Scope

SOccENT has requested a short-term effort to assess the appeal of ISIL, specifically to answer, “What makes ISIL so magnetic, inspirational, and deeply resonant with a specific, but large, portion of the Islamic population allowing it to draw recruitment of foreign fighters, money and weapons, advocacy, general popularity, and finally support from other groups such as Boko Haram, several North African Extremist Groups, and other members of the Regional and International Sunni Extremist organizations?” A study was undertaken to understand the psychological, ideological, narrative, emotional, cultural and inspirational (“intangible”) nature of ISIL. This white paper summarizes results from analytical efforts and key results and observations.

Executive Summary

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI; Dr. Hriar Cabayan, JS/J-39; Ms. Sarah Canna, NSI; Dr. Larry Kuznar, Indiana University–Purdue University, Fort Wayne, NSI; & MAJ Jason Spitaletta, JS/J-7 and JHU/APL

The articles in this paper summarize work performed at the request of SOCCENT by numerous government agencies, academics, think tanks, and industry. The participants and SMEs consulted are listed in Appendix B. The work was performed over a period of four months (July-Oct, 2014). SOCCENT requested a short-term effort to assess the appeal of ISIL. Specifically, SMA was asked to answer the question, “What makes ISIL so magnetic, inspirational, and deeply resonant with a specific, but large, portion of the Islamic population allowing it to draw recruitment of foreign fighters, money and weapons, advocacy, general popularity, and finally support from other groups such as Boko Haram, several North African Extremist Groups, and other members of the Regional and International Sunni Extremist organizations?” The study attempted to understand the psychological, ideological, narrative, organizational, leadership, emotional, cultural and inspirational (“intangible”) nature of ISIL. The project included the development of an overall (Evolution & Longevity) framework (Section I) to synthesize the qualitative and quantitative analytical approaches for discerning the appeal of ISIL. In the process, interviews were conducted with over 50 SMEs from across the globe to gain insights into the core questions being asked (see Section II). The effort brought together different perspectives, disciplines, methodologies, and analytic approaches and sources to uncover real and apparent consistencies and inconsistencies among them and to identify how the individual pieces combine to provide a clearer picture of an issue.

Overall, there was qualified agreement on key factors explaining ISIL support—the differences are in the importance attributed to these factors by different SMEs and researchers.

On the question of ISIL longevity, the study uncovered two very different schools of thought:

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2 Strategic Multi-Layer Assessment (SMA) provides planning support to Commands with complex operational imperatives requiring multi-agency, multi-disciplinary solutions that are NOT within core Service/Agency competency. Solutions and participants are sought across USG and beyond. SMA is accepted and synchronized by Joint Staff/J-39 DDGO and executed by ASD (EC&P).
1. ISIL has resilient properties via its capacity to control people and territory stemming from pragmatic leadership and organization, intimidation tactics, tapping into existing Sunni grievances, use of a well-developed narrative and media outreach to attract and motivate fighters.

2. ISIL is not a durable but rather an opportunistic group that 1) is taking advantage of a pre-existing sectarian conflict to acquire land, wealth, and power; 2) only attracts a narrow band of disaffected Sunni youth, 3) is alienating local populations by over-the-top violence and harsh implementation of Sharia; 4) is unable to expand into territories controlled by functioning states; and 5) does not possess the expertise required to form a bureaucracy and effectively govern.

Key insights provided that are of particular relevance to the operational community include:

- **ISIL’s Capacity to Control** is defined by its organizational skill and ability to use symbols, narratives, and violence (to intimidate or coerce).
- **External Support** – Sunni Muslim states’ main objective is power—not ideology. External support or opposition to ISIL could change rapidly based on new developments (e.g., if Shias are perceived to be winning the sectarian conflict).
- **Local Elite Power Base** (particularly in Iraq) is driven by elite desire to retain power and ISIL patronage, not primarily by ideology.
- **Civilian Support** is driven by coercion and fear, assessment of who offers better security and/or governance, and lack of viable alternative.
- **Ummah Support** – Radicalization is a very individualized process; there are many reasons why people sympathize, support, or join ISIL.

Key Study Observations:

1. There was a significant focus in the group on the persuasive narratives ISIL uses. However, there is little evidence that the USG is well positioned to counter these narratives, but the conditions that allowed ISIL to rise so quickly (weak states, Sunni sectarian grievances, youth bulge, unemployment, etc.) are things the USG and international community might affect over the long term.

