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Editorial

Articles

Farewell to *Air and Space Power Journal–Africa and Francophonie* (ASPJ-A&F)—it's been a good run

Dear readers of ASPJ-A&F,

I would like to inform you about the decision to suspend ASPJ-A&F. The site will remain accessible for everyone interested in searching our archives, but it will no longer be updated.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that what ASPJ-A&F achieved was almost entirely thanks to its staff, authors, reviewers and translators hard work and commitment. And here we are with 40 quarterly issues, more than 240 articles, each published in English and French, with over 240 authors from around the world, and a growing number of readers. ASPJ–A&F is read in 185 countries; 1,015 academic institutions worldwide; 292 think tanks in 42 countries; 667 institutes; government agencies; armed and security forces; and so forth.

We are launching a new project that will keep the legacy of ASPJ-A&F alive and will take it in new directions, providing the same quality of analysis and expanding the network of authors that ASPJ-A&F has gathered. The new journal, the U.S. Air Force *Journal of European, Middle Eastern, and African Affairs* (JEMEAA), will go live the 1st quarter of 2019, so stay tuned. On behalf of *Air and Space Power Journal–Africa and Francophonie* let me say thank you to all of you who followed ASPJ-A&F. It has been a great time for us. Please continue to follow what we do.

Rémy Mauduit, Editor
Air & Space Power Journal–Africa and Francophonie
Maxwell AFB, Alabama

National Intelligence Systems as Networks

Power Distribution and Organizational Risk in Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa

Marco Cepik, PhD[*]
Gustavo Möller

The legitimacy and performance of intelligence services continue to be as controversial as ever. Globalization only made matters more complicated. First, more actors (including business firms, nongovernmental groups, and international organizations) are engaging in such activities with a plethora of new technological resources. Second, it has become even harder to achieve a proper balance between security and freedom in the Digital Age. Finally, as a reminder of the international anarchic structure and its political constraints, intelligence services are present in both democratic and authoritarian countries. Along with police and the armed forces, they form the core of any state's coercive power. Often, one state's intelligence success is another state's security breach. Their best-regarded mission, however, is to provide specialized knowledge about threats and vulnerabilities to the benefit of the national security decision-making process. Their internal workings, institutional interactions, and externalities are the main subjects of an interdisciplinary field of research called Intelligence Studies. This field is closely related to similar undertakings, such as Strategic Studies, Defense Studies, and the International Security subfield in International Relations and Political Science.

*Dr. Marco Cepik is an Associate Professor of International Security and Comparative Politics currently based at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), Porto Alegre, Brazil. He has been invited as visiting scholar by the Renmin University (RUC, Beijing), University of Oxford, Naval Post Graduate School (NPS, Monterey-CA), Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and the Latin American Social Sciences School (FLACSO, Ecuador).

Gustavo Möller, Manager, Núcleo de Estudos em Economia Criativa e da Cultura (NECCULT), Faculty of Economics, Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), Porto Alegre, Brazil

One topic of permanent interest to Intelligence Studies is the distribution of power among the various elements comprising contemporary national intelligence systems. As pointed out by Gill and Phythian, the organizational/functional way of looking at the intelligence services has privileged the study of the United States and the United Kingdom.[1] Even so, the study of intelligence has also benefited from over 20 years of comparative research.[2] Most of the progress has been obtained on specific issues such as legislation, professionalization, external control, impact of terrorism, and democratization processes.[3] There are two main obstacles to advancing the comparative study of intelligence. The first one is empirical, as the difficulties in gaining access, dealing with disinformation, and official secrecy are even more restrictive when it comes to researching other countries. The second type of obstacle is theoretical, due to a lack of dialogue between organizational and interactional (behavioral) explanations of national intelligence systems' evolution.[4]

Therefore, the main contribution of this article is advancing comparative research in Intelligence Studies. Network analysis will be employed to assess national intelligence systems in Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. These five countries are members of the international group called BRICS, which brings together the largest developing economies in the world. Despite significant heterogeneity regarding military capabilities, threat perceptions, political regimes, diplomatic stance, and economic profiles, they are the most important states in the contemporary world along with the United States of America and its allies.[5] Although the BRICS are relevant actors on the world stage, our primary goal here is not to compare how powerful their national intelligence systems are, neither in contrast to the United States of America's intelligence community, nor in relation to each other. Instead, our task is to compare how power is distributed 'inside' each national system. Hence, we have tried to answer three questions: 01. How are the national intelligence systems organized in the five countries? 02. How is power distributed among specific organizations in each national intelligence system? 03. What are the implications of a given distribution of power to the system's overall organizational risk?

We define intelligence systems as networks composed of nodes (organizations) and links (relations), which allows us to consider the asymmetries of authority and information control as indicators of power distribution in a given network. Three types of organizations will be analyzed: supervising (government), coordinating (collegiate bodies), and executing (agencies). A fourth type of organization, namely external control bodies (control), was not included, for brevity. The empirical data from each country comes from public documents, legislation, and media news. We are aware of the limitations imposed by using such sources.

Nonetheless, graphs and adjacency matrices used in Network Analysis are better than traditional organizational charts to describe intelligence systems, because they allow for the representation of the mutual relations between the nodes of the network.[6] Moreover, once the power distribution inside the network is understood, one can begin to explain things like organizational risk, which is a range of effects from mild difficulties in achieving cooperation to severe difficulties to adapt to new strategic challenges, resulting in potential fragmentation of the network.[7]

In the next section, we explain the methods used to answer the research questions, including definitions, technical choices and procedures for data collection, calculations, results verification, and analysis of discrepancies. We then present the results obtained for each of the five countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). In the final section, we compare the results obtained for each country in order to answer the research questions and to indicate limits and challenges for the next round of comparative intelligence studies.

Methods

Networks are formed by nodes (also called vertices) and links (also called edges). The nodes can be people, cities, knowledge, resources, or any material or immaterial objects one chooses to analyze. In the case of national intelligence systems, all the nodes belong to a single class, namely, organizations. As organizations are collective actors, throughout the article the terms node, actor, and organization will be used interchangeably. For a network to exist, the nodes must be linked by means of a flow or relationship. The links between nodes can be directed (indicated by an arrow) or undirected (reciprocal). For the analysis of national intelligence systems, we considered both directed links (authority) and undirected links (information flows).

By authority, we mean the hierarchical subordination exercised by an organization over another. As part of a contemporary state, even staff relationships (experts asked to provide information instead of simply being told what to do) in intelligence happen in a bureaucratic and at least partially formal setting. In turn, the information flows between organizations were assessed according to formal reporting obligations, common membership, or otherwise indicated by country specific sources. Together, authority and information flows amount to a relational definition of power.[8] In other words, power stems from the position of an actor in the network. This position is determined by the number and the intensity of subordinate relationships that the actor experiences. Moreover, the actor's position is

also determined by the number and intensity of information flows that it intermediates.

Analyzing data obtained from public documents and news, the authority exercised by each organization was rated by the authors on a scale of four intervals (0, 03, 06, and 09). The intensity 09 indicates relations provided for by law and deemed effective; that is, authority to request others to collect and analyze information or act upon it which is both legally sanctioned and carried out without any significant insubordination. Authority relationships with intensity 06 are those provided for by law, but in which there are limitations on the observed degree of subordination, either in specific subjects or time periods. A level 03 of authority is one provided by law, but characterized by significant insubordination or leeway. It can also represent a situation where the organization is legally subject to a particular actor, but informally it is another actor who effectively subordinates it. It can also express a reversal of the direction of command. We apply '0' when no relationship exists between organizations, or when it is irrelevant to the functioning of the national intelligence system.

The same scale was used to rate the intensity of information flow. Relations in which the intensity was classified as 09 are those where the information flow is provided by law and where there is evidence that it is effective between two nodes in the network. In turn, intensity 06 indicates an information flow provided by law, but ineffective for various reasons (low sharing rates, competition between agencies, administrative rules of compartmentalization, etc). An intensity 03 was attributed to information flows that are not provided legally, but in which there is evidence of its existence between two actors. We apply '0' when there is no relevant flow of information between two nodes in the network.

The primary data about intelligence services is qualitative in nature and has been acquired from public sources, such as official documents, legislation, books, articles, and news.[9] Deciding which organizations make up a national intelligence system in the case of the BRICS countries presents some difficulties.[10] When available, legal definitions determine which organizations are part of the national intelligence system. When there was no legal basis to decide on the system's components, we have used the thematic proximity of an organization to national security matters to include it or not. Thus, many organizations dedicated to criminal intelligence activities, especially at the local level, were not included in the network. Similarly, private and non-governmental organizations were excluded, even as we recognize the growing importance and the need for additional research on them.[11] Task forces, fusion centers, and working groups were also excluded from the network. We are aware of their increasing importance in many places. However, their temporary and sometimes 'ad hoc' nature makes it difficult to even

compile enough information at this point. In the case of police, military, and constabulary forces scattered throughout the territory and with very complex divisional systems, we decided to group them by functionality and subordination at the national level (see Country Results). All network nodes belong to the same class (organizations), but they were classified into three major types: supervising (government), coordinating (collegiate bodies), and executing (agencies). As mentioned before, we are still collecting data about a fourth type of organization very relevant in intelligence systems, namely external control organizations (parliamentary committees, special courts, etc).

Once the organizations that form a country's national intelligence system have been established, we have also weighted the intensity of a certain relationship between any two given organizations inside that system. For instance, the authority relationship between a collegial organization (coordination) and the other nodes of the network was classified as intensity 09 only when an organization member of the collegiate body had the power to dissolve the collegiate, combining both coordinating and commanding roles. In other cases, this type of node always had its authority relations classified as grade 06. The authority relationship of the head of state with other nodes of the governmental supervising and directing organizations (government) type were classified with intensity 09 with the exception of some cases, based on evidence and explained in the text. Finally, although task forces, fusion centers, and working groups have not been included per se as nodes in the network, their existence was considered in view of the intensity attributed to the information flow relations between participating nodes of the task force.

Once all components of a national intelligence system (the network nodes) were identified and classified, their mutual relationships were recorded in two matrices, one for the relations of authority and others for the information flows. Adjacency matrices are one way to represent a network. In them, the same actors (or network nodes) are arranged in two axes, with rows and columns forming a square. In the cells of the matrix every relationship between two actors is recorded according to their intensity scale. Obviously, diagonal cells which cut the array in half (relating each actor to itself) are filled with '0.' The matrices are the basis for recording data, generating graphs, and performing calculations.[12] All work has been carried out with the help of ORA software (Organizational Analyzer) developed by the Center for Computational Analysis of Social and Organizational Systems (CASOS) of Carnegie Mellon University.[13]

In order to answer the research question on the power distribution in each national intelligence system, two different centrality indexes were calculated for

each node. According to Brandes and Erlebach, different centrality indexes allow for the observation of different aspects of power relations in a network.[14]

The Degree Centrality index, for example, is defined as the number of links between a node and the others, i.e., how connected is a node. In directed graphs, such as those generated by the authority matrix, we have two measures of centrality, one computing relations in which the actor is being subordinated (in-degree), and other relations in which the actor is subordinating another (out-degree). Therefore, the Degree Centrality is a composite index, which can be decomposed into in-degree, out-degree, and total degree measures. The higher the relative distribution of connections a node (organization) has, the less dependent it becomes on any other specific node.[15]

In turn, the Betweenness Centrality index is obtained by computing the number of times a given node intermediates the relationship between other nodes in a geodesic path (i.e., the shortest path between two nodes). This index allows us to evaluate which nodes (actors) are in the position of stakeholders, that is, who have the power to withhold information within the network and the potential to break or prevent relations, in fact isolating other actors.[16]

First, each centrality index (Degree and Betweenness) was calculated separately for each node (organization) in the network. Then, the results were normalized on a scale between 0 and 100, thereby equalizing the size of different national intelligence systems, which is technically called the network diameter. Normalization was achieved by adding the indexes obtained for each actor and then dividing the individual index of each actor by the value of the sum of them all. Finally, the normalized indexes were compared to establish the relative position (power) of each actor in the network. Henceforth, the method combines qualitative and quantitative steps. Qualitative steps are crucial and drive the process, although deciding upon the proper indexes and providing calculations is an important part of the methodology as well.

To answer the research question concerning the organizational risk of a national intelligence system due to a particular distribution of power, two additional indexes were used, in accordance with McCulloh, Armstrong and Johnson.[17] Remember that by organizational risk we mean the probability that the system's internal power distribution will produce a range of effects from mild difficulties in achieving inter-agency cooperation to severe difficulties to adapt to new strategic challenges, resulting in potential fragmentation of the network. Unfortunately, the methodology cannot establish which effects will follow or how the respective national government will respond to such difficulties.[18] Also, it is important to notice that Network Analysis literature uses similar names for the additional indexes. Although it can be a bit confusing, just remember that while the previous

indexes were calculated for each node of the network, these two new indexes are applied to the network as a whole (graph level analysis).

The Degree Centralization index indicates the existence of nodes (organizations) very central in the network. Such nodes, if removed, would lead to the dispersion of the others. The calculation of Degree Centralization was applied to the authority relations. This index is measured on a scale from 0 to 01. The closer to zero (0.00), the more resilient, or less prone to fragmentation a network is. One important caveat is the fact that being more resilient can also mean being less able to adapt to new strategic challenges.[19] Therefore, the exact meaning of a particular index requires additional qualitative analysis to be established.

The Betweenness Centralization index indicates how evenly the information is distributed on the network. It is also measured on a 0 to 01 scale. The calculation of Betweenness Centralization was applied to the information flow graphs. The closer to zero (0.00), the better the information is distributed. Obviously, due to security reasons, in the case of national intelligence systems a totally equal dissemination of information across the network is not necessarily desirable or possible. On the other hand, the closer to one (1.00) in terms of Betweenness Centralization, the higher the risk that a single node organization can retain all the information, acting as a gatekeeper on the network.

We have calculated each centralization index (Degree and Betweenness) separately. As the two indexes are already expressed on a scale between 0 and 01, it was not necessary to perform the standardization process. In the following sections one finds the preliminary results for the national intelligence systems of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.[20]

Brazil

Created in 1999 by Federal Law 9.883, the current Brazilian Intelligence System (SISBIN) has been characterized by organizational continuity and recurring institutional crises.[21] One reason for that is the preference in Brazilian legislation to use broad definitions of intelligence and threats.[22] Although a less than explicit definition of what intelligence is about is quite common in many countries (the United Kingdom, for example); two institutional consequences of this choice in the case of Brazil are the high inclusiveness of the Brazilian intelligence system and the difficulty in defining missions focused on the provision of national security.[23] In total, the Brazilian national intelligence system included 22 supervising and directing organizations (government), 05 collegial bodies (coordination), and 23 intelligence organizations (agencies).[24]

In Brazil, the president has the highest level of formal authority over the system (a Degree Centrality of 22.37). The actor with the second-highest level is

the Ministry of Justice (7.34). In part, this results from the fact that the president directly subordinates all other governmental supervising and directing organizations (government). Since the Brazilian system is very inclusive, many of these organizations do not have intelligence activities as their primary mission. A critical node is the Brazilian Intelligence Agency (ABIN). Designated by law as the intelligence system center, its leadership in SISBIN is hindered by issues related to budget, priority and focus of its primary mission, as well as personnel and administrative authority. Since 2002, ABIN has been placed under the authority of the Institutional Security Cabinet (GSI) of the presidency. As much for its intermediate position in the chain of command between the presidency and ABIN as for its participation in many collegial organizations for coordination (coordination), the GSI accumulates great power in SISBIN.[25] While the Degree Centrality of ABIN is 1.74, the same index in the case of GSI reaches 3.84. To increase sectoral coordination, preserve autonomy, and develop specific doctrines for military intelligence and public security intelligence, new collegial organizations were created in the early 2000s for coordination, such as the Defense Intelligence System (SINDE) and the Subsystem of Public Security Intelligence (SISP). Respectively, the Ministry of Defense (5.24) and the Ministry of Justice (7.34) have a high degree of centrality due to their roles in these subsystems.[26] The Ministry of Finance, in turn, also has a high centrality index (4.89), which indicates a tendency for the institutionalization of a subsystem of financial intelligence in Brazil.

Regarding the control of information flows, ABIN stands out with a Betweenness Centrality of 32.3. Although it has a low Degree Centrality index, this organization has links with most actors that provide links with other actors, having in fact the shortest geodesic path and the most obvious one as shown by information flow. Therefore, ABIN has power in the system not because of the number of organizations it subordinates, but for its role in the information flow. Given the density of the network, ABIN cannot position itself as a gatekeeper, i.e., as an actor that may impede the information flow.[27]

In sum, power is highly concentrated in the Brazilian National Intelligence System, even if the system itself is not very powerful due to its excessive inclusiveness and lack of effective external control. Only a few actors hold the majority of power resources (authority and information), among them the president, ABIN, and the Ministers of Institutional Security, Finance and to a lesser extent, Justice, and Defense.

Russia

Since the end of the USSR, the structure of the Russian national intelligence system has oscillated in accordance with changes in state capacity, threats to na-

tional interests, and the availability of resources. Since Vladimir Putin's presidential election in 2000, the legacy of Boris Yeltsin has been reverted. Instead of fragmentation and weakening of the intelligence services came a period of increasing power and more resources, especially following the Second War in Chechnya (1999-2009). There was a reduction in the number of intelligence organizations, replacement of several directors, and expansion of operational capabilities, missions and technology base.[28] More recently, despite the crisis in Ukraine and increased tension with the European Union and the United States, the expansion of the Russian intelligence system was put in check by the economic crisis. The legal basis for the functioning of the Russian intelligence system is a set of laws passed in February 2006 (On Counteraction of Terrorism; On Operational Search Activity; On Security), which applies to all the country's intelligence organizations. They complement specific laws called 'On the Federal Security Service' (May 1995) and 'On External Intelligence' (December 1995). There are other laws, decrees and presidential directives. According to Soldatov, major reforms in the Russian secret services did not occur because of September 11, but because of the attack of insurgents in Ingushetia in June 2004.[29] In total, the adjacency matrix (and the resulting graph) of Russia's national intelligence system included 06 governmental supervising organizations (government), no collegial bodies (coordination) and 07 proper intelligence organizations (agencies).

In the case of authority relations within the Russian intelligence system, the president has the highest Degree Centrality (36.84). After the 2006 reforms, the president concentrated even more authority, directly subordinating most organizations in the Russian network. Despite the Federal Security Service (FSB) being considered a central actor, its Degree Centrality index of 3.95 is lower than the Federal Service for Technical and Export Control (FCTEK) (5.26) and equal to organizations such as the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), Military Intelligence Directorate (GRU), Federal Protective Service (FSO), Directorate for Military Topography (VTU), or even the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) and the prime minister. Besides the president, the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces (13.16) and the Ministry of Defense (9.21) have high centrality in the Russian system.

When it comes to information flows, the GRU has the highest Betweenness Centrality (30.91) in the Russian system, higher even than the FSB (22.55). Part of the explanation lies in the fact that many information flows that pass through the FSB are informal, with intensity 03 only. In contrast, the information flows through the GRU are more formal and, therefore, more intense. Besides them, the FCTEK also has a relatively high Betweenness Centrality index (16.48). This can be explained by its role in information security and signals counterintelligence.

This type of mission compels the FCTEK to maintain communication (data streams) with different actors of type 01 (government) and some important organizations of type 03 (agencies). Finally, the Betweenness Centrality index of the president (14.67) is explained by the fact that he directly subordinates all political authorities and all agencies, except GRU and VTU, causing the president's office to be a natural intermediator in many relationships.

The power distribution in the Russian national intelligence system is heavily concentrated in the president. Note that type 02 organizations (coordination) were not included in the Russian system, given the difficulties in obtaining information about the possible role of the National Security Council in relation to the intelligence organizations (agencies).[30] In addition, it is worth noting that most agencies in the system are directly subordinated to the president. The only two agencies that are not directly subordinated are the GRU and the VTU, responsible for imagery intelligence (IMINT). Both organizations are directly subordinated to the Chief of Staff (CGS) which, although being subordinated to the Ministry of Defense, is appointed by the president.

Finally, a word about the centrality of the FSB, the organization responsible for counterintelligence, counterterrorism, and protection of the constitution. Vladimir Putin was FSB director from 1998 to 1999. During most of his tenure as president, the FSB has strengthened and acquired more power. FSB officers have assumed key positions in the MDV and also went on to develop intelligence activities in the fields of SVR and GRU, even taking responsibility for border control.[31] However, in the context of the Ukrainian crisis the Russian President may promote reform in order to reduce the FSB's centrality in the Russian intelligence system.

India

The Indian national intelligence system is strongly guided by regional security challenges, but also by Delhi's objective to become a great power.[32] The broad range of organizations in the system stems from three main factors, namely, the combination of internal security threats (insurgency and communal violence), border conflicts (especially with Pakistan), and regional and global ambitions (positioning towards China and the United States). So far, India has neither specific legislation regulating the operations and activities of its diversified intelligence organizations, nor significant external control mechanisms or congressional oversight. Therefore, defining the size of the intelligence system and its internal relationships becomes a challenge in itself.[33] Fortunately, since intelligence agencies in India are active players in the internal political process of the country, there is considerable debate in the media about their role.[34] The latest reform of the sys-

tem dates from 2002, when the Kargil Committee Report recommended changes that were partially implemented by 2008.[35] In total, the adjacency matrix (and the resulting graph) of India's national intelligence system included 07 governmental supervising and directing organizations (government), 02 collegial organizations (coordination) and 20 intelligence organizations (agencies).

From the authority relations point of view, it is important to highlight in the Indian case the Degree Centrality index of the prime minister (14.29). This can be explained by the PM's close working relationship to other supervising organizations (government), such as the Ministry of Defense (12.50) and the Ministry of Finance (12.50). India has intelligence agencies subordinated to the Ministry of Finance, of which the most important is the Central Economic Intelligence Bureau (CEIB).[36] Similarly, the Degree Centrality of the Defense Ministry is elevated because it subordinates a number of agencies that form a military intelligence cluster. The Ministry of Interior (Home Affairs) has a Degree Centrality index of 5.3, while the Intelligence Bureau's index is 4.76. We would expect the index of the Ministry of Interior to be significantly higher than that of the Intelligence Bureau (IB). However, the actual results reflect the double subordination of the agency to the minister and the prime minister, elevating the Centrality in-degree of the IB. The most important Indian collegial body (coordination) should be the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC). It is subordinated to the National Security Council (4.79) and consists of the directors of Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) (3.57), the Intelligence Bureau (IB) (4.76), the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) (1.79), the three officers of the military intelligence, a senior representative of the Ministry of Defense, and a senior representative of Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, the JIC has a relatively low Degree Centrality index (1.79). This may indicate that the JIC has not been able to produce effective coordination, mainly because of its reduced staff and infrequent meetings.[37]

Due to the system's size, Betweenness Centrality of the Indian network is concentrated among the system's clusters. The highest indexes are from the National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC), which reaches 20.50 for communicating closely with the other agencies on the specific issue of combating terrorism. Also notable are the JIC, with a 13.71 index and, again, the cluster of economic and fiscal intelligence, with Betweenness Centralities of 13.71 (CEIB) and 9.78 (Ministry of Finance), both higher than that of the prime minister (8.21). Betweenness Centralities of the intelligence agencies (organizations of type 03), are relatively low, but significant in the case of defense cluster agencies, RAW (4.68), DIA (3.87), JCB (3.87), and National Technical Research Organization (NTRO) (3.87).

