government strategy via a case study of the Vietnam War Civil Operations and Rural Development Support program (CORDS). Additionally, this thesis highlights the effectiveness of the counter-ISIL strategy and provides recommendations to improve the strategy.

In response to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) surprise emergence and atrocities in 2014, President Obama detailed nine lines of efforts within the whole-of-government approach: “Supporting Effective Governance in Iraq; Denying ISIL Safe-Haven; Building Partner Capacity; Enhancing Intelligence Collection on ISIL; Disrupting ISIL’s Finances; Exposing ISIL’s True Nature; Disrupting the Flow of Foreign Fighters; Protecting the Homeland; and Humanitarian Support.”¹

The counter-ISIL strategy is heavily dependent upon the use of the military. The Department of Defense (DOD) has primary responsibility for *Denying ISIL Safe-Haven*

¹ White House Press. “FACT SHEET: The Administration’s Strategy to Counter the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Updated FY 2015 Overseas Contingency Operations Request.”

and *Building Partner Capacity* lines of effort, and DOD has a significant role in the other seven lines of effort. President Obama, however, limited the use of U.S. military ground forces in Iraq and Syria, opting to use U.S. and Partner Nations air strikes for kinetic effect. According to Joseph Becker, President Obama desired “limited U.S. commitment over the course of time” ... because “the U.S. is a democracy, and a majority of Americans do not support direct involvement of U.S. ground forces in either Iraq or Syria.”² Plus, the involvement of U.S. ground forces would not solve the problem of ineffective governance, which was a significant factor in ISIL’s ability to capture territory in that region.³

As various U.S. government (USG) agencies work the more long-term process to build the Iraqi government and assist in humanitarian efforts, the current counter-ISIL strategy focuses on military operations to secure the area by a decisive military victory. Per Joseph Becker, a decisive military victory includes: “1) return of sovereignty and control of all Iraqi territory to the central government in Baghdad; 2) a measure of justice for the crimes committed by this organization on the world stage; 3) and addresses the status of ISIL in Syria.”⁴ In essence, a viable Iraq nation-state requires territorial integrity, effective governance, and a stable Syria. Without these factors, the region remains vulnerable to insurgents.

² Joseph Becker, “Obama’s Strategy for Defeating ISIS is the Only Viable Option. It Can Work,” *Small Wars Journal*, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/obama%E2%80%99s-strategy-for-defeating-isis-is-the-only-viable-option-it-can-work> (accessed on December 6, 2014).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

Military operations reclaimed significant territory in Iraq, Syria, and Libya, including the iconic cities of Mosul, Ramadi, and Fallujah.⁵ The capture or killing of over 180 ISIL leadership figures provides a measure of justice for the crimes committed.⁶ To address the status of ISIL in Syria, the U.S. supports Syria's main opposition alliance, by training rebel fighters and conducting air strikes on ISIL and other jihadist groups in Syria.⁷

As the Obama administration cited the many successes in the counter-ISIL strategy, others suggest the U.S. counter-ISIL strategy is failing. These arguments focus on the belief that the Obama administration has the incorrect strategy, or the current strategy lacks the appropriate level of integration to be successful. Continual, ISIL claimed, terrorist attacks throughout the world increases the level of fear among some citizens and gives credence to the belief that the U.S. counter-ISIL strategy is failing. However, this thesis will argue the current U.S. counter-ISIL strategy is appropriate and effective.

To support this thesis, Chapter 2 details the counter-ISIL strategy by providing an understanding of the strategic environment, an explanation of each line of effort, and critiques of the strategy. Chapter 3 provides a case study of the Vietnam War CORDS to provide a historical perspective of the whole-of-government strategy, and analyze interagency coordination and success. Chapter 4 assesses the effectiveness of the

⁵ News Room Americas Feed, "Press Briefing by Press Secretary Josh Earnest and Special Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL, Brett McGurk , 12/13/16," Newsroom America, www.newsroomamerica.com/636686.html (accessed on December 20, 2016).

⁶ Ammani, Lyle, "OIR Commander Describes Counter-ISIL Campaign's Successes," DOD News. www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/1030300/oir-commander-describes-counter-isil-campaigns-successes (accessed on January 1, 2017).

⁷ BBC News, Syria crisis: "Where key countries stand," BBC *News*, www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-23849587 (accessed on December 6, 2016).

counter-ISIL strategy by detailing its operational success and stabilization efforts.

Chapter 5 provides recommendations to improve the strategy by providing options to standardize integration of lines of effort to ensure interagency coordination continually occurs in war and in preparation for the next war. Additionally, Chapter 5 recommends legislation, similar to Goldwater Nicholas, for the USG agencies to address the need for a growth in civilian personnel and expertise to execute complex strategies. Chapter 6 concludes by summarizing the arguments made in this thesis.

Chapter 2: The Counter-ISIL Strategy

Understanding the counter-ISIL strategy provides the opportunity to appreciate its appropriateness and effectiveness. This chapter provides an understanding of the counter-ISIL strategy by, first, detailing the strategic environment. Next, a detailed explanation of each line of effort, and the DOD role in each line of effort, describes how the lines of effort converge to meet the counter-ISIL strategy objectives. Finally, this chapter analyzes the critiques suggesting the counter-ISIL strategy is failing. The detailed explanation of the counter-ISIL strategy, its strategic environment, and counter arguments of the strategy provides planners the framework to design strategies for future wars and/or conflicts against non-state actors.

The Strategic Environment

The complex strategic environment consist of a highly militarized non-state actor, thousands of displaced people, inept local forces, and U.S. public sentiment against the use of ground forces, which placed a constraint on the strategy. Additionally, the strategy required a high level of coordination between USG agencies known for operating in stove pipes, which increases the complexity of the strategic environment.

The U.S. counter-ISIL strategy is a whole-of-government approach to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL and bring stability to the region, with a minimal number of U.S. ground forces and the assistance of Partner Nations. According to President Obama,

the fight against ISIL will be a “long-term campaign that uses all dimensions of U.S. power to bolster economic and political stability in the region.”¹

To fully appreciate the counter-ISIL strategy, it is imperative to understand several factors that shaped the strategic environment. First, execution of the counter-ISIL strategy began as an emergency response to prevent genocide and the fall of Syria, and then became a containment strategy. Second, the strategy involves a long-term campaign to achieve stability and effective governance in the region. Third, DOD efforts are a central focus of the strategy because a certain threshold of security is required to stop atrocities and achieve stability and effective governance. Fourth, the strategy requires unprecedented levels of interagency coordination and unity of effort. Finally, the American public tolerance for war was (and remains) very low, which is a factor leading to the U.S. decision to limit the number of ground forces in the region.

The whole-of-government approach is the foundation of the counter-ISIL strategy and is a “unified effort between inter-governmental agencies to maximize all available resources in a collaborative effort.”² President Obama set forth a whole-of-government approach in the 2010 National Security Strategy (NSS).³ Within the NSS he stated, “We are improving the integration of skills and capabilities within our military and civilian institutions, so they complement each other and operate seamlessly. We are also improving coordinated planning.”⁴

¹ Lisa Ferdinando, “Obama: Fight Against ISIL ‘Long-term Campaign,” *Defense.gov*, www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/603444 (accessed on December 6, 2016).

² Jason L. Percy and Terry A. Fellows Jr, “A Whole of Government Approach for National Security,” *MBA Professional Report*, Naval Postgraduate School (Monterey, 2009), 4.

³ U.S. President, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, May 2010), 14.

⁴ *Ibid.*

The whole-of-government approach detailed in the 2010 NSS is how the U.S. executed the counterinsurgency (COIN) tactics in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. However, in 2014, a new, violent, and heavily militarized threat, ISIL, came to power and launched the “Soldier’s Harvest” campaign to diminish Iraqi security forces and capture territory, killing and displacing thousands of Iraqis and Syrians.⁵ To combat ISIL, the U.S. led a coalition of nations in airstrikes in Iraq, and later Syria, to stop the genocide conducted by ISIL. From August 2014 to August 2015, the United States conducted more than 8,000 airstrikes in Iraq and Syria, diminishing ISILs offensive capabilities.⁶

In response to the crisis caused by ISIL, in November 2015 the White House stated that, “ISIL poses an immediate threat to Iraq, Syria, and American allies and partners throughout the region as it seeks to overthrow governments, control territory, terrorize local populations, and implement an oppressive and intolerant interpretation of sharia law.”⁷ To avert the crisis and eventually defeat ISIL, the President set forth a comprehensive whole-of-government strategy that featured nine lines of effort.

