JOINT SPECIAL OPERATIONS UNIVERSITY

THE NEW WAY OF LIMITED WARFARE

THE VALUE OF THE AFGHAN MODEL OF WARFARE AFTER THE FIGHT AGAINST ISIS

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On the cover: Coalition Special Operations Forces operate in Syria with the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG). In front, a bulldozer creates a protective barrier against vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices. Source: https://www.france24.com/fr/20160422-reporters-doc-syrie-fds-kurdes-arabes-assaut-califat-ei-shedade-assad

Back cover: A Syrian Democratic Forces deputy commander advises his soldiers of an incoming missile attack on ISIS vehicles in Deir ez-Zor province, Syria, Nov. 28, 2018. Continued assistance to partner forces is essential to setting conditions for regional stability. The Coalition and its partners remain united and resolved to prevent the resurgence of ISIS and its violent extremist ideology. Source: U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Matthew Crane

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Today's international security environment confronts the United States and its partners with unprecedented challenges. Escalating competition with China and Russia, growing assertiveness of regional powers like Iran and North Korea, the persevering threat of violent non-state actors, and even a major war on European soil present multiple dilemmas that can only be faced with the help of a versatile strategic toolkit. Current military operations rely heavily on traditional deterrence strategy. China's military buildup and the conventional nature of much of the fighting in Ukraine as of 2024 reinforces this posture. Yet this covers only one side of the multifaceted threats we are facing. This fact especially reverberates in the special operations community, which finds itself engaged in both countering gray zone activities and the enduring fight against violent extremist organizations. This monograph seeks to contribute to the development of a broader strategic palette by analyzing the importance and utility of the so-called Afghan model (AM) as a way for achieving political ends through the employment of limited means.

Looking back at the war in Afghanistan today does not seem to illustrate a model for a successful future military approach. The lingering image of Western involvement there is one of strategic failure epitomized by the dramatic evacuation of Kabul in 2021. Yet in 2001 the initial invasion was regarded as hugely successful as U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF), supported by airpower and close cooperation with indigenous allies, toppled the Taliban regime in a matter of weeks. Furthermore, this was achieved using limited means. This novel operational approach was enabled by new doctrine based on major military innovation and aimed at exploiting new

technologies in the fields of information processing, communication, surveillance, networking, and precision weaponry. The groundbreaking level of air–ground integration that emerged thanks to the revolution in military affairs (RMA) enabled an unprecedented synergy between airpower, SOF, and indigenous forces–the core elements of this new model of limited warfare. The effectiveness and swift success of this combination triggered a debate on the exact significance and implications of what was dubbed the *Afghan model of warfare.* According to some scholars and policy officials, it presented the United States with an opportunity to reach strategic objectives through a new way of limited war, and hence the armed forces should be restructured accordingly.[1] Others, however, considered the approach of little value outside its original context.[2]

More than 20 years later, the approach has been successfully applied in several other cases (e.g., Iraq in 2003, Libya in 2010, and Iraq and Syria from 2014–2017). This demonstrates that the AM is not a one-day wonder and that it holds relevance beyond the unique situation of Afghanistan in 2001. On the other hand, it has also become clear that the AM is not a panacea; the invasion of Iraq and the counterinsurgency and stabilization efforts in that country and Afghanistan required far more than a limited approach. Moreover, as aforementioned, the reemergence of great power competition as a consequence of a resurgent Russia and rising China has emphasized the importance of a broad strategic toolkit that includes traditional conventional options as well as methods for limited warfare.[3] The key issue with regard to the AM, therefore, is to establish under which conditions this approach can be successfully applied to assess its utility in future cases.

Based on earlier research on Afghanistan, Iraq (2003), and Libya (2011), this monograph presents a framework of factors that determine to what extent an AM-type approach is applicable in future contexts.[4] This assessment tool is subsequently employed to analyze the most recent use of this form of limited warfare: the fight against ISIS in Iraq and Syria (2014–2017). The latter case has delivered a tremendous amount of relevant new data that can be used for further augmenting our understanding of the applicability of the AM in a specific context. As such, the resulting insights contribute to the current debate on the exact role of the model in the ISIS case and the way this should influence

thinking about this type of limited warfare. Furthermore, it should be mentioned here that positions in this discourse often seem heavily influenced by teleological reasoning in favor of, or objecting to, defense transformation (following an author's preference). This monograph does not originate from such a stance as it seeks to provide an objective analysis by addressing the value of the AM after the fight against ISIS.

1.2 METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

The value of the AM is dependent on the degree to which it is applicable in other contexts. The applicability of the AM is thus what could be called a *necessary intermediate variable* to draw conclusions on its value, which is the dependent variable in this study. This value of the AM is shaped by the future strategic context as it depends on the expected occurrence of conflicts that meet the applicability requirements. To draw conclusions on the model's value after the fight against ISIS, this study first explores the underlying academic debate. Chapter 2 discusses the origin of the AM, its theoretical embedding, and its relevance to different stakeholders. Chapter 3 introduces the framework of factors that determine whether the AM is applicable in a specific context. As previously mentioned, this is based on earlier research into the three cases in which the AM was employed prior to its most recent use in the fight against ISIS.[5] In Chapter 4, essential elements of the ISIS case and its operational and strategic context are discussed to provide the necessary understanding to utilize and, if necessary, refine the AM applicability assessment framework. Ultimately, this allows for drawing a conclusion on the value of the AM in Chapter 5. See Figure 1.1. It should be

Figure 1.1. Methodological design and chapter outline. Source: authors

noted that it is not this study's purpose to provide a definite vision on the remaining relevance of the AM in future conflict. This requires additional, more extensive research, for which this monograph aims to provide a substantiated underpinning as well as potential avenues for further exploration.

1.3 METHODOLOGY

This study combines several types of research methodologies. Chapter 2 is based on content analysis of extant literature whereas Chapter 3 relies upon a comparative-case-based research study.[6] With regard to the latter, the necessary data has been retrieved by vetting a wide range of available literature. The analysis of the application of the AM against ISIS and validation of the framework of factors in Chapter 4 follows the case study method. It should be noted that in the first instance, insufficient data was available for providing in-depth insight in the operational dynamics, as scholarly publications were particularly lacking. To overcome this challenge, newly available material from different sources like RAND, the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), academic journals, newspaper articles, policy publications and U.S. Senate hearings on Operation INHERENT RESOLVE (OIR) were combined to allow for a comprehensive analysis of the application of the AM in the ISIS case.[7] Furthermore, at various points this monograph delves into the strategic context, for which the authors rely on the analysis of a wide body of available literature. See Figure 1.2.

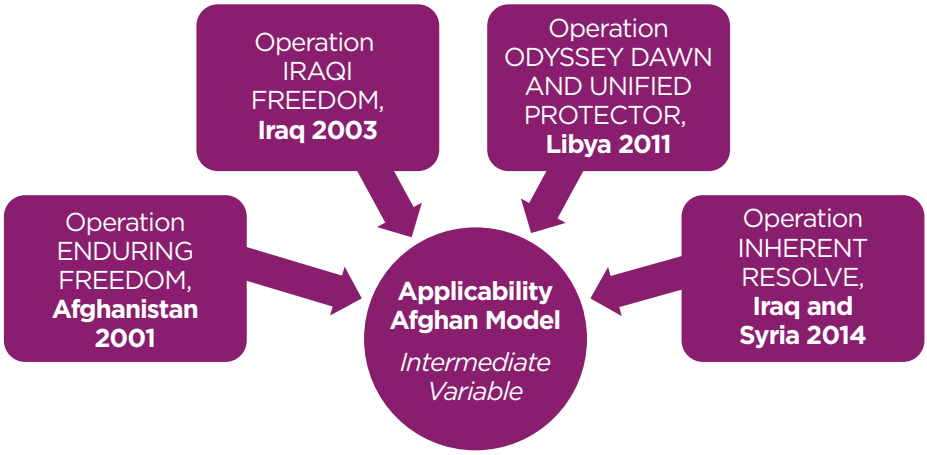


Figure 1.2. Case study outline. Source: authors

Chapter 2: The Academic Debate

2.1 INTRODUCTION TO AN EXISTENTIAL DEBATE

Since the emergence of the AM, there has been ongoing academic debate about the question as to what extent ground forces can be supplemented–or even replaced–by airpower under influence of the new RMA. The discussion on the applicability of the model is intimately connected to this debate and therefore should be placed in the context of grand strategy and international relations. If the AM should be perceived as the new, limited way of warfare for the U.S., this would lower the costs of global force projection. This is of existential relevance at both the military and the grand strategic level as it carries the potential to respectively change the power ratio between military services and influence the international geopolitical balance by improving the force projection toolkit available to the United States. Hence, it is no surprise that the nature and the potential of the AM have become the subject of a thorough academic debate, as many scholars have tried to value and comprehend its success. In this chapter the most relevant aspects of the debate will be discussed chronologically.

2.2 PRELUDE: A NEW REVOLUTION IN MILITARY AFFAIRS

Operation DESERT STORM in 1991 inaugurated a new era in the application of airpower by the United States and its allies.[8] For the first time in history, efforts in the air dominated a large-scale military campaign.[9] During this war against Iraq, airpower proved itself beyond expectations and, despite being criticized as an anomaly, it gained a new reputation for effectiveness.[10] Consequently, airpower quickly became the preferred weapon for Western politicians who oversaw the use of force in a post-Cold War era characterized by wars of choice.[11]

Keith Shimko, in this regard, explains that during this period, the focus shifted from industrial age to information age warfare, which inspired a transformation from air–land battle doctrine into network-centric warfare (NCW).[12] The simultaneous emergence of new technologies such as information technology, advanced digital networking, sixth-generation computers, a variety of electronic sensors, space-based platforms, precision-guided munitions (PGM), and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) convinced American military thinkers at the end of the 20th century that this new RMA was indeed taking shape, as Alexander Salt explains.[13] Previously disparate forces and weapons systems were integrated into a coherent system with unprecedented battle space awareness and speed of decision-making that provided the United States with a decisive advantage over opponents.[14] Shimko, a balanced advocate of the RMA, demonstrates that in the latter half of the 1990s, the paradigm of NCW-dominated American military thinking and was embraced by political elites. Consequently, there was a broad support base for far-reaching changes in U.S. military organization and doctrine to gain maximum advantage from this RMA. Of course, skeptics pointed at the fact that even high-tech sensors and information dissemination could not fully lift the fog of war, yet it was undeniable that the new developments greatly helped to mitigate this factor.[15]

2.3 THE BIRTH OF A NEW WAY OF LIMITED WAR?

The fairly traditional invasion plan that the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff proposed for overthrowing the Taliban and attacking Al-Qaeda would take too long to come to effect and was therefore politically useless and "depressingly conservative and unimaginative."[16] Instead, the Bush administration, which embraced NCW and corresponding defense transformation, opted for the highly unconventional CIA proposal of relying on CIA operatives and SOF that would join efforts with indigenous Afghan forces.[17] This joint combined ground maneuver element would be supported by U.S. airpower, and as such, the "Afghan Model of Warfare" was born.[18] See Figure 2.1.

Many scholars have tried to value and comprehend the success of the AM. One striking description is offered by Benjamin Lambeth, who says, "the three pivotal ingredients that made this achievement possible were long-range precision airpower managed by a uniquely

sophisticated and capable [Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC)]; consistently good real-time tactical intelligence; and mobile SOF teams on the ground working in close concert with indigenous Afghan resistance forces and equipped with enough organic firepower and electronic support to maintain adequate situation awareness, operate independently, and avoid ambushes."[19] Richard Andres et al. explain that the AM was successful because of the combination of interrelated tactical- and operational-level dynamics. The first of these dynamics that the AM imposes upon the enemy is what William Lind in 1985 identified as the *air-ground dilemma,* which dictates that whenever an opponent tries to concentrate forces to resist an infantry attack they become vulnerable to airpower and therefore forced to disperse.[20] The second dynamic is that air interdiction denies the enemy ability to wage an effective, combined arms defense at the operational level because this would require operational communications and mobility.[21]

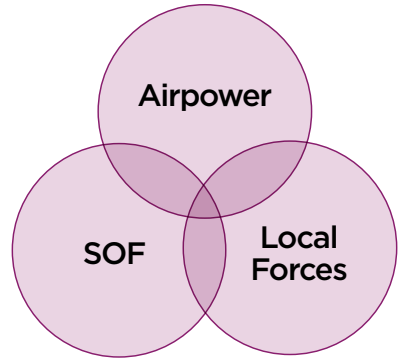


Figure 2.1. The three elements of the AM. Source: authors

RMA proponents saw the rapidity and ease of victory as evidence for fundamental change. This camp believed that the AM would be "the new way of war" for the West, and they attributed great strategic value to this new operational concept.[22] Andres et al. argue that the model has strategic relevance "because this new way of war lowers the costs to the United States, in both blood and treasure, it creates a more credible stick to use in coercive diplomacy against small- and medium-sized opponents than do threats of conventional invasion."[23]

RMA sceptics, however, of whom Stephen Biddle is most influential, argued that local conditions formed the key to the Taliban's fall and therefore the implications of the AM for the future of warfare would be low. Biddle denies a transformation of warfare because the combination of ground maneuver and firepower, which are indeed the core of the AM, are merely another demonstration of the modern system that emerged in the final years of World War I.[24] Biddle believes that SOF-guided

precision air strikes cannot decisively influence the equation of ground combat because the AM cannot compensate for a skill imbalance between allies and the enemy. Andres counters Biddle's reasoning by stating that the strategic benefits of fighting by proxy outweigh the costs created by the proxy's limited tactical skill. He acknowledges that tactical skill remains a relevant consideration but skill relative to the operation plan is what matters most, not skill relative to the enemy. In other words, the tactical requirements of an operation plan should be matched to the level of skill of an indigenous ally. See Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2. Schematic display of the theoretical standpoints of Biddle and Andres
Source: authors

The limiting factor for the utility of the AM on the strategic level, which transcends the lack of skill of indigenous forces according to Biddle, is their possible absence in certain contexts and misalignment or divergence of interests along the way. There is abundant academic literature on interest misalignment and related compliance issues in alliance politics and war by proxy.[25] There is no doubt that there will be serious problems when relying on small allies. However, when interests are real but non-existential, this limited approach will likely remain the preferred policy option for a long time to come.

2.4 THE INVASION AND OCCUPATION OF IRAQ: A PROGRESS REPORT ON THE REVOLUTION IN MILITARY AFFAIRS

Given the differences between the Iraqi Army and the Taliban, and the geographical concentration of Kurds in the North, most military planners opposed the idea of going in light and using an equivalent of the AM. The question then became exactly how heavy the United States should go in. The biggest issue that [then-Secretary of Defense Donald] Rumsfeld had with U.S. Central Command [USCENTCOM]'s plan for the invasion of Iraq was that it ignored the RMA. The consequence was that it required a much larger number of U.S. troops then he thought desirable. The intense troop size debate that followed revealed deeper

disagreements on two related questions that carefully need to be disentangled. First, what troop size would be required to defeat the Iraqi military and eliminate Saddam Hussein? Second, what troop size would be required for the post-war stabilization phase?[26] In retrospect, the answer the United States formulated to the first question was excellent, and although the conventional operation required more ground troops than Rumsfeld preferred, it embraced the RMA in many aspects.[27] Because of Turkish unwillingness to lend its territory for a large-scale, combined-arms maneuver into Northern Iraq, the United States was forced to partially rely on the AM. Although the AM this time was used in a different way, i.e. complementary to a conventional attack, it again proved to be a successful solution. The U.S. answer to the second question, however, proved catastrophic. Rumsfeld and [then U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul] Wolfowitz, ignoring senior military advice, failed to accept that the RMA was about winning the war and not about post-war stabilization.[28] "Technologies that substitute for mass in war do not necessarily substitute for mass in situations other than war," writes Shimko, who, in this regard, separates the invasion phase and the stabilization phase by speaking of the Second (2003) and the Third Iraq Wars (2003– 2011).[29] The role of airpower in the Second Iraq War confirms the RMA, and that precision, information, and jointness transformed the character of warfare. Meanwhile, the role of airpower in the Third Iraq War confirms (neo)classical counterinsurgency (COIN) doctrine by demonstrating that the role of airpower in war among the people is more limited and complicated.[30] What the utility of modern air assets should be in protracted asymmetrical campaigns remains the subject of heated debate and whether, as some argue, the AM might provide a more sustainable alternative for large numbers of U.S. boots on the ground.[31]

2.5 THE AFGHAN MODEL IN LIBYA: SAME ELEMENTS, DIFFERENT DYNAMICS

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973, which addressed the chaotic situation in Libya in 2011, prohibited the use of ground forces. Therefore, it might seem obvious to draw an analogy with Kosovo, where NATO's airpower achieved the desired campaign goals without the employment of conventional ground troops into

the fight. It is, however, well known that small teams of SOF were embedded with the rebels to whom they offered assistance, advice, and coordination of air strikes.[32] Erica Borghard, Constantino Pischeda, and Frederic Wehrey, among others, made important scholarly contributions to the AM debate on the basis of new data provided by the Libyan case.[33] They argue that Libya demonstrated how a new factor, "time," has emerged into the balance of the AM because it alters the dynamics of the balance of skill between parties.[34] First, the process of attrition of [Libyan leader Muammar] Gaddafi's forces over a prolonged period enabled relatively unskilled rebels to sustain in the fight. Second, the time provided to the rebels by the deployment of airpower enabled the rebels to organize themselves and become more skilled. The Libyan case has thus demonstrated that the AM is able to alter a major skill imbalance. In other words, pre-intervention skills are not a definite predictor for battlefield outcomes.[35] Additionally, the arrival of foreign ground advisors had a vast transformational effect on air-ground coordination.[36] Altogether, the Libyan conflict has effectively stretched the definition and applicability of the AM.

2.6 WRAPPING UP THE DEBATE

The NCW RMA refers to a period of new doctrine and major military innovation aiming to exploit new technologies in information processing, communication, surveillance, networking, and precision weaponry.[37] The overwhelming success of the First Gulf War validated the RMA and related force transformation in the eyes of many observers; however, the RMA and its implications remain a controversial subject. The RMA has not changed the nature of war, which in its essence remains violent, interactive, and political.[38] It did have transformational effects on the character of war, more specifically on the role of airpower. In a world where politicians need a fast, low-risk, and light footprint option to project forces in wars of choice, the AM is an attractive new approach. History has demonstrated that the AM is more than a fluke, but critics like Biddle nevertheless deserve praise for balancing the debate and preventing the dangerous slip into airpower dogma.[39] Three recent cases have demonstrated that airpower can be useful in overthrowing states, but that it holds limited value when trying to rebuild them. Scholars such as Frederick Kagan, Max Boot, and Alexander Salt have convincingly stressed the

downsides of technocentric military transformation when caught up in a population-centric counterinsurgency campaign after the initial phase of warfare is over.[40] Some scholars stress the disadvantage of being dependent on indigenous forces. This disadvantage is inherent to the AM and seems an acceptable price for a light footprint option for as long as it concerns non-existential interests. The AM is more versatile and robust than claimed by some skeptics, but it does have significant political and military limitations that need to be further examined. The RMA beyond doubt has proven its potential against a conventional adversary, but its utility against an insurgent style opponent is less clear.

Chapter 3: Toward a Framework for Analyzing the Applicability of the Afghan Model of Warfare

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The question of the AM's applicability in other contexts has become prevalent, as demonstrated. Academic literature has provided a multitude of factors that influence the expectations about the extent to which the AM can be successfully utilized, but a comprehensive framework of variables for analyzing the expected applicability of the AM remains absent in leading publications. In this chapter, the most relevant variables regarding the applicability of the AM are identified by performing a comparative, case-based research analysis to construct such a framework. The relevant aspects of the cases in which the AM played a role will be concisely discussed to extract these variables. This chapter is largely based on earlier research on the applicability of the AM in Operation ENDURING FREEDOM in Afghanistan (2001), Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (2003), and operations ODYSSEY DAWN and UNIFIED PROTECTOR in Libya (2011). For more extensive analysis and reasoning that substantiates the proposed variables, we refer to this earlier research.[42] The central question is which factors determine and predict the applicability of the AM of warfare? The factors, or variables, will be classified into four categories: political, airpower, indigenous forces, and factors related to the SOF component. See Table 3.1.

The political category tries to catch the factors that connect the political strategic level to the operational applicability of the model. After all, employment of the AM is the continuation of politics by other means. These other means, in the case of the AM, are divided into three categories that represent the pillars of the AM. They individually influence the degree of synergy that can arise, and they offer a clear and logical framework for analysis.

