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DETERRING A CALIPHATE: MEANS TO DELEGITIMIZE ISLAMIC STATE
RADICALIZATION AND RECRUITMENT

by

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PREFACE

I chose Islamic State radicalization and foreign fighter recruitment deterrence as my research topic because the complexity of this problem and the exhaustive research performed to combat it has yet to yield an adequate solution. During an individual augmentee assignment, I was intimately involved in the daily struggles to bring the foreign fighter problem under control. The sheer scope, complexity, and socially charged subjects surrounding Islamic State recruitment and foreign terrorist fighter travel proves to be a significant challenge to militaries, governments, and the academic community. My hope is the effort put into researching the deterrence of Islamic State recruitment and radicalization proves beneficial to the cause.

I would like to thank my Proposal and Project Advisors: Dr. Andrew Niesiobedzki and Dr. William Hanson. Their continued encouragement, critiques, suggestions, and guidance were critical in my completion of this endeavor. Finally, I would like to thank my wife for her unwavering support of me and my career and her sacrifices during the deployments and overseas duty stations that have come with it. Her support during the writing process has been amazing.

ABSTRACT

This study focuses on how to mitigate the Islamic State's attempts to radicalize and recruit new followers utilizing the internet and social media. A key to the Islamic State's rise was its ability to propagate its message and recruit substantial numbers of supporters through a widespread, global social media campaign. Their campaign utilized modern technology such as social media to distribute information and communicate with supporters and potential recruits. By examining the driving factors contributing to radicalization, this study shows how past and potential deterrence methods address the foreign fighter dilemma by working at the root of the problem: radicalization.

This paper employs the problem/solution methodology and qualitative analysis to answer the research question: What psychological methods can be exploited to deter radicalization and the recruitment of foreign fighters by the Islamic State? The evaluation process utilizes the individual factors that drive radicalization: (1) grievances, (2) enabling environments and support structures, (3) networks, and (4) ideologies to first evaluate past efforts and then analyze proposed solutions to radicalization and foreign fighter recruitment by the Islamic State.

Analysis determined previous efforts address radicalization and recruitment from a reactive approach and failed to address the four factors selected as evaluation criteria. A proactive social media campaign was the only proposed solution that mitigated every driving factor of radicalization; however, these results conflict with past state-sponsored attempts at utilizing social media as a deterrent to radicalization and subsequent foreign fighter travel. The reason for variance is the United States' lack of credibility with the Muslim community. This paper recommends social media energies be refocused using organizations and individuals with the Muslim community's trust to gain credibility and circulate Counter-Islamic State messaging.

INTRODUCTION

Overview of Foreign Fighter Dynamics

The radicalization and foreign fighter recruitment campaign orchestrated by the Islamic State proved to be one of the most technologically advanced and strategic campaigns of any terrorist organization to date. On Sunday, June 29th 2014, the first day of Ramadan, the Islamic State announced the establishment of the caliphate in Iraq and Syria. The purpose of their announcement was to communicate the Islamic State's legitimacy. This announcement combined with an aggressive social media campaign aimed at spreading propaganda and increasing recruitment subsequently led to the mass migration of radicalized individuals capitalizing on the relatively unconstrained travel through Europe and Mediterranean. Tens of thousands of radicalized people resolute on engaging in terrorism flocked to Iraq and Syria to join the Islamic State. Some brought their wives, husbands, and children intent on permanently leaving their past lives behind. Consequently, the mass migration appreciably compounded the instability in this region and further contributed to the difficult task of regaining control of the Middle East. Alternately, others traveled to the conflict zone and received instruction in terrorist training camps only to ultimately leave and return to their home countries in Europe and abroad. Now armed with skills and knowledge, these individuals are trained terrorists that pose a significant threat to security throughout the world. The successful terrorist attacks on 9/11 and in Paris, Belgium, and Boston show what determined extremists are capable of and justify the time and resources that must be invested in proactive efforts to deter radicalization and subsequent foreign fighter travel.

The Problem and Its Costs

The cost to combat the Islamic State and recover from their destruction is both enduring and astronomical. The effectiveness of the Islamic State's radicalization and recruitment campaign exponentially increased the means necessary to recapture assets and territory in their possession. The cost estimate for the US military campaign is billions of dollars; however, the human cost is arguably greater than the monetary cost. Thousands of civilian casualties have occurred since the Islamic State emerged in Iraq and Syria. Over four million Syrian refugees have been displaced by the civil war in Syria and the Islamic State and their plight has many additional secondary and tertiary effects.[1] The mass migration of asylum seekers has made it challenging to separate those truly seeking refuge and terrorist fighters attempting to flee coalition forces or carry out terrorist attacks. The magnitude of asylum seekers has overwhelmed neighboring nations' security forces and prevented the timely vetting of people seeking refugee status.

UN Security Council resolutions such as resolution 2178, were adopted to reaffirm "that refugee status is not abused by the perpetrators, organizers or facilitators of terrorist acts, including by foreign terrorist fighters."[2] The current situation presents a conundrum where nations must choose between violating international law by refusing asylum to people in legitimate danger and perpetuating terrorism by granting refuge to terrorists. In turn, millions of people sit in squalor at overcrowded refugee camps outside the borders of Turkey and Jordan; and the reports of refugees being shot at, shot and killed, and detained and subsequently deported are common.[3] These dangers force some to risk illegally crossing the border using smuggling routes which further complicates the situation and makes the separation of potential terrorists and asylum seekers nearly impossible.

The Study's Purpose, Radicalization and Recruitment

The challenges presented in combatting foreign terrorist fighter movement

simultaneously combined with a refugee crisis have proven to be daunting. The resources

needed to restrict and control movement in and out of the conflict zone in Syria and Iraq is

enormous and beyond what any single country in the surrounding region is capable of fulfilling.

To help prevent future occurrences and efficiently combat terrorism, proactive measures must be

taken to deter terrorist organization recruitment. The purpose of this study is to research the

factors that increase the likelihood of recruitment and subsequent terrorist action. Once

determined, successful strategies to mitigate terrorist action will be developed which will

subsequently increase global security if employed.