President Obama’s National Security Advisor, Susan Rice, later codified the whole-of-government campaign to defeat ISIL into four objectives: “1) attacking ISIL’s core in Syria and Iraq; 2) attacking ISIL branches with coalition forces; 3) working with

⁵ Cameron Glenn, “Timeline: Rise and Spread of the Islamic State,” *Wilson Center*, www.wilsoncenter.org/article/timeline-rise-and-spread-the-islamic-state (accessed on December 6, 2016).

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ White House Press. “FACT SHEET: The Administration’s Strategy to Counter the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Updated FY 2015 Overseas Contingency Operations Request.”

coalition to disrupt ISIL's global network; and 4) protecting the United States homeland.”⁸

Meeting the objectives requires coordination and unity of effort amongst USG agencies because of the complexity of the environment, in which actions in one line of effort can affect the other lines of effort. An unprecedented amount of interagency coordination and unity of effort is required because the DOD is responsible for *Denying ISIL Safe-Haven and Building Partner Capacity lines of effort*, and has a significant role across the full spectrum of lines of effort in the counter-ISIL strategy, yet there is no designated lead agency for the overall counter-ISIL strategy.

Nathan White, a Civilian Research Fellow with the Center for Complex Operations at National Defense University argues, “... the structure of the national security system is not conducive for whole-of-government campaign strategy management, and U.S. Government agencies have not demonstrated the ability to coordinate in the field for strategic impact.”⁹ The absence of a lead agency indicates there is no formal unity of command among the interagency, however, there is unity of effort and coordination among agencies from the tactical to Executive level. September 2014, President Obama did appoint retired General John Allen as the Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL. October 2015, Mr. Brett McGurk replaced retired General Allen. As the Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL, Mr. McGurk “leads a global coalition of 68 members and

⁸ The Simon Center, “Rice speaks on Whole-of-Government Approach against ISIL,” Arthur D. Simons Center for Interagency Cooperation, www.thesimonscenter.org/rice-on-approach-against-isil/ (accessed on December 6, 2016).

⁹ Nathan White, “Organizing for War: Overcoming Barriers to Whole-of-Government Strategy in the ISIL Campaign,” *Small Wars Journal*. www.smallwarsjournal.com/author/nathan-white (accessed on October 5, 2016).

“helps” coordinate all aspects of U.S. policy related to the ultimate destruction of ISIL.”¹⁰

Mr. McGurk facilitates coordination between agencies at the Executive level and often explains counter-ISIL operations to the press, but is not in charge of prioritizing or directing counter-ISIL actions.

It is important for Mr. McGurk to provide strategic communications to the public regarding the U.S. actions against ISIL. According to a 2015 Gallup poll, “As the U.S. intensifies its airstrikes against Islamic State militants in Syria and Iraq, Americans are more likely to oppose (53%) than support (43%) sending U.S. ground troops to these countries to help groups there fight the militants.”¹¹ After 15 years of war, the public is averse to U.S. ground forces involvement against ISIL. U.S. involvement in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq shows that when the U.S. commits forces to a conflict, local forces do not rise up, and this causes the U.S. to send more troops, fight a losing battle, or cut its losses and pull out.¹² The 2015 Gallup poll also stated, “the fairly low level of Americans' support for deploying ground troops could be related to their reluctance to engage in another major military commitment in Iraq, or elsewhere for that matter.”¹³

Based on the public sentiment, his campaign promise, and not wanting a repeat of the Afghanistan and Iraq war, in which the U.S. became occupiers, President Obama opted not to send U.S. ground forces to fight ISIL.¹⁴ Rather, the U.S. sent forces to train

¹⁰ Biography for Mr. Brett McGurk, <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/biog/bureau/213058.htm>

¹¹ Justin McCarthy, “In U.S., 53% Oppose Sending Ground Troops to Fight Militants,” *Gallup*, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/186590/oppose-sending-ground-troops-fight-militants.aspx> (accessed on December 6, 2016).

¹² Joseph Becker, “Obama’s Strategy for Defeating ISIS is the Only Viable Option. It Can Work,” *Small Wars Journal*. smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/obama%E2%80%99s-strategy-for-defeating-isis-is-the-only-viable-option-it-can-work (accessed on December 6, 2016).

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ David Johnson, “Means Matter: Competent Ground Forces and the Fight Against ISIL,” *War on the Rocks*, warontherocks.com/2015/03/means-matter-competent-ground-forces-and-the-fight-against-isil/ (accessed on December 6, 2016).

and advise the local forces to regain and secure their territory, with the assistance of U.S. and Partner Nation airstrikes. Furthermore, President Obama's administration realized that to have a lasting defeat of ISIL, Iraqis and Syrians must be able to provide security for their citizens before stability in the region and good governance can occur. Effective local security forces are key because the use of U.S. forces is politically constrained and is not a viable option due to the indefinite commitment required to prevent ISIL from recapturing territory.¹⁵

Nine Lines of Effort

The counter-ISIL strategy nine lines of effort differentiate it from the whole-of-government strategy used in Operation ENDURING FREEDOM and Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. To understand the strategy it is imperative to understand the nine lines of effort and the role of the DOD in each line effort. This section discusses the significance of each line of effort to the counter-ISIL strategy.

The DOD is responsible for *Denying ISIL Safe-Haven and Building Partner Capacity* lines of effort. Security of the Middle East and the people of the region, by the eradication of ISIL, is the overall mission of these lines of effort. U.S. Central Command (U.S. CENTCOM) Operation INHERENT RESOLVE leads the execution of these lines of effort in concert with 66 Partner Nations (*Building Partner Capacity*).¹⁶ *Denying ISIL Safe-Haven* involves “conducting a systematic campaign of airstrikes against ISIL in

¹⁵ Joseph Becker, “Obama’s Strategy for Defeating ISIS is the Only Viable Option. It Can Work.”

¹⁶ Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) is a “Combined Joint Task Force will accomplish its mission – to militarily defeat DA’ESH in the Combined Joint Operations Area by, with, and through regional partners in order to enable whole-of-governmental actions to increase regional stability – by conducting a campaign Operation Inherent Resolve, “CJTF Campaign Design,” [Inherentresolve.mil](http://www.inherentresolve.mil), <http://www.inherentresolve.mil/campaign/> (accessed on December 6, 2016).

Iraq and Syria; working with the Iraqi government; striking ISIL targets; and supporting Iraqi forces on the ground; degrading ISIL's leadership, logistical and operational capability; and denying it sanctuary and resources to plan, prepare and execute attacks."¹⁷

The Department of State (DOS) is the lead agency for *Supporting Effective Governance in Iraq, Exposing ISIL's True Nature, Disrupting the Flow of Foreign Fighters, and Humanitarian Support* lines of effort. *Supporting Effective Governance* in Iraq entails DOS assisting the Iraqi government on efforts to govern inclusively and effectively, as well as to strengthen its cooperation with regional partners."¹⁸ For example, the U.S. has a Strategic Framework Agreement (SFA) with the Government of Iraq (GOI).¹⁹ According to the U.S. Embassy in Iraq, the SFA "normalizes the U.S.-Iraqi relationship with strong economic, diplomatic, cultural, and security cooperation and serves as the foundation for a long-term bilateral relationship based on mutual goals."²⁰ Effective governance of Iraq is necessary for stabilization in the region and provides a rationale for continued U.S. support. The DOD supports security of the U.S. Embassy and has a role in security cooperation by training local forces. For a government to be effective, the country's border and citizens must have an acceptable level of security.

Exposing ISIL's True Nature entails DOS efforts "with partners throughout the Muslim world to highlight ISIL's hypocrisy and counter its false claims of acting in the name of religion."²¹ Additionally, DOS uses social media to expose ISIL's true nature.

¹⁷ SWJ Editors, "The U.S. Whole of Government Comprehensive Strategy."

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Department of State, "U.S.-Iraq Strategic Framework Agreement: Update on Implementation," DOS, www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2013/08/213170.htm, (accessed on October 5, 2016)

²⁰ Embassy of U.S. – Baghdad Iraq, "The Strategic Framework Agreement (SFA) and U.S.-Iraqi Bilateral Relations," Iraq-U.S. Embassy, www.iraq.usembassy.gov/american-iraqi.html (accessed on October 5, 2016).

²¹ SWJ Editors, "The U.S. Whole of Government Comprehensive Strategy."