Table 3.1. Afghan Model Applicability Assessment Framework

Political	Airpower	Indigenous Forces	SOF Component
Risk and Political Sensitivity	Air Superiority	Availability	Capability
Legal Mandate and Rules of Engagement	Capability	Reliability and Dependability	Liaison Capacity and Human Enablers
Time	Sustainability and Capacity	Unity or Fragmentation	
Regional Political Support and Coalition Involvement	Sensor-to-Shooter Time	Cultural Aspects–Trainability	
		Motivation, Morale, and Unit Cohesion	
		Triangular Balance: *Indigenous Forces –Mission Plan –Enemy Skill*	

Factors that determine the applicability of the Afghan model of warfare based on author research. Source: authors

3.2 APPLICABILITY FACTORS AT THE POLITICAL LEVEL

Political Risk and Sensitivity

The ongoing campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq have demonstrated that the risks and consequences of military intervention are hard to comprehend for political decision-makers. These experiences have had major influence on the manner in which the international coalition operated in Libya: "never before was aerial intervention pursued so intentionally as a strategy–introducing outside ground forces into the Libyan civil war was proscribed not only by the desire to avoid another quagmire in the region, but explicitly by the very U.N. resolution that the operations were conducted to enforce."[43] Learning from Afghanistan and Iraq, where the United States and its allies were sucked into large-scale counterinsurgency operations, the coalition was determined to avoid a repeat in Libya. The Libyan case thus provides a double-edged example of why politicians might need a limited military option that excludes conventional ground troops to pursue limited political interests. The AM obviously provides such an option, since small numbers of SOF can be deployed despite political sensitivities regarding "a foreign occupation force of any form."[44]

The positive first reaction of airpower proponents when looking at the short-term results seems justified. Mueller's response to Biddle's skepticism is characteristic of this initial sentiment and significant regarding the above-mentioned political preference for a limited military option. He writes, "In contrast to Stephen Biddle's March 25, 2011 warning that 'warfare rarely allows big payoffs from small investments,' the aerial intervention in Libya was in fact just such a case of a very small investment of resources paying off for the coalition."[45] The short-term payoffs were indeed impressive, but when looking at the long-term outcome, Biddle's statement seems more appropriate since the intervention has not improved the political situation in Libya. Although we do not yet know how this case will ultimately resolve, it seems fair to state that the interests at stake were not existential but limited, and that whereas Afghanistan and Iraq were expensive losses, Libya might be labelled a relatively cheap loss due to the absence of conventional ground troops. Consequently, it can be concluded that although the AM has its limitations (such as the inability to deliver political stability), it does offer U.S. politicians an attractive option in cases where political risk is low due to the limited interests at stake. Furthermore, the Libyan case demonstrates that SOF units can be secretly deployed to increase the effectiveness of airpower and indigenous forces.

Legal Mandate and Rules of Engagement

Legal mandates, the rules of engagement resulting from such mandates, and other factors, such as political sensitivity toward collateral damage, can have a restricting effect on the extent to which synergy is achieved between the elements of the AM. This potential of the rules of engagement (ROE) to restrict the synergy between the air component and the combined ground component within the AM is clearly visible when analyzing the Libyan case. Marcus Mohlin argues that SOF units could not directly coordinate airstrikes in Libya because certain countries were present in the CAOC that might not have accepted the tension between the deployment of SOF units and resolution 1973.[46] Therefore, SOF units could not play the direct role they played in Afghanistan and Iraq, and they had to be deployed under national authority, carefully avoiding NATO's command structure. "Illuminating targets with hand-held laser designators

would have required considerable interaction between SOF and the CAOC, and such interaction could easily have compromised the covert SOF teams operating in Libya."[47] The result was that SOF units had to coordinate airpower through the rebels, which clearly meant a limitation in the direct synergy of the AM and thus its effectiveness. Paradoxically, a restricted legal mandate might thus result in a situation in which a variant of the AM seems the only viable option, while simultaneously, the extent to which direct synergy between the components of the model can be achieved is restricted.

Time

In 2001, the Bush administration's lack of time, or more exactly, patience, led to the birth of the AM. While a conventional ground invasion would have taken months to come into effect, the AM proved a rapid option for effective force employment. As mentioned earlier, the time factor also proved critical for the AM's successful **application** in Libya where "the process of attrition over time enabled unskilled rebel forces to make substantial progress against [Gaddafi's] ground forces."[48] In this case, time was vital for the unskilled and unorganized rebel forces since it allowed them to improve their chances with regard to Biddle's balance of skill. The AM, by making use of the provided time, facilitated a new sort of indirect synergy. SOF units and liaison and intelligence officers helped to organize the indigenous forces in the time that was provided to them by airpower. To conclude, time is, first of all, a relevant factor because the AM can be utilized on relatively short notice. Second, by buying time, the AM is thus able to trump an imbalance of skill, organization, and sometimes even unity.

Regional Political Support and Coalition Involvement

Coalitions have always played an important role in warfare and it is no different when it comes to the AM. There are, however, a number of specific factors with regard to the composition of a coalition that influence the achievable degree of synergy between the AM's different components. Most importantly, the presence of regional countries has a strong positive influence on the applicability of the AM within certain contexts. Regional participation improves a coalition's legitimacy, which is essential for the willingness of indigenous forces to potentially

cooperate with the international coalition.[49] Moreover, when regional countries deploy SOF and intelligence personnel there is a positive influence on the cooperation between the ground elements as there are less practical obstacles such as language, cultural differences or even distrust.[50] Furthermore, regional SOF and intelligence personnel are likely to share the same culture as the local population, which improves their situational awareness.

3.3 APPLICABILITY FACTORS OF THE AIRPOWER COMPONENT

Air Superiority

The vital tasks of the airpower component in the AM are intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), air interdiction, close air support (CAS)–or more precisely, ground-directed dynamic targeting–and lastly, battlefield air interdiction (which closes the gap between air interdiction and CAS).[51] Joint Publication 3-09.3 defines the preconditions for effective CAS as "thoroughly trained personnel with well-developed skills, effective planning and integration, effective command and control, air superiority (especially suppression of enemy air defense [SEAD]), target marking and/or acquisition, streamlined and flexible procedures, and appropriate ordnance."[52] In Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, air superiority was achieved within a matter of days. The lesser the degree of air superiority, the less effective the model will be. There is, however, no clear threshold in this matter.

While a conventional ground invasion would have taken months to come into effect, the AM proved a rapid option for effective force employment.

Capability

The next rather obvious factor that influences the applicability of the AM is the degree to which an international coalition possesses the capabilities necessary to execute the airpower-related tasks of this approach. Just like the next factor, capacity, capability serves as a generic term to capture all relevant facets of airpower within

the applicability framework. This includes essential functions related to the realm of airpower-centric RMA such as NCW, PGMs, ISR and SEAD, but also logistical support assets such as precision airdrop systems to resupply isolated SOF units and indigenous forces.[53] When certain capabilities are insufficiently available this might act as a bottleneck for generating airpower and thereby severely limit the applicability of the AM.[54]

Sustainability and Capacity

Sustainability might be of decisive importance in a military campaign. Whenever the AM is utilized, the airpower capacity must therefore be large enough to guarantee long-term deployment on an operational level. This factor relates to the sustainability and capacity of all relevant airpower capabilities such as aircraft carriers, tanker aircraft, PGMs and ISR assets. The experience in Libya demonstrated the vastness of this range as it turned out that the CAOC required sustainable vetting capacity that could assess the enormous amount of target information provided by indigenous observers (rather than SOF). The limited capacity to address this niche and allocate additional air intel assets for longer periods proved a bottleneck that led to an airpower gap which severely limited the effectiveness of the operation.[55]

Sensor-to-Shooter Time

The shorter the time between the request for a PGM by a Joint Terminal Attack Controller (JTAC) or an indigenous observer and the destruction of that target, the bigger the combat effectiveness of the AM. There is a strong negative causal relation between the sensor-to-shooter time and the degree of synergy that can be achieved between the components of the AM. The length of the sensor-to-shooter time is highly dependent on the combination of the available airpower capability and capacity, when either one is suboptimal, the response time will be suboptimal as well. Other factors in this framework such as the legal mandate for example, also influence this factor. The legal mandate can prohibit direct communication between attack platforms and SOF and the Libyan case has demonstrated that air-ground synergy is suboptimal when indigenous forces provide the target information. The reaction time, consequently, is longer because the target information has to be vetted.[56]

3.4 APPLICABILITY FACTORS CONCERNING THE INDIGENOUS FORCES COMPONENT

Availability

The availability of suitable indigenous troops is possibly the most critical factor that determines the applicability of the AM because this factor is harder to control for the West than most other factors. As Mueller states: "Libya demonstrates that airpower can do much to compensate for a local partner's physical weakness, in fact more than many observers imagined when analyzing the Afghan model previously. But if no suitable political actor exists on whose behalf one can usefully intervene, it is extremely unlikely that one can be fabricated to effectively fill the vacuum."[57] The Libyan case did however shift thinking about the indigenous forces component because it demonstrated that a fragmented and unorganized rebel opposition was successfully shaped into that role. In Afghanistan and Iraq there was an obvious candidate to perform this role but in Libya this was certainly not the case.[58] This factor can be broken down into the presence of a political ally, which is a political level issue, and the related presence of military operational allies in specific geographical areas of the theater where the AM is used. Obviously, these two levels overlap and cannot be separated. It is therefore important to analyze this variable on the political level as well as on the military operational and tactical level.

Reliability and Dependability

Lack of trust in the reliability of a potential local ally can cause restraint on the political and military strategic level. Every case in which the AM has been utilized has proven that the reliability of local allies is a difficult point. When General Franks was asked whether or not he believed that the Northern Alliance (NA) was reliable, his answer was "well, we're not sure."[59] Even the Kurds, with their reputation for being a dependable ally, ignored the order that was given to them by the U.S. under diplomatic pressure from the Turks not to take Kirkuk.[60] What further influences decision makers is that the U.S. has found itself repeatedly fighting former allies who are armed with U.S. weapons that were previously provided to them. Strategic divergence between the West and their local ally is the

rule, rather than the exception. Although this factor is highly related to, and overlaps with other factors, it is of such importance that it is classified as a separate issue here.

Fragmentation

The Libyan case demonstrates that the more fragmented an opposition group that has to be shaped to function as an indigenous ally is, the more difficult cooperation is and the more unclear and complicated the political risk will be.[61] Fragmentation limits the degree of synergy that can emerge. It furthermore increases the potential for internal disputes, which has a negative influence on the prospected reliability of the indigenous ally. A high degree of fragmentation does on the other hand improve the chance that a local force can be found for each operational objective–but that is a blessing in disguise. What should be taken into account is that as part of the AM's external support to a conflict, such as financial assistance, weaponry, or manpower, can contribute enormously to fragmentation.[62] In general, the more fragmented a local opposition is, the less attractive the AM option will be. A potentially divisive form of external support are armed actors from antagonistic regional powers joining the domestic movement so they can then have a direct influence on the ground.

Cultural Aspects

Understanding a local ally's culture is first of all a precondition for estimating the value of that ally. The motivation, reliability and degree of fragmentation cannot be understood without thorough cultural understanding. Second, cultural differences, when not adequately anticipated, might limit the degree of cooperation that can be achieved within the ground element of the AM. The three AM cases have delivered multiple, strong examples of how cultural aspects influence the applicability of the AM. Some potential indigenous allies might have a strong warrior culture, as was the case for the NA for example. That warrior culture made it unacceptable for them to receive combat training, while in the Libyan case, the training offered by SOF units was of vital importance for the success of the AM.[63] The trainability of an indigenous ally, in this model classified under the umbrella term of cultural factors, is therefore a vital subfactor to consider for decision-

makers and executors. Another consideration is that most potential target countries have internal cultural differences that should be anticipated. Lambeth, for instance, has demonstrated how proxies with certain ethnical backgrounds are not suitable to conquer terrain that is inhabited by other ethnic groups.[64] The importance of this generic cultural factor cannot be overstated. When the tribal structures, ethnicities, religions and attitudes toward the West are not properly understood, it is unlikely that the AM will be successful.

Motivation, Morale, and Unit Cohesion

Troop motivation is a critical factor in war and when combat prolongs, and if conditions grow more dangerous, it becomes even more important. Michael O'Hanlon argues that the interests of local allies and the US can overlap but will not be exactly the same. O'Hanlon, among others, refers to Operation ANACONDA, where the interests of the NA and the United States diverged, to make his case.[65] Andres, Wills, and Griffith state that "probably more important than skill, however, was Afghan morale. Understanding the motivation of the indigenous ally is a critical consideration in proxy warfare...Thus, at Tora Bora, Afghan morale was built on U.S. diplomacy and cash, not internal motivation. Nevertheless, the Afghans fought."[66] When interests diverge, the motivation to fight stagnates. This motivation or loyalty cannot be bought but it can certainly be rented. Understanding when motivations in the ground element of the AM might start to diverge, and to what extent it can be controlled, is vital for preventing failures of the AM. Furthermore, indigenous unit cohesion forms another aspect vital for the degree to which an indigenous force can be expected to persevere in combat conditions. After all, the relation between military performance and unit cohesion is well known in military psychology. Wong et al. have demonstrated that social cohesion is even more important than task cohesion to the unit's commitment to the mission.[67] This has important implications for the applicability of the AM. To put it provocatively, if Western infantry can be found prepared to die for money and unit cohesion in messy wars of choice, then why not indigenous allies?

The Triangular Balance of Indigenous Force Skill vs. Mission Fitness vs. Enemy Skill

This factor contains the deeper argumentations of the debate between Biddle and Andres et al. Their disagreement on the strategic value of the AM originates in conflicting views on the character of war at the tactical level. Biddle argues that, "only allies with skills and motivation that approximate their enemy's will suffice. Inept or ill-motivated allies cannot realize the potential of U.S. airpower and SOF against competent enemies." In this point of view, indigenous allies are qualified if they are able to conquer defended terrain. A well-trained defender is able to limit his exposure to airpower, and, as World War I demonstrated, "a mere handful of surviving, actively resisting defenders in cover and armed with modern automatic weapons can slaughter even masses of unsophisticated allies who lack the skills to reduce their exposure and instead walk forward in the open."[68] However, history, and more specifically, the Libyan case, demonstrated that the AM can compensate for even a great imbalance of skill partly because skill can be influenced by training and experience over time. A precondition for the improvement of skill—and therefore even more important—is the motivation and morale of an ally to sustain the fight against an initially stronger opponent. Biddle makes a valuable point by stressing the importance of the balance of skill between enemies and local allies and it is therefore incorporated in this framework. In certain contexts, when the imbalance is large, the AM might not be able to compensate for it.

Andres et al. oppose Biddle's reasoning by stressing the dynamics the AM can unleash on the operational level. Airpower prevents the enemy to effectively wage defensive operations by suppressing and disrupting their maneuverability and communication. This renders the opponent unable to counterattack with reserves and to call in artillery. Despite this, it should be realized that an indigenous ally will never be a supplement for professional infantry, and, inherently, every indigenous ally will have its limitations. Consequently, military planners need to anticipate an ally's shortcomings. If an allied group is not competent to perform basic fire and maneuver tactics, it should not be allocated such tasks. "Leaders must plan custom solutions to unique problems, hardly a shocking revelation in the annals of warfare."[69] The

applicability assessment framework therefore also incorporates the balance between an ally's skill level and the military tasks assigned. In some situations, however, it might be inevitable to assign tasks to a local ally that prove too ambitious for the involved fighters.

This balance is of vital importance when estimating the applicability of the AM. Theoretically, however, this balance produces an unsatisfying situation as it effectively consists of three factors: the ally's level of skill, the enemy's level of skill, and the appropriateness or fitness of the mission or operation plan. Biddle and Andres both stress the relationship between two factors, and, thus they pay too little attention to the fact that all three factors are strongly interrelated. This study, therefore, proposes a different model that does more justice to reality by placing these three factors in an interrelated triangular relation. See Figure 3.1. A viable operation plan must be attuned to the level of skill of an ally, but it also has to anticipate the level of skill of an enemy. The triangular model is more realistic because of the dynamic interrelation it represents between, for example, the operation plan and the skill of the enemy, which is neglected by Biddle and Andres et al. Because of Allied airpower, Gadaffi's forces were no longer able to employ conventional tactics

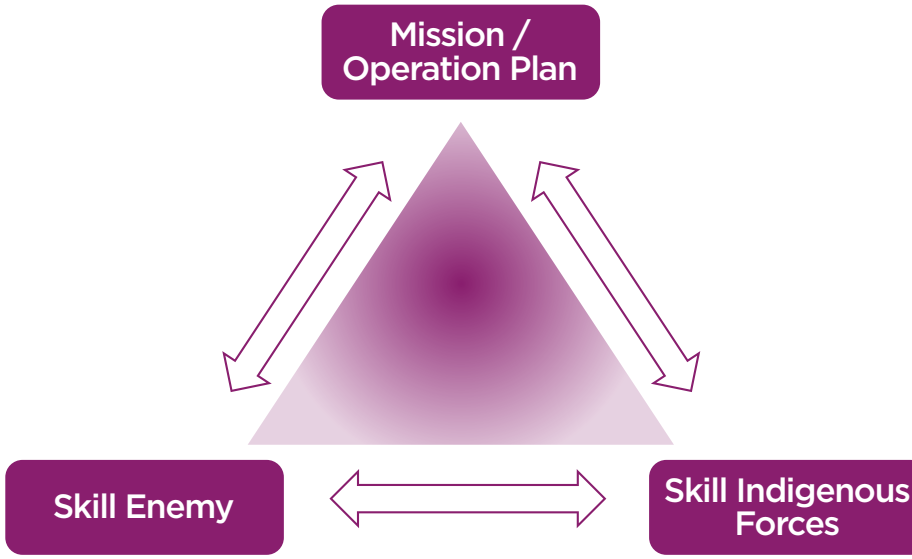


Figure 3.1. Triangular balance of skill and mission. Source: authors

in their fight against the rebels. Gadaffi's forces were forced to rely instead on new, unconventional tactics and skills in which they were relatively less proficient. This example, which demonstrates the paradox of tactics and strategy, explains how the mission plan leveled the chances on the battlefield.[70]

3.5 APPLICABILITY FACTORS RELATED TO THE SOF COMPONENT

Capability

For the application of the AM as it has been employed in the last two decades, it is obviously a precondition that the international coalition has SOF units available that are capable of fulfilling this role. The SOF component has to integrate modern technology for operating successfully within an AM variant. Integration of modern equipment and doctrine for the SOF component is vital for reaching air-ground synergy. For example, think of communication technology, laser range finders, and laser target designators. The presence of air-ground synergy specialists, forward air controllers, or joint terminal attack controllers is preconditional. However, the role of the SOF component goes far beyond the guidance of airstrikes.[71] Despite modern technology, coping with mental and physical hardship and old-fashioned soldiering skills are still essential for these units to be effective in hostile environments. O'Hanlon states that the skills of the SOF forces are just as important as modern technology.[72]

Liaison Capacity and Human Enablers

In this framework, the SOF component is stretched to also include some non-SOF human enablers such as intelligence personnel, liaison officers, military advisors, and translators. In some situations, it is unlikely that SOF units without these embedded other human enablers can cooperate with indigenous allies effectively, as the Libyan case demonstrated. In Libya, human enablers from the UAE and Qatar made a large contribution to the cooperation that was achieved, and it remains doubtful whether the West would have been able to deliver enough qualified personnel absent of these Arab contributions. "As brotherly Arabs with preexisting ties to elements of the opposition leadership, shared language, and awareness of Islamic traditions, they

were well positioned to play this role in ways that were culturally and politically preferable to Western parties."[73] It is clear that the scarcity of SOF personnel and other human enablers with the preferred language skill form a bottleneck in some situations. "Cooperation with indigenous forces is all-important in cases such as Libya and should be the first among many areas of further investigation into improving strategies and techniques for aerial interventions."[74]

3.6 CONCLUSION: A PROVISIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

This chapter sketched the outlines of a provisional framework for assessing the applicability of the AM to a certain context. Based on three earlier cases, only those factors with specific relevance to this operational approach have been identified. Other factors relevant for warfare in general, such as terrain characteristics, are not included. Each of the 16 identified factors provide information regarding its respective category (political, airpower, indigenous allies, and SOF) and how these aspects might hold negative or positive influence on the applicability of the AM in a specific conflict. Yet, it is important to stress that the framework is not a checklist—it merely forms a tool for structural analysis of potential operational environments. Thorough understanding of the unique circumstances in which the AM might be employed is paramount. Or, in Nardulli's words, "individual context is everything."[75]

Chapter 4: Assessing the Fight Against ISIS in Iraq and Syria

4.1 TO WHAT EXTENT IS ISIS DEFEATED?

This chapter concisely discusses various elements of the fight against ISIS, which in turn provides the analytical context of the campaign that will be used in the next chapter to apply the AM framework.