The Way to Deterrence

The driving factors behind recruitment and radicalization may prove beneficial to reduce

terrorism and prevent the reoccurrence of the Islamic State's caliphate. But what psychological

methods can be exploited to deter radicalization and the recruitment of foreign fighters by the

Islamic State? Despite the unclear path to radicalization or factors that definitively lead to it, it

may be possible to leverage the elements that compel one to radicalization and foreign fighter

travel to determine the most persuasive methods to counter them. This paper argues the United

States should implement a proactive social media information campaign to counter the Islamic

State's recruitment efforts and deter future terrorist acts. Without proactive efforts to undermine

recruitment, the Islamic State could continue to find trained fighters and cultivate new

generations of radicalized individuals who support their cause. Social media provides an

enabling environment and support structure that can lead to the radicalization and increased

commitment of those already radicalized.[4] The Islamic State's efficient use of social media

greatly contributed to its ability to recruit and provide command and control for terrorist acts outside the caliphate.[5] These capabilities make countering the Islamic State's use of social media a top security concern for the United States and its allies. Some would argue the Islamic State's use of social media hinders their efforts since it makes their activities more open to detection, law enforcement involvement, and ultimately failure.[6] Battlefield effectiveness has increased the occurrence of individuals willing to commit terrorist acts in Europe and America vice traveling into the conflict zone. These attacks will continue to persist until proper action to counter the Islamic State's media efforts is taken.

Method

Due to the nature of the problem, the majority of data and statistics relating to the Islamic State are estimates and vary drastically from one authority to another. For these reasons, this paper will use qualitative analysis to evaluate and determine the most productive method the United States can use to deter radicalization and recruitment by the Islamic State. The analysis will utilize the individual factors that drive radicalization: (1) grievances, (2) enabling environments and support structures, (3) networks, and (4) ideologies to first evaluate past efforts and then analyze proposed solutions to radicalization and foreign fighter recruitment by the Islamic State.[7] The evaluation criterion will be used to explore the failures of past mitigation endeavors by examining how these approaches address radicalization. These results will then be utilized to recommend solutions to the foreign fighter crisis. The rating scale will be POOR for no impact or a negative result, FAIR for some impact or limited success, GOOD for significant impact, and EXCELLENT for an impact which completely alleviates the examined factor. Finally, these solutions will be evaluated to determine which solution can address all or the most

of these factors. The results of the analysis will then be used to make recommendations on how to deter future radicalization with subsequent travel.

Definitions

   Islamic State. The Islamic State's name has changed multiple times over the last two decades. Its origins predate the Iraq invasion in 2003. Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) originated in 2004 when the leader of Ansar al-Islam (Partisans of Islam) pledged allegiance to Al Qaeda.[8] In 2012, AQI adopted its new name ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) which is sometimes translated to Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). To minimize confusion, Islamic State will be used for all references to this organization.

   Social media. The term social media is used to refer to any application or website that allows web-based communication/networking between users through the sharing of media. These applications and websites include the following: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, Pinterest, Reddit, YouTube, Skype, Flickr, LinkedIn, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Google+, WeChat, and many others.

   Foreign fighter. Many studies developed their own definitions for foreign fighters which were based on the specific region, conflict, and nuances of the personnel traveling. For the purpose of this research, the term foreign fighter refers to individuals with no military or state associations who travel to a region engaged in conflict or insurgency with the sole intention of actively participating.[9] Furthermore, these individuals have no legal citizenship in the respective state or states in which they are fighting and their motivation can be any number of factors to include: monetary gain, ideology, and/or a cause.

Foreign terrorist fighter. The term foreign terrorist fighter is used to refer to an individual that travels to a stable country not engaged in insurgency or conflict, where they do not possess citizenship, with the intention of committing terrorist acts.

Research Methodology and Framework

This paper uses the problem/solution framework and qualitative methodology to investigate some of the methods the US military can use to effectively deter the recruitment of foreign fighters by the Islamic State. It discusses the use of the internet as a powerful online social platform capable of skewing public opinion and inciting action. Past research will be reviewed to determine how the Islamic State's use of electronic communications works to generate recruits by playing on specific psychological factors that subsequently drive radicalization and terrorist action. Past reactive counterterrorism approaches such as kinetic strikes will be analyzed and evaluated on their ability to reduce foreign terrorist fighter numbers and travel. Gaps in current counterterrorism efforts will be explored to determine more successful means of minimizing the Islamic State's success in the virtual domain and subsequently increasing global security through reduced terrorism.

BACKGROUND/LITERATURE REVIEW

Psychological Aspects of Radicalization

To date, significant research has been performed to learn more about radicalization, terrorist recruitment, and the propensity to ultimately commit terrorist acts. Research has attempted to define the radicalization process and learn why Muslims living prosperous lives in Western countries would pick up and leave everything to join and fight in a war-torn conflict zone with an extremist organization such as ISIS. Case studies of foreign terrorist fighters, such as "Why they leave: An analysis of terrorist disengagement events from eighty-seven autobiographical accounts*"* and "Interviews with Canadian Radicals*"* have helped to elaborate the individual preconditions that contribute to being receptive to radical beliefs. These accounts provide a great insight into the psychology behind the adoption of extremist values; however, no solid answers have been found. So far, the results have only identified some driving factors that lead to radicalization: "grievances, networks, ideologies, and enabling support structures."[10] To complicate matters, the presence of these stimuli does not guarantee radicalization will occur; it merely increases its likelihood.[11] Conversely, their absence does not eliminate the chances of radicalization and radicalization does not guarantee terrorist actions.[12] The inconsistency shows much more research is necessary to determine the reasons for deviation and the causal factors that can be mitigated. The goal of this research paper is to expand where current research ends.