2. Beliefs about ISIL’s longevity generally fall into two camps: durable vs. flash in pan. However, a third possibility must also be considered: ISIL is a symptom of rising Islamist fundamentalism across the Muslim world combined with inequality and thwarted aspirations, declining sense of nationalism, and other pre-existing conditions including youth bulge, impact of the information revolution, drought, etc.

3. The political environments and sources of acquiescence to, or support for, ISIL are different in Syria and Iraq and require more investigation. However, SMEs tended to speak about ISIL support in terms that generalized across the two. There is a danger in thinking about them the same way in terms of solutions and root causes.

Bottom line:
• ISIL exists in a very fluid context where exogenous forces can drastically alter its prospects for success, just as exogenous factors created the conditions that allowed the organization to flourish over the last two years.
• ISIL’s primacy is a relative one, due to a lack of both inspirational and pragmatic alternatives and its present coercive and intimidation tactics.

Please refer to Appendix A for an overview of the research findings presented in the report as they relate to 1) the Longevity-Evolution Framework, 2) why ISIL is so appealing, and 3) issues emerging from various workshops held in support of the SMA/SOCCENT effort.

Topic Overview

In her opening paper entitled “Conceptual Organization: Evolution & Longevity Framework,” Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI, describes an organizing framework that was used throughout the effort to 1) provide a common vocabulary and standard scale for discussing this complex issue; 2) lay out the landscape or “schools of thought” regarding the intangibles that explain ISIL support and achievement; 3) guide identification of intangible factors that explain ISIL growth or decline; and 4) help distinguish those factors that relate to ISIL specifically versus those that relate more broadly to a sustained militant radical Islamist ideology and movement. She goes on to describe the framework and how it was put used in the study. These include ISIL Capacity to Control, Civilian Support, Local Elite Power Base, and ISIL External and Umma Support.

From July through October 2014, Ms. Sarah Canna, NSI, conducted a Subject Matter Expert (SME) Elicitation study to gather insights from interviews, panel discussions, seminars, and personal communications with over 50 SMEs from the United States, the Middle East, and Europe. SMEs described conditions on the ground as a “perfect storm” for the emergence of ISIL. The confluence of key conditions allowing ISIL to rise so quickly included a power vacuum in Iraq and Syria, the Arab world undergoing rapid change, the rise of the information age, drought, and the youth bulge. However, while these conditions were extremely important, ISIL’s sustainability and longevity is based on its capacity to control the population through fear and coercion, provision of order and governance, lack of viable alternatives, strong leadership, and momentum (success breeds success). ISIL’s capacity to control is largely based on its interaction with the local population. However, ISIL also enjoys sympathy, support, and recruits from the global Sunni Muslim population. SMEs interviewed felt that the primary way ISIL achieves support from the global Sunni Muslim population is through persuasive use of narratives. These narratives conveyed a sense of moral imperative, emphasized Sunni grievances, provided sense of identity and worth, and offered an outlet for adventure and heroism. While these factors represent areas of qualified agreement on key factors explaining ISIL support, SMEs differed on which factors were the most important, which led to two primary schools of thought regarding ISIL’s longevity: that ISIL is either a durable social movement or a flash-in-the-pan.
Section III: ISIL Capacity to Control, Civilian Support & Local Elite Power Base

Section III presents a series of articles assessing ISIL Capacity to Control, Civilian Support, and Local Elite Power Base. In the first article entitled “An Organizational Profile of the Islamic State: Leadership, Cyber Expertise, and Firm Legitimacy,” the authors (Dr. Gina S. Ligon, Ms. Mackenzie Harms, Mr. John Crowe, Dr. Leif Lundmark, and Dr. Pete Simi, University of Nebraska Omaha, START, DHS), using an internal strategic organizational analysis, show support for the hypothesis that the Islamic State is a durable movement in the geographic region it currently controls. They posit three strategic resources and capabilities that will allow ISIL to become a durable movement: (1) unique leadership style and structure, (2) state-of-the-art cyber usage (e.g., messaging and technology), and (3) organizational legitimacy in an unstable region. They state that their data supports the hypothesis that ISIL will evolve into a functioning government (in this case, a Caliphate) in the region it currently controls. They list following factors regarding the intangible factors central to ISIL success: High Performing Top Management Team/Leadership Structure, Innovative Cyber Sophistication, and Organizational Legitimacy.