On April 4, 2018, the White House claimed that the military mission to eradicate ISIS in Syria was coming to an end. Two days later, however, Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) warned that much work remained to defeat ISIS in Iraq and Syria.[76] An interesting theory for clarifying why it was too early to claim ISIS' defeat is Mao Tse Tung's protracted guerrilla warfare framework.[77] It might seem odd to suggest that jihadists are inspired by Mao, but experts such as Craig Whiteside, among others, have demonstrated that Mao's famous three phases of guerrilla warfare form the foundation of ISIS' grand strategy to establish an Islamic State.[78] This powerful method of insurgency as described in Mao's book, On Protracted Warfare, heavily influenced works of jihadist strategists such as Abu Musab al Suri, who wrote The Call to Global Islamic Resistance and for Abu Bakr Naji's work, The Management of Savagery.[79] The latter, in particular, adjusts Mao's principles and stages for use in a modern context of waging jihad with the ultimate goal of establishing a caliphate. According to ISIS' *Dabiq* magazine, ISIS founder Abu Musab al-Zarqawi even stated, "it is as if the author [Naji] knows what I'm planning."[80]

Looking through this Maoist lens with the benefit of hindsight, it becomes clear that in mid-2016 (after nearly two years of triumphalist rhetoric), ISIS began preparing an ideological ground for the collapse of its territory following battlefield realities.[81] According to Kyle Orton, the first major statement that marked this rhetorical tipping point was what turned out to be the final speech of ISIS spokesman Taha

Falaha on 21 May 2016.[82] In this speech, published by al-Hayat Media Centre, Falaha ideologically prepares the jihadists for the coming strategic degradation.[83] This new line of communication, fitting Mao's strategic narrative, was followed up by an article in al-Naba 34 "and culminated in al-Naba 101 on 12 October 2017, where the Islamic State announced it was reverting from governance to insurgency."[84] The latter article aptly reminds Jihadists how a similar abandonment of conventional warfare paid off in 2007, when ISIS was suffering a setback in the wake of the Sunni Awakening and deliberately opted for switching a phase back. This demonstrates that once ISIS had been militarily degraded, it was important to consolidate that success and deploy comprehensive follow-on operations that would target the group's ability to sustain in Mao's second phase and await the right moment for a full-fledged "resurrection." Thus, the Maoist revolutionary warfare narrative provides an understanding of ISIS' enduring threat, and the value of the AM needs to be considered from that perspective.

4.2 ASSESSING THE GRAND STRATEGY AND USCENTCOM'S OPERATIONAL APPROACH

This study focuses on the applicability of a military concept of operations, for which a thorough understanding of the strategic context is vital to reach a conclusion on its wider value. War should be the continuation of politics by other means, after all.[85] It goes beyond the scope of this monograph to analyze the entire strategic background in which the international coalition, and more specifically the United States, has fought ISIS. Instead, we will sketch a rough outline of the grand strategy, which forms the most tangible and relevant demonstration of this context. This exploration will first focus on the grand strategy and subsequently work down the military strategic to the operational

...the Maoist revolutionary warfare narrative provides an understanding of ISIS' enduring threat, and the value of the AM needs to be considered from that perspective.

levels of the campaign to enhance the understanding of how exactly the application of the AM fits in this wider context.[86]

The Global Coalition's Strategy

The global coalition against ISIS was formed in September 2014 and has since been committed to degrading and, ultimately, defeating the extremist group. The 83 allied members have agreed to fight on all fronts to dismantle ISIS' networks and counter its global ambitions.[87] This is echoed in the alliance's guiding principles, in which the coalition is described as "a mobilizing and coordinating mechanism nested in a much larger diplomatic, military, and counterterrorism ecosystem, in accordance with the principles of international law, including the Charter of the United Nations, and relevant Security Council resolutions."[88] The grand strategy of the global coalition follows five lines of effort (LOEs):[89]

1. Stabilizing liberated areas in Iraq and Syria
2. Countering ISIS' propaganda
3. Military progress; defeating ISIS by denying it safe haven and building military capacity
4. Preventing the movement of foreign fighters
5. Tackling ISIS' finance and funding

Each of these LOEs is assigned to a so-called Coalition Working Group with a unique path forward. According to the coalition's website, there is no single approach to defeat ISIS and that all efforts should be tailored to address the unique nature of the threat in a given country or region. That said, the alliance aims to achieve unity of purpose across the various LOEs and between its members to quell ISIS-related threats on a global scale. It is not surprising, therefore, that the coalition stresses that most activities to counter ISIS will not mirror efforts in Iraq and Syria, where military action is central. To decide the best approach for addressing the overall threat, the participating countries' foreign and defense secretaries will continue to coordinate regularly. Obviously, in this arena the coalition[90] deals with a lot of political sensitivities. This reason, among others, clarifies why it remains largely unmentioned that military efforts in Iraq and Syria have been led by the United States, and this has been implied

by a statement[91] on the coalition website the that these operations are directed from Tampa.[92]

The United States' Comprehensive Strategy

In the fight against ISIS, the United States pursued a whole-of-government strategy coordinated across nine LOEs, as explained by President Barack Obama in 2014.[93] Each LOE was assigned to a lead U.S. implementing agency or agencies.[94] Appreciating this whole-of-government strategy is a necessary step toward understanding in which framework the military efforts of OIR should fit. The strategy for OIR consisted of the following nine LOEs:

1. Supporting effective governance in Iraq (Department of State [DOS] and U.S. Agency for International Development [USAID])
2. Denying ISIS safe haven (DOD)
3. Building partner capacity (DOD)
4. Enhancing intelligence collection on ISIS (Director of National Intelligence/National Counterterrorism Center [NCTC])
5. Exposing ISIS' true nature (DOS/NCTC)
6. Disrupting ISIS' finances (Treasury/DOS)
7. Disrupting the flow of foreign terrorist fighters (DOS/NCTC)
8. Protecting the homeland (Department of Homeland Security/ Federal Bureau of Investigation)
9. Humanitarian support (USAID/DOS)[MC2]

The DOD was, and still is, responsible for the execution of LOE two and three. These two LOEs could be viewed as the military pillar of OIR. Although this presents a somewhat oversimplified view, it does represent the formal communication of the operational-level military command that lies with U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM).

USCENTCOM's Strategy

The USCENTCOM website makes reference to the DOS website, thereby recognizing that OIR is not limited to military efforts. It also refers to OIR's official website, which clarifies that OIR is a military mission consisting of three LOEs:[95]

1. Enable the military defeat of ISIS in the Combined Joint Operations Area (CJOA)

2. Enable sustainable military partner capacity in the CJOA
3. Leverage cohesive coalition effects

CJTF-OIR's mission is described as follows: "In conjunction with partner forces CJTF-OIR defeats ISIS as a military force on the battlefield in designated areas of Iraq and Syria and sets conditions for follow-on operations to increase regional stability."[96] It might appear as if there is a disconnect between the whole-of-government strategy that claims that OIR consists of nine LOEs and USCENTCOM's OIR strategy that consists of three LOEs. See Figure 4.1. An explanation for this could be that from the overarching U.S. strategy, USCENTCOM is only responsible for the two (out of nine) LOEs assigned to the DOD and that USCENTCOM's three LOEs for OIR form the military operational campaign plan.[97] Nevertheless, it seems as if there are two separate operations that are both named OIR. This is supported by a RAND report which concludes that the relationship between, and the degree to which the global OIR effort and USCENTCOM's OIR effort are integrated and complementary, is not particularly clear.[98] Moreover, the fact that USCENTCOM speaks of "follow-on operations" in combination with their isolated military focus suggests that what should be a comprehensive approach is in reality a sequential approach.[99] Additionally, reports of friction between the global coalition and USCENTCOM reinforce the idea that what should

Figure 4.1. Combined Joint Task Force Operation INHERENT RESOLVE. Source: Combined Joint Task-Force INHERENT RESOLVE/graphic redrawn by JSOU Press

be part of the operational implementation of an overarching strategy is, in reality, a disconnected and isolated effort.[100]

4.3 HOW DID THE ROLE OF THE AFGHAN MODEL EVOLVE DURING OPERATION INHERENT RESOLVE ON THE STRATEGIC LEVEL?

When it became clear that the United States had to step up efforts in order to contain the ISIS threat, it initially did so with minimal assets—both on the ground and in the air.[101] Since the AM offers an outcome when commitment is limited but not minimal, the concept of operations did not follow the approach.[102] It was only after severe criticism about the lack of effectiveness of U.S. airpower that the Obama administration intensified its effort.[103] It was because of the persistent calls of various influential experts (such as John McCain and John Nagl) to deploy the air-ground integration specialists who had proven so effective before, that the AM became the operational reality.

The combination of USCENTCOM's first LOE, "strike ISIL across the breadth and depth of their so-called caliphate," and the second, "train and equip, advise and assist regional partners," contains all elements of the AM. Regional partners, assisted by Western SOF, identify dynamic targets while Western airpower strikes those targets. This is equivalent to the more direct form of synergy that characterized the AM in Afghanistan and Iraq. The combination of these two lines of effort also contains the indirect and slower synergy between the various components that characterized the approach in Libya. In Iraq and Syria, Western airpower contained and suppressed ISIS on the battlefield. This enabled indigenous forces to organize resistance, assisted by SOF. In the beginning of the campaign, only the direct synergy of the AM was practiced, but as international commitment grew and more training capacity was deployed, the indirect form of synergy also started to play a major role. Thereby the AM's two operational edges were practiced in parallel.

The By-With-Through Operational Approach

Some of the strategic mismatches and imperfections that have come to light in this chapter have been addressed by a "new" operational approach propagated by Defense Secretary James Mattis

from mid-2017 onwards.[104] In his words: "Our approach is by, with, and through our allies, so that they own these spaces, and the U.S. does not."[105] The by-with-through (BWT) operational approach seems to be Mattis' promising effort to rethink the U.S. approach to light footprint campaigns. Subsequently, USCENTCOM Commander General Joseph Votel explained how BWT has been operationalized against ISIS and in other campaigns.[106] This explanation indicates that the AM might constitute an important part of the overarching BWT approach. It remains unclear, however, what the exact definition of BWT is, and Votel, therefore, encourages further doctrinal development of this concept.[107] On the other hand, is it perfectly clear that BWT is not a new concept as it has evolved over the years, that it is not necessarily less resource-intensive regarding enabling support, that it requires tactical and operational patience, and, most of all, that there is a lack of common understanding about its meaning[MC3].[108] At this place, however, we will leave the further debate on the BWT approach and focus on two, among potentially many others, important strategic solutions that its (re)emergence seems to offer.[109]

First, an important strategic problem related to the AM is that it seems to lack strategic and doctrinal embedding because it is typically an ad hoc solution, or, in the ISIS case, an incremental and pragmatic solution. Preferably, it should be part of an overarching strategic design and an operational plan from the onset of a campaign. The ad hoc, incremental, and pragmatic character initially accompanying the AM in the ISIS case has, for example, resulted in underinvestment of important aspects of OIR such as the coalition's advisory presence.[110] Merging the AM into the overarching BWT operational approach and the wide attention the latter has been receiving offers a chance to solve this problem.

A second problem with the U.S. counter-ISIS strategy is the aforementioned mismatch between the military LOEs and the other comprehensive efforts, which gives the impression of a sequential approach instead of the intended comprehensive approach. CJTF-OIR's campaign plan remains vague by stating that conditions will be set for "follow-on operations." The BWT approach makes an effort to close the gap between physically destroying ISIS and stabilizing liberated areas. It states that "compared to Operation

IRAQI FREEDOM and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM missions that debated the amount and length of U.S. force presence needed for long-term stability, in OIR the domestic Iraqi forces are the hold, build, and stabilize forces that can remain indefinitely.[111] The BWT approach thus answers the question of "how to not own the liberated spaces." This has been CJTF-OIR's plan from the start, but BWT integrates and connects those military LOEs in an overarching approach, thereby dramatically increasing the chances of success.

4.4 CONCLUSION

Mao's three-stage model is useful when trying to understand why ISIS is not defeated and what the limitations of military force are. In this view, ISIS has ordered their fighters to abandon statehood and switch back to the insurgency phase. They are currently awaiting an opportunity to resurrect. The global coalition that was forged to fight the extremist organization has consequently adopted a comprehensive strategy that aims to mitigate the threat and ultimately defeat ISIS. The United States has designed a whole-of-government strategy that builds on the coalition's strategy and consists of nine LOEs of which two are assigned to the DOD. At the military level, USCENTCOM has the lead over the efforts of OIR, for which a strategy consisting of three LOEs has been implemented. In its formal communication, USCENTCOM gives the impression that OIR exclusively consists of these three LOEs. After militarily defeating ISIS on the battlefield, follow-on operations will take care of the rest. This seems to imply that the comprehensive approach has deformed into a sequential approach. In the beginning of the campaign, after SOF units were deployed to support indigenous forces, the AM was put into practice in its direct form as seen in Afghanistan. Later, when international commitment grew and

By-with-through is not a new concept as it has evolved over the years, that it is not necessarily less resource-intensive regarding enabling support, that it requires tactical and operational patience, and, most of all, that there is a lack of common understanding about its meaning.

more troops, trainers and advisors were deployed, the indirect form of the AM, as seen in Libya, also became practice in parallel, thereby improving the results of the direct form.

The emergence of the BWT operational approach might close the strategic gap between the military LOEs and other non-kinetic efforts by integrating the AM into an overarching operational approach. The strategic embedding of AM variants in the BWT operational approach improves expectations about U.S. reliance on the AM and its effectiveness, since its potential is now widely recognized by top military planners. This recognition implies that AM variants are now part of the collective knowledge of military elites. It is therefore much more likely to be relied upon in campaign planning and is not just used as a pragmatic solution. For this purpose, BWT, and the AM approach as a more aggressive subset of operations, should also be properly institutionalized within the U.S. military and its doctrines.

Chapter 5: Validating the Afghan Model Applicability Assessment Framework in the ISIS Case

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the framework constructed on the basis of the employment of the AM in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya will be further developed and validated by use of the ISIS case. The individual factors will be analyzed in the context of the fight against ISIS, and, vice versa, the campaign will be evaluated through the framework. This latter analysis not only serves the purpose of understanding the application of the AM in this specific conflict but also seeks to identify previously 'hidden' variables that might not have manifested themselves in earlier cases. Thus, this chapter will provide an enhanced and validated version of the AM applicability assessment framework that can be used to analyze the suitability of the AM in future contingencies. While this case study relies upon extensive research, its complexity cannot be fully described within the limitations of this monograph. Instead, we will focus on essential information concerning the framework and its variables to gain a profound insight into the AM and its applicability. See Table 5.1. Ultimately, this serves as an underpinning for drawing a conclusion on the degree of generalizability, and therefore the value, of the AM.

5.2 POLITICAL APPLICABILITY FACTORS

Political Risk and Sensitivity

In this chapter, the framework based on the employment of the AM in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya will be further developed and validated by use of the ISIS case. The individual factors will be analyzed in the context of the fight against ISIS, and the campaign will be evaluated through the AM framework as well. This latter analysis not only serves the purpose of understanding the application of the AM in this specific

Table 5.1. Afghan Model Applicability Assessment Framework

Political	Airpower	Indigenous Forces	SOF Component
Risk and Political Sensitivity	Air Superiority	Availability	Capability
Legal Mandate and Rules of Engagement	Capability	Reliability and Dependability	Liaison Capacity and Human Enablers
Time	Sustainability and Capacity	Unity or Fragmentation	
Regional Political Support and Coalition Involvement	Sensor-to-Shooter Time	Cultural Aspects-Trainability	
		Motivation, Morale, and Unit Cohesion	
		Triangular Balance: *Indigenous Forces -Mission Plan -Enemy Skill*	

Factors that determine the applicability of the Afghan model of warfare based on author research. Source: authors

conflict but also seeks to identify previously "hidden" variables that might not have manifested themselves in earlier cases. Thus, this chapter will provide an enhanced and validated version of the AM applicability assessment framework that can be used to analyze the suitability of the AM in future contingencies. While this case study relies upon extensive research, its complexity cannot be fully described within the limitations of this monograph. Instead, the focus will be on essential information concerning the framework and its variables to gain a profound insight into the AM and its applicability. Ultimately, this serves as an underpinning for ultimately drawing a conclusion on the degree of generalizability, and therefore the value, of the AM.

The ongoing war in Syria is even more complex and fluid than the war in Iraq.[113] In this civil war, several different groups fight against the regime of President Bashar Al-Assad—and against each other. Several of these actors are simultaneously fighting ISIS, and Syria also forms the theatre of an international proxy war involving parties like Iran, Israel, Russia, Turkey, and the United States—to only mention the most influential players.[114] Syria, thus, has become an arena for realpolitik with the associated risks of staying out versus getting involved. Even within the global coalition, there are countries such as

Turkey and Saudi Arabia that pursue interests that conflict with those of the United States. It is not surprising, therefore, that the perceived political risk of getting (re)involved in both Iraq and Syria has strongly influenced decision-making. Since the most limited military option of exclusively relying on airpower proved too ineffective, the next serious–yet limited–option, the AM, was put into practice. In the ISIS case, therefore, the perceived political risk and sensitivity have certainly contributed to the choice for an AM option.

It should also be noted that the BWT approach might mitigate the risk for military forces and thus in some cases it can also limit the political risk. See Figure 5.1.[115] The trade-off, however, is that decreasing the risk to friendly forces increases the risk of not accomplishing the mission. This is exactly why Votel and Eero Keravuori conclude this approach is not suitable when existential interests are at stake. Furthermore, they conclude, as we did in earlier research, that when boots on the ground are politically deemed too sensitive, a covert AM or BWT variant might be the only option to secure certain interests, although this would at the same time limit the effectiveness of the approach.[116]

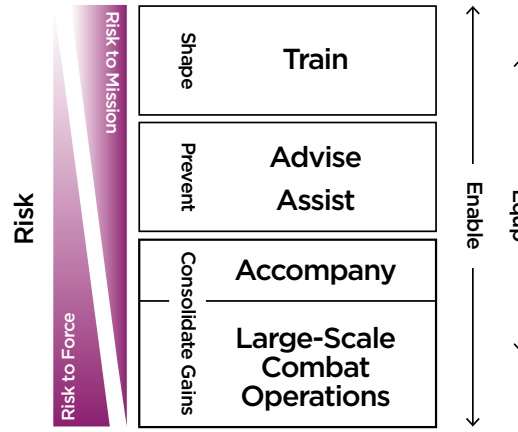


Figure 5.1. Tradeoff between risk to mission and risk to forces in the By-With-Through approach. Source: Garrett et al., 2018. Redrawn by JSOU Press

Legal Mandate and Rules of Engagement

The CJTF's combat operations have been based on solid and workable legal mandate–much more than was the case in Libya. Consequently, this does not seem to be a limiting factor and will not be elaborated on further. The ROEs for airstrikes, however, have been either heavily criticized for being too restrictive or praised for the extreme level of precision and restraint.[117] The ROEs far exceed the requirements of the Laws of Armed Conflict.[118] As early as 2015, this triggered both Lambeth and Michael Knights to plead for loosening the

ROEs, which they argued greatly held back the number of daily strikes and therefore the pressure on ISIS.[119] Moreover, Lambeth concludes that the restrictive ROEs are misplaced because the fight against ISIS is not about winning indigenous hearts and minds, and it should not be a COIN campaign.[120] It should be noted here, however, that together with his reminiscent reasoning for an air campaign resembling those against Saddam Hussein's regime in 1991 and 2003, this demonstrates a lack of awareness of the campaign's strategic context and the utility of force in it.[121] More important is that apart from such superficial criticism, the ROEs were altered to better fit the complicated situation in the battle for Mosul when U.S. Army Lieutenant General Stephen Townsend issued a new tactical directive in the field.[122] Before 26 December 2016, SOF units had to keep a distance of 1,000 meters from the fight in accordance with Directive 001.[123] The new ROEs allowed operators to move closer toward the front line, more directly supporting their local partners. Advisors who had been previously embedded at higher levels were pushed toward brigade staff and allowed to directly call for airstrikes. This allowed for a much quicker targeting process, as attacks could now be directed without going through the cumbersome Baghdad bureaucracy and strike cells. While this obviously increased the responsiveness of airpower, it simultaneously also improved the relationship between Western SOF units and indigenous forces.[124] Effectively, this encompassed a shift in focus from the training effort, or the indirect Libyan AM variant, to tactical and operational support, or the direct AM variant. The U.S. advisor on the ground almost immediately reported that the increased synergy paid off, as it broke through the threatening stalemate in Mosul.[125]

Time

With recent counterinsurgency experiences in mind, the U.S. administration was better able and more realistic in their estimates about the time U.S. military involvement needed to be sustained. Obama counseled strategic patience from the start and anticipated that it would be a multi-year campaign.[126] Planning for a long war, the White House committed the minimum amount of military assets that public outrage seemed to allow.[127] Yet, the absence of quick and tangible results along with increasing criticism resulted in a slow and reluctant increase of the U.S. military effort.[128] The limited escalation that followed

clearly led to an AM variant, as Obama stated that, "it will take time to root them out … doing so must be the job of local forces on the ground, with training and air support from our coalition."[129] Irregular wars tend to be long. It is certain that the estimated duration of a campaign, balanced against the interests at stake and perceived public support, pushed toward a limited military approach (as offered by the AM).[130]

Regional Political Support and Coalition Involvement

From its onset, the global coalition has been composed of various Arab and North African countries such as Egypt, Somalia, Libya, Tunisia, Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).[131] Although most of these countries have not actively participated in CJFT-OIR, their support nevertheless has proved vital for political and logistical reasons.[132] Most importantly, CJTF-OIR has always enjoyed a good amount of regional legitimacy and support. Despite the fact that—as has been the case in the past—the United States carried out the bulk of the combat operations in a Middle Eastern conflict, it has successfully avoided the perception of another U.S.-led war.