The Power of Social Media

Social media has become a large part of modern society, and its use has increased exponentially from its inception to present day. Hootsuite, a widely used social media management platform, in conjunction with We Are Social, a global social media agency, gathers and releases a yearly report on social media trends. From here, several statistics relating to the

internet and social media's reach, use, and growth are found. Cellular technology advancement combined with increased cellular networks and the availability of wireless internet allows the constant streaming of information to 5.135 billion active mobile internet users.[13] Cellular technology permits nearly half of the world's population to have a wealth of information and knowledge available at any time. Active social media users account for 3.196 billion people, 42 percent of the world's population.[14] Additionally, the global average for social media use per person has increased from 90 minutes a day in 2012 to 135 minutes a day in 2017.[15] Social media's potential to influence online is evident in Facebook's 29.9 billion dollars in advertising revenue for 2017.[16]

If utilized strategically, social media's power to reach and potentially influence the masses is extraordinary. Half of the world's population is subjected to unregulated information with the potential to educate, corrupt, and skew their opinions on any number of topics. The lack of restriction and filtering means that anything can be posted online. Once posted to social media it is part of the public domain where it can be perpetuated through sharing and reposting, and never truly goes away. Offensive accounts can be suspended, but anonymity and the minimal effort required to create new accounts make a reactive approach unproductive and does little to prevent the spread of offensive material.

Islamic State's Use of Social Media

Similar to advertisers paying to sell their product, the Islamic State has recognized the utility social media provides to market their message. Social Media has enabled the Islamic State to instantaneously reach a large audience with minimal effort and insignificant costs.[17] The Islamic States' efficacy in online recruitment and travel facilitation speaks to social media's power. One significant factor is the size of the net cast by social networking. Current research

on social media penetration shows social networks reach 42 percent of the world's 7.6 billion people.[18] The ability to sway even a minuscule percentage of this captive audience equates to tens of thousands of followers and pays exponential dividends when compared to the effort spent. To increase their success, the Islamic State developed professional quality, multilingual propaganda videos, and magazines aimed at influencing potential recruits and inciting terror in the general public. "By cross-posting content to several social media distribution hubs, where videos and magazines are shared and re-tweeted immediately by thousands of supporters, radicals disseminate their propaganda widely, nearly instantaneously, while precluding authorities from removing their online productions permanently."[19] These messages receive the same exposure as costly advertisements, and once shared they are in the public domain where they never go away.

Limited regulation and anonymity have allowed terrorists to broadcast their extremist ideas and rhetoric without legal repercussions. Social media has been especially convenient because it takes minimal time and effort to create an anonymous handle to spread extremism to a large audience. When accounts are suspended, another account can be created in a few moments. Additionally, the public nature of social media also provides an avenue to establishing online friendships. The Islamic State can then use a user's posts and interests to screen potential recruits for grooming.[20] Once identified, members can attempt to engage in an online friendship with the ultimate goal of increasing support and recruitment.

Military Use of Social Media and Counterterrorism

Military use of social media is at its infancy; initially it started as merely a public affairs medium to advertise general information such as command mission, vision, and leadership overviews. Research applying this relatively new technology and its strategic advantage has not

been performed; however, a search of open-source news articles shows there have been some strategic military applications of social media. Operational experience has shown the advantages in utilizing open-source information and social media as intelligence to identify enemy weaknesses. In fact, social media posts by one Islamic State member enabled the identification, targeting, and kinetic strike of Islamic State assets in 22 hours.[21]

Despite the lack of military programs, there have been US State Department programs aimed at countering online radicalization. Two such programs, the Counter-Misinformation Team (CMT) and the Digital Outreach Team (DOT), were part of the Bureau of International Information Programs (IIP). In 2009, the mission of the IIP was "engages international audiences on issues of American foreign policy, society and values to create an environment receptive to US national interests."[22] The IIP recognized the importance to keep up with new and emerging technologies such as the internet to promote international understanding and mitigate violent extremism. After 9/11 the CMT refocused its efforts from Soviet disinformation to provide ideological opposition to al-Qaeda. Meanwhile the DOT is a group that operates on internet sites such as discussion forums, news sites, and blogs.[23] Openly self-identified as the State Department, the DOT is engaged in a multi-lingual effort to explain US foreign policy and counter misinformation. Research into these programs has shown their past endeavors were unsuccessful. Specifically, the US government failed to adequately address concerns regarding questionable actions. Failing to address these concerns called the credibility of state-sponsored information into question and failed to convince Muslims that the actions of the United States had unadulterated intentions.[24] To leave a powerful capability in the hands of our enemies unopposed is a blunder; however, these unsuccessful online counter-terrorism efforts stress the importance of attacking this issue from the right angle. Traditionally, local groups such as

family, peers, and communities were the best source of messages to counter ideology and recruitment.[25] Since the advent of the internet and the succeeding rise of social media, globalization has significantly changed the conventional meaning of these groups. Today relationships can be developed that strictly exist online. The Islamic State has both embraced this phenomenon and strategically used it to their advantage. The challenge is the potential for controversy with military social media use and unclear laws regarding cyber warfare that transcends domestic lines and potentially influences the American public.

Security Issues Posed by Foreign Fighters and Mitigation

The ongoing conflict in the Middle East has whittled away at the infrastructure there and its ability to control insurgency and conflict. Instability combined with the vacuum created by the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq in 2011 directly led to the Islamic State's creation. Once established, the Islamic State's declaration of a caliphate and subsequent mass recruitment campaign drew a wide variety of supporters. Trained foreign fighters flocked to the caliphate after its declaration. Foreign fighters are not a new concept; however the scale and diversity of foreign fighters moving into Iraq and Syria were extraordinary.[26] Since travel occurred illegally and involves multiple travel methods and stops, it is difficult to track the number of foreign fighters that traveled to the conflict zone. Despite tracking challenges, there are several methods to estimate these numbers; the most accurate method has come from tallying travel validated by relatives in reports from foreign fighter's home countries combined with reported deaths on martyr sites. At the end of 2014, it was estimated that over 20,000 foreign fighters from more than 50 countries had traveled to Iraq and Syria.[27] By the end of 2015, The Soufan Group estimated foreign fighter numbers increased to between 27,000 and 31,000 from at least 86

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countries.[28] The foreign fighter number increase directly indicates that the counterterrorism