DOD has a significant role in this line of effort as it aids in diminishing ISIL resonance on-line by killing ISIL leaders, reclaiming territory, and destroying the groups resources.²²

Disrupting the Flow of Foreign Fighters is an “international effort to stem the flow of fighters into Syria and Iraq.”²³ DOS led the effort to create United Nations Security Council Resolution 2178, resulting in “45 countries enacting laws or amendments to create greater obstacles for travelling into Iraq and Syria.”²⁴ DOD and coalitions partners’ efforts in reclaiming territory in Iraq, Syria, and Libya eliminated major transition points for ISIL fighters.²⁵ In addition, air strikes limited ISIL’s freedom of movement and stems the flow of foreign fighters.

Humanitarian Support provides humanitarian assistance to the displaced and vulnerable in Iraq and Syria.”²⁶ According to White house talking points in November 2015, the U.S. provided \$4.1 billion of aid to the Syrian crisis and \$600 million to Iraq.²⁷ In planning for the recapture of Mosul, and the possibility of one million displaced individuals, the DOD trained 30 thousand disposition forces and 14 thousand tribal fighters.²⁸ These forces were able to conduct screening of refugees and provide security.

Enhancing Intelligence Collection on ISIL, led by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (DNI), counter terrorism mission is to “gain more fidelity on ISIL’s

²² Senate Foreign Relations Committee, “Global Effort to Defeat ISIS,” U.S. Senate, www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/062816_McGurk_Testimony.pdf (accessed on December 6, 2016).

²³ SWJ Editors, “The U.S. Whole of Government Comprehensive Strategy.”

²⁴ The Global Coalition, “Impeding the Flow of Foreign Fighters,” *Global Coalition*, www.theglobalcoalition.org/mission/impeding-the-flow-of--fighters/ (accessed on October 5, 2016).

²⁵ Senate Foreign Relations Committee, “Global Effort to Defeat ISIS.”

²⁶ SWJ Editors, “The U.S. Whole of Government Comprehensive Strategy.”

²⁷ White House Press: *Anti-ISIL Strategy Pocket Card*. White House Press, Washington: The White House Press Secretary, November 20, 2015.

²⁸ Department of State, “Update on Campaign Against ISIL,” State.gov, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2016/10/262934.htm> (accessed on December 6, 2016).

capabilities, plans, and intentions; use intelligence information to degrade, and ultimately destroy the group; continue to strengthen ability to understand this threat; and share vital information with Iraqi and Coalition partners to enable them to effectively counter ISIL.”²⁹ DOD and coalition Special Operation Forces and Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) platforms are primary sources for gathering information analyzed by DNI. Interagency and Partner Nations use the intelligence information provided by DNI to develop targets.

Disrupting ISIL’s Finances, led by the Department of Treasury (DOTR), works “aggressively with partners on a coordinated approach to reduce ISIL’s revenue from oil and assets it plundered; limit ISIL’s ability to extort local populations; stem ISIL’s gains from kidnapping for ransom; and disrupt the flow of external donations to the group.”³⁰ The DOD supports this line of effort in various ways. For example, Special Operation Forces conducted raids in Syria, collecting intelligence for DNI. This information enabled the U.S. to map ISIL’s resource stream, and then, systematically, destroy it.³¹

Protecting the Homeland led by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), “uses the criminal justice system as a critical counterterrorism tool to work with air carriers to implement responsible threat-based security and screening requirements and counter violent extremism here at home.”³² The DOD is responsible for homeland defense. The partner capacity of 66 nations, developed by the DOD, provides vital information regarding foreign travelers. This information provides increased aviation security and decreases the flow of terrorist into the U.S.

²⁹ SWJ Editors, “The U.S. Whole of Government Comprehensive Strategy.”

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Senate Foreign Relations Committee, “Global Effort to Defeat ISIS.”

³² SWJ Editors, “The U.S. Whole of Government Comprehensive Strategy.”

The objectives of DOD, DOS, DNI, DOTR, and DHS lines of effort converge to meet the objectives set forth by the National Security Advisor. DOS stabilization efforts of the Iraq government decrease ISIL's power and influence in the region, while DOTR's ability to limit ISIL's access to revenue inhibits ISIL's war effort and decrease the morale of its fighters, meet the objective of *Attacking ISIL's core in Syria and Iraq*. DNI provides critical intelligence aiding in the development of targets for U.S. and coalition forces to meet the objective of *Attacking ISIL Branches with coalition forces*. DOS leads the effort to expose ISIL's true nature with the help of the coalition by changing the narrative via Muslim Clerics and attacking ISIL's on-line presence, thus *working with the coalition to disrupt ISIL's global network*. The DOS led United Nations partners to create and enact UN Security Council Resolution 2178 in September 2014.³³ This resolution requires countries to take steps to counter foreign terrorist fighters, expand current obligations under international law, and strengthen international measures that prevent suspected foreign terrorist fighters from travelling.³⁴ This effort was vital to meeting the objective of *protecting the United States homeland*.

As shown, the counter-ISIL strategy nine lines of effort is a whole-of-government approach that simultaneously degrades ISIL, helps stabilize the region, and protects the U.S. and its allies. The execution of these lines of effort requires significant assistance from the DOD and unity of effort amongst the USG agencies. Through the effort of the respective USG agencies and the collective unity of effort, the nine lines of effort converge to meet the objectives, set forth by the National Security Advisor, Susan Rice.

³³ The Global Coalition, "Impeding the Flow of Foreign Fighters," [Theglobalcoalition.org](http://theglobalcoalition.org), <http://theglobalcoalition.org/mission/impeding-the-flow-of-foreign-fighters/> (accessed on October 5, 2016).

³⁴ Ibid.

Critiques

Two main arguments suggest the U.S. counter-ISIL strategy is a failure. One is the limited use of U.S. ground forces. David Johnson postulates that, “U.S. success is inextricably linked to ground combat operations against ISIL in perhaps the most difficult tactical environment of a densely populated urban battlefield.”³⁵ Nicholas Burns states, “Ultimate success against ISIS will depend on the United States helping to pull together a ground component to match the air campaign. ISIS is too strong, too entrenched, and too wealthy to be defeated by air power alone.”³⁶ However, the U.S., Partner Nations, and indigenous ground forces successfully removed ISIL from key cities, reduced its amount of controlled territory, killed some of its top leaders, and destroyed a significant portion of its infrastructure.

To achieve effective governance and stability in the region requires a threshold of security provided by the local forces. Limiting the numbers of U.S. ground forces encourages local forces to rise to the challenge of securing their nations. During a Pentagon Press briefing regarding the fight against ISIL, Secretary of Defense Carter echoed this sentiment by stating the defeat of ISIL will occur “When there are effective local forces on the ground that we can support and enable so that they can take territory, hold territory, and make sure that good governance comes in behind it.” To enhance the security posture of the region, the DOD lines of effort and role of DOD in each line of

³⁵ David Johnson, “Means Matter: Competent Ground Forces And The Fight Against ISIL,” *War on the Rock*, <https://warontherocks.com/2015/03/means-matter-competent-ground-forces-and-the-fight-against-isil/> (accessed on December 6, 2016).

³⁶ Nicholas Burns, “Stopping ISIL: What Should (or Shouldn’t) Be Done?” *Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs*, www.belfercenter.org/publication/stopping-isil-what-should-or-shouldnt-be-done (accessed on December 6, 2016).

effort is prominent since establishment of security is required for the execution of all the lines of effort.

The second critique, and the focus of this thesis, suggests the counter-ISIL strategy is failing due to the lack of coordination and integration among U.S. government (USG) agencies in counter terrorism (CT) and COIN operations executed in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. This lack of coordination and integration purportedly prevents USG agencies from having a unity of effort in CT and COIN operations.

Linda Robinson, of RAND, examined the first 18-months of implementation of the U.S. counter-ISIL strategy that started in September 2014, and suggests the lack of synchronization and integration across the lines of effort inhibited the counter-ISIL strategy from moving forward.³⁷ According to Richard Hooker, the interagency lack of vertical and horizontal unity of effort is a systemic problem that is evident at the Executive level.³⁸ The perceived lack of vertical and horizontal unity of effort is arguably a product of the agencies' parochialisms, bureaucracy, amount of power and resources, and lack of a united vision, objective, and/or culture.

A lack of unity of effort can be detrimental to the execution of the counter-ISIL strategy. As previously stated, the DOD is in charge of two lines of effort, but has a significant role in the execution of the additional lines of effort. Thus, without clear guidance from Executive leadership on the prioritization of the lines of effort, the DOD may misallocate assets and resources, limiting the ability to properly coordinate, integrate, and execute USG agencies lines of effort.

³⁷ Linda Robinson, "Assessment of the Politico-Military Campaign to Counter ISIL and Options for Adaptation," RAND, www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1290.html (accessed on October 5, 2016).