Bahrain, Qatar, Jordan, the UAE, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia all performed or assisted in the first coalition airstrikes over Syria, but generally speaking, Arab contributions have been rather small.[133] According to Kathleen McInnis, the UAE is the only Arab country of the Global Coalition that has committed an unspecified number of ground personnel to Syria in a training and advisory role.[134] The UAE has also been exceptional because it has proven capable of performing to the Western standard.[135] However, the military contributions of countries such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia came to an end.[136] Although it is unclear what the exact contribution of Arab countries to CJTF-OIR was on the ground, they did not play a similar bridging role between Western forces and local allies like they did in Libya. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar have put on record that they are willing to contribute ground troops to Syria under U.S. command.[137] Nevertheless, the fact that these Arab countries have made several air bases available has been of vital importance for the air war. The most important contribution of these allies has come in an intangible, yet precious form as their participation greatly augmented regional legitimacy.[138]

5.3 AIRPOWER FACTORS

Air Superiority

Air superiority over Iraq has never been an issue for CJTF-OIR, but in Syria it initially was a concern.[139] This, however, did not provide a problem as the Assad regime chose to stand down when their air sovereignty was breached by coalition combat aircraft.[140] Another new aspect in the Syrian war resulted from Russia's involvement. U.S. and Russian officials agreed on a geographical deconfliction line, according to which Russian aircraft would remain west of the Euphrates river while the coalition's assets would remain east of this watershed.[141] Part of the agreement was that if either military needed to cross the river for operations, they would use a much discussed "deconfliction hotline."[142] Yet, air superiority in Syria has suffered from almost continuous tension resulting from Russian violations, which have occurred despite regular talks at the highest military level and daily calls between senior officials at the CAOC at Al Udeid base in Qatar and their Russian counterparts.[143] To formulate it concisely, Russian involvement has highly complicated CJTF-OIR's mission from the top strategy level down to the technical level of warfare. Moreover, the resulting pressure on air superiority has claimed coalition air assets that consequently cannot be employed for ground support. A final consequence of the operational reality is that the geographical reach of the AM has been effectively limited to those areas east of the Euphrates.

Capability

Karl Mueller, among others, clearly exposed how certain airpower capability gaps had a limiting effect on air operations during the war in Libya.[144] Since that time, Western countries have been steadily investing in scarce assets to reduce that gap. Although it has not completely disappeared, the CJTF has access to all necessary airpower capabilities for its operations against ISIS. An example of how new ISR capabilities (and capacity) improved the applicability of the AM might be found in the fact that in Libya, Strike Coordination and Reconnaissance (SCAR) sorties, as part of the dynamic targeting process with embedded JTACs, had to be launched to identify targets and direct airstrikes.[145] During OIR, there have been

no reports of SCAR sorties, a task that seems to have been taken over in full by JTACs operating from the combined joint operations centers (CJOC) via remotely piloted aircraft (RPA) equipped with ISR assets.[146] The availability of RPAs had increased enormously, and their capabilities were enhanced, which enabled JTACs to rely on these RPAs for guiding airstrikes. This made SCAR sorties obsolete. OIR demonstrates a clear difference with the Libyan air war in the role that RPAs fulfilled. "In addition to tankers, RPAs were the platforms in greatest demand in OIR. Despite past research demonstrating a preference of Airmen and JTACs for manned assets, the almost limitless desire for RPAs in OIR seemingly bucks this trend. RPAs enabled the 'air accompanied' approach that emerged in OIR. Rather than U.S. or coalition JTACs on the ground, operating alongside Iraqi, Syrian, and Kurdish ground partners, JTACs early in OIR instead relied on aerial surveillance—chiefly, full-motion video provided by RPAs—to overwatch partner forces and call in strikes."[147] This notion demonstrates how the improved competence of RPAs influences the ratio between the three pillars of the AM.

Russian involvement has highly complicated CJTF-OIR's mission from the top strategy level down to the technical level of warfare.

Sustainability and Capacity

Some observers have stated that compared to previous campaigns, the intensity of OIR's air war has been relatively low.[148] This suggests that lack of capacity should not be a limiting factor during OIR. Yet, a statistical analysis of the air war against ISIS in comparison to other wars rejects this view and paints a more complicated and nuanced picture. Data released monthly by USCENTCOM has enabled us to compare the capacity used for OIR with the capacity used for the war in Afghanistan.[149] The data about the latter gives us crucial information on OIR, as assets used in Afghanistan cannot be used in Iraq and Syria. Whenever the situation required so, a shift in priority led to a transfer from one theatre to the other.[150]

This is best demonstrated by looking at the changing distribution of ISR assets. See Figure 5.2.[151] Military officials and analysts have

repeatedly called for additional RPA for their ISR capabilities.[152] According to Scott Vickery, in January 2015, USCENTCOM used six to 10 times as many ISR assets in Afghanistan, which constrained the amount of available targets in Iraq and Syria. In this early phase of the campaign, there also lacked ground troops that could act as sensors.[153] Table 5.2 demonstrates the relationship between the total number of ISR sorties per year in the Afghan theatre and for OIR. It is obvious that ISR assets were relocated to OIR to increase the amount of ISR sorties. Since the war in the Afghan theatre at that time was by no means over, this data endorses the reported shortage of ISR assets. In this regard, Table 5.2 and Figure 5.2 demonstrate that the call of generals such as the commander of U.S. Air Forces Central Command had impact.[154]

The battle for Mosul obviously was given the highest priority, and corresponding air assets were allocated. At its peak, an airstrike was conducted roughly every two minutes with the only thing limiting the tempo being the speed at which the targeting cycle and accompanying vetting processes could completed.[155] Once the combat was over, air assets were concentrated elsewhere with negative consequences for CAS requests in Iraq. This dynamic clearly demonstrates that there were insufficient platforms for ensuring optimal sensor-to-shooter time in the whole theatre simultaneously.[156]

As has been previously mentioned, the loosening of the tactical directives allowed JTACs to be more effective from 2016 onward, enabling them to identify more targets. The data in Table 5.2 supports that conclusion. Comparing the total number of strike sorties for 2016 and 2017 with corresponding total numbers of weapon releases, it seems likely that the effectiveness of the campaign did indeed improve. The CJTF was able to deliver a far greater number of weapons with a smaller number of strike sorties after the new directive. This demonstrates that with less strict ROEs, more munitions can be deployed, or more targets can be engaged with a smaller number of attack sorties. When ROEs are stricter, this puts a greater demand on ISR capacity for pattern-of-life analysis to minimize civilian casualties. The more stringent the collateral-damage mitigation measures are the higher the demand for ISR.[157] The ROE is thus related to the ISR and RPA capacity that is required for a campaign.

Table 5.2. Iraq/Syria and Afghanistan Air Power Statistics

	Total Days	Total Sorties	Tot. Strike Sorties	% Strike Sorties of Tot. Sorties	Av. Strike Sorties/Day	Sorties with at least One Weapon Release	% Sorties with Weapons Released of Tot. Strike Sorties	Tot. Weapons Released	Av. Weapons. Released/Day	Tot. ISR Sorties	% IRS Sorties
Iraq/Syria 2015	365	55.417	21.116	38%	57,85	9.912	47%	28.696	78,62	9.514	17%
Iraq/Syria 2016	365	54.915	21.181	39%	58,03	11.825	56%	30.743	84,23	12.270	22%
Iraq/Syria 2017	365	56.386	19.680	35%	53,92	9.944	51%	39.577	108,43	14.015	25%
Iraq/Syria Overall	**1.368**	**195.832**	**73.942**	**38%**	**54,05**	**34.030**	**46%**	**107.383**	**78,50**	**40.595**	**21%**
Afghanistan 2015	365	39.540	5.774	15%	15,82	411	7%	947	2,59	21.634	55%
Afghanistan 2016	365	40.053	5.162	13%	14,14	615	12%	1.337	3.66	19.681	49%
Afghanistan 2017	365	36.887	4.603	12%	12,61	1.248	27%	4.361	11,95	15.404	42%

Note: ISR = intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance Source: U.S. Air Forces Central Airpower Summaries 2018

ISR missions in Iraq/Syria and Afghanistan

Coalition airstrikes in both Iraq and Syria are highly dependent of aerial intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) to provide targeting and post-strike assessment given the absence of ground troops. As our ongoing tracking of ISR operations shows, the coalition remains significantly under-resourced in comparison to Afghanistan.

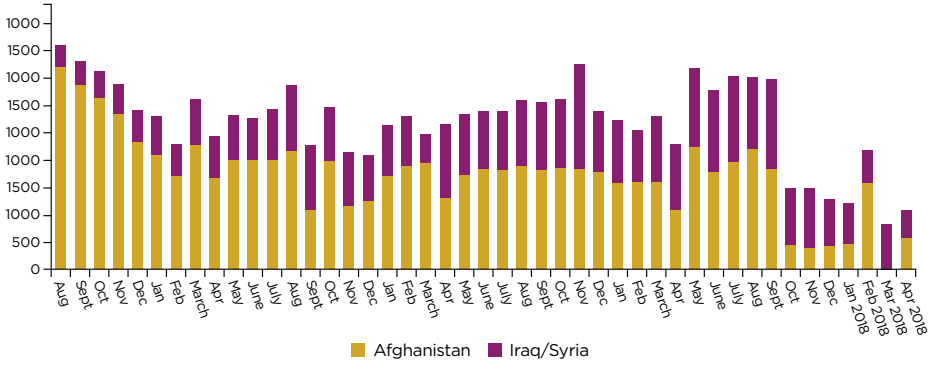


Figure 5.2. Changing distribution of ISR assets between Iraq/Syria and Afghanistan. Source: Airwars.org

Table 5.3 is based on Micah Zenko's comparison of the first year of OIR with previous campaigns.[158] This data only holds value if one is aware of the specific contexts of the different campaigns. An interesting difference with the Libyan campaign is that it needed much more strike sorties per day to release a smaller number of weapons. Mueller explains that this was caused partly by limitations in tanker capacity, ISR assets, and "personnel skilled in the arcane arts of air targeting."[159] This suggests that OIR's air war was relatively efficient. See Table 5.3.

Figure 5.3 demonstrates how USCENTCOM's strategy shifted from an Iraq-first approach to an operational-level simultaneity strategy, and later, how the successes in Iraq freed air assets for Syria.[160] During OIR, sustainability and capacity of assets related to airpower once again proved to be a factor, or major importance and concern.

Sensor-to-Shooter Time

There are several ways in which an airstrike can be initiated. Some insight into the different methods and corresponding situations is necessary to understand how the sensor-to-shooter time factor played out in the ISIS case. First, there is dynamic targeting. This is ad-hoc weapon deployment often used for time-sensitive targets.[161]

Table 5.3. Air Campaigns Compared

STRIKE SORTIES/WEAPONS RELEASES BY AIR CAMPAIGN							
	Total Days	Total Sortie Missions	Total Strike Sorties	Percent Strike Sorties	Total Weapons Releases	Average Strike Sorties Per Day	Average Bombs Dropped Per Day
IRAQ 1991	43	120,000	42,000	35%	265,000	976	6,163
BOSNIA 1995	17	3,515	2,470	70%	1,026	145	60
KOSOVO	77	38,004	14,112	37%	28,018	183	364
AFGHANISTAN	76	20,600	6,500	32%	17.500	86	230
IRAQ 2003	26	41,000	15.500	38%	27,000	596	1,039
LIBYA 2011	210	25,944	9,700	37%	7,642	46	36
IRAQ/SYRIA	361	16,164	3,837	24%	15,245	11	43

Source: Zenko 2015

Typically, but not exclusively, these dynamic targeting strikes are requested by embedded SOF units operating from a static observation post. When their indigenous partners get involved in a troops in contact (TIC) incident, the SOF JTAC requests an air strike that opens with the words "green forces, troops in contact." However, in the fight against ISIS, the ROEs generally did not allow embedded JTACs to direct the strike on a target via a "talk-on procedure" or by laser marking. Thus, these air-to-ground specialists were not always allowed to control the terminal attack phase, as would be optimal.[162] Instead, directing the strike on target is in most cases done by JTACs working in one of the two CJOCs via ISR assets such as the MQ-1 Predator or MQ-9 Reaper (which are equipped with laser guiding capabilities).[163] For self-defense, or in a so-called "blue [own SOF] forces, troops in contact" situation, however, the embedded JTACs are allowed to direct air strikes themselves. It is easy to understand that this has gained them the nickname of "SOF's life insurance."[164] This suboptimal situation changed when the battle of Mosul began to stall in December 2016, and CJTF-OIR Commander Lt. General Stephen Townsend modified U.S. military authorities with Tactical Directive 1 in a successful effort to regain momentum. "This order delegated target engagement authority to American combat advisors with the organic ability to conduct terminal control

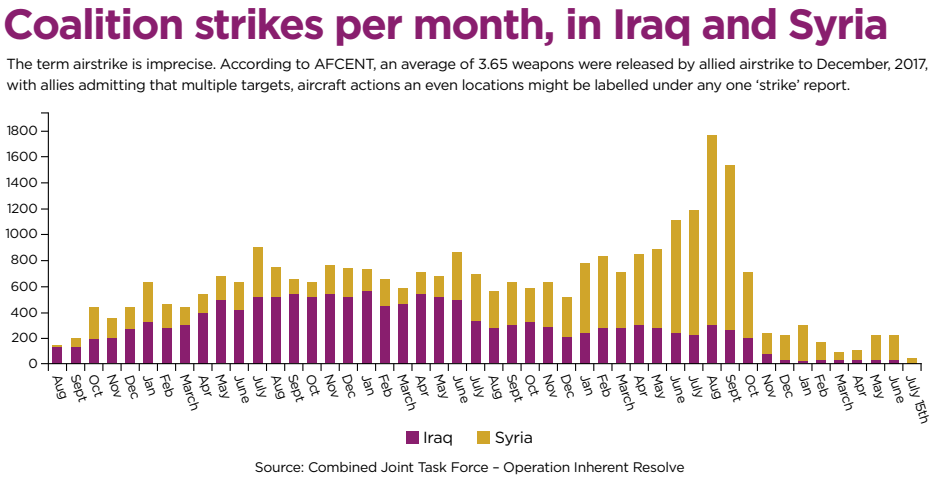


Figure 5.3 Development of air war intensity over time. Source: airwars.org

in an effort to increase the responsiveness of surface and air fires and their coordination with Iraqi forces."[165] The devolution of target engagement authority during OIR demonstrates that this improved the sensor-to-shooter time and that this was vital for winning the more challenging battles. See Figure 5.4.

Another way to initiate an air strike is via the deliberate targeting procedure.[166] This typically concerns targets that have been identified and subsequently observed–often for protracted periods of time. To prevent collateral damage, the surroundings and patterns of life are meticulously watched. Obviously, in such cases the sensor-to-shooter time is much longer, ranging from hours to days or even months. In these cases, the term sensor-to-shooter time does not apply properly because the sensors are used for a pattern-of-life analysis, which encompasses a different process than dynamic targeting.[167]

The sensor-to-shooter time for dynamic targeting is much shorter—a couple of minutes for self-defense situations up to dozens of minutes (depending on the situation) for more complicated strikes. What generally applies is that the higher the estimated possible collateral damage, the higher the target approval authority lies, thus the longer

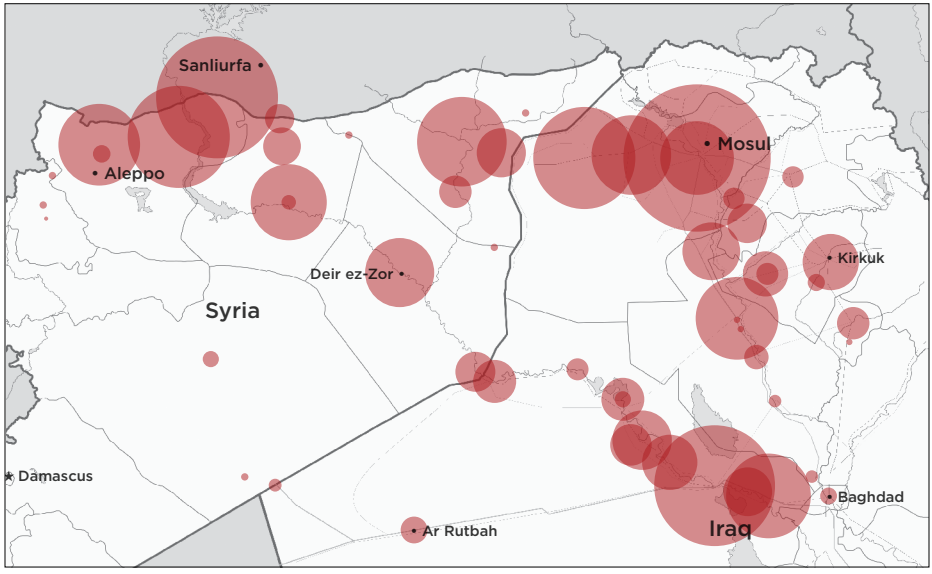


Figure 5.4. Geographical dispersion and magnitude of OIR airstrikes 2014-2018. Source: Airwars.org

the sensor-to-shooter time will be.[168] Dynamic targeting strikes, often in the shape of CAS, may be approved by subordinate commanders closer to the front lines.[169] All strikes in Iraq must be authorized by an Iraqi or Kurdish government official. Due to classification, it is not entirely clear how the ROEs and tactical directives have exactly evolved, although open sources confirm that the sensor-to-shooter time has improved during the course of the war. First, because target approval authority was pushed down from Tampa to the CAOC, and later for some cases, Tactical Directive 1 pushed it further down to the CJOCs and local commanders. It is clear that this improved the applicability of the AM.[170]

Apart from air support, the increase of artillery has also improved the sensor-to-shooter time. The ISIS case demonstrates that this classical form of fire support can also be of importance in AM-type approaches. Paladin howitzers and other ground systems were important enablers during the battle for Mosul, and throughout the campaign they were even more important to the lightly armed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Syria.[171]

5.4 INDIGENOUS FORCES FACTORS

Availability

While a myriad of local factions joined the fight against ISIS, this section focuses on the SDF, which provides the most valuable and promising example when theorizing about the generalizability of the AM.[172] Initially, Syria proved a challenge as there were no obvious reliable indigenous forces to act as proxy.[173] U.S. efforts to create a local ground force through the so-called Train and Equip Program largely failed and were eventually abandoned. This made it apparent that the United States could only rely on the Syrian Kurds.[174] The fact that the SDF was created and able to fulfil the role of the indigenous ground force in the AM is promising for the generalizability of the success of the AM. After the failed train and equip efforts, expectations were low. The SDF case demonstrates that the inherent limitation of the AM, relying on a local proxy, might in some cases be less problematic than AM critics argue.

This operational necessity had severe political consequences. Without a doubt, the Kurdish People Protection Units (YPG) have

proven to be the most effective proxy in Syria. They are, however, related to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which NATO ally Turkey believes to be an even bigger threat than ISIS.[175] Another problem even more relevant for our analysis is that Syrian Arabs would not accept Kurds entering (and occupying) their territories in order to fight ISIS.[176] To circumnavigate this precarious issue, the United States created the SDF as an umbrella organization that incorporated not only the YPG but also the Syrian Arab Coalition (SAC) and other militias.[177] Yet, it is clear that the Kurds delivered the bulk of the fighting power. In 2015, for instance, there were roughly 40,000 Kurdish fighters and 5,000 fighters of the SAC, which endorsed its symbolic role as it mainly seemed to be co-opted for legitimacy purposes.[178] On the ground, however, the Arabs turned out to be a formidable fighting force as well and as their number gradually increased. They not only gave legitimacy to SDF operations but also bore the brunt of actions in routing ISIS from Raqqa.[179]

Reliability and Dependability

In the ISIS case, abundant reports on failures confirm that reliability of potential indigenous forces is a major problem for policymakers and the military alike.[180] Whereas the Syrian Kurds proved the most reliable indigenous partner force, even they could not always be relied upon.[181] As long as ISIS represented the main threat to the Kurds, the Kurds shared the interest of degrading this extremist movement. With the decline of ISIS, however, interests diverged between the United States and the Kurds due to Turkish pressure. In January 2018, when Turkey launched Operation OLIVE BRANCH against PKK and YPG targets in the Afrin region, Kurdish SDF fighters massively deserted and crossed into western Syria to fight alongside their brethren.[182] Whereas the United States attempted to pass off the SDF as a balanced fighting force separated from the YPG and the PKK, it now became clear that the SDF was intimately related with the YPG, which had delivered the backbone of the umbrella organization.[183] Thus, the battle for Afrin painfully revealed the limitations of the SDF's reliability, as it stressed they could not be depended on when interests diverged.[184] In order to cope which such issues, Aaron Stein recommends that to achieve the alignment of end-goals, the United States should be prepared to

tolerate the possibility that partner forces may act in ways that do not perfectly align with its objectives.[185]

Fragmentation

One of the factors in which the ISIS case distinguishes itself from the other cases where the AM was applied is the extreme degree of fragmentation of the Syrian opposition. This is an important issue, as some commenters consider this the "new normal" in civil wars.[186] The fact that the AM was successfully employed in this fragmented context, therefore, holds a promise about the approach's applicability in future conflicts. This, however, does not mean that fragmentation has become irrelevant. As was seen in Syria, this matter greatly complicated operations. Paradoxically, the hesitant conduct of the United States and its Western partners in the beginning of the Syrian civil war seemingly contributed to the fragmentation of the opposition.[187] As the Syrian opposition was confronted with an "extreme military asymmetry favoring the Assad regime," the various factions could not unite. They were forced to fragment, as centralization would render them far more vulnerable.[188] Furthermore, Western reluctance created an opportunity for Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, and others to create their own Islamist proxy forces.[189] Young Syrian men willing to resist the regime could hardly be blamed for preferring well-resourced Islamist groups over uncertain Western-sponsored groups that required cumbersome vetting processes. It should be noted, therefore, that when political leaders consider the AM, it is important to prevent a phase of ambivalence that might increase fragmentation and thereby complicate or hamper the execution of such a limited approach.