Taken together, the distribution of authority and information flows in India's system indicate that power is firmly in the hands of government supervising organizations (government), with a limited role played by coordinating organizations (type 02). Also, well-defined clusters of power also exist in the area of defense, counter-terrorism, and finance. The financial intelligence cluster demands additional research, but its power seems to be significant in India. The four major intelligence agencies of the Indian system are the IB, RAW, the NTRO, and the DIA. The Intelligence Bureau (IB), which is subordinated to the National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC), is the agency dedicated to coping with internal security threats and also the main result of the post-Mumbai reform. The RAW is the foreign intelligence agency and its real importance for the state power in India seems to contrast with its relatively low indexes in terms of authority and information control. Both the IB and the RAW are subordinated to the prime minister. As they are frequently reported as having considerable autonomy, such discrepancies between informal accounts and formal institutional arrangements need to be reconciled through additional research. Finally, the two most-important military intelligence agencies are the NTRO, dedicated to technical means of collection, and the DIA, which emulates the U.S. model of consolidating the contributions of the three armed forces.

China

China's national intelligence system defies classification, mainly because of its complexity and incommensurability in relation to the United States of America, the United Kingdom, or even to the other BRICS countries. However, a first step should be to avoid including all state and communist party organs as "potential intelligence organizations."[38] This is not to neglect the central role played by the Communist Party of China (CPC) in the political system as well as in Chinese society. Neither to ignore that as a great power (similar to the United States and Russia), China probably has a very large intelligence system, one with specialized organizations focused on internal, regional, and global security issues. The deep historical continuity of the state in China, its cultural characteristics, or even the Soviet influence in the twentieth century should not obscure the fact that modern military tasks, police, foreign policy, development, and others demanding support from the intelligence system in China are the same found in other countries. This modern national intelligence system emerged along with the military modernization since the 1980s.[39] In total, our account of China's national intelligence system included 10 governmental supervising organizations (government), no collegial body (coordination) and 24 intelligence (agencies).[40]

Constitutionally, the role of the President of the Republic, Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC) and the Communist Party of China Secretary General (CPCSG) need not necessarily be held by the same person. That these roles are now held by one person represents a 'de facto' political and institutional arrangement. Given the authority relations with different network nodes, the Degree Centrality index of the president (7.41) is higher than that of the CPCGS (5.09). In addition, both have lower indexes than the CMC (11.11), and an even lower index than that of the Ministry of State Security (MSS) (18.52). This is partially a consequence of the authors' decision to consider the major departments of the MSS separately. Other important ministries are the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) (4.63), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) (3.24) and the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) (2.78). As in the Russian case, type 02 organizations (coordination) were not identified. Given the high functional specialization in the network (division of labor between the nodes) and the large number of agencies, Degree Centralities indexes remain low for all type 03 organizations (agencies), ranging between 1.39 and 2.78.

Although it is very difficult to estimate the flow of information in Chinese intelligence, organizational system configuration indicates that most likely some organizations establish different degrees of communication with others. The especially high values for the Betweenness Centrality index of the Ministry of State Security (36.62) and CPC General Secretary (27.19) stand out as examples. All other nodes in the network show a variation in their Betweenness Centrality indexes ranging from 0 to 5.89, including the president (2.19) and the Central Military Commission (2.86).

Considering the performance of both indexes and similar to what is found in other countries, three actors (nodes) concentrate a lot of power in China's national intelligence system; namely, the MSS and, to a lesser extent, the president and the CMC. In the case of the CMC, the chain of command in the military intelligence cluster encompass the general departments (General Political Department [GPD]; General Staff Department [GSD]; 2nd Department [GSD2]; and 3rd Department [GSD3]), and also the intelligence capabilities of the four singular forces in the People Liberation Army (PLA), namely the PLA ground forces, the PLA Navy, the PLA Air Force, and the PLA Second Artillery Force. Notably, the intelligence capabilities of the People's Armed Police (PAP), the main constabulary force in the country, are subordinated to both the MPS and the CMC. In turn, the MSS and its various departments (bureaus) correspond to an important cluster in Chinese civil intelligence. Finally, unlike other countries where a financial or tax intelligence cluster seems to be taking institutional form, in China what stands out is the growing importance of the GSCPC and MIIT.

South Africa

After the defeat of the apartheid regime, South Africa's national intelligence system underwent two major reorganizations. In 1996, the new constitution established two basic principles for the democratic functioning of South African intelligence: coordination between agencies and civil control of their activities. In the mid-1990s, the Intelligence Law and the White Paper on Intelligence specified the division of intelligence missions in separate agencies (internal and external), with emphasis on external control mechanisms, coordination, supervision, and use of technical means of collection. In 2005, complaints related to illegal operations to intercept communications of ANC (the ruling party) members damaged the legitimacy of the intelligence services and their oversight bodies.[41] In 2009, the new president Jacob Zuma announced changes in the intelligence system, which by 2013 were guided by the General Intelligence Laws Amendment Act. The new structures were designed to produce administrative consolidation, reduce the number of agencies, and to refocus on missions strictly related to national security.[42] In total, the adjacency matrix (and the resulting graph) of South Africa's national intelligence system included 05 supervising organizations (government), 02 collegial bodies (coordination) and 11 intelligence organizations (agencies).

In terms of authority, the South African President's Degree Centrality index (18) is lower than that of the State Security Agency (SSA) (20). Although the president subordinates all ministries and is not subordinate to any other node in the network, making his out-degree higher than that of the SSA, the Total Degree is lower because the composite index considers all subordinative relations in which an actor is involved. As the SSA answers to the president and the Ministry of State Security, but subordinates the six branches that comprise it since the 2009 reform, its Degree Centrality is higher. All other organizations in South Africa's Intelligence System have Degree Centrality indexes ranging between 02 and 07.

The president has the largest Betweenness Degree in the South African case (38.85). This indicates that all three types of organizations communicate with each other through the presidency. The Betweenness Centrality index is also high for the National Intelligence Coordinating Committee (22.29) and the Financial Intelligence Centre (18.17). Although the National Intelligence Coordinating Committee's (NICOC) case is relevant to support the intention of transforming the committee into a major locus of communication between network nodes, the case of Financial Intelligence Centre (FIC) stands out as a result of the large number of informal relationships with other organizations in the intelligence sys-

tem. As observed in other countries, the so-called financial or tax intelligence cluster has grown in importance and demands further study.

In fact, the power distribution in South Africa's national intelligence system tilts heavily to the president and the SSA. Besides them, we highlight the NICOC and the FIC. The importance of the SSA cannot be underestimated in the current configuration (post-2009) of the South African intelligence system. This agency also concentrates corporate services (human resources, IT, infrastructure, logistics and finance) previously redundant in different agencies. It is also in charge of ensuring unity of command and consistency of objectives for the different branches of the intelligence activity: the internal, the external, and the technical. Because of the SSA's position in the network, the president does not directly subordinate any intelligence agency.

Finally, a summary of the results obtained in the five countries can be seen in Table 01.

Country	Unit Types			Unit Indexes				Network Indexes	
	GOV	COO	AGE	Highest Degree Centralities		Highest Betweenness Centralities		Degree Central-ization	Between-ness Central-ization
				Unit	Value	Unit	Value		
BR	22	05	23	PR	22.38	ABIN	32.38	0.206	0.314
RU	06	0	07	PR	36.84	GRU	30.91	0.364	0.208
IN	07	02	20	PM	14.29	NCTC	20.50	0.116	0.260
CH	10	0	24	MSS	18.52	GSCPC	27.19	0.184	0.428
SA	05	02	11	SSA	20	PR	38.85	0.159	0.394

Table 1: National intelligence systems in the BRICS group

Conclusions

In this article, we have tried to answer three questions: 01. How are the national intelligence systems organized in the BRICS countries? 02. How is power distributed among specific organizations in each national intelligence system? 03. What are the implications of a given distribution of power to the system's overall organizational risk?

Regarding the first question, a few commonalities and various specificities were observed in the cases of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. For example, Russia and India have civilian intelligence agencies specialized in collecting and analyzing intelligence about international security threats. In the cases of China (MSS) and South Africa (SSA), the same missions and functions are performed by specialized branches (bureaus) of larger organizations. Brazil is the

only country in this sample with no major civilian intelligence agency primarily focused on external threats. Even so, the overall number of organizations involved in each national intelligence system is much higher in Brazil (50), China (34), and India (29) than in South Africa (18) and Russia (13).

This alone cannot be taken as an indicator of how capable or efficient a given intelligence system is. For instance, Russia is a great nuclear power with advanced conventional weaponry and significant force projection capabilities, but has only 07 main intelligence agencies. On the other hand, Brazil is a regional power with 23 main intelligence agencies. In the case of China and South Africa, we stand by our decision to consider specialized branches of MSS and SSA as distinct agencies for analytical purposes. Even so, India (20) and China (24) have similar numbers of intelligence agencies despite their different political regimes. One organizational feature that seems to be associated with a polyarchic form of government is the presence of collegiate bodies to coordinate different parts of the national intelligence systems. Institutions like South Africa's NICOC, India's JIC, and Brazil's SISBIN Council have no equivalents in Russia or China.

As for the second question, by employing node (organization) level measures of Degree Centrality (authority) and Betweenness Centrality (information) we were able to assess how power distribution varies in the five national intelligence systems. As predicted by theories of intelligence systems evolution, rulers (democratic and otherwise) create agencies to expand the surveillance and awareness capabilities of the state.[43] However, they are probably aware that creating multiple agencies helps prevent one agency from becoming too powerful and usurping the ruler.[44] Therefore, one should expect government principals to enjoy more power than intelligence agencies.[45] Whatever the political regime type (presidential, parliamentary, or communist), well-established states are characterized by intelligence subordination to the political authorities. Presidents have the highest Degree Centralities (authority) in Russia (36.84) and Brazil (22.38), as does the prime minister in India (14.29). In the cases of China and South Africa, the highest Degree Centralities are respectively those of the MSS (18.52) and the SSA (20).

This is not to say that intelligence agencies are powerless. Their power comes from their control of important information flows (Betweenness Centrality). Besides, much of an intelligence agency's power comes from its attachment to a powerful cabinet-level sponsor. We found this feature in the case of ABIN in Brazil, FSB in Russia, IB and RAW in India, or the various intelligence bureaus of the Ministry of State Security in China. Even the now-powerful State Security Agency in South Africa is subordinated to a Ministry of State Security (the successor of the Ministry of Intelligence Services). Whenever an agency seeks to concentrate too much power, the political authority starts mobilizing to avoid it,

as we observed in the case of Russia's FSB. The highest Betweenness Centrality degrees observed in the five countries were those of ABIN in Brazil (32.38), GRU in Russia (30.91), and NCTC in India (20.50). In contrast, in China and South Africa the highest Betweenness Centralities are those of the General Secretary of the CPC (27.19) and the president (38.85), respectively.

Finally, we have also tried to compare the cases at graph level with respect to the organizational risk posed by a particular distribution of power. As a reminder, organizational risk is the probability that internal vulnerabilities or external threats will adversely affect the network. We use Degree Centralization to measure resilience/adaptability and Betweenness Centralization to measure information concentration. The respective Centralization indexes for Brazil (0.206), Russia (0.364), India (0.116), China (0.184), and South Africa (0.159) indicate that Russia runs the highest risk of having an intelligence system less able to adapt to changing strategic circumstances, at the same time being the most resilient among the five countries.

Unfortunately, one cannot say from this index how President Putin's reform efforts will impact Russian intelligence, or if the Ukrainian crisis will force any kind of institutional stress. Likewise, the respective Betweenness Centralization indexes for Brazil (0.314), Russia (0.208), India (0.26), China (0.428), and South Africa (0.394) indicate that China has the highest risk of a single actor (MSS) being able to retain most of the information, acting as a gatekeeper on the network. Of course, the index itself reveals nothing about actual tendencies or evidence of what the CMC, the president or the MSS intend to do. However, the current crackdown on corruption under Xi Jinping's rule bears watching from a Network Analysis standpoint.

Network Analysis has proved to be a useful approach to promote a comparative research program in the Intelligence Studies field. So far, we were able to offer a systematic way of describing national intelligence systems in such relevant countries as Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. It was also possible to state with some corroboration the existence of a causal relationship between certain organizational settings and a higher or lower level of organizational risk in the case of national intelligence systems. Aware of the Network Analysis limitations, researchers will continue to explore its potential. For example, by integrating more data on external control organizations in the legislative and judiciary branches of government. With new measurements and updated data, even better interpretations of results shall follow.

Notes

1. Peter Gill and Mark Phythian, "What is intelligence studies?" *The International Journal of Intelligence, Security, and Public Affairs* 18, no. 1 (2016): 10; Mark M. Lowenthal, *Intelligence: from secrets to policy*, Sixth edition (Thousand Oaks, California: CQ Press, 2015), 37-69.

2. Wilhelm Agrell and Gregory F. Treverton, ed., *National intelligence systems: current research and future prospects* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2009), 304; Steven Boraz and Thomas Bruneau, ed. *Reforming intelligence: obstacles to democratic control and effectiveness* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 407; Philip H. J Davies and Kristian C. Gustafson, ed., *Intelligence elsewhere: spies and espionage outside the Anglosphere* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 256; Peter Gill, "Evaluating intelligence oversight committees: the UK intelligence and security committee and the 'war on terror,'" *Intelligence and National Security* 22, no. 1 (2007): 14-37; Glenn Hastedt, "Towards the comparative study of intelligence," *Conflict Quarterly* 11 (1991): 55-72; Michael Herman, *Intelligence power in peace and war* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 438; Kevin M. O'Connell, "Thinking about intelligence comparatively," *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 11, no. 1 (2004): 189-199.

3. Michael M. Andregg and Peter Gill, "Comparing the democratization of intelligence," *Intelligence and National Security* 29, no. 4 (2014): 487-497; Hans Born and Ian Leigh, "Democratic accountability of intelligence services," policy paper (Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), 2007); Stuart Farson; Peter Gill; Mark Phythian and Shlomo Shpiro, eds., *PSI handbook of global security and intelligence: national approaches*, two volumes (Westport/London: Praeger Publishers, 2008), 700; Susana C. Lemozy and Russell G. Swenson, eds., *Democratization of intelligence: melding strategic intelligence and national discourse* (Washington, DC: National Defense Intelligence College, 2003), 127; José Manuel Ugarte, *Legislación de inteligencia* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Dunken, 2001), 518.

4. Marco Cepik and Christiano Ambros, "Intelligence, crisis and democracy: institutional punctuations in Brazil, Colombia, South Africa and India," *Intelligence and National Security* 29, no. 4 (2014): 523-551; Eduardo E. Estévez, "Comparing intelligence democratization in Latin America: Argentina, Peru and Ecuador cases," *Intelligence and National Security* 29, no. 4 (2014): 552-580; Mark Phythian, "Intelligence theory and theories of international relations: shared world or separate world?" in *Intelligence theory: key questions and debates*, ed. Peter Gill, Stephen Marrin, and Mark Phythian (New York: Routledge, 2008), 54-72.

5. For discussion of the meaning and the various ways to classify the BRICS countries, see Andre Cooper and Daniel Flemes, "Foreign policy strategies of emerging powers in a multipolar world: an introductory review," *Third World Quarterly* 34, no. 8 (2013): 943-962; Andrew Hurrell, "Rising powers and the emerging global order," in *The globalization of world politics: an introduction to international relations*, ed. John Baylis, Steve Smith, and Patricia Owens (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 80-94; and Paulo Fagundes Visentini, Gabriel Adam, Maíra Vieira, André Silva, and Analúcia Pereira, *BRICS: as potências emergentes: China, Russia, Índia, Brasil e África do Sul* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Vozes, 2013), 232.

6. Helen Armstrong, Anthony Johnson, and Ian Mcculloh, *Social network analysis with applications* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 18.

7. According to the hypothesis proposed by Cepik and Ambros, one of the variables that affect the learning capacity and the evolution of national intelligence systems is the degree of functional differentiation (division of labor) observed in each country.

8. Robert A. Hanneman and Mark Riddle, *Introduction to social network methods* (Riverside: University of California Press, 2005), 60.

9. The specific sources for each country are referred to throughout the article.

10. Andregg and Gill, "Comparing the democratization of intelligence," 488.

11. Patrick R. Keefe, "Privatized spying: the emerging intelligence industry," in *The Oxford handbook of national security intelligence*, ed. Loch K. Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 296-309.

12. Graphs (G) are abstract objects formed by a set V of vertices (or nodes) and a set E of edges (or links). That is, G = (V, E). Graph theory and relational algebra are the mathematical basis of the Network Analysis

area. Other important methodological foundations are the Statistics and Computational Algorithms; Ulrik Brandes and Thomas Elerbach, eds., *Network analysis*: *methodological foundations* (Berlin: Springer, 2005), 472.

13. Cf. http://www.casos.cs.cmu.edu/projects/ora/software.php. Other network analysis software do exist. See Mark Huisman and Marijtje A. J. Van Duijn, "A reader's guide to social network analysis software," in *The SAGE handbook of social network analysis*, ed. John Scott and Peter J. Carrington (Washington: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2011), 578-597.

14. Brandes and Erlebach, *Network analysis*, 92-95; Further discussion about the insufficiency of centrality indexes to measure power to be found in Stephen P. Borgatti, "Centrality and network flow," *Social Networks* 27 (2005): 55–71.

15. Linton C. Freeman, "Centrality in social networks conceptual clarification," *Social Networks* 1 (1979): 215-239.

16. Armstrong, Johnson, and Mcculloh, *Social network analysis with applications*, 320; Hanneman and Riddle, *Introduction to social network methods*.

17. Armstrong, Johnson, and Mcculloh, *Social network analysis with applications*, 205-234.

18. According to Cepik and Ambros, organizational risk in this sense is conducive to institutional crises, which tends to be more recurrent in the intelligence realm than in other areas of government due to secrecy, lack of proper external controls, as well as low functional differentiation.

19. As Russell Swenson called to our attention (e-mail to the authors), "greater resiliency, in more cultural terms, could also imply that no hegemon exists among members of the system that would insist on other organizations becoming adaptive to new situations or threats. That is, each bureaucratic unit is able to maintain its old habits, even if less productive than before."

20. Besides, two types of annexes can be found as online supplements on the Brazilian Political Science Review website. First, tables for each country detailing the names of all organizations, their types (government, coordination, agency) and the values of both indexes (Degree and Betweenness). Second, graphs (one for each country) where the nodes colored in red are type 01 organizations (government), the nodes colored in green type 02 organizations (coordination), while the blue ones are type 03 organizations (agencies). Although it is not possible to visualize each link individually, the darker the color of the edge the more intense is the relationship of authority or communication.

21. Priscila C. Brandão, *Serviços secretos e democracia no Cone Sul: premissas para uma convivência legítima, eficiente e profissional* (Niterói: Impetus, 2010), 302; Marco Cepik, "Regime político e sistema de inteligência no Brasil: legitimidade e efetividade como desafios institucionais," *DADOS* 48, no. 1 (2005): 67-113; Marco Cepik, "Structural change and democratic control of intelligence in Brazil," in *Reforming intelligence: obstacles to democratic control and effectiveness*, ed. Thomas Bruneau and Steven Boraz (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007): 149-169; Joanisval Brito Goncalves, "The spies who came from the tropics: intelligence services and democracy in Brazil," *Intelligence and National Security* 29, no. 4 (2014): 581–599.

22. Marco Cepik, *Espionagem e democracia* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora, 2003), 207-212.

23. In addition to the Law 9,883/1999, the organization and the functioning of SISBIN are regulated by Decree 4,376/2002. The Decree 8,793/2016 establishing the first ever public guidelines for a National Intelligence Policy was finally issued (after more than five years of expectations) by the interim Temer government in June 2016, in the midst of controversial impeachment procedures against the President elected Dilma Rousseff. Reflecting the need of legal and legitimacy reassurances in times of vicious political turmoil, the new National Intelligence Policy limits itself to reiterate the strict adherence of Brazilian intelligence activities to the Constitutional principles. Of much more positive consequence—if it ever overcomes the National Congress maze—is the Law Project (Bill) 3,578/2015, introduced by Representative Jô Moraes (PCdoB/MG) to regulate ABIN's operational procedures and judicial control of secret intelligence collection in the country.

24. The Public Prosecutor's Office (MP) is the Brazilian body of independent public prosecutors at both the federal (Ministério Público da União) and state level (Ministério Público Estadual). The intelligence roles played by specific organizations inside the MP seems to be increasing, but they were not included this time because they are not an official part of SISBIN.

25. The Director of ABIN is a civilian who has to go through confirmation hearings of his name in the Senate, while the Minister of the Institutional Security Office (GSI) has been an officer of the Armed Forces appointed by the President of Republic. This arrangement is problematic for the democratic functioning of the intelligence in Brazil; Luiz Carlos de Carvalho Roth, "Uti exploratoribus: credibilidade e controle da atividade de inteligência no Brasil," Masters dissertation, Ciência Política (Niterói: Universidade Federal Fluminense, 2009).

26. Originally, ABIN exercised the SISP coordination function. One of the reasons for the transfer of responsibility to SENASP was the existence of operational problems and disputes between ABIN and Ministry of Justice. Still, the SENASP itself finds resistance from the Federal Police, which, in turn, also presents difficulties in cooperation with other state police; Marco Cepik, "Regime político e sistema de inteligência no Brasil: legitimidade e efetividade como desafios institucionais," *DADOS* 48, no. 1 (2005): 67-113.

27. A finding that reinforces recent studies on the development of intelligence systems in Brazil is the high Betweeness Centrality (7.3) of the Operations and Management Center of the Amazonian Protection System (CENSIPAM). Created in 2002 with a focus on a critical region for the security and the development of Brazil, the Center provides joint experience for actors from different parts of the system and focuses on results, stimulating inter-agency cooperation. See Flávio César de Siqueira Marques, "Fusão de dados na inteligência militar," Doctoral thesis, Ciências Militares (Rio de Janeiro: Escola de Comando e Estado Maior do Exército (ECEME), 2016); and Túlio Marcos Santos Cerávolo, "A integração da inteligência nas operações interagências no Brasil contemporâneo," Masters dissertation, Ciências Militares (Rio de Janeiro: Escola de Comando e Estado Maior do Exército (ECEME), 2014).

28. Mark Galeotti and Johnny Shumate, *Russian security and paramilitary forces since 1991* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2013), 64; Andrei Soldatov, "Russia," in *PSI handbook of global security and intelligence: national approaches*, ed. Stuart Farson, Peter Gill, Mark Phythian, and Shlomo Shpiro (Westport/London: Praeger Publishers, 2008), 479-497.

29. Soldatov, "Russia."

30. See also the National Antiterrorist Committee (NAK), established in 2006. It is subordinated to the FSB, but we could not assess if it has authority over other intelligence agencies. Within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) there is a Commonwealth of Independent States Anti-Terrorism Center (CIS ATC), established in 2000 to coordinate the exchange of information among member countries of the institution, http://www.iacis.ru/eng/about/partners/partnerskie_organizatsii/antiterroristicheskiy_tsentr_sng.

