The Foreign Fighter Problem – Analyzing the Impact of Social Media and

the Internet

BY

Lt Col Albert Scaperotto

A THESIS PROVIDED TO THE FACULTY OF

THE SCHOOL OF ADVANCED AIR AND SPACE STUDIES

FOR COMPLETION OF GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

SCHOOL OF ADVANCED AIR AND SPACE STUDIES

AIR UNIVERSITY

MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

JUNE 2015

APPROVAL

The undersigned certify that this thesis meets master's-level standards of research, argumentation, and expression.

_____
Lt Col Shawn Cochran   8 May 2015

_____
Dr. Richard Muller   8 May 2015

DISCLAIMER

The conclusions and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author. They do not reflect the official position of the US Government, Department of Defense, the United States Air Force, or Air University.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lt Col Scaperotto graduated from The University of Delaware with a Bachelors of Arts in History. After receiving his commission through the Reserve Officer Training Corps in 2000, he attended Undergraduate Pilot Training (UPT) at Columbus AFB, MS. His first operational assignment was in the F-16 at Misawa AB, Japan in 2003. In 2006, he continued flying the F-16 at Osan AB, South Korea. In 2008, he transitioned from the F-16 to the MQ-9 at Creech AFB, NV. He flew combat support sorties in both Afghanistan and Iraq. He attended USAF Weapons School, MQ-9 division, in 2010. While at Creech, he completed a Master's of Military Operational Art and Science from Air University. He deployed to the NATO air operations center in support of Operation Unified Protector in 2011 as the MQ-1 liaison officer. In 2012, he was selected as the Director of Operations, 26th Weapons Squadron, USAF Weapons School, Nellis AFB, NV. In 2013, he attended Command and General Staff College (CGSC) at Fort Leavenworth, KS, and was then selected to attend the Air Force's School of Advanced Air and Space Studies program. Following his assignment at Maxwell AFB, Lt Col Scaperotto was selected to serve as the commander, 432 Attack Squadron, Ellsworth AFB, SD. The 432 ATKS flies MQ-9 combat support sorties in a number of theaters.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ABSTRACT

The current foreign fighter problem has received significant global media attention. Why and how do individuals from relatively affluent Western countries travel to poor and war torn countries to fight in a foreign war? How do social media and the internet impact the process? Ultimately, fighting in a foreign war requires the will and ability to participate, which in turn requires that an individual overcome significant psychological and physical barriers. The process of overcoming these participation barriers and thus the process of becoming a foreign fighter, hinges on four key factors: transnational ideology, close-knit social groups, and transnational resource networks, and a foreign sponsor facilitates the process by integrating the other three factors. Prior to social media and the internet, this process worked through local networks with face-to-face interaction. With the spread of social media and the internet, these networks and interactions have become increasingly global and virtual, increasing audience numbers but also increasing state ability to intervene. Analyzing globalization's impact, including what has changed and what has stayed the same, is important to understanding the foreign fighter phenomenon both now and in the future.

Contents

Illustrations

Introduction

> *If it's an obligation, then why don't you and the others go to Iraq or Afghanistan?" "There's no organized network to get there. If there were, everyone would know, even the police. It's difficult to get there. It costs money, for one thing, about five thousand euros for Iraq, more for Afghanistan: it's expensive. I know that if I really wanted to, I could go. Everyone can find a way. But you also need a lot of courage. Maybe I'm not so courageous.*

> Scott Atran interviewing Muhsein al-Chabab

An April 2015 UN report claimed that since the mid-2000s, over 25,000 foreign fighters have traveled from over 100 countries to fight with extremist groups.[1] This includes approximately 3,500 fighters from Western countries, the vast majority traveling to Syria and Iraq. Although foreign fighters are currently a topic of significant public interest and concern, the phenomenon is by no means new. What has changed is global and virtual networking facilitated by the rapid spread of the internet and digital social media technologies. Anecdotally, recent trends in these technologies, such as Twitter and Facebook, seem to matter for the current wave of foreign fighter activity. Terrance Ford, the Director of Intelligence at US Africa Command, argues "globalization has changed how foreign fighter networks operate throughout the world."[2] But why these trends matter, and the extent to which they matter, remains unclear. What has changed, and what has stayed the same? Is

---

[1] "UN Says '25,000 Foreign Fighters' Joined Islamist Militants," *BBC News*, April 2, 2015, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32156541.

