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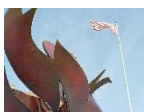
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Flag flying over the Strength and Wisdom statue, a gift from the class of 2014, capturing the mission, spirit, and history of Carlisle Barracks (photo by Laura A. Wackwitz, Ph.D.).

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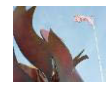
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Human Trafficking in Belize

Asariel Loria

Transnational crime in all of its varied forms is a significant problem in North America with drug trafficking and human smuggling often taking center stage. Yet, the exploitation of individuals, families, and communities impacted by human trafficking may take an even greater toll, especially in the Central American region. Belize currently serves, and suffers, as a major transportation route and way-point for human trafficking between China and the United States. If not addressed, human trafficking will become a major threat to the national security and government of Belize. After examining some of the challenges associated with attempts to contain or reduce the illegal transportation of persons transnationally, this essay calls for Belize to strategically reframe the problem and engage in a realistic, but robust response.

Keywords: Transnational Crime, Central America, China, Corruption, Smuggling

The geographical location of Central America in the Western Hemisphere is advantageous to transnational criminal organizations poised to use it as an in-transit route. Historically, migrants trafficked through Central America came mostly from the region itself and from South America, but over the past decade, the situation escalated with a growing flow of Chinese nationals. Even twenty years ago, according to official statistical estimates 10,000 undocumented Chinese nationals entered and worked in Chinese owned businesses in the Central American region, with many others passing through seeking to reach the United States and Canada.¹ The Chinese “mafia” developed connections with Central American trafficking rings due to a high and lucrative market demand.² Presently, the Chinese diaspora dominates a substantial amount of businesses in Belize, some of which temporarily shelter trafficked Chinese nationals. The movement of Chinese nationals through the country occurs virtually unnoticed through the informal relationship of Chinese traffickers and business owners.³

If not addressed, human trafficking and smuggling of Chinese nationals passing through Belize could transcend into a national security concern with considerable diplomatic and economic consequences. The situation is exacerbated by physical security of territorial control, governance paradoxes relating to corruption, scarce resources affecting the country, and lack of a coherent

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¹ Organization of American States, *Bibliography on the Topic of Chinese People Trafficked into the Western Hemisphere* (Washington, DC: Organization of American States), <http://www.oas.org/atip/pdfs/bibliography%20with%20annotations.pdf>.

² R. Evan Ellis, *The Strategic Dimension of Chinese Engagement with Latin America*, Perry Paper Series, no. 1 (Washington, DC: William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies, 2013), 120.

³ *Ibid.*, 18.

strategy for addressing the problem. To contain or reduce human trafficking and related ills, Belize must transcend these challenges to reshape a more favorable environment.

Human trafficking is often mistaken for human smuggling although the two are rather distinct. Both are punishable offenses worldwide. The primary difference is one of consent. Human trafficking, a transnational crime occurring with frequency throughout the world described by many as modern day slavery, is defined as:

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.⁴

Human smuggling is the conscientious agreement of aliens being smuggled into a foreign country.⁵ The common objective of both activities in Belize is to generate hefty profits by leveraging characteristics of Central America as an accessible region for holding/moving persons and an important access route to North America.

In general, people from third world countries are trafficked to industrialized countries where demand is high for cheap or forced labor, the sex industry, and child adoption, among other things.⁶ The United States is among those industrialized and prosperous countries that attract people from around the world in pursuit of favorable opportunities.⁷ The journey may begin with consenting individuals who then fall victim to the extortion and exploitation of deceptive human trafficking organizations. Consequently, human trafficking has developed into a lucrative and appealing enterprise and one of the most profitable transnational crimes globally.⁸ Estimates of the global annual profits stand at U.S. \$150 billion affecting 21 million people per year.⁹

The U.S. government has implemented a multi-tiered system to measure the effectiveness by which countries fight against human trafficking. The influx of trafficked persons into the United States from across the Americas remains high. Assigning a low rating to a country on this system may function as a diplomatic tool intended to induce countries in implementing measures to revert the trend. A tier rating of one indicates that a country is fully compliant with the Trafficking Victims Protection Act.¹⁰ Central American countries do not meet this standard. Panama, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala are tier two countries; Costa Rica is on the tier two-watch list;

⁴ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, *Protocol to Prevent Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime*, General Assembly Resolution 55/25 (Palermo, Italy: United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, November 15, 2000), <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/ProtocolTraffickingInPersons.aspx>.

⁵ U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Trafficking in Persons in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Washington, DC: U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, July 15, 2013), 2.

⁶ United Nations Information Service, "13th United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice," April 12-19, 2015, http://www.unis.unvienna.org/unis/en/events/2015/crime_congress_human_trafficking.html.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Arthur Brice, "Human Trafficking Second Only to Drugs in Mexico," *CNN*, August 27, 2010, <http://www.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/americas/08/26/mexico.human.trafficking/>.

⁹ International Labor Organization, "Trafficking in Humans is not a Thing of the Past," July 30, 2014, http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/who-we-are/ilo-director-general/statements-and-speeches/WCMS_250609/lang-en/index.htm.

¹⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report July 2015* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, July 2015), 54, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/245365.pdf>.

Belize is assigned to the lowest tier: tier three.¹¹ The low rating highlights shortcomings in Belize's efforts to combat human trafficking vis-à-vis collaboration with U.S. initiatives and international norms. To diffuse the current threat in Belize, proactive security measures are needed immediately.

Consequences of Human Trafficking to Belize

The fight against human trafficking in Central America is closely associated with the region's fight against drug trafficking since the networks used for each may overlap. At the regional level, the Central American Integration System (SICA) is a means through which nations of the region collaborate to combat the scourge of drug trafficking and other transnational challenges.¹² Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador—commonly referred as the northern triangle—have united their efforts to combat drug trafficking and other transnational threats. Human trafficking generally provokes less violence and is not given as much priority by authorities as the drug trafficking threat. If human trafficking organizations develop robust networks with other transnational criminal organizations, the situation could become even more dire with serious consequences for Belize as a whole.

In Belize, the increased trafficking of Chinese nationals has strengthened the Chinese community's entrepreneurial influence, gradually displacing traditional patterns of economic activity. At present, the Chinese business community controls most of the goods and services sector in the country. The Chinese diaspora took control of most of these businesses in the cities and towns and eventually extended their marketing mechanisms to the rural areas.¹³ The monopoly over supply and delivery chains with respect to cheaper goods and products accessed directly from China has allowed the Chinese entrepreneurs overmatch against local Belizean business owners. The local Belizean entrepreneurs are now in an arduous competition struggle with the dynamic Chinese business practices.¹⁴ Some Belizean small business owners have had to venture into other sectors of the economy. Many have sought to diversify in areas that are undesirable to Chinese newcomers such as agriculture in the north and south of the country, and the tourism sector in the city and cays. The chain of Chinese shops, super markets, hardware stores, restaurants, etc. provide both work and shelter to Chinese nationals trafficked through Belize.

The effective takeover of the goods and services sector by Chinese nationals has caused substantial losses of revenue for the Belizean government due to the many Chinese businesses that operate on a cash basis and underreport their incomes. Chinese owned establishments also tend to favor the employment of Chinese immigrants rather than Belizean nationals previously employed by the businesses that they supplanted. Furthermore, security and administrative expenditures financed by the government of Belize arguably divert resources away from other purposes in order to render aid and administratively process immigrants (providing shelter, clothing, food, health care, and deportation costs). Although precise estimates are unavailable, the average airfare fee to deport a Chinese national from Belize is \$5,000.00 (USD) of which the country's budget would absorb the expenses.¹⁵ In comparison, the United States spends \$7,054.00 to process and repatriate an illegal

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Sistema de la Integración Centro Americana, "Estrategia de Seguridad de Centro America," December 3, 2010, 8-9. <http://www.sica.int/consulta/documento.aspx?idn=74952&idm=1>. (Translation).

¹³ Joshua Samuel Brown, "In Belize, the Chinese are on Strike," *The Asia Magazine*, April 6, 2011, <http://www.theasiamag.com/patterns/in-belize-the-chinese-are-on-strike>.

¹⁴ "Addy Castillo says Chinese Dominating Import and Wholesale Business," *7Newsbelize*, August 21, 2015, <http://www.7newsbelize.com/sstory.php?id=33490>.

¹⁵ American Airlines Home Page, <http://www.aa.com/homePage.do>.

immigrant caught in its territory.¹⁶ Expenses incurred by the government of Belize are likely to be even greater especially when handling victims from other parts of the Western Hemisphere.

Belize's perceived noncompliance in adequately addressing human trafficking could also lead to indirect economic costs from both the United States and Mexico. The rating of Belize on the U.S. government's human trafficking watch list slid from tier two in 2014 to tier three in 2015—the lowest possible rating.¹⁷ Belize's strategy does not meet the minimum standards in addressing trafficking in persons. This poor rating could eventually lead to sanctions from the U.S. government as well as alienation from neighboring friendly countries such as Mexico, and those of the northern triangle in Central America.¹⁸ Mexico, a significant trading partner and the largest contiguous neighbor may also consider in extreme circumstances withdrawal of longstanding economic, technical, training, and other initiatives because of Belize's poor human trafficking record.¹⁹

The challenges induced by human trafficking include physical territorial control in the land, air, and maritime domains, and governance challenges in administering control of immigration issues. People around the world are prone to migrate because of economic difficulties and security challenges in their countries. They withstand serious risks to migrate elsewhere in search of improving their economic conditions and a better way of life. The industrialized countries in North America and Europe have a high demand for low paying jobs. As a result, persons hire trafficking networks in desperation and determination to reach their final destination. In the Central American region, human trafficking rings operate in the periphery of the southern Mexican border with Belize and Guatemala. Persons engaged in human trafficking commonly known as “Enganchadores, Transportistas, or Polleros” vie for control of the Mexican southern border.²⁰

When individuals and families are unable to enter a country legally, the services of human trafficking networks become an appealing option. For their part, the traffickers also work relentlessly to attract clients. A common method used is to deceive victims through the promise of well-paid jobs in the United States. People entrust and risk their livelihood to human traffickers only to realize that the end of their journey may result in betrayal and exploitation. The victims often find themselves employed in physically demanding jobs and habitually paid below the minimum legal wages.²¹ Others are subdued, enslaved, or sexually exploited.²² In the case of Chinese nationals trafficked through Belize, they are commonly required to commit to providing their labor within the Chinese business community in payment for the journey. In most cases, they unwillingly surrender their official travel documents to their employers and work under deplorable conditions while in Belize. Their stay in Belize is usually between four to seven years before proceeding to the United States.²³

Weak government institutions and corrupt law enforcement authorities in Central America embolden human trafficking rings to operate with impunity. Countries with governance deficits are unable to control territorial space, especially at border regions. The porosity of the borders

¹⁶ Glen P. Hastedt, *American Foreign Policy: Past, Present, and Future*, 10th ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 57.

¹⁷ Adele Ramos, “Belize Hits Rock-bottom on TIP Scale,” *Amandala Newspaper*, July 28, 2015, <http://amandala.com.bz/news/belize-hits-rock-bottom-trafficking-persons-scale/>.

¹⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons*, 53.

¹⁹ “Mexico Offers Anti-Crime Aid,” *News5*, February 25, 2015, <http://edition.channel5belize.com/archives/110364>.

²⁰ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Trafficking of Women and Girls within Central America* (New York: United Nations), 56, https://www.unodc.org/documents/toc/Reports/TOCTASouthAmerica/English/TOCTA_CACaribb_trafficking_womengirls_within_CAmerica.pdf.

²¹ John Davidson, *The Long Road North, The Story of a Mexican Worker's Perilous Crossing into the United States* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1979), 10-11.

²² Denise Brennan, *Life Interrupted: Trafficking into Forced Labor in the United States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 8-10.

²³ Organization of American States, “Bibliography on the Topic of Chinese People Trafficked into the Western Hemisphere.”

compounded with inadequate security practices enable human traffickers to conduct border crossing within the region virtually unimpeded. Conversely, the robust security measures on the U.S. / Canadian border effectively deflect human trafficking to Central America. Good governance in these first world countries contributes to efficient border control through comprehensive security measures that promote mutual confidence and trust. The resilient border security mechanisms between these two countries maintain the threat of border encroachments under control. Undocumented immigrants can pursue direct access to the U.S. via sea, air, and land but attempting to break through layers of security is extremely risky. Security cooperation involving effective Immigration and Customs law enforcement between the U.S. and Canada obstructs direct access. Due to Mexico's efforts against drug cartels, human trafficking organizations concentrate their efforts where they encounter the least resistance. Central America has become a gravitating point for human traffickers to stage operations into Mexican territory before making landfall in the United States. Human trafficking in Belize gained momentum particularly due to the illegal movement of Chinese nationals. The Chinese business establishments coupled with governance issues in Belize provide optimal conditions for their eventual pivot into the United States.²⁴

Land, Maritime, and Air Challenges

Mexico also has governance issues reflected in weak border security practices along the Mexico/U.S. border.²⁵ In light of 9/11, the United States increased security measures along the border with Mexico to minimize illegal border crossing activities,²⁶ improving physical security and restricting the rampant illegal border crossing.²⁷ The modest Belizean economy cannot construct an effective physical barrier along the border with Guatemala and Mexico. Even if Belize obtains funds to build a barrier, the ongoing Guatemala/Belize territorial dispute regarding the precise location of the shared border impedes the consensual demarcation and responsibility to protect it.²⁸ Neighboring Guatemala is claiming the entire territory of Belize and does not recognize the contiguous international border prescribed by the United Nations after the declaration of independence from the United Kingdom in 1981. Both countries are currently negotiating the settlement of the territorial dispute under the auspices of the Organization of the American States.²⁹

The government of Belize is attempting to address challenges from transnational organized crime such as human trafficking and smuggling through the establishment of a Joint Intelligence and Operations Center (JIOC). The lack of an establishment to coordinate intelligence sharing and interagency operations at national level prompted the Belizean government to solicit the United States and Canadian governments for assistance in its establishment.³⁰ Prior to the establishment of the JIOC, Belize's law enforcement agencies conducted operations comprised of ad hoc participation. Inter-agency task forces were reactionary to crises or seasonally planned operations especially during festive periods when criminal acts escalated. At present, policy for the command structure, management of the JIOC, and inter-agency cooperation is in progress, nevertheless, it began to operate with neophytes from the Belize Defense Force (BDF), Belize National Coast Guard (BNCG),

²⁴ Ellis, *The Strategic Dimension of Chinese*, 119.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 56-57.

²⁶ Hastedt, *American Foreign Policy*, 57.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Montserrat Gorina-Ysern, "OAS Mediates in Belize-Guatemala Dispute," *American Society of International Law* 5, no. 20 (December 19, 2000): <https://www.asil.org/insights/volume/5/issue/20/oas-mediates-belize-guatemala-border-dispute>.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Embassy of the United States, Belmopan, Belize, "Ministry of National Security Inaugurates Joint Center with U.S. and Canada," December 11, 2013, http://belize.usembassy.gov/pr_12_11_2013.html.

and the Belize Police Department (BPD). The Customs and Excise Department, Immigration Department, and the Financial Intelligence Unit are other major government security stakeholders that have yet to join. The most common reason these agencies provide for not participating actively at the JIOC is the lack of manpower. Moreover, the requirement of mandatory polygraph testing stymies many personnel from joining the JIOC.³¹

Belize also struggles to control its maritime and air domains. In 2005, Belize reorganized its armed forces, creating the BNCG to improve its efforts to control its territorial waters,³² enhance law enforcement at sea, and provide credible deterrence to suspicious maritime illegal activities, including human trafficking.³³ Regrettably, the current manpower establishment and maritime resources are incapable of providing adequate coverage of Belize's maritime domain. At present, the BNCG has no offshore capability to maintain maritime integrity in the Exclusive Economic Zone. It remains an under-resourced department with limited operational reach to conduct successful operations at sea.

As in the land and maritime domains, controlling the airspace against illicit activities is a major challenge for Belize. The BDF is the only in-country entity that has limited capacity to exercise airspace integrity. It has a chronic lack of air assets and cannot guarantee air control of the territory. Suspicious aircraft originating from South America have violated Belize's airspace repeatedly.³⁴ Since the BDF lacks air capacity, intercepting suspicious aircraft is impossible. The Mexican government, wary of these suspicious aircraft, conducts overflights in Belizean territory with Mexican Air Force assets reportedly after getting verbal clearance to deter aircraft from encroaching into Mexican territory.³⁵ No official treaty or formal agreement exists for such overflights raising scrutiny by Belizeans concerned with airspace violation by foreign military aircraft.³⁶ Clandestine landings have occurred at illegal and legal airstrips, but the BDF has been unable to respond.

The Belize Department of Civil Aviation, a stakeholder in airspace control, has oversight of civil aviation matters.³⁷ Its main function is “. . . to regulate and administer a safe civil aviation system whilst ensuring that Belize discharges its obligations properly under international civil aviation agreements and treaties, in particular, the Convention on International Civil Aviation.”³⁸ Air surveillance is limited with only one radar system in country controlled by the Department of Civil Aviation. The radar system tracks air movement within a 250 miles radius, but operates only during daylight hours.³⁹ The inability to respond to air violations and lack of air surveillance at night is a key vulnerability for the country and a marked advantage for transnational criminal organizations. Human trafficking networks are aware of Belize's lack of air assets, sovereignty issues that arise when Mexican planes overfly Belize's airspace, and that radar is easily evaded at night.

³¹ “Canada/U.S. Fund Joint Operations Center,” *7Newsbelize*, December 9, 2013, <http://www.7newsbelize.com/sstory.php?nid=27297>.

³² “The Coast Guard is Strong at Seven,” *7Newsbelize.com*, November 20, 2012, <http://www.7newsbelize.com/sstory.php?nid=24064>.

³³ Mike Rudon, “The Belize National Coast Guard Unveils Development Strategy,” *News 5*, October 15, 2014, <http://edition.channel5belize.com/archives/105002>.

³⁴ Julie Marie Bunck and Micheal Ross Fowler, *Drug Trafficking and the Law in Central America: Bribes, Bullets, and Intimidation* (State College: Pennsylvania State University, University Park 2012), 111-116.

³⁵ “Mexican Fighter Jet Given Permission to Fly over Belize,” *News 5*, July 18, 2013, <http://edition.channel5belize.com/archives/88264>.

³⁶ “Foreign Plane in Belize's Airspace,” *News5*, July 1, 2013, <http://edition.channel5belize.com/archives/87476>.

³⁷ *Belize Department of Civil Aviation Home Page*, <http://www.civilaviation.gov.bz/>.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ “Tracking Belize's Airspace,” *7Newsbelize*, May 4, 2007, <http://www.7newsbelize.com/sstory.php?nid=4711&frmsrch=1>.

