

Strategy Research Project

Alternative Strategy for Destroying ISIS

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Alternative Strategy for Destroying ISIS

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Abstract

In spring 2013, the world sees the emergence of ISIS as a terrorist organization as they start wreaking havoc in Syria and Iraq. ISIS now controls territory to give them operational capability and to manage logistics. Terrorism is the dominant feature today, and ISIS is now attacking abroad. Based on their radical ideology, destroying ISIS is important to maintaining regional / global order and security. The current United States strategy hinges on destroying ISIS through a comprehensive air campaign and limited advisors operating in Syria and Iraq. The preponderance of the burden to date has been placed on the United States due to a limited coalition not willing to contribute as much military power or resources. The United States needs to take a different approach in U.S. foreign policy and build a stronger coalition through diplomacy. Without effective boots the ground, a coalition of necessity is required to destroy ISIS.

Alternative Strategy for Destroying ISIS

The current United States strategy to destroy Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is insufficient to achieve victory because the end, ways, and means are not in balance. A more effective strategy should include a revised approach in U.S. foreign policy that aims to unite countries in a coalition of necessity to destroy ISIS for the common good. Since 9/11, the United States has been engaged in warfare for 14 years after invading Afghanistan and Iraq. Neither war ever achieved its stated objectives and has increased instability in the Middle East. Meanwhile, there has been an increase in non-state actors vying for power in the region due to instability coupled with weak and fragile state governments in Afghanistan and Iraq. Neither country has been able to secure its borders and defend itself from violent extremist organizations. Since this time, terrorism has been the dominant feature in the contemporary international system affecting the world.¹ In December 2011 when the United States pulled out of Iraq, the country became a sanctuary for sectarian violence due to an unstable government that was unable to secure its territory. This security crisis, combined with corruption in the Iraq government, caused the military to fracture, which set conditions for further sectarian violence and an inability to respond to threats.

In spring 2013, the world witnessed the emergence of the ISIS as the terrorist organization seized the city of Raqqa in northern Syria. Then in June 2014, after capturing Mosul in Iraq and claiming additional territory in northern Iraq, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared a worldwide caliphate. Following this statement, jihadists from around the world began pledging allegiance to ISIS. Not only was ISIS wreaking havoc in Syria and Iraq, they were also asking Muslims in Western countries to kill whom they call "infidels," basically targeting innocent people. ISIS has now become transnational

as Russia, France, and now the United States have been recently targeted by this radical extremist organization. These attacks have resulted in over 360 innocent senseless deaths. This new security challenge for the United States and its allies is known as Operation Inherent Resolve that focus' on the destruction of ISIS, which provides military intervention against ISIS and displays our resolve to partner nations in the region.

U.S. National Interests and ISIS

These radical ideals of ISIS go completely against what Amos Jordan calls American National Security; the safeguarding of people, territory, protecting our interest and the American way of life.² The United States is required to take action to protect our enduring beliefs, values, and ultimately the American people. Therefore, destroying ISIS is important to maintaining regional / global order and security, to include security of our multinational partners. This will enhance security at home and abroad, promote economic growth specifically in Syria and Iraq, and stop the violation of human rights by ISIS.³ Remaining involved would benefit our own interest and preserve our freedoms outlined by our founding fathers, especially with ISIS now attacking the homeland.

The President does have political support from policy makers for this action and from 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force from 9/11. He could use his executive power granted through the constitution to authorize the use of force against ISIS if required. On 06 December 15, after the deadliest attack by ISIS on the homeland, the President did call on Congress to formally pass legislation and declare war on ISIS.⁴ Moreover, from a moral perspective, the passion and will of the people is strong in the fight against ISIS. Additionally, Carl Von Clausewitz points out in his unfinished book *On War* that the passion of the people is critical to support your war effort, so you can use

force to compel the enemy to do your will.⁵ Consequently, based on all these points above, this action does constitute war and morally is the right thing to do.

Proposed Strategy and Options

The United States Army War College (USAWC) defines strategy as the skillful formulation, coordination, and application of ends (objectives), ways (courses of action) and means (supporting resources) to promote and defend the national interest.⁶ Since this was a new war for the United States, one would need to gain insight on the policy that would govern the war. Clausewitz further points out that war is an act of policy, and the political aim would permeate all military operations.⁷ Policy is therefore derived from the head of state for the purpose of war, and in the United States, the President would determine the new Grand Strategy for Iraq and Syria.