[2] Tally Helfont, "The Foreign Fighter Problem: Recent Trends and Case Studies," *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, November 2010, 2, http://www.fpri.org/articles/2010/11/foreign-fighter-problem-recent-trends-and-case-studies.

the foreign fighter problem of today fundamentally different from the foreign fighter problem of the past?

This thesis addresses how technological and communicative trends associated with the internet and digital social media technologies affect the development of foreign fighters. Specifically, how do these trends influence the will and ability of individuals from relatively affluent Western countries to fight in a foreign war? The central argument is that to become a foreign fighter, an individual must overcome significant psychological and physical barriers to participation. The process of overcoming these participation barriers hinges on four key factors: transnational ideology, close-knit social groups, transnational resource networks, and a foreign sponsor who facilitates the process by integrating the other three factors. Prior to the advent of the internet, this process worked primarily through local networks and face-to-face interactions. With the spread of digital social media technology and the internet, these networks and interactions have become increasingly global and virtual. While the process of becoming a foreign fighter in the current day and age might look different on the surface, the underlying social dynamics remain the same.

The Foreign Fighter Problem

There are many reasons why people have fought in foreign wars, whether they are ethnically or religiously displaced peoples returning to the homeland, or people sharing non-ethnic ideological beliefs. Whatever the reasons, there are historical commonalities in the process which are relevant today. The overall trend of foreign fighter involvement in non-ethnic conflicts has increased since the early 1800s, with a dramatic increase after World War II. The main reasons for this are the increase

in wars of liberation after the end of colonialism; the fall of communism has continued the trend.[3]

The lack of an accepted or agreed upon definition of foreign fighter complicates research and categorization. Different terms convey different understandings of the problem, based on different cultural definitions of the concept of "foreign."[4] Mainstream use of the term "foreign fighter" originated in 1988 to describe how Egyptians, Saudis, and Pakistanis aided Afghan fighters against the Soviets. While used sporadically from 1988 to 2001, the term exploded after September 11, 2001. From 1994 to September 10 2001, the term had only appeared in the media 39 times. In the few months after the start of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), the term appears at least 313 times. The expansion of its use has only increased since.[5]

During the early months of OEF, US forces made specific distinctions, both in label and treatment, between captured Afghan Taliban and captured non-Afghan fighters. US forces usually imprisoned non-Afghan fighters to question them on wider links to Bin Laden and other top Al Qaeda leadership. The differentiation of non-Afghan fighters helped publicize and politicize this issue as a distinct facet of the conflict.[6]

Western views of foreign fighters form through the lens of state-centric war.[7] Westerners understand nationality and citizenship as belonging to a state. Confronting numerous foreign nationalities on a non-linear battlefield complicates tactical as well as strategic context. In tribal Afghanistan, co-ethnic and co-religious ties hold more value than state borders. Afghans might consider individuals from other villages or

---

[3] David Malet, *Foreign Fighters: Transnational Identity in Civil Conflicts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 44, 54.
[4] Malet, *Foreign Fighters*, 215.
[5] Malet, *Foreign Fighters*, 217.
[6] Malet, *Foreign Fighters*, 217.
[7] Barak Mendelsohn, "Foreign Fighters - Recent Trends," *Orbis* 55, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 192.

valleys as foreign. Similarly, Pashtuns in Pakistan feel more identification with fellow Pashtuns in Afghanistan than they do with other Pakistani citizens.[8] Bounding the concept of foreign by the nation-state framework is not a universally accepted concept and complicates research into the problem. Globalization has further diluted the traditional concept of nation-state. The internet and social media have helped foster global connections with like-minded individuals on a scale unprecedented in history.

For the purposes of this study, a foreign fighter is simply an individual who leaves his or her country of origin to fight in a war in which his or her country is not a belligerent. The individual is acting as an agent of a foreign sponsor and for a foreign cause, and is not serving as a representative of his or her own government or as a professional mercenary.

The Participation Problem

Becoming a foreign fighter is a matter of generating sufficient will and ability through overcoming participation barriers, both psychological and physical. These barriers include lack of military training, lack of information and local contacts, funding requirements, legal hurdles and law enforcement, international travel to a war zone, unclear combatant status, fear of being killed or wounded, as well as a slew of moral and ideological reservations.