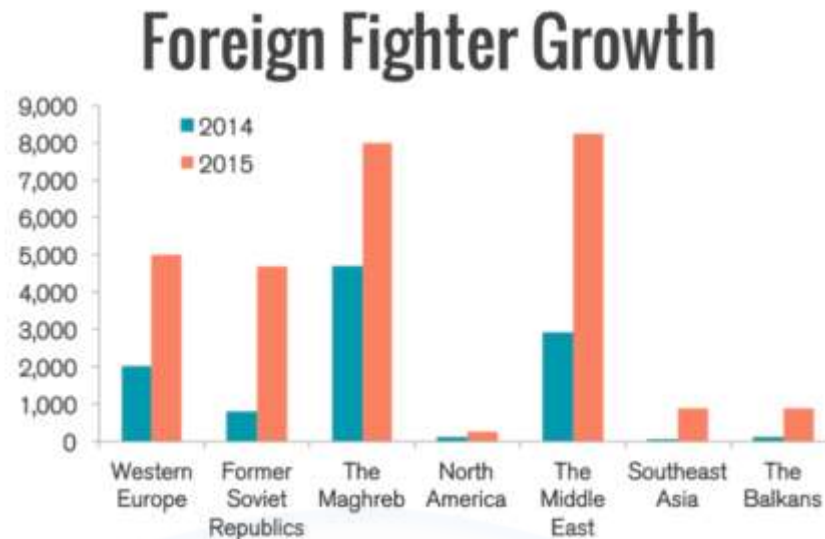efforts in place during these times were unproductive.

Figure 1. Foreign Fighter Numbers and Growth from 2014 to 2015. Adapted from The Soufan Group. *Foreign Fighters An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq***. The Soufan Group, 2015.**

Some key players in Islamic State territory were the trained fighters left over from the

Chechen and Bosnian wars of the 90's. Initially, it seems most countries hoped the foreign

fighters traveling to the conflict zone would die in battle, therefore their travel was not a concern

and little was done to restrict it.[29] Instead, these experienced fighters stepped up to train and

lead, resulting in a new generation of trained and battle-hardened fighters. Now that coalition

forces have decimated the physical caliphate; the problem shifts to those surviving foreign

fighters and their trainees who have traveled outside the conflict zone and returned to their home

countries and abroad.

In response to the movement of foreign fighters outside the conflict, actions such as

United Nations Security Council Resolution 2178 were established in 2014. SCR 2178

reinforces the criminality in foreign fighter travel; however, foreign fighter numbers continued to

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increase by more than 50 percent in 2015.[30] Ensuing terrorist acts in the United States and

Europe have incited terror and panic and influenced countries to create legislation in line with

United Nations Security Council Resolution 2178 which stresses prosecuting terrorist

participation and preventing terrorist movement through border control.[31] So far, criminalization

and surveillance measures have proven rather inefficient at stopping foreign fighter flow into

areas of conflict and civil turbulence.[32] These failures suggest that alternative approaches to

defeating foreign fighters and foreign terrorist fighters need to be explored.

Despite the subsequent legislation focusing on criminalization and surveillance,

Resolution 2178 addresses much more than these avenues to deterrence. Specifically it states:

> Recognizing that addressing the threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters requires
> comprehensively addressing underlying factors, including by preventing
> radicalization to terrorism, stemming recruitment, inhibiting foreign terrorist
> fighter travel, disrupting financial support to foreign terrorist fighters, countering
> violent extremism, which can be conducive to terrorism, countering incitement to
> terrorist acts motivated by extremism or intolerance, promoting political and
> religious tolerance, economic development and social cohesion and inclusiveness,
> ending and resolving armed conflicts, and facilitating reintegration and
> rehabilitation,[33]

Governments have applied several different approaches to eliminate the foreign fighter

issue in the past. Studies analyzing these methods are rather surprising. West Africa utilized a

governmental approach to disarm and reintegrate 400,000 armed combatants in the 2000's.[34]

These efforts focused on reducing the conditions that lead to armed groups by providing

financial assistance that came at a hefty $500 million cost; however, this cost is insignificant to

the cost of combatting continued conflict. Subsequent studies show governmental approaches

were very productive. Since the implementation of these programs, only five percent of these

forces are thought to have become combatants in neighboring conflicts and another 20,000

former rebels later returned to take advantage of these opportunities.[35] These studies suggest that

lack of opportunity and poverty may be factors that drive foreign fighters to continue the foreign

fighter profession.

Another line of effort employed in the East and West African region's strategy to

dissuade violent terrorism focuses on educating the matriarchs. Similar to Middle Eastern

culture, the woman's role in African culture is inferior to men and subsequently motherhood and

raising children are considered "women's work."[36] Despite this, women can be the first source

of protection from radicalization in their community. Consequently, the Department of State

trains them to recognize the signs of radicalization, employ deterrence methods, and become

accountable for the deterrence of radicalization and local security.[37] Additionally, victims of

terrorism are encouraged and trained to share their stories through media, both conventional and

social, while developing campaigns to project their messages. Their messages help provide a

reverberating counter-narrative to the public on the realities of terrorism's death, destruction, and

devastation.[38] The success of these approaches in Africa shows great potential for their use in

counter-extremism efforts. Messages opposing extremism and terrorism may hold more weight

when coming from credible sources such as respected society leaders, senior family members,

and peers. Similar endeavors could reduce radicalization in other similarly structured cultures.

Past Roadblocks and Efforts to Deter Terrorism

Legislation and Turkey

One of the largest challenges in addressing foreign fighter travel is not necessarily

legislation but differences in what other countries consider terrorism. With 1632 miles of land

borders with eight countries, Turkey played a large part in the foreign fighter problem. At its

height in 2013, Turkey's liberal reciprocal visa policy allowed visa-exempt travel from 78

countries and territories. Two of these countries were Syria and Iran which physically share

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borders with Turkey and are both designated as state sponsors of terrorism. Depending on the

country, the requirement to enter Turkey was as little as an expired ID card or expired passport.

Subsequently, a majority of foreign fighters traveled legally to Turkey and afterward slipped into

Syria across the expansive 511-mile border the two countries share. To compound the issue,

Turkish legislation's restricted definition of terrorism, "a crime targeting the Turkish state or

Turkish citizens," made Turkey's counter-terrorism efforts largely unproductive.[39] The limited

characterization of terrorism drove the majority of Turkey's border control enforcement actions

likened to catch and release where immigration violations resulted in temporary detainment and

deportation. Additionally, Turkey's actions varied depending on the direction of the travelers.

Those leaving Turkey to cross into Syria were given unrestricted freedom of movement;

however, those attempting to enter Turkey were restrained and deported in mass. Unfortunately,

several known members of the Islamic State were retained by Turkey and later deported rather

than held accountable for their ties to terrorism.