Strategy Option A: The Current Strategy

On 10 September 2014, President Obama addressed the nation to articulate his Grand Strategy against ISIS. To deal with this complex problem, the President quickly articulated the ends for the terrorist organization. “Our Objective is clear: We will degrade, and ultimately destroy ISIS through a comprehensive and sustained counter-terrorism strategy.”⁸ However, after the ruthless attacks in Paris, France and fighting ISIS for over 16 months the President announced on 19 November 2015 a shift in his strategy language from “degrade and ultimately destroy ISIS” to “defeat and ultimately destroy ISIS”.⁹ This is illustrated in Figure 1 below.



Figure 1: Adjustment to Strategy

This shift recognizes the seriousness of ISIS as a non-state actor and just simply degrading them will not solve the problems facing the world. The President presented his message in very simplistic terms: First, together with our allies, we would ultimately defeat and put an end to ISIS. The President pointed out that it would take time to accomplish this objective. Second, the United States and its coalition partners would build, equip, and train the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and Peshmerga Forces in Kurdistan to increase their capabilities to re-secure territories lost and defend their freedom from ISIS control, to include support to the Syrian opposition. Third, working with our allies in the international community: rely heavily on our superior counterterrorism capabilities by cutting off funding; counter the warped ideology and flow of recruits to ISIS; and strengthen our homeland defense.¹⁰ Fourth, United States and its allies would provide necessary humanitarian assistance to the population (Sunni and Shia Muslims, and Christians) of Iraq and Syria who had been displaced by ISIS.

The means by which we would accomplish the war would be through employing three main resources. First, he ordered a comprehensive air campaign with our coalition partners to attack ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Second, the coalition would employ advisors to train and equip the ISF and Peshmerga Forces and recently announced employing

advisors to mentor the Syrian opposition. Third, Special Operation Forces would focus on the counter-terrorism mission in Iraq and Syria. The strategy conveyed by the President covered all the elements within the ends, ways, and means construct.

Diplomatic, Information, Military, Economic (DIME) for Strategy Option A

The ability of the United States to advance national interests is dependent on the United States government in effectively employing the instruments of national power to achieve national strategic objectives.¹¹ The instruments of national power are conveyed as diplomatic, economic, information and economic. After identifying the ends, ways, and means for the strategy option A, it is necessary to analyze how the instruments of national power DIME are integrated.

For this strategy option, there has been little emphasis in the diplomatic realm. Prevailing opinion is that the administration has taken more of a constrained approach characterized by downplaying ISIS as a threat and an inability to identify an effective strategy to destroy ISIS since the crisis began. There have been limited global engagements or negotiations to promote destroying ISIS. Due to this lack of engagement, America is in the lead without a major coalition partner contributing as much resources or military power to the cause. Additionally, Congress appears to be disengaged, willing to cede their authority to make crucial foreign policy decisions to the President.¹² Congress could provide more oversight on foreign policy concerns and be an active voice to ensure the desired objectives can be achieved.

From an information perspective, there has been little emphasis. The American public opinion supports airstrikes against ISIS. Americans are very concerned with ISIS' ability to continue attacks on the homeland. ISIS' information operations are leaps and bounds ahead of the United States. To recruit followers, this year alone ISIS created

media in nine different languages and produced almost 1,800 propaganda videos, 14,523 graphics, and songs¹³. One reason ISIS leads the information narrative is the fact that the United States lacks an organization to lead information operations since the U.S. Information Agency was abolished in 1999. The administration has not presented a counter information operations plan that negates or rejects ISIS' warped ideology, such as, if you join the radical Islamic group you will be prosecuted or killed on the battlefield wherever it may exist. What Americans prefer is through public diplomacy, is to get rid of the negative image of America and encourage other foreign governments and citizens to get on board and contribute to the cause of destroying ISIS. Joseph Nye calls this Soft Power, the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes you want in public diplomacy.¹⁴

When considering the military instrument of national power, the resources applied have been minimized. The current strategy hinges on a targeted air campaign where the United States has conducted 78% of the total 8,783 air strikes as of 09 December 2015.¹⁵ The second part of the strategy relies on a small number of advisors without a dedicated land force. The means to achieve the objective of destroying ISIS have been significantly limited. This can be considered a diplomatic maneuver of containment where states seek to erode the aggressor's ambition.¹⁶ From this perspective, containing ISIS has had limited effect, as they have not seized more terrain as of late. However, allowing ISIS to control terrain in Syria and Iraq gives them the operational capability needed to manage their efforts operationally and from a logistics perspective. Additionally, with ISIS not being destroyed, they are expanding into

Afghanistan and Libya to secure additional safe havens to expand to worldwide caliphate.