The concept of participation barriers stems from Chenoweth and Stephan's *Why Civil Resistance Works.* They argue domestic non-violent resistance movements are generally more successful than violent insurgencies due to one main factor – participation. Non-violent domestic resistance campaigns mobilize more participation simply because the barriers to participate are lower than for violent

---

[8] Mendelsohn, "Foreign Fighters - Recent Trends," 192.

insurgencies.[1] The danger is less, the commitment required is less, and the legal and logistical hurdles are less. Therefore, the effort of the organizer to generate support and participation is less. Chenoweth and Stephan argue that even domestically, overcoming the participation barriers to violent resistance is difficult.[9] Expanding this concept to include fighting in a foreign war, and the participation barriers become even more restrictive. The need to overcome larger obstacles such as international travel, foreign law enforcement, and increased financial costs can be prohibitive for most. Yet, individuals in relatively large numbers still manage to find a way to overcome barriers to participating in a foreign war.

Preview of the Argument

To become a foreign fighter, an individual must overcome significant psychological and physical barriers to participation, thus generating the necessary will and ability. The process of overcoming these participation barriers hinges on four key factors: transnational ideology, close-knit social groups, transnational resource networks, and a foreign sponsor who facilitates the process by integrating the other three factors.

Transnational ideology involves seeing the ideals, beliefs, and sacred values of an ideology as transcending any government or state-based system. It is a borderless conception which links many separate communities as part of the same global community. In terms of foreign fighters, the key is for individuals to view their local struggle, and the local struggles of others, as all part of the same global ideological community. This helps overcome psychological barriers to fight by viewing the defense of those values in a local conflict as necessary for the

---

[9] Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*, Reprint edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 10.

survival of the global ideological community. Close-knit social groups are necessary to develop and cultivate these transnational ideological beliefs. These groups provide the social ties of family and friendship to reinforce beliefs, connect to other local groups with similar beliefs, and ultimately connect into the global community. These connections enable a foreign sponsor to link potential fighters to recruitment and resource networks required to transport them to the front.

Globalization has numerous potential impacts on the process. Technology such as the internet and social media contribute to the perception of an increasingly borderless world, increasing the impact and reach of a transnational ideology. Close-knit social groups can now form online, in virtual and global communities of like-minded believers. These connections, unlike local and face-to-face ones, are available anytime and anywhere. This persistent capability means individuals can reach outside their local groups to find global communities which support and reaffirm their beliefs. A foreign sponsor can use these virtual and global connections to disseminate its message, recruit, and resource fighters to get them to the front. For all the benefits, however, the internet and social media provide government law enforcement agencies opportunity to surveil, exploit, and intervene in the process.

Thesis Overview

Chapter 1, drawing upon Social Movement Theory, elaborates the argument that while the process of becoming a foreign fighter in the current day and age might look different on the surface, the underlying social dynamics remain the same. To start, the chapter describes the psychological and physical barriers to participating in a foreign war. Next, it explains how the combination of transnational ideology, close-knit social groups, transnational resource networks, and a foreign sponsor facilitates an individual overcoming these barriers. Finally, it

explains how the internet and digital social media technology can affect this process.

Chapter 2 analyzes the case of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade (ALB) in the Spanish civil war of 1936-1939. The Spanish civil war is one of the most prominent foreign fighter cases in history. In total, 40,000 foreign fighters took part, including approximately 3000 Americans of the ALB. The chapter analyzes the case through the lens of the theory developed in Chapter 1. It demonstrates the generation and impact of transnational ideology, the role of close-knit social groups, as well as transnational resource networks. It also analyzes the role and impact of the foreign sponsor in coherently integrating these factors. This entire process took place in local and face-to-face networks without the benefit of the internet and social media.

Chapter 3 analyzes the contemporary case of the Western foreign fighters of ISIS. As of April 2015, there are an estimated 25,000 foreign fighters from 100 countries fighting with a number of different extremist groups. The vast majority fight with ISIS in Syria and Iraq. This chapter analyzes the impact of the internet and social media on the process. ISIS, as the foreign sponsor, has transitioned the interaction of the three factors to online platforms. The transnational ideology can reach a wider global audience through decentralized and virtual networks. However, the online activity enables state agencies to intervene in the process. The internet and social media are not panaceas for either ISIS or state agencies. While it affords more opportunity for government agencies to intervene, it also affords ISIS the ability to adapt and change its processes more quickly.