³⁸ Richard D. Hooker and Joseph J. Collins, *Lessons Encountered: Learning From the Long War* (Washington DC: National Defense University Press: 2015), 189.

There is considerable debate regarding the inability of USG agencies to work as a cohesive and integrated team. When the threat of ISIL emerged, President Obama had difficulties stabilizing Iraq and the relationships between the USG agencies in Washington, D.C., especially the DOS and DOD.³⁹ USG agencies operated in stovepipes, which was counterproductive to a whole-of-government approach. President Obama understood this problem and created a new position at DOS, appointing General John Allen as Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL. General Allen's task was to "build and sustain the coalition so it can operate across multiple lines of effort in order to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL."⁴⁰ Thus, he was the integrator of the nine lines of effort.

Additionally, the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) (which is part of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence) "integrates foreign and domestic analysis from across the Intelligence Community (IC) and produces a wide-range of detailed assessments designed to support senior policymakers and other members of the policy, intelligence, law enforcement, defense, homeland security, and foreign affairs communities."⁴¹ The results of information sharing and coordinated planning was evident when, on January 11, 2016, NBC News reported "Millions in ISIS cash destroyed

³⁹ David Ignatius, "Interagency battles are hurting the U.S.'s fight against the Islamic State," The Washington Post, www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/interagency-battles-are-hurting-the-uss-fightagainstthe-islamic-state/2015/05/20/80068f44-ff2e-11e4-8b6c-0dcce21e223d_story.html?utm_term=.053b0c75b3e8 (accessed on December 6, 2016).

⁴⁰ Department of State, "Announcement of General John Allen as Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL," state.gov, www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2014/09/231627.htm (accessed on December 6, 2016).

⁴¹ Office of Director of National Intelligence, "National Counterterrorism Center," NCTC.gov, www.nctc.gov/overview.html.

in U.S. airstrike.”⁴² Various news outlets and social media sites praised the military operation and the U.S. government for taking the fight to ISIL by crippling ISIL’s ability to fund its military force and potential terrorist actions. Some viewed this precision guided missile air strike of a bank, in the ISIL-held Iraqi city of Mosul, as an example of the U.S. military might and capabilities. However, this airstrike was also an example of interagency coordination and integrated planning, the whole-of-government strategy, used to achieve positive tactical and strategic results. In this case, theoretically, the DOD and DOS provided information, obtained from operations in the field, to the DNI and DOTR analysts, via the NCTC. This information allowed DOTR, DNI, DOS, and DOD to follow the money trail and movement of ISIL fighters, and to collaboratively develop targets to destroy.

Though a considerable amount of literature claims the U.S. counter-ISIL strategy has failed, this thesis argues the strategy is appropriate and has been successful. Within the strategic environment, the U.S. counter-ISIL strategy is the appropriate strategy to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL, because it focuses on stability and effective governance in the region, with the understanding that achieving these two goals is a long-term process.

The counter-ISIL strategy is also appropriate for the complex strategic environment faced in today’s fight, as it allows USG agencies the flexibility to engage in different phases of war on multiple fronts. The strategy empowers the local population to lead the effort in securing and effectively governing their nation. This counter-ISIL

⁴² Jim Miklaszewski and Corky Siemaszko, “Millions in ISIS Cash Destroyed in U.S. Airstrike,” NBC News, www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-terror/millions-isis-cash-destroyed-u-s-airstrike-n494261 (accessed on December 27, 2016).

strategy is an appropriate way to protect the U.S. enduring national interests of “security of the homeland and our allies,” while using minimal ground forces to acknowledge the public’s low tolerance for war.⁴³ Finally, the counter-ISIL strategy effectiveness resulted in regaining ISIL held territory, killing key ISIL leadership, providing humanitarian assistance, and decreasing its sense of invincibility.

⁴³ Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff, *National Military Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2015), 5.

Chapter 3: CORDS - A Case of Interagency Success

The whole-of-government strategy is not a new phenomenon in U.S. national security. The Vietnam War CORDS provides an example of U.S. military and civilian unity of effort to stabilize the rural areas of South Vietnam, gain support for the South Vietnamese government, and remove insurgents from the region. Lessons learned from CORDS are applicable to the USG agencies' current fight against ISIL, violent extremists, and insurgents due to the similar purpose and tactics of the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong. In addition, stabilization and nation building efforts of CORDS are similar to actions taken by the USG agencies in today's war-torn areas in the Middle East.

General William Westmoreland, Commander U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (COMUSMACV) understood the need and importance of a whole-of-government strategy to combat an insurgency, and that pacification (the term used for COIN operations in Vietnam) programs were as vital as military operations.¹ The reality of the battle against insurgents showed General Westmoreland that the Viet Cong mastered this integrated strategy. His analysis of the strategic environment caused him to realize the U.S. needed a robust whole-of-government strategy, stating, "It is abundantly clear that all political, military, economic, and security (police) programs must be completely integrated in order to attain any kind of success in a country which has been

¹ According to R.W. Komer, whom President Johnson appointed as the first Deputy for CORDS, the term pacification is synonymous with counterinsurgency. R.W. Komer, "Bureaucracy Does Its Thing: Institutional Constraints on U.S.-GVN Performance in Vietnam," RAND, www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/reports/2005/R967.pdf (accessed on December 6, 2016). Andrade and Willbanks, "CORDS/Phoenix," 13.

greatly weakened by prolonged conflict.”² President Lyndon Johnson understood and agreed with General Westmoreland’s assessment and set forth a plan to achieve “greater American coordination in the pacification effort (in Vietnam) and called for a single manager to head the entire program.”³ On May 9, 1967, President Johnson established CORDS when he signed National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) 362.⁴

The establishment and implementation of CORDS was the first time the U.S. fully integrated civilian and military efforts in the Vietnamese counterinsurgency.⁵ CORDS lasted from 1967 to 1973. During this time, CORDS initiated many pacification efforts to include “refugee resettlement; development of police forces; the Chieu Hoi program (inducing defectors), Phoenix program (Viet Cong Infrastructure neutralization); and Revolutionary Development Cadre (which dealt with restoring local elected government, medical treatment, local development projects, and farmer credit).”⁶

Within the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) organizational structure, the Deputy for CORDS (DEPCORD) was a three-star general equivalent rank and was peer to the Deputy Commander Military Assistance Command Vietnam and Deputy Air Operations.⁷ The military deputies performed a broad range of duties while the DEPCORD was solely responsible for pacification programs.⁸ President Johnson appointed Robert Komer, a former National Security Council member, as DEPCORD.

² Dale Andrade and James H. Willbanks, “CORDS/Phoenix: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Vietnam for the Future,” *Military Review*, March-April (2006): 10.

³ R.W. Komer, “Bureaucracy Does Its Thing,” 13.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵ Rufus Phillips, “Counterinsurgency in Vietnam: Lessons for Today,” *Foreign Service Journal*, April 2015, 7

⁶ William Schoux, “The Vietnam CORDS Experience: A Model of Successful Civil-Military Partnership?,” U.S. Agency for International Development, http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pnaec349.pdf (accessed on December 6, 2016).

⁷ Andrade and Willbanks, “CORDS/Phoenix,” 14.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

Under the MACV organizational structure, Komer no longer had direct access to the President; he had to report to General Westmoreland.⁹ Having a lead agency and a well-defined chain of command ensured that all operations were aligned vertically and were prioritized based on the decisions of leadership. Additionally, working alongside the military deputies created horizontal unity of effort and fully integrated civilian and military programs.

Prior to the establishment of CORDS, DOS, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), U.S. Information Service (USIS), and Department of Agriculture (DOA) “pursued separate and conflicting pacification initiatives without an integrated strategy.”¹⁰ Each USG agency operated in a mutually exclusive manner, which caused each organization to grow in size and complexity, and increased parochialism. Additionally, multiple agencies, conducting a variety of pacification initiatives, became problematic for the Government of South Vietnam to coordinate and allocate resources.

CORDS’ position in the MACV organizational structure helped centralize civilian and military resources and priorities. The Government of South Vietnam replicated the CORDS organizational structure at each level of its government. The hierarchal structure of the MACV and CORDS mirrored by the South Vietnamese Government, increased unity of effort and produced great results when directed to expand the pacification programs. For example, from 1963 to 1966 the “Chieu Hoi” Amnesty program for Viet Cong deserters only offered amnesty and rehabilitation to 75,000 North Vietnamese and

⁹ Ibid., 14.

¹⁰ Richard Weitz, “CORDS and the Whole of Government Approach,” *Small Wars Journal*, February 4, 2010, 2.