In the second article entitled “Dynamic Innovation and Evolutionary Capabilities of ISIL,” Dr. Shalini Venturelli (American University) assesses ISIL’s network dynamics as a unique typology of violent jihadist network that will continue to display advanced capabilities and powerful strategic effects within and beyond the region. The paper draws from the author’s 11-month ongoing comparative investigation of ISIL and employs an original dynamic model design and integrated complex analysis of multiple types of primary data sets, including original field data. The study’s model was tested on the battlefield in a theater of war and is designed to assess the complex interactive dynamics of underlying factors driving Jihadist network transformation in a field of conflict. The study’s findings and analysis show that ISIL is no longer just an adaptive network but, instead, has leaped far ahead of its competitors on the study’s scale of stages of network transformation derived from the author’s first-hand field observations of insurgencies in recent wars. The article addresses some of the study’s key findings including an elaboration of ISIL’s evolutionary capabilities to reconstruct and transform the tangible and intangible ecosystem of conflict in the Middle East region. As outlined in the paper, particularly significant are a unique set of critical evolutionary capabilities for integration of material and nonmaterial warfighting functions, domination of the information environment with greater strategic depth than any of its adversaries, qualities of robustness to resist attack, methodology of population control, and strategies for widening the battlespace to other regions. The paper discusses some of the study’s high-confidence implications and predictions that are based on complex analysis of multiple variables and provides concepts for a commensurate dynamical strategy response to address ISIL’s vulnerabilities emerging from the investigation.

The third article entitled “Thematic Analysis of ISIL Messaging,” Dr. Larry Kuznar (Indiana University – Purdue University, Fort Wayne & NSI) and William H. Moon (Department of the Air Force) state that the key themes that resonate with ISIL followers include the following: 1) victory is destined and ordained; 2) it can only be achieved through violence; 3) rewards and honor will accrue those who fight (especially in the hereafter) and 4) the primary enemies are apostate Sunni, Shia, Americans, Westerners, Jews, and then all others. These themes appear to resonate with disaffected young males, aggrieved Sunni in the...
region, and an increasing number of active Jihadists. ISIL is particularly adept at manipulating deeply resonant themes in Sunni Islam that enable them to morally outbid alternative and more moderate voices. It is imperative that these deeper themes be appreciated and accounted for in our understanding of ISIL. These strengths of the narrative provide ISIL with short-term durability and a durable recruitment strategy. However, the rejection of their message by the vast majority of Muslims and their need to continue to achieve victory, along with discrepancies between their rhetoric and behavior indicates that ISIL as an organization may not be sustainable indefinitely, especially if effectively opposed.

In his article entitled “Comparative Psychological Profiles: Baghdadi & Zawahiri, Maj Jason A. Spitaletta (USMCR, Joint Staff J7 & The Johns Hopkins University-Applied Physics Laboratory) states Baghdadi may be a high value target (HVT), but is not likely a high payoff target (HPT). While he is likely to be perceived as more charismatic than Zawahiri, the relative charisma of a leader may not necessarily translate into lower-level recruitment. Baghdadi’s Islamic State is not a cult of personality, and its structure may be less vulnerable to decapitation than other groups with more charismatic leaders. Analysis of Baghdadi’s speeches indicates that he is respectful, but not supplicant, toward Zawahiri and considers himself more a successor to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the former emir of Al Qaeda in Iraq. ISIL’s thematic content particularly in Adnani’s comments, and its desired target audience, indicate multiple risk factors for radicalization. ISIL targets adolescents, young adults, and people in middle adulthood. The continuity of message across multiple demographics and psychological vulnerabilities makes for a coherent master narrative. The ISIL narrative is not novel, but it is compelling; ISIL leaders have a nuanced understanding of their desired target audiences.