From an economic perspective compared to the last 10 years of war in Afghanistan and Iraq, there has been less economic expenditure. The United States currently spends on average \$11 million a day on military operations against ISIS for the last 465 days.¹⁷ With no combat boots on the ground, the cost savings is in human American lives indicating that humans do have value.

When analyzing ISIS' finances from an economic perspective, ISIS has an estimated "war chest" of over \$2 billion and a potential annual income of \$900 million.¹⁸ ISIS is able to finance its operations due to its main source of income from stolen oil and illicit trade of oil. Other sources of income include looting banks in Syria and Iraq, profiting from collecting ransoms from releasing hostages and more recent source of income is from stolen antiquities from Iraq. To impact funding of ISIS, the United States has worked with the Iraqi government to shut down about 90 banks that were operating in ISIS-controlled territory that are no longer tied to the global financial systems.¹⁹ The United States has also introduced sanctions against more than 30 ISIS-linked senior leaders and financiers to cut off the group's access to international financial channels.²⁰ Additionally, the United States has recently started conducting airstrikes on oil revenue-producing sources in controlled ISIS territory to impact its main source of income. The goal of the airstrikes is to cripple eight major oil fields, about two-thirds of the refineries and other oil-production sites controlled by ISIS.²¹ Time will tell if these airstrikes do constrain ISIS operations and have an overall impact on their ability to survive. At some point, The Syrian and Iraqi governments may seek financial compensation for damages

to oil infrastructure which could increase our economic expenditures in the fight against ISIS.

The strategy option A approach has predominantly relied on a very limited approach of all instruments of national power. The risk to this approach is not being able to achieve the objective of destroying ISIS. The current option allows ISIS to control terrain to operate their self-declared caliphate and export terrorism abroad. Additionally, announcing to ISIS that we will not send in American boots on the ground or have a quality ground force does not put pressure on the will of ISIS and allows them to survive. However, this also prevents ISIS' ultimate goal of an apocalyptic battle in their operation space with U.S. and coalition ground forces in which they believe prophecy indicates they will win.

Strategy Option B: American Boots on the Ground

An alternative strategy to consider is option B where the United States allocates more means in form of American boots on the ground in a combat role to destroy ISIS. The ends and ways remain the same as in strategy option A.

Diplomatic, Information, Military, Economic (DIME) for Strategy Option B

From a diplomatic stand point, there continues to be little emphasis in this realm. The first consideration in this proposed option is whether the sovereign state of Iraq is supportive of this option. The Iraqi government has recently stated that American ground troops are not needed in the fight against ISIS. Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi recently stated: "The Iraqi government stresses that any military operation of the deployment of any foreign forces – special or not – in any place in Iraq cannot happen without its approval and coordination and full respect of Iraqi sovereignty."²² However, with Iranian Shia forces fighting on the ground in Iraq achieving good results against

ISIS and Iran's strong influence in Iraq, this actually is preventing any consideration of a larger American ground force. It appears Iran is in the diplomatic lead in Iraq.

This proposed option also has significant conflict domestically in the United States and many politicians remain not in line with one another or united on this option. The President has consistently stated that there will be no American boots on the ground in the fight against ISIS. "I want the American people to understand how this effort will be different from wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. It will not involve American combat troops fighting on foreign soil."²³ To change his position on this, the National Security Council would ultimately need to persuade and negotiate with the President that American boots on the ground could ultimately destroy ISIS and advance the United States interests. Additionally, Congress would need to speak truth to power and with one voice to achieve diplomatic support for this option of destroying ISIS. Clausewitz reminds us, if a commander prefers another strategy, it must not appeal to his opponent. "To sum up: of all the possible aims in war, the destruction of the enemy's armed forces always appears as the highest."²⁴ Ultimately, the final support for this decision to destroy ISIS resides with the President as commander in chief.