Viet Cong defectors.¹¹ CORDS emphasized this program by providing additional and more experienced U.S. personnel for training and assisted in creating a Government of Vietnam Chieu Hoi Secretariat.¹² Thus, after 1966, over 172,000 defectors surrendered to the South Vietnamese Government.¹³

There are several similarities to the CORDS and the current whole-of-government strategy. First, is the requirement for multiple USG agencies to support with funds, personnel, or their respective capabilities. Similar to the counter-ISIL strategy nine lines of effort, NSAM 362 directed the DOS, CIA, USAID, USIS, and DOA to align efforts to achieve the mission objectives of pacification and stabilization in the region.¹⁴ Likewise, the current counter-ISIL strategy nine lines of effort involve DOD, DOS, DOTR, DNI, and the DHS, and task each agency to provide the necessary resources to meet counter-ISIL objectives.

Additionally, CORDS pacification and the U.S. counter-ISIL strategy have three similar goals. First, CORDS sought security of the North Vietnamese, by safeguarding the population from South Vietnamese forces and the Viet Cong.¹⁵ The CORDS goal of security mirrors President Obama's administration goal to hunt down terrorist plotters,

¹¹Richard Weitz, "CORDS and the Whole of Government Approach," 4.

"Chieu Hoi" means open arms. The Viet Cong who surrendered were called Hoi Chanh, which means returnees. Viet Cong Hoi Chanh surrendered using safe conduct passes and, after a short period of internment to ensure that they were legitimate deserters, they would be retained in a craft or given some land for farming and be resettled.

¹²J.A. Koch, "The Chieu Hoi Program in South Vietnam, 1963-1971," Rand Corp, citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.920.6592&rep=rep1&type=pdf.

¹³ Ibid., 4

¹⁴ Federation of American Scientist, "NSAM 362: Responsibility for U.S. Role in Pacification (Revolutionary Development)," FSA.org, <http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/NSAMs/nsam362.asp> (accessed on December 29, 2016).

¹⁵ Andrade and Willbanks, "CORDS/Phoenix," 13.

and to provide training and equipment to Iraqi and Syrian forces fighting ISIL.¹⁶

Additionally, the CORDS goal of security aligns with the DOD lines of effort Denying ISIL Safe Haven, as the U.S. seeks to destroy ISIL's ability to occupy territory, and Building Partner Capacity, as the U.S. trains, assists, and advises Iraqi and Syrian forces.

The second goal of CORDS was to delegitimize Communism and the need for Communist support by conducting operations to control the narrative and provide programs that allowed the North Vietnamese to rebuild their country and aid in the support of their government.¹⁷ These actions are similar to the DOS line of effort focused on *Exposing ISIL's True Nature*, in which Muslims speak out regarding the hypocrisy of ISIL's caliphate and propaganda, and *Supporting Effective Governance in Iraq*.

CORDS and the counter-ISIL strategy both experienced a change of their goals. Initially, General Westmoreland used conventional war methods to *search and destroy* the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong.¹⁸ The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong, however, engaged in guerrilla war tactics, embedded in the population, and dictated when battles would occur. Therefore, General Westmoreland began *clear and hold* operations that required winning the hearts and minds of the people.¹⁹ These actions are similar to U.S. operations in Iraqi and Syria. In Iraq, the U.S. and local ground forces, continue to search, capture, or kill ISIL forces. However, in Syria, the U.S. engages in a containment strategy, focused on pursuing ISIL via airstrikes.

¹⁶ White House. "Address to the Nation by the President," White House. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/12/06/address-nation-president> (accessed on December 1, 2016).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁸ William Schoux, "The Vietnam CORDS Experience"

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

The final similarity of CORDS and the counter-ISIL strategy is the inability to sustain civilian initiated and led programs once U.S. military forces depart the area of responsibility. The sustainability of the initiatives, pacification programs and stabilization produced by CORDS failed once American troops withdrew from Vietnam. CORDS success was heavily dependent on the military resources. Robert Komer, appointed by President Johnson to lead CORDS, desired for the military to be the lead agency because the military had the preponderance of the resources. Therefore, Komer petitioned Secretary McNamara by stating, “With 90 percent of the resources, it was obvious that only the military had the clout to get the job done.”²⁰

Once the military withdrew from Vietnam, the security of South Vietnam drastically decreased, and the remaining South Vietnamese and U.S. civilian workers were not able to effectively execute CORDS initiated programs.²¹ Likewise, the counter-ISIL strategy is heavily military dependent, as indicated by DOD involvement in each line of effort. Additionally, the “surge” of U.S. forces in Iraq and the halt to the drawdown of forces in Afghanistan showed the need for continued security in counterinsurgency and stabilization programs.

The similarities identified in CORDS and today’s whole-of-government strategy to counter-ISIL are valuable lessons learned from the Vietnam War. However, CORDS and the counter-ISIL strategy differ in terms of organizational structure. Understanding the CORDS “lead agency” model for execution of the whole-of-government strategy provides more options in planning future wars against non-state actors.

²⁰ Ibid., 13.

²¹ Mandy Honn and Farrah Meisel, “A Legacy of Vietnam: Lessons from CORDS,” Col. Arthur D. Simons Center for the Study of Interagency Cooperation. www.thesimonscenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/IAJ-2-2-pg41-50.pdf (accessed on December 6, 2016).

Having the MACV as the lead agency, with a plethora of resources, was important to the whole-of-government strategy in Vietnam because it established unity of command and facilitated unity of effort. Unity of command, or a lead agency, was prudent in Vietnam because the leaders (military and civilian) operated in a conventional war mindset and unity of command structure is customary in conventional wars.

In contrast, there is no lead agency in the counter-ISIL strategy, nor is a lead agency necessary in today's strategic environment. Today's leaders and tacticians are attune to COIN and CT operations and rely on interagency information and assistance to accomplish missions. Additionally, technology has changed the strategic environment, as transfer of information and data occurs in nanoseconds or live. These technological advances potentially increase the speed of transfer of interagency information sharing, integration, coordination, and synchronization capabilities.

Furthermore, in today's strategic environment, having the military as the lead agency is problematic for U.S. Central Command because of the optics of foreign policy and diplomacy, in an unstable region, led by the military. General Tommy Franks experienced this scenario when military combat operations began in Afghanistan and Iraq. There was no U.S. Ambassador in Kabul in 2001 or in Bagdad in 2003. Therefore, General Franks and his staff assumed the duties for "operations such as disaster relief, humanitarian support, and non-combatant evacuations,"²² which placed more requirements on U.S. CENTCOM. In addition, General Franks became a de facto Ambassador, speaking on behalf of the nation. The U.S. government is designed for civilians (Department of State), not military, to lead foreign policy efforts.

²² Tucker Mansager, "Interagency Lessons Learned in Afghanistan," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Issue 40 (1st Quarter2006): 81.

There were several other differences in the strategic environment for CORDS and the counter-ISIL strategy. In Vietnam, the U.S. was welcomed as an ally and the local population was willing to work with CORDS personnel. The Iraqis considered the U.S. as invaders and/or occupiers, and were more reluctant to build relationships. Due to the overwhelming number of military forces in Vietnam, there was an increased security presence. The limitations on the number of ground forces and the administration's containment strategy in Syria, significantly lowers the U.S. security presence for counter-ISIL operations. On the other hand, the amount of coalition assistance in the counter-ISIL operations far exceeds the amount of coalition involvement in CORDS.

The examination of CORDS provides several key points about the whole-of-government strategy that is applicable to the counter-ISIL strategy. First, non-state actors are proficient in executing their whole-of-government strategy, which increases the complexity of the strategic environment and requires expert execution of the nine lines of effort. Next, unity of effort is required to successfully execute the strategy. Finally, the U.S. must establish a sufficient level of security to effectively execute the whole-of-government strategy.

Chapter 4: Assessing the Counter-ISIL Strategy

According to a May 2016 poll by the Pew Research Center, 80 percent of the population agreed that the “Islamic militant group known as IS remains the American public’s top international concern.”¹ ISIL remains a dangerous organization and should be a concern for U.S. citizens because it poses a threat to the nation’s enduring national interest of security of the homeland and security of its allies. If the public was more aware of the successes of the counter-ISIL strategy and effectiveness it has on ISIL, there would be less cause for concern.