Another issue concerns internal rifts within local partners. This might be best illustrated by the Iraqi Kurds' partisan division, which seriously endangered the Iraqi Security Forces' (ISF) advance on Kirkuk in October 2017. Fighters of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) abandoned their positions, even though the fighters of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) expected them to stand their ground.[190] This supposed betrayal resulted in severe tensions between the two Kurdish factions.[191] Almost two years later, one of the authors learned about this the hard way when, during a deployment in Iraqi Kurdistan as

Battalion Staff Trainer for a Regional Guard Force Battalion consisting of both PUK and KDP elements, he mentioned the retaking of Kirkuk. The normally relaxed and kind atmosphere quickly turned sour, and a vicious discussion emerged that could only be quelled by the battalion's commander. The topic was very sensitive and led to the awareness that the soldiers' loyalty still lay with either the PUK or the KDP instead of the newly combined Regional Guard Force.[192] In the eyes of both factions, the new force structure was a necessary evil to absorb support and funding.[193]

Cultural Aspects

The ISIS case is full of examples that demonstrate the importance of cultural aspects when considering an AM approach. This part of the discussion will focus on the crucial point that OIR's efforts to train and equip the ISF were seriously undermined by cultural differences, as introduced by Biddle.[194] The methods and processes taught to local officers for executing command and control are based on Western military principles such as mission command, which is part of the maneuverist approach. This command philosophy requires a high degree of mutual trust between commanders and subcommanders to share information, delegate tasks and responsibilities, and enjoy freedom of action within the boundaries set by the commanders' intents. Unfortunately, these principles proved difficult to reconcile with Iraqi culture.[195] An Iraqi military commander, for instance, might not at all be pleased with well-trained subcommanders since he might perceive them as a personal threat. This discrepancy likely contributed to the limited availability of trainees for OIR's officer training capacity.[196] This triggers the question of whether the current approach of imposing Western military doctrine is the most effective approach.[197] Culture and doctrine, after all, are inextricably linked.[198] A deep understanding of a partner force's culture can be an AM force multiplier.

Both the United Kingdom and NATO have published capacity-building doctrines that stress the importance of tailoring training to the needs, habits, and situations of the local training audience, and that training should begin with an extensive analysis of these needs, habits, and situations.[199] Despite this doctrinal imperative, the Kurdistan Training and Coordination Centre prescribed a curriculum

based on the U.S. Military Decision-Making Process (MDMP), written orders, and relatively complex staff procedures. When explained to the Kurdish battalion commander—who could not read—that he should start the MDMP by issuing a warning order to his company commanders as soon as possible to give them as much time as possible to conduct their own planning, he explained that he would typically be informed no more than 24 hours before the start of an operation where to assemble his battalion. To ensure operational security and maintain surprise, all other information would be received later. Via an interpreter, he explained that timely warning orders, like those on which the MDMP relies, would certainly ruin operational security. Or in his words, "The housekeeper of a staff officer will spread the word to the barber of the cousin of the local ISIS commander." It became painfully clear that standard operating procedures and the MDMP, which we imposed upon them, were worlds apart. This is just one of many examples of how, despite the availability of excellent doctrine, Western militaries dramatically fail to tailor staff training programs to local partners.

Motivation, Morale, and Unit Cohesion

Critics such as Biddle have pointed to supposed lack of motivation of indigenous allies to fight ISIS as one of the reasons why a strategy based on an AM variant will not be effective.[200] It is clear that lack of motivation, morale, and unit cohesion of the ISF, among others, initially facilitated the rise of ISIS and provided a grim prospect for the future. It can be concluded post hoc that the course of events leading to the physical degradation of ISIS proved that willing local allies had been found and formed.[201] The retaking of the northern Syrian city of Manbij is just one example of the SDF's, or arguably the YPG's, impressive ability to maintain morale and motivation. During the two-month urban battle, the SDF persevered despite losing around 300 fighters, with another 1,200 injured.[202] Later during the war, when the YPG's interests diverged from its SDF umbrella, it became clear that the SDF's unit cohesion had limits that followed ethical divisions. Understanding local motivation, therefore, remains essential for successful application of the AM.

The Triangular Balance of Indigenous Force Skill vs. Mission Fitness vs. Enemy Skill

In OIR's concept of operations for annihilating ISIS, SOF units reported enemy positions to the CJOC when indigenous forces and ISIS got into a TIC situation. Dependent on the situation and after vetting information such as coordinates, the JTAC in the CJOC would direct an airstrike after authorization. Initially, airstrikes were able to inflict major damage on ISIS because they were not prepared for Western airpower. When ISIS commanders got a grasp of the coalition's strengths and weaknesses, however, they quickly proved able to adapt their combat tactics accordingly.[203] The weekly ISIS newspaper, *al-Naba,* which was meant to inform fighters, reveals how these commanders perceived Western strategy and how they proposed to counter it.[204] These analyses of ISIS' and the coalition's military performances testify to a keen military insight and creative solution for countering and exploring an adversary's weak point.[205] An article in *al-Naba,* for instance, provides detailed instructions on how to hide positions.[206] The coalition had to react to ISIS' adaptability by employing more ISR capabilities and by moving SOF units closer to the front lines, which endorses the interrelation between the three elements of the triangular balance. The changing skillset of ISIS, in turn, demanded a higher skill level from indigenous partners. This required a more systematic and coordinated approach to cope with the newly arisen necessity to move closer to the enemy without being annihilated.[207] Thus, the final element of the triangular balance encompassed increased training and advisement for local partners to cope with these new tactics, then accompany them more closely to the forward line of operations. This was an ongoing process of adaptation. The perceived ability of Western troops and local allies to cope with these dynamics influences the applicability of the AM.[208] The dynamic nature of the three elements of the AM stretches the generalizability of the model when they are understood and anticipated by military planners and politicians. If not, the same dynamic nature might blunt the AM's effectiveness.

5.5 SOF FACTORS

Capability

Former USCENTCOM Commander General Joseph Votel has described the campaign against ISIS as warfighting "by, with, and through" local forces.[209] The BWT terminology is often echoed by the SOF community, and Votel's explanation of that term suggests that it aptly captures the general operational approach to which SOF units contribute.[210] The role of SOF units is "building partner capacity" and to "advise, assist, accompany, and enable" local forces.[211] This, of course, is all but new as it fits seamlessly in the U.S. Army's SOF doctrinal term *special warfare*.[212] Moreover, special warfare campaigns might well include the coordination of air strikes.[213] Elaborating further on this theoretical standpoint, the AM could be regarded as the convergence of classical special warfare doctrine with NCW and airpower RMA. SOF units contributing to an AM approach therefore have to be capable of acting as sensors in order to direct modern airpower as well as performing special warfare.[214]

This perspective suggests, or explains, why the AM is less revolutionary from the SOF perspective than it is from an airpower perspective. It has even been suggested that the role performed by SOF in Iraq and Syria is a return to their roots.[215] Contemporary American strategic culture favors direct action-types of SOF activities such as "surgical strikes."[216] Therefore, the latter type of operations typically catches disproportionate attention compared to special (or unconventional) warfare. This also applies to their contribution to the desired ends of the BWT operational approach. Because surgical strike operations entail direct kinetic force by SOF units on the ground, it could well be argued that operations of this type fall outside the scope of the BWT approach and the AM. In reality, however, both types of operations are used mutually. Whenever necessary, surgical strikes have been employed to support special warfare.[217] In Iraq and Syria, the acceleration of successful intelligence-driven SOF raids on ISIS leadership raised the prospect

...the AM could be regarded as the convergence of classical special warfare doctrine with NCW and airpower RMA.

of outrunning the advances in building a competent and coherent hold force in both Iraq and Syria.[218] Yet, it should be noted that while contributing tremendously to the demise of opposing groups, the overall AM approach's emphasis on local allies is deemed more effective for guaranteeing a limited involvement since it recognizes the importance of battlefield success exploitation and consolidation.

The SOF capability that should thus be critically reviewed when considering an AM- or BWT-type approach is the capability of conducting special warfare, combined with the capability to achieve air-ground integration in the specific context at hand. Although the United States has a rich history of special warfare, and it has dedicated SOF units specialized in this type of SOF operation, the role of SOF units keeps evolving and seems to emphasize direct action missions.[219] Therefore, the question of whether the SOF component is prepared for their envisioned task in a particular operational environment remains relevant when considering them for use in an AM-type operation.

Liaison, Advisory, and other Human Enabler Capacity

The relevance of liaison, advisory, and other human enabler capacity is essential in any AM-variant. This factor comprises all personnel that enable the AM other than SOF personnel. Liaison officers and advisors that link the different elements of the AM together are obvious human enablers, but there are more essential specialists, including specialists from the intelligence community, specialists occupied with target vetting, or reliable translators that communicate between SDF fighters who request air strikes on the ground and JTACs in strike cells. The particularities of Iraq and Syria not only confirmed this but also revealed some additional points regarding this factor. First, the use of advisors at the tactical and operational level should be dramatically increased. Although the debate on the role of ground troops focuses on the coordination of airstrikes and other fires, the advisory functions entail far more than that, thus necessitating additional troops.[220] While one might expect this problem to be less relevant in the case of Iraq, where a U.S. presence since 2003 has resulted in an impressive network of human enablers, the absence of a large number of advisors was felt almost as badly as in Syria, where scarce human enabler capabilities were totally dependent on SOF units.[221] In Syria, the strike

cells were exclusively manned with SOF personnel.[222] Moreover, force-protection concerns further hampered operators' abilities to connect with local partners. At the onset of the campaign especially, the "risk to forces" outweighed the "risk to mission."[223] Altogether, this constrained the results of OIR, as it led to a lack of coordination with, and between, indigenous elements. It also instigated preventable friction, of which the performance of Iraqi units during the battle for Ramadi is perhaps the most infamous illustration.[224]

Developments at the strategic level seem to emphasize the importance of this factor, as BWT seems to be embraced by USCENTCOM as a new, light-footprint strategy. In 2018, for instance, the approach was simultaneously employed in Yemen, Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq, which indicates the need for an increased capability.[225] Furthermore, both Votel and former Secretary Mattis have stressed the importance of BWT and the accompanying demand for greater liaison, advisory, and other human enabler capabilities.[226] With the reemergence of great power competition, this gives the United States additional options for enhancing and maintaining its influence with a relatively limited number of resources.

5.6 WHAT NEW FACTORS CAN BE IDENTIFIED BASED ON THE USE OF THE AFGHAN MODEL IN THE FIGHT AGAINST ISIS?

The analysis of the ISIS case in the preceding part of this chapter revealed that not all relevant data was covered with our framework. Therefore, we introduce three new complementary factors, or, rather, they have been detached from overarching factors and are now separately included in the framework. The ISIS case has stretched the definition of the AM, and consequently, the applicability assessment framework must be updated.

Public Support and Political Will

In conflicts that only hold limited strategic interest–either real or perceived–and a corresponding degree of public support, the political will of a nation to massively deploy its own troops is typically absent, rendering proxies essential.[227] Although general factors were earlier excluded from the AM applicability assessment framework, the ISIS

case brings forward the insight that political will and support should be included. This might push decision-makers toward an AM approach. Moreover, maintaining political support is crucial since public support in a democracy is, or should be, the source of political will. The evaporation of public support for the Iraq war, for instance, meant that the success of the 2007 U.S. troop surge into Iraq was abandoned. The intensity of the surge was clearly not aligned with U.S. public support, and Obama was voted into office on a course that drastically changed U.S. political will to remain committed in Iraq. However, when ISIS emerged, there apparently was enough public support for an AM variant (which was initially beyond the expectation of the U.S. government). The almost continuous shifts in U.S. and wider Western commitments are highly inefficient. The ISIS case has demonstrated that understanding the degree of public support for an operation and the ability to sustain it is an important factor that should influence decision-makers when deciding on strategy.[228] Valuing this factor could cause them to consciously opt for the AM. Moreover, this factor could also constrain decision-makers to the point where such an approach is the only realistic escalation or de-escalation strategy for containment.

Strategic Interest Misalignment and Divergence

This factor relates to the inherent risks of proxy warfare, or the "indirect approach," as it was labelled in the 2006 U.S. Quadrennial Defense Review.[229] When real but limited interests are at stake, the result is a dilemma that has dominated U.S. security policy for decades and is likely to do so for a long time.[230] A favorite answer to this problem has been to rely on a proxy that is willing to fight in its own as well as U.S. interests. Proxy warfare offers clear political benefits, but it does come with inherent disadvantages. These could be strategic interest misalignment and divergence, which always lead to systematic frustration.[231] The process of strategy becomes even harder when one must trust a local political ally that has to be co-opted for achieving political ends.[232] The issues caused by strategic interest misalignment and divergence might be essentially understood as a principal–agent problem. Biddle et al., in this regard, argue that agency loss will be high, and that adverse selection even promotes major interest asymmetries between the provider and the recipient.[233] The prospects

about interest misalignment and the abilities to manage it should influence the decision whether to opt for the AM.

This, again, can be easily demonstrated through the example of the Kurds.[234] Given the sensitivity of employing and empowering this ethnicity as proxies against ISIS, the coalition had to be cautious of possible unintended consequences—especially when it came to Turkish or Iraqi national interest. Seemingly, policymakers who instigate proxy warfare rarely consider the long-term implications of their actions.[235] Although it is too early for definitive judgement, in Iraq the West's strategic interest most severely diverged from that of the sponsored Kurdish faction when the latter started focusing on more political autonomy or even independence from Iraq. The events did not end up escalating even though it was all but certain beforehand.[236] In Syria, the strategic interest of the sponsored Kurdish faction clashed with Turkish interests. The empowerment of Kurdish factions in Syria triggered the Turkish invasion of Syria and subsequently, the absurd situation materialized that Turkish troops have been fighting the U.S.-backed SDF. A clash between NATO allies was far from inconceivable at some moments.[237] It is beyond dispute that the perceived misalignment and divergence in strategic interests have been, and will remain, relevant factors when estimating the applicability of the AM. The risk of unintended strategic consequences is a major hazard when the West tries to influence strategic outcomes by indirect engagement in conflicts with third parties who have overlapping, but not identical interests.

Building Partner Force Capacity

The ISIS case demonstrates that coalition SOF units were unable to provide the required amount of personnel needed for the building partner force capacity LOE. Conventional forces have played an important role in the training of the Iraqi military. Votel and Keravuori argue that the most constraining factor for a BWT approach is "the required supporting forces and sustainment levels needed to ensure the host partner's progress, parity or overmatch–and ultimately secure the shared U.S. interest."[238] As mentioned, the coalition's limited capacity to train the Iraqi military, and the Syrian opposition troops had

a restrictive influence on OIR's effectiveness and the efforts to build counter-ISIS forces proved more modest than generally believed.[239]

Historically, SOF units have been the primary advisory force in support of both conventional and irregular forces around the world.[240] However, that perception has changed significantly over the last 20 years.[241] Conventional forces have played an important role in building partner force capacity in the ISIS case and therefore they too, like SOF units, should invest in understanding historical context, language, and culture.[242] This, however, results in a recurring and highly debated dilemma because conventional forces should, according to many, focus on conventional warfare instead of low intensity warfare.[243] The U.S. Army has addressed this problem (and probably anticipated the prospect of future BWT warfare) by creating specialized Security Force Assistance Brigades.[244] While some might consider such units as an institutional threat to SOF, there are significant advantages to conventional units in the advisory role.[245] A conventional combined arms maneuver is, for example, the core competency of conventional forces and not of SOF units. Therefore, an Iraqi battalion commander might be better off with conventional advisors specialized in combined arms maneuvers, as this type of operation approaches battlefield realties. It should be noted, however, that despite similarities in task and organization, cultural awareness is key for building indigenous partner capacity in a way that is self-sustainable. The prospect that AM variants and BWT are a recurring model for future warfare, in combination with the suboptimal capacity building efficacy in the ISIS case, necessitate that this should be incorporated in the AM applicability assessment framework as a separate factor.

5.7 CONCLUSION: AN UPGRADED AFGHAN MODEL APPLICABILITY ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

This chapter applied the AM applicability assessment framework to the ISIS case. This not only enhanced our understanding of this particular case but also demonstrated that all factors identified in earlier cases are echoed in the latest application of the AM. Furthermore, the brief analysis of each individual factor serves to illustrate how the framework can be used to identify bottlenecks or

potential restraints that influence the applicability of an AM variant, or how certain factors might even be an incentive for its use. Additionally, three new complementary factors have been introduced, or rather, they have been detached from overarching factors and are now separately included in the framework.[246] The ISIS case provided data demonstrating that these three factors are of such importance for the successful application of the AM that they should be critically assessed individually when contemplating AM-type approaches. Building partner force capacity, in particular, has stretched the definition of the AM since there is now a role for conventional forces in some AM variants. But what does this all mean for the remaining relevance and value of the AM in the coming years?

Chapter 6: The Value of the Afghan Model

What option does the AM provide in the contemporary security environment? Or, in other words, what is the remaining value of the AM after the fight against ISIS? First, its success is dependent on 19 factors that constitute the AM applicability assessment framework. This monograph has demonstrated how that framework can be used to identify bottlenecks or limitations that influence the applicability of an AM variant and how factors can be drivers for the use of the AM. By analyzing the ISIS case along these lines, we validated the framework and identified that there are three additional factors that need to be included: public support and political will, strategic interest misalignment and divergence, and building partner force capacity. See Table 5.4. The value of the resulting framework is that it provides a clear analytical structure that provides guidance for military and political decision-makers who decide how to align ends, ways, and means in limited warfare. The success of the AM in the ISIS case has improved expectations about the generalizability of the success of the AM and it has stretched the definition of the AM.

Two decades after the AM appeared as a new and promising concept of operations, the Afghan war finally came to an end. It is hard to frame this in any other way than complete strategic failure. The concept of operations that was used for overthrowing the Taliban during the initial phase, however, remains in no way less promising. The AM once again proved its utility in the fight against ISIS. Western airpower contained and suppressed ISIS on the battlefield, which enabled indigenous forces to organize resistance assisted by Western SOF. This analysis sheds a revealing light on some highly disputed issues in the academic debate related to the RMA, war by proxy, and the generalizability of the success of the AM. The employment of

Table 6.1. Afghan Model Applicability Assessment Framework

Political	Airpower	Indigenous Forces	SOF Component
Risk and Political Sensitivity	Air Superiority	Availability	Capability
Legal Mandate and Rules of Engagement	Capability	Reliability and Dependability	Liaison Capacity and Human Enablers
Time	Sustainability and Capacity	Unity vs Fragmentation	**Building Partner Force Capacity**
Regional political support and coalition involvement	Sensor-to-Shooter Time	Cultural Aspects -Trainability	
Public Support, its Maintenance, and Political Will		Motivation, Morale, and Unit Cohesion	
Strategic Interest Misalignment and Divergence		Triangular Balance: *Indigenous Forces -Mission Plan -Enemy Skill*	

Validated and complementary set of factors that determine the applicability of the Afghan model of warfare. Source: authors

modern airpower is still evolving, and new ways to achieve air-ground synergy have emerged. This indicates that the network-centric RMA might still not be fully exploited; consequently, the AM approach will continue to develop as it has been doing since 2001.