It is suspected that Turkey generally ignored the Islamic State since a majority of the

Islamic State's efforts in Syria were against the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) and the Assad

regime, both opponents of the Turkish government. This policy allowed the Islamic State to

continue to increase its resources and manpower. However, in 2015 Turkey's counter-terrorism

policy visibly changed to an active stance against all forms of terrorism which included

significantly increasing border security by increasing guards and constructing walls at the Syrian

border. Still, it was not until after the March 13, 2016 bombing in Ankara that Turkey's

President spoke out to reform Turkish Legislation's definition of terrorists.[40] Additionally, these

wanting efforts continued until a second bombing occurred on October 10, 2015, when the

Islamic state executed a suicide bombing in Ankara killing 102 and wounding over 499.[41] For

the first time, Turkey openly stated the Islamic State was responsible for a terrorist act. The shift

in policy ultimately led to the 2015 Country Report on Counter Terrorism stating "Turkey - a

critical geographic chokepoint in the flow of foreign terrorist fighters – increased detentions,

arrests, and prosecutions of suspected foreign terrorist fighters, increased its information sharing

with international partners, and is taking steps to improve the security of its borders."[42] It is after

this point that foreign fighter and foreign terrorist fighter numbers started to fall substantially.

Military Action

In addition to the legislation previously discussed, other efforts have been taken to

combat the Islamic State in both Syria and Iraq. The most direct method used was military

action. On June 15, 2014 President Obama directed US forces to combat the Islamic State in

Iraq.[43] The next week Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR)

was established to conduct operations in Iraq. In 2014, the Combined Forces Air Component

Commander reported 6,981 sorties with 5,886 weapon releases in Iraq. Despite a heavy

offensive campaign, the Islamic State managed to still recruit and facilitate the movement of

thousands of foreign fighters. "Deterring the Undeterrable: Coercion, Denial, and

Delegitimization in Counterterrorism*"* makes a compelling argument regarding deterrence and

terrorism. In traditional deterrence, compliance on the part of the challenger results in

refrainment from a penalty.[44] When the challenger is expecting punishment with action and

restraint, deterrence fails.[45] This simple and profound statement explains why past coercive

efforts, such as military action, failed to deter terrorism and recruitment successfully. Past

research has shown that military efforts alone do not stop terrorist organizations.[46] The

radicalization problem is complex and no succinct combination of factors definitively decides

whether radicalization or subsequent travel with terrorist intentions will occur.

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Evaluation Criteria – Radicalization's Driving Factors

The continued spread of Islamic State-controlled territory in Syria and Iraq, as well as the human rights violations, violence, murders, and destruction it brought with it made regaining control both time sensitive and of utmost importance. The Islamic State's persistence, resources, and controlled territory posed a significant challenge and eventually became the priority of the United States and coalition forces. Multiple methods were employed to mitigate the spread of extremism, foreign fighter travel, and the Islamic State. The Islamic State's persistence and exponential increase in numbers and controlled territory drove the escalation of assets, means, and force used to counter it. These simultaneous coalition efforts make directly evaluating the value of these individual methods challenging; however, these strategies can be analyzed to determine how well they address the individual driving factors of radicalization.

Grievances and Ideologies

The issues that lead to grievances can be diverse, subjective, and culturally dependent; but the end state is the same. A grievance is a cause, resulting from a real or imagined wrong, that motivates someone to speak out or take action. Muslim communities living in Western culture cite several grievances. These grievances range from poor socioeconomic status to bigotry and ethnic and religious discrimination.[47] For the purpose of this paper, grievances result from any action that can be perceived as causing physical or emotional harm to the Muslim community that could motivate someone towards radical beliefs.

Similarly, ideology provides the driving force behind an insurgency's commitment to a cause. The Islamic State's actions in Iraq and Syria model an insurgency where their efforts worked to replace the existing government with their own. Without a strong cause, insurgents have difficulty attracting and maintaining support from followers amongst the people.[48]

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Normally, insurgencies focus on gaining support of the local population. The Islamic State varied from past insurgencies by not limiting their recruitment efforts to a region or state and projecting to the global Muslim population. The Islamic State is founded around the Jihadi-Salafism movement where Muslims are obligated to carry out war until all Muslim lands are freed. This ideology plays a significant part in terrorism and radicalization; without it, moderate resistance to the Islamic State's efforts would have quickly challenged the resolve of their recruits and supporters.

The actions of Iraqi security forces are a great example of this dynamic and how commitment to a cause affects resolve. The Army disbandment after the defeat of Saddam Hussein created a lack of professional soldiers, something Iraq desperately needed. The resultant capability gap and consequent expeditious creation of a new army caused multiple problems. The Iraqi Army was riddled with mismanagement and corruption. Rather than experience and merit, bribes were used to make high ranking officer selections and appointments. Units were segregated by religious sects and regions. Unit commanders used these positions for personal gain by selling off military property and by collecting the salaries of "ghost troops" on the payroll. These actions created weakness. When opposed by the Islamic State, Iraqi security forces' lack of obligation to their duties resulted in soldiers dropping their weapons and running before the battle began.[49] A lack of commitment to duty by the Iraqi SDF's directly contributed to these actions. Iraqi SDF was not dedicated to conducting their duties and relied on the support of US forces to execute their missions. In the absence of US support, they abandoned their duties and ran.

Networks

Networking is the combination of resources, abilities, and experience between individuals, groups, countries, or any combination of these entities to develop mutually beneficial relationships. Networks can consist of acquaintances, family members, co-workers, and members of the same church or religious group. Col. Thomas X. Hammes described war in the 21st century, "fourth-generation warfare" as follows:

> Fourth-generation warfare (4GW) uses all available networks - political, economic, social and military - to convince the enemy's political decision makers that their strategic goals are either unachievable or too costly for the perceived benefit. It is an evolved form of insurgency. Still rooted in the fundamental precept that superior political will, when properly employed, can defeat greater economic and military power, 4GW makes use of society's networks to carry on its fight. Unlike previous generations of warfare, it does not attempt to win by defeating the enemy's military forces. Instead, via the networks, it directly attacks the minds of enemy decision makers to destroy the enemy's political will.[50]

In the context of radicalization and the analysis conducted in this paper, networks specifically refer to relationships with the potential to facilitate the inspiration or propagation of extremist ideals which can lead to radicalization.