The Problem of Corruption

Corruption deteriorates institutional cohesion in Belize and other Central American countries. According to Transparency International, Belize acquiesced considerable slippage in corruption arguably attributed to delinquent groups meddling with governmental departments.⁴⁰ In 2003, Belize ranked 46 in the corruption perception index and skyrocketed subsequently to 109 by 2008.⁴¹ In just five years, the country registered an extraordinary rise in corruption associated with government and public sector glitches. Corruptive practices, therefore, stymie the effective functioning of law enforcement agencies in combating human smuggling and trafficking.

The infiltration of transnational criminal organizations into the government's institutional framework is a significant contributor to corruption. Human trafficking rings rely upon deceitful access of false or legitimate travel documents to evade law enforcement authorities. Past and recent cases involving immigration authorities illustrate the degree to which such misconduct hinders Belize's ability to control effectively persons entering or exiting the territory. The loss of legitimate travel documents such as Belizean passports and visas at the Immigration Department are often unresolved cases. In 2008, two hundred Belizean passports went missing from the Immigration Department and another 100 passports vanished a year later.⁴² Strong suspicion erupted of an internal conspiracy in the department, and the passports eventually found their way to an agent from the human trafficking network.⁴³ The investigation into the misappropriation of the passports remains ongoing. In addition, three chartered airplanes tracked from Haiti landed in Belize's international airport with 34 Chinese nationals onboard. Reportedly, the passengers had false travel documents and managed to slip through the airport Immigration and Passport Control section; their whereabouts are still unknown.⁴⁴

In one case that illustrates the challenge, media houses exposed a typical scheme in 2013 where Chinese nationals entered Belize enabled by trafficking networks and shady Immigration Officials. Mr. Carlos Murga, a Belizean acted as a courier in supplying Belizean visas to Chinese nationals while in Cuba. In that case, immigrants entered Cuba where visas are not required for Chinese nationals.⁴⁵ Belize requires that Chinese nationals obtain a visa prior to visiting the country. The courier took their passports and in-transited via Cancun, Mexico into Belize.⁴⁶ While in Belize, the disbursement of large sums of money facilitated the "purchase" of visas in collusion with unidentified Taiwanese nationals living in Belize. They acted as "immigration agents" through connections established with some Immigration officials.⁴⁷ The courier then proceeded to return the passports with Belizean issued visas through the same route, and with that operating concept, Chinese nationals entered Belize legally.⁴⁸ Fortunately, the detection of the visa fraud resulted in the dismantling of one of many human trafficking rings, and exposure of corrupt practices at the Immigration Department.

⁴⁰ Transparency International, "Corruption Perceptions Index 2003 – 2008," https://www.transparency.org/research/cpi/cpi_2008/o/#results.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² "200 Passports Stolen from Immigration Department," *7 newsbelize*, August 30, 2005, <http://www.7newsbelize.com/sstory.php?nid=4248&frmsrch=1>.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ U.S. Department of State, "2012 Investment Climate Statement- Belize," June 2012, <http://www.state.gov/e/eb/rls/othr/ics/2012/191109.htm>.

⁴⁵ KLM Royal Dutch Airlines, "Visa Information – Destination Cuba," https://www.timaticweb.com/cgi-bin/tim_website_client.cgi?SpecData=1&VISA=&page=visa&NA=CN&AR=00&PASSTYPES=PASS&DE=CU&user=KLMB2C&subuser=KLMB2C.

⁴⁶ "The Visa Human Smuggling Ring Exposed Belize-Cuba- Cancun," *7 Newsbelize*, October 18, 2013, <http://www.7newsbelize.com/sstory.php?nid=26832>.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Furthermore, corruption at the highest levels of government thwarts the fight against trafficking. In the past, human trafficking scandals compromised ministers of government. In 2003, the United States cancelled a visa issued to Belize's Minister of Immigration.⁴⁹ The Minister was allegedly involved in the sale of Belizean passports. The Prime Minister simply re-assigned the Minister to another ministry due to lack of evidence with which to substantiate the accusation. Another case exemplifying the challenge occurred in 2013 implicating a Junior Minister of Immigration in the sale of passports among other immigration irregularities. *The Economist* magazine reported the removal of the Immigration Minister from office over a passport issued to Kim Won-Hong, a South Korean then in a Taiwanese prison for fraud. The Minister personally signed Won-Hong's passport application forms but claimed he "was misled by his own staff."⁵⁰ The Junior Minister was also allegedly involved in signing 150 passport application forms of Asian, Middle Eastern, and Guatemalan nationals who had never set foot in Belize.⁵¹ He lost his position in the ministry and eventually resigned his seat as a Member of the House of Representatives.

Reportedly, the U.S. consular services at the Embassy in Belmopan are more receptive to granting U.S. visas if recommended by a high Belizean government official. Taking advantage of the courtesy provided by the U.S. Embassy to dignitaries, another Junior Minister purportedly facilitated 200 U.S. visa recommendations for Asian nationals.⁵² According to the Junior Minister's "whistle blower," each visa recommendation had a value of U.S. \$1,000.00.⁵³ The Junior Minister also lost his high office but was allowed to remain in government as a backbencher. While it is difficult to establish with precision how widespread incidents of this nature are within government, it illustrates the sagacity of traffickers to permeate high government positions. These circumstances impair government's ability to combat human trafficking.

It seems rather perplexing that Ministers are exempt of immigration violations, even though the law allows for their prosecution. Nonetheless, U.S. sanctions of human trafficking tier downgrades and revoking of visas from Ministers jolted the government into acknowledging the challenge. The pernicious influence of human trafficking can easily beguile government dignitaries who fall victims of corruption. Quite evidently, the high demand for passports is accessible from within the Immigration Department and facilitated by dishonest high government officials. Moreover, unscrupulous Asian nationals are taking advantage of these susceptibilities to gain increased access through Belize and the Central American region.

In addition to the impact of corruption, other urgent security priorities limit the resources available to combat human trafficking. Belize is currently experiencing a surge of violence that is a top priority for the BPD along with the BDF in a supporting role. The increase in human trafficking offenses are overwhelming the Immigration Department's scarce resources, which are concentrated in routine administrative functions. The department possesses technical expertise to deal with immigration matters; nonetheless, it lacks an adequate personnel to conduct operations nationwide. Labor constraints accentuate reliance on the BPD that enforces law and order countrywide.

⁴⁹ "U.S. Embassy Confirms Max's Visa Cancelled," *News 5*, February 12, 2003, <http://edition.channel5belize.com/archives/15666>.

⁵⁰ "Passports to Ignominy, The Murky Road of the Boutereses," *The Economist Online*, November 23, 2013, <http://www.economist.com/news/americas/21590574-murky-world-boutereses-passports-ignominy>.

⁵¹ "Another Scandal Erupts, Penner Implicated Again," *CTV 3 News*, http://ctv3belizenews.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3730%3Aanother-scandal-erupts-penner-implicated-again&Itemid=108.

⁵² "Castro Cross Examination Reveals His Office Facilitated Visa Hustle," *7NewsBelize*, May 14, 2015, <http://www.7newsbelize.com/sstory.php?nid=32450>.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

Violent crime resulting in high murder rates over the last decade has overwhelmed Belize's law enforcement agencies. Homicides, in particular, are on the rise. Belize's murder rate for 2014 was 34.2 when adopting the statistical comparison on annual number of homicides per 100,000.⁵⁴ The Immigration Department is the primary organization responsible for combatting human trafficking violations with the BPD playing a supporting role. Committed to addressing other priorities such as violent crime, curbing immigration violations is not the primary mission of the BPD. Its ability to contribute to the fight against human smuggling and trafficking is, therefore, minimal.⁵⁵ The BPD role is limited to detaining persons caught breaking immigration laws and then referring them to the Immigration Department for prosecution.

With respect to combating the trafficking of Chinese nationals, lack of diplomatic relations with the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) presents another obstacle. Diplomatic inertia hampers formal communication between both countries. Belize initially established diplomatic relations with the Peoples' Republic of China in 1987. The level of economic assistance that the PRC was willing to provide for Belize was insufficient in comparison to that offered by the Republic of China Taiwan (ROC). In October 11, 1989, Belize opted to establish formal diplomatic ties with the ROC as well.⁵⁶ The PRC reciprocated by suspending its diplomatic relations with Belize.⁵⁷ Diplomatic relations are such that there is no official representation of the PRC in Belize or vice versa. The lack of communication channels between the PRC and Belize has resulted in a concurrent the lack of security cooperation. Belize law enforcement agencies are unfamiliar with the Chinese triads, their networks, and global influence.⁵⁸ Information exchange is inadequate among Chinese and Belizean law enforcement agencies. INTERPOL has been providing technical assistance to the BPD in criminal matters.⁵⁹ Information sharing with INTERPOL, however, yields limited success of mostly high profile cases from the Belizean perspective.

Recommendations

Belize must act decisively to reframe its strategy to reverse the current human trafficking trend. The government of Belize in its National Security Strategy acknowledges that combatting transnational threats is a public priority. Belize's National Security Strategy (BNSS) states that, "The BNSS concept encompasses all factors identified essential to the security, stability, and prosperity of Belize and the protection of the geo-political space of Belize as defined by the Belize Constitution."⁶⁰ Furthermore, it articulates a vision of "A safe secure Belize at peace with itself and its neighbors, where the security environment allows the development of a peaceful democratic society that utilizes its human and natural resources to ensure social justice, ethnic harmony, security, stability, and prosperity."⁶¹

In order to effectively combat the threat, Belize must act decisively in the land, sea, and air domains. On the land domain, Belize must deny territory to human trafficking organizations and maintain effective control of its sovereignty and integrity. The two larger security organizations, the

⁵⁴ "Crime Stats Show Murder Up by 20% in 2014," *7 Newsbelize*, December 23, 2014, <http://www.7newsbelize.com/sstory.php?nid=31072>.

⁵⁵ Belize Police Department, "Mission and Values," <http://www.police.gov.bz/index.php/about-us/mission-and-values>.

⁵⁶ Tricia Chen, "Belize and Taiwan Celebrate 20-year Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations," *The China Post*, December 9, 2009, <http://www.chinapost.com.tw/taiwan/foreign-affairs/2009/12/09/235754/Belize-and.htm>.

⁵⁷ "Belize, A Case Study," <http://www.country-data.com/frd/cs/bztoc.html#bzo105>.

⁵⁸ Ellis, *The Strategic Dimension of Chinese*, 118.

⁵⁹ INTERPOL, "Connecting Police for a Safer World," <http://www.interpol.int/Member-countries/Americas/Belize>.

⁶⁰ Dean O. Barrow, *The National Security Strategy of Belize* (Belize: Belmopan City), 8.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

BPD and BDF, must maintain law and land territorial integrity respectively. The deterrence of transnational criminal organizations would require the systematic denial of land especially along border areas. Government agencies and departments lack sufficient human resources for border security. Concerning the porosity of the land border and improved implementation of security measures, the BDF has the mandate to provide for the territorial integrity of Belize, and assistance to law enforcement agencies (ALEA) as stipulated in its Defense Act.⁶² Joint Interagency Task Forces operations with continual involvement of the Immigration Department would deter human trafficking while ensuring the territorial integrity of the country.

Another significant element of the solution is expeditious interagency coordination in support against human trafficking and smuggling. Security agencies and government departments must provide representation at the JIOC. The JIOC coordinates interagency operations at the national level, yet only a few agencies have representation or liaison with the institution. Its functions originated due to increased transnational threats that exceeded law enforcement capacity. The country's scarce security resources required coordination to achieve unity of effort to avert security issues. Preferably, all government agencies should have representation at the JIOC and most prominently, the embattled Immigration Department. The Customs and Excise Department displays more propensity of joint inter-agency collaboration along the border, however, their efforts are limited and dedicated in contraband delinquencies.⁶³ Furthermore, the National Security Council or the Cabinet of Ministers should deliberate in an effort to sway formal adherence of the Departments distant from the JIOC.

Belize must improve and expand information sharing mechanisms with neighboring countries and international partners by considering the complexity of the threat. The BDF and BPD, for example, conduct regular information sharing on security matters with their counterparts in Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and U.S. Southern Command.⁶⁴ The covert maneuvering schemes of Chinese human traffickers are intricate and the absence of information impedes its analysis. Drug trafficking activities are critical information sharing priorities within the Central American region. The Immigration Department made a substantial gain when recently connected to the Personal Identification and Registration System that monitors movement of people at official entry and exit points.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, they must resolutely engage their regional partners in information sharing to decipher the Chinese human trafficking connections and develop better situational awareness.

The government should consider reforming its Immigration Department. Belize's Immigration Department experienced adversities that challenged past government administrations in mitigating its consequences. The configuration of the Immigration Department lacks dedicated enforcement and intelligence units. The department conducts enforcement operations by creating ad-hoc teams of very limited duration when immigration threats are assumed to be high. Belize should consider seeking collaboration with external agencies in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Specifically, Belize would benefit from the experiences of subject matter experts from the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and, if possible, consider the establishment of an

⁶² *Belize Defense Act, Employment of the Force*, Revised Ed. 2000, Chapter 135, sec. 5.

⁶³ "Customs Officers Hit Jack Pot with Contraband Goods," *CTV News*, April 24, 2015, http://www.ctv3belizenews.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6165:customs-officers-hit-jack-pot-with-contraband-goods-&Itemid=100.

⁶⁴ Adam Isacson, Maureen Meyer, and Gabriela Moralez, *Mexico's Other Border: Security, Migration, and the Humanitarian Crisis at the line with Central America* (Washington, DC: Washington Office on Latin America, June 2014), <http://www.wola.org/files/mxgt/report/>.

⁶⁵ International Organization for Migration Regional Office for Central America, North America, and the Caribbean, "IOM Hands Over to Belize an Advanced Border Management System," July 1, 2013, <http://costarica.iom.int/en/campaign/80/>.

indigenous ICE for the Immigration Department. The U.S. Department of Homeland security has a wealth of experience in matters of human trafficking gained from operations along the Mexican border. The establishment of an ICE primarily responds to immigration and customs related security matters as well as other threats internal to the United States.⁶⁶ ICE has been extremely successful in the United States and worth emulating.

Beyond such measures, the formation of an intelligence unit for the Immigration Department is essential to providing accurate information for successful immigration operatives. The proposed establishment of such units implies an increase in personnel and budget expenditures. Doing so would assist in a reduction of human trafficking crimes, which is key to achieving favorable objectives. Belize should also explore other options such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to request specialized training for the Immigration Department.⁶⁷ As part of the reformation process, the Immigration Department should undergo internal reorganization. A first reorganization step is to perform a comprehensive study of the department's internal environment. The services of consultants in systems thinking and organizational behavior would be useful in this initiative. The Prime Minister Honorable Dean Barrow had to intervene during his tenure to ameliorate scandals in the department. It involved the removal of Ministers implicated in corruption practices.⁶⁸ Despite disciplinary actions, these concerns persist since dishonest practices kept evolving in complex and adaptive ways within the department. Arguably, the removal and appointment of Ministers will not rid the department of its objectionable complex adaptive ways without first having an understanding of the fundamental issue.⁶⁹ The objective of the study would focus at improving transparency and mechanisms for detection and control to reduce opportunities for graft in the department's daily affairs. The head of the ministry or department would then implement these and other recommendations identified, which could potentially achieve the strategic vision of change.

Belize, as other developing countries in Central America with weak economies must seek assistance from willing international partners that share a vested interest in combatting trafficking of Chinese nationals. Belize has a small economy confronting a global threat, which also affects developed countries. Human trafficking organizations have a marked advantage over law enforcement due to their unconventional ways of operating. Their financial gains provide unrivaled flexibility and agility to succeed in illicit activities. Belize should continue seeking security cooperation with the United States and Mexico in acquisition of materiel resources, technology, and training initiatives to strengthen the country's institutions and build capacity for law enforcement agencies. The United States has been a steadfast partner for Belize in security related matters and it is foreseeable that they would willingly provide assistance in training, equipment, and mentorship as has been done in the past with other security agencies.

Despite the lack of formal diplomatic relations, Belize should approach the Chinese government through intermediaries (Mexico, U.S.) about expanding its assistance in combating trafficking of Chinese nationals. Belize's current diplomatic relations with the ROC may cause reluctance from the PRC to provide material assistance in organized crime issues. Nonetheless, the Belizean government should explore with both the ROC and PRC the possibility for expanded collaboration against trafficking and smuggling of Chinese nationals through the country. If such collaboration through intermediaries is not possible, the government of Belize should not rule out the possibility of reestablishing diplomatic relations with the PRC.

⁶⁶ U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, "What We Do," , <https://www.ice.gov/overview>.

⁶⁷ United Nations Information Service, "13th United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice."

⁶⁸ "Belize Prime Minister Throws Immigration Minister under the Bus." *Belizean*, October 15, 2013, <http://belizean.com/belize-prime-minister-throws-immigration-minister-under-the-bus-1700/>.

⁶⁹ Andrew Hill, *The Devil you Know: An Introduction to Complex Adaptive Systems*, Faculty Paper (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, June 2014), 2-6.

Belize's must strengthen land, air, and maritime domains within the limits of available financial and human resources. Belize is extremely vulnerable to aircraft perpetrating unauthorized entries into its airspace. The few air assets are reconnaissance capable only. Due to increasing air threats, Belize should seek means to acquire air interceptor capability. In addition, the BDF should procure its own radar system, independent from the one employed at the international airport. Doing so is necessary because the radar at the international airport is under control of the Civil Aviation, which is not a law enforcement agency. If it is not possible to acquire an independent radar system for the BDF, an alternate solution is to hire personnel to maintain a dedicated 24-hour watch and linked to the JIOC to monitor suspicious air activity at night.⁷⁰

In order to fulfill its responsibilities effectively in control of territorial waters and exclusive economic zone, the BNCG must strengthen its maritime capabilities. Denial of maritime approaches to human trafficking networks is an underpinning for the BNCG to exercise effective control of the maritime domain. Human trafficking organizations are less inclined to use maritime approaches to enter Belize. Nevertheless, the Coast Guard's inability to provide adequate maritime control is another loophole that may afford contingencies to human trafficking networks. The BNCG is in the process of acquiring two offshore patrol vessels (OPV) that would provide limited coverage beyond territorial waters.⁷¹ Acquisition of additional OPVs, however, would contribute significantly to maximize effective control of Belizean territorial waters and exclusive economic zone.

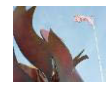
Conclusion

Although not a perfect solution, the recommendations provide strategic alternatives for policymakers to contemplate in the quest to reduce, if not eradicate, human trafficking in Belize. The Immigration Department needs special attention to transform the institution and truncate the embedded culture of corruption. Organizational innovation is a difficult process to achieve due to the pushback that it often produces within the department; therefore, strategic leadership is indispensable to restoring healthy work ethics. Early in the twenty first century, Belize still faces a diplomatic dilemma between ROC and an emergent PRC. Should Belize align its foreign policy with the PRC due to its security challenges attributed by Chinese citizens? The long-term global effects of human trafficking requires attention with calculated integration of the instruments of national power. In the absence of effective changes, these complex diplomatic paradigms could ultimately result in undesirable sanctions for the Central American region; partner countries could discontinue or suspend foreign aid. In the extreme, these problems could lead Belize to risk diplomatic isolation from its neighbors and face the potential of plummeting into a failed state.