In the fifth article entitled “ISIL’s Inter-O rganizational Relationships: Conflict and Cooperation” Dr. Philip Potter (University of Virginia) states that ISIL’s extensive relationships in the region raise immediate concern about both the augmentation of capabilities and the diffusion of tactics. However, ISIL’s inter-organizational relationships stand in contrast to the typical alliance formation patterns. ISIL has a broad network of relationships that have contributed in meaningful ways to its capabilities. Most notably, its relationships have brought manpower and weapons without which the organization could not have grown at the pace that it did. However, the element of compellence in these relationships has made the network fluid over time. The evolution of this network of relationships among Islamist factions defies simple, unambiguous characterizations; however, in the broadest possible terms, it has shifted from inter-organizational fighting and competition in 2012-2013, to ISIL domination in 2013-2014, and to rapprochement in the second half of 2014. Much as it did for al Qaeda central, outside pressure is leading ISIL to struggle with a loss of operational control over the organizations with which it has forged cooperative relationships. However, this decline in control is accompanied by a decline in threat to their organizational structure, which has allowed organizations with complimentary ideologies to reengage with ISIL. The result is increasing consistency and coherence in the network of organizational relationships in Iraq and Syria with the Islamist organizations aligned on one axis and the moderate and secular organizations aligned on another.

In the sixth article entitled “A Red Team Assessment of ISIL Competitive Strategies,” Dr. Benjamin Jensen and Majors Craig Giorgis and Dan Myers (Marine Corps University, Command and Staff College) state
that ISIL’s connectivity with a family of networks (illicit, commerce, religious, etc.) allow the group to generate momentum and appeal in chaotic environments by transiting the Observe, Orient, Decide, and Act (OODA) loop faster than any adversary. Furthermore, ISIL operates within a vanguard model (i.e., small groups using violence to signal political action) that generates two types of appeal: 1) active sympathizers and supporters and 2) temporary alliances of convenience. ISIL uses higher degrees of violence to establish extremist credibility (i.e., programming effects) and exploit the signal to recruit along a digital network connecting disenfranchised populations around the world. The critical factor to ISIL’s success is its leadership. ISIL’s leadership successfully integrates tactical success with its strategic goals. In other words, it understands the character of the conflict, has a vision, and implements it faster than its adversaries can respond.

In her article “Branding the Caliphate: Online Media Framing from a Self-Proclaimed State,” Dr. Laura Steckman (WBB) examines ISIL’s perception of itself, as portrayed through its rhetoric in *Dabiq* magazine in terms of Nation Branding Theory, analyzing ISIL’s overtures at branding itself as a state. ISIL’s rhetoric shows that it is shaping its identity and crafting a new narrative based on the Middle East’s pre-modern history and its own interpretation of Islam. ISIL communicates its self-conceptualized identity through multiple means, including prominent figures and online media; it projects its self-created image to encourage potential consumers to “buy in” to its vision of a caliphate. From the analysis, ISIL’s magazine offers a version of state and government designed to support Sunni Muslims while subjugating all other populations. While this image of a state is not necessarily cogent with that of the West, the caliphate, whether real or imagined, appeals to some Sunni Muslims, as evidenced by the influx of foreign fighters to the region. Pictures and stories describing the benefits ISIL claims to offer also send the message to Sunni Muslims that ISIL takes care of its “citizens” and meets the Muslim population’s social welfare needs. These are only some of the ways in which ISIL is working to create a nation brand through its media wing.

In the final article in this section entitled “The Validity, Viability—and Possible Value—of Neuro-cognitive Science and Technology in Operational Intelligence and Deterrence,” Drs. James Giordano and Rachel Wurzman (Georgetown University Medical Center) argue that neuro-cognitive science and neurotechnology (neuroS/T) are of increasing interest in and to national security, intelligence, and defense (NSID) endeavors. They describe current, in-development, and proposed neuroS/T approaches, including a novel method, NEURINT (neural intelligence) and address the focus, capabilities, limitations, and potential utility of these techniques and tools in assessing and deterring information transfer and violent behaviors of hostile agents and actors. They posit that neuroS/T can provide insights to patterns and mechanisms of individual and group cognition, emotions and behaviors, and that there is a growing body of information about the ways that individuals and groups are neuro-cognitively affected by, and respond to, various types of information including narratives, propaganda, and environmental conditions. Giordano and Wurzman conclude that the current task—and opportunity—will be to seek viable ways to translate neuroS/T approaches to greater utility in specific NSID operations.