The final chapter compares each case directly to highlight the specific

impacts of globalization on the foreign fighter process. It also provides areas where further research is required based on the research and the limitations of the theory.

Chapter 1 – Overcoming Barriers

> *Globalization has changed how foreign fighter networks
> operate throughout the world, enabling these networks to be
> far more efficient, lethal, and clandestine. Foreign fighters
> often see themselves – and are perceived by some – as
> freedom fighters. Motivated by ideology, religion, oppression
> and social injustice, these fighters take up arms to further
> what they consider a noble cause.*
>
> Terrance Ford

Terrance Ford's keynote address at the Foreign Policy Research
Institute's 2010 conference highlights two key issues concerning foreign
fighters. First, technology such as the internet and social media have
changed how groups communicate and interact. Second, the
fundamental processes and motivations remain unchanged. Individuals
have participated in foreign wars for centuries. To do so, potential
fighters have to achieve two things, regardless of time, place, or
technology available. Individuals need to generate the will and ability in
order to fight in a foreign war.

 Developing will and ability involves overcoming participation
barriers, both psychological and physical. The process of overcoming
these barriers to fight in foreign wars involves four key factors. The first
is a transnational ideology, which links separate local struggles as part of
a global ideological community. The second factor is close-knit social
groups. These groups based on family ties and bonds of friendship
reinforce and cultivate ideological beliefs. The third factor is
transnational resource networks, which serve as a way to mobilize,
recruit, and transport fighters to the front. These three factors are
important and must be present in some way. However, the fourth factor
of a foreign sponsor is also critical.

A foreign sponsor is the state or non-state group seeking to recruit foreign fighters to their cause. The foreign sponsor plays the essential role linking and integrating the other three factors. The foreign sponsor does not necessarily create the other factors but insteads facilitates the foreign fighter process through utilizing existing networks, and highlighting existing local struggles as part of the larger global ideological struggle.

Section I – Participation Barriers

To become a foreign fighter, the individuals must overcome both psychological and physical participation. Psychological barriers include *moral* dilemmas and *commitment* constraints. Physical barriers include legal hurdles, logistical requirements, as well as human capabilities (military skill).

Psychological Barriers – Will to Participate

Of the psychological barriers, morality is most important to overcome. Moral barriers come down to one key factor – aversion to killing.[1] This one factor often explains Atran's observation that so many are willing to support a cause, yet stop short of fighting and killing for it.[2] Overcoming the aversion to killing is a critical step along the path to becoming a foreign fighter. Once an individual sees killing as a moral right in defense of a cause, aversion to killing ceases to be a psychological barrier.

Commitment barriers involve four factors.[3] Fighters may require extensive training, increasing the time between joining and fighting. This

---

[1] Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*, Reprint edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 37.

[2] Scott Atran, *Talking to the Enemy: Faith, Brotherhood, and the (Un)Making of Terrorists*. New York: Ecco, 2010, xii.

[3] Chenoweth and Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works*, 37-38.

time delay spent training (thus not fighting) may require significant commitment, especially if the window for fighting is fleeting. Second, foreign fighters must essentially leave their lives behind. Depending on the cause, the home community may view them as pariahs, complicating reintegration if they survive. Third, the ultimate outcome, death, is a significant factor causing many to stop short of participating. A high level of commitment to the cause is necessary to overcome this hurdle. Finally, and most importantly, potential fighters must be committed not only to local issues, but to the global struggle as well. The potential fighter must see their local struggle not as an isolated event, but as part of a larger global ideological effort.

Overcoming psychological barriers is the first step in the process, providing the will to participate. This provides the drive to continue and overcome the physical barriers.

Physical Barriers – Ability to Participate

Physical barriers are more varied and include legal issues (both domestic and international), logistical issues (transportation and funding), as well as human capabilities (military skill). In domestic resistance campaigns, participants can usually act within the confines of local laws, do not need to travel great distances, or require any particular military skill. However, all three of these areas are significant hurdles to fighting in a foreign war. Avoiding domestic and international law enforcement, potentially traveling across multiple continents and in difficult terrain, financing the effort, and then actually fighting describe the physical barriers. These can be more than enough to prevent most people from participating, even if they possess the will to fight.