Furthermore, there are underexposed developments that could have great implications for AM-type approaches. The role and influence of private military companies is ever-increasing, and some already have the capabilities to take over the role of the Western ground component by coordinating airstrikes and training and advising indigenous forces. This possible replacement obviously increases the potential of an AM-type approach in cases where plausible deniability is required, or where boots on the ground are not desirable. This potential is also well understood by Russian political and military elites as witnessed by, among others, the deployment of the Wagner Group in Syria.[247]

Whatever the future might have to offer, it is clear that even–or maybe especially–in a time of (renewed) global competition, the United States needs to deal with real but limited security threats. Therefore, three options are available. First, go all-in with the risk of

overspending so that limited stakes are realized. Second, stay out and remain unengaged, which results in losing the stake, although cheaply. Finally, and most likely, there is the option to go for a middle approach in which it is likely that an AM variant will be the preferred concept of operations to bring about this balance.[248]

Asymmetric adversaries have drawn the right lesson from Desert Storm and will take all possible measures to limit their exposure to Western airpower. Recent history indicates that it is not viable for Western democracies to maintain a large COIN force for the time that this type of operation requires. It is, however, possible to maintain the components of the AM, which, when combined, are able to suppress insurgencies while transitioning from covert insurgency to overt control of territory. If used in that sense, an AM variant would not be a solution for deeper political grievances. However, containment should be preferred over an uncontrolled power vacuum, as the ISIS case demonstrates. The AM in its narrow definition can be a useful tool for situations that require containment or destructive power. The AM, however, might be much more valuable when it is embedded in the proper, overarching strategy. The BWT approach, as used against ISIS, seems to offer appropriate strategic embedding of the AM, by connecting the AM, which is mainly a kinetic tool, to other non-kinetic means. As such, it closes the strategic disconnect between the physical destruction of an enemy and operations that address root causes of conflict. Furthermore, the employment of the AM in the ISIS case endorses that the RMA can also be of great value in asymmetric or irregular warfare. Twenty years after the emergence of the AM in Afghanistan, international coalition forces left that country with Afghan Security Forces far from self-sustainable. The AM in its narrow containment form could have provided an alternative course of action for the U.S. to deal with this theatre.

Since successful application of the AM is dependent on the factors presented in the AM applicability assessment framework, the value of the AM depends on the occurrence of situations that meet the requirements of these factors. A multitude of scholars and political entities have tried to comprehend and predict the future security environment. Generally, the result has been that over the past few

years, Western militaries have been reorienting toward high-end warfare against an equally sophisticated, or even superior opponent. This focus has been further enhanced as a consequence of China's build-up of traditional-style armed forces and the predominantly conventional nature of the Ukraine War. Whereas it is understandable that militaries prepare for the most dangerous course of action, history reveals a recurring pattern in which disappointing irregular endeavors act as a catalyst for such a reorientation.[249] This comes with the tendency not to learn from and prepare for future limited wars, which is a very dangerous development in a time of tense relations between superpowers, assertive regional actors, and a corresponding likelihood of proxy war.[250] Besides this, it might not even be relevant to try to make a clear separation between irregular or unconventional warfare and conventional warfare because future armed conflicts will likely contain elements of both.[251] Great power competition, therefore, might very well come, or is already in progress, in the form of manifold low-intensity conflicts. Therefore, this monograph calls for the investment in limited or low-intensity warfare capabilities in order for the West to also prepare for the most likely course of action.

Ultimately, the RMA has not changed the nature of war, since war, in its essence, remains violent, interactive and political. It did have transformational effects on the character of war or the nature of warfare.[252] When politicians need a fast, relatively low-risk and light footprint option to project force, an AM variant will form an attractive option that is widely applicable. Even though some scholars stress that being dependent on indigenous forces is a disadvantage of the AM, it seems an acceptable price for a light footprint option—as long as interests are limited. Moreover, this approach is more versatile and robust than claimed by some sceptics. However, it does have significant political and military limitations that strategists should be aware of and which can be understood for each unique case through the assessment framework.

The ISIS case has revealed that the AM can be even more effectively employed as part of a sustainable, realistic, and long-term strategy. In this regard, the BWT approach offers a promising underpinning for

developing and institutionalizing a new Western way of limited warfare. Whereas the AM, in itself, holds remaining value for future conflicts, its incorporation in such an overarching approach will definitely transform the character of limited war. This ultimately provides a powerful and much-needed addition to the strategic toolkit for dealing with the multi-faceted threats of today and tomorrow.

Notes

1. Donald H. Rumsfeld, "Transforming the Military," *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 3 (2002): 20–32; Richard B. Andres, Craig Wills, and Thomas E. Griffith Jr., "Winning with Allies: the Strategic Value of the Afghan Model," *International Security* 30 no. 3 (2006): 136, 337.
2. Stephen Biddle, *Afghanistan and the Future of Warfare: Implications for Army and Defense Policy,* (Carlisle: U.S. Army War College, 2002), 6.
3. See, for instance, Martijn Kitzen, "Operations in Irregular Warfare," in *The Handbook of Military Sciences,* ed. A. Sookermany (Cham: Springer, 2020), 18, https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/978-3-030-02866-4_81-1.pdf, 18.
4. Tijs Althuizen, "The New Way of Limited Warfare: The Value of the Afghan Model after the Fight against ISIS" (master's thesis, Netherlands Defence Academy, August 2018), https://bibliotheeknlda.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p21075coll27/id/73 http://defbib.kma.nl/art2/pdf/Masters/2018/Althuizen, T.H.M.pdf
5. Tijs Althuizen, "Het Afghaanse Model en de Strijd Tegen ISIS: Een Onderzoek naar de Mogelijkheden en de Beperkingen van het Afghaanse Model in de Strijd Tegen ISIS," (bachelor's thesis, Netherlands Defence Academy, 2016) http://defbib.kma.nl/art2/pdf/KMA/2016/Althuizen.pdf; Tijs Althuizen, "The New Way of Limited Warfare."
6. Laura Roselle and Sharon Spray, *Research and Writing in International Relations* (New York: Routledge, 2016).
7. With a few exceptions, the literature on the ISIS case focuses on the period up to the end of 2018 because at the time this research was conducted there was a lack of data from after this period that met the reliability criteria. Hence the decision to focus this particular case on the years 2014–2017.
8. See, among others, John Andreas Olsen, "Operation Desert Storm, 1990," in *A History of Air Warfare,* ed. John Andreas Olsen (Dulles: Potomac Books Inc., 2010), 177-200; Benjamin S. Lambeth, "American and NATO Airpower Applied: From Deny Flight to Inherent Resolve," in *Airpower Applied, U.S., NATO and Israeli Combat Experience,* ed. John Andreas Olsen (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2017), 124–216.
9. Tony Mason, however, claims that it was actually Operation Allied Force in 1999, rather than Desert Storm, that marked the beginning of a new era of airpower because of the used technology, the evolution of asymmetric countermeasures, the impact of humanitarian issues, the exposure to the international media, and the uneasy alliance. Tony Mason, "Operation Allied Force, 1999," in *A History of Air Warfare,* ed. John Andreas Olsen (Dulles: Potomac Books Inc., 2010), 225–252.
10. This unpreceded potency of airpower did not suddenly fall from the sky but was the result of military innovation framed against the Soviet Union during the Cold War.
11. Frans Osinga, "Air Warfare," in *The Oxford Handbook of War,* ed. Julian Lindley-French and Yves Boyer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 444–457.

12. Keith L. Shimko, *The Iraq Wars and America's Military Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 108–109.
13. Alexander Salt, "Transformation and the War in Afghanistan," *Strategic Studies Quarterly* (Spring 2018): 101–102.
14. Shimko, *The Iraq Wars,* 108–109.
15. In the remaining years of the 20th century, American-dominated airpower prevailed in two more cases.
16. Shimko, *The Iraq Wars,* 135.
17. Rumsfeld, "Transforming the Military," 20–32.
18. The indigenous force consisted of the Northern Alliance (NA) with whom the CIA had ties since the insurgency against the Soviets. Shimko, *The Iraq Wars,* 138. Additionally, in the south and east, the indigenous component consisted of various more tribally affiliated militias.
19. He uses this identical description in the following three publications: Benjamin S. Lambeth, *Air Power Against Terror: America's Conduct of Operation Enduring Freedom* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2005), 248; Benjamin S. Lambeth, "Operation Enduring Freedom, 2001," in *A History of Air Warfare,* ed. John Andreas Olsen (Dulles: Potomac Books Inc., 2010), 270; and Lambeth, "American and NATO Airpower," 158.
20. William S. Lind, *Maneuver Warfare Handbook,* (Boulder: Westview Press).
21. Andres, Wills, and Griffith Jr., "Winning with Allies, 136, 337.
22. Another scholar impressed by the results of the AM is Frederick Kagan, who states that the model demonstrated that because of innovative doctrine and new technology, "warfare will be truly revolutionized." Frederick Kagan, *Finding the Target* (New York: Encounter Books, 2006), 305–306.
23. In Afghanistan, airpower denied the Taliban the ability to rapidly communicate, move, and counterattack. Andres, Wills, and Griffith Jr., "Winning with Allies," 127.
24. Biddle, *Afghanistan and the Future of Warfare,* 6.
25. Barbara Elias, "The Big Problem of Small Allies: New Data and Theory on Defiant Local Counterinsurgency Partners in Afghanistan and Iraq," *Security Studies* 27, no 1: 1-30.
26. Shimko, *The Iraq Wars*, 144.
27. Shimko describes: "[…] the goal was to create the paralysis envisaged by Warden while getting inside the Iraqi decision cycle as suggested by Boyd." Shimko, *The Iraq Wars,* 147.
28. Shimko, *The Iraq Wars,* 145.
29. Shimko, *The Iraq Wars,* 145.
30. The withdrawal of U.S. military forces from Iraq began after the surge in December 2007 and was completed by December 2011, thereby ending the Third Iraq war. Although the Third Iraq War was still raging when Shimko published his book, it is clear that the formal withdrawal would mean the end of the Third Iraq War. The current war against ISIS could therefore be labelled the Fourth Iraq War; Shimko, *The Iraq Wars,* 145.
31. James S. Corum, "Air Power in Small Wars: 1913 to the Present," in *A History of Air Warfare*, ed. John Andreas Olsen (Dulles: Potomac Books Inc., 2010), 327–350; US Army/Marine Corps, FM 3–24.
32. Charles J. Dunlap Jr., "Making Revolutionary Change: Airpower in COIN Today," *Parameters* 38, no. 2 (2008): 52–66.

33. Lambeth concludes that Operations ODYSSEY DAWN and UNIFIED PROTECTOR, as case studies in airpower employment, "did not depart in any fundamental way from the six previous American and NATO air combat experiences since 1991 [...]." This shows that Lambeth does not classify the operations where the AM was utilized as a relevant subcategory of these recent combat experiences. Lambeth is correct by this observation in the way that the AM is merely a concept of operations to which the new technologies of the RMA are a precondition. However, with this statement, he does seem to undervalue the role of the rebels and SOF, thereby underestimating the relevance of the synergy between the three elements of the AM that delivered the success. This unfortunately seems to be the case for various other airpower focused RMA proponents as well, even after this third campaign that demonstrated the importance of synergy between ground and air operations. Lambeth, "American and NATO Airpower," 179.
34. Erica D. Borghard and Constantino Pischedda, "Parameters," *Parameters,* (Spring 2012): 64.
35. Frederic Wehrey, "The Hidden Story of Airpower in Libya (and What it Means for Syria)," *Foreign Policy,* (2013).
36. Borghard and Pischedda, "Parameters," 67.
37. "By nearly every account, the arrival of foreign ground advisors had a transformational effect on air-ground coordination. They built trust, provided training, and corroborated targeting information provided by Libyan networks of spotters and informants that reported to the operations rooms. They helped smooth the political and regional divisions within the rebels' ranks. They proved instrumental in major breakthroughs on the Nafusa front, Misrata, and the liberation of Tripoli. Their effectiveness suggests a new variant of the Northern Alliance model that can amplify airpower's effects through the coordination of precision strikes, even when the military competence of indigenous forces is low or nil." Frederic Wehrey, "The Libyan Experience," in *Precision and Purpose: Airpower in the Libyan Civil War,* ed. Karl P. Mueller (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2015), 45.
38. Salt, "Transformation and the War in Afghanistan," 101–102.
39. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War,* tr. and ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).
40. For a balanced critique of Biddle's absolute reasoning in the revolutionary change versus continuation debate, see Eliot A. Cohen, "Stephen Biddle on Military Power," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 28, no. 3 (2005): 421–422 or Shimko, *The Iraq Wars,* 142.
41. Salt, "Transformation and the War in Afghanistan," 102.
42. Tijs Althuizen, "Het Afghaanse Model en de Strijd Tegen ISIS: Een Onderzoek naar de Mogelijkheden en de Beperkingen van het Afghaanse Model in de Strijd Tegen ISIS," (Breda, The Netherlands Defence Academy, 2016), http://defbib.kma.nl/art2/pdf/KMA/2016/Althuizen.pdf
43. Karl P. Mueller, "Examining the Air Campaign in Libya," in *Precision and Purpose: Airpower in the Libyan Civil War,* ed. Karl P. Mueller (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2015), 8.
44. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973.
45. Karl P. Mueller, "Victory Through (not by) Airpower," in *Precision and Purpose: Airpower in the Libyan Civil War,* ed. Karl P. Mueller (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2015), 380.
46. Marcus Mohlin, "Cloak and Dagger in Libya: The Libyan Thuwar and the Role of Allied Special Forces," in The NATO Intervention in Libya: Lessons Learned from the Campaign, ed. Kjell Engelbrekt, Marcus Mohlin, and Charlotte Wagnsson (Milton Park: Routledge, 2014), 195–216.
47. Mohlin, "Cloak and Dagger," 202.
48. Borghard and Pischedda, "Allies and Airpower in Libya," 64.

49. L.W.E.M van Geel, G. de Koster en F.P.B. Osinga, "De NAVO tegen Gaddafi: Operation Unified Protector," Militaire Spectator 128, no. 5 (2013): 220–236.
50. Bruce R. Nardulli, "The Arab States Experience," in *Precision and Purpose: Airpower in the Libyan Civil War,* ed. Karl P. Mueller (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2015), 369–372.
51. A debate emerged that most missions cannot be qualified as CAS since "detailed integration" was often absent. See Mike Benitez, "How Afghanistan Distorted Close Air Support and Why it Matters," *War on the Rocks* (June 29, 2016), https://warontherocks.com/2016/06/how-afghanistan-distorted-close-air-support-and-why-it-matters/ (accessed April 13, 2018).
52. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 3-09.3 Close Air Support, November 25, 2014, 1–6.
53. Géraud Laborie, "The Afghan Model More Than 10 Years Later, An Undiminished Relevance," *ASPJ Africa & Francophonie* 4, no. 3 (2013): 56.
54. Mueller, "Victory Through (not by) Airpower," 385,391.
55. Mueller, "Victory Through (not by) Airpower," 385–387.
56. Frederic Wehrey, "The Libyan Experience," in *Precision and Purpose: Airpower in the Libyan Civil War,* ed. Karl P. Mueller (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2015), 45, 61.
57. Mueller, "Victory Through (not by) Airpower," 390.
58. Nardulli, "The Arab States Experience," 361.
59. Lambeth, *Air Power Against Terror,* 105.
60. Richard B. Andres, "The Afghan Model in Northern Iraq," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 29, no. 3 (2016): 409.
61. For a comprehensive analysis on the influence of fragmentation in contemporary armed conflict, seeKathleen Gallagher Cunningham, "Understanding Fragmentation in Conflict and its Impact on Prospects for Peace," Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (December 2016).
62. Gallagher Cunningham, "Understanding Fragmentation in Conflict," 6.
63. Mueller, "Victory Through (not by) Airpower," 375–378.
64. Lambeth, *Air Power Against Terror,* 115.
65. Michael E. O'Hanlon, "A Flawed Masterpiece: Assessing the Afghan Campaign," *Foreign Affairs* 82, no. 3 (2002).
66. Andres, Wills, and Griffith, "Winning with Allies," 147–148.
67. Leonard Wong, Thomas A. Kolditz, Raymond A. Millen, and Terrence M. Potter, *Why They Fight: Combat Motivation in the Iraq War* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2003).
68. Biddle, "Allies, Airpower and Modern Warfare: The Afghan Model in Afghanistan and Iraq,"165–166.
69. Andres, Wills, and Griffith, "Winning with Allies," 153.
70. Edward N. Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), 200.
71. Géraud Laborie, "The Afghan Model More Than 10 Years Later, An Undiminished Relevance," *ASPJ Africa & Francophonie* 4, no. 3 (2013): 56.
72. O'Hanlon, "A Flawed Masterpiece: Assessing the Afghan Campaign," 7.
73. Nardulli, "The Arab State's Experiences," 368.
74. Mueller, "Victory Through (not by) Airpower," 391.
75. Nardulli, "The Arab State's Experiences," 370.
76. Thomas Joscelyn, "U.S. Coalition Says "Much Work Remains to Defeat ISIS," *FDD's Long War Journal,* Foundation for Defence of Democracies (April 6, 2018), https://www.

longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/04/us-led-coalition-says-much-work-remains-to-defeat-to-isis.php (accessed April 13, 2018). The Trump administration was eager to claim victory and to collect political gains. The CJTF-OIR military command, on the other hand, is seeking consolidation of military gains and knows that territorial loss is not the same as defeat in an insurgency context.

77. The first phase is called the building or preservation phase, followed by the expansion phase and finally the decisive statehood phase.

78. Whiteside offers a thorough explanation of how these three phases of blended guerrilla activities and increasing conventional strength have taken shape in ISIS' struggle for statehood, summarized by himself in the following words: "The Islamic State built a widespread network of ideological fighters that thrived in the chaotic environment of Iraq (Phase 1), expanding into a national network with a strong bureaucracy and organization supporting its operations (Phase 2). The tribal backlash forced it to return to the build phase, where the leadership analyzed the problem and addressed the fissures within their community. Iraqi political dysfunction and a failed reconciliation allowed the movement to use sectarianism as a lever to return to the second phase. Conditions in Syria provided supplies, money, and a new flow of foreign fighters to enable the Islamic State to initiate a decisive campaign that secured the political and environmental conditions for their establishment of the caliphate (Phase 3)." Craig Whiteside, "New Masters of Revolutionary Warfare: The Islamic State Movement (2002-2016)," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10, no. 4, (2016), 7. Although this revolutionary warfare lens is not uncontested, reality in communications as well as in practice demonstrates that the three-phase protracted warfare framework is relevant. It should be noted that Zarqawi disputes Naji based on philosophical arguments but the military strategy he prescribes is spot on. Islamic State, "The Revival of Jihad in Bengal," *Dabiq* 12, no. 39, (2015): 37–41.

79. Whiteside, "New Masters of Revolutionary Warfare," 7, 10.

80. Whiteside, "New Masters of Revolutionary Warfare," 7.

81. Kyle Orton, "The Islamic State Says the Loss of the Caliphate Does Not Mean Defeat," *The Syrian Intifada.* December 16, 2018, https://kyleorton1991.wordpress.com/2017/12/16/the-islamic-state-says-the-loss-of-the-caliphatedoes-not-mean-defeat/. (accessed February 10, 2018).

82. Orton, "The Islamic State."

83. For extended research on the evolution of ISIS' media enterprise, see Craig Whiteside, "Lighting the Path: the Evolution of the Islamic State Media Enterprise (2003-2016)," International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague (ICCT Research Paper November 2016).

84. Orton, "The Islamic State."

85. Clausewitz, *On War,* 280.

86. All efforts at the tactical level should, connected by the military operational level, contribute to the perceived strategic end state.

87. The revolutionary warfare model implies that ISIS can be on the on the strategic defense in general in their core areas of operation while being on the operational offensive in other areas, such as their distant franchises. If pressure is not applied over the entire width of ISIS' areas of operations, they will simply keep transferring their resources to the location of opportunity.

88. Global Coalition, Guiding Principles from the Global Coalition to Defeat DAESH, http://theglobalcoalition.org/en/mission-en/ (accessed July 1, 2021).

89. Global Coalition, Guiding Principles.

90. The website, for example, tries to disassociate participation in the Global Coalition from military action under OIR by mentioning that OIR is only a minor part of the Coalition's efforts thereby implying that participation to the Global Coalition does not automatically mean support to OIR. When visiting the website of OIR however, one gets directed to the same Global Coalition website. The explanation is probably that certain individual partaking countries in the Global Coalition want to downplay their support for the military operation in Iraq and Syria while the command of OIR wants to profit from the perceived increased legitimacy that the support of these same countries yields (www.inherentresolve.mil).

91. Global Coalition, Military Progress in Syria and Iraq, January 31, 2017, https://theglobalcoalition.org/en/mission/military-progress/ (accessed July 1, 2021).

92. Jon T. Rymer, Lead Inspector General for Overseas Contingency Operations, Operation Inherent Resolve, Report to the United States Congress December 17, 2014–March 31, 2015, 1.