In September 2016, CNN reported “since declaring its caliphate in June 2014, the self-proclaimed Islamic State has conducted or inspired more than 140 terrorist attacks in 29 countries other than Iraq and Syria...killing more than 2,043 people.”² In December 2016, CNN also reported, “at Reina Night Club in Istanbul, Turkey, a gunman opened fire and killed 39 people, and ISIL claimed responsibility for the attack.”³ Considering the amount of ISIL-claimed terrorist activity reported throughout the world, it may be difficult to believe the U.S. counter ISIL strategy is successful. Although, admittedly President Obama’s administration poorly communicated the counter-ISIL strategy and its

¹ Jenna Jordan and Margaret Kosal, “The Strategic Illogic of Counter Terrorism Policy,” *The Washington Quarterly*, www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0163660X.2016.1261564 (accessed on January 25, 2016).

² Tim Lister, “ISIS goes global: 143 attacks in 29 countries have killed 2,043,” CNN.com, www.cnn.com/2015/12/17/world/mapping-isis-attacks-around-the-world/ (accessed on December 6, 2016).

³ Euan McKirdy, Holly Yan and Ian Lee, “Istanbul attack: ISIS claims nightclub shooting; killer still at large,” CNN.com, www.cnn.com/2017/01/02/europe/turkey-nightclub-attack/index.html (accessed on January 2, 2017).

successes to the public, there were many successes in the campaign to defeat and ultimately destroy ISIL.⁴

In a December 2016 press briefing at the White House, Mr. McGurk detailed successes in the counter-ISIL campaign. The U.S. and coalition degraded ISIL's key strategic areas that include: 1) territory; 2) leadership; 3) fighting capacity; 4) revenue and access to revenue; 5) media presence; and 6) ties to affiliates. He also highlighted the significant level of integrated planning and execution by the USG agencies and coalition partners.

Recent reports show that ISIL lost 61 percent of its territory in Iraq and 28 percent in Syria.⁵ These recent reports are significant for several reasons. First, ISIL's loss of territory diminishes its ability to claim a caliphate in the region or promote propaganda of its expanding caliphate.⁶ Second, ISIL no longer has access to international borders and is more isolated.⁷ The isolation significantly decreases its ability to project power and decrease its ability to replenish forces with foreign fighters. Third, the ability of Iraqi and Syrian forces to reclaim and hold this land provides increased stabilization in the region and exhibits the strength of their fighting and security force. According to Lieutenant General Stephen Townsend, Commander Combine Joint Task Force - Operation

⁴ Karen DeYoung, "Obama Thinks His Syria Strategy Is Right — And Folks Just Don't Get It," *Washington Post*, www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/to-explain-his-syria-strategy-obama-wants-messaging-that-is-loud-and-clear/2015/12/31/fbdc5a76-aa65-11e5-9b92-dea7cd4b1a4d_story.html?utm_term=.837f90d3fcec (accessed on December 6, 2016).

⁵ News Room Americas Feed, "Press Briefing by Press Secretary Josh Earnest and Special Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL, Brett McGurk , 12/13/16," Newsroom America, www.newsroomamerica.com/636686.html (accessed on December 20, 2016).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

INHERENT RESOLVE, “All told, almost three million people and more than 44,000 square kilometers of territory have been liberated from ISIL in 2016.”⁸

ISIL’s loss of territory and subsequent isolation restricts its freedom of movement and provides greater opportunity for U.S. and Partner Nation forces to eliminate ISIL leaders when they appear. ISIL experienced a significant loss in leadership. Notably, the killing of several of Abu Baku Baghdadi deputies, to include his Minister of War, Minister of Finance, Minister of Oil and Gas, Minister of Security, Minister of External Operations, and his likely successor Haji Iman.⁹ Additionally, Abu Baku Baghdadi (the proclaimed leader of ISIL) “has not been seen of in over [sic] a year.”¹⁰

The loss of ISIL leaders and territory contributes to the declining fighting capacity of ISIL. Reports show that the number of ISIL battle ready fighters significantly decreased. Previous reports estimated ISIL had roughly 30 thousand fighters, but current estimates report that ISILs fighting forces are approximately 12 to 15 thousand.¹¹ It is increasingly difficult for ISIL to replenish its forces due to loss of territory, stricter border and immigration laws by Partner Nations, information sharing among Partner Nations, and airstrikes by the U.S. and coalition forces. These actions decreased the number of foreign fighters from one thousand per month to a negligible amount.¹² Conversely, “to date, the coalition has trained over 66,000 Iraqi security forces and over 3,000 Syrian partner forces.”¹³ The U.S. and Partner Nations’ ability to increase the number of trained

⁸ Ammani Lyle, “OIR Commander Describes Counter-ISIL Campaign’s Successes,” DOD News, www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/1030300/oir-commander-describes-counter-isil-campaigns-successes (accessed on January 1, 2017).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ News Room Americas Feed, “Press Briefing by Press Secretary Josh Earnest and Special Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL, Brett McGurk , 12/13/16.”

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ammani Lyle, “OIR Commander Describes Counter-ISIL Campaign’s Successes.”

forces, while simultaneously diminishing the strength of ISIL and its inability to rapidly replenish its forces, is a positive trend towards a more secure and stable region.

The pay for remaining ISIL fighters has decreased or been withheld due to the counter-ISIL efforts to disrupt or eliminate ISIL's revenue base. Airstrikes recently destroyed 168 ISIL oil tankers eliminating a source of ISIL's revenue.¹⁴ According to Lieutenant General Townsend, "We have conducted hundreds of strikes to destroy ISIL oil infrastructure; we assess these efforts have cost ISIL between \$4.5 million and \$6.5 million a month."¹⁵ The destruction of ISIL funding streams has the potential to create frustration or disenfranchisement amongst ISIL fighters who need money to provide for their families.

The counter-ISIL campaign has been successful in decreasing ISIL's media propaganda and its on-line presence. There are several factors that led to this success. First, ISIL lost key leaders of its media operations when ISIL's Chief Spokesperson and Minister of External Operations, Muhammad Adnani, and the producer of its media videos, Dr. Waeli were killed.¹⁶ Second, through the efforts of U.S., Partner Nations, and private industry, there was a 75 percent decrease in ISIL's on-line presence.¹⁷ For example, Twitter removed over 400,000 ISIL Twitter handles.¹⁸ Lieutenant General Townsend cites the ISIL magazine "Dabiq", which featured articles on a utopian Islamic State, is now controlled by Turkish and Syrian partners."¹⁹

¹⁴ News Room Americas Feed, "Press Briefing by Press Secretary Josh Earnest and Special Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL, Brett McGurk , 12/13/16."

¹⁵ Ammani Lyle, "OIR Commander Describes Counter-ISIL Campaign's Successes."

¹⁶ News Room Americas Feed, "Press Briefing by Press Secretary Josh Earnest and Special Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL, Brett McGurk , 12/13/16."

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ammani Lyle, "OIR Commander Describes Counter-ISIL Campaign's Successes."

There are many efforts taking place to defeat and destroy ISIL and its affiliates throughout the world. To aid in this effort, the U.S. collaborated with multi-national organizations like INTERPOL and Europol, “to help develop a global database of ISIL-affiliated fighters to stop, again, their transit across borders.”²⁰ Collaboration and integration is the key to successes in the counter-ISIL campaign experienced thus far. Mr. McGurk explained that proactive planning of campaigns prepares the area of responsibility politically, economically, and to get stabilization resources in place.²¹

The counter-ISIL strategy also has notable successes in terms of political, stabilization, and humanitarian efforts. According to the White House press brief:

- “Over a dozen Coalition partners have collectively contributed over \$50 million to the Funding Facility for Iraq Stabilization.
- The U.S. and our Coalition partners, working with the Iraqi government, have now retrained more than a thousand Iraqi police officers to provide security in liberated areas. In Syria, the U.S. Government has provided more than \$4.5 billion to date and USAID is providing emergency assistance to 5 million Syrians every month, including 4 million people inside Syria. USAID is also providing food assistance to Syrian refugees in neighboring countries.
- In Iraq, the U.S. Government has provided more than \$603 million in life-saving humanitarian assistance for the Iraqi people including critically needed relief items, food, shelter, clean water, and medical services.
- Members of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) have agreed to a notional timeline for a political transition, which was unanimously adopted by the UN Security Council in December 2015.”²²

The successes noted in the counter-ISIL strategy indicate its effectiveness.

Though the ultimate defeat of ISIL is a long-term process, there is significant progress towards achieving the objectives set forth by the National Security Council of attacking

²⁰ News Room Americas Feed, “Press Briefing by Press Secretary Josh Earnest and Special Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL, Brett McGurk , 12/13/16.” .

²¹ Ibid.

²² White House, “FACT SHEET: Maintaining Momentum in The Fight against ISIL,” White House, obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/01/15/fact-sheet-maintaining-momentum-fight-against-isil (accessed on December 6, 2016).