Physical barriers are more contextual than psychological barriers in time and space. The nature and location of the foreign conflict, as well as the legal and law enforcement structures of the countries involved,

11

determines the impact of the physical barriers. Fighting in Syria or Iraq is physically less complicated for a fighter from the Middle East or North Africa than from England or America. A fighter from Turkey only has a single land border to cross, flat terrain, and short distances. However, a fighter from America has many more obstacles: avoidance of well-resourced local and federal law enforcement; expensive transoceanic travel; and avoidance of foreign law enforcement while potentially crossing multiple borders enroute to the front.

Both physical and psychological barriers can be significant impediments to active participation in a foreign war. It is much easier to voice support for a cause than actually fight for it. This is where most people stop. However, people have and will continue to fight in foreign wars. Overcoming barriers requires the interaction of a transnational ideology, social group dynamics, and transnational resources, orchestrated by the foreign sponsor with a vested interest in the conflict.

Section II: Overcoming Barriers

Fighting in a foreign war is not an impulsive activity. It requires significant commitment, mutual support and encouragement from family and peers, planning and access to resources. Overcoming barriers to fight in a foreign war involve the interaction of four elements: transnational ideology, close-knit social groups, transnational resource networks, and foreign sponsor facilitation.

First Factor - Transnational Ideology

The development of a transnational ideology is the most important element to becoming a foreign fighter. It is the driving factor enabling individuals to overcome psychological barriers. A transnational ideology views the ideals, beliefs, and sacred values of an ideology (such as Communism, Socialism, Islamism) as transcending a government system

or national boundary. From the perspective of the potential fighter, the foreign sponsor promotes and markets the transnational ideology to create a global community of like-minded believers. The intent of the foreign sponsor is for separate communities to view their environment through the lens of the global ideology's beliefs and sacred values. These beliefs and values could range from strict religious interpretations, to justice for a particular group of people, to workers' rights. The transnational ideology requires individuals to subordinate their real family to the needs and betterment of the larger global community.[4] Perceiving separate local struggles as part of the overall global community's fight is the key to the transnational ideology. This perception results from the foreign sponsor's intentional message framing.

Framing builds a narrative to elicit a specific emotional, rational, or moral response or perception from an audience. To motivate and mobilize foreign fighters, framing constructs reality to exploit an ideology's sacred values. Atran uses the concept of sacred values to demonstrate how they upset normal cost-benefit calculations. When considering an ideology's sacred values, people will choose to act now to preserve or reinstate the traditions of the distant past in hopes of creating a better future."[5]

The foreign sponsor fosters this mindset by depicting the sacred values as under attack from an external enemy. This could be a general state of being to keep motivation high, or a specific instance of conflict. Framing a message specifically to mobilize and motivate foreign fighters involves three specific tasks – diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational

---

[4] Atran, *Talking to the Enemy*, 13.
[5] Atran, *Talking to the Enemy*, 344-345.

framing.[6] Diagnostic framing involves generating a shared understanding of the threat, including assigning blame for a specific hardship or atrocity. Prognostic framing builds a strategy to defend the ideology and defeat the threat. Finally, motivational framing involves compelling others to act in defense of the global community's sacred values.[7] The key to mobilizing and motivating foreign fighters is for members of one geographic community to view the struggles of another geographic community as part of the larger global ideology to which they both ascribe. The foreign sponsor frames the threat to one community as existential to all communities. This compels people to act or risk destruction of the global ideology. Thus, a potential fighter's moral calculus changes because non-action equates to letting down the imagined global community.[8]

The creation of a transnational ideology is the primary means to overcome psychological barriers of moral reservation and commitment. It may originate with the foreign sponsor, but the dynamics of small social groups and networks is important. Human interaction through family ties and bonds of friendship are required to develop and cultivate the importance of sacred values and subjugation to the imagined global community.

Second Factor – Close-knit social groups

The transnational ideology primarily works to overcome psychological barriers. Close-knit social group interaction overcome *both* psychological and physical barriers. They reinforce and strengthen the development of the transnational ideology, and they connect potential

---

[6] Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment," *Annual Review of Sociology* 26, no. 1 (2000): 615, doi:10.1146/annurev.soc.26.1.611.
[7] Benford and Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements," 615.
[8] David Malet, *Foreign Fighters: Transnational Identity in Civil Conflicts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 25–26.

fighters to the transnational resource networks necessary to travel to the front.