**Section IV: External and Umma Support**

The next set of articles assesses ISIL External and Umma Support. In the opening article entitled “ISIL Affinity Study,” the TRADOC/G-2 Operational Environment Lab team asserts ISIL’s appeal is relatively
narrow amongst the overall population. In Iraq, two of its key allies, the Neo-Baathists and Sunni Tribalists, are not ideologically wed to ISIL but see ISIL as allies of convenience against the Government of Iraq (GoI). While the al Abadi government appears to be receptive towards rapprochement with the Sunni population *writ large*, it will take a combination of GoI action and ISIL missteps to move these groups towards the government. Regionally, the majority of the populations’ affinities are not aligned with ISIL, but in several countries the affinities for ISIL are slightly positive. This results in an environment that is conducive to unsanctioned recruitment and support for the portion of the population attracted to ISIL. This positive population affinity will require their government’s intervention to disrupt ISIL recruitment and support. However, the regional governments (and the USG) need to be cognizant that governmental action against ISIL may potentially led to their facing civil tension from segments of their population over the issue of ISIL.

In the second article of this section entitled “Understanding the Threat: Explaining the Rise and the Appeal of The Islamic State,” Mr. Jonathon Cosgrove, Mr. Muayyad al-Chalabi, Mr. Lee Slusher, and Dr. Stacey Pollard (JUH/APL) conclude that ISIL’s ascent was the result of a confluence of favorable conditions—a perfect storm. First, longstanding grievance-based narratives made Sunnis in the region and farther afield susceptible to ISIL’s messaging. Second, the sectarian strife in Iraq produced a marginalized Sunni population, especially in the country’s northern and western portions. Third, the organization has made use of several methods to further expand its ranks. The organization has “low barriers to entry,” meaning it accepts recruits from diverse backgrounds, forgoing the type of vetting process common in other extremist groups. Also, the group’s success has created a snowball effect in that many flock to ISIL simply due to its success to date. Lastly, the group employs a sophisticated media apparatus to propagate its message. Key narratives that gave rise to ISIL include victimization, the plight of Iraqi Sunni Arabs, Sunni/Shia antipathy, an alternative to chaos, and an alternative to the nation-state. While narratives provided the informational backdrop for ISIL’s appeal, the group was able to take advantage of regional instability to transform its goal of a state into reality and implemented successful recruiting practices.

In their article entitled “Understanding the Rise of ISIL in Iraq and Syria, and its Appeal in the US” Drs. Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko (Bryn Mawr College, START, DHS) use social movement theory to analyze the rapid rise of ISIL in Syria and Iraq as a perfect storm of political opportunity and material and human resources forwarded with a “Sunni Salvation” framing. They use 2014 polling data from US Muslims to argue that foreign fighters from Western countries are motivated more to fight Bashar al-Assad than to join ISIL, with only a small proportion of US Muslims having a favorable opinion of ISIL. These results lead them to suggest that the appeal of ISIL to Sunnis in Syria and Iraq is based in sectarian threat, whereas appeal to Western volunteers has more to do with individual psychology than sectarian division.

In the fourth article entitled “Understanding the Dynamics of ISIL Mobilization: The Challenge of Foreign Fighters,” Dr. Jocelyne Cesari (Georgetown University, Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, and Harvard University) argues that several distinctions are necessary to appropriately evaluate the ideological influence of ISIL. First, ISIL’s influence in combat zones like Syria and Iraq are not primarily related to its ideology but to local political conditions. When it comes to foreign fighters
however, ideology plays a more significant role but follows different patterns according to political and national contexts. In Muslim countries outside the combat zones, the attraction is linked to the pre-existing political forms of Islam. In other words, the higher the influence of Islam in politics and legal systems, the greater the probability of attraction of ISIL. In the West, the attraction comes from the lack of symbolic integration of Islam. It means that lack of political acknowledgement of Islam as a legitimate component of secular democracies makes Muslims more vulnerable to the message of ISIL. Both in majority and minority contexts, ISIL’s discourse has to be analyzed as the most recent expression of the global ideological cluster called Salafism. She argues that Salafi doctrine has become central in the way that Muslims deal with their religious tradition. In this context, Salafism may be generally defined as a variant of “pan-Islamism.” This term refers to those religious or political transnational movements that emphasize the unity of the Ummah (the community of believers) over specific cultural, national, or ethnic loyalties. These movements indicate the emergence of fundamentalism as a global phenomenon. Global fundamentalism is defined, above all, by an exclusive and hierarchical vision of the world, as well as by a taxonomy of religions that places Islam at the top. She argues that in the case of European and American Muslims, the accessibility of Salafism is a primary reason behind its popularity. She goes on to emphasize that social media do not create ISIL success but that this success is facilitated by the preexisting presence on the internet of the Salafi interpretation of Islam.