Enabling Environments and Support Structures

An enabling environment is a setting that encourages a certain outcome. Enabling environments and support structures to radicalization can come in many conventional and unconventional forms such as social media, access to terrorist training camps, or the internet.[51] Specifically, they encourage radicalization by providing receptive individuals with ideological or material support. For the purposes of analysis, enabling environments and support structures refer to anywhere individuals receive ideological or material support.

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ANALYSIS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Analysis - Evaluation of Past Efforts

Legislation

There have been multiple attempts to refine legislation to close gaps in travel regulations and local laws open to exploitation. Legislation in place makes it very clear that providing support to terrorist organizations or engaging in terrorist acts is criminal. One such action, UN Security Council resolution 2178, demands the comprehensive mitigation of the underlying factors contributing to foreign terrorist fighters: radicalization, recruitment, travel, financial support, and violent extremism.[52] Unfortunately, subsequent law enforcement efforts, strict border control, financial oversight, and religious practice restrictions failed to reduce recruitment. The reason for failure is that these strategies failed to address the factors that drive people to radicalization.

The challenge is separating radicalization from the Islamic faith and utilizing effective techniques to diminish radicalization without infringing on the human rights of all Muslims. Unfortunately, law enforcement is only able to take action after crimes take place. With foreign fighters, wrongdoings can occur long after the radicalization and recruitment process. Once extremist ideologies drive a person's motivations, it is difficult to fight what one believes is ideologically correct and direction from a higher power. Due to these limitations, law enforcement endeavors mostly work to address the foreign fighter problem reactively.

One step towards reactively addressing extremism was to generate legislation that criminalizes common religious practices of extremists. In efforts to deter radicalization and comply with SCR 2178, six European countries banned the niqab and burqas due to their association with the extremist sects of Islam: France, Belgium, Austria, Denmark, Bulgaria and

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Latvia.[53] These actions actually increased perceptions of religious persecution, added to

grievances, and promoted the fear of Muslims in their people. These actions likely contributed

to four of these nations leading the list of Islamic State foreign fighters per capita from Europe

and Western countries.[54] Additionally, travel restrictions and the collapse of the physical

caliphate shift the problem by motivating freshly recruited individuals to waive traveling

altogether and conduct terrorist attacks in their home countries, abroad, or where opportunity

allows them. Travel restrictions reduce access to training camps, one portion of support

structures, and lack of training diminishes the potency of their attempts at terrorism. For these

reasons, the legislative actions taken are evaluated as follows:

Table 1. Legislation Evaluation.

	Grievances	**Networks**	**Ideologies**	**Enabling environments and support structures**
Legislation	Poor	Fair	Poor	Fair

Military Action and Kinetic Strikes

While necessary to regain control of areas overtaken by insurgency, the use of military

action presents several challenges to counterterrorism efforts. First, kinetic strikes risk

accidentally killing civilians and alienating local populations. As of 30 April 2018, coalition

forces under US Air Forces Central Command control have conducted a total of 67,351 manned

sorties dropping 101,091 weapons in Iraq and Syria.[55] Figure 2 below shows there are numerous

confirmed instances of civilian casualties during that offensive. Some estimates are in the

thousands. Subsequently, these instances provided Islamic State propagandists and the media

substantial material to degrade coalition efforts and ultimately increase grievances.

Alternatively, battlefield effectiveness and kinetic strikes have managed to drive many trained

foreign fighters out of the caliphate. These actions degrade access to the terrorist training camp

portion of enabling environments and support structures by eliminating training camps and

providing a strong deterrent to travel. Unfortunately, these displaced individuals pose a

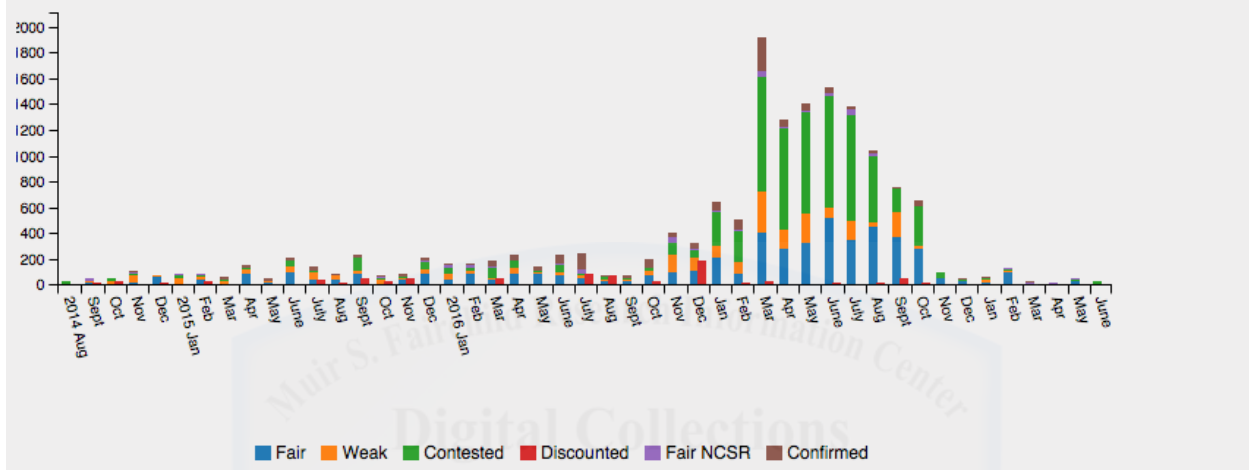significant security risk abroad.

Figure 2. Coalition airstrikes in Iraq and Syria: Alleged civilian deaths and levels of reporting. Adapted from "Coalition Strikes per Month, in Iraq and Syria." Airwars. Accessed June 09, 2018. https://airwars.org/data/.

These points all corroborate research already performed on terrorist organizations

between 1968 and 2006. Military action has not historically led to the disestablishment of

terrorist groups.[56] There are no indications that the Islamic State's defeat will be any different.