This factor describes the nature of social groups such as families, church communities, schools, athletic clubs, and similar groups that influence the radicalization process.[9] Atran's central thesis is people don't fight and die just for a cause, they fight and die for each other. He identifies the central element of the radicalization process as the social group, the tribe. The tribe in a broad sense is the interconnected communities that share a common identity beyond local or familial ties. These groups subordinate individual views to the group's views, and provide an avenue to link into the global community. The common identity, which links these interconnected communities, is the transnational ideology. Social networks, both physical and virtual, allow people to overcome their individual physical and mental limitations. Social networks are the means through which individual personalities subordinate to first the small social group, and then to the global community. The group dynamic is where the foreign sponsor's framed message of transnational ideology takes hold, and contributes to overcoming both psychological and physical barriers. In this way, a small social group of ordinary people can produce extraordinary things when united under a global ideological community.[10]

The sacred values of the transnational ideology foster a sense of an imagined kinship, a global community, which links local issues to global struggles. From the small group perspective, sacred values can define how the group identifies itself, and the values gain strength within the group dynamic.[11] It also provides the link from the small group into the broader global ideological community. Three specific group dynamics –

[9] Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen, *Studying Violent Radicalization in Europe I: The Potential of Social Movement Theory* (Copenhagen, Denmark: DIIS, 5.
[10] Atran, *Talking to the Enemy*, 8–13, 36, 222–223.
[11] Atran, *Talking to the Enemy*, 39, 344.

political grievance, consensus, and intergroup conflict – describe how a group radicalizes towards violence in defense of the transnational ideology's sacred values.

McCauley and Moskalenko describe political grievance as a small group experiencing an injustice committed against a wider community to which it identifies. The injustice is not committed against the group directly, but to another part of the global community. The indirect nature of the injustice can facilitate feelings of helplessness, resentment, and anger.[12] The identification of a political grievance can eventually lead to group consensus to reduce insecurity and uncertainty.

Humans' need to reduce uncertainty in life leads to consensus in groups, even if consensus runs counter to individual members' feelings. As the group continues to identify with an external political grievance, the drive towards consensus increases, causing "reasonably intelligent and well-meaning young people" to make increasingly extreme choices.[13] Identifying a specific external enemy, and perceiving an imminent threat to the global community's sacred values, propels the group towards violence.

Intergroup conflict involves direct competition with an external enemy. In terms of mobilizing foreign fighters, the group must see an external enemy as more than just a local threat. This represents the interpretation of the foreign sponsor's diagnostic framing process. If the small group perceives the enemy as an imminent global threat to the sacred values of the imagined community, intragroup consensus as to action solidifies. Continued competition with the external enemy builds unity of thought, feeling, and escalation towards violent action.[14] The

---

[12] Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, *Friction: How Radicalization Happens to Them and Us*, 1 edition (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 20.
[13] McCauley and Moskalenko, *Friction*, 93.
[14] McCauley and Moskalenko, *Friction*, 118.

foreign sponsor propagates this perception through framing, which develops within the small group dynamics to overcome psychological barriers.

The three group mechanisms of grievance, consensus, and intergroup conflict explain how a small group overcomes psychological barriers. The interplay of foreign sponsor actions within the group dynamic overcomes the moral aversion to killing, as well as builds strong commitment to the transnational ideology. The group evolves to see killing and fighting as the only morally acceptable choice in response to the external threat. Fighting in this case becomes a necessity to protect the transnational ideology's sacred values, thus overcoming psychological barriers.

Overcoming psychological barriers involves the interaction of the transnational ideology and small group dynamics. The foreign sponsor frames and disseminates its message, and social group dynamics cultivate and develop it. This creates a pool of participants willing to defend the sacred values of the transnational ideology. The last element, the transnational resource network, describes the mobilization, recruitment, and resourcing necessary to overcome the physical participation barriers.

Third Factor - Transnational Resource Network

Transnational resource networks primarily deal with overcoming physical barriers. These are often the same networks used by the foreign sponsor to develop and disseminate the transnational ideology. These networks are the end-result of the lengthy process of building willing participants. They allow the foreign sponsor to identify mobilization potential, recruit, and resource fighters.