As the United States became the world's top economy, it attracted a human desire, particularly for those living in poverty around the world, to search for the "American Dream." An increase in the trafficking of human persons has been the result. Along with the rest of Central America, Belize has fallen prey to the lucrative business of trafficking in Chinese nationals. Trafficking networks have adapted well to the region's unique characteristics, including the plethora of governance, economic, and security challenges. In Belize, the weak security apparatus has particularly negative consequences. If the current policy remains unaltered, the increase in human trafficking could further jeopardize the local economy, undermine governance, fuel corruption, and intensify transparency issues. Actions must be taken now to minimize human trafficking before the practice jeopardizes the security and prosperity of Belize.

⁷⁰ Belize Airport Concession Company Limited, "The Business," 2014, <http://www.pgiabelize.com/about-us/>.

⁷¹ Duane Moody, "U.S. Embassy Donates Boats and Gear to the Belize Coast Guard," *News 5*, December 17, 2015, <http://edition.channel5belize.com/archives/122642>.



Understanding Syria through the Islamic State's Eyes

Benjamin R. Jonsson

By examining the relationship between the rhetoric of the Islamic State and their actions on the ground, this essay exposes the way in which the Islamic State has framed its role in the struggle for Syria. Assessment of provincial Twitter posts from January 2016 reveals the four key themes of the Islamic State's narrative: military strength, battling God's enemies, piety, and the caliphate as a prosperous place. Armed with an understanding of this conflict frame, the United States urgently needs a robust information campaign of its own that exploits weaknesses in Islamic State messaging.

Keywords: *Twitter, Framing, Information Campaigns, Social Media, Terrorism*

It is in psychological terms, though, that IS [the Islamic State] has truly transformed the state of play...So far, most of our attempts to meaningfully mitigate IS's ability to globally engage have been left floundering.

—Charlie Winter¹

In 2014, President Obama referred to the Islamic State as a “JV Team.”² The terror group subsequently took over large portions of Iraq and Syria, established networks throughout the Middle East, and has conducted attacks in a dozen countries. Misreading the Islamic State cannot continue. A self-proclaimed caliphate with control over significant territory, the Islamic State is unique as a terror-organization. It has State-like characteristics and behavior, but lacks aspirations to join the community of nations. In some respects, then, the Islamic State seems indecipherably anomalous. The Islamic State, however, is also, at times, a Twitter-State, providing valuable insights for dealing with a JV team gone rogue. Looking beyond individual tweets to analyze the ways in which the Islamic State defines and frames its struggle, reveals four corners of the Islamic State's conflict frame

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¹ Charlie Winter, *Documenting the Virtual Caliphate* (London: Quilliam Foundation, October 2015), 3.

² Glenn Kessler, “Spinning Obama's Reference to Islamic State as ‘JV’ Team,” *Washington Post Online* September 3, 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2014/09/03/spinning-obamas-reference-to-isis-as-a-jv-team/>.

for its war in Syria (a) military strength, (b) holy battle, (c) caliphate piety, and (d) prosperity of place. Thus, brutality and fear represent only part of the Islamic State’s metanarrative. Internally, the Islamic State frames the struggle quite differently, championing military strength, civil order, and the Sunni cause. To date, the U.S. approach has been informed more by its own political culture than by a deep understanding of the Islamic State. Understanding the frame³ within which the Islamic State operates rhetorically is an important step in understanding how best to respond to the Islamic State as both an enemy combatant and an ideological force.

Method

A snapshot of the Islamic State’s Twitter messages from within Syria at a specific point in time exposes the Islamic State’s conflict frame and facilitates comparison of its virtual-Twitter and physical-military realities. Twitter messages were examined and categorized according to idea content. The data consisted of 134 Twitter posts⁴ from January 1-31, including 99 posts with links to longer pictorial reports, 22 with embedded photos, and 13 with links to video reports (Figure 1).⁵

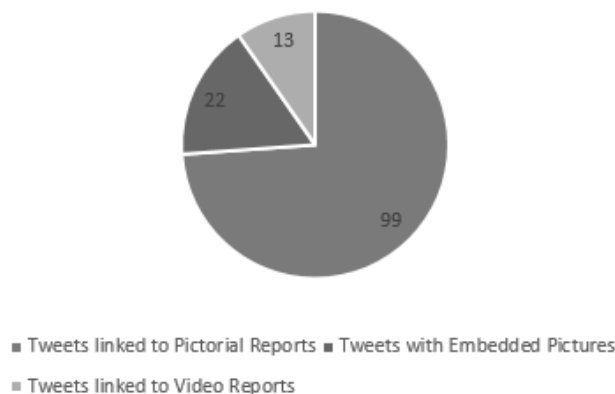


Figure 1: Media Content Type

The Twitter posts were categorized according to 28 primary themes, based on the content. As much as possible, the research categorized the language content of each Tweet into one primary theme. However, 14 Tweets were cataloged into more than one primary theme, based on the varied nature of the content. Tables 1 and 2 depict this categorization of ideas according to 3 schemes

³ B. Gray, “Framing and Reframing of Intractable Environmental Disputes,” in *Research on Negotiation in Organizations*, Vol. 6, ed. R. Lewicki, R. Bies, B. Sheppard (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1997), 171.

⁴ Due to the nature of the content, the Twitter accounts that posted the content were removed from Twitter, and the links are no longer valid. For a screenshot of any/all of the 134 Tweets, please contact the author: benrjonsson@gmail.com.

⁵ The small dataset forms a robust foundation for this analysis for a variety of reasons: It provides a snapshot in time of the Islamic State’s Twitter activity from within Syria; it contains an appropriate number of Tweets compared with a July 2015 study; and it suggests findings that are consistent with four different studies on the Islamic State’s use of social media over the past twelve months: Winter, *Documenting the Virtual Caliphate*; Aaron Zelin, “Picture or It Didn’t Happen: A Snapshot of the Islamic State’s Official Media Output,” August 2015, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/picture-or-it-didnt-happen-a-snapshot-of-the-islamic-states-official-media>; David Gartenstein-Ross and Nathaniel Barr, “Neither Remaining Nor Expanding: The Islamic State’s Global Expansion Struggles,” *War on the Rocks*, February 23, 2106, <http://warontherocks.com/2016/02/neither-remaining-nor-expanding-the-islamic-states-global-expansion-struggles/>; “The Winner’s Messaging Strategy of the Islamic State: Technically Excellent, Vulnerable to Disruption,” June 2015, <http://wikistrat.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/The-Winner%E2%80%99s-Messaging-Strategy-of-the-Islamic-State-Wikistrat-report.pdf>.

identified by researchers in discourse analysis: world view, principled beliefs, and causal beliefs.⁶ Linguistic typology was used to classify ideas even further.⁷ Table 1 identifies ideas that were primarily assertive: they “asserted” a particular truth about a state of affairs. Table 2 identifies ideas that were primarily used to hold other people to their commitments. Taken together, these categories helped identify focal points of the Islamic State’s messaging, revealing a broad conflict frame. Whether the Islamic State is sincerely committed to the focal points of its messaging, or simply communicating something that is self-serving, the importance of what it tells us remains. While admittedly requiring some subjective judgment, the research relied on repeated words and ideas propagated in the Twitter posts to determine which category was most represented by each post’s content. As an example, on January 13, 2016, a user Tweeted a link to a pictorial report at Figure 2.



Figure 2: Translation "Pounding Nusayri and Hizb Al Shaytan (Party of Satan) Bunkers in the Ad Dawwah Region with a 122 mm Cannon." Bottom right: Wilayah Homs Media Office Logo.⁸

The verbiage conveys an identity that is juxtaposed the Shia power-base, both the regime and its allies. “Party of Satan” is a play on words that refers to Hezbollah, Iran’s proxy in Syria, which literally means “Party of God” in Arabic. The text asserts the worldview that the Islamic State is fighting the enemies of the Sunni faith, the Tweet is therefore categorized as “assertive” (Table 1) and “worldview” oriented.

Since all of the Twitter posts included in the analysis were purportedly produced by the Islamic States’ provincial media network inside of Syria, the research focused on media directed at the Arabic-speaking populations in and around Syria. One of the challenges for verifying the claims made in the Islamic State’s Twitter posts is that Syria is a non-permissive environment for journalists and outside news organizations, which have come to rely largely on individual reporting through social media.⁹ As a result, this study tracked events on the ground using the open data-driven media

⁶ Judith Goldstein and Robert Keohane, eds., *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).

⁷ Nicholas Onuf and Frank Klink, “Anarchy, Authority, Rule,” *International Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (1989): 149-173.

⁸ Homs Media Office, Twitter post, January 13, 2016 (7:33 a.m.), “Pounding Nusayri and Hizb al Shaytan Bunkers in the Ad Dawwah Region with a 122 mm Cannon,” <http://justpaste.it/5naem> (originally posted but no longer available at https://twitter.com/abo_m_76/status/687296391669006337).

⁹ Paul Shinkman, et al., “Journalism, the Military, and America’s Wars,” Podcast, *War on the Rocks*, January 25, 2016, <http://warontherocks.com/2016/01/journalism-the-military-and-americas-wars/>.

platform <http://syria.liveuamap.com/>, which relies on field reports from open sources as a method to corroborate or contradict the Islamic State's Twitter posts.

Table 1: Assertive Posts

	# of uses	Post Descriptions
Worldview	20	Victorious combined arms maneuver against "Nusayris" (derogatory term for Alawite), "Apostate" Sunnis and Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) (ie. depicting ISIL fighters firing various weapons, including tanks, mortars, and machine guns); dead Nusayris or awakening apostates following battles; pounding Nusayri and the "party of Satan" (Hezbollah) with artillery; video of commando units and dead "Nusayri" soldiers; attacking Awakening and Nusra fighters, dead Nusra fighter and prisoners taken
	10	Targeting "Nusayri" Army gatherings with <i>locally-made</i> rockets in the village of Najjarah; targeting the PKK with locally-made rockets
	9	Peaceful scenery: (ie. Gardens of Ashadadah)
	2	Aftermath of attacks by the Alawite regime; by Russian airstrikes
	8	Spoils that God gave his fighters; spoils after retaking Kubri; after taking 6 Nusayri checkpoints; from awakening rejectionists
	1	There is no value in this world apart from God
	2	Video of ISIL fighters from N. Africa discussing colonization against Islam; call to unity; West occupying N. Africa
Principled Beliefs	2	Mercy: (ie. distributing alms to in Al Qaryatayn sector, depicting ISIL operatives keeping a log of alms recipients and distributing plastic bags of foodstuffs)
	1	Reconciliation between two spouses, pictorial report
	2	Video of military training, "Allah extend the caliphate until it rules the eastern and western parts of the world"
	9	Suicide Attacks (ie Successful truck attack on regime forces) video of three suicide attacks against regime elements; against awakening apostates in the North
	6	Details (graphic pictures) of killed "awakening" fighters, Nusayri "agents" of the regime, and alleged spies
Causal Beliefs	20	Ongoing military operations: Pictures of ongoing battles around the area of Ayn Isa; successful targeting of Nusayri positions with rockets, targeting with artillery; against the unseen PKK; clashes with Nusayri Army; sophisticated operations north of Kuwayris airport against Nusayri; Nusayri security and militia men captured, their planes "do nothing for them"; crusader plane does nothing to help the awakening apostates; engaging Nusayri positions and Russian aircraft)
	2	Video on production and use of a superior sniper rifle against regime and Nusra members; pictorial report on an air defense company
	3	Preparing food for the men on the front lines; distribution of news and prayer times to the front lines
	1	Ghazal village sweep results in picture of grisly awakening corpse

Table 2: Commitment Posts

	# of uses	Post Descriptions
Worldview	17	Civil order in the caliphate (ie. pictorial report of snow in Al Bab with children playing, men shoveling, peaceful city life; town of Rai, stone-cutting, slaughterhouse; shops filled with food and merchandise; inspection and testing of foods; repairing power lines in Ash_Shadadah; Raqqa electric service offices and men at work to repair crusader or Russian aircraft damage; distributing newspaper An Nab'a; male and female children schools with math and reading, the "cubs and flowers of the caliphate")
	5	Defensive (ie. sentries guard against the awakening apostates; against the regime; guarding the frontiers; victorious repelling of an apostate awakening attack; repelling helicopter attack)
	3	Pictorial report of young suicide driver; father hugs son before teenage son climbs into a vehicle-borne explosive device, followed by explosion in distance
	1	Religious workshop for the "cubs of the Caliphate," with boys armed and dressed in camouflage
Principled Beliefs	3	Public execution for crimes (i.e. execution of man for apostasy; stoning a man for adultery, execution of a man for murder)
	1	Video report citing the Koran and depicting North African fighters criticizing their apostate governments, their affiliation with Jews and crusaders; the sword is the only way
	1	Pictorial report: Police were established for the protection of the people and their property (picture of police listening to citizens)
Causal Beliefs	4	Call to Jihad videos: Former Saudi singer calls others to Jihad; A historical overview and call for North Africans to join Jihad
	15	Religious Piety (ie Activities of Al Hisbah [ISIL religious compliance police] in the cities of Ar Raqqah and Tabaqah; distribution of Da'wa literature; Friday worship and shopping; distribution of religious literature to fighters; community watching a program on Islam and science; testing Imams after a Sharia course; those who die live in God's presence)
	1	Memorialized fighter who died storming a Nusayri gathering
	1	Preparing and departing for a battle against "atheists"
	1	Pictorial report on caring for the family needs of the martyrs

The Islamic State's Twitter Presence

Four focal points emerge from the analysis. They represent four corners of the Islamic State's conflict frame for its war in Syria:

- Strength of the military campaigns (victory, targeting, advanced weapons built in the caliphate, spoils gained, mutilated opponents)
- Battle against God's enemies (Nusayris [a derogatory term for the regime], apostate Kurds, Awakening [Sunni] apostates; sentries on the frontier)
- Piety in the actions of the people of the caliphate (mercy, justice, prayer, distribution of literature, educating youth, dying for God)
- A prosperous place (pictures of nature, orderly streets, filled markets)

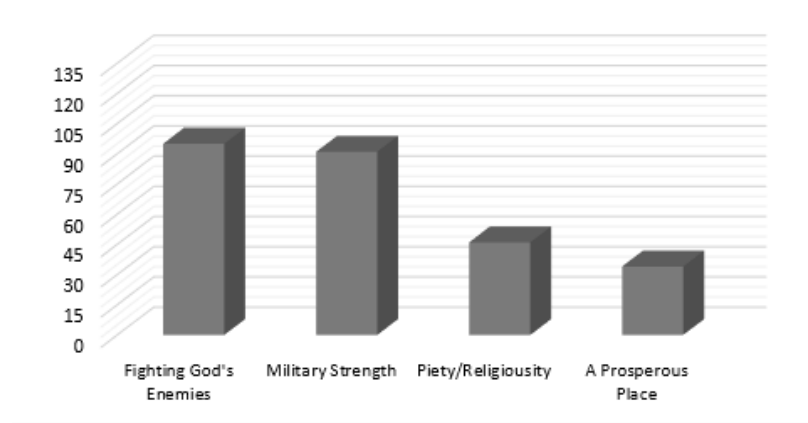


Figure 3: Occurrences of Each Theme across 134 Twitter Posts

Military Strength

Among these posts were reports of victorious battles against regime and Kurdish forces, including pictures of uniformed Islamic State forces firing tanks, heavy artillery, rockets, and machine guns. They also featured grisly pictures of dead enemies, a video of a newly developed sniper rifle and tails of its success in action and pictures of spoils taken in battle.

Events on the ground during the period of analysis demonstrate that the Islamic State's narrative of victory and strength did not reflect reality. The month of January was marked by Islamic State losses, counter-attacks, and modest expansion within Syria, but the Islamic State still lost more territory than it gained. For example, on January 13, 2016, regime and Syrian rebel forces made significant territorial gains against the Islamic State in northern Syria, where the Islamic State lost the towns of Baghidin, Khalfatli, Ayn Al Bayda, Surayb, and A'ran.¹⁰ On the same day, the Islamic State posted an account of its "pounding" of regime and Hezbollah positions outside of Palmyra. No external reporting supported the Islamic State's claim. The Islamic State simply ignored battles where they lost significant territory and emphasized other elements of the struggle—featuring a new sniper rifle, the activity of an air defense company, suicide missions, and a 14-minute video about a new military offensive. In other cases, the Islamic State reported the results of actual fighting, but where the Islamic State lost ground, its Twitter posts continued the narrative of strength and did not depict any losses. In the few instances that Twitter posts depicted coalition or regime airstrike activity, the Twitter posts still conveyed a message of strength by stating that the airstrikes were unable to help Nusayri or Awakening forces (alluding to the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces) on the ground. Likewise, although the Islamic State lost territory in January, no mention of it appeared in the Twitter posts (and coalition airstrikes despite confirmed damage to infrastructure, equipment, and personnel were only mentioned twice), demonstrating the perceived strategic importance of maintaining its strength narrative.¹¹ This type of framing through social media is vulnerable to contradiction and could be weakened with an extensive information campaign, with virtually no additional commitment of combat resources.

¹⁰ *ISIS Live UA Map Home Page*, <http://syria.liveuamap.com/en/2016/13-january-saa--tiger-forces-captured-ayn-albayda-east-of>.

¹¹ United States Central Command, "Jan. 16: Military Airstrikes Continue against ISIL Terrorists in Syria and Iraq," January 16, 2016, <http://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/PRESS-RELEASES/Press-Release-View/Article/904506/jan-16-military-airstrikes-continue-against-isil-terrorists-in-syria-and-iraq/>.

Battle against God's Enemies

The theme of the Islamic State's battle against God's enemies was emphasized in 94 out of 134 twitter posts. The posts included the extensive use of Koranic verses and the exclusive use of the term "Nusayri" for regime forces, in one case coupling it with the term "crusader." "Nusayri" is a reference to Ibn Nusayr, the man believed to have propagated the Alawite sect in the 9th century, and implies that the sect was founded by man-made ideas and is therefore not Islamic.¹² Similarly, references to clashes with the Kurdish forces were always preceded by "apostate" or "atheist," as are the depictions of slain Sunni Arabs, who are referred to as "awakening apostates." The "awakening" term was first used for the Sunni Muslims in Anbar that sided with the United States against Al Qaida in Iraq (which later became the Islamic State) in 2007-2008, ostensibly portraying those Sunnis that fight against the Islamic State as Western agents.¹³

The assertion that the Islamic State is fighting against God's enemies accords the group a religious authority and sense of mission with which few governments or rebel factions can compete—especially Arab states that are viewed as serving their own interests rather than the faith of Islam.¹⁴ The rule of Bashar Al Assad's Alawite sect through decades of brutal oppression, in the context of a regional struggle for domination between Shia and Sunni power-centers, created a space for religiously-motivated militancy. While the Islamic State dominates this space, there is competition for the opportunity to represent the aspirations of Sunni militancy, as demonstrated by the strength of Jubhat Al Nusra, Jaish Al Islam, Ahrar Al Sham, and other militant Islamist groups. These groups are fighting not only against the regime, but against secular-leaning rebel forces and against each other for domination.