In their article entitled “Texas A&M University Media Monitoring: Representations of ISIL in Arabic Language Social Media” Ms. Jacquelyn Chinn and Dr. Randy Kluver (Texas A&M University) use the Twittersphere as a proxy indicator of public opinion across the region. They conclude that based on Arabic language Twitter activity, support for ISIL in the region is limited, yet support for Western intervention and policies also limited. ISIL networking patterns on Twitter are distinct and have largely adapted in response to Twitter’s network disruption strategy. Lastly, even though they are unlikely to change the regional view of the caliphate, small networks can still do significant damage to the community. They state that despite ISIL isolation from the mainstream, events could quickly break to their advantage. As social media conveys attitude better than argument, what is true can be false tomorrow. Also USG and allies must not play into ISIL themes of far enemy/near enemy, granting legitimacy as a viable political alternative, or overstatement of their nature and intentions. As with other forms of media, ISIL social media tells a unitary story, of ruthlessness towards enemies with gentleness towards the ummah.

In her article “The Militant Jihadi Message Propagated by ISIL is a Contagiously Virulent Meme in the West—the Ebola of Terrorism,” Dr. Anne Speckhard (Georgetown University) discusses the history of how the ISIL meme came into existence, defines what it is, and examines its power to infect. She also briefly discusses, from the memetic stance, ways of limiting and inoculating resistance to the power of the ISIL meme to inspire violent terrorist actions. ISIL has regenerated and repackaged an already virulent terrorist ideology into a powerful social meme that is now viral, inciting social contagion throughout the world. The ISIL meme builds on already existing and accepted Islamic dogma that most Muslims treasure, as well as ideological advances that predecessor organizations were able to achieve, distorting Islamic teachings, as they did, into a violent ideology that has become as highly infectious. This violent meme travels virally via the Internet and social media. The epidemic in the West has incited over
two thousand men and some women—hundreds from nearly every Western country to join ISIL, most by physically migrating to Iraq and Syria to join the battle, with some staying at home and acting in place as homegrown terrorists.

In the seventh article, “Radicalization Is Overrated,” Mr. Andrew Bringuel and Ms. Natalie Flora (FBI) state that radicalization is overrated when assessing motive for criminal behavior. Scholars and forensic behavioral scientists have spent their entire careers trying to understand why someone commits an act of criminal violence. The environmental factors that facilitate and provide access for committing criminal violent acts are of equal significance. It is important that any strategy looks beyond the radicalization process in order to identify the reasons criminal enterprises survive leadership changes as well as changes in environment. So the core question of how ISIL has become a magnetic and inspirational group that deeply resonates with Sunni Muslims has to be asked in terms of the “why” as well as the “how.”

In his article “De-Romanticizing the Islamic State’s Vision of the Caliphate,” Dr. Steve Corman (ASU, Center for Strategic Communication, HSCB) states that ISIL, like other Islamist extremist groups, promotes two related narratives of the collapse of the historical Caliphate. The first is a catastrophe, caused by the Jews and Crusaders that resulted in domination and oppression of Muslims, harm to the religion, and exploitation of Muslim lands. The second is a call for restoration of the ideal system of government. He goes on to state that the Caliphate was far from ideal, being marked by infighting, conflict, assassination, and war. Extremists obscure this history by editing “inconvenient details” to create a romantic history, and generate support for their vision by promoting an imagined community of unified Muslims and using strategic ambiguity to suppress discussion about its details. This creates a brittle ideology that can be countered by deconstructing the imagined community, challenging strategic ambiguity, and de-romanticizing the history of the Caliphate.

In their second article in Section IV entitled “Combining Police and Military Response to the ISIL Threat,” Mr. Andrew Bringuel and Ms. Natalie Flora (FBI) state, in order to effectively combat the spread of ISIL’s influence among US citizens, the USG needs to develop a comprehensive strategy involving both military and police agencies. These agencies need to share intelligence developed INCONUS as well as OCONUS. They argue that a combined military and police response is necessary in order to mitigate the threat caused by ISIL and identify, infiltrate, and neutralize individuals inspired by ISIL’s message. Furthermore, a combined military and police response can build on public trust, improve resiliency, leverage restorative justice, and facilitate identification of emerging threats. Furthermore, a combined military and police response will improve policy, training, and development of research-based structured professional judgment tools (SPJTs). They conclude that while the missions, methods, and rules of engagement (ROEs) are different between police and the military, there is much that that the two share in terms of processes.