From an information perspective, this strategy option would require a lot of emphasis in the information realm to attain support for ground troops. The American public opinion would need to be swayed to support boots on the ground after seeing over 6,000 American Soldiers lose their lives fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. Most Americans support intervention in Syria and Iraq, but not at the cost of losing more American lives since our initial strategies in Iraq and Afghanistan have never achieved their desired objectives. However after the ISIS attack in Paris, France and the attack

on the homeland in San Bernardino, California, sentiment in America is changing. This was demonstrated in a recent poll released by CNN on 06 December 2015. For the first time in polling, a majority of Americans (53%) say the United States should send ground troops to Iraq or Syria to fight ISIS.²⁵ ISIS is jeopardizing our way of life with their ability to radicalize individuals and attack the homeland. Americans only want a safe and secure place to live each and every day. When American safety becomes jeopardized, Americans will desire a more aggressive approach. This was additionally articulated in the recent poll as 68% say America's military response to the terrorist group thus far has not been aggressive enough.²⁶ If ISIS continues to attack the homeland or Americans continue to feel threatened, public opinion will continue to soar in favor of this strategy option.

In this strategy option there is big emphasis on military land forces. This option requires the use of military power in the form of ground troops to destroy ISIS, then seize terrain and allow Syrian and Iraqi indigenous forces to hold it. This action is known as hard power in foreign policy. An action forces or compels another actor such as ISIS to act in a prescribed fashion and limit their choices to act in accordance with United States demands.²⁷ If the goal is to destroy ISIS, there needs to be a dedicated and effective ground force that is interdependent and complementary to the air campaign supported by an aggressive information operations campaign that counters ISIS in worldwide public opinion. Many strategists believe that the will of ISIS cannot be broken without a dedicated ground force. Clausewitz would argue that the maximum use of overwhelming force is good and the most humane thing to do. Right now, the current strategy is not applying the maximum use of force within the military national instrument

of power in the form a ground force. An effective ground force could achieve some decisive victories and test the will of ISIS, coupled with the rest of our military power, and coalition partners would be more effective. American ground troops are considered due to the fact that no other ally, coalition member or Arab nation has agreed to provide an effective ground force to destroy ISIS. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) even recently ruled out sending troops to fight ISIS militants on the ground as NATO General Secretary Jen Stoltenberg stated “that is not on the agenda of the coalition and the NATO allies.”²⁸

This analysis would not be complete without mentioning the ISF and Peshmerga Forces to include Syrian rebels. The writer can provide context on this topic due to recent service in Iraq as a Joint Operations Officer. To date, the ISF has proven incapable of defending Iraq. After the fall of Mosul in June 2014, the ISF lost Hawija in the fall of 2014, and Ramadi in May 2015. Many question the desire and will of ISF in the current fight with ISIS as they have lost more territory than they have gained. As for Peshmerga Forces, they have been very effective in warfare against ISIS, retaking over 90% of territory once controlled by ISIS. The Peshmerga have been able to render the enemy powerless with overwhelming force, which in theory is the true aim of warfare.²⁹ Consequently, the relationships between these two forces have been on the fringe at best, and they have failed to unite politically to fight for a common cause of defeating ISIS.

To date, the administration’s plan to train Syrian rebels has produced very little benefit. A recent program to train and equip the rebels at a staggering cost of \$500 million only produced four or five Syrian fighters.³⁰ Many strategist believe the program

failed due to Special Forces not being able to accompany Syrian rebels on missions and the constraint to fight ISIS and not President Assad backed forces. After this effort failed, the Department of Defense started air dropping ammunition and equipment to United States vetted Syrian rebels battling ISIS in Syrian territory. Then last month, the Pentagon announced sending 50 Special Forces to northern Syria to advise Syrian rebel forces fighting ISIS. If this program is deemed successful, the Pentagon may send more United States advisors to northern Syria. However, more time is needed to determine if this current plan will produce better results.

From an economic stand point there would need to be a lot of emphasis placed on money and resources to support this option. The economic cost would balloon and surpass the estimated \$280 million a day that was spent in Iraq in 2007 under supplementary funding, plus \$440 million daily incurred, but unpaid, long term costs.³¹ This option would also potentially affect the draw down as the active Army has been directed to reduce to 450,000 Soldiers by 2019 to save money under the Budget Control Act passed by Congress. Reversing the drawdown to ensure enough forces are available to destroy ISIS would be a tough sell economically to the current administration.