Many Sunni "fence-sitters" view the fight against the aggressive militancy of Iran and their proxies in the region (and by extension the Syrian regime) as an imperative.¹⁵ When it comes to the question of who will guarantee the best future for the Sunni people of Syria, the Islamic State responds with the insistence that it is God's army, fighting God's enemies. As such, the Islamic State has an inherent appeal as the Sunni force that is pushing back against the enemies of Islam, whether those of the oppressive "Nusayri" government (ie, Bashar Al Asad), the regional Shiite threat (Iran and Hezbollah), or against Kurdish forces that are apostates of the faith. Some Twitter posts featured the Islamic State "sentries" on the borders of the frontier. The language conveyed the idea that the Islamic State is threatened by "apostates" and must protect the caliphate—and, by extension, the faith of Islam itself.

Piety

Not only did the Islamic State frame its legitimacy with its theme of fighting God's enemies, but it also demonstrated the group's piety in 46 of 134 Tweets. The Islamic State presented the ideas of mercy, justice, religious activity, commitment unto death, and even the training of children in a

¹² Joshua Landis, "Zahran Alloush: His Ideology and Beliefs," *Syria Comment*, Blog entry posted December 15, 2013, <http://www.joshualandis.com/blog/zahran-alloush/>.

¹³ Najim Abed Al-Jabouri and Sterling Jensen, "The Iraqi and AQI Roles in the Sunni Awakening," *Prism* 2, no. 1 (2010): 3-18.

¹⁴ Rami Khouri, *ISIS is About the Arab Past, Not the Future* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, May 2015),

https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/isis_is_about_the_arab_past_not_the_future.pdf

¹⁵ Council on Foreign Relations, "The Sunni-Shia Divide," http://www.cfr.org/peace-conflict-and-human-rights/sunni-shia-divide/p33176#!?cid=otr-marketing_url-sunni_shia_infoguide; Patrick Tucker, "Here's Why People Join ISIS," *Government Executive*, December 8, 2015, <http://www.govexec.com/defense/2015/12/heres-why-people-join-isis/124300/?oref=d-dontmiss>.

religious workshop (a group that strangely resembled Islamic State Cub Scouts). In counterintuitive way, the three executions it Tweeted portrayed swift justice, a notion that may be appealing to people that have often been victims of rampant corruption. While the Western world focuses on the brutality of the Islamic State, the analysis suggests that the Islamic State spent the first month of 2016 strengthening its core narrative of pious religionists. For Western audiences, the irony seems so stark as to not be believable. For an organization that purports to be a religious caliphate, however, a strict adherence to Islamic religiosity and jurisprudence is crucial. As other research has suggested, the Islamic State has a narrow and selective interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence. Despite the fact that this interpretation is not representative of the developments in Islamic law over past centuries,¹⁶ however, it should not be overlooked as a key feature of the Islamic State's framing of its activities in Syria.

A Prosperous Place

The final corner of the Islamic State's conflict frame for its war in Syria is that it has created a prosperous place. Thirty-four out of the 134 Twitter posts pictured nature, orderly streets, filled markets, or social services. The ideas of civil order and the beauty of the caliphate together made up 20% of the textual content. While the theme of the caliphate as a prosperous place is not generally appreciated by Western audiences, it is crucial to an organization that markets itself as the guardian of God's people, the people of the caliphate. Not only does it help the Islamic State attract sympathetic Muslims to its cause, but it also demonstrates that, compared to competing jihadi movements, the Islamic State can deliver a better life to the families of fighters and to those who support the Mujahedeen (doctors, industries, etc). As Charlie Winter observed in his comprehensive work on the Islamic State's messaging, "With its 'caliphate' narrative as a unique selling point, the group is able to decry the intransigence of its jihadist rivals, pick holes in their respective programmes, and claim that Islamic State alone is legitimate in the eyes of God."¹⁷ The success of the Islamic State as a caliphate is a key component of its metanarrative of restoring the greatness of Islam, whose previous caliphates were dominant world powers between the 8th and 13th centuries.¹⁸

Countering the Islamic State through Social Media

Dispersed in the 134 Twitter posts are hundreds of photos that tell the story visually—an important component of the Islamic State's Twitter campaign. In contrast, the Combined Joint Task Force Inherent Resolve Tweets during the period of time covered in this study contained relatively few post-strike photos and videos or Arabic language Tweets. A serious U.S. counter-information campaign would better exploit the Islamic State's military defeats (such as the destruction of Islamic State targets) and would include reporting on Kurdish and regime victories over the Islamic State in order to *erode the Islamic State narrative of military strength*. Since reliable sources of objective media within Syria are scarce, engaging in this information war by Tweeting pictures and videos of reality could gain credibility over time.

¹⁶ Caner Dagli, "The Phony Islam of ISIS," *The Atlantic* February 27, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/02/what-muslims-really-want-isis-atlantic/386156/>.

¹⁷ Winter, *Documenting the Virtual Caliphate*, 30.

¹⁸ Cole Bunzel, *From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State*, The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World, no. 19 (Washington, DC: Brookings, March 2015), <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2015/03/ideology-of-islamic-state-bunzel/the-ideology-of-the-islamic-state.pdf>.

The Islamic State's one-dimensional representation of military strength must also be challenged through counter-discourse. Local forces, coupled with special operations advisors and coalition airstrikes, can erode the Islamic State's narrative of military strength if managed adroitly and augmented by a targeted information campaign. Simply Tweeting pictorial reports and videos in Arabic that highlight Islamic State losses could serve as a powerful information weapon when propagated through hashtags and retweets by Arab news sources. This effort could be overseen by the State Department's new Center for Global Engagement, especially if experts in social media exploitation execute the effort.¹⁹ The Islamic State is likely to persist in actions and policies that portray an image of military strength in the form of offensive operations, competency with advanced weapons, and/or uniforms and organization—whether real or imagined. The fact that the Islamic State is willing to fabricate military successes for rhetorical effect suggests that undermining the Islamic State's military strength narrative could reduce its credibility and help erode its momentum.

A revived U.S. information campaign should also exploit fissures in the Islamic State social contract, highlighting reports of disparities in wealth between foreign fighters and locals, the misery of the poor, and heavy-handed Islamic State tactics for taxation and conscription in places like Deir Az Zur.²⁰ The approach should build on existing efforts by Syrian activists, include Arabic interviews with returning fighters and fleeing refugees, and employ metadata software to inform targeted messaging strategies.²¹

The U.S. information campaign should depend on transparency, demonstrating that American values are better by consistently reporting the truth, even when that means describing U.S. setbacks. While no counter-messaging panacea for reversing Islamic State dominance on Twitter exists, these efforts would help undermine the Islamic State's domestic and global appeal over time.

The risks that engaging in a more active information campaign carries are not insignificant. When pressured, the Islamic State may shift to a narrative focusing on the fulfillment of prophesied defeats preceding the return of the Mahdi and their final victory, as Graeme Wood warned.²² While this shift could help the Islamic State survive as an ideology, it would make clear that recruits were signing up for premature death—not heaven on earth—a potential deterrent.

Another risk to undermining the Islamic State's narrative on Twitter is that it could drive the organization to develop new social media encryption technologies or tactics that make it harder for non-followers to access. It could also strengthen certain elements of the Islamic State's core narrative if the United States Tweets footage that the Islamic State is able to successfully exploit (for example, by portraying the Americans as culpable for civilian deaths). These risks do not negate the urgency for a robust information campaign, but they should inform its implementation. The United States must avoid adding to the perception that Sunnis are under attack from all sides.

Conclusion

The United States is inadvertently helping the Islamic State maintain its allure even in the midst of relative decline in Syria by woefully underperforming in the social media realm. The Islamic State formed out of the ashes of a near-complete defeat of Al Qaida in Iraq by the end of 2010. While core Sunni grievances in Iraq certainly strengthened the position of its remaining leaders, its quick rise back to power demonstrates the strength of its deeply sectarian and religious narrative. The sectarian

¹⁹ U.S. Department of State, "Global Engagement Center."

²⁰ Mara Revkin, "ISIS' Social Contract," *Foreign Affairs Online*, January 10, 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/syria/2016-01-10/isis-social-contract>.

²¹ Sound and Picture, <http://sound-and-picture.com/?p=1335>.

²² Graeme Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants," *The Atlantic*, March 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980/>.

appeal of the Islamic State is bolstered by propaganda that exploits sectarian tensions and appeals to Sunni masses, making political reconciliation extremely difficult. Even if the United States solved the Arab-Israeli conflict on decidedly positive terms for the Palestinians, disposed of every autocratic ally in favor of a populist choice, and withdrew every American soldier from the Arab lands, there would still be radical Islamists that threatened the United States. There is a deeply religious narrative to Islamic terrorism that will not be satisfied short of total world domination.²³ At the core of the Islamic State's conflict frame is an interpretation of the Koran that is militant and expansionist.²⁴ In formulating a counter-narrative, the United States must recognize and account for both the underlying sectarian appeal and the prominence of religious messaging in the Islamic State's framing of the conflict.

For all of President Obama's missteps in Syria, the decision to not commit a large ground force has meant that the Islamic State targeted the Nusayris and the Kurds as its principle enemies. If the United States had committed ground forces, it might have played into the religious narrative of the Islamic State that prophetically believes in a final battle against "Rome" or the West.²⁵ Those who advocate for a large U.S. ground combat role should anticipate how the Islamic State would exploit U.S. intervention in a religious context, attempting to validate their call for the final battle for all Muslims at Dabiq.

The potency of the religious appeal of the Islamic State has been the focus of previous efforts to counter the messaging of the Islamic State, attempting to win over would-be jihadists with the powerful voice of "moderate" or true Islam.²⁶ Even President Obama weighed in on the messaging effort with his controversial statement that "ISIS is not Islamic."²⁷ While his point that the Islamic State does not represent the 1.6 billion Muslims in the world was accurate, it raised the broader question of who in the Muslim world possesses the power and influence to counter the Islamic State's messaging in the global media? Do such forces even exist, and presuming that they do, have they been utilized to the maximum extent possible? While there is a natural problem with trying to preach a loud message of moderation, more can be done by religious centers like Al Azhar mosque in Cairo, the Organization of the Islamic Summit, and the various Mufti leaders of large theological traditions. The United States should more vigorously pursue regional cooperation on a social media strategy that undercuts the Islamic State's claims that they are God's people, fighting God's enemies.

In the context of sectarian violence in Iraq after the U.S. invasion, an effort began in Jordan in 2004 called the Amman Message, which created a definition for who is a Muslim and eliminated illegitimate practices of calling other Muslims "takfir" (apostates). It was endorsed in July 2006 by over 500 leading Muslim scholars, and it was an important part of dealing with the religious war in Iraq.²⁸ The Amman Message, however, has not had an active role in addressing the resurgence of sectarianism in Iraq (or in Syria) and the rise of the Islamic State. The United States should explore an Amman Message part II, as a part of its ongoing cooperation with partners in the region.

²³ Aaron Zelin, "English Translation of Aḥmad Bawādī's "Revolutions are no Substitute for Jihād" from Issue #62 of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan's al-Ṣamūd Magazine," September 19, 2011, <http://jihadology.net/2011/09/19/english-translation-of-a-%e1%b8%a5mad-bawadi%e2%80%99s-%e2%80%9crevolutions-are-no-substitute-for-jihad%e2%80%9d-from-issue-62-of-the-islamic-emirate-of-afghanistan%e2%80%99s-al-%e1%b9%a3amud-magazine/>.

²⁴ Thomas Joscelyn, "Baghdadi Claims Infidel Nations are Afraid of Final War," *Long War Journal*, December 27, 2015, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/12/baghdadi-claims-infidel-nations-are-afraid-of-final-war.php>.

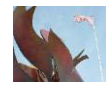
²⁵ Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants."

²⁶ Tucker, "Here's Why People Join ISIS."

²⁷ "Transcript: President Obama's Speech on Combating ISIS and Terrorism," *CNN*, September 10, 2014, http://www.cnn.com/2014/09/10/politics/transcript-obama-syria-isis-speech/index.html?hpt=po_c1.

²⁸ *The Amman Message*, "Summary," http://ammanmessage.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=16&Itemid=30.

Ultimately, however, coordinating with regional partners to enhance the influence of Sunni religious authorities is a necessary but insufficient answer to the deep, religious claims of the Islamic State and the enduring threat of Islamic terrorism. The U.S., nevertheless, can help strengthen these alternative voices and religious narratives from within the region by effectively engaging social media. A robust and nuanced information campaign is urgently needed and long overdue. Because the conflict frame established by the Islamic State enables them to persist despite military and economic setbacks, the frame itself provides a key to its own destruction. To maximize success, the United States should exploit rather than attack this conflict frame. A direct attack in social media is easily countered and absorbed by the structure and history of the conflict frame and its constituents. The Islamic State's reliance on themes of their own military prowess, their fight against God's enemies, the piety of their actions, and the creation of a prosperous place are all vulnerable to exploitation through counter-messaging. By fundamentally altering the Islamic State's regional and domestic appeal, successful exploitation could help dismantle the frame, guarantee the rights and future of the Syrian Sunnis, and weaken the Islamic State's ability to threaten the United States over the long term.



Taming the LTTE: Counterinsurgency Insights from Sri Lanka

Mark O'Connell

The 26-year conflict between the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the LTTE provides an excellent case study for counterinsurgency theorists. Ethnocentric tensions born out of British rule fueled the insurgency from its nascent stages until the LTTE's defeat in May of 2009. Although not without controversy, the LTTE was defeated following four years of concerted government efforts. This essay examines the conflict, its root causes, and the strategies used, offering insights and exploring lessons-learned for future counterinsurgency operations.

Keywords: *Tamil Tigers, Terrorism, Strategy*

For 26 years Sri Lanka was embroiled in a brutal civil war to control much of its countryside. The small island nation of Sri Lanka off the coast of India is roughly the size of West Virginia and home to over 22 million people. Ethnically divided, the country is composed of 74% Sinhalese, 13% Sri Lankan Tamil, and 7% Moor (Muslim).¹ The terrorist organization, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), waged a guerilla insurgency against the government's forces, the majority Sinhalese Sri Lankan Armed Forces (SLAF). For 18 of these 26 years, LTTE attacked the SLAF with ferocity and ingenuity that was unmatched by any other terrorist organization for its time. The LTTE were labeled "among the most dangerous and deadly extremists in the world" by the FBI; they revolutionized suicide attacks with the invention of the suicide belt, were the first terrorist organization to employ the use of chemical weapons, were the first to employ a cyber-attack against a state, and assassinated two world leaders.² In the early 2000's their force of approximately 20,000

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¹ Neil DeVotta, "The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the Lost Quest for Separatism in Sri Lanka," *Asian Survey* 49, no. 6 (November/December 2009): 1028.

² Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Taming the Tamil Tigers from Here in the U.S.," January 10, 2008, https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2008/january/tamil_tigers011008; Bruce Hoffman, "The First Non-State Use of a Chemical Weapon in Warfare: The Tamil Tigers' Assault on East Kiran," *Small War & Insurgencies* 20, no. 3 (September – December 2009): 465; University of Maryland, "Terrorist Organizational Profile: Internet Black Tigers," http://www.start.umd.edu/tops/terrorist_organization_profile.asp?id=4062.

included a navy, air force, suicide wing, and an international funding organization that raised millions for the cause, while controlling almost a quarter of the Sri Lankan countryside.³ And yet in a little over four years, the LTTE was wiped off the map despite their robust capability. In 2005, Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa assumed office and embarked on Eelam War IV to pursue the complete annihilation of the militant separatist movement. Government forces won. This, the first successful counterinsurgency campaign of the 21st century, raises many questions. What were the root causes of this conflict? Did the LTTE make any mistakes that made their defeat easier? What were the keys to the Sri Lankan success? What does this mean for counterinsurgency theory?

The counterinsurgency struggle between the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the LTTE provides an excellent case study for counterinsurgency theorists. Ethnocentric tensions born out of British rule fueled the insurgency from its nascent stages until the LTTE's defeat in May of 2009. Successive strategic missteps by the leader of the LTTE, Velupillai Prabhakaran, contributed to their destruction. The GoSL underwent a series of necessary improvements to enable success on the battlefield. And yet the government's win still remains tarnished; the end of Tamil Eelam War IV did not end the controversy over the conduct of the war nor the calls to assuage Tamil grievances. If the LTTE had pursued different strategies following the Cease Fire Agreement (CFA) of 2002, they might not have been defeated. The end of Tamil Eelam War IV did not end the controversy over the conduct of the war nor the calls to assuage Tamil grievances. The struggle between the LTTE and the GoSL provides insights for strategists who may confront counterinsurgency conflicts in the future.

Background

British Colonial Rule established the precursors for a 26 year Sri Lanka insurgency. The empowerment of Tamils influenced by western education helped fuel ethnic tensions on the island. After gaining independence in 1948, the Sinhalese attempted to correct perceived favoritism towards the Tamils by instituting policies that favored the majority Sinhalese population. After years of seeking a political resolution to the tensions, the Tamils initiated an armed conflict in 1983 to force a more equitable distribution of power, spawning the birth of the LTTE organization. India tried to intervene in 1987, but could not deter the LTTE from its quest to build a Tamil state. Following the withdrawal of Indian forces in 1990, the LTTE renewed its attacks on the GoSL to bring about the just treatment of the Sri Lankan Tamils until a tenuous peace was struck in 1994. No political resolution emerged after multiple rounds of peace talks, thus the LTTE reengaged the SLAF until both sides became fatigued in 2002. Political events, including the election of President Rajapaksa, and a natural disaster damaged the LTTE from 2002 to 2006. Despite its weakened state, the LTTE again chose to engage the SLAF leading to the military defeat of the Tigers.

British methods to maintain control over the island of Sri Lanka empowered the minority Tamil people. The Dutch ceded control of the island to the British in 1801 after wresting control from the Portuguese. The British encountered a nation divided along cultural lines predominately between the Sinhalese Buddhist and the Hindu Tamils.⁴ Yet these two communities had coexisted for nearly two thousand years together as neighbors.⁵ Tensions between the two cultures arose after a brief period of resistance during which the British were able to subdue the Sinhalese Kingdom of

³ DeVotta, "The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the Lost Quest for Separatism in Sri Lanka," 1023.

⁴ Ahmed S. Hashem, *When Counterinsurgency Wins, Sri Lanka's Defeat of the Tamil Tigers* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 55-57.

⁵ Gordon Weiss, *The Cage, the Fight for Sri Lanka and the Last Days of the Tamil Tigers* (New York: Bellevue Literary Press, 2012), 18.