93. The U.S. Joint Strategic Plan to conduct "Overseas Contingency Operations," such as OIR, is overseen and audited by the Lead Inspector General for Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO), who reports quarterly on US OCO's to Congress. The partaking departments for OIR are the Department of State (DOS), the Department of Defense (DOD) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

94. CJTF-OIR, "CJTF Campaign Design," http://www.inherentresolve.mil/campaign/ (accessed July 1, 2021).

95. CJTF-OIR, "Our Mission," http://www.inherentresolve.mil/About-Us/ (accessed July 1, 2021).

96. It is worth mentioning that the air war is not commanded by the commander of CJTF-OIR, currently Lt. Gen. Funk II, but is commanded, via the CAOC, by the commander of Air Forces Central Command (AFCENT), currently Lt. Gen. Harrigian. Both Lt. Generals parallelly report to CENTCOM's commander, currently General Votel.

97. Ben Connable, Natasha Lander, and Kimberly Jackson, *Beating the Islamic State, Selecting a New Strategy for Iraq and Syria* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2017), 19.

98. CJTF-OIR does however try to connect its military efforts to the overarching strategy on its website by explaining that military action is not the only action the governments of the Global Coalition are taking in the following words: "The Coalition's military operations against ISIS weaken the terror group and enable the nations of the Global Coalition to bring the full might of their national power—including diplomatic, informational, economic, law enforcement, and other aspects of national power—to bear against the group. The Global Coalition realizes that not only must we defeat the military power of ISIS, but we must also defeat the ideology of ISIS to stem the global flow of foreign fighters and radicalized jihadists in all of our nations." CJTF-OIR, "Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve Fact Sheet," http://www.inherentresolve.mil/Portals/14/Documents/Mission/20170717-%20Updated%20Mission%20Statement%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf?ver=2017-07-17-093803-770 (accessed February 20, 2018).

99. Connable et al, *Beating the Islamic State,* 66.

100. Elizabeth Quintana, "Introduction: Countering ISIS - A Military Operation to Buy Time," in Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies Occasional Paper *Inherently Unresolved: The Military Operation against ISIS,* eds. Elizabeth Quintana and Jonathan Eyal (London: RUSI, October 2015), 1.

101. This reluctance was understandable since President Obama was chosen into office on a campaign program that involved ending the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

102. John McCain, "Senate hearing on White House ISIS strategy," 7 July 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BcblYQRi9lU, and David E. Johnson, "Fighting the 'Islamic State': The Case for US Ground Forces," *Parameters* 45, no. 1 (2015): 7–17.

103. Cheryl Pellerin, "Mattis Highlights Working By, With, Through Allies," U.S. Department of Defense, October 12, 2017, https://www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/1340562/mattis-highlights-working-by-with-through-allies/ (accessed July 5, 2018).

104. Joseph Votel and Eero Keravuori, "The By-With-Through Operational Approach," *Joint Forces Quarterly* 89 (April 2018): 40.

105. Votel and Keravuori, "The By-With-Through Operational Approach," 40.

106. Votel and Keravuori, "The By-With-Through Operational Approach," 47.

107. Michael Garrett et al., "The By-With-Through Approach: An Army Component Perspective," *Joint Forces Quarterly* 89 (April 2018): 48–55.

108. The Second Quarter 2018 issue of *Joint Forces Quarterly* is, with seven articles, for a large part dedicated to debating and elaborating on the BWT approach.

109. Linda Robinson, *Assessment of the Politico-Military Campaign to Counter ISIL and Options for Adaptation,* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2016): 59.

110. Votel and Keravuori, "The By-With-Through Operational Approach," 43.

111. The fact that the words "defeat ISIS on the battlefield" are used could mean that USCENTCOM has a disturbingly biased perception of the situation, or, more likely, it represents the desire of USCENTCOM to formulate a realistic and limited end state for OIR.

112. The political risks for the United States was different for the situations in Iraq and Syria. In Iraq, the political risk lay in the damage to the U.S.' reputation as a military super power and Obama's reputation as the one who provided ISIS with a power vacuum. By allowing ISIS to advance further, both reputations would suffer. This risk had to be balanced against the risk of redeploying to Iraq, which could become a quagmire once again after all. The "no boots on the ground" discussion between the media and the Obama administration demonstrates how sensitive the redeployment of U.S. troops was for Obama.

113. Quintana, *Inherently Unresolved: The Military Operation against ISIS,* 3.

114. Garrett et al., "The By-With-Through Approach," 51.

115. Votel and Keravuori, "The By-With-Through Operational Approach," 44.

116. Scott Vickery, "Operation Inherent Resolve: An Interim Assessment," Policy Analysis for the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, January 13, 2015, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/operation-inherent-resolve-an-interim-assessment (accessed May 16, 2018).

117. Vickery, "Operation Inherent Resolve."

118. Lambeth argues that the "uniquely stringent ROE regime imposed by a micromanaging White House" was the most inhibiting constraint on airpower's effectiveness. Lambeth, "American and NATO Airpower," 189. Michael Knights calls the ROE's "without doubt the most obsessively restrictive of any air campaign ever fought by a U.S.-led coalition, and probably by any nation in any war." Michael Knights, "Campaign Acceleration: How to Build on Progress and Avoid Stalemate Against ISIL," *War on the Rocks* (University of Texas, November 3, 2015), https://warontherocks.com/2015/11/campaign-acceleration-how-to-build-on-progress-and-avoid-stalemate-against-isil/ (accessed May 24, 2018). The restrictive ROEs often prohibited JTACs on the ground to coordinate airstrikes. Instead, this had to be done by JTACs working from the CJOCs via UAVs. sometimes, the ROEs thus resulted in suboptimal target designation thereby increasing the chance on civilian casualties instead of decreasing it. Conversation between CJTF-OIR JTAC and author.

119. These statements might give the impression that almost no civilian casualties were being caused by the air war, but other sources contradict that image. At a certain point during the campaign, the website www.airwars.org even reported that Coalition airstrikes were killing more civilians than Russian airstrikes. Raf Sanchez, "U.S.-Led Coalition is 'Killing More

Civilians than Russia'," *The Telegraph* (February 23, 2017), https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/02/23/us-led-coalition-killing-civilians-russia/ (accessed July 16, 2018).

120. Airpower cannot solve the root causes for ISIS' emergence; moreover, civilian casualties would only increase Sunni resentment against the Iraqi government, delegitimize the CJTF, and increase approval of ISIS.

121. Balint Szlanko and Susannah George, "U.S. Changes Rules of Engagement for Mosul Fight in Iraq," *The Associated Press* (February 24, 2017), https://apnews.com/f084b4f094f440058e6b58318a67adce (accessed May 24, 2018).

122. Conversation between CJTF-OIR JTAC and author.

123. Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "Why U.S. Forward Air Controllers are Moving Closer to Combat in Mosul," *Washington Post* (February 2017), https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2017/02/24/why-u-s-forward-air-controllers-are-moving-closer-to-combat-in-mosul/?utm_term=.7a6143519f9c (accessed July 9, 2018).

124. Gibbons-Neff, "U.S. Forward Air Controllers."

125. Peter Baker, "Defending ISIS Policy, Obama Acknowledges Flaws in Effort So Far," New York Times (May 21, 2015), https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/22/world/middleeast/obama-defends-approach-to-islamic-state-fight.html (accessed May 25, 2018).

126. The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Martin Dempsey, suggested that defeating ISIS might take up to 20 years. Lambeth, *American and NATO Airpower,* 186.

127. Shreeya Sinha, "Obama's Evolution on ISIS," *New York Times,* (June 9, 2015). https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/06/09/world/middleeast/obama-isis-strategy.html (accessed May 25, 2018).

128. Sinha, "Obama's Evolution on Isis."

129. Another example that demonstrates the importance of the factor "time" and that deserves mentioning is that the duration of OIR has altered the skill balance between Iraqi forces and ISIS. This is thus the same dynamic as was seen in the Libyan case. The factor "time" is able to alter the balance of skill.

130. Global Coalition, 75 Partners, http://theglobalcoalition.org/en/partners/ (accessed May 25, 2018)

131. For an extensive analysis on the contribution of Arab countries to the air war, see: Becca Wasser, et al, *The Air War Against the Islamic State; The Role of Airpower in Operation Inherent Resolve* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2021): 32–37.

132. Wasser, et al., The Air War Against the Islamic State 34; Justine Drennan, "Who Has Contributed What in the Coalition Against the Islamic State?," *Foreign Policy* (November 12, 2014), http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/11/12/who-has-contributed-what-in-the-coalition-against-the-islamic-state/ (accessed May 25, 2018).

133. Kathleen McInnis, Coalition Contributions to Countering the Islamic State, Congressional Research Service Report R44135 (August 24, 2016) https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R44135.pdf.

134. Rajiv Chandrasekaran, "In the UAE, the United States has a Quiet, Potent Ally Nicknamed 'Little Sparta'," *Washington Post* (November 9, 2014), https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/in-the-uae-the-united-states-has-a-quiet-potent-ally-nicknamed-little-sparta/2014/11/08/3fc6a50c-643a-11e4-836c-83bc4f26eb67_story.html?utm_term=.d64e7683f829 (accessed May 25, 2018).

135. Other priorities, policy differences between the more involved Western countries and Arab countries and differences or rivalries between regional countries themselves, have probably prevented them to play that role. Nick Thompson, "War on ISIS: Why Arab states aren't doing more," CNN, (December 17, 2015), https://edition.cnn.com/2015/12/10/middleeast/isis-what-arab-states-are-doing/index.html (accessed May 25, 2018).

136. Sabahat Khan, "Lessons Learned from Arab Military Contributions to the War on ISIS," *The Arab Weekly,* (August 7, 2016), https://thearabweekly.com/lessons-learned-arab-military-contributions-war-isis (accessed May 25, 2018).

137. Wasser, et al., *The Air War Against the Islamic State,* 28.

138. Because of the worries over Syria's unusually sophisticated and capable Soviet-style integrated air defense system, that U.S. and NATO aircrews had never before encountered, the U.S. flew the first-ever combat sorties with the fifth-generation F-22 stealth fighter (Raptor) in the first night of coalition air strikes in Syria. The Raptor, which entered service in 2005, made its combat debut because of its capabilities as a highly survivable ground-attack platform. Lambeth, American and NATO Airpower, 188.

139. Amy McCullogh, "With the Raptors over Syria," *Air Force Magazine* (February 2015): 26–33.

140. Eric Schmitt, "In Syria's Skies, Close Calls With Russian Warplanes," New York Times (December 8, 2017), https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/08/world/middleeast/syria-russia-us-air-war.html (accessed May 27, 2018).

141. Schmitt, "In Syria's Skies."

142. Schmitt, "In Syria's Skies."

143. Mueller, "Victory Through (not by) Airpower," 387.

144. Deborah Kidwell, "The U.S. Experience: Operational," in *Precision and Purpose: Airpower in the Libyan Civil War,* ed. Karl P. Mueller (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2015): 127.

145. For an extensive analysis of the air war and how RPAs were used by JTACs, see Wasser, et al., *The Air War Against the Islamic State,* 75.

146. Wasser, et al., *The Air War Against the Islamic State,* 303.

147. Lambeth, *Airpower Applied,* 186.

148. AFCENT, Airpower Summaries, (May 31, 2018), http://www.afcent.af.mil/About/Airpower-Summaries/ (accessed June 1, 2018).

149. Conversation between CJTF-OIR JTAC and author.

150. Airwars.org, "Iraq and Syria; Conflict Data," Airwars.org, https://airwars.org/data/ (accessed June 6, 2017).

151. Oriana Pawlyk, "These are the Fighter Jets Leading the Air War Against ISIS," Military.com (June 6, 2017), http://www.businessinsider.com/these-are-the-fighter-jets-leading-the-air-war-against-isis-2017-6?international=true&r=US&IR=T (accessed May 30, 2018); Oriana Palyk, "More Intel Flights could Minimize Collateral Damage AFCENT Commander Says," *Air Force Times* (May 28, 2016), https://www.airforcetimes.com/news/your-air-force/2016/05/28/more-intel-flights-could-minimize-collateral-damage-afcent-commander-says/ (accessed June 1, 2018).

152. Vickery, "Operation Inherent Resolve."

153. At the time Lt. Gen. Brown.

154. E-mail exchange and telephone conversation between CJTF-OIR JTAC and T. Althuizen, June 2018; Wasser, et al, *The Air War Against the Islamic State,* 25.

155. One might expect a strong positive relationship between the number of ISR sorties and the number of strike sorties because, as explained, ISR sorties find, fix, and vet targets for strike sorties. Table 1 does not, however, confirm this relationship. What undermines the assumption is the fact that all strike sorties nowadays also provide ISR data via their targeting pods. A strike sortie might therefore reduce the need for a dedicated ISR sortie. It is even possible that a JTAC in the CJOC performs a talk-on based on the data delivered by the targeting pod of the same jet that performs the strike. Vice versa, ISR platforms are often equipped with Hellfire missiles. Pawlyk, "More Intel Flights could Minimize Collateral

Damage AFCENT Commander Says." The separation between ISR assets and strike assets is fading. Furthermore, the paradox of an effective air campaign is that the enemy adapts in order to limit its vulnerability for strikes which causes an increasing demand for ISR assets that will provide fewer targets.

156. Wasser, et al., *The Air War Against the Islamic State,* 223.

157. Micah Zenko, "Comparing the Islamic State Air War with History," Council on Foreign Relations Blog (July 6, 2015), https://www.cfr.org/blog/comparing-islamic-state-air-war-history (accessed May 28, 2018).

158. Mueller, "Victory Through (not by) Airpower," 377.

159. "Iraq and Syria; Conflict Data," Airwars.org, https://airwars.org/data/ (accessed July 17, 2018).

160. Guus de Koster and Joel Postma, "F-16's in de Strijd tegen ISIS: De Nederlandse Air Task Force-Middle East," *Militaire Spectator* 185, no. 5 (2016): 204–216.

161. Wasser, et al., *The Air War Against the Islamic State,* 25.

162. Valerie Insinna, "Unmanned Unleashed: In the Fight against ISIS, Predators and Reapers Prove Close-Air Support Bona-Fides," *Defense News,* (March 28, 2017), https://www.defensenews.com/smr/unmanned-unleashed/2017/03/28/in-the-fight-against-isis-predators-and-reapers-prove-close-air-support-bona-fides/ (accessed June 3, 2018).

163. Conversation between CJTF-OIR JTAC and T. Althuizen.

164. Wasser, et al., *The Air War Against the Islamic State,* 100.

165. Typically, this procedure is used for more complicated targets that are identified by ISR assets and are not in vicinity of blue and green forces.

166. Chris Church, "On Target: The Making of an Airstrike against ISIS aboard the USS Bush," *Stars and Stripes* (July 7, 2017), https://www.stripes.com/news/middle-east/on-target-the-making-of-an-airstrike-against-isis-aboard-the-uss-bush-1.477070 (accessed June 3, 2018).

167. Once developed, the strike package for both a dynamic and a pre-planned target go to a senior target engagement authority for approval, which might involve further vetting and legal review.

168. Church, "On Target: The Making of an Airstrike."

169. Wasser, et al., *The Air War Against the Islamic State,* 11.

170. Linda Robinson, "SOF's Evolving Role: Warfare 'By, With, and Through' Local Forces," The RAND Blog, (May 9, 2017), https://www.rand.org/blog/2017/05/sofs-evolving-role-warfare-by-with-and-through-local.html (accessed June 20, 2018).

171. For a comprehensive analysis of local counter-ISIS forces in Iraq and Syria, see Linda Robinson, *Assessment of the Politico-Military Campaign,* 25–42.

172. In September 2015, Secretary of Defense Carter stated that he wanted to apply the AM in the fight but that there were no readily available proxies. "Of course, in this current circumstance in Syria and Iraq, we're having to build those forces, and they don't exist in the same way that they did in the Northern Alliance (NA)." Ashton Carter, "Hearing to receive testimony on the U.S. strategy to counter the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant and U.S. policy toward Iraq and Syria," Stenographic transcript before the Committee on Armed Services for the United States Senate (Washington D.C.: Alderson Reporting Company, 9 December 2015).

173. Aaron Stein, *Partner Operations in Syria: Lessons Learned and the Way Forward,* Policy Analysis, Washington D.C. Atlantic Council (2017): 6. http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/publications/reports/partner-operations-in-syria (accessed June 4, 2018).

174. Arnold Schuchter, *ISIS Containment & Defeat: Next Generation Counterinsurgency - NexGen COIN* (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2015).

175. Stein, *Partner Operations in Syria,* 2, 20.

176. Schuchter, *ISIS Containment & Defeat: NexGen COIN;* Stein, *Partner Operations in Syria,* 10.

177. Schuchter, *ISIS Containment & Defeat: NexGen COIN*.

178. John Davison, "Raqqa: Isis Completely Driven out of Syria 'Capital' by US-backed Forces," *Independent* (October 17, 2017). https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/raqqa-isis-battle-syria-defeat-latest-lost-us-sdf-rebel-monitoring-group-a8004581.html (accessed June 5, 2018).

179. Paul McLeary, "U.S. Acknowledges Reality and Scraps Failed Syria Training Program," *Foreign Policy* (October 9, 2015), http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/10/09/u-s-acknowledges-reality-scraps-failed-syria-training-program/ (accessed June 6, 2018). It is worth mentioning that reliability should be reciprocal and is dependent on the relationship that Coalition Forces are able to develop with indigenous allies. Mutual trust is paramount and the commonly seen 4-month rotation cycle "does not match up with the importance of relationships." Some promising suggestions have been made to improve mutual trust and reliability, such as sending SOF teams and advisors back to the same locations of previous tours. Votel and Keravuori, "The By-With-Through Operational Approach," 45, 46.

180. Stein, Partner Operations in Syria. And: Wladimir van Wilgenburg, "Pentagon Will Continue to Work with SDF in Syria," *The Region* (April 20, 2018), http://theregion.org/article/13310-pentagon-will-continue-to-work-with-sdf-syria (accessed June 6, 2018).

181. One should ask the question whether the Kurds in the SDF are to be blamed for this. It could also be perceived as a strong strategic move by Turkey to damage the U.S.-Kurdish alliance.

182. Wasser, et al., *The Air War Against the Islamic State,* 31–32.

183. Adam Garrie, "Pentagon Admits Losing Control Over SDF in Northern Syria, Leaving The US Without A Reliable Proxy Force in The Region," *Eurasia Future,* (March 6, 2018), https://www.eurasiafuture.com/2018/03/06/pentagon-admits-losing-control-sdf-northern-syria-leaving-us-without-reliable-proxy-force-region/ (accessed June 6, 2018).

184. Stein, *Partner Operations in Syria,* 21.

185. Gallagher Cunningham, "Understanding Fragmentation in Conflict."

186. Jonah Schulhofer-Wohl, "How the U.S. Fragmented Syria's Rebels," *Washington Post*, September 22, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/09/22/how-the-u-s-fragmented-syrias-rebels/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.cfb3ca791701 (accessed June 7, 2018); Wendy Pearlman, "Understanding Fragmentation in the Syrian Revolt," Project on Middle East Political Science, (November 8, 2013), https://pomeps.org/2014/02/12/understanding-fragmentation-in-the-syrian-revolt/#_ednref1 (accessed June 7, 2018).

187. Schulhofer-Wohl, "How the U.S. Fragmented Syria's Rebels" ; Pearlman, "Understanding Fragmentation."

188. Schulhofer-Wohl, "How the U.S. Fragmented Syria's Rebels" ; Pearlman, "Understanding Fragmentation."

189. Farhad Hassan Abdullah, "PUK–KDP Conflict: Future Kurdish Status in Kirkuk," *Jadavpur Journal of International Relations* 22, no. 2 (May 2018): 1–20.

190. Hawre Hasan Hama and Farhad Hassan Abdulla, "Kurdistan's Referendum: The Withdrawal of the Kurdish Forces in Kirkuk," *Assian Affairs* 50, no. 3 (2019): 364–383.

191. This concern is widely shared amongst scholars. See for example: Wladimir van Wilgenburg and Mario Fumerton, "Kurdistan's Political Armies: The Challenge of Unifying the Peshmerga Forces," *Regional Insight Report,* Beirut and Lebanon: Carnegie Middle East Center (2015).

192. For further reading see "Arming Iraq's Kurds: Fighting IS, Inviting Conflict," *Crisis Group Middle East Report* (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2015).

193. Stephen Biddle, "Rethinking 2015–16: U.S. Strategy for Syria, Iraq, and the Islamic State," Seminar JHU Applied Physics Laboratory, (April 7, 2016), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rJH_1CBDYGM (accessed February 7, 2018).

194. Robinson, *Assessment of the Politico-Military Campaign to Counter ISIL,* 27.

195. Peter Quentin, "The Land Component," in Royal United Services Institute Occasional Paper *Inherently Unresolved: The military Operation against ISIS,* ed. Elizabeth Quintana and Jonathan Eyal (London: Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, October 2015), 23.

196. Quentin, "The Land Component," 19.

197. David Kilcullen agrees that the current approach is not optimal: "The natural tendency is to build forces in our own image, with the aim of eventually handing our role over to them. This is a mistake. Instead, local indigenous forces need to mirror the enemy's capabilities and seek to supplant the insurgent's role." David Kilcullen, *Counter Insurgency,* (London: C. Hurst & Co. 2010), 22.