31. Galeotti and Shumate, *Russian security and paramilitary forces since 1991*.

32. Marco Cepik, "Segurança nacional e cooperação Sul-Sul: Índia, África do Sul e Brasil," in *Brasil, Índia e África do Sul: desafios e oportunidades para novas parcerias*, ed., Maria Regina Soares de Lima and Monica Hirst (São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 2009), 63-118.

33. N. C. Ashtana and Anajali Nirmal, *Intelligence and security management* (Jaipur: Pointer Publishers, 2004), 454.

34. Rana Banerij, "Legalising intelligence gathering," *The Hindu* 8 July 2014, http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/legalising-intelligence-gathering/article6186885.ece?css=print.

35. Created after attacks on Pakistani Kargil district of Ladakh region in 1999 and discussed the course of Indo-Pakistani relations since 1947, the proxy war in Kashmir, and the nuclear issue. The committee sought to determine whether the type of aggression occurred could have been anticipated by the intelligence services and what were the possible failures that allowed the surprise attack. Many of the proposals, however, were only implemented in 2008, after the attacks in Mumbai, whose authorship is still debated; Cepik and Ambros, "Intelligence, crisis and democracy."

36. Bruce Vaughn, "The use and abuse of intelligence services in India," *Intelligence and National Security* 08, no. 1 (1993): 01-22.

37. Major General V. K. Singh, *India's external intelligence: secrets of research and analysis wing (RAW)* (New Delhi: Manas Publications, 2007), 157-170; Vaughn, "The use and abuse of intelligence services in India."

38. This is a common error incurred by ideologically motivated observers. One example is the otherwise useful volume by the French journalist Roger Faligot, *O serviço secreto chinês* (São Paulo: Larousse, 2009), 543.

39. For the general security context see chapter 18 of Henry Kissinger, *On China* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011), 624; as well as David Shambaugh, *China goes global: the partial power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 432. Regarding the intelligence component of the military modernization in China, see Dennis J. Blasko, *The Chinese army today: tradition and transformation for the 21st Century* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 256; as well as Anthony H. Cordesman and Martin Kleiber, *Chinese military modernization: force development and strategic capabilities* (Washington: CSIS, 2007), 226.

40. After taking into consideration their specific missions, technical requirements, organizational dimensions, and amount of people employed, we came to the analytical decision of considering 12 specific bureaux under the authority of the Ministry of State Security (MSS) as distinct intelligence agencies. Otherwise the total number of intelligence agencies in China would be reduced to 12 down from 24. See Xuezhi Guo, *China's security state: philosophy, evolution, politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 496.

41. The Project Avani was an intelligence operation designed to assess the impact of the presidential Succession battle of ANC on the country's stability. As part of this project, the NIA intercepted e-mails from people in senior positions, who allegedly conspired to block the possibility of Zuma becoming the president of the ANC. The inspector general concluded that the emails were false and recommended disciplinary action against those responsible. The director of the NIA at the time (Masetlha) was dismissed by President Mbeki, as well as two senior officers; Kevin O'Brien, "Controlling the hydra: a historical analysis of South African intelligence accountability," in *Who's watching the spies? Establishing intelligence service accountability*, ed. Hans Born (Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), 2005), 199-222.

42. Cepik and Ambros, "Intelligence, crisis and democracy," 541-545.

43. David H. Bayley, "The police and political development in Europe," in *The formation of national states in Western Europe*, ed. Charles Tilly (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 328-379; Cepik, *Espionagem e democracia*; Charles Tilly, *Coerção, capital e estados europeus: 1990-1992* (São Paulo: EdUSP, 1996), 356.

44. Russell Swenson has called our attention (e-mail to the authors) to this particular important motivation for rulers to design Intelligence Systems with more than one agency. See Peter Gill, *Policing politics: security intelligence and the liberal democratic state* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 384; and also Florina Cristiana Matei, and Thomas Bruneau, "Intelligence reform in new democracies: factors supporting or arresting progress," *Democratization* 18, no. 3 (2011): 602 –630. For historical examples when an intelligence and security apparatus became too powerful up to a point of usurping power to itself by forming a police state (Brazil's SNI or South Africa's BOSS).

45. For an institutionalist theory of intelligence systems development, see Amy B. Zegart, *Flawed by design: the evolution of the CIA, JCS, and NSC* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 336. Power-based and institutionalist approaches toward national security are not mutually exclusive.

Defected from ISIS or Simply Returned, and for How Long?

Challenges for the West in Dealing with Returning Foreign Fighters

Anne Speckhard, PhD[*]
Ahmet S. Yayla, PhD
Ardian Shajkovci, PhD

The U.S. Pentagon has reported a considerable drop in the number of foreign fighters flowing to Iraq and Syria, from 2,000 to 500 a month according to some estimates.[1] While such numbers are encouraging and offer evidence of foreign fighter attrition from Iraq and Syria, one must not underestimate the rate at which the group continues to replenish itself, which according to some sources, is far greater and faster than that of al-Qaeda at its peak.[2] The "Islamic State" also continues to suffer significant territorial losses in Iraq and Syria.[3] Such setbacks are likely to continue to weaken the group's recruitment campaign and efforts, especially important given that the group also relies on recruits from the territories it controls.[4]

Despite the significant setbacks in the battlefield, ISIS continues to attract followers. During our *ISIS Defector Interview Project*, we interviewed dozens of defectors and foreign fighters from Syria, Europe, Central Asia, and the Balkans who had served in "Islamic State" controlled territories. We found that a vast

majority of these were truly defectors, and no longer support or ever intend to go back to the ranks of ISIS in Syria and Iraq, or to serve them at home. However, we also found that some were more accurately viewed as "Islamic State" returnees, but not defectors, having only temporarily disengaged from the battleground—sometimes even being allowed to temporarily return home by the group, or more chillingly, sent home to recruit or otherwise serve the group's goals in the West. These returnees remain aligned with the so-called "Caliphate" and contemplate returning to Syria and Iraq and, in some cases, we learned that they have already returned to the battlefield and rejoined the terrorist group. Some of those who truly defected from ISIS, even risking their lives to do so, also returned to supporting or actually returned to the group. In the case of some of these defectors, despite having disavowed ISIS for a considerable period, the challenges of living back home caused them to flip and return to the group. Some were actually contacted by ISIS, or unable to reintegrate well at home, and again took up the cause. This article relies on a sample of sixty-three ISIS defectors/returnees imprisoned by authorities, collected between May 2014 and August 2017.

The sample of nine out of sixty-three total was collected between May 2014 and February 2017 from returnees of Western European and Balkans countries as well as Syrians fleeing ISIS by escaping into Turkey. One of the returnees was interviewed in a prison setting. He was imprisoned by the authorities following his defection from ISIS and return from Syria. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, allowing the participants to tell their stories of being recruited into the group, serving, and then defecting, followed by detailed questioning involving a series of twenty-five questions and going in depth on topics they had personal experience with inside the group. The defectors were judged to be genuine on the basis of four things: referral from prison authorities and prosecution records, referral from defectors who knew them from inside the group, insightful knowledge about experiences inside the group, and intense post-traumatic responses during the interview evidencing they had been present and taken part in events they were describing. The subjects were contacted via smugglers, other defectors, personal introductions, and via prison authorities, thus the sample is entirely nonrandom. The defectors did not give their real names except for those in prison or already prosecuted.

Before and during the course of the research, the participants were informed about the authors' credentials in the field of counter-radicalization and counter-terrorism so as to secure interviews. The participants were informed that this research is part of a larger research project and is not sponsored or reporting to law enforcement. Informed consent was gained from each participant, with special care taken for those in prison to ensure they were speaking freely and knew that

they may be under surveillance that neither they nor we could control. In the case of those interviewed in prison, the authors filed proper applications to gain access to the correctional facilities, and abided fully by the policies and procedures of those facilities. The authors did not pose any questions that could lead to the disclosure and admission of potential crimes or participation in illegal activities. This was important in the sense that it represents an ethical issue and any potential disclosure of incriminating evidence may be utilized against our participants in a court of law. That said, the interviewees were fully aware that in the event they voluntarily disclosed incriminating information, such as information about an impending attack, the principle of confidentiality would no longer apply. Our results cannot be generalized from this non-representative and small sample to apply to all returnees/defectors, yet the issues these interviews raise are deeply important for policy considerations in dealing with ISIS returnees because they describe the pathways into terrorism and back out for some, and how some at least deal with having returned from the conflicts in Syria and Iraq.

Some security experts predict that as ISIS continues to lose territory and its brutal grip on local populations in Syria and Iraq, it will migrate to other territories, with Southeast Asia (Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia), Libya, and even the Balkans being cited as possibilities.[5] When we interviewed Syrian defectors from June 2015 to February 2017 in the *ISIS Defectors Interviews Project*, many told us that in the event of losing their territory in Syria and Iraq, ISIS cadres plan to shave their beards and blend into normal society in Syria and elsewhere to mount guerilla warfare attacks.[6] Certainly, of the 38,000 foreign fighters ISIS has managed to attract to Syria and Iraq, many will return home—some disaffected and defecting from the group, some disillusioned in the short-term but still longing to build an Islamic "Caliphate," and still others sent back to recruit and attack at home. Already Western consulates in Turkey report an increase in their citizens showing up to report "lost passports" and wishing to return home.[7]

As ISIS continues to lose most or all of its territory, it is important for Western governments, particularly from the Balkans and Western Europe, to prepare for the reality that in this flood of returnees only some will be defectors, while others will simply be returnees who will continue to support the Islamic State. Many of these returnees will be dangerous and may return to Syria and Iraq at some point, or go elsewhere, or act at home on behalf of ISIS or its potential successor organizations. Whether all returnees from ISIS constitute a danger to their homelands is unknown, although those who left ISIS but are not necessarily defectors nor disillusioned with Islamic State's claim to be able to construct a utopian Islamic Caliphate are likely more easily manipulated to attack at home and return to service. In our interviews, we found the dream of the "Caliphate" was a

very potent one, and while many understood that ISIS would never be able to deliver it, that nevertheless remained as a hoped-for ideal.

As increasing numbers of ISIS cadres flee the battlefield, some as defectors and others as returnees still aligned with ISIS' goals and ideology, the challenges for the West will be how to identify and sort out true defectors from returnees and determine if they are at risk to flip back again to supporting or rejoining the group. It will be incumbent on Western states to find ways of determining who among returnees is a security risk at present, who may become one in the future (e.g. by returning their allegiance to the group), and who can be safely reintegrated into society for the long-term. The questions for those handling the likely flood of ISIS returnees include identifying the variables that can be manipulated potentially to lessen the possibilities of return to the group. This article offers a small insight into those returnees who have not entirely renounced ISIS, or who have re-connected with the group over time, identifying what appeared to be the causes.

Sample

This analysis is based on nine cases chosen from a total of sixty-three ISIS defectors/returnees imprisoned by authorities. The sample of sixty-three was identified by the smuggler who had brought them to Turkey, via a defector network, by virtue of their cases being public and having gone through prosecution, or because of the fact that they were imprisoned as ISIS (or in the case of the two Central Asians as ISIS affiliate) members.

Nine Cases Discussed

The age of the participants at the time of the interview ranged from fifteen to forty-nine, with the majority being under thirty. Their professions before joining ISIS included farming, trade, and professional jobs, with the majority being blue collar, farm workers, or unemployed. All but one of the nine cases were men. Of the nine cases culled for this analysis, one was female, one was a minor, and the rest were adult males. These nine cases (the returnee or the defector representing all geographic areas of the sample) were specifically selected from the rest of the total sample because, unlike others, they: 1) expressed conflicting feelings about having left ISIS; 2) expressed the potential desire to return to the group; 3) expressed outright, continued affiliation and support for ISIS, and/or; 4) we learned that the person actually returned to fighting with ISIS.

Methods

All of the nine defectors were interviewed in-depth using a semi-structured interview instrument (with open-ended questions included) between May 2014 and February 2017. One of the interviews took place in a prison setting. The person had defected, but was arrested by the authorities upon his return. Most interviewees did not give their names and real names are used only for those whose cases are public and already in the press. The interviews served to develop an understanding of their motivations for joining ISIS, what attracted them, what they found positive, how they were trained and ideologically indoctrinated into the group, what they witnessed inside ISIS, and what disturbed them enough to defect or to leave for those who did so.

For the forty-five out of sixty-three interviewees who were true defectors, their main reasons for leaving included the brutality and corruption of ISIS (including its hypocritical and un-Islamic nature), being coerced into actions they found morally or otherwise repellant, and sheer terror for their own or family members' lives.[8] Note that Speckhard and Shajkovci interviewed sixteen ISIS cadres imprisoned in Iraq, and with the exception of one prisoner, they could not determine their current level of support or loyalty for ISIS.

With the exception of the nine who continued or clearly returned their allegiance or who physically returned to ISIS, we could not determine if the remaining sample of interviewed ISIS defectors/returnees who denounced ISIS at the time of their interview ever returned to ISIS or expressed allegiance once again to the group. The nine who continued or clearly returned to their allegiance, or who actually physically returned to ISIS, are the subject of this analysis with the focus being on their motivations for doing so and the potential factors regarding their decisions to continue or return to supporting ISIS.

Results

Out of the sixty-three interviewed ISIS cadres, we found nine of them either to have reversed their defection by returning to the battlefield or to have continued their ideological commitment to ISIS. Among the nine subjects who, despite having left the group, were conflicted about ISIS and continued or returned to supporting the group (physically or ideologically), one was Belgian, three were Albanians from Kosovo, two were Bosniaks, and three were Syrians in Turkey. We know that four of these physically returned to the group, and one who was jailed in Kosovo had come and gone previously and flipped again back to ISIS in prison.

Reasons cited for leaving ISIS included homesickness, battle fatigue, fear of ISIS leadership, disillusionment with ISIS living up to its utopian ideals, prob-

lems that needed attending to at home, anger over ISIS hypocrisy and/or mendacity, and the prospect for females of being forced to remarry. Yet despite this, upon return to their home countries, or in the case of Syrian defectors fleeing to Turkey, they expressed allegiance to the group, with nearly half returning to it. While our research ethic was never to ask our respondents to directly incriminate themselves, including asking them directly if they still wanted to return to ISIS, it became clear to us from what they voluntarily offered that of these nine subjects, all of them either continued or returned their allegiance to ISIS at some point after leaving the group and that half of them actually returned to the ISIS battlefield.

Discussion

After interviewing more than five hundred terrorists (or their family members and close associates when they are already dead) between us, it is clear that the individual vulnerabilities and motivations for joining terrorist groups are always contextual and vary even by neighborhood, even within the same city.[9] The same is true for this sample.

Among the thirty-three Syrians interviewed in our sample of sixty-three, the desire to join the uprising against Assad, alongside heavy coercion from ISIS, was a huge factor for joining the group. Some of the fighters from other militias joined the "Islamic State" only when they were captured and offered a choice-less choice: die or join the group. Other Syrian militia members joined ISIS voluntarily, citing it as Islamic, more successful in battles, and better financed in terms of weapons and providing better salaries than their group—reasons they gave for switching allegiances. Likewise, the Syrian respondents told us that Syrian youth easily believed the lies of ISIS preachers who promised youth unheard-of salaries, marriages, and even cars if they joined. This happened despite the fact that many of the *Cubs of the Caliphate* were actually groomed for vehicular suicide missions and received only some of these rewards. Local Syrian civilians who joined ISIS also referenced the fact that when ISIS overtook their areas, "Islamic State" took over all the means of employment and sustenance in the territories they controlled, and that to fail to join meant suffering, possible targeting for punishments, and potential starvation. Female Syrians told us, and male Syrians confirmed, that local Syrian women also often married into ISIS as a means of feeding themselves and their families.

European foreign fighters, by contrast, were repeatedly referenced by the Syrians as already indoctrinated into Salafi militant jihadi ideas before coming to Syria, and were seen as the "true believers" who had come for "jihad."[10] Western foreign fighters, male and female, enjoyed exalted status above the Syrians in the

"Islamic State" and were given many perks including free housing, arranged mar-riages, sometimes cars—and for the men, sex slaves.[11] Our interviews in Europe and the Balkans point to a completely different set of motivations for joining ISIS than many of the Syrians had. High unemployment in the Balkans and in Muslim enclaves in Europe, alongside the marginalization and discrimination of first and second-generation Muslim minorities in many Western European countries, played an important role in these recruits finding ISIS attractive. Offers of a real salary, arranged marriages, sex slaves for men, traditional living for women, free housing and other amenities, along with the honors bestowed by ISIS on foreign fighters who come to Syria and Iraq, attracted many who also felt their lives to be lacking dignity, purpose, significance, and honor.

More importantly, however, our total sample of interviews revealed that the significance of the ISIS captured territory and what appeared to be the real pos-sibility of establishing a utopian Islamic "Caliphate"—given the oil wealth and battlefield successes of ISIS—were strong motivating factors for joining. The dream of the "Caliphate" was important to them.

Those from the Balkans who went early on to join the uprising against Assad and later found themselves in the ranks of ISIS also referenced their own personal experience of war as children and youth, and the duty they felt for Muslims to defend one another from tyrannical and violent leaders and unjust attack.[12] In fact, all of those interviewed in Kosovo by Speckhard (n=6), referenced the fact that others, including Americans, had come to save them from killings and rapes decades ago, and that now it was their Islamic duty to help Syrians defend them-selves from Assad's atrocities—events they had viewed on video and found ex-tremely disturbing. However, once in Syria, they discovered the unexpected com-plexities of multiple actors with differing goals and the various militias warring with each other. Those we interviewed left while others who stayed in Syria be-came enamored of what became the Islamic State.

Likewise, many foreign fighters from Central Asia, Europe, and the Balkans were recruited into "Islamic State" by friends and family members, or with offers of marriage—creating and deepening already existing friendship and familial bonds—making it harder to exit the group. Some of the reasons we identified that seem to draw foreign fighters back to the group include: the friendships and ca-maraderie that also arose between foreign fighters, along with their deepened Is-lamic identities, sense of purpose, significance, heroism and dignity forged in ISIS; the material as well as spiritual rewards of participation; the potential of dying for a greater purpose with the religious promises of "martyrdom," versus living a life of ennui; and the manner in which the group promoted its brand as representing an ultimate quest for Muslim dignity, self-rule, and justice. Whereas

Syrians were more aware of the brutalities of ISIS toward other Sunnis (e. g. the decimation of the Sunni al-Sheitaat tribe) and their hypocritical lies, the Syrians in our sample also expressed vulnerabilities to returning to ISIS, such as longing for "true" Islamic living and Syrian freedom with the overthrow of Assad, as well as having become invested in the possibility of a real Islamic Caliphate.

Alongside the motivations for joining, the problems facing foreign fighters back home—factors that played in their decisions to join such as high unemployment, underemployment, discrimination, marginalization, difficulty living a conservative Salafi lifestyle in the West, messy and unsatisfying family relationships that they had fled—all still existed as problems once they returned home. These problems continued on without new or satisfying solutions. In addition, having lived in a conflict zone and having witnessed and taken part in extreme brutality also took a heavy psychological toll upon returned ISIS cadres, who now in safety told us of enduring symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Their high arousal states in particular—feeling jumpy, fidgety, and on high alert—do not match the calm, bored ennui of being back home, or of hiding in Syria without a clear purpose. Equally important, they are lacking good psychological treatment along with the ability to admit safely the disturbing things in which they took part. Many returnees long again for the clarity of purpose and experiences of the battleground with the potential rewards of death by "martyrdom." Only one returnee in our sample received psychological assistance—an Albanian from Kosovo who was offered psychological help in France for the traumas of having served in "Islamic State." He stated that before taking the offered therapy he suffered nightmares and what sounded like symptoms of PTSD, but that the treatment greatly helped him to reintegrate. Some of the aforementioned factors also serve to explain why some foreign fighters seem to overlook the group's limitations and territorial setbacks, dismissing reality while hoping for the best upon return.

Case Examples

ISIS, like al-Qaeda before it, has been adept at convincing adherents that to die killing enemies of the group is to die a "martyr's" death with all the Islamic rewards of "martyrdom" conveyed to the suicide terrorist. Of course, most Muslims would not recognize this terrorist ideology as their Islam. Yet, during the course of our interviews, we have learned how the group has managed to hijack Islamic scripture by promising fighters that suicide terrorism is an act of "martyrdom" that wipes away sins, gains the adherent immediate entry to Paradise, and grants family members Paradise upon their deaths as well. Our defectors told us of many Arabs and some Westerners who joined ISIS for the express purpose of

gaining a "martyr's" death—even volunteering for suicide missions. When one is faced with a seemingly insignificant and purposeless life, and problems of rampant unemployment, or if one is carrying guilt over "sins," a significant death with an immediately improved afterlife can become an important allure to returning to ISIS, as one of our Balkan defectors told us:

> I am thinking about it [returning to Syria]. There is a possibility. There is a bigger purpose in dying than staying here. Here is worse than you think. The cause I was fighting for, the brotherhood, and the life I had in Syria was powerful. I had a reason both to live and to die. I had a reason to live because I had income and food on the table every day. I also did not mind dying because I believe in God and justice. What I mean is that I don't have to worry about starving, like here [in Kosovo]. I have stability, and I don't mind dying because it is for a greater purpose: to free innocent Muslim brothers and sisters who are being killed every day. (D.K, age thirty-five, interviewed in June 2015, Kosovo)[13]

A thirty-four year old Albanian Kosovar explained how he had found purpose and meaning in ISIS and only returned for a short time to Kosovo—for a break from the battlefield, "I am temporarily disengaged. I will return. I have established my life in the Islamic State. This [Syria] is my new home." He denied defecting saying,

> Defecting means switching allegiance and commitment. I have not abandoned my brothers and sisters in Syria. I will be there for as long as I need to. I will help my brothers and sisters in Syria. It is my new career and my new life. Even though I love my family in Kosovo, I have found a new purpose in life (R.B., age thirty-four, interviewed in March 2016, Kosovo).

Two middle-aged men who went to join ISIS from Bosnia but had returned to be with their families stated, "Our families are in Bosnia. The war is not over yet. We hope to bring our families to live with us in the Islamic State." (M.S., age forty-seven and B.I, age forty-nine, interviewed between May and September 2014, Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Another thirty-five-year-old Albanian Kosovar explained that it is hard to reintegrate into a society that labels those who went to assist in the uprising in Syria as terrorists and that he intends to return to ISIS, "[There is] no reason to live here, stigmatized by Kosovars. Difficult to return when people call you a terrorist." (A.K., age thirty-five, interviewed in June 2015, Kosovo)

Syrian defectors in Turkey also told us about languishing in refugee camps and looking impatiently back to ISIS, idealizing what they had defected from and hoping still that ISIS could liberate their country from Assad. One defector stated:

I complain to my friends here in Turkey [about ISIS atrocities]. I always complain to them. I tried to convince them, at a time when they tried to convince me to go back. "Let's go back. We will have money and pay." I told them, "Money is not everything. You need to be patient here. Inshallah, you will feel relieved soon. It won't be long. It won't be long. They [ISIS] are not righteous." They didn't believe me. Many of my friends went back and they are still there. The others were convinced because I told them about the reality of things. (Abu Yousef, age twenty-nine, interviewed in November 2015, Turkey)

Syrian Tahir, age fifteen when we interviewed him, returned to ISIS despite having become disaffected with ISIS cadres tricking small children into suicide missions and also pushing him to take one during his time inside Islamic State. He returned after ISIS fighters came and told him that they could take his town back from the Kurds but needed his help as a guide. Homesick and desperate to return home, he was easily manipulated by them. Tahir, we later learned through those who knew him, was killed on a landmine as he tried to guide the fighters in their unsuccessful bid to overtake his village. (Tahir, age fifteen, interviewed in November 2015, Turkey)

Umm Rasheed, a twenty-one-year-old Syrian woman who had been indoctrinated by ISIS after being orphaned as a teen and married into the group, was forced by circumstances into three serial marriages (after each husband died in battle). The single mother of a small child had been living in a Turkish refugee camp for nine months but still expressed deep confusion about ISIS when we spoke to her in Turkey. Her case made it clear to us that those who escape from terrorist groups need supportive therapy and remain deeply vulnerable to the ideologies they have been forced to live under, especially if they fell under ISIS rule as youth, as she did.