ISIL's core in Syria and Iraq, attacking ISIL branches with coalition forces, working with coalition to disrupt ISIL's global network, and protecting the United States homeland.²³

Due to the success and effectiveness of the counter-ISIL strategy, ISIL is less of a threat and has less influence in the region today than it had two years ago. Though there is considerable work remaining, the counter-ISIL strategy successes pave the way for stability in the region that provide the opportunity for economic prosperity, and eventually effective governance.

²³ The Simon Center, "Rice speaks on Whole-of-Government Approach against ISIL," Arthur D. Simons Center for Interagency Cooperation, www.thesimonscenter.org/rice-on-approach-against-isil/ (accessed on December 6, 2016).

Chapter 5: Recommendations

The success of the counter-ISIL strategy and the CORDS in Vietnam provides the framework for operational design in future U.S. efforts against non-state actors. Proper understanding and utilization of the whole-of-government strategy allows planners foresight into the application of all instruments of national power, and the unity of effort needed to achieve positive results. However, the strategy is limited by its lack of a formal structure for USG agency coordination and unity of effort. Additionally, there is a deficit in civilian human capital to fill requirements, decreasing the effectiveness of the strategy.

Integration of Lines of Effort

Integration of the nine lines of effort is key to the success of the counter-ISIL strategy. To ensure integration occurred, President Obama established a Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL.¹ Establishment of this position was a counter to the bigger issue of interagency parochialism. Establishing a Presidential Envoy is a reactive measure to a conflict or war and does not provide a means for the U.S. to properly prepare for the next war or conflict that requires the whole-of-government approach.

At the operational level, Nathan White recommends that the U.S. develop a campaign-specific strategy management office to ensure synchronization throughout the nine lines of effort because the “whole-of-government strategy” cannot efficiently occur

¹ Department of State, “Announcement of General John Allen as Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL.”

without the proper management system.² There is interagency coordination in Combatant Command Joint Planning Groups. However, this coordination occurs when the military planners (O-5 to O-6 level) seek out representatives from the interagency to answer questions regarding a plan that the military planners developed or are developing. Having a dedicated office for integration, instead of a Special Presidential Envoy, would be beneficial and make planning more efficient.

An article by the Atlantic Council Combatant Command Task Force discussed the need for interagency synchronization at the Combatant Commands.³ The task force recommended two ways to align interagency synchronization functions in Combatant Command organizations. The first recommendation is for an unconventional end-state “Interagency Regional Center” (IRC) that would act as a regional interagency headquarters for foreign and defense policy (see Figure 1 on page 42).⁴ In this organization, the regional commander and top DOS official would serve as deputies to the Interagency Regional Director, who answer directly to the President.⁵ The second recommendation co-locates geographic combatant commands and DOS regional bureaus (see Figure 2 on page 42).⁶ This structure would integrate the agencies, without forming a new organization, and would require DOS regional bureaus to move from Washington, DC to the area of responsibility. This allows the country team experts and campaign

² SWJ Editors, “The U.S. Whole of Government Comprehensive Strategy.”

³ Atlantic Council, “All Elements of National Power: Moving Toward a New Interagency Balance for US Global Engagement,” The Atlantic Council, www.atlanticcouncil.org/images/publications/All_Elements_of_National_Power.pdf (accessed on December 6, 2016).
Balance for US Global Engagement,” The Atlantic Council, www.atlanticcouncil.org/images/publications/All_Elements_of_National_Power.pdf (accessed on December 6, 2016).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid

planners to more effectively plan civilian-military operations and engage with key leaders in the region.

The use of these organizational structures would formalize interagency coordination and unity of effort, and provide significant continuity. Thus, when a conflict or war occurs, the Joint Planning Group has already formed relationships and processes, resulting in a proactive and more efficient planning and execution of strategy. The availability of the proper human capital is a limitation of these proposed organizational structures. Leaders of these organizations must be cognizant of the potential for vacant positions due to the lack of civilian resources to fill required positions.

To mitigate this problem requires direct involvement by the nation's top officials. For example, under the CORDS model, President Johnson and senior official in the U.S. and South Vietnamese government dedicated resources and personnel to pacification efforts.⁷ The actions of President Johnson and senior government officials underscored the political commitment to successful CORDS operations and programs. This same level of commitment is necessary to achieve greater success in the counter-ISIL strategy and future conflicts with non-state actors.

Goldwater Nichols for Interagency

A whole-of-government strategy requires integration and synchronization of the whole government. More importantly, the strategy requires knowledgeable people

⁷ Mandy Honn and Farrah Meisel, "A Legacy of Vietnam: Lessons from CORDS," Col. Arthur D. Simons Center for the Study of Interagency Cooperation. www.thesimonscenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/IAJ-2-2-pg41-50.pdf (accessed on December 6, 2016).

available to fill positions to enable integration and successful execution of strategies.

Hans Binnendijk asserts USG agencies need to develop the capacity to conduct complex operations that require close civilian-military planning and cooperation.⁸ According to his calculations, to conduct and complete tasks associated with complex operations on a consistent basis, requires an additional 15,000 civilians.⁹ Civilian vacancies inhibited progress in the respective programs, initiatives, and /or campaigns and, sometimes, result in the military assuming civilian positions. Furthermore, the vacancy of these positions creates a lack of institutional knowledge in civilian-military operations.

Interagency reform should take place as a means to fill vacant positions and ‘grow’ professionals to successfully execute operations similar to those in Iraq and Syria, which require a refined civilian-military approach to handle global problems. There are a large number of advocates for interagency reform. Peter Roman notes “the Goldwater-Nichols' successful promotion of joint military professionalism, in both operations and advice, is seen by some as a model for promoting an integrated interagency perspective and operations across national security institutions.”¹⁰

Agencies may resist reform because they see no incentive for change and are opposed to actions or policies that infringe on their institutional roles or interest. Military service chiefs faced this same dilemma in the 1980’s, and resisted, when the Goldwater-Nichols Act was proposed. According to General Peter Pace, while Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, “the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 ... made the services chiefs act more in

⁸ Hans Binnendijk and Patrick Cronin, *Civilian Surge: Key to Complex Operations* (Washington DC: National Defense University, 2009), “DoD Live,” www.ctnsp.dodlive.mil/files/2009/07/Civilian-Surge.pdf (accessed on December 6, 2016).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Peter J. Roman, “Can Goldwater-Nichols Reforms for the Interagency Succeed?” stimson.org, www.stimson.org/content/can-goldwater-nichols-reforms-interagency-succeed (accessed on December 6, 2016).

concert and forced the services to place their best people in joint billets ...by giving up some of their service prerogatives, the service chiefs got back much more than they gave up, as joint chiefs.”¹¹ Now the DOD grows Joint officers that are able to operate in a complex strategic environment and effectively impart the capabilities of their respective service, strengthening the defense of the nation and its allies.

Dan McCauley believes that interagency reform is unattainable because the system is too large and includes too many stakeholders.¹² Additionally, such reform would require an enormous amount of legislation. Passing new legislation of this magnitude would be contentious for USG agencies, as it was for the service chiefs, during the proposal of the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986,

Interagency reform is a contentious subject and requires significant legislation. However, the complexity of wars with non-state actors, and the global issues that occur as a result of destabilization in a region, require knowledgeable civilians, trained in civilian-military operations, to successfully execute a whole-of-government strategy. Pursuing legislative actions to create interagency reform is an example of the level of political commitment, required by U.S. senior officials, to increase the probability of success in a whole-of-government strategy.

Assessment

As the U.S. continues its fight against ISIL and prepares for future wars and conflicts against non-state actors, refinement of the whole-of-government strategy is

¹¹ DoD News, “Pace Proposes Interagency Gold-Water Nichols Act,” American Forces Press Service, www.archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=25384 (accessed on November 19, 2016).

¹² Dan McCauley, “Goldwater-Nichols II? Not What You Think,” *Small Wars Journals*, (15 Oct 2012): 1.

necessary. The creation of formal structures and processes to codify USG agencies coordination and unity of effort allows planners the ability to proactively and collectively plan all aspects of a whole-of-government strategy in current campaigns and future wars or conflicts. The Atlantic Council recommendations to create Interagency Regional Centers or co-locating DOS Regional Bureaus with the Combatant Commands provides opportunities to achieve a formal structure and processes for USG agencies coordination.