198. NATO Standardization Office, Allied Joint Publication-3.16; Allied Joint Doctrine for Security Force Assistance (SFA), May 2016. Head Land Warfare Army Doctrine, "Army Field Manual Tactics for Stability Operations," Part 5: Military Support to Capacity Building, Warminster: Land Warfare Centre, March 2018.

199. Stephen Biddle and Jacob Shapiro, "Here's Why We Can Only Contain the Islamic State, not Bomb it Back to the Stone Age," *Washington Post*, December 1, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2015/12/01/heres-why-we-can-only-contain-the-islamic-state-not-bomb-it-back-to-the-stone-age/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.15a637db112c (accessed June 11, 2018).

200. "It's worth noting that it was Iraqi soldiers who took back the city center of Ramadi and are fighting every day to clear the remainder of the city, proving themselves not only motivated but capable." Ashton Carter, Secretary of Defense Speech at Fort Campbell, January 13, 2016, http://www.defense.gov/News/Speeches/Speech-View/Article/642995/counter-isil-campaign-plan-remarks (accessed January 20, 2016).

201. Stein, *Partner Operations in Syria,* 13.

202. Hassan Hassan, "New Document Sheds Light on the Changing Nature of ISIL's Combat Tactics," *The National,* September 20, 2017, https://www.thenational.ae/opinion/new-document-sheds-light-on-the-changing-nature-of-isil-s-combat-tactics-1.630289 (accessed June 12, 2018).

203. Whiteside, "Lighting the Path: the Evolution of the Islamic State Media Enterprise (2003-2016)," 19.

204. The following quote from the *al-Naba* article demonstrates ISIS' understanding of the Western operational approach: "If you are fighting on a battlefield where there is aerial surveillance and accurate targeting, the first step to enemy action is knowing your location and the second is targeting. Therefore, your primary goal is to hide your position. And here, a whole new fighting doctrine begins, because fighting while hiding your location requires drastic changes in the methods of warfare and planning…The basic principle is always the same: "Fight from a location unknown to the enemy and change place immediately if the enemy discovers it." "Therefore, the greatest mistake is that the mujahideen deal with them [the YPG/PKK] as a fighting force. They are weak forces used by the crusaders as a bait for the fish. The fighter should never swallow the bait. The best way to proceed is for the fighter not to reveal his position to the enemy until the enemy is within shooting range and then, and only then, God willing, must the mujahideen fire on an enemy target, before quickly changing location." Kyle Orton, "The Islamic State Adapts to the Coalition Campaign," The Syrian Intifada, October 3, 2017, https://kyleorton1991.wordpress.com/2017/10/03/the-islamic-state-adapts-to-the-coalition-campaign/ (accessed June 12, 2018).

205. Orton, "Islamic state Adapts."

206. Moreover, the local allies had to learn to cope with fake camouflage, disguised attacks, hit and run attacks, concealed defensive positions and other deceptions. Orton, "The Islamic State Adapts to the Coalition Campaign."

207. For an in-depth case study on adaptation by indigenous partner forces see Maarten P. Broekhof, Martijn W. M. Kitzen, and Frans P. B. Osinga, "A Tale of Two Mosuls, the Resurrection of the Iraqi Armed Forces and the Military Defeat of ISIS," *Journal of Strategic Studies* (published online Dec. 12, 2019): 96–118, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2019.1694912

208. General Joseph Votel, "Statement Before The House Armed Services Committee on the Posture of U.S. Central Command," March 15, 2017, Stenographic Transcript, https://docs.house.gov/meetings/AS/AS00/20180227/106870/HHRG-115-AS00-Wstate-VotelJ-20180227.pdf (accessed June 20, 2018), 19.

209. The Green Berets' foreign internal defense; advise, assist, accompany, and enable (A3E); and train, advise, assist are all tailorable subsets of the BWT approach. See John Richardson IV and John Bolton, "Sacrifice, Ownership, Legitimacy; Winning Wars By, With, and Through Host-Nation Security Forces," *Joint Forces Quarterly* 89, (April 2018): 67.

210. Votel and Keravuori, "The By-With-Through Operational Approach," 42.

211. "Special warfare" is defined as the "execution of activities that involve a combination of lethal and nonlethal actions taken by a specially trained and educated force that has a deep understanding of cultures and foreign language, proficiency in small-unit tactics, and the ability to build and fight alongside indigenous combat formations in a permissive, uncertain, or hostile environment." It includes "special operations forces conducting combinations of unconventional warfare, foreign internal defense, and/or counterinsurgency through and with indigenous forces or personnel." U.S. Department of the Army Headquarters, Special Operations Army Doctrine Publication 3-05, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Army, 2012), 9.

212. Dan Madden et al., *Toward Operational Art in Special Warfare,* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2016), 139.

213. In April 2013, the U.S. Army Special Operations Command released a special edition magazine entitled *ARSOF 2022*. This publication, which was meant to be a blueprint for Army special operations forces, envisioned splitting SOF operations into two categories: special warfare and surgical strike. For an analysis of ARSOF 2022 in relation to recent SOF deployment, see: Tim Ball, "Replaced? Security Force Assistance Brigades vs. Special Forces," *War on the Rocks,* February 23, 2017, https://warontherocks.com/2017/02/replaced-security-force-assistance-brigades-vs-special-forces/ (accessed July 4, 2018).

214. Daniel Brown, "The U.S. Military's Special Ops has Slowly Fallen back to its Roots — and it's Paying off in Iraq and Syria," Business Insider, May 10, 2017, http://www.businessinsider.com/the-us-militarys-special-ops-new-strategy-is-working-in-iraq-syria-2017-5?international=true&r=US&IR=T (accessed June 27, 2018) and Linda Robinson, "SOF's Evolving Role: Warfare 'By, With, and Through' Local Forces," The RAND Blog, May 9, 2017, https://www.rand.org/blog/2017/05/sofs-evolving-role-warfare-by-with-and-through-local.html (accessed June 20, 2018).

215. Michael Noonan, "The Seductiveness of Special Ops?," *War on the Rocks,* March 3, 2015, https://warontherocks.com/2015/03/the-seductiveness-of-special-ops/ (accessed June 29, 2018). On the consequences of this and the urge to incorporate a broader view on the activities of SOF see, for instance, Funs Titulaer and Martijn Kitzen, "The Population-Centric Turn in Special Operations: A Possible Way Ahead for SOF Informed by a Cross-Disciplinary Analysis of State-Building Interventions," *Special Operations Journal* 6 no. 1 (March 19, 2020): 35-54.

216. Owen Broom, "Assessing the Role of Surgical Strike Operations in Support of a Special Warfare Campaign," (master's thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2017).

217. Robinson, *Assessment of the Politico-Military Campaign to Counter ISIL and Options for Adaptation,* 46.

218. Robinson, "SOF's Evolving Role: Warfare 'By, With, and Through' Local Forces."

219. Robinson, *Assessment of the Politico-Military Campaign to Counter ISIL and Options for Adaptation,* 55.

220. Votel and Keravuori, "The By-With-Through Operational Approach," 43.

221. Wasser, et al., *The Air War Against the Islamic State,* 26.

222. Robinson, *Assessment of the Politico-Military Campaign to Counter ISIL and Options for Adaptation,* 56.

223. Robinson, *Assessment of the Politico-Military Campaign to Counter ISIL and Options for Adaptation,* 53.

224. Votel and Keravuori, "The By-With-Through Operational Approach," 41.

225. Votel and Keravuori, "The By-With-Through Operational Approach," 40.

226. The U.S. and coalition partners will provide training, weapons, technical support, and airpower but someone else has to do the dying on the ground, as Thornton put it. If a proxy has to do the dirty work, an AM variant probably will be the planned or ad hoc outcome for many decades to come. Rod Thornton, "Problems with the Kurds as Proxies against Islamic State: Insights from the Siege of Kobane," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 26, no. 6 (2015): 866.

227. Public support has the characteristic of being high in the beginning, after which it starts decreasing. The better approach would obviously be to align public support and the intensity of the commitment from the start and manage expectations from the start. Select a sustainable approach and a realistic end state. Public support for a more limited approach can more easily be maintained. Perhaps aiming low might therefore result in higher scores.

228. Many other factors that are placed in the indigenous forces category are operational level expressions related to, or arising from, this newly identified political level factor.

229. Stephen Biddle, Julia Macdonald, and Ryan Baker, "Small Footprint, Small Payoff: The Military Effectiveness of Security Force Assistance," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 41, no. 1–2 (2018): 89–90.

230. Tyrone L. Groh "War on the Cheap? Assessing the Costs and Benefits of Proxy War," (dissertation for the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences; Washington: Georgetown University, 2010), 1–22. Political benefits might take forms like conservation of resources, obscured involvement, decreased political commitment, and the protection against unwanted escalation.

231. Geraint Alun Hughes, "Syria and the Perils of Proxy Warfare," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 25, no. 3 (2014): 532.

232. Biddle et al., "Small Footprint, Small Payoff," 126.

233. The Kurds are a divided and fractious nation spread across three states. They are, furthermore, historically famous for fighting among themselves. Thornton, "Problems with the Kurds as Proxies against Islamic State," 865.

234. Geraint Alun Hughes, "Syria and the perils of proxy warfare," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 25, no. 3 (2014): 532; Hughes and Rod Thornton argued in 2014 that the biggest long-term risk of strategic interest divergence originates in the possible exacerbation of factionalism.

235. It culminated in a referendum and consequently the invasion of Kirkuk by Iraqi government forces.

236. Carlotta Gall, "Turkish Troops Attack U.S.-Backed Kurds in Syria, a Clash of NATO Allies," *New York Times,* January 21, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/21/world/middleeast/turkey-syria-kurds.html (accessed May 24, 2018).

237. Votel and Keravuori, "The By-With-Through Operational Approach," 44.

238. Robinson, *Assessment of the Politico-Military Campaign to Counter ISIL and Options for Adaptation,* 46–47.

239. The Iraqi counter Terrorism Service is the unit that has been most effective in combat and they have been co-created by coalition SOF units. The SOF model of insensive mentorship, from the design and selection to going into battle alongside them, provides a good example to other training efforts. Robinson, *Assessment of the Politico-Military Campaign to Counter ISIL and Options for Adaptation,* 50–51.

240. Ball, "Replaced? Security Force Assistance Brigades vs. Special Forces." See also Ivor Wiltenburg and Martijn Kitzen, "What's in a Name? Clarifying the Divide Between Military Assistance and Security Force Assistance," *Small Wars Journal* (November 9, 2020), https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/whats-name-clarifying-divide-between-military-assistance-and-security-force-assistance.

241. Wiltenburg and Kitzen, "What's in a Name?" 46.

242. For more background on this debate, see, for example, Martijn Kitzen, "Western Military Culture and Counterinsurgency: An Ambiguous Reality," *Scientia Militaria, South African Journal of Military Studies* 39, no.2 (2012): 8, https://scientiamilitaria.journals.ac.za/pub/article/view/982.

243. Ball, "Replaced? Security Force Assistance Brigades Vs. Special Forces."

244. Ball, "Replaced? "Security Force Assistance Brigades Vs. Special Forces." The newly created Security Force Assistance Brigades are specifically designed to conduct A3E in a combined arms maneuver contex. Richardson and Bolton, "Sacrifice, Ownership, Legitimacy," 67.

245. The inclusion of the three new factors is not only based upon the ISIS case, since their importance was recognized in earlier research. Nevertheless, further research on these suggested new factors is necessary before accepting them to the same degree as the other factors.

246. See for example the exploits of Russian Spetsnaz and the Wagner Group in Syria; Timothy Thomas, "Russian Lessons Learned in Syria," MITRE Center for Technology and National Security June (2020): 18.

247. Stephen Biddle, "Rethinking 2015-16: U.S. Strategy for Syria, Iraq, and the Islamic State," Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory, April 7, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rJH_1CBDYGM (accessed January 23, 2018). Obviously, there are other even more limited options, below the threshold of warfare, but these are outside the scope of this study.

248. According to many scholars, by preparing for that course of action, the chance of its actual occurrence might decrease because of the deterrence mechanism.

249. During the cold war, the U.S. performed 66 foreign-imposed regime changes while it fought zero conventional wars. Alexander Downes and Lindsey O'Rourke, "You Can't Always Get What You Want; Why Foreign-Imposed Regime Change Seldom Improves Interstate Relations," *International Security* 41, no. 2 (2016).

250. See for example, Martijn Kitzen, "Operations in Irregular Warfare," 18.

251. Clausewitz, *On War.*

Acronyms

A3E – Advise, assist, accompany, and enable

AM – Afghan model

AFCENT – Air Forces Central Command

BWT – By, with, and through

CAOC – Combined Air Operations Center

CAS – Close air support

CIA – Central Intelligence Agency

CJOA – Combined joint operations area

CJTF-OIR – Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve

COIN – Counterinsurgency

DOD – U.S. Department of Defense

DOS – U.S. Department of State

ISF – Iraqi Security Forces

ISIL – Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

ISIS – Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham

ISR – Intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance

JTAC – Joint Terminal Attack Controller

KDP – Kurdistan Democratic Party

LOE – Line of effort

MDMP – military decision-making process

NA – Northern Alliance

NCTC – National Counterterrorism Center

NCW – Network-centric warfare

OCO – Overseas contingency operations

OIR – Operation INHERENT RESOLVE

PGM – Precision guided munition

PKK – Kurdistan Workers' Party

PUK – Patriotic Union of Kurdistan

RMA – Revolution in military affairs

ROE – Rules of engagement

RPA – Remotely piloted aircraft

RUSI – Royal United Services Institute

SAC – Syrian Arab Coalition

SCAR – Strike coordination and reconnaissance

SDF – Syrian Democratic Forces

SEAD – Suppression of enemy air defense

SOF – Special Operations Forces

TIC – Troops in contact

UAE – United Arab Emirates

UAV – Unmanned aerial vehicle

USAID – United States Agency for International Development

USCENTCOM – United States Central Command

YPG – People Protection Units

Appendix A: Operation INHERENT RESOLVE's Lines of Effort

LOE 1: Supporting Effective Governance in Iraq (DoS/USAID)

Support the new Iraqi government in efforts to govern inclusively and effectively as well as to strengthen its cooperation with regional partners.

LOE 2: Denying ISIS Safe Haven (dod)

Conduct a systematic campaign of airstrikes against ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Work with the Iraqi government to strike ISIS targets and support Iraqi forces on the ground. Degrade and ultimately defeat ISIS' leadership and logistical and operational capability, and deny it sanctuary and resources to plan, prepare, and execute attacks.

LOE 3: Building Partner Capacity (DoD)

Build the capability and capacity of partners in the region to sustain an effective long-term campaign against ISIS. Train, advise, and assist Iragi forces, including Kurdish forces, to improve their ability to plan, lead, and conduct operations against ISIS. Provide training to help the Iraqis reconstitute their security forces and establish a national guard. Strengthen the moderate Syrian opposition and help them defend territory from ISIS.

LOE 4: Enhancing Intelligence Collection on ISIS (Director of National Intelligence/National Counterterrorism Center [NCTC])

Gain more fidelity on ISIS' capabilities, plans, and intentions. Strengthen the ability to understand the ISIS threat. Share vital information with Iraqi and Coalition partners to enable them to effectively counter ISIS.

LOE 5: Exposing ISIS' True Nature (DoS/NCTC)

Work with partners throughout the Muslim world to highlight ISIS hypocrisy and counter its false claims of acting in the name of religion.

LOE 6: Disrupting ISIS' Finances (Treasury/DoS)

Work aggressively with partners on a coordinated approach to reduce ISIS* revenue from oil and assets it has plundered, limit ISIS" ability to extort local populations, stem ISIS' gains from kidnapping for ransom, and disrupt the flow of external donations to the group.

LOE 7: Disrupting the Flow of Foreign Terrorist Fighters (DoS/NCTC)

Lead an international effort to stem the flow of fighters into Syria and Iraq.

LOE 8: Protecting the Homeland (Department of Homeland Security/Federal Bureau of Investigation)

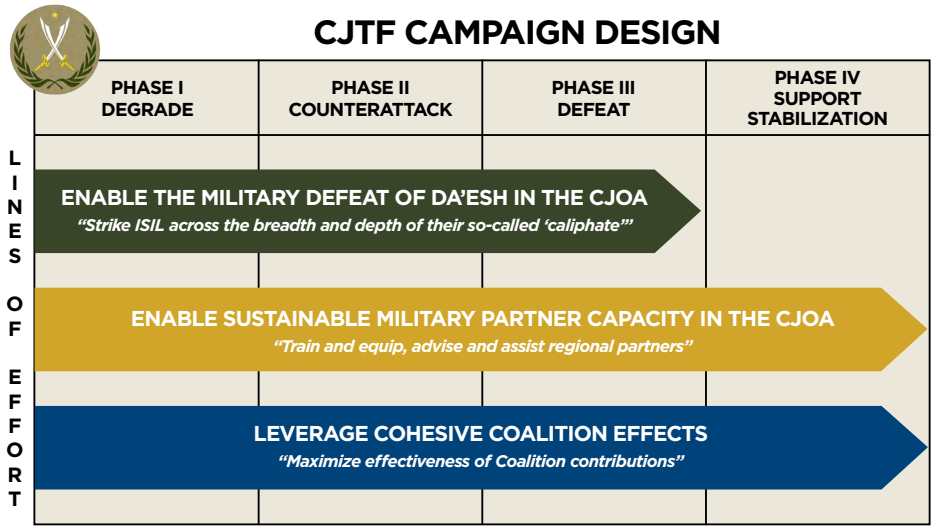
Use the criminal justice system as a critical counterterrorism tool, work with air carriers to implement responsible threat-based security and screening requirements, and counter violent extremism in the United States.

LOE 9: Humanitarian Support (USAID/DoS)

Provide humanitarian assistance to the displaced and vulnerable in Iraq and Syria.

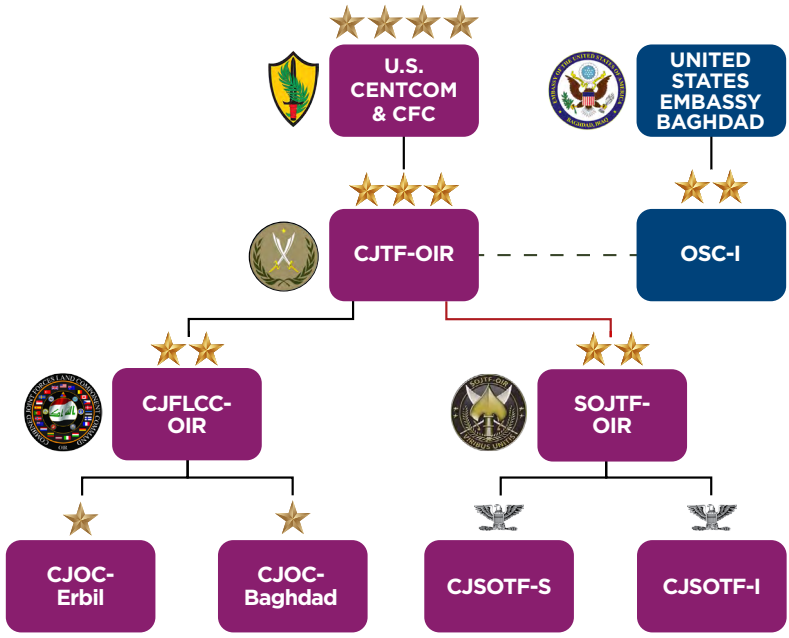
Source: Lead Inspector General for Overseas Contingency Operations, Overseas Contingency Operations —FY 2018 Comprehensive Oversight Plan, October 2018. https://www.stateoig.gov/system/files/cop_oco_fy2018_signed.pdf. Redrawn by JSOU Press

Appendix B: Combined Joint Task Force Operation INHERENT RESOLVE Campaign Design



Source: http://www.inherentresolve.mil/campaign/. Redrawn by JSOU Press

Appendix C: Combined Joint Task Force Operation INHERENT RESOLVE Command Structure



OIR: *Operation INHERENT RESOLVE*

CENTCOM: *United States Central Command*

CFC: *Combined Forces Command (for OIR)*

CJTF: *Combined Joint Task Force*

OSC-I *Office of Security Cooperation – Iraq*

CJFLCC: *Combined Joint Force Land Component Command*

SOJTF: *Special Operations Joint Task Force*

CSOJTF-S: *Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force – Syria*

CSOJTF-I: *Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force – Iraq*

CJOC: *Combined Joint Operations Center*

Joint: Two or more military services working together

Combined: Militaries of two or more countries working together

General Officer level command

Colonel level command

OPCON (operational control)

TACON (tactical control)

Coordination, but no command relationship

Source: http://www.inherentresolve.mil/About-Us/Organization/. Redrawn by JSOU Press

Appendix D: U.S. Dynamic Targeting Steps

Source: Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 3-60; Joint Targeting, January 31, 2013. Redrawn by JSOU Press

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