Despite having run from them when she believed they would force her into yet a fourth ISIS marriage, Umm Rasheed appeared completely disoriented in her life in Turkey, telling us, "I would do the same thing again if given the opportunity. I escaped because I have a small child, but I want to go back after the baby is grown. I want to go back. When my son is three or four years old, if ISIS still exists, I will go back and fight with them."

Having known poverty in her family home and then repeated tragedy in her late teens as her parents and three husbands were all killed and then knowing poverty again as a refugee, she idealized the prosperity and powerful position she had briefly held in ISIS, married to a Saudi foreign fighter and being herself a member of the ISIS *hisbah*. She claimed, "ISIS is a really good group, I have to help them. If they allow me to keep my son, I would marry [again] but I don't

know yet. They are not as bad as people tell. ISIS is good. Woman are covered over there."

Like many who had fallen under the total indoctrination of ISIS, she still believed that "Islamic State" represented the true Islam and all others were enemies. She also had personal experience to back up some of her beliefs. She had been relatively rich in ISIS until each of her husbands died in battle. Likewise, she had seen the civilian killings caused by Coalition bombings that made her conclude that the West was an enemy to Syrian civilians, "Those coalition forces are not killing us, our soldiers, but they are attacking civilians, and everyone sees that." She claimed to have seen dead women and children killed by Coalition airstrikes as well.

While she had risked her life to escape ISIS and was clearly relieved to be away from the battlefield and not forced to remarry yet a fourth time, she still idealized the "Islamic State" and was unclear about what to believe, "They lie about us and create negative propaganda," she said of the West. Also having so many of her close family killed in battle and having been taught by ISIS that they were "martyrs," it may have been hard for her to let go of this idea. When asked about others joining the group, she said,

> Advise them to come and join ISIS. Go! Die in the road of Allah. When you die for the religion, you save yourself. I want my child to be an ISIS fighter and martyr. That son must go through the way of his father, follow his path, I wish I was a 'martyr' as well. I can die when he's ten. Martyrdom is the most important rank you can reach.

When asked if she would take other Syrian refugees back to ISIS with her, she answered,

> Of course, if someone wants to go I will take them. I invited a lot of women in Raqqa to become ISIS members. Inshallah, ISIS will become the real state of the region and I will become the martyr for them. What you hear here is all lies. You think they won't last but if you go to Raqqa you see everyone is living peacefully there.

Having lost her girlhood dream of becoming a doctor, her parents having been killed by regime bombings, and having to marry young and repeatedly with little chance to grieve; and then having been trained by ISIS as a young woman to be sadistic in torturing other women who infringed upon their strict rules. It is likely this widowed single mother was so traumatized by all she had seen that she could not clearly work through ISIS claims of being righteous. (Umm Rasheed, age twenty-one, interviewed in May 2016, Turkey)

In Belgium, 27-year-old Younes Delefortrie (his real name), told of being raised by an alcoholic and violent mother and feeling that the Catholic Church he regularly worshipped in as a child had failed to protect him. When introduced to Islam by second-generation North African Belgians who have strong extended family ties, he was captivated by a religion that bans alcohol and immediately converted. He gave up drugs and alcohol and over time moved beyond those Muslim friends to an extremist version of Islam and eventually went to Syria in 2013. Delefortrie spent only five weeks in Syria in a group composed of al-Nusra and ISIS cadres and returned to Europe when the groups started fighting each other, giving as his reasons that he wanted to make a better living, reunite with his wife, and escape the battleground.

Yet, when he returned to Europe, he was returning to a troubled marriage, a conviction on terrorism charges, release on a travel ban, and overall failure. After having tried to restart his life, he had his business shut down by Gert Wilders, who complained that his bakery loaves "have blood on them." Disillusioned with life in Belgium, Delefortrie expressed in his interview his wish to return to ISIS. Idealizing their "Caliphate," he justified the 2015 Bataclan Paris attacks as retaliation for Coalition bombings and said he hoped for the ISIS "Caliphate" to extend to Brussels. Journalists who have interviewed him at home report an ISIS flag hanging in his bedroom and Delefortrie dressed in a hoodie adorned with the ISIS flag. The judge who decided Delefortrie's case saw him as not enough of a danger to society to lock him up; however, there are clear signs of his vulnerability to rejoin old comrades and his continued adherence to an ideology that addresses his childhood traumas and that supports terrorist attacks on European soil. His case would seem to support an argument for providing remedial therapy for ISIS returnees. (Younes Delefortrie, age twenty-seven, interviewed February 2016, Belgium)

Fitim Lladrovci (his real name), a twenty-five-year-old Albanian Kosovar interviewed in prison in Kosovo, raises many of the war-related issues associated with others from the Balkans who went to Syria. As a young boy, Lladrovci had witnessed his own family attacked by Serbs and vividly recalled that an American woman had saved their village. He, like many of the other Albanians who initially went to fight against the Assad regime, recalled how traumatized and helpless they felt during their war. As a result, he felt that it was his Islamic duty to help. He, like the others interviewed, felt that the Kosovo government had supported Albanians going to help with the uprising in Syria, but later hypocritically condemned him as a terrorist. Lladrovci travelled first to Syria in 2013 and joined the Free Syrian Army for four months. Like many Albanians in the conflict zone, he became disenchanted when the militias started turning on each other and returned home. Recalling that time, he stated, "I joined the FSA. [When they]

started fighting al-Nusra, I decided to return to Kosovo." Despite trying to return to his normal life, he kept abreast of developments in Syria, particularly the rise of ISIS, as he became enamored of their claim for an Islamic "Caliphate."

Lladrovci had, during his brief time in Syria, met many of the Albanian foreign fighters who later became leaders in ISIS, so he knew he could play an important role if he joined. Recalling how he tried to settle back into normal life in Kosovo, Lladrovci stated, "I got back and tried to move away from those kind of things, go back to my own life, but it was impossible. When I saw ISIS created, my desire [to return] was so great. The second trip in ISIS was totally exciting. The first time was boring, just guard duty."

Like many of the Albanian foreign fighters from Kosovo, Lladrovci expressed extreme disappointment with the Kosovo government for criminalizing his initial acts of fighting with the Free Syrian Army to assist in the Syrian uprising and equating it to joining a terrorist group, more specifically,

> Once I came back in 2014, arrests started to happen in Kosovo and police took me in to question me. … They came and arrested me, took my computers and phones. They found evidence. It wasn't like I didn't admit it. I told them I went to [Syria to] help the people. It shouldn't be a surprise. Even the Kosovo Islamic community made a call for going [to Syria] and helping, so it wasn't like I ever denied it.

Yet, despite there being no law on the books in Kosovo for joining the uprising in Syria at the time he served the Free Syrian Army, his act of helping the Syrians was criminalized as terrorism. "[I was] put on the potential terrorist list. Arrested for nine hours. At the time, we didn't have a law," Lladrovci recalled, obviously angry about what he saw as hypocrisy on the part of the state. Lladrovci, however, also had a criminal streak—with a history of stealing and petty criminality in his early life (according to those who knew him) —and he easily lied to the government, "In front of prosecutor I said that I regret and have no intentions of going back. He believed me. I went home and the first thing I did was contact the people in Syria."

As ISIS declared its "Caliphate," Lladrovci became excited by the idea of joining and getting in on the ground floor. The first time in Syria, he had left his wife behind, but this time he recalled, "It was at that period, people were taking their wives. Wives were joining their husbands. Why not? I can do that too. So, I got in touch with Lavdrim Muhaxheri and Ridvan Haqifi, [They were] big shots at the time. I made some very good connections since my first time." Material considerations played a part as well. Lladrovci told his ISIS friends that he wanted

to bring his wife and asked them, "Can I get a house?" The answer back, "Yes conditions here are excellent for you. We are just waiting."

Lladrovci continued to misrepresent himself to the authorities, recalling,

I started searching for ways how to get there. I decided to go from Montenegro. I took a bus with my wife, flew from Podgorica. I was on the [potential terrorist] list so once I got to the border of Kosovo, I didn't need a passport to cross to Montenegro, I showed my ID—they saw the name and questioned me. "Yes, I've been to Syria but now we are going to Ulcinj and taking my wife. We are going to work. My wife shouldn't be punished, for a stupid decision, why should she suffer?"

Lladrovci lied charmingly to the authorities and passed into Montenegro unstopped.

Once inside ISIS, Lladrovci recalled fighting for ISIS on an almost daily basis and had no regrets whatsoever about ISIS killing civilians, taking sex slaves, beheading so-called spies and enemies of the "Islamic State," and killing other Sunnis—most notably decimating the al-Sheitaat tribe in a genocidal battle where thousands of men, women, and children were killed by ISIS. He had so completely drunk the ISIS poisonous ideology of believing the "Islamic State" was righteous that he rarely questioned their brutalities or corruption.

However, when he began to witness discrepancies that reflected his own life and values as they were played out upon insiders, he became upset with the leaders of ISIS. Lladrovci, whose father died when he was young, was raised by his mother and perhaps easily felt sympathy for widows. Likewise, he had vivid recollection of himself, his mother and an older brother being attacked by Serbs when he was only eight—an age that he would also relate to during his time in ISIS.

Lladrovci recalled, "When wives got sick they [ISIS] wouldn't take them to the hospital. They can't travel alone. [According to ISIS] wives are only there to cook and take care. For me that was a huge sign something is wrong." Lladrovci's wife fell ill and was not cared for by ISIS. He continued, "There was not only my case, there was another person's wife. She was sick with cancer, had four kids. They didn't take care of her or allow her to go back [home for medical treatment]." He also became upset seeing that ISIS was only paying a widow's pension for the first month then refusing to pay further payments and not helping the women to get out buying necessities, effectively forcing these women to remarry in order to survive.

As is the case with many who join ISIS, part of the attraction to the group is its promise to deliver justice and dignity to all Muslims. Lladrovci was no different in this regard. He became enraged when he saw hypocrisies and injustice as it applied to ISIS members. His refusal to follow the group's motto of "hear and

obey," and his tendency to speak out about these injustices did not endear him to the ISIS leadership. He recalled, "I told you I cannot tolerate injustice, so I always confronted them [the ISIS leaders] and argued. At some point, we even went to the *shariah* court. Because of that they started distancing themselves from me."

The final straw for Lladrovci was an eight-year-old child who probably represented for him, his own fatherless, boyhood, unprotected-self during war. "So, there was this eight-years-old kid," Lladrovci recalled, whose father had brought him to Syria against the wishes of his mother.

> His mother was in Kosovo. They didn't allow him to use the Internet. Imagine this kid not being able to speak with his mother! His father went to Iraq to fight, so he left his kid with some Arabs. He told the Arabs, "Please send my kid to the Albanian group." He got wounded. From the hospital he wouldn't call his son or anything. At some point the hospital was bombarded. We thought he was dead. This boy had no food to eat and no one was taking care of him. Within the [ISIS] law he was supposed to get money, but other Albanian kids were mocking him. So, he came to me one day, "Abu Musab brother, sorry to bother you, I don't have anything." He had ten cents in his pocket while the other kids had 10 Euros.

Lladrovci got upset and complained to the Albanian leaders,

> I got very distant with Muhaxheri, but with Lavdrim, I spoke to him, "He is being mistreated, you have to help him." The answer, "You have to mind your own business." But for me it was very important. I loved that boy and you have to help him somehow. There was one night during bombings around the house of Lavdrim Muhaxheri. He [Muhaxheri] was scared and took his wife and left this kid all alone, knowing they were bombing and aiming at the house. I couldn't tolerate it. The Coalition, I think, was bombing and aiming at his house specifically. Later he recalls that the boy was also beaten, "Ramadani and Astrajevi, beat him very badly." (Lladrovci denied that the child was raped).

Unable to help the boy, Lladrovci started risking his life by taking the boy daily on the back of his motorcycle to an Internet café to talk with his mother. Ultimately, Lladrovci decided to defect with his wife and take the boy back to his mother, probably because he truly cared for and identified with the boy's plight, and quite possibly because he also saw it as an insurance policy to avoid a prison sentence upon his return to Kosovo.

Again, Lladrovci spoke cavalierly about the details of his escape, saying he paid smugglers $3000 to get the three of them out of Syria—the money he freely admitted to stealing from homes ISIS cadres pillaged. Nowhere in his interview did Lladrovci express concern for the homes that were taken from Shia to house ISIS cadres, nor for looting homes, the genocidal killings and enslavement of

Sunnis, Shia, and Yazidis, rapes of Yazidi women, or ISIS beheadings. Nevertheless, he did feel bad for ISIS widows who were not paid their widow's pensions and were forced to remarry in order to survive, and for the boy whom ISIS mistreated. Thus, he decided to risk everything and defect from the group.

To an experienced psychotherapist speaking with Lladrovci (Speckhard), his personality in regard to his time in ISIS appears naïve, undeveloped, and somewhat psychopathic. Expressing no regret for serious war crimes, combined with total surprise that he was imprisoned upon his return from ISIS to Kosovo, Lladrovci stated, "The court gave me the letter that when I came here [to Kosovo], I'll be free." Yet the Kosovo courts did not honor the arrangement that Lladrovci claims to have negotiated. He was initially sentenced to five years for "participating with terrorist organization and for illegal possession of weapons," but his sentence was later reduced to three and a half years. Lladrovci was serving his time in prison at the time we interviewed him.

"I'm threatened inside the prison," Lladrovci complained. "There are people who are praying all the night to kill people in Kosovo. They are on first barrier [in the prison]. They are going to kill me for sure." As a defector, Lladrovci knew that other ISIS inmates would like to kill him, but he did not blame ISIS at all for that—he blamed Kosovo.

Suffering alone in prison, he also got very angry at the state for not keeping the bargain he claimed they had made for rescuing the boy. Lladrovci began returning in his mind to freedom all the while idealizing his time in ISIS and their so-called "Caliphate" where he again believed justice would be served, "The things that the IS has done, I'm willing to forgive them for everything. Compared to what they have done in Kosovo [to me]. It is way worse, I will never forgive them," Lladrovci complained from prison.

Lladrovci acknowledged that he had indeed defected from ISIS and would have been killed had he been caught, but now in prison he was again enamored with ISIS, "[y]es it was a time when I decided ad-Dawlah [the Islamic State] was not for me. But when I came here to this *kufr* [unbelieving] state and institutions, they made me think I am for ad-Dawlah." Discussing how hard prison can be, Lladrovci rationalized,

> I was trying to help my country. Being alone in the jail for sixteen hours by myself [he is in solitary for his own protection] everyday, of course I'm going to think to kill. I never used to hate persons like you—civilians. Now I'm hating institutions, courts, because these are the people who put me in this position. They are the reason. They put me in the problems with ISIS. They are the reason why I was arrested and I'm leaving my family. The way I'm standing in the jail. The "Caliphate" is quite better than where I am treated by Albanians.

Lladrovci never admitted that in this victim stance he takes no responsibility for his own actions and simply blames others.

Lladrovci's case also argues for in-prison rehabilitation treatment for those in Europe who will not be serving long sentences, as he becomes more violently committed to ISIS each passing day in prison, "[w]hen I stay in my cell, I don't want to watch Turkish TV. I read Koran and reflect. There is no doubt that life in the Caliphate was better."

When confronted with the fact that he is comparing apples and oranges—freedom to imprisonment, and is being contradictory, given that when a male ISIS defector is caught he is beheaded—Lladrovci stated, "Be honest, death is easier. When you die, you go to hell or heaven. To be alive and mistreated it really hurts. I'm losing the hope; I can't stand myself like this."

Over years of interviewing terrorists, we have often heard them say that prison is psychologically untenable and that they would rather take a suicide mission than return to a prison cell. Indeed, Chechen suicide bombers were over-represented by those who had fugitive status within Russia. They would rather take a "martyrdom" mission than risk arrest, torture, and prison. Some Palestinians also said they would rather die fighting than return to prison.[14] Belgians involved in the 2016 airport attacks also said they wanted to avoid arrest and prison and preferred "martyrdom." This is a chilling thought: if the person emerging from prison is not fully disengaged from the terror group, he or she may be more than willing to be sent on a suicide mission rather than get re-arrested. This is something Western nations will have to think over when they begin to imprison ISIS returnees. Holding the returnees in cages and not offering useful rehabilitation, including not helping them to admit what they are indeed responsible for, may keep society safe while they are locked up, but may make even more of a monster out of those already strongly indoctrinated by ISIS—and increase societal danger upon their release.

After being totally disillusioned by his imprisonment, Lladrovci explained that he flipped from being an ISIS defector to a full supporter and encouraged others to go to ISIS, "[a]fter I came back from Syria and Iraq, two persons came and I said, 'Don't go there,' and I made them promise not to. But since I'm arrested, I'm going to say go there."

He also idealized depending on God for everything, despite ISIS currently losing in Syria and Iraq, "Yes things have gotten worse. They've lost territory, weapons, and money. They don't have good military tactics. They are not doing very well, but the point is, we only depend on Allah's will and that is what is important."

Having learned to view the world through the lens of Islamic State and the claim that they alone are representing Islam correctly, Lladrovci also fails to distinguish terrorist acts against innocent civilians from collateral damage during acts of war. When asked about the airport, restaurant, and nightclub terror attacks carried out by ISIS cadres in Brussels and Paris he answered,

> Alhamdulillah [praise be to God], they [the Coalition] are bombing in Syria and Iraq! Restaurants! They bomb children all the time in Syria and they complain after… That's why they [ISIS] bombed in the [Brussels] airport. It's almost the same. They have tortured in Syria, now they have the same in their cities." He added, "I am not like the Islamic Community of Kosovo to put a candle and say I'm crying for them."

Having been taught well by ISIS, he also now judges people's worth by asking, "But do they follow *shariah*?" Lladrovci, consumed with issues of social justice, also asked important questions about controversial interrogation practices, like, "Do you know what Americans did to the Muslims in the jails, especially jails in the Middle East?"

When calmed a bit, Lladrovci stated, "If you love justice you should work both sides, not leave only one," and admits, "I know it's not good to do terror in Europe or Kosovo." However, the difficulty of being in solitary confinement in prison continues to eat at his soul. He admitted, "But then you have the pressure like this, put in jail, and you are dirty in everywhere—then of course you will be a terrorist."

His case profoundly illustrates the challenges faced by Western governments that are unwilling to lock individuals like him up for a lifetime—shifting views and the idealizing of ISIS that may occur when faced with the challenges of prison as well as simply the return to "normal" life. (Fitim Lladrovci, age twenty-five, interviewed in June 2016, Kosovo)

Policy Implications

This original, field-based research reflects our sixty-three interviewed ISIS cadres worldwide. Out of sixty-three interviewed, we found nine of them to have either reversed their defection or returned to the battlefield or continued their ideological commitment to ISIS. In this paper, we examined all nine cases using a psychosocial, case study methodology. While we cannot know the entire sample of ISIS returnees, nor what percentage is likely to reverse or continue their loyalty to ISIS, we believe that our sample gives the reader important insights into the factors that lead to discontinuing their loyalties toward the terrorist group, and then later in some cases reversing that position. This field-based research helps to

develop an understanding of factors that may play into terrorists' recidivism, particularly in the case of returning ISIS foreign fighters.

These nine examples raise issues of enduring ideological indoctrination to groups like ISIS, strong ties with ISIS that persist even upon return from the battlefield, and the glum depression of having returned from the excitement of ISIS to a life of frustrated boredom, seeming insignificance, and economic challenges. Given that those who lived under ISIS are often initially attracted to join due to childhood traumas, current challenges and deprivations, possible psychopathic traits as well as failures in relationships and life. All problems they initially believed the terrorist group could ameliorate or at the minimum distract them from—we can expect that they also return to the same issues that have not disappeared during their stint with the terrorist group. As a result, returnees, even those who claim to have de-radicalized or disengaged from the terrorist group, may continue to be vulnerable to further involvement in terrorism. For that reason, qualified mental health workers, and possibly religious leaders (e.g. qualified imams in the case of ISIS, al-Qaeda, and al-Shabaab, for instance), should carefully assess all returnees, and those suspected of having traveled to terrorist groups. Moreover, those who have these psychosocial vulnerabilities should receive supportive therapy to ensure they do not involve themselves in terrorism again.

We must also keep in mind that many who traveled to join ISIS will return even further handicapped by additional traumas experienced in ISIS that may manifest as symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This requires careful assessment and treatment. One Albanian interviewed in Kosovo who had spent time fighting in Syria stated that he greatly benefited from a French treatment program that helped him come to terms with the atrocities in which he had taken part. Feelings of guilt, fear, shame, nightmares, flashbacks, bodily arousal, and avoidance are all symptoms of post-traumatic stress that may occur from having been involved in ISIS. Those who were involved during their development also need supportive therapy to help them recover from shattered world assumptions (i.e. the world is predictable, safe, human beings are caring, etc.) and from loss of childhood dreams and innocence. ISIS turned Umm Rasheed, for instance, who wanted to be a doctor as a teen girl and put considerable effort into her dream, into a sadistic torturer: a group that provided her security when she had lost everything as a young woman. She will need supportive therapy to overcome her identification with a brutal group and to overcome her feelings of shame once she begins to admit that what she participated in was morally wrong.

Prison, or the threat of it, also appears to be a major stressor driving some back into the arms of ISIS. In all societies, there is tension between repressive measures against those involved in terrorism and rehabilitative measures that may

put society at increased risk. Policy makers need to assess the risk of jailing radicalized individuals without treatment—that is, whether they will seed their terrorist ideas throughout the prison. Likewise, short prison sentences risk returning would-be terrorists back into society, but long ones may make choosing death as a terrorist seem like a good choice.

The direct effects of imprisonment on cognitive changes or cognitive aspects of radicalization are poorly understood,[15] yet it is well known that prisons often represent potentially fertile recruiting grounds for those representing groups like ISIS.[16] The stressors of being in prison are many, and it is often necessary to join a group to gain protection and camaraderie, and feelings of resentment for the government can easily be exploited in prison. However, the prison environment also may provide a venue and opportunity for those disengaged from groups like ISIS to receive treatment and interact with others who could have a positive effect if they are placed in a controlled environment where they may have access to more progressive or liberal religious literature[17] as well as contacts and treatments that could challenge their existing radical worldviews.[18] Such programs need to be individualized, highly specialized, and carried out by highly skilled professionals. They must also include prisoner dispersion[19] to isolate those who are vulnerable from terrorist recruiters and leaders to minimize group control over prisoners in isolated conditions and the immediate undoing of any prison treatment program that could potentially encourage prisoners to rethink their support for terrorism and, most importantly, ensure their reintegration into society once out of prison. Whether imprisoned upon their return, or free, it appears ISIS returnees and defectors harbor many vulnerabilities for return to the group, to recruit for it, and to offer it support, and they would benefit from well-thought-out treatment plans that effectively address both their original reasons for joining and the challenges they face upon return.