Kandyan in the central highlands and unite the whole of the country under one rule. British reign brought with it English language education, first by missionaries and later by the state. British efforts were embraced by the Northern Tamils and initially rejected by the Sinhalese, leading to a disproportionate number of the schools built in the Tamil north.⁶ With education came opportunity and many Tamils easily rose from British errand boys to western-educated lawyers, doctors, and administrators running much of the country.⁷ The Tamils thus became disproportionately overrepresented in the universities, industry, and the highest levels of government.⁸

The British ceded control of the island to the democratically representative government of Ceylon in 1948. Upon transition to self-governance, the majority Sinhalese moved to correct imbalances in government and education inciting the civil divide between Tamils and Sinhalese.⁹ Almost immediately the ruling elites decided that English had to be replaced as the official language of the country. Initially, *both* Sinhala and Tamil languages would be the official languages. By the mid-1950's, a growing Sinhala nationalist movement wanted to impose only Sinhala.¹⁰ The Sinhala Only Language Act that became law in 1956 sparked widespread hostility between the Sinhalese and Tamils.¹¹ Continuing Sinhalese resentment of perceived Tamil advantages produced university admissions processes favoring the Sinhalese with the Standards of Education Act of 1970. Sinhalese Nationalism even drove the government to adopt a new Constitution in 1972 establishing Buddhist primacy in Sri Lanka.¹²

These Sinhalese actions led to a civil war requiring international mediation. In response to the Constitution of 1972, the Tamil minority formed the Tamil United Front (TUF) which would develop to become the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF).¹³ The TULF cited a litany of grievances against the current government and demanded the establishment of an independent Tamil state, to be named Eelam, in the northern and northeastern of Sri Lanka.¹⁴ Infighting between moderate and more active members of the TULF youth organization split creating the Tamil New Tigers (TNT) in 1972, which would evolve to become the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 1976. A charismatic young leader commanded the outfit by the name of Velupillai Prabhakaran.¹⁵

On July 13, 1983, an LTTE group ambushed an army patrol in the northern province of Jaffna, killing 13 soldiers and triggering the worst Anti-Tamil rioting in Sri Lankan history. Over 2000 Tamils were killed prompting masses to flee the island for India and other nations. Many of the Tamils remaining fled to the northeast of the country and supported the rebel groups.¹⁶ The LTTE initially had to compete with numerous other militant groups, but by the late 1980s it had ruthlessly consolidated power as the premier Tamil insurgent organization. The LTTE initially overmatched the ill-equipped and undermanned Sri Lankan Army (SLA), because of training assistance and intelligence support from the Indian government.¹⁷ It took four years for the Sri

⁶ Hashem, *When Counterinsurgency Wins*, 55-58.

⁷ Weiss, *The Cage*, 18.

⁸ DeVotta, "The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the Lost Quest for Separatism in Sri Lanka," 1025.

⁹ Hashem, *When Counterinsurgency Wins*, 65-66.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ DeVotta, "The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the Lost Quest for Separatism in Sri Lanka," 1026.

¹² Hashem, *When Counterinsurgency Wins*, 70-80.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁴ Hoffman, "The First Non-State Use of a Chemical Weapon in Warfare," 465; Hashem, *When Counterinsurgency Wins*, 82.

¹⁵ Hashem, *When Counterinsurgency Wins*, 88.

¹⁶ DeVotta, "The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the Lost Quest for Separatism in Sri Lanka," 1028; Hashem, *When Counterinsurgency Wins*, 89.

¹⁷ Hashem, *When Counterinsurgency Wins*, 88-92.

Lankan army to mount an effective campaign against the LTTE, later known as Eelam War I. In the summer of 1987, the SLA marched into the Northern Province with 8000 men and almost succeeded in capturing much of the LTTE Leadership. As the SLA prepared to assault the Tamil stronghold in Jaffna, an outcry of support from the 60 million Tamils from within India forced it to interfere and impose a peace treaty.¹⁸

India's arbitration attempts led to unlikely consequences, including uniting GoSL and the LTTE to demand India's ultimate withdrawal from the Sri Lankan conflict. India attempted to arbitrate the civil war, but could not prevent the conflict from continuing. The Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) arrived in July 1987 in accordance with the Indo-Lanka Accords, signed by India and Sri Lanka but not by the LTTE. The IPKF grew to a force of 80,000 to establish a buffer between the warring parties in the North.¹⁹ Neither the SLA nor the LTTE were keen on Indian involvement. The GoSL felt they had the LTTE on the run and were prepared to make the final assault. The LTTE saw the Indian government as self-serving in calling for the complete disarmament of the LTTE. Prabhakaran stated he would teach the Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, a lesson for his interference in the Tamil quest for Eelam.²⁰ The LTTE began an all-out fight against the IPKF after refusing to turn over their arms. In an odd twist, the GoSL began arming the LTTE in their fight against the IPKF. For three years, the LTTE harassed the Indian forces, who were well-disciplined and equipped, but ill-manned and poorly trained for a counterinsurgency fight.²¹ Finally, after losing approximately 1,200 killed or injured soldiers, the IPKF withdrew in March 1990.²²

Emboldened by the withdrawal of the Indian Peace Keeping Forces the LTTE renewed their fight for independence with vigor and tenacity until both sides were exhausted. In many areas, the LTTE just occupied the bases and infrastructure the IPKF had vacated thereby creating in effect the nascent beginnings of Tamil Eelam.²³ The Tigers struck with a vengeance to open Eelam War II by killing 600 Sri Lankan police that had surrendered. The LTTE also began to conduct targeted assassinations of those opposed to their cause. In September 1991, a female LTTE suicide bomber killed a former Indian Prime Minister and two months later a suicide bomber killed the Sri Lankan President.²⁴ This stage of the conflict also saw the emergence of LTTE conventional warfare capability. Over 5,000 LTTE troops unsuccessfully waged a multi-week siege of the SLA base at Elephant Pass in the Northern Province of Jaffna. The main focus of the SLA strategy was holding key military bases to prevent the LTTE from having free passage in the north and east of the country. Battered and battle-weary the Sri Lankan people went to the polls in 1994. The people elected Chandrika Kumaratunga to the Presidency on a platform in which she promised to bring about a negotiated settlement with Prabhakaran and the LTTE.²⁵

After multiple rounds of peace talks, the LTTE initiated Eelam War III which produced victories and losses for both sides until exhaustion forced a cease-fire in 2002. The GoSL and LTTE conducted four rounds of talks from 1994 to 1995, but the LTTE wanted too much.²⁶ The

¹⁸ Ibid., 93-96.

¹⁹ Kumar Rupesinghe, "Ethnic Conflicts in South Asia: The Case of Sri Lanka and the Indian Peace-Keeping Force (IPKF)," *Journal of Peace Research* 25, no. 4 (December 1988): 349.

²⁰ Hashem, *When Counterinsurgency Wins*, 97-98.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Weiss, *The Cage*, 74.

²³ Hashem, *When Counterinsurgency Wins*, 98-99.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 99-102.

²⁶ Syed Rifaat Hussein, "Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam," *Criterion Quarterly* 4, no. 1 (January/March 2009): <http://www.criterion-quarterly.com/liberation-tigers-of-tamil-eelam-ltte/>.

government balked at the demand to dismantle its military bases in LTTE areas and at allowing free reign to move about the north and east of the country. After growing frustrated with the peace negotiations and the government's unwillingness to meet its demands, the LTTE reignited the conflict by blowing up two Sri Lankan Navy (SLN) gunboats in the eastern harbor of Trincomalee in April 1995. In response, the Kumaratunga administration launched the "war for peace," beginning a series of large-scale operations in an attempt to bring the LTTE back to the negotiating table.²⁷ In Operation Riviresa in October 1995 40,000 Sri Lankan Army troops marched to Jaffna, the "capital" of Tamil Eelam, and successfully expelled the LTTE. This was a major coup, but subsequent operations proved more difficult. The LTTE shifted to more guerrilla tactics following the loss of their capital and chose not to fight where disadvantaged. The LTTE was not defeated following the loss of its capital. In a series of conventional counter attacks from 1996 to 2000, the LTTE was successful in overrunning SLA bases in Mullaitivu, Killinochi, and Elephant Pass.²⁸ These attacks in effect isolated the SLA forces in Jaffna by April of 2000. The only means to resupply the force was by sea and the SLN and the Air Force lacked the ability to exfiltrate over 60,000 military personnel.²⁹ The LTTE continued to attack SLA forces, but soon all sides became exhausted. The LTTE declared a unilateral cease-fire in December 2000. Parliamentary elections in October 2001 brought new leadership and the promises of a negotiated settlement. The Norwegians acted as mediators and the LTTE and the GoSL signed the Cease Fire Agreement in February 2002.³⁰

Numerous events during the interwar period from 2002-2006 helped to diminish the strength of the LTTE, but did not prevent their continued resistance. International efforts to abolish terrorist global funding networks re-doubled following the September 11, 2001 attacks and impacted the LTTE funding systems.³¹ Infighting amongst the LTTE led to the defection of an Eastern Province Commander Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan, also known by his nom de guerre COL Karuna, along with an estimated 3000 LTTE cadres in March 2004.³² Additionally, the tsunami of 2004 further impacted the LTTE's grip on Tamil Eelam. Triggered by a massive earthquake off the coast of Indonesia, the tidal wave killed roughly 30,000 Sri Lankans and an estimated 3,000 LTTE cadres.³³ In November 2005, Mahinda Rajapaksa narrowly won election to become the Sri Lankan President.³⁴ Rajapaksa was determined to realize a lasting peace through a negotiated settlement from a position of military strength. Throughout the interwar period and despite a cease-fire, the LTTE continued its campaign of consolidating power through targeted assassination and intimidation of not only Sri Lankan officials, but also influential Tamil leaders who opposed LTTE. By the end of 2005, the Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission had counted over 3000 cease fire violations by the LTTE.³⁵

Despite reduced funding and support, the LTTE marched headlong into Eelam War IV with both sides promising a final resolution to the conflict and engaging in excessively brutal tactics without heed of collateral damage. Hostilities resumed between the two parties following the LTTE

²⁷ Hashem, *When Counterinsurgency Wins*, 102-110.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Weiss, *The Cage*, 75.

³⁰ Hussein, "Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam."

³¹ "Feeding the Tiger – How Sri Lankan Insurgents Fund their War," *Janes Intelligence Review*, July 8, 2007, <https://janes.ihs.com/Janes/Display/1193454>.

³² Hashem, *When Counterinsurgency Wins*, 119-122.

³³ Paul Moorcraft, *Total Destruction of the Tamil Tigers, The Rare Victory of Sri Lanka's Long War* (South Yorkshire, UK: Pen & Sword Books, 2012), 44.

³⁴ DeVotta, "The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the Lost Quest for Separatism in Sri Lanka," 1037

³⁵ Hashem, *When Counterinsurgency Wins*, 123-127.

closing the gates on the Mavil Aru dam in the Eastern Province in July of 2006.³⁶ By doing so, the LTTE threatened the water supply for 15,000 people and agriculture production in government-controlled areas. Responding to the provocation with the assistance of COL Karuna, the SLA began a widespread offensive to remove the last vestiges of the LTTE in the east. As they did so, the SLA sought to validate training and investments made during the early stages of the war. Highly trained Special Infantry Operations Teams (SIOTs) and Long Range Reconnaissance Patrols (LRRPs) were used to disrupt LTTE movements and target field commanders.³⁷ The LTTE responded with a major offensive targeting the Trincomalee Naval Shipyards, attempting to cut the maritime supply lines to the 50,000 SLA forces located in Jaffna. The LTTE was no match for the reinvigorated SLAF and with each defeat, the SLA grew even stronger. By August of 2007, the SLAF had reduced the LTTE resistance in the Eastern Province and handed over operations in the area to the Sri Lankan Police and Civil Defense Forces, allowing the Army to focus on the North.³⁸

The SLA had begun their operations aimed at the LTTE's northern center of gravity six months prior, but the added troops and the victory in the east increased momentum to crush the LTTE once and for all.³⁹ The LTTE initially proved effective in countering five SLA assaults into the north, but utilizing increased manpower and tactics honed in the east; the SLA began a multipronged attack. Advances by the SLA 53rd and 55th Divisions, garrisoned in Jaffna, forced the LTTE to commit their best forces to prevent an immediate attack on the LTTE capital of Kilinochchi and the Wannu region.⁴⁰ The recently raised SLA 58th Division moved along the western coast from Silavatturai north destroying Sea Tiger Bases and cutting off any remaining resupplies or prospect of escape to the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The 57th Division assaulted adjacent to the 58th and aimed directly at sweeping into Kilinochchi, while the 59th moved along the northeastern corridor to attack the LTTE logistical nerve center in Puthukkudiyiruppu (PTK).⁴¹ The assault by the 58th and 57th Divisions methodically moved through the northwest and threatened to encircle Kilinochchi, forcing the LTTE to withdraw its remaining forces towards PTK in early January 2009. Linking up with the 53rd and 55th Divisions shortly after the capture of Kilinochchi, the four divisions then began pushing south towards PTK. The SLA then began slowly tightening its control over the last LTTE strongholds in the "Vanni Pocket" around PTK from January to May of 2009.⁴²

At this stage of the war, the international community began to raise concerns about civilian casualties. The LTTE began to petition European countries for outside intervention to end the conflict while at the same time using human shields to protect their withdrawal.⁴³ The SLA established a series of No Fire Zones (NFZs) in response to international pressure, but continued to tighten its search for LTTE leader Prabhakaran and the last remaining fighters. The LTTE had lost its ability to fight as large units but remained a fierce foe forcing the SLAF to fight hard for every piece of land.⁴⁴ Much controversy remains over the exact sequence of events that occurred in these final moves of the war. What is known is that both the LTTE and the SLAF made counter accusations of atrocities against each other and over the treatment of the Tamil population. The

³⁶ Ibid., 135-137.

³⁷ Sergei DeSilva-Ranasinghe, *Strategic Analysis of Sri Lankan Military's Counter-Insurgency Operations* (Perth, Australia: Future Directions International, February 12, 2010), 1-4, <http://www.futuredirections.org.au/files/1266992558-FDIStrategicAnalysisPaper-12February2010.pdf>.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Hashem, *When Counterinsurgency Wins*, 144-150.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² DeSilva-Ranasinghe, *Strategic Analysis of Sri Lankan Military's Counter-Insurgency Operations*, 1-3.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Moorcraft, *Total Destruction of the Tamil Tigers*, 134.

LTTE allegedly held 300,000 Tamils as hostages and used them as human shields as the SLAF encircled them. The SLA reportedly intentionally shelled NFZs and hospitals in LTTE-controlled areas, in blatant disregard of international law and human rights, as they tightened the noose around the LTTE remnants.⁴⁵ A U.N. investigation found that more than 70,000 civilians were killed in the final stages of the conflict.⁴⁶ On May 19th, 2008 the SLA stormed a mangrove patch on the edge of the Nandikadal lagoon and killed Prabhakaran. Within hours, President Rajapaksa announced the defeat of the LTTE and the end of Eelam War IV.⁴⁷

LTTE Failures

Commander Prabhakaran significantly contributed to the demise of the LTTE with successive strategic errors. His heavy-handed tactics to control all aspects of the Tamil liberation movement isolated the LTTE from the people. He further isolated the people from the political process when he forbade Tamils from voting in the 2005 presidential elections; all but guaranteeing a win for Rajapaksa. The decision to attack the IPKF and assassinate the Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi allowed the Sri Lankan Government to secure the New Dehli government as a strategic partner. Lastly, in choosing to pursue a military resolution to secure Tamil Eelam and using conventional tactics, Prabhakaran all but ensured defeat for the LTTE.

The harsh tactics used by Prabhakaran to consolidate, maintain, and advance the freedom movement eroded support for the LTTE amongst the Tamil people. As war broke out in Tamil Eelam I, the Tigers were one among numerous other Tamil liberation movements. Prabhakaran and the LTTE killed opposing insurgent leaders; the LTTE became the de facto sole representative of the struggle for Tamil Eelam.⁴⁸ The structure of the LTTE evolved into a cult of personality with all wings reporting directly to Prabhakaran and with much of the decision-making centered on him. Prabhakaran spent little time with the political messaging of the LTTE; instead he chose to focus on the military aspects of the conflict. The LTTE information campaign developed into the worship of Prabhakaran and attempted to elevate him to a godlike status.⁴⁹ Throughout the conflict, the Tigers assassinated anyone who questioned Prabhakaran and the legitimacy of the movement to include moderate Tamil politicians, Tamil people, and military leaders within the LTTE. Heavy taxes, forced labor, child conscription, and brutal repression in LTTE controlled areas distanced the LTTE from its support base. Towards the end of the conflict, Tamils even began providing information to the Sri Lankan Forces on LTTE activities.⁵⁰

At the direction of Prabhakaran, the Tamil people boycotted the 2005 election allowing Rajapaksa to rise to power, vowing to end the conflict. The elections pitted Rajapaksa against the United National Party (UNP) candidate Ranil Wickremesinghe. Wickremesinghe ran on a platform to continue negotiations with the LTTE seeking to end the conflict once and for all. The UNP had historically relied upon the nation's minority populations to achieve victory. Credible reports indicate that a deal between Rajapaksa and Prabhakaran encouraging the boycott may have been struck for either a handover of COL Karuna to the LTTE or to provide an opportunity for the LTTE

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ United Nations, *Report of the Secretary-General's Internal Review Panel on United Nations Actions in Sri Lanka* (New York: United Nations, November 2012), 14, http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/Sri_Lanka/The_Internal_Review_Panel_report_on_Sri_Lanka.pdf.

⁴⁷ Moorcraft, *Total Destruction of the Tamil Tigers*, 147.

⁴⁸ Hashem, *When Counterinsurgency Wins*, 88.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 193.

⁵⁰ DeVotta, "The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam," 1032-1037.

to renew hostilities with the GoSL.⁵¹ In what would turn out to be a close election, Prabhakaran's decision to forbid Tamils in LTTE-controlled areas to vote helped turn the tide in Rajapaksa's favor.⁵² Rajapaksa immediately set out to fulfill his election promises, selecting his brother as Minister of Defense, instituting a study of the past LTTE wars, and establishing the "Rajapaksa Model" for counterinsurgency. This approach emphasized doing whatever was necessary to bring about the military destruction of the LTTE to include regulating the media, allowing complete operational authority to the military and working with strategic partners.⁵³ Allowing Rajapaksa to come to power proved to have dire consequences for Prabhakaran and the LTTE.