Furthermore, American boots on the ground in a combat role could put pressure on ISIS finances, specifically on ISIS' main source of income oil which is typically defended lightly. American boots on the ground would seize key oil infrastructure supported by airpower with a goal of handing it over to Syrian and Iraqi indigenous forces to secure it. Due to the lack of an effective ground force, ISIS has had freedom of maneuver against key oil infrastructure in their controlled territory. Additionally, an

effective ground force early in the campaign would have prevented stolen antiquities from Iraq. As observed in Operation Iraqi Freedom, preservation and protection of antiquities was a priority for the coalition and the presence of an effective ground force allowed this to be achieved. Due to this shortcoming, ISIS has been able to ravage precious antiquities from Iraq as a source of income.

Another consideration to employing a ground campaign to destroy ISIS is due to the fact that the United States Air Force is depleting munitions supply and that additional money is “critical” for the long fight.³² The Air Force has fired over 20,000 bombs and missiles and according to Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Welsh, "We're expending munitions faster than we can replenish them, we need the funding in place to ensure we're prepared for the long fight. This is a critical need."³³ Many of the bombs being dropped on ISIS could be handled by an effective ground force with the use of direct fires from Soldiers. This would reduce expensive bombing costs on targets that could be eliminated by Soldiers using rifles. However, based on the current economic conditions and the national debt, the option of ground troops would be a tough sell domestically to the American people and the administration.

The risk with option B, boots on the ground is that it may be politically unpalatable especially from the U.S. and Iraqi Presidential viewpoints. From a resource perspective, there will be a significant amount of blood and treasure exhausted that may not be publically supported. Lastly, America will continued to be seen as a realist, attempting to solve the world’s problems with ISIS without a true ally committing as much resources and military power.

Strategy Option C: Coalition of Necessity

A final strategy option to consider is option C. The ends and means remain the same as in option A, but a fifth way is needed to achieve the ends. This will be conveyed as where the United States builds a “coalition of necessity.” The option A approach lacks any statement of this type in the strategy and implies we are doing the mission without a true coalition of necessity. The sheer fact that the United States is contributing the most resources and military power in the fight against ISIS is an indication of a dismal effort to build a coalition of necessity. A more effective approach would be to bring all western countries together, each committing more resources with the common goal of defeating ISIS. Regardless of each countries motive, we are all bound by necessity due to the dangers ISIS poses as a threat to the world. Western countries are very strong and need to deal with ISIS appropriately. Thucydides reminds us that: the weaker should be subject to the stronger, and to maintain the empire; fear, honor, and interest should be the strongest motives.³⁴ ISIS is definitely weaker than the military might western countries can bring to bear. ISIS has also provoked fear around the world with their attacks abroad, controlling territory to synchronize operations and now setting conditions to expand into other fragile states. To maintain honor, all western countries have a moral obligation to destroy ISIS to protect partners in the Middle East and our own societies. Regardless of self-interest to engage in the fight with ISIS, we all may need to find common ground in the struggle against ISIS. The ultimate goal is to get more countries to commit to the effort, not just the current few that are committing limited airpower and the small amount of advisors in northern Iraq.

Diplomatic, Information, Military, Economic (DIME) for Strategy Option C

In this strategy option, it will take extraordinary effort in the diplomatic realm to build a coalition of necessity. The administration would need to take a different approach in U.S. foreign policy and become very active in the global environment and promote internationalism. The internationalist perspective sees protecting and promoting American national interest and requiring an active foreign policy which admits the United States cannot escape the world.³⁵ This approach would take time and energy, and our foreign policy would need to be priority just as it was during Operation Desert Storm. The administration should build an effective coalition to destroy ISIS where America does not take the preponderance of the burden. In order to do this, it requires American exceptionalism, demanding a role in world affairs and taking a lead in this role.³⁶ America is unique and powerful and with effort, the administration can bring the world together out of necessity to destroy ISIS.