In their article entitled "Identifying ISIL Support Populations and Persons Vulnerable to Recruitment: Implications for Force Protection," Mr. Jeff R. Weyers and Dr. Jon Cole (University of Liverpool) discuss the use of social media by terrorist groups. They propose that such use poses a unique situation for researchers in that it allows for examination of live samples at every stage on the spectrum from
 extremism to terrorism. By utilizing the Identifying Vulnerable Persons (IVP) guidance (a screening tool for identifying terrorist involvement and potential recruitment behavioural cues), they describe a yearlong analysis that was conducted of persons self-identifying as members of ISIL and Jabhat al-Nusra (JN). In total, over 3000 cases were screened using the IVP guidance, which identified over 355 foreign fighters and individuals at risk of recruitment to the terrorist groups. Recent attacks on western targets in Europe and North America have focused on military personnel that are outside their bases and mostly unarmed indicating that the early identification of such individuals has implications for force protection. They conclude that the research clearly indicates that screening tools, such as the IVP guidance, can be utilized to provide an early decision regarding the potential danger posed by an individual or a group. As the communities in which these individuals live are the most likely to spot the behavioral indicators of radicalization, it is essential that any screening tool is acceptable to those communities. They furthermore add that the key should be to avoid the identification of ‘false negatives’ and enhance the identification of ‘true positives’ before an individual engages in violence.

In their article “A Tale of Two Caliphates,” Mr. William Braniff and Mr. Ryan Pereira (University of Maryland, START, DHS) argue that ISIL’s appeal is based on a more compelling vision, operational menu, and strategy in the post-Arab Spring context relative to that of al Qaeda (AQ) and its associated movement. AQAM primed the global jihadist community to mobilize. ISIL has created a destination that is inspiring, accessible, and appropriate for the historical moment. By comparing these two visions, they observe ISIL’s relative appeal can be distilled into five points.

1. Sectarianism: Whereas AQ “far-enemy” strategy bet on provocation to polarize and mobilize the masses, ISIL is ratcheting up already elevated levels of sectarian tension in the post Arab-Spring world and benefitting from the resulting resource mobilization.
2. Righteousness: While AQ emphasizes the importance of doctrine in its rhetoric, ISIL has evidenced a fervent desire to enforce an uncompromising interpretation of Islamic law through its behaviors.
3. Obligation: AQ relies on an abstract argument—that Islam is under attack everywhere—to convince Muslims that it is their individual duty to defend Islam everywhere, obfuscating offensive tactics with notions of classical or defensive jihad. ISIL has established a physical Caliphate and, with it, the pragmatic obligation to defend the Caliphate and build its institutions.
4. Strength: AQ is a cautious and nomadic terrorist organization that has shied away from equating terrain with success, trying instead to reorient extant militant groups from the periphery of their respective conflicts in a slow war of attrition with the West. ISIL, by comparison, appears decisive, confident, and contemporary as they opportunistically seize terrain, antagonize their enemies, and publicize their exploits.
5. Urgency: ISIL sees the Caliphate as the means to the final apocalyptic battle between Muslims and the non-Muslim world. For those ideologically inclined individuals, it is essential to participate in ISIL’s campaign now, before the opportunity passes. Without the Caliphate, al-AQ’s call to arms lacks the same urgency.

The following article entitled, “The Devoted Actor, Sacred Values, and Willingness to Fight: Preliminary Studies with ISIL Volunteers and Kurdish Frontline Fighters,” Dr. Scott Atran with Ms. Lydia Wilson, Mr.
Richard Davis, and Mr. Hammad Sheikh (ARTIS Research & The Centre for the Resolution of Intractable Conflict, University of Oxford, Harris Manchester College and School of Social Anthropology) assess ISIL membership. They observe that much prior research indicates that close camaraderie with a family-like group (band of brothers) is critical to the “fighting spirit” of combatants, and recent studies among combatants and supporters of militant Jihad suggest that identity fusion is a key mechanism, providing a sense of invincibility and special destiny to the group and motivating willingness to make costly sacrifices, including fighting and dying. Yet, historical studies of foreign volunteers such as those recruited by ISIL indicate that for some groups, commitment to sacred values ratchets up fusion and fighting spirit beyond the close family-like group to an extended ideological group defined by a sacred cause. The authors go on to propose if sacred values are more strongly associated with a larger group, then combatants will fuse with that larger group and consider that larger group, defined by its sacred cause, to be what they are most willing to defend and fight for, even unto death. Unconditional commitment to comrades, in conjunction with their sacred cause however perverse it may seem to others, can be what allows low-power revolutionary and insurgent groups (e.g., the Islamic State) to endure and often prevail against materially stronger foes who are motivated more by typical reward structures like pay and promotion (e.g., the Iraqi army).