Given that most of the defectors we spoke to were truly repulsed by ISIS and harbored no positive feelings for the group at the time of our interviews (n=43), we must also stress that most of those who we spoke to did not remain aligned to ISIS, nor appear easily vulnerable to return. This does not mean, however, that they never will flip. Likewise, while Syrian ISIS cadres with whom we spoke cited Westerners as the "true believers," not all were. A European woman who returned pregnant via an extremely perilous escape after her ISIS husband was killed, for instance, never really endorsed the group, and only followed her husband to Syria to remain married. She had no illusions about ISIS after having been pressured to leave her baby behind in order to leave with their blessings. Many of the Albanians who went to Syria early in the conflicts also said they went for humanitarian reasons to help in the uprising against Assad, but quickly returned upon seeing

the factions turning upon each other. They also held no interest in the ISIS "Caliphate," either while in Syria or upon their return.

All of these cases demonstrate that it will be important for governments, when dealing with ISIS returnees, to look carefully into the motivations and vulnerabilities of each individual for having traveled to Syria and Iraq and for having fallen into the ranks of ISIS. Those who appear as truly defected must be given a chance to prove themselves through the justice systems of their countries while being monitored by their governments to ensure that they do not continue to have ties with ISIS, intentions of going back, or intentions to carry out attacks in the name of ISIS in their countries. Such policies will be important as governments consider the impact on those who have been deceived into joining terrorist organizations in Iraq and Syria and now have second thoughts. This is especially crucial considering that not all who have joined ISIS were religious or ideological fanatics. As evidenced in our research, some joined for what they believed to be humanitarian reasons and quickly backed away from ISIS when they saw its extreme brutality.

During the course of our interviews with government officials and religious and civil society figures, some stressed the importance of introducing amnesty in the case of those who wish to return but have not committed crimes. The issue of granting amnesty remains contentious and open to debate and it is very difficult to distinguish between those who committed crimes and who have not. Already one ISIS defector imprisoned in Germany who claims not to have killed anyone while he was denounced by ISIS themselves as a killer.[20] However, providing adequate legal tools and venues for the returnees to prove their innocence is necessary to fight the narratives of alienation and victimization that groups like ISIS seek to exploit. That said, new policy initiatives must strike a delicate balance between ensuring security, including imprisoning those who might threaten society, while encouraging full rehabilitation of those who really have defected.

On the government side, it is difficult to prove which groups a returnee was in and produce evidence strong enough for courts to indict them on terrorism charges. Yet, it is important to remember what ISIS cadres told us about their one to three-week long *shariah* indoctrination classes (occurring after the ISIS Caliphate was created as a "State" of sorts)—that these classes ended with sworn *bayats* and demonstrations of loyalty being carried out by each cadre beheading an ISIS prisoner. If true for returnees who joined ISIS once it was a "State," they have committed war crimes and truly have blood on their hands, and psychologically have crossed a barrier from which it may be hard to return.

Conclusion

Arguably, the group's battlefield losses due to aerial bombardments and ground combat, alongside the recent introduction of laws that criminalize material support and travel to combat zones with the purpose of joining terrorist organizations in Iraq and Syria, will continue to slow, if not completely halt, the flow of foreign fighters to Syria and Iraq. Equally important, the group's aura and appeal are likely to continue to dwindle in light of accounts and narratives that depict the extreme violence and brutality of life under the "Islamic State" and ISIS-controlled territories, as is also evidenced in our recent research in Syria, Europe, and the Balkans. Some, however, will continue to fall prey to the group's slick recruitment strategy, the promise of a "righteous" Islamic life, and the allure of successes that resulted in the creation of the "Islamic State." However, as foreign fighters begin to stream home, a whole new set of challenges will begin. Now is the time to start planning how best to respond.

Notes

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7. See also Maria Abi-Habib, "Islamic State Members from the West Seek Help Getting Home," *the Wall Street Journal*, 6 June 2016, http://www.wsj.com/articles/islamic-state-members-from-the-west-seek-help-getting-home-1465244878.

8. Note that 45 out of 63 we interviewed defected from ISIS. The remaining 18 (captured by the Iraqi government forces) are not included in the category of "defected." Although three individuals in Kosovo at the time of the interview were serving prison sentences for having joined ISIS, they are considered defectors in this paper as they all had fled ISIS and were only arrested upon their return.

9. Anne Speckhard, *Talking to Terrorists: Understanding the Psycho-Social Motivations of Militant Jihadi Terrorists, Mass Hostage Takers, Suicide Bombers & Martyrs* (McLean, VA: Advances Press, 2012).

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11. Speckhard and Yayla, *ISIS Defectors*, 332.

12. Anne Speckhard and Ardian Shajkovci, "Balkan Jihad: Recruitment into Violent Extremism and Issues of Returning Foreign Fighters in Kosovo and Southern Serbia," Manuscript submitted for publication.

13. We have used pseudonyms for most interviewees except those whose cases are public—they have spoken openly to the press or their cases have been discussed extensively in the press.

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Contentious Borders in the Middle East and North Africa

Context and Concepts

R̴affaella A. Del Sarto, PhD[*]

Following the upheavals in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) that began in 2010–2011, a major transformation of the regional state system in place since the end of the First World War seemed likely. While pundits were perhaps too quick to predict the collapse of the regional order in the Middle East, the regional state system is undoubtedly under pressure. The aftermath of the Arab uprisings, which developed into civil wars in Libya, Syria and Yemen, affected many territorial borders in the region. The territorial integrity of states has come under challenge from armed actors, with the potential to lead to their disintegration, and trafficking activities along regional borders have noticeably increased. Three cases stand out in particular: Libya's porous borders and the collapse of central authority after the fall of Gaddafi; the precarious security situation in Egypt, particularly in the Sinai; and the civil war in Syria, together with the advance of the self-declared Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), or Daesh. Concurrently, we are witnessing the emergence of distinct political entities or quasi-states, with three very different examples in the form of ISIS, Iraqi Kurdistan and the Rojava–Northern Syria Democratic Federal System established by the Kurds in March 2016.

While borders in much of the MENA region were never hermetically sealed, the changing nature of borders and of their management in recent years is significant at three different levels. First, at the level of international politics, current developments affect the capacity of states to exert sovereignty over their territory. This may potentially lead to a redrawing of borders in the region, entailing a profound transformation of the regional and international order. Second, at the

*Associate Professor of Middle East Studies at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies in Europe (SAIS Europe); Part-time Professor at the Robert Schuman Centre of the European University Institute. PhD, international relations, Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

domestic level, the altered nature of borders and their management has impacts on the arrangements between the state and specific local or societal groups. For instance, specific actors have been empowered by their growing role in border management, with power shifts 'at the borders' potentially affecting domestic politics. Finally, at the regional level, developments in one state can easily affect events in another, as borders are, or have become, increasingly porous. The circulation of weapons and of armed militants is the best example here. Thus, while we are currently witnessing a significant reconfiguration of power at the regional and domestic levels, the region has remained fragmented but it has also become increasingly interconnected.

A comprehensive and theory-informed exploration of the impact of the current political transition process in the MENA region on the nature and function of borders, with a particular focus on the issues of sovereignty and territoriality, is thus long overdue. Similarly, it is imperative to analyze the implications of these developments at the domestic, regional and international levels, while paying attention to the multiple interdependencies between the three levels of analysis. This is particularly relevant as holistic approaches are generally lacking in the literature. This article aims to put the problem of contentious borders in a historical context, while also raising a number of conceptual issues.

The article sets out to analyze the currently contentious nature of many borders in the MENA region by considering the often conflicting configurations of state authority, legitimacy and territoriality over time, with the 'Arab Spring' uprisings marking the most recent of a series of critical junctures. Through this conceptual lens, the article provides a historical overview of key political developments and historical moments that have affected the configuration of these three elements from the formation of the modern state system in the Middle East up to the present. I will consider developments at the international, regional and domestic levels, with attention to the links between them. On the basis of this discussion, and considering both the current changes affecting borders in the MENA region and the high levels of fluidity attending scholarly debates, I will then address the question of whether prevailing conceptualizations of the state and its borders are adequate in arriving at a real understanding of past and present developments in the region.

Concepts and historical context

It has become fashionable to link the current upheaval in the MENA region to the specific conditions under which the state system in the Middle East was created—not least because of the stated obsession of ISIS with erasing the current

borders in the Middle East as allegedly established in the Sykes–Picot agreement of 1916.[1] Of course, when discussing the current challenges to borders, sovereignty and statehood in the Middle East, history matters. However, which historical and political processes are relevant, and how do we conceptualize the challenges to sovereignty and statehood? A number of observations are in order here.

First, the contestation of political authority and territoriality in the region is the result of very complex historical and political processes. Significantly, these processes generally also reflect the contentious legitimacy of the state and of political rule, a crucial feature of Middle Eastern politics up to the present.[2] As discussed further below, the European colonial powers exported the Westphalian concept of the state to the region—although the concept itself was probably never as fully formed as imagined by subsequent scholarship. According to this model, borders were meant to define the authority of the state, its territory, and the population living within it, conceived of as a bounded political community. From the outset, however, and depending on where the borders were drawn and who was put in power within them, the legitimacy of many states and their borders remained contested. After independence, the regimes engaged in the processes of state- and nation-building within the parameters of the Westphalian state and according to a largely imported conception of politics. The tension between the Westphalian state model and the promotion of transnational identities, such as pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism in the case of Arab states, or the idea that the state was to represent world Jewry in the case of Israel, was never resolved. Regional and external actors would exploit these tensions to advance their own political aims and interests. Likewise, the idea of the modern nation-state did not accommodate the existence of what would become important, often transnational, minorities in the region;[3] nor was it compatible with ethnic, religious and tribal identities that continued to prevail in many of these states. Considering the ease with which difference along ethnic or religious lines can be exploited by specific actors for their own political ends (an observation applying to any part of the world), this set of mismatches was to haunt Middle Eastern states throughout the succeeding decades.

Second, the nature and origin of the various challenges to borders and statehood in the region are widely disparate. Some have their origins in the process of state- and nation-building. Others are the result of specific domestic policy choices over time. Still others can be associated with features of regional politics and developments, policies of external actors and/or global processes. The different factors and developments originating at the domestic, regional and international levels tend to intersect and interlink, often with region-wide implications.

Third, the question of state autonomy in the MENA region is relevant. There are of course very different conceptualizations of the state and its formation,[4] but the Westphalian state model undoubtedly continues to underpin both international law and the practice of international politics. Similarly, Theda Skocpol's famous definition of the state as "a set of administrative, policing, and military organizations headed, and more or less well coordinated by, an executive authority" has remained influential.[5] Considering that the Westphalian state model never fully corresponded to reality—not even in Europe, where it originated—its conceptual strength for analyzing past and current developments in the Middle East remains questionable.[6] Similarly, Skocpol's conception of the state, while useful, does not leave any room for differentiating between the diverse functions of the state. Nor does it address potentially different configurations of state–society relations, the territorial scope of state authority or the crucial question of legitimacy.

Specifically regarding the Arab Middle East, it has been argued that Arab states have been wrongly categorized as 'strong states,' as this 'strength' did not move beyond coercion and a corporatist social and economic model.[7] Arab states remained weak in terms of institutions and the capacity for both wealth extraction from and the inclusion of their societies, or large parts of them. There has also been a tendency to see the state as a static, coherent and autonomous actor, a misleading conception that informed state-building policies in post-Saddam Iraq.[8] At the same time, state borders are far more complex constructs than any simple line on a map would imply. An analysis of the Syrian–Iraqi border, for instance, shows it to be characterized by an ever-evolving tension between resilience and degeneration. While it has lost certain key functions, the border still continues to define the rules of the game at the local, national and international levels, with the Iraqi and Syrian states still playing important roles.[9] Hence, a strong focus on the presence of the state does not capture the interconnectedness of the region, the porousness and fluidity of borders, the overlapping and intersection of different kinds of borders, and the existence of those areas in between state borders that have been conceptualized as 'borderlands.'[10]

Finally, and related to the previous point, sovereignty—a fundamental concept as well as a founding practice of contemporary international relations—has remained an extremely ambiguous notion. There is an impressive range of perspectives on sovereignty in the literature, which cannot all be cited here; suffice it to say that the notion comprises related but distinct aspects, such as the international legal sovereignty of states and domestic sovereignty.[11] At present, the international sovereignty of MENA states is, arguably, far less an issue of contestation: in spite of the turmoil in Libya, Syria and Iraq, the international community still recognizes the international sovereignty of all states in the region. In fact, the

Middle Eastern state system with its colonial borders has remained surprisingly resilient.[12] Domestic sovereignty, however, is far more problematic. Involving the effectiveness, legitimacy and territorial scope of state authority, this notion directly touches upon the configuration of state authority, borders and territoriality, and legitimacy.

Thus, a state-centric perspective may be helpful for a discussion of the international sovereignty of states and the international order in the MENA region. However, such an approach is not suited to capture the contestation of state authority, the fragile or compromised territorial integrity of states or their legitimacy deficit. Equally, it cannot account for the changing functions of borders and their management, which in turn may affect the domestic sovereignty and territorial integrity of states. Nor is a state-centric perspective useful in assessing the interplay of domestic, regional and international developments in this context.

This article thus proposes to discuss the current pressures exerted on borders in the MENA region by considering the relationship between state authority, territoriality and regime legitimacy over time. Conceptually, the article borrows from Saskia Sassen's seminal analysis of the history of nation-building and globalization.[13] While, for obvious reasons, the historical and geographical scope of this article is far less ambitious, the discussion will be attentive to the intersection of domestic, regional and international dynamics. Such an approach, it is argued, is extremely helpful in seeking to understand the origin and implications of many of the pressures currently bearing on the borders in the Middle East and North Africa.

States, borders and legitimacy in the creation of the modern Middle East

Profound disjuncture's between state authority, legitimacy and territoriality lie at the heart of the state-formation process in the Middle East. As the European colonial powers drew many of the borders of the modern states in the Middle East after the end of Ottoman rule in the region, European colonial interests and aspirations largely created a new regional order in the Middle East.

Certainly, many Arab countries, not to mention Iran or Turkey, had a history as distinct political and social units. For instance, the 'imam–chief type' system of Morocco, Yemen and Oman dates back to a period between the seventh and ninth centuries CE; Lebanon and Syria have been cultural and political centres since the Middle Ages; the political roots of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait go back to the seventeenth century; and Egypt, Algeria and Tunisia emerged as 'bureaucratic–military oligarchies' in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[14] In the fourteenth cen-

tury Ibn Khaldun, in his work *Muqqadimah*, described feelings of belonging and group solidarity (*'asabiyah*) based on blood ties and geography, and non-sectarian nationalism certainly has a longer tradition than is commonly assumed, for example in Iraq.[15] Ilya Harik thus emphasizes that many countries in the Middle East are not only old societies but also 'old states.'[16] However, the responsibility for creating the 'modern nation-state' with defined borders, such as Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Israel and the smaller Gulf monarchies, lies with the European colonial powers. In the Maghreb, where rule had been based on 'tribal' allegiances, the French and Spanish colonial powers imposed borders where there had been none, "regardless of any historical local pre-existing factors and without any consultation with the local populations."[17]

As a result of these processes of external imposition, and given the incapacity of many states to manage their disagreements, the territorial scope of state authority remained contested. Border disputes continue to characterize the region, almost every MENA state having a border demarcation problem with its neighbor(s). To give just a few examples: Algeria and Morocco fought a border war in 1963, and the Western Sahara problem remains unresolved today; the Iran–Iraq War from 1980 to 1988 involved the question of control over the Shatt-al-'Arab waterway; Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 was motivated by, *inter alia*, a border dispute (the Iraqi regime under Saddam Hussein considered Kuwait an integral part of Iraq); Lebanon and Syria have a contested border; and borders are of course also a prominent factor in the Arab–Israeli conflict. In some rather rare cases, the redrawing of state borders resulted from peaceful negotiations, as for instance between Jordan and Saudi Arabia in 1956, between Jordan and Iraq in 1982, and in the Arabian Peninsula in the 1980s and 1990s.[18]

Of course, all borders are artificial in one way or another, and the Middle East is no exception to this.[19] Thinking specifically of geography, few of the borders in the Middle East and North Africa follow geographical features, such as rivers, mountains or deserts.[20] Conversely, many state borders were defined according to the old administrative boundaries of the Ottoman empire, which delimited different districts, sub-districts and provinces. Straight lines, particularly those cutting through deserts, are fairly frequent, reflecting British and French colonial officers' use of the ruler when defining the borders of new states.[21] In the Mashreq and in the Gulf, oil also played a prominent role in the colonial delineation of borders.[22]

Colonial policies towards different ethnic and religious groups contributed considerably to the friction between the legitimacy of state authority and its territorial control. While Middle Eastern borders did not usually delineate ethnic or religious communities, the colonial powers often manipulated ethnic and religious

divisions for their own interests, following the old Roman strategy of 'divide and rule.' France created Lebanon, in which the Christian Maronites would become a majority—albeit a thin one—and sought to establish two distinct legal systems for Arabs and Berbers respectively in Morocco. Britain, on the other hand, consented to the creation of a Jewish 'national home' in Palestine. Yet, in general, colonial policies resulted in the creation of multi-ethnic and/or multi-confessional entities within the newly established borders. Moreover, particularly in the Arab Middle East, the colonial powers assigned authority to specific clans or tribes, which were not always local, reflecting their ignorance of local realities, strategic calculations, and a general sense of superiority.[23] In some cases, the new ruling elites hailed from what would become ethnic or religious minorities within the newly composed citizenry, while some groups, such as the Kurds, the Palestinians and the Armenians, failed to obtain a state or were prevented from doing so. The problem of weak popular legitimacy of regimes in the Arab Middle East, which has remained a significant factor in explaining the contentious nature of borders in the region, is thus also deeply embedded in, and owes its origins to, colonial state-formation practices.

As the European colonial powers controlled the governance of, and admittance to, the international system, the Middle East would remain under their control.[24] Altogether, the new regional order was contested from the outset: a revolt against the British in Iraq took place in 1920; there were anti-British and anti-Zionist disturbances in Palestine from the 1920s on; and anti-French uprisings took place in Syria in 1925–1927. In Egypt, although it was nominally only a British protectorate, there were widespread revolts in 1919, after Britain initially wanted to prevent the Egyptian *wafd* (delegation) from attending the peace conference in Versailles to present its claims for independence—which it eventually did, but without success. There was also resistance against European attempts to create zones of influence in Anatolia in 1922, with the resistance movement rallying behind General Mustafa Kemal, or Atatürk. Thus, between the early twentieth century and 1956, "the basic framework for Middle Eastern political life was firmly laid—together with many of its still unresolved problems involving disputed boundaries, ethnic and religious tensions and the existence of national minorities."[25]

Subsequent developments in the process of state formation in the Middle East were no less significant—although within colonial history, the Middle East is by no means an exception. Indeed, the emergence of the state system in the Middle East in the interwar years, and the role played by the colonial powers in this process, are comparable to the experience of large parts of Africa and Asia.[26] Thus, within the new boundaries, state formation took place under strict imperial control, with the colonial powers aiming to expand the monopoly of force to the

territory of the state. In addition to a massive investment in the police and security forces, usually at the expense of education, health and other social services, central administrations were established. The new borders, often challenged by nomads, became the subject of tight policing. As elsewhere, the states in the Middle East were generally subjected to colonial economic policies, entailing that the economy was geared towards the benefit of the nationals of the colonial powers, including European settlers, who forged alliances with the large landowners and sheikhs who controlled the rural areas.[27] The distortion of political and economic processes, at the expense of simple peasants and other population groups, was thus partly the result of the colonial powers' reliance on specific segments of society to exert control over the territory under their formal rule.

The colonial practices of state formation also included attempts to create a territorially defined nationality, usually based on a population census. However, reflecting the practice of the Ottoman *millet*, specific ethnic or religious groups were given the right to manage their own affairs; and in some states (Lebanon being the best example), privileges were allocated on the basis of ethnic or religious communities. Once more, the old principle of divide and rule defined the management of religious and/or ethnic differences in the colonial state. Yet sectarian politics not only contradicted the idea of the modern nation-state but also undermined the legitimacy of political rule from the outset.

The process of transferring political power after independence varied across the region, creating instability and a series of military coups. In all cases, however, the new rulers faced the challenge of how to reduce the tension between state authority and territoriality that they had inherited from the former colonial rulers. Perhaps an even greater challenge was to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the new citizens. The struggle for independence usually placed the nation-state at the centre, creating vested interests on a *territorial* basis. Thus, the leaders of an independent and territorially defined nation-state promoted the idea of a national identity that was based on the Westphalian model and its inherent trinity of state territory, state authority and people. The new national loyalties, however, continued to co-exist in an uneasy way with tribal, ethnic or religious identifications, as in the decolonization process in other parts of the world. As almost all states in the Middle East developed into autocratic regimes or dictatorships, often of a secular type, religious or ethnic groups that had now become national minorities often remained disfranchised.

Simultaneously, however, the idea of a greater Arab nation that transcended colonial borders remained influential.[28] This feature distinguished the anti-colonial struggle in this area from the experience of many Asian and African states. As Arab regimes started engaging in the discourse of pan-Arab unity, tension with

the territorially defined national identity emerged, with pan-Arabism also affecting the relationship between the legitimacy of political rule and the Arab states' territorial scope. In the name of pan-Arabism, the 1950s and 1960s also witnessed frequent interferences in the domestic affairs of fellow Arab states, together with growing tensions and competition for regional hegemony within the Arab state system.[29] As Etel Solingen notes, pan-Arabism thus camouflaged the fragility of the state while feeding assaults on the sovereignty of neighboring Arab states.[30]

In their quest for legitimacy, the new regimes often used or manipulated religion. The strategic use of religion certainly applies to the monarchies of Morocco and Jordan, where the kings regularly invoke their *sharifian* lineage to legitimize their political authority.[31] But even Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser, the champion of secular pan-Arabism, used *fatwas* (religious rulings) to justify major policy decisions;[32] he also chose to address the Egyptian people during the 1956 Suez War from the pulpit of the Al-Azhar mosque. In addition to persisting ethnic and religious divisions and the frictions generated by pan-Arabism, the new regimes faced widespread poverty and illiteracy among their citizens, together with various developmental needs. They generally responded to these challenges by extending the powers of the state bureaucracy and the military.[33] These measures would generally ensure the deference of the population, but they would not necessarily enhance the popular legitimacy of the regimes, from which derives much of the pressure exerted on the state and its boundaries in the Middle East that we see at today. While colonialism laid the foundations of the contentious nature of statehood and sovereignty, specific domestic practices of state- and nation-building after independence, together with regional and international policies and developments, would increase the pressures exerted on MENA borders even further.

Authority, legitimacy and territoriality after independence

The politicization of religion and religious sectarianism

The rise of political Islam and the growing politicization of religious sectarianism have been, and continue to be, major factors affecting the relationship between authority, legitimacy and territoriality in the Middle East. Postulating religious identifications as the only valid organizing principle of politics, political Islam and religious sectarianism have emerged as extremely powerful challengers to the legitimacy of political rule. The rise of Islamism and sectarianism is a result of a range of domestic, regional and international dynamics, with individual

agency being crucial in the process of manipulating religious identities for political ends.