Prabhakaran's tactical decisions to attack India further isolated the LTTE and allowed the Sri Lankan Government to secure a critical strategic partner. The Indian state of Tamil Nadu lies just across the Palk Strait and is home to 65 million Tamil people.⁵⁴ This area was a significant support base for the LTTE and in the early 1980's liberation fighters received training and equipment from the Indian Intelligence Agency Research and Analysis Wing (RAW). Prabhakaran was furious when the Indians interceded in the conflict as he felt they were subjugating his quest for independence to the political motivations of the Indian Government.⁵⁵ He vowed to continue his fight and punish those responsible. The expulsion of the IPKF in 1980 and the assassination of the Indian Prime Minister the year following ensured little political or military support from New Delhi.⁵⁶ The Rajapaksa government was able to exploit this rift and set up high-level communications with the Indian Government providing critical support to the Sri Lankan Government.⁵⁷

Prabhakaran's failure to consolidate political gains before shifting prematurely to conventional military operations during Eelam War IV doomed the LTTE.⁵⁸ Prabhakaran had attained recognition for the LTTE as the ruling authority over much of the northern areas of Sri Lanka following the CFA in August of 2002. The LTTE had established constabulary functions and prided itself on the prompt and efficient execution of justice.⁵⁹ Despite these significant gains, Prabhakaran wanted more, and chose to incite the fourth and final round of the conflict.⁶⁰ Not willing to cede any of his recent gains to the SLA with guerilla tactics, Prabhakaran chose instead to engage conventionally. Even when asked by some of his military commanders to return to hit-and-run tactics he did not relent.⁶¹ By choosing to fight this way, the LTTE was outgunned, outmaneuvered, and ultimately defeated by a force much more adept at conventional warfare. Although the Sri Lankan Armed Forces of 2000 were ill prepared to undertake Eelam War IV, they were able to learn and adapt their strategy to ultimately win the war, assisted by the LTTE moving away from their guerrilla tactics that had been so successful.

GoSL Successes

The Sri Lankan Government adapted their strategy in the post 9/11 world to increase their chances of success against the LTTE. The Government of Sri Lanka used strategic communications and diplomacy to align global powers against the LTTE, boost its military capability, and negate

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Hashem, *When Counterinsurgency Wins*, 97, 123-126.

⁵³ VK Shashikumar, "Lessons from Sri Lanka's Long War," *Indian Defence Review* 24, no. 3 (July – September 2009): http://www.indiandefencereview.com/print/?print_post_id=7783.

⁵⁴ Hashem, *When Counterinsurgency Wins*, 15.

⁵⁵ Hussein, "Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam."

⁵⁶ Hashem, *When Counterinsurgency Wins*, 97, 191.

⁵⁷ Shashikumar, "Lessons from Sri Lanka's Long War."

⁵⁸ DeVotta, "The Liberation Tigers of Tamil," 1030; Weiss, *The Cage*, 216.

⁵⁹ DeVotta, "The Liberation Tigers of Tamil," 1032-1033.

⁶⁰ Hashem, *When Counterinsurgency Wins*, 118-123.

⁶¹ Moorcraft, *Total Destruction of the Tamil Tigers*, 167.

international criticisms. Vice Admiral Wasantha Karannagoda began a series of improvements to the SLN in 2005, resulting in the isolation of the LTTE from the sea. The GoSL exploited divisions amongst the LTTE and was able to secure the cooperation of the defector COL Karuna, thus weakening the LTTE's grip on the eastern province. The SLAF went through a period of massive growth and training leading up to and throughout Eelam War IV. Finally, the SLAF began to cooperate between their services creating improved joint effects on the battlefield.

The GoSL effectively leveraged diplomacy with global powers to isolate the LTTE, achieve military superiority, and negate international condemnation of the conflict. Following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, the international community became increasingly critical of violent separatist movements employing terrorist tactics.⁶² The U.S. had previously designated the LTTE a Foreign Terrorist Organization in 1997, but other nations began to follow suit motivated by skillful diplomacy on the part of Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar.⁶³ Britain banned the LTTE in 2001. The EU instituted a travel ban on LTTE representatives in 2005, followed by Canada outlawing LTTE funding networks later the same year.⁶⁴ After the LTTE assassinated Kadirgamar in 2005, the EU banned all remittances and funding networks of the organization within its 22 nation delegation.⁶⁵ The GoSL effectively capitalized on the rift between the Indian government and the LTTE securing political, economic, and intelligence support for operations against the Tigers.⁶⁶ The GoSL was able to work with the U.S. to secure military education, equipment, and intelligence sharing.⁶⁷ President Rajapaksa secured over 6 billion USD in military and financial aid from China in exchange for the rights to develop a deep sea port in Sri Lanka. With the Chinese agreement, Sri Lanka also found a strategic partner that could prevent the U.N. Security Council from interfering with the destruction of the LTTE. The Rajapaksa government proficiently used diplomacy to isolate the LTTE internationally and strengthen their own military capability.⁶⁸

SLN maritime interdiction operations reduced external support to and the efficacy of the LTTE. Prabhakaran understood the importance of the maritime domain soon after founding the LTTE. He formally established the Sea Tigers, the naval wing of the LTTE, in 1984, enhancing the capability to smuggle men, arms, and equipment across the Palk Strait to and from Tamil Nadu. In response, the SLN attempted to halt the cross-channel traffic using Israeli-built Dvora Fast Attack Craft (FAC); then the Sea Tigers upgraded from small boats to high horsepower suicide boats and swarm tactics.⁶⁹ Building on the initial success of the Sea Tigers and needing new sources of revenue and supplies, the LTTE expanded their fleet to include over 20 trawlers, over 25 ocean going cargo ships, six submarines, and numerous other small craft.⁷⁰ Using their ocean-going capability, the Tigers were able to develop an extensive smuggling network transporting arms and drugs to fuel the conflict. Profits from smuggling, taxes, and fundraising activities from the Tamil

⁶² Sebastian Bae, "Unraveling the Organizational Collapse of the Tamil Tigers," *Georgetown Security Studies Review* 3, no. 2 (July 2015): 8, linked from the *Georgetown Security Studies Review Home Page*, <http://gssr.georgetown.edu>.

⁶³ Hashem, *When Counterinsurgency Wins*, 123; DeVotta, "The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam," 1040; U.S. Department of State, "Foreign Terrorist Organizations," <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm>.

⁶⁴ Niel Smith, "Understanding Sri Lanka's Defeat of the Tamil Tigers," *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 59 (October 2010): 43, <http://ndupress.ndu.edu/portals/68/Documents/jfq/jfq-59.pdf>.

⁶⁵ Alok Mukhopadhyay, "The EU Ban on the LTTE," http://idsa.in/idsastrategiccomments/TheEUBanontheLTTE_ARMukhopadhyay_060606.

⁶⁶ Bae, "Unraveling the Organizational Collapse of the Tamil Tigers," 9.

⁶⁷ Justin Smith, "Maritime Interdiction in Sri Lanka's Counter Insurgency," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 22, no. 3 (July 2011): 454.

⁶⁸ Weiss, *The Cage*, 177-179.

⁶⁹ Tim Fish, "Sri Lanka Learns to Counter Sea Tigers' Swarm Tactics," *Janes Navy International*, March 2009, 20, linked from *Janes Navy International Home Page*, <http://search.janes.com>.

⁷⁰ Moorcraft, *Total Destruction of the Tamil Tigers*, 96.

diaspora, according to Sri Lankan intelligence estimates, reached \$50-75 million annually from 1993-2002, increasing to \$200-300 million per year until 2008.⁷¹

Vice Admiral Wasantha Karannagoda was appointed to command the SLN in 2005 and was determined to defeat the LTTE maritime capability.⁷² The SLN took a two-pronged approach to defeat the Sea Tigers; first attacking the smuggling network and then defeating the LTTE small boats. The SLN experienced modest success initially in defeating the LTTE mid-range trawlers, but these efforts failed to stem the flow of arms and support in 2005. The SLN shifted tactics in 2006 to focus on the ocean-going cargo ships.⁷³ Using a fleet of Offshore Patrol Boats (OPBs) purchased from India, the U.S., and Israel along with intelligence support from the U.S. and India the SLN was able to destroy the Tigers ocean-going fleet, with the last demolished in 2008 1,890 nm off the coast of Sri Lanka.⁷⁴ To defeat the LTTE's suicide and swarm tactics Vice Admiral Karannagoda developed the Small Boat Concept, essentially taking the Sea Tigers tactics and turning them back on to themselves.⁷⁵ Rapid Action Boat Squadrons (RABS) were developed with 25 to 30 indigenously constructed 14- and 17-meter long, high-powered, and heavily armed inshore patrol craft. RABS were then stationed in high threat locations and equipped with improved maritime surveillance and communications systems provided by the U.S. These advances enabled the SLN to interdict and destroy the Sea Tigers swarms. Capabilities, incorporated with the OPBs and Dorva FACs, established a layered defense around Sri Lanka, eliminating the threat the Sea Tigers once posed and a significant source of the organization's funding.⁷⁶

The GoSL capitalized on internal LTTE dissension and brokered a peace deal with COL Karuna in March of 2004, reducing the LTTE's grip in the east. COL Karuna had been an LTTE senior commander since 1984.⁷⁷ Though originating from the east, he had supported northern LTTE counter-offensive operations on numerous occasions.⁷⁸ High casualty rates incurred during these counter-offenses, high taxes on eastern Tamils, and perceived political favoritism for Northern LTTE commanders prompted Karuna to revolt along with forces loyal to him. Prabhakaran viewed the rebellion as de-legitimizing his role as the undisputed leader of the LTTE and diminishing the LTTE's bargaining power with the GoSL, so he launched an offense to crush Karuna and his supporters. With the support of the GoSL, Karuna, along with many of his troops began a low-level war against the LTTE.⁷⁹ Within months, LTTE personnel in the eastern province were being picked off through ambushes and assassinations. Later, Karuna would form the Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (TVMP), reconciling with the GoSL and being placed in charge of the Eastern Province.⁸⁰ Karuna's partnership with the GoSL provided the government with a wealth of intelligence on the LTTE's formations, training, and fortifications as well as information on its internal and international operations. Lastly, the Tamil people were able to see in Karuna and his defection that there was a different way for Tamils to attain freedom that did not run through the LTTE and Prabhakaran.⁸¹

⁷¹ Ibid., 105-106.

⁷² Smith, "Maritime Interdiction in Sri Lanka's Counter Insurgency," 454.

⁷³ Hashem, *When Counterinsurgency Wins*, 174.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 175-176.

⁷⁵ Smith, "Maritime Interdiction in Sri Lanka's Counter Insurgency," 457-458.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Weiss, *The Cage*, 80.

⁷⁸ Hashem, *When Counterinsurgency Wins*, 119-120.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Hussein, "Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam."

⁸¹ Weiss, *The Cage*, 80.

The SLAF went through a period of massive growth and training leading up to and throughout Eelam IV. Shortly after Rajapaksa assumed the presidency in 2005, he initiated a detailed review of past campaigns against the LTTE. Two significant shortfalls became readily apparent based on the analysis; one, the SLAF lacked the necessary force structure to hold terrain that they had fought so hard to gain; second, limited manpower restricted the SLAF from opening a multi-front campaign against the LTTE.⁸² Based on the outcome of these studies Rajapaksa approved the rapid expansion of the armed forces and began growing the Army by 5,000 new recruits each month.⁸³ The appointment of General Fonseka by Rajapaksa to command the SLA brought with it a renewed focus on training. Expanding upon the Special Infantry Operations Team (SIOT) concept, which he had developed in 2002, Fonseka made it standard across the army. SIOTs consisted of eight-man elements that had completed a 22-week selection and training regimen that focused on jungle warfare, explosives, medical and communications training. SIOTs were then attached six to a rifle company where in addition to their other duties they served as instructors to raise the overall level of readiness and impart SIOT skills to the rest of the company.⁸⁴ This massive expansion and improved training and readiness enabled the SLAF to pursue the LTTE relentlessly on multiple fronts and were a significant factor in the SLAF success during Eelam War IV.⁸⁵

Concurrently the SLAF expanded its capability to integrate fully maritime and air operations to create joint effects on the battlefield. While the services conducted separate operations during Eelam War IV, cooperation among the services and the police enabled success.⁸⁶ Sri Lankan Air Forces (SL-AF) extensively employed Close Air Support (CAS) to assist ground and maritime operations. The SL-AF employed Israeli-built Kfir ground attack fighters, MIG-29 fighters, and MI-24 "Hind" gunships to soften LTTE defenses and demoralize the enemy while supporting the SLA.⁸⁷ The Hinds assisted the SLN with the destruction of the Sea Tigers. SL-AF mobility platforms ferried troops and cargo throughout the area of operations as well as conducted medical evacuations of the wounded. The SLN's aforementioned layered defenses complimented SLA activities in the northern provinces and prevented LTTE forces from escaping by sea. The SLN acquired a converted cruise ship dubbed the "Jetliner" to conduct resupply missions to the SLA forces stationed in Jaffna and participated in ground operations to free up manpower.⁸⁸ The synergies achieved through cooperation amongst the SLA, SLN, and SL-AF served as a force multiplier and a critical component in the destruction of the LTTE.

What Could the LTTE Have Done Differently

Given the state of affairs in Sri Lanka post 9/11, the LTTE could have chosen other strategies to prevent their defeat. First, the LTTE could have opted to abandon terrorist tactics and pursue primarily political actions to realize Tamil Eelam given the CFA and the new global environment post 9/11. Once enjoined in battle, the LTTE fought conventionally, instead the LTTE should have used guerrilla tactics. Ultimately, different strategy options proved too difficult for Prabhakaran to understand.

The LTTE could have renounced terrorism and consolidated their territorial gains to focus on a political means for the realization of Tamil Eelam. Following the CFA of 2002, Prabhakaran had

⁸² VK Shashikumar, "Winning Wars: Political Will is the Key," *Indian Defence Review* 25, no. 2 (April – June 2010): http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=20100429_05.

⁸³ Hashem, *When Counterinsurgency Wins*, 186-188.

⁸⁴ DeSilva-Ranasinghe, *Strategic Analysis of Sri Lankan Military's Counter-Insurgency Operations*, 1-2.

⁸⁵ Hashem, *When Counterinsurgency Wins*, 185-186.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Weiss, *The Cage*, 60-61; Shashikumar, "Winning Wars."

the opportunity to establish Eelam politically. The LTTE could have settled for the territory it possessed and pursued political recognition through the CFA. The LTTE could have continued to expand its historical claims through democratic determination once it had been recognized domestically and internationally, as the CFA intended. To complete this undertaking, the LTTE would have had to be willing to give up much of their military capability as a bargaining instrument and to reject terror as a tool. By agreeing to wed their cause to the outcome of the CFA deliberations, Prabhakaran would have committed the Norwegians to the defense of the Tamil people and Tamil Eelam. In the end, Prabhakaran instead chose to pursue a purely military solution.

Once engaged in hostilities the LTTE could have decided to fight more asymmetrical vice playing to SLAF strengths. Given the increased manpower and training of the SLAF, the only alternative for the LTTE once engaged in combat was to abandon their fixed structures and large conventional weapons and fight guerilla-like. Choosing to fight on the SLAFs terms negated any strengths the LTTE possessed. Caching their arms and resorting to hit and run tactics would have allowed the LTTE to lengthen the conflict and to attack the will of the Rajapaksa government without giving the GoSL the satisfaction of triumphant victories for each town or village seized. In the end, the previously adaptable Prabhakaran proved unwilling to revert to guerrilla warfare. He was incapable of abandoning Eelam, even temporarily, and in doing so, he sealed his fate and the fate of the LTTE.

Post War

The cessation of hostilities did not end the controversy surrounding the conduct of the war, nor did it end the call to recognize Tamil grievances. Rajapaksa maintained Sri Lanka on a war footing in the months following the conclusion of hostilities. Much of the north of the country remained under tight military control.⁸⁹ Many of the 300,000 people who came out of LTTE-controlled areas were held in detention camps for extended periods of time.⁹⁰ Rajapaksa chose to consolidate his power and control dissent inside the country instead of moving to address the grievances of the Tamil population. The U.N. began initial investigations into possible human rights violations during the final months of Eelam War IV amid increasing international criticism of the GoSL. The GoSL's ruthless control of the media, which helped ensure popular support for the war, continued alongside an edict to stomp out critics of the regime.⁹¹ Rajapaksa held elections two years early to capitalize on his popular support following the war and won in January 2010. In the months following, the Rajapaksa coalition employed bribes and plush appointments to guarantee a majority of seats in parliamentary elections.⁹² He dismissed judges that dared question the regime, packed loyalists into positions of power and eradicated term limits on the presidency, all but ensuring a dynastic rule for the him and his allies. For four years Sri Lanka continued to slide deeper and deeper into what most thought was an authoritarian state.⁹³ Then in elections in 2015, in what was thought to be an impossible outcome, Maithripala Sirisena, the former Minister of Health and a defector from the president's party, won. Sirisena narrowly defeated Rajapaksa using a broad-based coalition that spanned ethnic and ideological lines. The Sirisena government began

⁸⁹ International Crisis Group, *Sri Lanka's Potemkin Peace: Democracy under Fire*, Asia Report No. 253 (Brussels, Belgium: International Crisis Group, November 13, 2013), 1, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/sri-lanka/sri-lanka-s-potemkin-peace-democracy-under-fire>.

⁹⁰ Neil DeVotta, "Sri Lanka: From Turmoil to Dynasty," *Journal of Democracy* 22, no. 2 (April 2011): 134-139.

⁹¹ Ibid; Jason Stone, "Sri Lanka's Postwar Descent," *Journal of Democracy* 25, no. 2 (April 2014): 154.

⁹² DeVotta, "Sri Lanka: From Turmoil to Dynasty," 136; Stone, "Sri Lanka's Postwar Descent," 146-148.

⁹³ Ibid.

rolling back many of the presidential powers and nepotism that was central to the past regime.⁹⁴ Coinciding with this, the UNHCR released its long-awaited report on Human Rights violation allegations against the LTTE and the GoSL in September of 2015.⁹⁵ The report stated that there are reasonable grounds to conclude that each side committed human rights abuses to include the LTTE using civilians as human shields and conducting assassinations of both Tamil and Sinhalese civilians whom opposed Prabhakaran.⁹⁶ Further, it found that the SLAF illegally detained almost 300,000 Tamils and illegally targeted NFZs and hospitals among a host of other egregious acts.⁹⁷ President Sirisena's legitimacy was further strengthened after his United National Front for Good Governance party won the largest number of seats in parliamentary elections in August of 2015.⁹⁸ Sirisena addressed the Sri Lankan Parliament in January 2016 stating that he was beginning the process of rewriting the Sri Lankan constitution. His intent is to distribute more political power to the local level. While still facing opposition this devolution from Sinhalese Nationalists, these actions, if enacted, could adequately address many of the grievances of the Tamils and could avoid another conflict.⁹⁹

Insights

Examining the Sri Lankan counterinsurgency fight provides many insights for counterinsurgency theorists. The structures of terrorist organizations and the manner in which they make decisions are important to understand in counterinsurgency operations. Isolating guerillas from support and safe havens limits their ability to sustain the conflict. Overwhelming force ratios on the part of the SLAF enabled the military defeat of the LTTE. Yet the excessive force employed by the SLAF was unneeded and counterproductive to GoSL goals. Finally, the population's will and support matters when waging a counterinsurgency war—for both sides.