Another important consideration for the coalition of necessity option is seeking effective diplomatic relations with Russia and others out of military necessity. The Russians recently surprised the administration with the deployment of their military aircraft to Syria, demonstrating their political and military power in the area. Frederick and Kimberly Kagan point out that the positioning of Russian aircraft in Syria gives the Kremlin an ability to shape and control United States and Western operations in both Syria and Iraq, and can compel the United States to accept a de facto combined coalition with Russia and possibly other states in the region.³⁷ Subsequently, Iraq announced an expansion in relations and de facto coalition with Russia, and other state actors after Russia expanded into Syria: Baghdad has struck an intelligence sharing agreement with Russia, Syria, and Iran to better fight the Islamic State militant group.³⁸

This has to be a concern for the administration as most of the intelligence is coming from the United States in support of the fight against ISIS. With other countries maneuvering diplomatically, it would be in our best interest to diplomatically work with the Russians to solve this crisis and destroy ISIS with a strong partner. This is known as constructive engagement where there is diplomatic dialog to expand areas of agreement and cooperation, even as both states acknowledge they have irreconcilable differences.³⁹

There are historical examples of United States and Russian relations that were amiable due to military necessity. Whether it was in WWII, the end of the Cold War, or when Russia denounced Iraq's invasion into Kuwait, history shows that, when needed, these two countries can forge a coalition for the greater good. There are also shared interests for both the United States and Russia that can be leveraged to ensure cooperation in the fight against ISIS. Simon Saradzhyan outlines a few of our shared vital interests which converge. Each country wants to prevent a large-scale or sustained terrorist attack on their homeland; each country wants to prevent the use and slowing the spread of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction; each country wants to ensure viability and stability of major markets to include flow of exports and imports in and out of their respective countries.⁴⁰ Right now each country has citizens being influenced and radicalized by ISIS. Americans are volunteering to support ISIS, and recent reports indicate over a thousand Russians are also fighting with ISIS. ISIS also has displayed strong interest in acquiring weapons of mass destruction and has allegedly used crude chemical weapons.⁴¹ Both countries rely on military exports, where the United States sells many weapons to Middle Eastern countries, and Russia

depends on exporting military equipment to Syria and Iraq. Most importantly, ISIS continues to use rhetoric, stating it will continue to attack America, with Russia also on their hit list. After the attacks in Paris, France by ISIS, talks between the United States and Russia were initiated. If the administration wants to solve the crisis without ground troops, we need to work shoulder to shoulder with Russia and move forward with a coalition of necessity based on our shared interest and the destruction of ISIS.

In strategy option C, the military and information instruments of national power remain the same as in option A. However, it is necessary to discuss the economic instrument which continues to have little emphasis as in strategy option A. One area of consideration is that there may come a point when Russia requests support from the administration to lift sanctions for actions in the Ukraine and Crimea. The administration will need to weigh the cost of the sanctions on Russia and their effect, versus the benefit of a relationship with Russia that focuses on stabilizing the Middle East and destroying ISIS.

The inherent risk in this option is assuming both the United States and Russia support the Rational Actor Model. Both behave as a unitary actor, agree to speak with one voice, and make decisions in an orderly process on foreign policy decisions.⁴² One could assume this is logical reasoning as both countries have come together in the past to face a common enemy. Additionally, both countries have more military power deployed combined than the rest of the coalition. In lieu of deploying American ground troops, it is practical to use Russian military power to destroy ISIS for a common good. What's missing is working together out of military necessity through diplomatic relations and negotiations.

Analysis and Comparison of Strategy Options

The ideal state for an effective strategy is that the relationship between ends, ways, and means are in adequate proportion and balance. Clausewitz points out that the political object is the goal, war is the means of reaching it, and the means can never be considered in isolation from their purpose.⁴³ For him, and many other strategists, the ends, ways, and means need to be in balance to be an effective strategy. If the ends, ways, or means are unbalanced or out of proportion, there is some inherent risk to the strategy that could lead to possible failure. To determine whether the strategy for ISIS is unbalanced or out of proportion, a test for the strategy is needed.

Dr. Boone Bartholomees, a Professor of National Security and Strategy at the USAWC, provides a test for strategy by examining it for suitability, feasibility and acceptability. Suitability is a test for the desired end (objective), acceptability is a test of the way (moral or legal approach), and feasibility tests the means (resources).⁴⁴ Dr. Boone Bartholomees further explains that a strategy must at least have a reasonable expectation of meeting all tests to be valid.