Military efforts contribute to grievances rather than mitigate them and fail to address extremist

ideologies. For these reasons, the effects of military action are as follows:

Table 2. Military Action Evaluation.

	Grievances	Networks	Ideologies	Enabling environments and support structures
Military Action	Poor	Fair	Poor	Good

Website Removal and Blocking Social Media Handles

Due to their similarity in nature, website removal and social media handle blocking are grouped into one category. Unfortunately, the nature of the internet and social media prevents these actions from making a large impact on the virtual environment. As previously discussed, once ideological material is posted on social media, it can be reposted, spread, and can exist indefinitely. The ease and low cost at which website URLs and social media handles are changed and recreated make mitigation efforts an inconvenience at most. Furthermore, the anonymity and global reach of the internet combined with tools geared at anonymizing online use makes determining the location and identity of offenders nearly impossible and subsequently makes it severely difficult to take legal action. These efforts completely neglect to address grievances or ideologies, while they show minimal impacts on networks and enabling environments and support structures. For these reasons, these methods are evaluated as follows:

Table 3. Website Removal and Social Media Block Evaluation.

	Grievances	Networks	Ideologies	Enabling environments and support structures
Website Removal and Blocking Social Media Handles	Poor	Fair	Poor	Fair

Proposed Solutions

Active Social Media Campaign

As the Islamic State's momentum shifts from the physical caliphate to a virtual environment, their endeavors will most likely shift back to spreading extremism and encouraging homegrown terrorist attacks such as those seen in the Orlando, San Bernardino, and Chattanooga. The first proposed solution is a social media campaign aimed at delegitimizing the Islamic State's ideological message and recruitment.

This approach focuses on documenting and projecting the realities of living in the Islamic State. To accomplish this, US forces need to prioritize documenting the experiences of those subjected to living in the Islamic State-controlled territory. These experiences would be used to create an information movement to educate the world on the realities of extremism. The desired outcomes would be to replace extremist networks and enabling environments and support structures with supportive and constructive networks/environments that discourage extremism and terrorism. These positive networks will show the contradictions between the Islamic State's messages and their actions. The desired result would be to educate and connect with those most susceptible to Islamic State message and ideology before they can be radicalized and become recruits. Ideally, this approach has the potential to make a positive influence on all of driving factors behind radicalization and is assessed as follows:

Table 4. Social Media Campaign Evaluation.

	Grievances	**Networks**	**Ideologies**	**Enabling environments and support structures**
Social Media Campaign	Fair	Good	Good	Good

Social Media Denial

The complete denial of social media access would require the formation of an organization solely aimed at preventing the Islamic State from utilizing social networks and applications. To accomplish this, one approach would be policy mandating authentication processes to prevent the creation of accounts tied to anonymous and fraudulent information. Authentication processes would require global cooperation and legislation to justify actions, but this could alleviate some of the issues associated with anonymity. Some challenges with this tactic are the ease at which applications can be created and the anonymity that accompanies the use of encryption and the dark web. Additionally, it could be argued that social media denial could be used to oppress free speech which makes human rights a concern. Skilled software programmers can create a mobile application in as few as a couple hundred hours. While the regulation of major social media platforms based in the US and Europe is feasible; an application can easily be created to circumvent these advances and undermine their benefit. Despite this, the ability to spread extremism on platforms with global popularity would be severely limited which reduces the Islamic States' capability to spread their rhetoric. Overall, these efforts would do a good job of reducing networks and enabling environments by reducing the potential to spread extremism online. Therefore, the spread of ideologies is reduced; however, the grievance portion of the evaluation factors is neglected. This method rates:

Table 5. Social Media Denial Evaluation.

	Grievances	**Networks**	**Ideologies**	**Enabling environments and support structures**
Social Media Denial	Poor	Good	Fair	Good

Create Positive Paths to Purpose and Opportunity Outside Terrorism

Focusing solely on the criminalization and punishment of terrorist group associations projects the message that there is no alternative to terrorism once a potential recruit steps on the path to radicalism. Strict law enforcement provides deterrence; however, it does not provide an avenue to encourage members of the Islamic State who were recruited under false pretenses, forced to join, or became disillusioned to escape and leave the caliphate. Additionally, grievances from real or imagined persecution and subsequent ideologies can provide a push to the perception that there is no option other than radicalization and terrorism. Thus, successful extremist group participation deterrence tactics could contradict current counter-terrorism doctrine. The creation of programs aimed at increasing opportunity by investing in both infrastructure aimed at supporting the less fortunate and outreach programs could work to reduce the driving factors of radicalization significantly. First, outreach programs could reduce grievances by increasing the opportunities for economic prosperity and reducing perceptions of persecution. Next, these programs can provide positive networks, enabling environments and support structures to contest extremist ones. For these reasons, positive paths created by developing outreach programs focused on creating opportunities other than terrorism are evaluated as:

Table 6. Positive Paths and Opportunity Evaluation.

	Grievances	Networks	Ideologies	Enabling environments and support structures
Positive Paths and Opportunity	Good	Good	Poor	Good

Conclusions

The establishment of the caliphate, Islamic State-controlled territory in Iraq and Syria, presented a momentous challenge to coalition forces. The monetary cost to regain control in this region was billions of dollars. Meanwhile, ground gained in the Middle East has shifted security issues to Europe, the US, and abroad. Now that little territory remains under Islamic State control, coalition forces must focus on preventing a reoccurrence of these events while eliminating terrorist attacks in Europe and the United States. Legislation has been developed and refined to ensure the gaps that allowed this event to occur are closed. This reform required redefining criminal acts associated with terrorism as well as tightening travel policies, adding security enhancements to travel documents, and applying pressure to nations with lenient regulations. There are laws in place, backed by sufficient police and security forces, directed specifically at deterring extremism and ensuring acts of terrorism receive swift punishment. Despite these deterrent efforts, the Islamic State continues to conduct terrorism and recruit followers to regenerate their cause. The Islamic State's continued success shows that legislation and punitive actions are not enough to combat them. Which leads to the question: What psychological methods can be exploited to deter radicalization and the recruitment of foreign fighters by the Islamic State?