Section V: Objectives and Scenarios for ISIL

In an article entitled “Objectives and Scenarios for ISIL,” Drs. Ali E. Abbas, Richard S. John, Johannes Siebert, and Detlof von Winterfeldt (University of Southern California, CREATE, DHS) report analyzing the transcripts of interviews with 59 subject matter experts and also conducting an extensive review of Internet and other open sources to address the following three questions.

1. What are the objectives of ISIL?
2. What are the objectives of ISIL’s followers?
3. What are the scenarios and associated uncertainties for the success or failure of ISIL?

Their indicate that ISIL pursues four strategic objectives: “Establish a Caliphate in Iraq and the Levant,” “Control and Govern the Caliphate,” “Expand Islam and Sharia Law Worldwide,” and “Recreate the Power and Glory of (Sunni) Islam.” ISIL wants to “Derive Legitimacy as Heirs/Descendants of Mohammed” and wants to “Be Recognized as the Leader of the Jihad.” Furthermore, it has clear ideas about how it wants to achieve its strategic objectives and how an Islamic State should be structured. ISIL wants to “Implement a Pure and Strict Version of Islam.” Instead of collaborating with other Islamic groups that are not as radical as ISIL, it tries to “Radicalize and Align Followers” and “Take over other Islamic Movements.” ISIL’s key means objectives are “Generate Revenue” and “Kill, Frighten, and Convert Infidels.” The followers and recruits of ISIL have a complex set of objectives that can be partitioned into three strategic objectives: “Humanitarian Fulfillment,” “Religious Fulfillment,” and “Personal Fulfillment.” This is consistent with many observers’ opinions that potential followers and recruits are “damaged,” “empty,” or “unfulfilled” in a very personal way.
VI Bringing it All Together

In the closing article entitled “Connecting the Continua,” Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois (NSI) summarizes key intangibles and vulnerabilities. Regarding intangible factors, she lists the following.

1. There is a significant tension between the domestic and national security interests of Sunni regimes. Because they see the value in ISIL as a sectarian force against Shia/Iranian influence, unless they begin to perceive a threat to domestic stability from ISIL, there is little incentive to oppose the group—until ISIL moves its fighters/ influence outside Iraq and Syria it supports Gulf security.

2. The psychology of intimidation, ISIL’s aura of “victoriousness,” and pragmatic political calculations reinforce elite acquiescence in Iraq and ISIL’s ability to control population and territory.

3. Umma support includes military successes and popular perception of ISIL as a defender of Sunni against the West, Shia, apostate oppressors. While related, these have difference antecedents; military success is not necessary for ISIL to retain support.

4. Support/acquiescence among the local elite power base appears to be based in material factors more so than local “civilian” support, which evolves from fear and intimidation buttressed by, for some, highly resonant psychological/perceptual factors (e.g., grievance).

She lists the following key vulnerabilities:

- There are both active and influential population segments in regional Sunni states (in this study referred to as the “regional umma”) that are sympathetic to ISIL’s program, which, according to its rhetoric, ultimately requires overthrow of the regimes under which they live. As such, ISIL leaders tread a fine line between appearing to pose a threat to the domestic security of those Sunni regimes and thus inviting more vigorous opposition from them on the one hand, and maintaining the support it has gained among local populations and financiers on the other.
- ISIL capacity to control population and retain elite support is related to the belief that ISIL will be in power in the future.
- The degree to which it ISIL retains its branding as defenders of Sunni/ warriors against Shia and the West; ISIL use of violent tactics and messages also inhibits Umma support.
- Tactics and harsh interpretation of Muslim law are vulnerabilities only in the shorter term; an added vulnerability may be competition spurred by elite perceptions of unequal benefit or reward for ISIL support. In many areas, loss of elite support would have a direct negative impact on civilian support as well.

Some of the authors in this compilation have also produced and additional, longer report on their findings. Please contact either Mr. Sam Rhem at the SMA office at samuel.d.rhem.ctr@mail.mil or the individual authors to request a copy of the full report.