Organizational structures and the personalities of leaders should be analyzed when undertaking counterinsurgency operations. In the case of the LTTE, the organization was a creation of Prabhakaran's. All organizational decision-making was centralized around him. Once known for being a dynamic trend-setting terrorist leader, Prabhakaran's successive strategic errors doomed the LTTE.¹⁰⁰ Political maneuvers by the GoSL were able to exploit rifts in the LTTE, turning COL Karuna against the Tigers, and in doing so substantially reduce the LTTE's hold on the Eastern Province.¹⁰¹

Isolating insurgencies from safe havens and support zones constricts their ability to sustain conflict. Maritime interdiction operations isolated the Tigers geographically, eliminating their smuggling operations and significantly impacting their fundraising activities.¹⁰² The GoSL was able

⁹⁴ International Crisis Group, *Sri Lanka between Elections*, Asia Report No. 272 (Brussels, Belgium: International Crisis Group, August 12, 2015), i, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/sri-lanka/sri-lanka-between-elections>.

⁹⁵ United Nations Human Rights Council, *Report of the OHCHR Investigation on Sri Lanka (OISL)* (New York: United Nations, September 16, 2015), 5, http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session30/Documents/A.HRC.30.CRP.2_E.docx.

⁹⁶ United Nations Human Rights Council, *Report of the OHCHR Investigation on Sri Lanka (OISL)*, *Info Note 6: Control of Movement by the LTTE* (New York: United Nations, September 16, 2015), <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/OISL/ControlOfMovement.doc>.

⁹⁷ United Nations Human Rights Council, *Report of the OHCHR Investigation on Sri Lanka (OISL)*, *Info Note 7: Last Phase and Aftermath of the Armed Conflict* (New York: United Nations, September 16, 2015), <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/OISL/LastPhase.doc>.

⁹⁸ "Mahinda Misfires; Sri Lanka's Parliamentary Election," *The Economist* 416, no. 8952 (August 22, 2015): 34-35.

⁹⁹ Shihar Aneez and Ranga Sirlal, "Sri Lanka Government Proposes New Constitution to Devolve Power," *Reuters*, January 9, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/sri-lanka-politics-idUSKCN0U001Y20160110>.

¹⁰⁰ Hoffman, "The First Non-State Use of a Chemical Weapon in Warfare," 464-465.

¹⁰¹ Weiss, *The Cage*, 80.

¹⁰² Smith, "Maritime interdiction in Sri Lanka's Counter Insurgency," 457-458.

to isolate the LTTE successfully from international support with adept diplomacy. Indeed, the LTTE's actions even distanced the movement from the Tamil population reducing a critical support base for the insurgency.¹⁰³ Commenting on the defeat of the LTTE, Niel Smith noted that by 2009, the LTTE was "a shadow of its former self, bankrupt, isolated, illegitimate, and divided . . ." ¹⁰⁴

Overwhelming force ratios enabled the SLAF to pursue a military defeat of the LTTE. Exact force numbers for this case study have proved elusive for both the SLAF and the LTTE. Manpower approximations for the Sri Lankan defense organizations to include police forces and civil defense forces range from approximately 433,500 to 450,000 personnel depending on the sources.¹⁰⁵ Ascertaining the size of the LTTE is even harder with numbers ranging from 10,000 – 30,000 cadres.¹⁰⁶ Using these estimates the number of GoSL forces to LTTE is a range from 14:1 – 45:1. By comparison, the total security troops in Iraq in March of 2007, according to the Brookings Institute, was 155,205 coalition troops plus 439,678 Iraq security forces, against an estimated 70,000 insurgents.¹⁰⁷ Force ratios in comparison would be 8:1. Using the Sri Lankan ratios, the coalition would have needed security forces numbering between 1,000,000 to 3,150,000 troops.

The excessive use of force in the waning days of the war was unneeded and counterproductive to the GoSL cause. The LTTE was isolated internationally and geographically, divided, and separated from its population base. Prabhakaran's desire to hold territory at all cost doomed the LTTE. On top of it all, they were significantly outnumbered by the GoSL security forces. In a conventional fight, the LTTE had little chance of escaping a military defeat.

The Rajapaksa government held over 300,000 Tamils in internment camps. The U.N. estimates 40,000-70,000 civilians were killed in the crossfire from January to May of 2009. Those deaths could have been prevented; instead of shelling the NFZs, the SLAF could have chosen to rescue LTTE-held civilian captives. The captives could have been detained in the detention camps. The detainment of the individuals would have come at the cost of increased casualties or a lengthened siege, but would have preserved the professional reputation of the GoSL and possibly helped avoid international condemnation. Allegations of rape, abductions, intentional shelling of NFZs and war crimes only served to solidify UNHCR, U.S., British, and international calls for investigation, reconciliation, and accountability. The fervor created by these actions only served to highlight the plight of the Tamil people and feed the eventual downfall of the Rajapaksa regime, and in the end might give the Tamils some concessions.

Populations' hearts and minds still matter in counterinsurgency operations. In a conflict where both sides ignored the population, their importance may seem counterintuitive. In ignoring them, however, each side doomed their cause. If Prabhakaran had adhered to Mao's three dictums of the unity within the insurgency, unity amongst the people and the insurgency, and the destructions of the unity of the enemy, he could have grown the LTTE numbers to incorporate a larger portion of the 2 million ethnic Tamils in Sri Lanka.¹⁰⁸ Adhering to Mao may not have saved Prabhakaran, but it would have presented a more formidable challenge to the SLAF and also strengthened the LTTE cause. For the Rajapaksa Government, employing excessive force and ignoring the plight of the Tamil people opened his government to international scrutiny. Following

¹⁰³ DeVotta, "The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam," 1032.

¹⁰⁴ Smith, "Understanding Sri Lanka's Defeat of the Tamil Tigers," 44.

¹⁰⁵ Moorcraft, *Total Destruction of the Tamil Tigers*, 77; Shashikumar, "Winning Wars."

¹⁰⁶ Moorcraft, *Total Destruction of the Tamil Tigers*, 91; Hoffman, "The First Non-State Use of a Chemical Weapon in Warfare," 468.

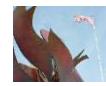
¹⁰⁷ Michael O'Hanlon and Jason Campbell, *Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction & Security in Post-Saddam Iraq* (Washington, DC: Brookings, October 1, 2007), <https://www.brookings.edu/iraq-index/>; Michael O'Hanlon and Ian Livingston, *Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction & Security* (Washington, DC: Brookings, July 2013), <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Centers/saban/iraq-index/index20130726.pdf?la=en>.

¹⁰⁸ Azeem Ibrahim, "Conceptualization of Guerrilla Warfare," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 15, no. 3 (Winter 2004): 118.

a period of elation, the regime was ousted and replaced by a government that appears to be moving towards addressing the grievances of the Tamil populace and pursuing devolution.

Conclusion

The 26-year conflict between the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the LTTE provides an excellent case study for counterinsurgency theorists. Ethnocentric tensions born out of British rule fueled the insurgency from its nascent stages until the LTTE's defeat in May of 2009. Prabhakaran made successive strategic errors in isolating the LTTE from the people and from India, allowing Rajapaksa to come to power, and being inflexible in his military operations. The Government of Sri Lanka learned and adapted to enable success on the battlefield. Following the CFA of 2002 the LTTE had options, which if taken may have prevented its defeat. Following the war, the international community continued to demand reconciliation and accountability for the brutality of the conflict. Insights about the organizational structures of insurgencies, the effectiveness of isolation, overwhelming force ratios, the excessive use of force, and the population-centric nature of counterinsurgency are worth pondering for those who would undertake such operations in the future.



Russian “Lawfare” in Ukraine

Stephen E. Schemenauer

Although a hot and recurrent topic internationally, Russian “hybrid warfare” is not a new concept. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and subsequent annexation of Crimea appears to be nothing more than a page taken from Russia’s 1920s playbook with enhanced capability.¹ Over time, Russia has become increasingly adept at employing “lawfare”² as a prime component of its hybrid warfare strategy.³ As evidenced in Afghanistan, Georgia, and now Ukraine, Russia’s use of lawfare is becoming a major problem for the international community, NATO, and the West.⁴ Left unchecked, Russia will be emboldened to act even more aggressively throughout the region. The time to act is now. A place to start is Ukraine.

In the midst of the 2014 Ukrainian Revolution, Moscow began its hybrid warfare campaign of “returning Crimea to Russia.”⁵ General Valeriy Gerasimov, Russian Chief of the Army General Staff, described hybrid warfare as a military action “started by groups of troops during peacetime without war being officially declared and where non-contact clashes occur between highly maneuverable interspecific fighting groups with the overall goal of defeating the enemy’s military and economic power by short-term precise strikes aimed at strategic military and civilian infrastructure.”⁶

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¹ Merle Maigre, *Nothing New in Hybrid Warfare: The Estonian Experience and Recommendations for NATO* (Washington, DC: The German Marshall Fund of the United States, February 12, 2015), 2. <http://www.gmfus.org/publications/nothing-new-hybrid-warfare-estonian-experience-and-recommendations-nato>.

Arguing that Russian hybrid warfare tactics are not new and providing multiple examples from the 1920s, including failed attempts to overthrow the governments of Germany, Estonia, and Bulgaria.

² “Lawfare” is the the use, or misuse, of laws and/or treaties to gain an advantage over an enemy and justify the aggressor-state’s actions in a target country. See Christi Scott Bartman, “Lawfare and the Definition of Aggression: What the Soviet Union and Russian Federation Can Teach Us,” *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law*, 2010, 423, 427-28. Explaining that “lawfare” is the “manipulation or exploitation of the international legal system to supplement military and political objectives legally, politically, and through the use of propaganda”; see also Council on Foreign Relations, *Lawfare, the Latest in Asymmetries*, (Washington, DC: Council on Foreign Relations, March 18, 2003), http://www.cfr.org/publications/5772/lawfare_the_latest_in_asymmetries.html. Calling “lawfare” an “asymmetrical weapon” and defining it as “a strategy of using or misusing the law as a substitute for traditional military means to achieve military objectives.”

³ Aapo Cederberg and Pasi Eronen, “Wake Up, West! The Era of Hybrid Warfare is Upon Us,” August 31, 2015, <http://www.gcsp.ch/News-Knowledge/Global-insight/Wake-up-West!-The-Era-of-Hybrid-Warfare-Is-Upon-Us>.

⁴ See Maigre, *Nothing New in Hybrid Warfare*, 2. Discussing Russia’s use of hybrid warfare in Afghanistan and Ukraine.

⁵ See “Putin Describes Secret Operation to Seize Crimea,” *Yahoo News*, March 8, 2015, <http://news.yahoo.com/putin-describes-secret-operation-seize-crimea-212858356.html>. Quoting Putin’s comments to his security chiefs following an all-night meeting to discuss Yanukovich’s extrication from Ukraine.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 3; See also U.S. Department of the Army, *Hybrid Threat*, Training Circular No. 7-100 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, November 26, 2010), v. Defining a “hybrid threat” as “the diverse and dynamic combination of regular forces, irregular forces, and/or criminal elements all unified to achieve mutually benefitting effects.”

Ultimately, Russia's intervention led to a disputed referendum and the subsequent declaration of Crimean independence, the installation of a pro-Russian government in Crimea, and on March 18, 2014, Russian annexation of Crimea.⁷ Condemned as illegal by many in the international community, including NATO and the United Nations,⁸ these actions clearly violated numerous agreements between the two countries and distorted and manipulated both domestic and international law. Russia, however, disputes that interpretation, using lawfare to justify the invasion and annexation.⁹

U.N. Charter Article 2(4) prohibits states from engaging in any *threats or use of force* against the territorial integrity or political independence of other states.¹⁰ Acts constituting "threats" of force include military maneuvers or troop concentrations on the border and declarations of hostile intent.¹¹ Examples of the "use of force" include direct actions, like military incursions or occupations, and indirect actions, like "organizing, instigating, assisting or participating in acts of civil strife or terrorist acts in another State."¹²

Russia violated both tenets of Article 2(4), threatening to use force *and* actually using force in Crimea. For example, on March 1, 2014, the Russian Federation Council granted President Putin the right to use military force in Ukraine, and Russia conducted military exercises along the Ukrainian border in the months leading up to annexation;¹³ both acts were clear signals, if not threats, to the Ukrainian government to not interfere with Russia's actions in Crimea. Meanwhile, unmarked Russian troops assisted pro-Russian forces in seizing key Crimean facilities and infrastructure, the Russian navy blockaded the Port of Sevastopol, and Russian troops established military checkpoints throughout Crimea.¹⁴ In fact, by March 1, 2014, nearly three weeks before annexation, 16,000

⁷ Pryanika Das, "The Crimea-Ukraine-Russia Crisis Explained in a Nutshell: All You Need to Know," *Youth Ki Awaaz*, March 24, 2014, <http://www.youthkiawaaz.com/2014/03/crimea-ukraine-russia-crisis-explained-nutshell-need-know/>.

⁸ Borys Vasylyshyn and Lesia Stangret, "Seven Reasons the Conflict in Ukraine is Actually a Russian Invasion," *Euromaidan Press*, March 24, 2014, <http://euromaidanpress.com/2014/03/24/international-response-to-annexation-of-crimea/>. Compiling various reactions by world leaders in the days following Russian annexation.

⁹ Vladimir Putin, "Address by President of the Russian Federation," March 18, 2014, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>.

¹⁰ "Chapter I: Purposes and Principles," *United Nations*, <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/chapter1.shtml> (emphasis added)

¹¹ Marc Weiler, ed., *The Oxford Handbook on the Use of Force and International Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 913.

¹² U.N. General Assembly, *Resolution 2625 (XXV). Declaration on Principles of International Law Concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States in Accordance with the Charter of the United Nations* (New York: United Nations, October 24, 1970), <http://www.un-documents.net/a25r2625.htm>; See, e.g., *Nicaragua v. United States of America*, Merits Judgment, I.C.J. Reports 14 (June 27, 1986). Finding that attacks on Nicaraguan forces constitute a direct use of force; training, arming, equipping and financing *Contra* forces is an indirect use of force; *Democratic Republic of the Congo v. Uganda*, Judgment, I.C.J. Reports 168 (Dec. 19, 2005). Finding that direct military intervention by Uganda in the DRC violated Article 2(4).

¹³ See Roland Oliphant, "Vladimir Putin Revokes Russia's Mandate for Use of Military Force in Ukraine," *Telegraph*, June 24, 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/ukraine/10922531/Vladimir-Putin-revokes-Russias-mandate-for-use-of-military-force-in-Ukraine.html>. Noting that Putin "acknowledged that the 'little green men' involved in the takeover were Russian forces"; Katie Stallard, "Russia Stands with Putin Over the Ukraine Gamble," *Sky News*, March 2, 2014, <http://news.sky.com/story/1219532/russia-stands-with-putin-over-ukraine-gamble>. Noting that the Russian Senate "voted unanimously in favour [of the use of force] with almost palpable glee, applauding themselves as they did"; Maigre, *Nothing New in Hybrid Warfare*, 3. (noting that Russia conducted snap exercises in the western and southern military districts in March and April 2014, mobilizing over 150,000 forces); Mark MacKinnon, "Globe in Ukraine: Russian-backed Fighters Restrict Access to Crimean City," *Globe and Mail*, February 26, 2014, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/tension-in-crimea-as-pro-russia-and-pro-ukraine-groups-stage-competing-rallies/article17110382/#dashboard/follows/?cmpid=tgc>. Reporting that more than 150,000 troops and hundreds of tanks and helicopter gunships conducted war games along the Ukrainian border.

¹⁴ See e.g., Alison Smale and Steven Erlanger, "Ukraine Mobilizes Reserve Troops, Threatening War," *New York Times Online*, March 1, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/02/world/europe/ukraine.html?_r=0. Reporting that "Russian troops stripped of identifying insignia but using military vehicles bearing the license plates of Russia's Black Sea force swarmed the major thoroughfares of Crimea . . . , encircled government buildings, closed the main airport and seized communication hubs, . . ."; Daniel Sanford, "Ukraine Crisis: Navy Vessels Blockaded in Sevastopol," *BBC News*, March 5, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26459027>. Reporting that the Russian Navy blockaded the port of

Russian military personnel reportedly had complete control over Crimea.¹⁵ Russia also conducted a massive information operations campaign, characterizing pro-Ukrainian protesters as extremists and terrorists while decrying western provocation in the region.¹⁶ The overwhelming evidence of Russia’s overt threats and actual use of force in Crimea makes clear that Russia violated both tenets of Article 2.

In addition to violating Article 2, Russia also failed to recognize Ukraine’s sovereignty, political independence, and territorial integrity, an obligation outlined in the 1994 Budapest Memorandums on Security Assurances (“Budapest Memorandums”), the 1997 Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership between Ukraine and the Russian Federation (“Friendship Treaty”), and the 1997 Partition Treaty on the Status and Conditions of the Black Sea Fleet (“Black Sea Fleet Treaty”), referred to collectively as the “Agreements.”¹⁷ Taken as a whole, Article 2 and the Agreements imposed a litany of obligations that Russia conveniently ignored, or unilaterally terminated post-annexation, without legal justification.

In an effort to counteract international condemnation, Russia maintains that its intervention in Crimea was legal and necessary: (1) to correct a violation of Soviet law that occurred when control of Crimea was transferred to Ukraine in 1954 (“Transfer”); and (2) to defend ethnic-Russians in Crimea who were threatened by the lack of a “legitimate authority” in Ukraine.¹⁸ Neither claim withstands legal scrutiny.

Russia’s first claim is that the Transfer is illegal because the United Soviet Socialist Republic’s (“USSR”) Supreme Soviet Presidium (“Presidium”) failed to hold a referendum, procure the republic’s agreement, and submit the issue to an open discussion before approving the transfer in 1954.¹⁹ Review of the Transfer makes clear, however, that it was procedurally correct and performed in accordance with the 1936 Soviet Constitution.²⁰ Moreover, regardless of the alleged procedural

Sevastopol.

¹⁵ “Timeline: Key Events in Ukraine’s Ongoing Crisis,” *Washington Times Online*, May 12, 2014,

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/timeline-key-events-in-ukraines-ongoingcrisis/2014/05/07/a15b84e6-d604-11e3-8a78-8fe50322a72c_story.html.

¹⁶ See Noah Rothman, “The Most Hilarious Russian Propaganda Justifying the Invasion of Crimea,” *Mediaite*, March 4, 2014, <http://www.mediaite.com/online/the-most-hilarious-russian-propaganda-justifying-invasion-of-crimea/>.