Research has shown the likelihood of radicalization, a precursor to violent action and foreign fighter travel, is increased by driving factors: grievances, ideology, networks, and support structures and enabling environments. Addressing these factors provides a great potential to provide a pre-emptive solution to violent extremism resulting from Islamic State recruitment. An evaluation of previous antiterrorism attempts, specifically legislation, military action, and website removal/social media handle blocks shows these endeavors mostly address

the foreign fighter problem reactively. Specifically, they fail to address the elements that contribute to radicalization, but rather work to control radicalized individuals instead of preventing radicalization.

Table 7. Results.

	Grievances	**Networks**	**Ideologies**	**Enabling Environments and Support Structures**
Military Action	Poor	Fair	Poor	Good
Legislation	Poor	Fair	Poor	Fair
Website Removal and Blocking Social Media Handles	Poor	Fair	Poor	Fair
Active Social Media Campaign	Fair	Good	Good	Good
Social Media Denial	Poor	Good	Fair	Good
Positive Paths and Opportunity	Good	Good	Poor	Good

Western deterrence tends to address issues from the Western culture's point of view rather than taking the thoughts and beliefs of their opponent into mind. Consequently, coalition strategy makes the assumption that the possibility of becoming a battlefield casualty provides sufficient motivation to deter trained foreign fighters and Islamic State recruits from traveling into the conflict zone. This is not the case. Despite coalition forces conducting thousands of sorties that produced an estimated 10,000 casualties by the end of 2015, foreign fighter numbers continued to increase. There are multiple reasons these methods are ineffective. First, collateral damage contributes to grievances, one of radicalization's driving factors. Second, military actions only addressed the enabling environment portion of radicalization's precursors

successfully. Meanwhile, the Islamic State leveraged technology to produce a global media campaign directed towards skewing perceptions of coalition actions and gaining support. The scale of their efforts worked to counteract combat related losses.

Changes in legislation have concentrated on limiting previously unrestricted travel within Europe, a significant contributor to the foreign fighter issue in Iraq and Syria, while simultaneously making terrorist associations illegal and punishable. These changes have permitted the detention, trial, and deportation of those with suspected ties to the Islamic State; however, they also managed to shift the foreign terrorist fighter problem from the conflict zone to Europe and abroad. Meanwhile, anti-terrorism laws in Europe struggle to distinguish the differences between terrorism and the religion of Islam. Thus, some countries in Europe and the Middle East have developed laws accused of being Islamophobic which criminalize Islamic practices common within extremist branches of Islam. These actions cause further issues by alienating Muslims in Europe, increasing grievances which lead to radicalization, and driving Muslims to desire an Islamic state.

The internet and social media provide a virtual soap box to globally distribute information. Attempts to squash extremist activity online have been inadequate. The drawback of this emerging technology is that regulation can only reactively address new capabilities and subsequent abuses once they emerge. As new capabilities are developed, regulations to restrict their abuse must follow. Consequently, the ability to prosecute illegal activities aren't immediately available. Regulatory processes and means must be developed to regain control, meanwhile technology continues to outpace their efforts. The lack of resources to impede the Islamic State allows them unrestricted access to propagate extremism, groom potential recruits, and facilitate travel. Even social media accounts and websites with obvious ties to terrorism

cannot be mitigated. As accounts and websites are shutdown, new ones are created to take their place. Additionally, messages in cyber space spread like a virus. Once posted, they can be saved, reposted, and shared in a multitude of public and private ways at an exponential rate. Similarly, techniques aimed at restricting social media use are ineffective because they fail to address radicalization at its origin.

This analysis shows that previous endeavors failed to address radicalization and sometimes actually contributed to increasing the driving factors behind it, thus producing results opposite of their objectives. Once radicalization occurs, the power of the Islamic State's ideology provides the momentum to push recruits to travel and commit terrorist acts at home or abroad. A solution to this problem is to take actions which influence the components that motivate people to join the Islamic State. Successful applications need to address the underlying causes behind grievances and ideologies which should both deter radicalization and delegitimize the Islamic State's rhetoric. To deter future terrorist acts, the United States should implement a proactive social media information campaign to counter the Islamic State's recruitment efforts.

Social media is a platform with the ability to reach far and wide. The Islamic State's success and the challenge of regulating social media suggest that strategic advantages should be leveraged to prevent such success. Popular social media applications provide a powerful platform to counter the Islamic State's message. With the ability to reach nearly half of the world's population anywhere at any time, a well-designed campaign could have lasting strategic effects and transform counterterrorism. An active social media campaign was the only proposed solution that showed the capacity to address all four pieces of the evaluation criteria, radicalization's driving factors.

The challenge with a social media focused approach is overcoming the credibility issues of similar programs in the past. Previously, there have been significant problems with state-sponsored social media programs and campaigns. Specifically, these efforts failed to establish credibility which ultimately led the Muslim community to question the legitimacy of state-sponsored messages. This solution would need to differ from past techniques by utilizing sources less likely to be called into question.

Recommendations

There is a tendency to focus on applying solutions to address symptoms rather than curing the problem. When culture is a factor, social and ethnic differences and their consequences must play a predominant role in strategic decisions. Research must be conducted to determine how to make government and military approaches to social media more credible which will ultimately make counterterrorism efforts more successful. Credibility can be gained with Counter-Islamic State and anti-extremist messages from organizations and individuals the Muslim culture trusts. Currently, this is not the American government. Adding credibility starts with identifying spokespeople that have authenticity with the Islamic State's target audience and then utilizing them to distribute messaging that degrades the Islamic State and their messages.

Energy must be put into capturing and broadcasting the realities of the Islamic State, specifically the destruction left in their wake. The goal is to remove government affiliation from the message to where the communications presented come from a genuine source the Muslim population can relate to. One such source is their peers, elders, and societal leaders. Disillusioned Islamic State defectors and survivors must be encouraged to openly speak out about their experiences and human rights violations witnessed at the hands of the Islamic State. These messages need to focus on the contradictions between their ideology, messages, and

actions while specifically publicizing their atrocities. Reintegration actions will vary

significantly for foreign fighters vice extremists and these individuals must be identified and

addressed separately.   Law enforcement endeavors must balance punitive and non-punitive

approaches to maximize reintegration and encourage foreign fighters to become productive

members of society while showing extremists the flaws in their ideology.

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