USG agencies coordination and unity of effort “enable” effective execution of the whole-of-government strategy. However, having the appropriate civilian human capital is “necessary” for execution of the whole-of-government strategy. The whole-of-government strategy requires knowledgeable people to fill required positions. In an effort to grow a civilian force capable of operating civilian-military complex operations, this thesis recommends legislation similar to Goldwater-Nichols to incentivize civilian growth and development in a joint environment.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

ISIL is a dangerous global threat that is responsible for the death of thousands of people and the displacement of millions. It is imperative that ISIL is defeated and regional stability restored to the Middle East. The U.S. leads a global coalition in this endeavor with a whole-of-government strategy, featuring nine lines of effort. Analysis of the counter-ISIL strategy indicates that degrading, and ultimately defeating ISIL, will be a long-term process that requires all the instruments of national power. Security of the region is the corner stone of the strategy, and is required before stability and effective governance can occur.

An analysis of the strategic environment shows that local forces, with the assistance of U.S. and Partner Nation airstrikes, continue to make progress towards achieving an appropriate security threshold in the region. In spite of the constraints of limited U.S. ground forces, the U.S. and Partner Nations effectively meet the counter-ISIL strategy objectives of: “1) attacking ISIL’s core in Syria and Iraq; 2) attacking ISIL branches with coalition forces; 3) working with coalition to disrupt ISIL’s global network; and 4) protecting the United States homeland.”¹

While there is debate regarding the proper strategy to defeat ISIL, it is the duty of many to execute the current strategy. Proper execution of the current strategy requires a unity of effort, integration, coordination, and synchronization of USG agencies throughout the nine lines of effort. Analysis of the success and failures of the current

¹ The Simon Center, “Rice speaks on Whole-of-Government Approach against ISIL,” Arthur D. Simons Center for Interagency Cooperation, www.thesimonscenter.org/rice-on-approach-against-isil/ (accessed on December 6, 2016).

strategy indicates that unity of effort, integration, coordination, and synchronization of USG agencies throughout the nine lines of effort occurs continuously.

The men and women who execute the strategy do a dutiful job and achieved a significant amount of success against a complex adversary. However, to prepare for future threats, those in leadership must refine the whole-of-government strategy to create a formal and systematic approach to USG agencies coordination. Collectively planning for the next conflict, war, or campaign provides the best opportunity to degrade and defeat future adversarial non-state actors. Additionally, the U.S. must grow the civilian human capital to fill the requirements necessary to effectively execute a whole-of-government strategy.

In 2017, Donald Trump took office as the 45th President of the U.S. Based on comments during the 2016 election campaign, the new administration may decide to modify the current counter-ISIL strategy and deploy U.S. ground forces to engage in direct combat with ISIL. But, execution of the strategy developed under President Obama's administration continues.

In conclusion, the counter-ISIL strategy provides the U.S. and its Partner Nations the flexibility to fight an adversary on multiple fronts, in various phases of war, while preparing for regional peace and stability. The counter-ISIL strategy is successful since it continues to significantly decrease ISIL's key strategic factors of controlled territory, size of its combat forces, leadership, infrastructure, and the perception of ISILs sense of invincibility. The most notable success of the counter-ISIL strategy is the U.S. and Partner Nations' empowerment of the local population to thwart a complex and dynamic adversary and bring security, stability, and effective governance to their region.

Appendix: Figures

Figure 1. Unconventional End State: Interagency Regional Center

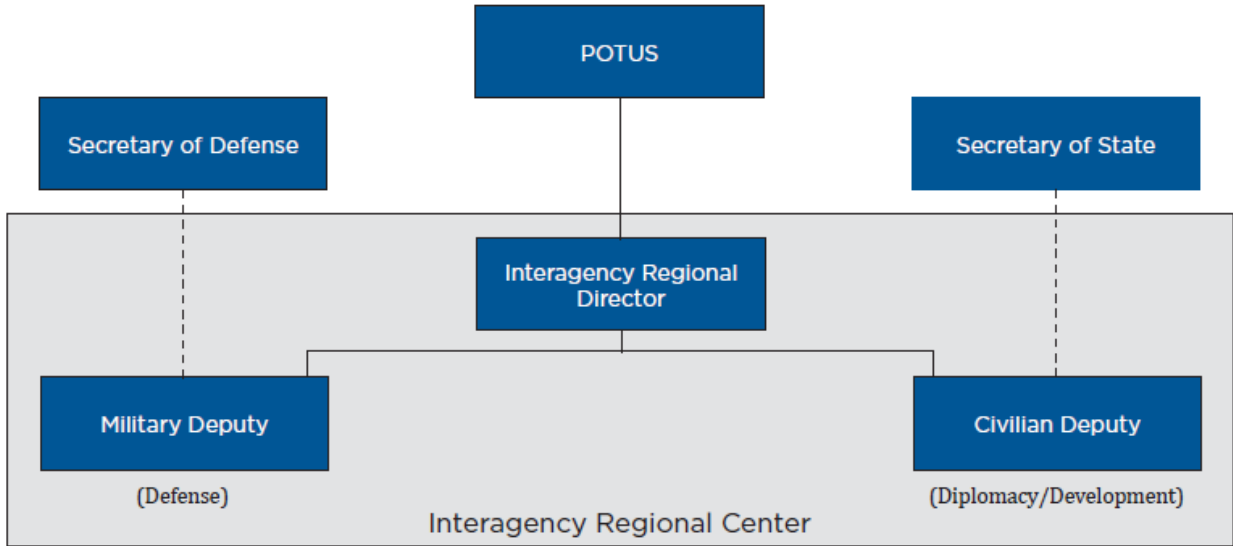
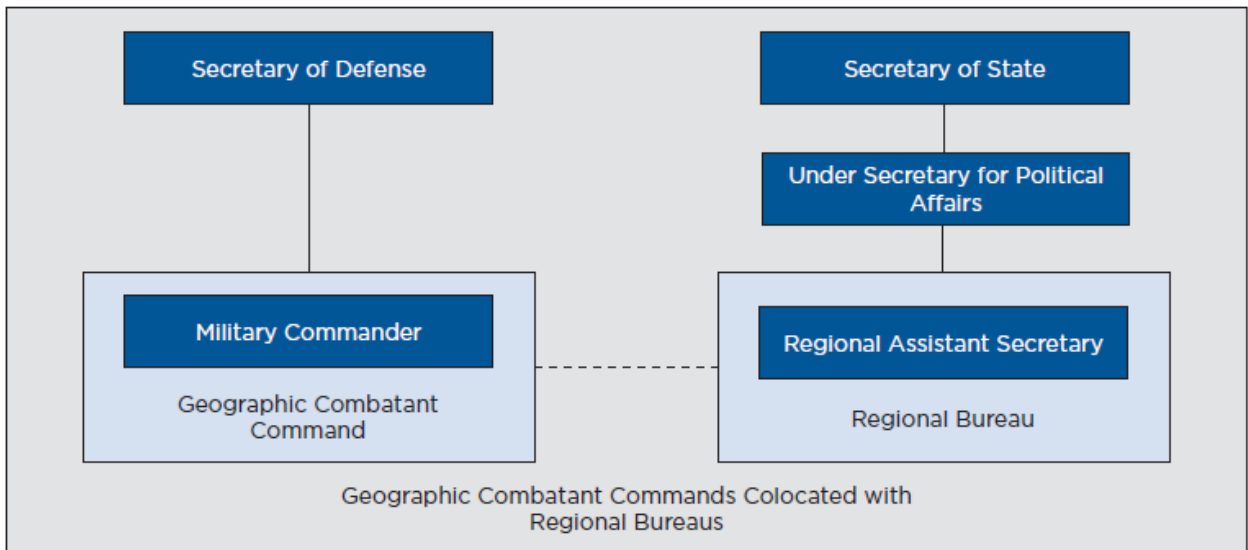


Figure 2. Intermediate Approach: Colocation



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Vita

Lieutenant Colonel, (USAF), Ronald “Kenyatte” Booker is a graduate of Morehouse College and earned his commission in 1996 through the Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps at Georgia Institute of Technology. He is a career Force Support officer and has served in various personnel management assignments at all levels to include squadron, wing, Major Command, Headquarters Air Staff, Office of the Secretary of Defense, as well as Joint and combined deployments. Prior to this assignment, Lt Col Booker was the Director of Manpower, Personnel and Services, U.S. Air Forces Central Command (USAFCENT), Southwest Asia. In this position, Lt Col Booker provided direct support to USAFCENT Commander, seven Air Expeditionary Wings, six Air Expeditionary Groups, and two Air Component Coordination Elements. He led 14 military personnel responsible for planning and executing support for more than 20,000 Air Force deployers within the USAFCENT’s area of responsibility. Kenyatte earned a Psychology Pre-med degree from Morehouse College, M.S. in Business Management from Troy University, and M.S. in Operational Art from Air Command and Staff College of the U.S. Air Force.