¹⁷ See e.g., “Budapest Memorandums on Security Assurances, 1994,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, December 5, 1994. Requiring Russia to: (1) respect Ukrainian independence and sovereignty and the existing borders (which necessarily, and indisputably, included Crimea); (2) “refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Ukraine;” and (3) refrain from using Russian weapons against Ukraine except in self-defense; “The Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership between Ukraine and the Russian Federation,” March 23, 2015, <http://cis-legislation.com/document.fwx?rgn=4181>. Requiring Russia to, *inter alia*: adhere to the “principles of mutual respect of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, inviolability of borders, peaceful settlement of disputes, non-use of force or threat of force, including economic and other forms of pressure, and non-interference into internal affairs . . . ;” and “abstain from participation in or the support of any actions whatsoever which are directed against [Ukraine], and obligate[] itself not to conclude with third countries any treaties whatsoever that are directed against [Ukraine].”; J.L. Black, ed., *Russia & Eurasia Documents Annual 1997: The Russian Federation* (Gulf Breeze, FL: Academic International Press, 1998), 129. Requiring Russia to limit its military operations and exercises to specific areas, respect Ukraine’s sovereignty, obey its legislation, and refrain from interfering with Ukraine’s domestic affairs. The Black Sea Treaty was extended for 25-years by the 2010 Agreement between Ukraine and Russia on the Black Sea Fleet in Ukraine (“Kharkiv Accords”). Simon Pirani, Jonathan Stern and Katja Yafimava, “The April 2010 Russo-Ukrainian Gas Agreement and its Implications for Europe,” *The Oxford Institute for Energy Studies*, June 2010, 2. The Black Sea Treaty and the Kharkiv Accords are collectively referred to herein as the “Black Sea Treaties.”

¹⁸ See Lukas I. Alpert, “5 Reasons Putin Gave for Annexing Crimea,” *Wall Street Journal Online*, March 18, 2014, <http://blogs.wsj.com/briefly/2014/03/18/5-reasons-vladimir-putin-gave-for-annexing-crimea/>.

¹⁹ See “1954 Transfer of Crimea to Ukraine Illegal – Russian Prosecutor General,” *Sputnik International*, June 27, 2015, <http://sputniknews.com/russia/20150627/1023916532.html>.

²⁰ Mark Kramer, “Why Did the Soviet Union Give Away Crimea Sixty Years Ago?” March 19, 2014, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/why-did-russia-give-away-crimea-sixty-years-ago>. Noting that one of the Soviet officials boasted that “only in our country is it possible that issues of the utmost importance such as the territorial transfer of individual oblasts to a particular republic can be decided without any difficulties.”

deficiencies, the Soviet Union and Russia expressly ratified the Transfer and acknowledged Ukraine's control over Crimea in the 60 years that followed, as evidenced by Russia's entry into, ratification of, and subsequent course of conduct consistent with the Agreements. Thus, Russia's nullification of the Transfer is little more than a contrived, *ex post facto* justification for Russian intervention.²¹

Unable to unwind the Transfer, Russia's only other potentially viable legal justification is a defense of nationals claim as acknowledged under Article 51 of the U.N. Charter, which also fails.²² Although this defense has been used by other countries, including Israel in Uganda and the United States in Panama, Grenada, and Iran, the instant case is clearly distinguishable.²³ To begin with, the foregoing operations were limited to defending foreign-nationals who had already been attacked or were facing imminent harm. In contrast, Russia failed to provide any evidence that ethnic Russians, or even pro-Russian Ukrainians, were in danger; and certainly nothing rising to the level of an "imminent threat" required to justify a defense of nationals claim under Article 51.²⁴ Furthermore, unlike Russia's intervention in Crimea, American and Israeli intervention did not result in the installation of a pro-intervenor government in the host country, creation of a new and independent nation, or annexation of the target country by the intervenor.

Finally, even assuming, *arguendo*, that Russia properly acted in defense of its nationals in Crimea, that right is not unfettered; rather, Article 51 limits the use of force in self-defense until such time as the Security Council takes measures to maintain and restore peace and security.²⁵ In this case, Russia's actions went far beyond defending its nationals, garnering condemnation from the U.N. and foregoing any legitimate resort to Article 51's protections.

In sum, neither Russia's attempt to manipulate international laws and treaties *ex post facto*, nor its proffered defense-of-nationals claim, legitimately validates its actions in Ukraine and Crimea. Both the invasion and the annexation were illegal and unjustified. The international community should take appropriate steps to return the territory, restore Ukraine's sovereignty, and defend the rule of law. Anything less is an invitation for something more: more Russian hybrid warfare, more lawfare, more threats, more use of force . . . with Crimea as a solemn harbinger of things to come.

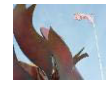
²¹ Russia also unilaterally terminated the Black Sea Treaties 13 days after Crimea's annexation. See "State Duma Approves Denunciation of Russian-Ukrainian Agreements on Black Sea Fleet," *Tass Russian News Agency*, March 31, 2014, <http://tass.ru/en/russia/725964>. Reporting that the Russian Duma unanimously approved the unilateral termination of the Black Sea Fleet Treaties three days after President Putin submitted the proposal. The timing of these acts was not coincidental and belies President Putin's intent. Despite wielding power for over 16-years, he did nothing to nullify the Transfer or terminate the Black Sea Treaties until after Crimea's annexation, when he needed to legally justify Russia's intervention.

²² The U.N. Charter provides two exceptions to the general prohibition against the use of force in or against another state: (1) where the Security Council directs it in accordance with Article 42; and when it is required for self-defense under Article 51. See United Nations, "Chapter VII: Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression," <http://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/chapter-vii/index.html>. Since the U.N. condemned Russia's actions in Crimea (see *supra* note 8), Russia's only option was a defense of nationals claim under Article 51. See Nicholas Tsagourias, "Necessity and the Use of Force: A Special Regime," in *Netherlands Yearbook of International Law*, eds. E. Hey and I.F. Dekker (New York: Springer, 2010), 22. Interpreting self-defense under Article 51 to include protection of nationals abroad.

²³ See Tsagourias, "Necessity and the Use of Force: A Special Regime," 22.

²⁴ See Michael Bjohrn, "Top 5 Myths About Russia's Invasion of Crimea," *The Moscow Times*, March 11, 2014, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/opinion/article/top-5-myths-about-russias-invasion-of-crimea/495918.html>.

²⁵ See Charter of the United Nations, "Chapter VII: Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression."



The Funnel of Darkness

James McNeill Efaw

“I think we are in a crisis mode.” Senator Robert Portman sounded the alarm to the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs’ Permanent Subcommittee during a July 2016 hearing.¹ All experts appearing before the committee confirmed that the United States continues to face an uphill battle in combatting terrorists’ online radicalization and recruitment efforts. That same day, the Center on National Security at Fordham Law School released a study of all criminal cases in the U.S. involving ISIS from March 1, 2014 to June 30, 2016. Of the 101 cases, 89 percent involved social media and nearly 70 percent included direct ISIS messaging via the Internet.²

While U.S. prevention efforts remain largely focused on lone-wolf attacks,³ terrorists have crowdsourced radicalization and recruiting so that true lone wolves no longer exist.⁴ Through the Internet and social media, a potential bad actor can always be part of a “virtual pack.”⁵ Despite our best efforts, the virtual pack continues to find success in recruiting, radicalizing, and inspiring individuals via online modalities to carry out ISIS-inspired or ISIS-enabled attacks. Terrorist recruitment is no longer dependent upon individuals who diligently seek out and doggedly pursue information or images that contribute to radicalization. Today, the radicalization and recruitment of susceptible individuals can begin with nothing more than an Internet connection. The Internet, as Senator Portman so aptly noted, now contains a disturbingly effective “Funnel of Darkness.”⁶

Above the broad portion of the Funnel exists the entire online population, most of whom have little interest in developing a deep understanding of, let alone affinity for, terrorist recruitment strategies. As the figure below illustrates, however, once a susceptible or curious individual seeks or is otherwise exposed to extremist propaganda, these at-risk or on-the-fence individuals enter the Funnel where recruiting and radicalization take place. Within this portion of the Funnel an individual

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¹ Robert Portman, U.S. Congress, Senate, Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, *ISIS Online: Countering Terrorist Radicalization & Recruitment on the Internet & Social Media*, 114th Cong., 2nd sess., July 6, 2016, video file, <http://www.hsgac.senate.gov/subcommittees/investigations/hearings/isis-online-countering-terrorist-radicalization-and-recruitment-on-the-internet-social-media>.

² Center on National Security at Fordham Law, “Case by Case: ISIS Prosecutions in the United States,” July 6, 2016, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/55dc76f7e4b013c872183fea/t/577c5b43197aea832bd486co/1467767622315/ISIS+Report+-+Case+by+Case+-+July2016.pdf>.

³ James B. Comey, *FBI Budget Request for Fiscal Year 2017*, Statement presented to House Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies, 114th Cong., 2nd sess., February 25, 2016, <https://www.fbi.gov/news/testimony/fbi-budget-request-for-fiscal-year-2017>.

⁴ Gabriel Weimann, “Virtual Packs of Lone Wolves: How the internet made ‘lone wolf’ terrorism a misnomer,” *Small Worlds, Big Ideas Online*, February 25, 2015, <https://medium.com/its-a-medium-world/virtual-packs-of-lone-wolves-17b12f8c455a>.

⁵ Weimann, “Virtual Packs,” *Small Worlds, Big Ideas Online*.

⁶ Portman, *ISIS Online*.

could be: a) exposed but not radicalized, b) radicalized but not act, c) radicalized and inspired to act by either joining and fighting with an organization or supporting the organization in other ways (to include “lone-wolf” attacks) which can lead to moving deeper into the Funnel of Darkness.

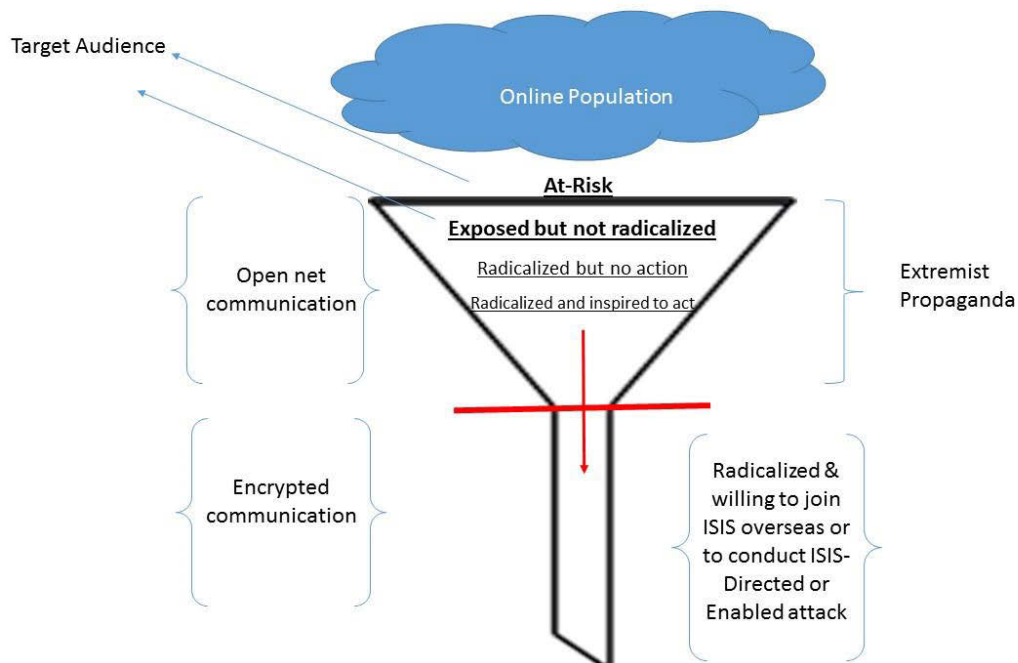


Figure: Funnel of Darkness⁷

All communication above the red line represents open net communication. Below the red line, in the narrow portion of the Funnel, communication is more restricted. Terrorist organizations encrypt communication within the Funnel’s depths, limiting access to specialized audiences. This conceptualization illustrates the potential for using online resources to divert at risk individuals away from the downward spiral of terrorist radicalization. While everyone inside the Funnel should be addressed, those at the top will be the most susceptible to counter recruitment and anti-radicalization efforts.

Thus far, U.S. attempts to re-structure to meet the ever-growing terrorist challenge include several promising initiatives: In late 2015, the Department of Homeland Security launched the Office of Community Partnerships (OCP) with the goal of building domestic community partnerships and “to find innovative ways to support communities that seek to discourage violent extremism and undercut terrorist narratives.”⁸ In January 2016, the Department of Justice and the Department of Homeland Security jointly announced the beginning of the Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) Task

⁷ The author created this figure after learning of Senator Portman’s use of the term “Funnel of Darkness” to illustrate the recruitment and radicalization process and identify the target audience that is most susceptible to influence by terrorists’ propaganda and those attempting to counter the propaganda.

⁸ Jeh C. Johnson, Statement by Secretary Jeh C. Johnson on DHS’s New Office for Community Partnerships, September 28, 2015, <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2015/09/28/statement-secretary-jeh-c-johnson-dhs%E2%80%99s-new-office-community-partnerships>.

Force with the goal of organizing all CVE efforts across the federal government.⁹ In March 2016, an executive order established the Global Engagement Center (GEC) “which shall lead the coordination, integration, and synchronization of Government-wide communications activities directed at foreign audiences abroad in order to counter the messaging and diminish the influence of international terrorist organizations.”¹⁰ While the OCP focuses domestically, down to the city and town level, to build and support partnerships that have potential to counter recruiting and radicalization efforts locally, the GEC focuses globally and externally—primarily through the use of proxies such as supportive governments, non-governmental organizations, and other private organizations. Each organization has an overarching concern to counter online terrorist propaganda through such means as:

- Working with technology companies to shut down accounts and remove terrorist content.
- Countering jihadist online messaging by attempting to flood relevant platforms with counter messages.
- Amplifying credible voices online in the U.S. and abroad.
- Sponsoring online contests, prizes, and challenges that provide a counter-narrative to extremist messaging to local communities.

Although these efforts and initiatives all challenge the online terrorist narrative, they nevertheless fail to engage within the sites where the recruiting and radicalization of those most susceptible actually occurs. The Funnel of Darkness remains relatively stable as current online counter-narrative projects are not reaching intended targets. Google has become a prime entry point for potential terrorists to find and connect with those who will recruit and further radicalize them.¹¹ In fact, Google is used by individuals to search for extremist information nearly 500,000 times per month—yielding volumes of extremist material.¹² Despite counter-narrative efforts in the last few years, “these narratives are desperately weak in their presence in search engine results pages. They do not sufficiently contest or dominate extremist ideas online.”¹³

In a 2015 article, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Schultz convincingly argued that the United States could use false-flag operations as an effective technique for countering extremist groups in cyberspace.¹⁴ The concept essentially outlined a method of designing fake “websites, blogs, and chat rooms that mirror a targeted extremist group’s ideology.”¹⁵ One idea behind this proposal is that a potential terrorist will do an online search using typical key words that would ordinarily lead to extremist web sites, however, instead the recruit happens upon the false flag site. Rather than being radicalized and recruited by terrorists on the site, the false site gradually exposes the recruit to counter-narratives leading away from the terrorists’ organization and doctrines. The “build it and they will come” strategy of a false-flag operation counts on a susceptible individual “stumbling” onto a fake site. But just because websites, blogs, and chat rooms exist does not mean that the intended

⁹ DOJ Office of Public Affairs and DHS Office of Public Affairs, *Countering Violent Extremism Task Force*, January 8, 2016, <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2016/01/08/countering-violent-extremism-task-force>.

¹⁰ Barack H. Obama, Executive Order 13721, “Developing an Integrated Global Engagement Center To Support Government-wide Counterterrorism Communications Activities Directed Abroad and Revoking Executive Order 13584,” *Federal Register* 81, no. 52 (March 17, 2016): 14685.

¹¹ Mubarak Ahmed and Fred Lloyd George, “A War of Keywords: How Extremists are Exploiting the Internet and What to do about it,” (July 2016), 7, <http://tonyblairfaithfoundation.org/sites/default/files/War-of-Keywords.pdf>.

¹² *Ibid.*, 8.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

¹⁴ Robert Schultz, “Countering Extremist Groups in Cyberspace,” October 1, 2015, <http://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/621124/jfq-79-countering-extremist-groups-in-cyberspace/>.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

target audience will visit those sites or that the sites will even show up in the first several pages of search results.¹⁶

Rather than create false-flag operation, the U.S. should make more effective use of The Funnel of Darkness by engaging at-risk individuals where they are already searching and landing on the Internet. If at-risk, fence-sitting individuals discover these sites by entering keywords into search engines and then click on the top sites to join groups or enter into conversations, it stands to reason that counter violent extremist organizations can search the same keywords, enter the same sites, and engage in the same conversations. Once within these terrorist sites, operators can observe and then begin engaging individuals who have not yet been radicalized—those at the very top of the Funnel—before they become part of a “virtual pack.”

One of the *New York Times*’ leading reporters on terrorism, Rukmini Callimachi, uses a similar technique with great effect to discover and enter into terrorists’ Internet sites:¹⁷ “Social media enables Callimachi to access what she calls the ‘inner world of jihadists’; she lurks in Telegram chat rooms, navigates an endless flood of tips on Twitter, and carefully tracks sources and subjects all over the Internet.”¹⁸ The U.S. should follow Callimachi’s lead with one significant change: rather than entering and engaging in these sites as a reporter, the U.S. should use deception and engage as a site member—a terrorist sympathizer or follower. Using the same methods and rationale for deception laid out in Schultz’s argument, this technique would likely yield more results more quickly by engaging susceptible people where the recruiting and radicalization already takes place.

Engaging in the propaganda websites, blogs, and social media where actual online recruiting and terrorism occurs allows counter-terrorism operatives to enter into conversations with those individuals who are still on the fence or looking for a reason to join or not. Success is not guaranteed, but this type of strategy has recently garnered positive results. In October 2015, for example, the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) in coordination with Facebook, Twitter, and Google began three experiments using pop-up videos to determine messages that resonated with potential extremists and then shared this knowledge with others engaging in counter narrative campaigns.¹⁹ Zahed Amanullah, head of the counter-narrative program at ISD, revealed that the study’s most promising results “came when organizers engaged in extended conversations with people who commented on videos.”²⁰

Despite domestic and global efforts to stem recruitment and radicalization, the U.S. continues to lose ground to terrorists in the online battle for the hearts and minds of those vulnerable and susceptible to radicalization. By entering those sites and engaging in the conversation before recruitment and radicalization take place, the potential exists to head off future terrorists before other means of intervention become necessary. To be effective, then, the U.S. needs an online counter-terrorism strategy the focuses light in the darkness by meeting and greeting those seeking recognition through radicalization before they are drawn into the depths of the Funnel of Darkness.

¹⁶ Ahmed, “A War of Keywords,” 20.

¹⁷ Caitlin Roper, “How One Journalist Uses Social Media to Get Inside the Minds of ISIS,” *WIRED Online*, August 3, 2016, <http://www.wired.com/2016/08/rukmini-callimachi-new-york-times-isis/>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Tanya Silverman, et al., “The Impact of Counter-Narratives,” *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*, August 2016, 11, http://www.strategicdialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Impact-of-Counter-Narratives_ONLINE_1.pdf.

²⁰ Sam Schechner, “Tech Giants Target Terrorist Propaganda,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 31, 2016, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/tech-giants-target-terrorist-propaganda-1470001314>.

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