Strategy Option A

In the strategy option A, the suitability which analyzes the ends to “destroy” ISIS, and the feasibility which analyzes the means with no effective ground force appear to be out of proportion and unbalanced. The means are very limited, which carries significant risk in accomplishing the mission to destroy ISIS. This does not mean the strategy will fail, it only concludes that the current strategy is not appropriate in its current structure and it will not achieve victory against ISIS. From an acceptability standpoint, this option is legally sound, but many critics in Congress, the media, and public opinion argue that

this strategy will not destroy ISIS as it has failed to adapt to the reality that ISIS is a global threat especially against the homeland.

Strategy Option B

The second strategy option puts more means in the form of American boots on the ground in a combat role to destroy ISIS. The suitability to “destroy” ISIS and increase the means with a dedicated and effective American ground force that is interdependent and complementary to the air campaign will destroy ISIS and win. Increasing the means does balance out this option. The inherent risk with this option is whether it will achieve lasting victory without the ability to employ an effective Syrian and Iraqi Army to hold terrain. Legally, the option would be more acceptable with Congress and the American people if a new authorization to use force or declaration of war was issued. However, at this point the cost in blood and treasure is not acceptable with the President. Congress does not completely support it, and the American people are definitely wary and not sold on this option.

Strategy Option C

In the strategy option C, building a coalition of necessity, the suitability and feasibility are still out of balance initially. This option attempts to increase the means through diplomacy and global engagement to persuade other countries to commit more military power regardless of self-interest, to make it more feasible. This option counts on effective relations and a coalition with Russia to destroy ISIS in order to balance out the means and make it more acceptable. With increased means this strategy is more suitable to achieve the desired ends. From an acceptability perspective this option is legal and limits the loss of American Soldiers and resources. This option would need to be articulated to the American people, Congress, world leaders, and interest groups as

better than option A and an alternative to option B. The risk with this option is whether the administration, Congress and the American people will accept a relationship with Russia out of military necessity. The administration may need to lift sanctions with Russia if this lever hinges on the strategy working. The second order of effect would be engagements with the European Union and the Ukraine to articulate reasons for the decision. If commitments globally are limited, and the relationship with Russia is not accepted, then the strategy will remain out of balance and not achieve victory. At that point a revisit of option B may be necessary.

Recommendation and Conclusion

The recommended strategy is option C. This option does not increase our military power or resources, and is a slight adjustment to the current strategy. The main instrument of national power is diplomacy. It is recommended to add a fifth way to be used in the strategy to destroy ISIS, where the United States builds a “coalition of necessity.” This would demonstrate that the coalition is more important than America doing it alone. This strategy hinges on becoming very active in the global environment and building a more effective coalition to destroy ISIS where America does not take the preponderance of the burden. Looking back at the Gulf War and WWII, the coalition provided effective air power and ground forces to achieve victory complimentary to America applying all instruments of national power. Most importantly, the development of effective diplomatic relations with Russia as a military partner is paramount even though we have differences. This option changes Option A which has limited means and ISIS attacking abroad. It also prevents American boots from being put on the ground where America will be forced to give up more blood and treasure. This option is least risky, but the inherent risk of this option is admitting to the world that we are going

to partner with Russia. This could prove to be a significant challenge given that Russia is viewed as an international outcast by many of our allies.

The research has provided an alternative strategy to accomplish the goal of destroying ISIS, which hinges on significant diplomatic efforts by the President and his administration. A coalition of necessity focuses on a more aggressive approach from other western countries, all bound by necessity to destroy ISIS regardless of self-interest. Additionally, with Russia already conducting operations in Syria, this presents a strong military partner to provide much needed resources that are currently lacking in the American approach. Due to its own self-interest, Russia is seeking relevance on the world stage which could play perfectly into the American strategy to destroy ISIS. The United States will need to know "what makes them tick" if it wants to manage its relations with potential peer competitor and troubled world regions successfully.⁴⁵ An aggressive approach in diplomacy could solve this more quickly knowing we already have vital interests that converge. History provides examples where we had built a coalition out of military necessity with Russia to solve volatile, uncertain and complex problems.

With the terrorist organization ISIS spreading radical Islamic ideology around the world, wreaking havoc in Syria and Iraq, and attacking abroad, it is imperative that America builds a coalition of necessity. Time is not in our favor, as ISIS is dominating the information war to recruit and evoke fear. We need to act now before more attacks like Paris, France or San Bernardino occur, or even a horrific attack such as 9/11. The world expects America to be in the lead, and we must provide the necessary strategic leadership to build a coalition of necessity to destroy ISIS.

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