The idea that the religious community, the *umma*, should be the basis of socio-political life goes back to Islamic modernism, the movement that emerged under the leadership of the highly influential scholar Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani and his follower Mohammed 'Abduh in the second half of the nineteenth century. Islamic modernism was a defensive reaction to European colonialism, but it also sought to modernize Islamic faith and to reconcile it with western values, such as nationalism, rationality and progress. The early Islamist movements, such as Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, adopted these ideas, thus opposing non-religious rule and, theoretically, the very concept of the modern nation-state.

Religious and sectarian tensions have always existed in the MENA region, with the 15 years of civil war in Lebanon between 1975 and 1990 being an extreme example here. Specifically the schism between Sunni and Shi'a Islam, going back to the seventh century, has a very long history. However, this division became politically relevant mainly during the Safavid dynasty's rule over the Iranian empire between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, leading subsequently to the establishment of different zones of influence between Sunni and Shi'a Islam. Many ethnicities in the region, such as the Kurds, had and have Sunni and Shi'a' branches whose ethnic identity existed, and continues to exist, in parallel to a sectarian identity. It should also be noted that sectarian clashes in medieval times were very different from those in the age of the nation-state, when belonging was radically redefined.[34]

Political Islam, in its different forms, and religious sectarianism had thus been present in MENA societies for a long time, but were formerly far less significant in the political marketplace. This would change in the aftermath of the Arab defeat in the 1967 war with Israel, which dealt the final blow to pan-Arabism as a political practice.[35] Two additional factors would contribute to the strengthening of political Islam. First, Islamism filled a void left by the violent suppression of left-wing secular political opposition throughout the Middle East, in which western powers had often acquiesced in the Cold War context. Second, the strengthening of Islamist movements, which often succeeded in presenting themselves as the only non-corrupt opposition and which frequently provided social and educational services where the state had failed, was often the result of a process of being co-opted or being granted greater room for maneuver by the respective regimes. This occurred often for domestic political reasons linked to the quest for legitimacy, as exemplified by the case of Egypt under Sadat.

As for religious sectarianism more specifically, in the context of the nation-state the Sunni–Shi'a divide obtained a growing political importance once politi-

cal leaders decided to invoke it, usually for their own political ends. Sectarianism thus served as a powerful tool used by aspiring rulers to legitimize their quest for power, while defying the legitimacy of incumbent regimes. It is no coincidence that the 1970s witnessed the substitution of the traditional Shi'a leadership by a new generation of *politicized* religious leaders. This resulted in a reassertion of Shi'a identity in all Middle Eastern states in which the Shi'as were a marginalized minority, that is, all states except for Iran and Iraq. Following the 1979 revolution, the Islamic Republic of Iran would further instrumentalize the Sunni–Shi'a divide in its attempts to increase the regime's legitimacy both domestically and regionally. As Olivier Roy observes, this divide had been more or less contained by the early 1990s, particularly after Iran's defeat in the eight-year-long war against Iraq.[36] However, while the Iranian Revolution undoubtedly triggered the revival of political Islam in general, the rise of religious identifications must also be put into the context of a general religious revival and the strengthening of ethno-religious movements across the region since the late 1970s, including in Israel.[37]

The continuous rise of (partly radical) Islamist preferences in the region may also be linked to the as yet unresolved Israeli–Palestinian and wider Arab–Israeli conflicts, which provide a perfect breeding ground. Concurrently, the Arab/Palestinian–Israeli conflict is increasingly framed in ethno-religious terms. Indeed, the claim that the Arab–Israeli and Israeli–Palestinian conflicts do not involve land and borders, but rather pit 'the Jews' against 'the Arab/Muslim world' in existential terms, has become prominent in the region, including in Israel. However, this is just another example of the instrumentalization of religion in the context of a conflict that revolves around borders, territory and statehood. More recently, the political bankruptcy of the Palestinian Authority in the face of continuous Israeli settlement expansion, over two decades after the signing of the Oslo Accords, in the territories Israel occupied in 1967, has further contributed to the rise of Islamist preferences. Together with the problems of corruption and mismanagement that characterize the Palestinian Authority, these factors undoubtedly contributed to the popularity of the Palestinian Hamas. It is worth noting, in this context, that borders in the Israeli–Palestinian context are strongly contested, with Israel's control over the Palestinian territories it occupies comprising a complex and fragmented configuration of different types of borders pertaining to territory, people and rights.[38]

It is also significant that the export of Islamist fundamentalism and sectarianism by different states in the region, together with the funding of jihadist movements, has a long history. This includes Wahhabi Saudi Arabia (which provided funding to Al-Qaeda), together with some Gulf monarchies and Iran. In fact, the information and communications technology revolution and the growing

access to internet and satellite TV did not necessarily have the effect of spreading education and democracy in the Middle East and beyond, as many had hoped. The broadcasting of extremist and illiberal versions of Islamist preaching has increased as well, generally facilitated by public and private funding from the Gulf region.

To what extent do Islamist movements pose a challenge to the configuration of authority, territoriality, and legitimacy in the region? Most Islamist movements, of which the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and its offshoots were traditionally the most important ones, contest the legitimacy and authority of state regimes, particularly of the secularist republics. However, most of these movements do not necessarily challenge the territorial scope of the state in practice. Indeed, while advocating the unity of the transnational Islamic *umma*, most of these movements had been contestants for political power *within* a specific political system delineated by state borders.[39] Smaller fundamentalist groups resorted to violence in seeking to topple the regime, as for example in Egypt in the 1990s and during the Algerian civil war in the same decade. However, their ambitions usually remained focused on the territorially defined state as well.

In contrast to those Islamist movements that do not recognize state borders according to their ideology but accept them in their political practice, Salafi or jihadist movements pursue very different objectives, as discussed by Mohamed-Ali Adraoui.[40] These movements, of which Al-Qaeda and more recently ISIS are the most notable examples, usually try to revise internationally recognized state borders or physically erase them. As is well known, the origins of Al-Qaeda are to be found in the exploitation of religious identities by the West to defeat Marxism and the Soviet presence in Afghanistan in the Cold War context. The attention given to Islamist fundamentalists and terrorist groups that operate beyond state borders increased considerably after 9/11.[41] Concurrently, the 2000s witnessed not only the expansion of the Al-Qaeda network throughout the Maghreb and the Mashreq, but also the franchising of 'global jihad.' Hence, these movements defy both the internal and international facets of sovereignty, together with the regional state system as a whole.

Armies, economics and development

Another factor exerting pressure on the relationship between territoriality and state legitimacy is the fact that the region is well armed and has experienced decades of recurrent conflicts and wars. While domestic coercion usually relies on the army and the security services,[42] disputed borders and the desire to cement authoritarian rule against the backdrop of a generally weak popular legitimacy are the main reasons for the region's high level of militarization. Compared to south

Asia, for instance, between 1997 and 2006 the ratio of military expenditure in the Middle East to GNP was almost four times as high, military expenditure per capita on average three times as high and arms delivery twelve times as high.[43] Since the 1990s the MENA region has been the most heavily militarized in the world, in terms of military expenditures both in total and as a proportion of GDP.[44]

The central role of the army in Middle Eastern states became linked with specific economic policy choices. In the Arab republics, the military obtained important economic privileges, with the result that the military–industrial complex intersected with policies of state-led industrialization based on import substitution. Oil-rich states developed their rentier economies, with the 'Dutch disease'[45] affecting the region at large. While these policies sustained authoritarianism, they were generally "unable to deliver resources and services to constituencies previously mobilized through revolutionary or nationalist fervor" in the Arab republics.[46] Conversely, the oil-rich monarchies could allow themselves literally to buy the population's deference. In both cases, however, the legitimacy of political rule remained weak.

The pampering of dictators by the West, for the sake of stability and its own economic interests (arms sales included),[47] has contrasted with rapidly worsening socio-economic conditions in most MENA states. Over recent decades, economic growth has generally been low and unequal, while populations are growing rapidly, leading to elevated unemployment rates, particularly among the young. High military expenditure in the region, particularly compared to the relatively small budgets for health and education, has further undermined economic development. Concurrently, the neo-liberal restructuring of the authoritarian state has produced ever-widening gaps between rich and poor, weakening the state's legitimacy even further.[48] Particularly in the absence of democratic reforms, the neo-liberal prescriptions for development resulted in the emergence of new economic elites linked to political power, together with growing alienation and discontent in the population at large.

Domestic economic policies have been interlocking with international prescriptions, however, as states have been pressured by the West to adopt the neo-liberal model of development. The policies of the nearby EU, in particular—the largest trading partner of many MENA states—resulted in a further fragmentation within and along state borders. As neo-liberal economic policies increasingly connect the political and economic elites in many Middle Eastern states to the economic elites of the EU and its member states, some regimes were also co-opted into the EU's security policies and the governance of migration control.[49] Against the background of the continuing Syrian civil war and the mass migration of Syrian (and other) refugees to Europe, the EU's attempts to co-opt Turkey

into the prevention of unwanted migration is perhaps the best example.[50] With the Mediterranean MENA increasingly turning into EU borderlands,[51] many borders between Europe and the MENA region have witnessed processes of dis-aggregation, multiplication and, partially, 'outsourcing.' In other words, while governments of MENA states selectively participate in the management of the EU's borderlands, very different types of borders regulate the circulation of different types of goods and different categories of people, with those regulating the flow of goods (and of MENA elites) being increasingly open, and those applying to unwanted migrants being closed. There has also been a proliferation of borders stopping unwanted migrants. While the EU is involved in exporting border management practices to its southern Mediterranean neighbors—conveniently adapted to the regional context, as pointed out by Simone Tholens[52]—many borders between MENA states and their respective hinterlands have become increasingly impermeable and closed. Sovereignty, territorial control and state authority, then, have been undergoing an important reconfiguration in the EU–MENA context.

The role of the US intervention in Iraq

Undoubtedly, the events following 9/11, and particularly the US-led invasion of Iraq, marked a significant turning-point in the recent history of the Middle East. As is well known, the toppling of Saddam Hussein created a power vacuum in the region. In the resulting chaos Iran expanded its role and other regional powers began to intervene. The US attempt to democratize Iraq by introducing sectarian politics, used by the Al-Maliki government at the expense of Sunni Iraqis, contributed to a rise in Shi'a influence and a striking increase in sectarian violence in the area.[53] Concurrently, Iran became more assertive after the defeat of the Taliban in Afghanistan and in particular of the arch-enemy Saddam Hussein of Iraq, while Hezbollah gained power in Lebanon. The US-led intervention in Iraq and its aftermath thus contributed significantly to the growing territorialization and militarization of confrontation between Sunnis and Shi'as in the Middle East, fundamentally disturbing the configuration of authority, territoriality and legitimacy in the region.

However, external intervention also laid the foundations for the emergence of an autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq. The emergence of a Kurdish quasi-state in Iraq followed the imposition of no-fly zones in northern and southern Iraq during and after the 1991 Gulf War and was facilitated by the breakdown of state authority in Iraq after the US-led invasion of 2003. Over time the Kurds have changed their political aspirations, from the idea of a greater pan-Kurdistan to autonomy, and perhaps secession, in northern Iraq, and some sort of confederation in Turkey, Syria and Iran. The recent formation of the Kurdish quasi-state

in northern Iraq is best explained by the inter-linkage of external factors and successful domestic coalition-building, as Johannes Jüde argues.[54] This quasi-state represents yet another challenge—this time from within—to the Iraqi state, its legitimacy and its borders, and to the broader territorial status quo in the region.

The Arab uprisings and their aftermath

The wave of Arab uprisings that swept through the region after 2011 undoubtedly represents the culmination of the Arab regimes' legitimacy deficit. The aftermath of the uprisings also witnessed a combination of (often mutually reinforcing) domestic, regional and international factors, all potentially undermining the authority and the territorial integrity of the states in the MENA region. What had started as peaceful protest movements in most Arab states degenerated in most cases, perhaps with the exception of little Tunisia, into violence. In Syria, the brutal repression of the demonstrations by the Assad regime soon developed into a civil war, entailing a growing erosion of central authority and the regime's loss of territorial control over large swathes of the country. Regional powers and non-state actors (including Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, Turkey, Iran and Hezbollah) started intervening, each funding its own militias, or, as in the case of the Lebanese Hezbollah, taking part in the fighting. Involvement in the civil war by the United States and other western powers, as well as by Russia on the other side, added yet another layer of external power intervention, further complicating a peaceful resolution of the conflict.[55] Libya is struggling to retain a single government, with tribal militias fighting each other, nationalists opposing Islamists, revolutionaries fighting former Gaddafi elites, and regional actors (such as Egypt and the United Arab Emirates) picking their sides. In the Libyan case, central authority and territoriality are currently non-existent, with large domestic groups opposing (and fighting) the internationally recognized government led by Fayyez al-Serraj. Egypt witnessed a period of markedly sectarian and exclusionist politics under the democratically elected government of Mohammed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood, which was subsequently deposed by a military coup. While the military regime under 'Abd-el Fattah al-Sisi is even more repressive than Mubarak's rule ever was, the internal fragmentation has increased, with the now outlawed Muslim Brotherhood and different jihadist groups challenging the state, its legitimacy, and its territorial control in the Sinai.

Altogether, many borders in the Middle East have become more porous, allowing for an easier circulation of migrants and armed fighters, as well as of trafficked goods. The circulation of arms, deriving from the weapons depots of deposed dictators or imported from abroad, has increased throughout the region, with Libya looming particularly large. The case of the Egyptian–Libyan border,

discussed by Thomas Hüsken, shows that even before the uprisings, central authority never fully reached the borderlands, with specific groups based on kinship managing large segments of the border, in agreement with the state. For those tribes, cross-border activities, which we would define as smuggling, are a socially embedded activity. Before the fall of Gaddafi, it was mainly focused on consumer goods; but once the uprisings in Libya started, the porousness of the border allowed for the smuggling of weapons.[56] Here, the structure of the trans-boundary movement of goods was already in place, although the filtering function changed. The porousness of many borders in the region also sheds light on its interconnectedness, as the self-declared integration by ISIS of the Libyan city of Derna into its realm in mid-November 2014 demonstrated. Since 2015, jihadists pledging allegiance to ISIS have also been present in the Egyptian Sinai.

The growing pressure on borders since the Arab uprisings is expressed in the challenges mounted by violent and armed groups to the status quo all over the region, from Tunisia and Libya through the Sinai to Syria and Iraq. This development was enabled in the first place by the enduring legitimacy deficit of many of these states, coupled with the failure to exert central authority over their territory. The rise of the self-declared Islamic State, which developed from Al-Qaeda in Iraq and other Sunni jihadist groups, is the most obvious example. Profiting from the changing power structure in Iraq and the civil war in Syria, the initial strengthening of ISIS drew on the convergence of interests of different regional players, local groups and tribes.[57] These alliances are, however, neither transparent nor stable, as we have seen. Although ISIS has been losing control over territory since the start of the US-led air strikes in mid-2014, it is expansionist in nature and aims at redrawing the borders of the Middle East according to sectarian lines. ISIS may not constitute a major threat to the state system in the Middle East in its entirety, but it undoubtedly challenges Syria and Iraq's claims to sovereignty and statehood.

Regional actors are significantly contributing to the further erosion of the legitimacy of the state and its territorial control. Saudi Arabia and the smaller Gulf states have increased their involvement in North Africa and the Middle East, spreading Wahhabi and Salafi ideas that challenge the legitimacy of incumbent regimes and providing funding to their clients.[58] Iran, the long-time ally of the Lebanese Hezbollah, also supports and funds Shi'a militias in Syria and Iraq. Incumbent regimes and regional powers alike instrumentally use sectarianism to advance their interests and justify their claims.[59] The breakdown of law and order in Syria, Libya and, to some extent, Iraq undoubtedly provides a fertile ground for pan-Islamist and jihadist groups in the struggle for power amid shifting alliances, rival interests and external interventions.[60] However, precisely because of these

shifting alliances and interests, the degree of ISIS's local support and social resilience, and thus its political survival in the long term, remain open to question.

In turn, real or perceived threats to state authority and territorial integrity have fuelled an impressive pace of militarization in the region since the beginning of the Arab uprisings.[61] This trend has resulted in persistent or growing coercion at home as well as military interventions in regional conflicts abroad, with Egypt under Al-Sisi and Saudi Arabia being prime examples. While coercion does not increase the popular legitimacy of the regimes, meddling in the domestic affairs of neighboring states only tends to increase the instability of the region as a whole, prompting even stronger militarization. In respect of the challenges to sovereignty, legitimacy and regional order, the interconnectedness between domestic and regional factors forms a dangerous vicious circle.

Due to the dynamics described here, the modalities of border control have undergone profound changes in many areas. New de facto borders have emerged, for example in Syria and Iraq. Iraqi Kurdistan has continued its path towards autonomy, and perhaps statehood and the Kurdish-controlled area in northern Syria may go the same way. In the course of the current civil war in Syria, the newly emergent internal borders are controlled by different armed factions, while different parties—the Assad regime, various armed opposition groups or the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD)—also control segments of the country's external borders. The evolving nature of the management of these borders, and the presence of different formal and informal border regimes along them, reflects the state of play of the military confrontation at any given moment. As Leïla Vignal argues, different areas with competing authorities and legitimacies have emerged, along with new borderlands that are the object of competition for control and intense trans-border activity.[62]

As regards Syria's external borders, the border regime also has an impact on relations with neighboring states. A change in the management of the border reflecting both internal and international dynamics is apparent in the case of Turkey, which moved from an initially rather permeable border with Syria to an impermeable one, albeit in a highly selective way. The variation in the management of the border, in turn, had a profound impact on Turkey's domestic politics. The Turkish case is particularly interesting as it points to the intrinsic relationship between altered patterns of border management and domestic affairs, as highlighted by Asli Okyay.[63] Thus, the initially porous border with Syria reflected Ankara's political and material support for an Islamist alternative to Assad's regime, while the subsequent closing of the border expressed the Turkish government's firm objection to the materialization of an autonomous Kurdish area across

the border in Syria. This objection is largely driven by Turkey's own preoccupation with statehood and sovereignty in the face of the unsettled Kurdish issue at home.

The state and its boundaries in the Middle East: new concepts required?

This article has proposed an analysis of contested borders in the MENA region since the Arab uprisings by considering the development of the relationship between state authority, territoriality and legitimacy over time. This approach helps to shed light on the origin and nature of the pressures currently being exerted on MENA borders, while accounting for the interplay of different factors that originate at different levels of analysis. This perspective permits us to aggregate the variety of developments that are resulting in a region-wide challenge to the borders in the Middle East at present. While the approach adopted here may certainly be broadened in time and scope, it may also be worthwhile to explore alternative conceptualizations of the state and its borders, so as to assess the impact of the contentious nature of MENA borders since the uprisings of 2011.

For instance, it may be useful to rethink the historical context of state formation by focusing on the delineation of different hierarchies of spaces through different frontiers and boundaries over time.[64] Similarly, a focus on the changing composition of territory, authority and *rights* throughout the ages, as Sassen proposed in another geographical context, may be helpful.[65] In this vein, during the Ottoman empire, the configuration of authority, territorial control and rights varied across the region and shifted over time, with the Sublime Porte exercising different forms of direct and indirect control over the various provinces of the empire. The colonial state in the Middle East presented yet another specific configuration of authority, territorial control and rights. As noted above, in this phase rights were granted, for instance, to those segments of society that were involved in controlling parts of the territory, such as large landowners, tribal sheikhs and European settlers. This pattern changed dramatically in most states after independence, as the new rulers sought to exert direct control over people and territory with the help of the army and the security apparatus. A focus on rights may thus yield additional insights into the different pathways taken by sovereignty, statehood and the legitimacy of state authority in the region.

Likewise, most scholars would agree that borders are complex institutions regulating the degree of exclusion and inclusion, the degree of permeability and the modalities of trans-boundary movement.[66] Thus it may be helpful to unpack the specific function, nature and management of different types of MENA borders, and to observe the changes that have taken place in these factors over time.

This approach draws on the idea of disaggregating different types and functions of borders from one another, as in the case of the changing patterns of control of Syria's external and new internal borders, discussed by Vignal, and the management of the Libyan–Egyptian border, discussed by Hüsken.[67] Similarly, although the myriad borders imposed by Israel in the West Bank may differ widely in their nature—physical, legal or functional—their definition and management by Israel is also a clear expression of power relations.[68]

In this context, it may be useful to follow Rainer Bauböck's differentiation of territorial borders according to two structural characteristics: namely, permeability and stability over time.[69] He thus distinguishes between stable and permeable borders (membranes), stable and impermeable borders (walls) and unstable and impermeable borders (barricades). Indeed, from this perspective a set of questions about borders are relevant for our purpose. Are specific borders territorial or functional, or both? Do they relate to people or goods, or both? Are they porous or closed, fixed or mobile? Has there been a change in their permeability? Have they moved or multiplied? What is their specific function, and who manages and controls them? What are the domestic, regional and international implications of the function and scope of borders and what is the impact of possible changes in their function and scope? This set of questions allows for a problematizing of the nature as well as the territorial dimension of state sovereignty and autonomy, together with the configuration of state–society relations. This, in turn, may be extremely useful in attempting to capture the domestic, regional and international dimensions of the current state of affairs in the Middle East. In a similar vein, it is essential to integrate theories of state formation and state failure into our analyses, as Louise Fawcett argues.[70]

Developments in the region since the Arab uprisings may also validate a quite different conceptualization of the state and its borders: one that focuses on the centre of gravity. According to this model, "the concept of centre of gravity identifies centres *that do indeed hold* even as their boundaries are increasingly fuzzy."[71] Here, a distinction is made between the military–fiscal centre of gravity, the political centre of gravity and the cultural centre of gravity, which may or may not overlap. While it may be necessary to add other centres of gravity to this model, it is important that the model stipulate the fuzziness and fluidity of borders, together with the existence of different cores and peripheries within 'the state.' Thus, it can also easily accommodate the concept of borderlands. This is not to say that we should start thinking of the Middle East as 'tribes with flags,' as the veteran Egyptian diplomat Tahseen Bashir famously put it, or that we are likely to go back to the ages of empire. These conceptions of Middle Eastern politics would be an exaggeration, particularly since many of the national and territorially

based identities in the Middle East are surprisingly strong—perhaps against the odds. In fact, their resilience will determine the survival of the state system in the region in the long run. By accommodating the stubborn persistence of states as the most significant element in the theory and practice of international relations, the centre of gravity model may indeed be a useful starting-point in thinking about the current regional order and its transformation. In other words, the state system in the Middle East is still relevant, and the 'Westphalian' state model is, and is likely to remain, the basis of contemporary international relations. However, it seems increasingly imperative to consider the concept of the Westphalian state as a shell, which is functional for the purpose of international relations, but which in practice contains different models and concepts with a greater explanatory power. Domestic politics matter, including the crucial question of the domestic legitimacy of state authority. Different configurations of authority, territoriality and legitimacy are possible. Similarly, the links between domestic, regional and international politics in defining the nature of sovereignty and territoriality are highly relevant and cannot be ignored.

Whether these or alternative concepts are useful in capturing current events in the Middle East, what their limits are, and whether it is possible to let go of the ideal-type Westphalian concept of the state and its borders from an analytical perspective are key questions.

Notes

1. In fact, the mandate system that would be imposed on the region was defined at the San Remo Conference of 1920. It implied a departure from the Sykes–Picot Agreement, for instance by establishing Iraq and Syria as two separate states.

2. Michael C. Hudson, "Arab politics after the uprisings: still searching for legitimacy," in Larbi Sadiki, ed., *The Routledge handbook on the Arab Spring* (London: Routledge, 2015).

3. National minorities only became minorities once the nation-state was created; "during the Ottoman Empire, the categories of majority and minority were largely meaningless," Benjamin Tomas White, *The emergence of minorities in the Middle East: the politics of community in French Mandate Syria* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 209. See also Lorenzo Kamel, Karim Makdisi, Waleed Hazbun and Tariq Tell, "The past: terminology, concepts and historical junctures," in Eduard Soler I Lecha, Silvia Colombo, Lorenzo Kamel and Jordi Quero, eds, *Reconceptualising orders in the MENA region: the analytical framework of the MENARA project*, Methodology and Concept Papers No. 1, Nov. 2016, 8–9, http://www.menaraproject .eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/menara_cp_1-1.pdf.

4. See e.g. Charles Tilly, ed., *The formation of national states in western Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

5. Theda Skocpol, *States and social revolutions: a comparative analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 29.

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11. Stephen Krasner, *Sovereignty: organized hypocrisy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 3–4. See also Stephen Krasner and Thomas Risse, "External actors, state-building, and service provision in areas of limited statehood: introduction," *Governance* 27, no. 4 (2014): 545–67; Louise Fawcett, "States and sovereignty in the Middle East: myths and realities," *International Affairs* 93, no. 4 (2017): 789 807.

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13. Saskia Sassen, *Territory, authority, rights: from medieval to global assemblages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

14. Ilya Harik, "The origins of the Arab state system," in Giacomo Luciani, ed., *The Arab state* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 1–28.

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16. Harik, "The origins of the Arab state system," 3.

17. Kamel et al., "The past: terminology, concepts and historical junctures," 14. See also Jean-Pierre Cassarino, "Approaching borders and frontiers in North Africa," *International Affairs* 93, no. 4 (2017): 883–96.

18. Gideon Biger, "The boundaries of the Middle East: past, present and future," *Studia z Geografii Politycznej i Historyeznej* [Studies in geography, politics and history], no. 1 (2012): 61–7.

19. Pinar Bilgin, "Whose 'Middle East?' Geopolitical inventions and practices of security," *International Relations* 18, no. 1 (2004): 25–41.

20. See John Robert Victor Prescott, *The geography of frontiers and boundaries* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1965).

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25. Roger Owen, *State, power and politics in the making of the modern Middle East*, 3rd edition (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 7.

26. Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, eds, *The expansion of international society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); Etel Solingen, "*Pax Asiatica* versus *Bella Levantina*: the foundations of war and peace in east Asia and the Middle East," *American Political Science Review* 101, no. 3 (2007): 772; also Fawcett, "States and sovereignty in the Middle East."

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28. See e.g. James P. Jankowski and I. Gershoni, *Rethinking nationalism in the Arab Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); F. Gregory Gause III, "Sovereignty, statecraft and stability in the Middle East," *Journal of International Affairs* 45, no. 2 (1992): 441–69.

29. Malcolm H. Kerr, *The Arab Cold War: Gamal Abd Al-nasir and his rivals, 1958–1970* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

30. Solingen, "*Pax Asiatica* versus *Bella Levantina*," 772.

31. The present ruling dynasties of Morocco and Jordan claim descent from the Prophet Muhammad.

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38. See e.g. Adi Ophir, Michal Givoni and Sari Hanafi, eds, *The power of inclusive exclusion: anatomy of Israeli rule in the occupied Palestinian territories* (New York: Zone Books, 2009); Raffaella A. Del Sarto, "Defining borders and people in the borderlands: EU policies, Israeli prerogatives and the Palestinians," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 52, no. 2 (2014): 200–216.

39. Sami Zubaida, *Islam, the people and the state: political ideas and movements in the Middle East* (London and New York: Tauris, 2009), ch. 6.

40. Mohamed-Ali Adraoui, "Borders and sovereignty in the Islamist and jihadist thought: past and present," *International Affairs* 93, no. 4 (2017): 917–35.

41. See e.g. Fawaz A. Gerges, *The far enemy: why jihad went global* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

42. Picard, "Arab military in politics."

43. Bahgat Korany, "The Middle East since the Cold War," in Fawcett, ed., *The international relations of the Middle East*, 80.

44. Robert Springborg, "The Middle East is the most militarized region in the world," interview, 18 July 2016, MENARA project, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EPyss74rN4I. See also the Global Militarisation Index of the Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC), referred to by Springborg and available at http://gmi.bicc.de/. This index considers the relative weight and importance of a state's military in relation to society. The main indicators comprise the comparison of military expenditures with the country's GDP and its spending on health, the ratio between the number of military and paramilitary forces and the number of physicians as compared to the overall population, and the ratio between the number of heavy weapon systems and population size.

45. Coined by *The Economist* in 1977 to describe the internal ailments of the Dutch economy following discoveries of vast natural gas deposits in 1959, the term 'Dutch disease' refers to the negative economic consequences arising from large increases in the value of a country's currency. As the country's currency becomes stronger, exports lose their competitiveness, and imports become cheaper. As a result, non-competitive sectors, such as manufacturing or agriculture, may decline or remain underdeveloped. 'Dutch disease' is primarily associated with natural resource discoveries or development but can result from any large influx of foreign currency, such as foreign aid.

46. Solingen, "*Pax Asiatica* versus *Bella Levantina*," 771.

47. Western states, together with Russia and China, are the largest weapons suppliers to the MENA region, with the United States being the largest arms seller in the Middle East (and indeed worldwide). The MENA region is the world's biggest arms market. See Springborg, "The Middle East is the most militarized region,"; BICC, Global Militarization Index.

48. See Laura Guazzone and Daniela Pioppi, eds, *The Arab state and neo-liberal globalization: the restructuring of state power in the Middle East* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 2009).

49. Raffaella A. Del Sarto, "Normative empire Europe: the European Union, its borderlands, and the 'Arab Spring,'" *Journal of Common Market Studies* 54, no. 2 (2016): 215–32.

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58. See e.g. Sally Khalifa Isaac, "Explaining the patterns of the Gulf monarchies' assistance after the Arab uprisings," *Mediterranean Politics* 19, no. 3 (2014): 413–30; Elisabeth Dickinson, "The case against Qatar," *Foreign Policy*, 30 Sept. 2014, http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/09/30/the-case-against-qatar/.

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60. See e.g. Evan Fowler, "From Raqqa to Derna: exceptionalism in expansionism," *Jadaliyya*, 4 Dec. 2014, http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/20182/from-raqqa-to-derna_exceptionalism-in-expansionism.

61. Springborg, "The Middle East is the most militarized region,"; BICC, Global Militarization Index.

62. Leïla Vignal, "The changing borders and borderlands of Syria in a time of conflict," *International Affairs* 93, no. 4 (2017): 809–827.

63. Asli S. Okyay, "Turkey's post-2011 approach to its Syrian border and its implications for domestic politics," *International Affairs* 93, no. 4 (2017), 829–46.

64. Malcolm Anderson, *Frontiers: territory and state formation in the modern world* (Cambridge: Polity, 1996).

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66. See e.g. David Newman and Anssi Paasi, "Fences and neighbours in the postmodern world: boundary narratives in political geography," *Progress in Human Geography* 22, no. 2 (1998): 186–207; Anderson, *Frontiers*; Cassarino, "Approaching borders and frontiers in North Africa."

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69. Rainer Bauböck, "Rethinking borders as membranes," in Leanne Weber, ed., *Rethinking border control for a globalizing world: a preferred future* (London: Routledge, 2015), 169–78.

70. Tilly, ed., *The formation of national states*; Hendrik Spruyt, *The sovereign state and its competitors: an analysis of systems change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Robert I. Rotberg, ed., *When states fail:*

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Strategic Communications for Peace Operations

The African Union's Information War Against al-Shabaab

Paul D. Williams, PhD*

There is very little scholarly literature on how to design and implement effective strategic communications for peace operations. The few examples have focused on the need for the United Nations (UN) to manage public opinion in its mission areas and utilize new communications technologies through effective information strategies; recommended that UN peacekeepers develop cultural awareness, i.e. "the ability to attain knowledge about the particular cultural characteristics of the people of a certain terrain (state or region)."[1] There have also been periodic calls for specific missions to improve their strategic communications capabilities.[2]

The lack of scholarly attention is surprising given that several international organizations engaged in peace and security activities have long recognized the importance of developing a strategic communications policy. Both the UN and European Union (EU), for example, have a Strategic Communications Division that deals with peace operations as part of their Department of Public Information and European External Action Service, respectively. Similarly, NATO has a strategic communications policy and a specific military concept for it.[3] Effective strategic communications have also been widely recognized as a necessary part of countering insurgencies and combating terrorism.[4]

At the UN, it is now widely agreed in principle that "a broad-based, well-resourced and accurately evaluated strategic communications plan" is a necessary part of managing "evolving expectations and build[ing] lasting support among central constituencies for its contemporary peace operations."[5] However, this is

*Paul D. Williams is Associate Professor in the Elliott School of International Affairs at the George Washington University. Dr. Williams is also a Non-Resident Senior Adviser at the International Peace Institute in New York where he manages the "Providing for Peacekeeping Project."

rarely implemented, prompting the 2015 High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (HIPPO) to recommend that communications teams must be deployed to ensure "interactive two-way communications with the local people," and peace operations must possess "modern and appropriate communications approaches and technologies."[6]

At the African Union (AU), however, the Commission's only strategic communications capability is the Directorate for Information and Communication, which focuses on the day-to-day communications about its general activities. The AU Commission's Peace and Security Department has no dedicated strategic communications capability. In 2016, there was an attempt to develop a public information policy and capacity for AU peace operations but it has not been completed. It drew heavily on the communications strategy developed for the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).[7]

This article therefore uses AMISOM as a case study to illustrate the importance of developing effective strategic communications for peace operations engaged in enforcement and stabilization activities and the challenges posed in the AU's case.[8] Among other things, it concludes that the AU has thus far operated without a dedicated strategic communications capacity for its peace operations and should develop one soon. Second, not only was AMISOM deployed without the capacity to conduct an information campaign, its contributing countries were not always willing to implement the communications strategy that was subsequently developed. Third, successful strategic communications require more than just institutional capacity in the mission; they also require sustained, high-level political support from the key stakeholders beyond the mission to ensure that the agreed policies are implemented.

Following the scholarly literature, I define strategic communications as "the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfill its mission."[9] Or, more precisely, as the "coordinated actions, messages, images, and other forms of signaling or engagement intended to inform, influence, or persuade selected audiences to support national objectives."[10] Its principal methods include audience analysis, goal setting, and message strategy.

In UN peace operations, such tasks are normally the remit of the Public Information Unit (PIU). However, the AU's lack of capabilities in this area meant that when AMISOM deployed to Mogadishu in March 2007, it did so without the ability to wage an effective strategic communications campaign. For its first two years, AMISOM had virtually no media presence or proactive communication strategy and operated with a 'bunker mentality' whereby media briefings were sporadic, poorly organized, the messaging confused and the tone defensive.[11] The resulting information vacuum played into the hands of opposition forces and un-

dermined AMISOM's operational effectiveness. In particular, AMISOM's reputation with local Somalis and key international partners suffered from: incoherence of its narrative; opaqueness and lack of transparency; and problems related to civilian and AMISOM casualties and human rights violations perpetrated by the mission's personnel.[12]

To remedy this situation and counter al-Shabaab's narrative of events, in November 2009 the UN Support Office for AMISOM (UNSOA) contracted a consortium of private firms that established the AU-UN Information Support Team (IST). Utilizing techniques employed in a variety of war zones, the IST's goal was to drive, as well as communicate AMISOM's success, improve the mission's media presence and develop a communications strategy. Working with AMISOM's tiny PIU (Public Information Unit), the IST devised key strategic information objectives related to maintaining the cooperation and support of the local population, informing international opinion of AMISOM's progress in order to sustain support from troop-contributing countries (TCCs) and donors, and promoting a culture of peace and non-violence in Somalia to create an environment for national reconciliation.

Especially between 2010 and late 2012, the IST actively countered al-Shabaab's strategic narrative in several respects, including building greater confidence in the mission and its effects. Later, however, several factors coalesced that reduced AMISOM's ability to deliver effective strategic communications. First, the environment in which the IST was asked to operate changed, most notably AMISOM's expansion beyond Mogadishu and the inclusion of new TCCs (Kenya, Djibouti, Sierra Leone, and Ethiopia), which eroded the mission's coherence. Second, during late 2012 and early 2013, the UN and AU competed over which organization should lead politically in Somalia, which made the IST's tasks more challenging. When the UN Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) deployed from mid-2013, there was a significant increase in international civilian staff in Mogadishu, which meant the IST was pulled in multiple, sometimes contradictory, directions. Finally, by the time a new set of firms took over the IST contract in late 2014, the IST had in some respects developed a different relationship with AMISOM, particularly over the scope for the IST's strategic communications experts to give autonomous advice to AMISOM's leadership. Unfortunately, this coincided with polling evidence that showed AMISOM's reputation with local Somali civilians reduced significantly during 2015 and 2016.

To address these issues, this article proceeds in two main parts. It begins by providing an overview of the AU-UN IST and its efforts to promote a strategic narrative about AMISOM and Somalia. The second section discusses the major challenges faced by the IST, paying particular attention to the roles of AMISOM's

contributing countries. The conclusion identifies four main lessons that one should draw from AMISOM's experiences with strategic communications. As well as relevant official documents and scholarship, the article draws on interviews with relevant experts and personnel involved in these activities as well as internal, unpublished documents given to the author.

AMISOM's Strategic Communications

AMISOM's principal objective in the strategic communications realm was to prevent al-Shabaab dominating the narrative about Somalia. It therefore devoted considerable time and effort to understanding how al-Shabaab conducted its media operations. Although al-Shabaab's strategic communications are not the focus of this article, it should be noted that the militants have run a very capable, multifaceted media and information operations campaign for over a decade.[13] They have consistently, and sometimes accurately, depicted successive Somali 'governments' and AMISOM's contributing countries as weak, corrupt and illegitimate. Al-Shabaab's two most important tools were radio and the Internet: it ran a Ministry of Information that used a network of FM radio stations (and some TV stations) known as al-Andalus and its rebranded media department Al-Kataib Media Foundation and News Channel produced material across multiple platforms in English and Somali, and then branched out into Swahili, Norwegian, Swedish and even Urdu.

Al-Shabaab's strategic communications were certainly not news to AMISOM, which conducted extensive analysis of them. The practical issue was translating a sophisticated understanding of al-Shabaab's operations into an effective plan to combat them, with the correct priorities and appropriate resources.

Origins of the IST

The origins of AMISOM's strategic communications capabilities lie in the deployment of the UN Support Office to AMISOM (UNSOA) in mid-2009.[14] Shortly after deploying to Mogadishu, UNSOA's leadership concluded that AMISOM could not adequately communicate with the local population under the existing conditions. Therefore, it contracted a service provider to mount an information campaign in support of AMISOM. In November 2009, AMISOM signed a Support Implementation Agreement on Public Information whereby a consortium of three firms was hired to drive its strategic communications to a variety of target audiences.[15] The three firms would subsequently form the AU-UN Information Support Team (IST).

The UN concluded that in Somalia, private firms would provide more effective operations than their standard PIU approach. As a senior UNSOA official recalled, the primary reason for establishing a commercially contracted capability was that it provided "a means for the UN to transfer risk to a deployable commercial entity."[16] This was largely because the intense insecurity in Mogadishu precluded the deployment of UN staff there. As was the case with UNSOA, a contracted capability permitted the deployment of personnel, as well as considerable flexibility in approach. This was not entirely unprecedented, since the UN had previously utilized contractors in some of its peacekeeping operations, including in South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) where they played a role in the establishment of local radio stations.[17]

Initially, the IST consortium comprised of: Bell Pottinger (part of Chime Communications plc), which provided the strategic oversight and production research and project management; Albany Associates Ltd, which led on project strategy and direction, press news, and media development; and Okapi Consulting, which set up Radio Bar-Kulan in Somalia, a credible Somali-language radio station, having previously established similar radio stations in the DRC, Central African Republic and Croatia.[18] In terms of personnel, the IST built a team of consultants and staff recruited from the region and AMISOM TCCs as well as from Somalia itself who worked out of London, Nairobi and Mogadishu.[19] There were about 20 employees in the general IST and approximately another 50 running Radio Bar-Kulan. By early 2011, the forward team in Mogadishu was about ten strong.

The IST's Objectives and Methods

At the time the IST contract began, AMISOM's strategic information objectives were: to maintain cooperation of the parties and the support of the local population; inform international opinion in order to sustain support from the mission's TCCs and partners; and to foster a culture of peace and non-violence.[20] This was all very well but AMISOM had no means to implement these objectives. Its own PIU had only one member of staff until 2011, when two new personnel were recruited.[21] Even by early 2017, AMISOM's PIU had just one officer and one assistant.[22] In retrospect, the IST team concluded: "The resulting information vacuum and hostile misrepresentations of AMISOM's role played into the hands of opposition forces and undermined AMISOM's ability to accomplish its mandate."[23] One senior IST official at the time therefore saw the consortium as "a desperate and ultimately very successful attempt to reverse the appalling headlines emanating from Mogadishu about AMISOM."[24]

Hence it was the IST that embarked on implementing a new information strategy for AMISOM. It did so through six core lines of effort.[25] First, it provided strategic communications and information support to execute a strategic communications plan.[26] Second, it provided research, monitoring and analysis to map the information ecology and media landscape of Somalia, track public opinion, and test products to measure campaign effect. Third, it established Radio Bar-Kulan, which went on air on 1 March 2010 and began 24-hour broadcasting exactly one year later.[27] The content was intended to emphasize the growing level of normalcy in Mogadishu, that the population could openly criticize al-Shabaab, and that it was legitimate of the TFG to relax al-Shabaab's restrictions, such as watching football and texting freely.[28] The IST's fourth task was to establish a fast, professional and consistent media capability for AMISOM. As part of this it would produce and disseminate audio-visual material to support AMISOM's work and messages. Finally, it would conduct outreach to ordinary Somalis, key leaders and the diaspora.

In addition to organizing press conferences, briefings and releases, and weekly information meetings to coordinate with partners at the UN compound in Nairobi, the IST also developed a variety of products to strengthen AMISOM's media presence, including a website for the mission launched in March 2010.[29] A media observatory site was implemented in June 2010 and shortly thereafter a summary of media reporting, including monitoring of al-Shabaab-affiliated radio.[30] Daily situation reports were also compiled and transmitted to the AU headquarters in Addis Ababa. Several publications were developed including the AMISOM fortnightly and quarterly bulletins, which distributed about 4,000 copies to international stakeholders. These were intended to keep stakeholders informed, maintain morale within the mission, and promote local ownership of the Somali peace process.[31] Numerous op-eds were also drafted on behalf of AMISOM's senior leadership and published in such outlets as Foreign Policy magazine as well as in the East African, New Vision, Monitor and New Times newspapers. Thousands of printed desktop and wall calendars were also produced. The IST also facilitated media visits to Mogadishu for international journalists and from the TCCs and potential TCCs. In 2010, it began holding media training workshops in Nairobi for key AMISOM staff to equip them with skills in handling the media.[32]

The IST also started to produce radio shows and video documentaries to support AMISOM's activities. Examples include "Gate of Hope," "Somalia back from the brink," "AMISOM Hospital," and the "Mayor of Mogadishu." In 2014, the UPDF also produced a 23-minute film about AMISOM's successes titled "Heroes in the Horn." One particularly significant example came in 2010 when

the production team produced "The Misleaders," a radio drama of ten 30-minute episodes exploring al-Shabaab's recruitment methods that aired on Radio Shabelle. A follow-up ten-episode series "Happy People Can't Be Controlled," aired on Radio Frontier during 2011.[33] Video documentaries were also produced, usually based on material filmed by embedded reporters, for example, from the frontlines of the battle for Mogadishu in 2010 and 2011, with the KDF before the final assault on Kismayo in 2012, and clearing the road from Mogadishu to Baidoa.[34]

The IST was also keen to promote a more secure environment in which journalists could work within Somalia as part of its media sector development. With sixty-two journalists killed in Somalia between 1992 and 2017, it was one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a journalist.[35] This goal sometimes extended to the IST helping to provide physical security to journalists. For example, the IST established the Mogadishu Media House complete with computers and Internet access as a safe house for journalists to meet, stay and work.[36] In another episode in 2011, the IST provided equipment and technical support to the staff of Radio Shabelle who were trying to relocate out of an al-Shabaab-controlled part of Mogadishu.[37] This part of the IST project was called "Lifeline."

The overall goal of AMISOM's new communications strategy was:

> To obtain broad popular support and understanding of the role of AMISOM in protecting the sovereignty, rebuilding the national institutions and safeguarding natural resources as well as to promote the implementation of the peace agreement through supporting an all inclusive Somali dialogue.[38]

The IST proceeded to work on two main strands of this to reinforce the profile, credibility and legitimacy of AMISOM, and to undermine the narratives produced by 'obstructionists': insurgents, criminals, warlords, pirates etc.[39] It also tried to ensure there was a coherent AMISOM message and that the mission's personnel adhered to a single narrative (that challenged misconceptions) and explained their mandate and intentions to the Somali people. The IST summarized its work as an attempt to promote three principles of consistent and credible messaging, and confidence that the peace process could be reinforced through public participation and dialogue.[40]

The IST organized its activities to engage four clusters of target audiences:[41]

- Somali audiences (especially political leaders, clan leaders, displaced people, local civilians, and rebels);
- regional audiences (Somalia's neighboring countries, other regional players, refugees, and the region's civilian population);
- international audiences (notably the government and military of AMISOM's TCCs, international organizations, the Somali diaspora, NGOs with a

presence in Somalia and the region, and other organizations with a credible global reach); and

- internal audiences (namely, AMISOM's leadership and spokespeople, AU civilian staff across the region, AMISOM troops, and UN partners).

As well as outreach to media houses, particular attention was paid to 'potential change leaders' in each of these audiences, i.e. actors with status and respect to act as opinion leaders.[42]

The IST's Core Narratives and their Impact

The IST's core narrative about AMISOM and Somalia had several dimensions.[43] First, it emphasized that the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) was a transitional mechanism "to prepare the way for the establishment of legitimate and accountable public institutions, which respond to the desires and aspirations of the Somali people."[44] Second, AMISOM was portrayed as representing the whole of Africa and a friend of Somalia, not an invading force. In particular, the IST promoted a narrative that AMISOM and the TFG were working in a constructive alliance to stabilize the country. In contrast, the IST depicted al-Shabaab as being controlled by foreigners linked to al-Qa'ida.[45] A third strand was to emphasize that AMISOM's progress depended on continued support of its TCCs but "chiefly on the participation of Somalis themselves." For Somalis, the message was that AMISOM is here to help; for the region, AMISOM was portrayed as the natural African reaction to a fire in a neighbor's house; and for international audiences AMISOM was depicted as having a positive effect by providing an opportunity for political dialogue but it needed additional troops and donor support.[46]

By early 2012, the IST was focused on disseminating four basic stories to support the transition from war to peace. These focused on explaining how the TFG was established and what it was trying to achieve, a story of how the security environment was improving, a story about trying to achieve a settlement and reconciliation between Somalis, and a story focused on the negative traits and activities of what the IST called the "obstructionists."[47] As one senior IST official put it, "We needed to change the messaging around AMISOM and Somalia: From conflict to post-conflict. From destruction to reconstruction. From failed state to emerging statehood."[48]

Evidence from the IST's own polling suggests that their efforts were not in vain. The IST initially conducted three waves of opinion polling in November 2009, October–November 2010, and December 2011 to January 2012.[49] Using a sample of 1,150 people in Mogadishu and its environs, the three polls indicated a significant positive shift in AMISOM's reputation.[50] In January 2010, almost one-third of Somalis polled said AMISOM was in Somalia to cause harm. By December 2011, however, this figure had dropped to 9%. This was important because until 2011, "the perception that AMISOM was the prime cause of civilian casualties in Mogadishu as a consequence of indiscriminate shell fire was the single most potent message deployed by Al-Shabaab, undermining much of AMISOM's broader success both with Somalis themselves and the international community."[51] By late 2011, the IST could claim that charges of civilian casualties caused by AMISOM had 'practically disappeared.'[52]

By the end of 2012, the IST concluded that AMISOM was seen as a 'trusted local partner' rather than 'a foreign occupier' and al-Shabaab as foreign-led and al-Qa'ida-affiliated.[53] More generally, AMISOM was being hailed as a potential model for responding to other international crises.[54] And yet, at the same time the strategic terrain started to shift. With AMISOM's expansion beyond Mogadishu and the inclusion of two new TCCs (Kenya and Djibouti), the AU mission became more disjointed as it shifted into stabilization mode.[55] In 2013, political competition between the AU and UN began to surface and affect the IST's work as its staff were pulled in multiple, sometimes-contradictory directions.

In addition, a fourth round of similar IST polling of 1,031 adults conducted during March and April 2013 in Mogadishu and its environs suggested that 59% felt AMISOM had been 'very' or 'fairly' effective at providing security for the local community, although surprisingly, only 844 of the 1,031 people polled had heard of AMISOM.[56] Local respondents also urged AMISOM to provide more training for the Somali National Army (SNA) (mentioned by 70% of respondents) and disarm militias (43%). On the other hand, the same survey revealed only 50% of respondents viewed AMISOM as a 'friendly force' compared to 30% who felt it was not. Furthermore, more than half of all respondents believed Kenya (61%) and Uganda (54%)—AMISOM's most prominent troop-contributing countries at the time—were involved in Somali affairs for their own interests rather than for the interests of Somalis (the answer in Burundi's case was 48%, Djibouti 45%, and Sierra Leone 39%). On the positive side, similar polling conducted in October–November 2013 saw a rise in the proportion of respondents who viewed AMISOM as a friendly force—an average of 65% of respondents across Mogadishu, Beledweyne, Kismayo, Baidoa and Marka.[57]

A Shift in Approach

Spurred in part by the changing external environment noted above, in late 2013 the UN and AU put a basic system of Task Order (approvals) in place to de-conflict the use of IST resources, and to try and refocus the IST's activities, which UNSOA thought had lost momentum in the changing environment.[58] This perturbed some IST staff because it was seen as altering the previous arrangement where the contractors—who were the strategic communications professionals—generated the concepts of work and then implemented them, to a more stifling situation where tasks were generated top-down.[59] There was also a growing sentiment that the new arrangement was intended to get the IST to do more 'crass public relations' work for the AU.[60]

AMISOM's media operations thus came to resemble the more standard UN PIU format rather than the IST's earlier more autonomous, research-led approach. It also brought more internally-focused products and mission paraphernalia and merchandise such as AMISOM calendars, T-shirts, bags, etc. This reflected an increasing focus on production (i.e. the number of outputs became key) rather than the need to generate influence and specific political effects that reduced the risks to AMISOM's reputation with local Somalis. There was also a noticeable decrease in the number of media visits, although this usually fluctuated due to several factors, including the tempo of AMISOM operations and the new Federal Government developing its own embryonic capacity and hence the IST—which had provided accommodation, life support and security for visiting journalists—became less vital. One outside journalist, suggested that this might also have been due to the fact that AMISOM was increasingly only sharing media that independent journalists "weren't interested in—such as your typical public relations products, ribbon-cutting, ceremonies etc.—and suppressed the things we were, often because it made them look bad, incompetent or beaten."[61]

In late 2014, the IST transitioned from the original private firms, which lost the new UN contract.[62] Aethos, a specialist communications division of Aegis Defence Services Ltd, won the contract and then was subsequently bought out in 2015 by another private security company, Garda. Despite the change in contractors, some of the personnel remained the same. For example, some senior Aethos personnel had previously worked for Bell-Pottinger/CHIME and numerous lower-ranking staff simply changed contracts. The Tasking Order arrangement previously put in place continued under the new IST management.

Under these new arrangements, there were notable elements of both continuity and change at the IST. For example, the new team remained approximately 50-strong, maintained a predominance of Somali speaking local staff in the field, and continued to organize media and communication pre-deployment trainings for AMISOM personnel.[63] Although 37 such trainings were conducted between December 2014 and September 2017, the challenge was to keep them regular enough to meet the demands posed by a high turnover of AMISOM personnel. The IST also continued to produce official video programming, such as the 'AMISOM in Action' series examining key aspects of the mission's operations.

The approach to research products displayed elements of both continuity and change. The IST continued to compile research products as directed by AMISOM. These included assessments of the SNA, SPF, and countering al-Shabaab propaganda, as well as studies on the voices of ex-combatants and women's roles in Somali politics. It was noticeable, however, that the new arrangements saw a shift to a more centralized approach. Whereas previously, AMISOM leadership received some research products sent to them by the strategic communication advisers at IST, the new arrangement saw IST only able to respond to AMISOM's requests for communications support.[64] The former arrangement granted more autonomy to the strategic communications professionals to advise AMISOM.

In terms of novelty, at the strategic level, during 2015 and 2016, AMISOM (together with UNSOM) reconfigured their communication strategy based around a three-pronged campaign to push a security narrative (themed as 'Safe and Secure Somalia'), a political narrative (themed as 'Our Somalia'), and a future-state narrative (themed as 'Self-Reliant Somalia').[65] Operationally, there were some novel advances in the social media realm with new AMISOM Facebook and Instagram accounts established. An outreach unit was also established. This consisted of two staff operating out of the fortified Jazeera Hotel, very close to the Mogadishu International Airport. In mid-2017, the IST expanded these efforts when one Somali member of the outreach IST personnel was deployed to each of Baidoa, Beledweyne, and Kismayo.[66] In early 2016, the US donated to AMISOM 'Radio-In-A-Box' communication capabilities in order to broadcast pro-Federal Government, pro-AMISOM and anti-al-Shabaab content to local target communities across south-central Somalia.[67] This gave AMISOM an additional form of outreach, which broadcast news messaging as well as dramas, Somali music, and talk shows featuring community call-in. AMISOM deployed the 'Radio-In-A-Box' in each sector except Kismayo, which did not implement the program.[68]

A Decline in Local Support

Despite these various initiatives, AMISOM faced a significant strategic communications problem between 2014 and 2016 as the IST's opinion polling showed that Somali public opinion of the mission had become considerably less favorable. In polls of 2,000 Somalis from Mogadishu, Baidoa, Beledweyne and Kismayo conducted between December 2014 and February 2015, the IST found significant positive local perceptions of AMISOM.[69] For example, 76% of respondents had some or a lot of 'confidence' and 80% had some or a lot of 'trust' in the AMISOM military, although the statistics for the AMISOM police and civilian components were considerably lower. 52% strongly or somewhat agreed that AMISOM presence would assist the Somali people to achieve peace, and over 60% felt positive that AMISOM would enable the stabilization of Somalia. In particular, AMISOM's operations were credited with facilitating significant improvements in education (68%), the competence of the SNA (52%), freedom to use/own land (50%), and the ease of doing business (49%).[70] Interestingly, residents in Beledweyne felt significantly safer than those in Mogadishu, Kismayo and Baidoa. This correlated with strongly positive views of AMISOM's Djiboutian contingent, which was playing a significantly larger role in managing local disputes there than the TCCs deployed in other parts of the country. Kismayo, in contrast, with mostly Kenyan troops, had the highest proportion of dissatisfaction with AMISOM.

However, the next major survey conducted during June and July 2016 saw AMISOM's popularity significantly diminish among local civilians. This survey polled 2,306 adults in Mogadishu, Baidoa, Beledweyne, Kismayo and Garowe.[71] The context in which it was undertaken was mixed. On the one hand, almost all the socio-economic indicators measured by the IST improved across Somalia during 2015–16, except cost of living.[72] On the other, there was a significant overall decline in perceptions of security and AMISOM engaging in less constructive ways with the local population. Overall, support for AMISOM reduced by over half from 64% to 28%, and nearly half of Somali citizens polled (48%) wanted AMISOM to leave immediately.

In more detail, 62% of respondents said they received no services from AMISOM in 2016 compared to only 32% in 2014. Overall, local support for AMISOM fell significantly from 2014, when 64% of respondents had a lot or some support for AMISOM, to just 28% in the 2016 survey. There was also a drop in satisfaction of AMISOM's performance. Whereas in 2014, 64% were very or somewhat satisfied with AMISOM (with the worst figures coming from respondents in Baidoa and the best from Beledweyne), in 2016 the figure had dropped

to 37% (with the worst figures coming from respondents in Mogadishu and the best from Kismayo). Incredibly, by 2016, only 15% of respondents viewed AMISOM as friendly and 55% saw it as an unfriendly force. The worst figures (and a huge reversal from the previous year) came from Beledweyne where 64% now saw AMISOM as unfriendly and only 13% as friendly. The most positive figures this time around came from Kismayo where 22% saw AMISOM as friendly and 42% saw it as unfriendly. In 2014, 56% had seen AMISOM as a friendly force and only 14% saw it as unfriendly. This was reflected in the overall assessment that by June 2016, 47% had no confidence at all in AMISOM; 30% some little confidence; and only 14% had a lot of confidence in the mission.

Similar research conducted for UNSOM confirmed these negative trends. By 2016, AMISOM was generating more negative than positive reactions from local Somalis, including the perception that despite receiving much higher remuneration, AMISOM personnel were working in 'safer' zones compared to the SNA troops who were more exposed. Criticisms over human rights abuses by AMISOM personnel also remained prominent and intensified calls for AMISOM to handover to Somali security forces.[73]

Key Challenges for AMISOM's Strategic Communications

Although the IST provided AMISOM with an enormous boost to its strategic communications capacity, it also suffered from some major challenges and limitations. Indeed, one of the IST's own retrospective conclusions was that AMISOM never achieved the desired press 'rhythm' and remained essentially reactive in its approach to strategic communications.[74] Similarly, AMISOM itself identified a range of ongoing public information challenges. In late 2012, these were summarized as understaffing; lack of proper coordination and information-sharing; laborious statement clearance procedures that delayed information dissemination and inadequate harmonization of the statements that were produced, the security situation, which made information-gathering very difficult; a lack of Crisis Communications guidelines; irregular media briefings; and the lack of high-level information coordination meetings since March 2011.[75] In addition, AMISOM's tiny PIU bemoaned the fact that it was overshadowed by the IST. In reality, however, there was no viable route for the PIU to meet AMISOM's strategic communications needs without the IST. One senior IST official also complained that AMISOM had to operate within a rather different set of rules than al-Shabaab, which often relied on gory and gratuitous 'shock and awe' tactics in its media.[76]

Of course, probably the most fundamental challenge was the operating environment in Somalia, which was exceptionally hostile with few secure locations available for IST staff to live and operate. They ended up staying on Bancroft Global Development's facilities until a separate compound was built for them within AMISOM's main base at the Mogadishu International Airport in 2012. Security concerns also restricted the amount of activity IST personnel could undertake in the sectors beyond Mogadishu.

A second, and perhaps surprising problem, was selling some of the concepts to skeptical AMISOM commanders. An early example of this challenge was the difficulty the IST faced with regard to Radio Bar-Kulan when it became apparent that some of the AU's senior leadership thought they would be getting 'Radio AMISOM.' This reflected the Ugandan primacy in AMISOM at the time and the UPDF's experience in the Ugandan bush wars, which saw strategic communications as essentially pro-AMISOM propaganda.[77] In Somalia, however, what was required was an impartial and credible news outlet that was balanced, which meant at times being critical of AMISOM. Indeed, Albany Associates advertised Radio Bar-Kulan as "a trusted independent, impartial observer of affairs in the country run by Somalis."[78] This was unexpected and caused friction with some of AMISOM's senior leadership. Arguably the turning point came after al-Shabaab's failed Ramadan Offensive in August and September 2010 when IST staff embedded with AMISOM on the front-lines produced useful footage and escorted international media personalities, which eventually changed the perception of AMISOM from invaders to liberators. Overall, the IST concluded it took about a year to dispel the UPDF's initial assumptions.[79]

The IST found that AMISOM's civilian component was also reluctant to engage in its strategic communications plan. In one sense, the IST's relations with AMISOM force headquarters had been good in terms of access because the project lead was a senior Ugandan who had been press secretary to Yoweri Museveni during the civil war. But while AMISOM's military came around, the IST concluded that the civilian component "remained reluctant to shoulder its responsibilities with regard to the political communications process."[80] This meant the IST had to do it for them. Having the head of mission based outside of Somalia (in Nairobi) with only short trips to Mogadishu also made it harder for AMISOM to maintain consistently positive relationships with local leaders.[81]

A third set of challenges revolved around the IST's relationship with the governments of AMISOM's contributing countries. In sum, AU and UN personnel would repeatedly contend with AMISOM TCCs pursuing their own, national communications goals, which often ignored the IST's advice. This was particularly apparent on information related to casualties (both locals and peacekeepers). Sev-

WAR AGAINST AL-SHABAAB

eral dimensions of this challenge arose. First, as noted above, the military forces initially displayed a limited understanding of strategic communications. As a result, when they did deploy national media teams to their sectors, they tended to only produce news that was focused on their own country. This was to be expected but it should not have come at the expense of strategic engagement with other audiences. It also reflected the wider tendency of the TCC contingent commanders to report back to their home capitals rather than through the AMISOM force headquarters. Especially in the first few years, there was also a problem of considerable mistrust of the local Somali population, which meant local IST staff were often excluded from entering AMISOM camps.[82] Since the IST first established a presence in AMISOM's sectors, these personnel had been Somali staff.[83]

Another dimension of this challenge was noted by prominent Somali intellectual, Faisal Roble, who argued there was a tension between AMISOM's stated agenda of improving Somali governance and the fact that most of its TCCs (with the exception of Kenya and Sierra Leone) were run by autocratic regimes. There was an apparent contradiction, he argued, between AMISOM acting to "steward Somalia to democracy" while its 'Godfather,' Ugandan President Museveni, "believes only in one party democracy!"[84] In some emergency cases, the IST had to try to build AMISOM's reputation as a source of credible information while some of its TCCs were caught lying. This was particularly apparent in relation to casualties and illicit trading of commodities. As veteran British journalist Tristan McConnell, who covered al-Shabaab for more than a decade put it: "the tendency of Kenya in particular to lie in its press statements means that we've reached the thoroughly disheartening situation in which the terrorists seem more honest than the government."[85] Al-Shabaab's media products frequently highlighted the Kenyan government's lies, but the IST had only very limited contact, coordination and influence over the KDF since they were often reluctant to accept any of the IST's advice.[86] This situation persisted, as was evident in the Kenyan government's incoherent media response to the battles at its El Adde bases in January 2016 and at Kulbiyow in January 2017.[87]

One should note that the example set by the United States on some of these issues did not help. As journalist Robyn Kriel observed, there tended to be intense secrecy about US strikes against al-Shabaab, which had taken place for over a decade and were often left unexplained. There was also little willingness to reveal any video footage from strikes as was done elsewhere, including Iraq, Pakistan and Syria.[88] This reinforced the view of AMISOM TCCs that operational security should override strategic communications and they remained secretive about various aspects of their operations. As the IST acknowledged, probably more than

any other issue, debates over acknowledging military casualties "led to serious issues of credibility."[89]

The unhelpful attitude of some of the TCCs was also reflected in the limited media training available to most AMISOM personnel, especially in the early years. Although the IST continued to provide pre-deployment and some other media and communications trainings, it also regularly identified the need for more and better training as a weakness. As noted in AMISOM's 2013 Strategic Directive, "Ensuring that accurate information about the mandate, objectives and operations of AMISOM is disseminated as widely as possible, both within Somalia and beyond, is important with regards to ensuring the success of AMISOM operations and the attainment of the mandate of the Mission."[90] And yet, numerous mission personnel continued to make mistakes and there was little evidence of AMISOM's military component seriously buying into such declarations.

In early 2013, for example, one of AMISOM's key spokespeople had no prior training in this area.[91] Probably the most infamous case occurred in March 2014 when a Burundian officer was quoted in local Somali media as saying "I don't want to defeat Al-Shabaab. I would rather scatter them to prolong my mission."[92] Widely broadcast across Somali radio and other media sources, this gave the impression that AMISOM peacekeepers did not want their mission to succeed until they had made enough money to build their houses or buy cars back home. IST officials also noted that the quality of media training varied across contributing countries; it was implemented first for Uganda, then Burundi, and then expanded to the other TCCs. While the UPDF pre-deployment package was generally praised, the performance of KDF officers came in for considerable criticism.[93]

The IST also faced several organizational challenges. Like most international actors operating in Somalia, it suffered at times from a lack of resources, a high turnover of personnel, and the inappropriate hiring of professionals who "lacked cultural understanding, linguistics but also those with insight into the Somali culture."[94] The IST's research component, for instance, struggled to produce consistently reliable and accurate products intended to help senior leaders better understand the operating environment. While this was partly a problem of limited resources, it was also due to insecurity, and perhaps most fundamentally to the complexity of Somalia's clan dynamics and the shifting alliances between different armed actors. For example, even after ten years, the AU, UN and even the Federal Government did not have an accurate list of who was in the Somali National Army! There was also some controversy about the lack of Africans in senior management roles with British ex-media, ex-armed forces and ex-political communications personnel predominant.[95]

These challenges and limitations generated missed opportunities to damage al-Shabaab's brand. To take just two examples, in 2011, one visiting journalist reported on how AMISOM missed a good chance to exploit evidence of al-Shabaab's regular references to sexual imagery and its abuse of women.[96] In one captured al-Shabaab position, AMISOM troops found "the walls covered with doodles of the most obscene type," including scenes of rape, bestiality and half-man, half-beast depictions not usually associated with pious Islamists. The discovery prompted one UN official to joke that "to neutralize al-Shabaab as a fighting force, all AMISOM needed to do was to fly in two planeloads of prostitutes from Bangkok and ferry them up to the front."[97]

Another more recent example came in 2016 when the UN Secretary-General documented that al-Shabaab had been recruiting and using children to fight in some of their bloodiest battles.[98] Despite being given ample time to respond to the story, it took two weeks for AMISOM to formulate a counter-message.[99] As Robyn Kriel argued, this was a perfect occasion for AMISOM to paint al-Shabaab as cowards who pushed young children out front to fight their battles, but the opportunity was missed.[100] One former IST official concluded that such lost opportunities reflected a broader and "consistent failure to message in any way against al-Shabaab's high-profile attacks. There is no preparatory work in terms of reporting suspicions, no rapid response messaging once the incident starts [and] no follow-up messaging to clarify what happened."[101]

Lessons

The preceding analysis suggests that there was no viable route for AMISOM's tiny PIU to meet the mission's strategic communications needs. Without the IST, AMISOM would have had almost zero capabilities in this area. Moreover, as part of the IST's broader strategic communications strategy, polling evidence and broader debates about AMISOM in Addis Ababa, New York, Brussels and Washington DC suggest that its work helped shift the tide against al-Shabaab's initially dominant narrative.

As circumstances changed, however, AMISOM's strategic communications needed to evolve as the nature of the threat from al-Shabaab altered, as the mission brought on more TCCs, as the new Federal Government of Somalia started to establish its own, albeit embryonic, strategic communications, and as the UN established a more significant field presence in Somalia. Despite the challenges and shortcomings discussed above, the IST played an innovative and important function for AMISOM. With an expanded UN mission authorized in 2013 and the shift into more of a stabilization mode from 2014, the terrain had shifted. This

put a premium on supporting the Somali authorities, which, like other components of AMISOM, had not been the IST's priority.

Arguably the most basic lesson is that deploying a peace operation without the capabilities to wage an effective strategic communications campaign is a major error. To ensure history does not repeat, the AU needs a standing strategic communications capability equipped to develop policy and plans, build coherence, as well as support robust communications operations in all its peace operations. Naturally, the precise nature of the strategic communications capabilities should be constituted in accordance with the needs on the ground.

A second lesson is to ensure coherence between a clear vision and sound policy to guide strategic communications. The mission leadership should clearly articulate the desired effects and clarify how particular audiences can be influenced to support the mission's goals. Moreover, as seen in AMISOM's case, it is not enough to devise a coherent policy; the countries contributing to the mission must also implement it. To be effective also means building trust and remaining credible. Here, the issue of casualties (both civilians harmed by AMISOM and the mission's own casualties) most clearly demonstrated how the absence of a coherent policy between the AU and the mission's TCCs could have a disastrous impact on strategic communications. It was therefore unsurprising that the IST sometimes struggled to build trust both with some of the mission's contingents and with local Somali audiences.

A third lesson is that effective strategic communications in AMISOM required an expeditionary mindset and a willingness to take risks, including generating and supporting media access in difficult circumstances. Like UNSOA's operations with regard to logistics, only a contractor could plausibly deliver this in the early years as opposed to a standard UN format PIU. Like UNSOA, the IST's experience demonstrates that in such an insecure and fluid environment as Somalia, contractual arrangements need to build in flexibility and a willingness to take some risks. In this case, the IST was initially designed to ensure a strategically focused and decentralized approach to project design, which was subsequently curtailed from 2013. However, given the need to learn and evolve quickly on the job, the ability to take risks was crucial.

Finally, a related lesson is that the need for expertise about local conflict dynamics means that IST-like operations probably need a predominantly local team in order to ensure sustainable success. The challenge facing AMISOM early on was the absence of a Somali commercial capability able to manage an effort of the scope, scale, and complexity of the IST.[102] The situation improved over time and the IST maintained over 50% local staff. Nevertheless, it remained difficult to hire and retain the best people and the issue was sometimes complicated by

AMISOM's initial mistrust of Somalis, which often raised practical obstacles to running an effective campaign such as the inability to co-locate.

Notes

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7. Interview, AU official, 3 December 2017.

8. AMISOM's mandated tasks have evolved well beyond the realm of peacekeeping, including VIP protection, war-fighting, counterinsurgency, stabilization, and state-building as well as supporting electoral processes and facilitating humanitarian assistance. For a detailed history of the mission see Paul D. Williams, *Fighting for Peace in Somalia: A History and Analysis of the African Union Mission (AMISOM), 2007–2017* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

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