Mobilization potential describes the individuals in a community that could be utilized in a social movement.[15] In terms of foreign fighters, it is the reservoir the foreign sponsor can draw from. It is the result of the foreign sponsor's lengthy process to build support and belief in the transnational ideology. Threat-centric diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing intends to create the mobilization potential to call upon during times of actual conflict.

Mobilization potential must have access to recruitment networks for the foreign sponsor to employ it. The same social networks used to develop the transnational ideology are critical to the recruitment process. Individuals who have friends or family already involved with or committed to a transnational ideology are more likely to join themselves.[16] Subsequently, the more the foreign sponsor can extend its reach into mobilizable communities through formal organizations, the more it can recruit. A foreign sponsor can do this by creating physical organizations in local communities, or more recently creating virtual communities online. Either way, the intent is the same – to be able to recruit fighters committed to defense of the transnational ideology quickly upon initiation of conflict.

The last step is to resource fighters to travel to the front. This involves everything from providing travel advice, to help circumvent law enforcement, to planning and financing the entire journey. The most prohibitive physical barrier is domestic and international law enforcement. Hence, the foreign sponsor must design all other arrangements to avoid legal issues. Depending on the geography and nature of law enforcement, this may involve simply flying into the conflict country, to multiple legs involving multiple means of travel. The foreign

---

[15] Bert Klandermans and Dirk Oegema, "Potentials, Networks, Motivations, and Barriers: Steps Towards Participation in Social Movements," *American Sociological Review* 52, no. 4 (August 1, 1987), 519.
[16] Klandermans and Oegema, "Potentials, Networks, Motivations, and Barriers," 520.

sponsor's role is to facilitate the connection of potential fighters with existing travel structures, funding, and guidance.

Fourth Factor – Foreign Sponsor

The three factors are themselves important, but alone are not enough to overcome psychological and physical barriers. The foreign sponsor must facilitate their interaction. The foreign sponsor does not create any of the three factors. Rather, its role is to coordinate and facilitate the interaction of existing beliefs, social groups, and networks. The foreign sponsor markets and disseminates the transnational ideology. This usually happens over an extended period, creating a global community of like-minded believers. The foreign sponsor exploits existing social groups and networks to cultivate and spread the ideology. Most importantly, the foreign sponsor creates the perception that separate local struggles are part of the same global ideological community. Finally, the foreign sponsor utilizes existing organizations and travel structures to mobilize, recruit, and resource potential fighters. In this way, the foreign sponsor is the nexus between all three factors. It facilitates the interaction among them to reduce psychological and physical barriers so that potential fighters generate the will and ability to participate.

Prior to the advent of the internet and social media, these processes happened through local and face-to-face networks. With the advent of these technologies, the interaction of the three factors can happen globally and through virtual online networks. While the internet and social media present numerous advantages to the foreign fighter process, they simultaneously introduce new challenges.

Section III – Potential Impacts of Globalization

Globalization is an encompassing term referring to the phenomenon of an increasingly interconnected, interdependent, and borderless world. Technology, specifically the internet and social media, contributes to this perception and connects people all over the globe. This technology has helped foster a sense of a global community over a range of societal issues. Political matters, once confined geographically, can now become global. Atran mentions how youth, connected and reliant on social media, increasingly form their identities in terms of global political cultures.[1] People are increasingly connected to an imagined community, a brotherhood, regardless of physical location. This can increase emotional and rational identification with global political grievances, regardless of border or culture.

Potential impacts of the internet and social media present both opportunity and challenges to foreign fighters and foreign sponsors. The internet can provide a forum for more impactful messaging, ease of connection, and mutual support. However, these opportunities quickly run into challenges presented by well-resourced and well-staffed governmental law enforcement agencies. The actions and counteractions by both sides create a shifting advantage, meaning the internet is not a panacea for either. Furthermore, research has shown human connections and real-world social interaction continue to be the primary mechanism for radicalization.[17] Thus far, the internet and social media have enhanced the opportunity and ability for potential fighters and foreign sponsors to link up and make the necessary human interactions.

---

[17] Tim Stevens and Peter Neumann, "Countering Online Radicalization: A Strategy for Action" (International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, 2009), 13, http://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/1236768491ICSROnlineRadicalisationReport.pdf.

The primary advantage the internet and social media afford to foreign sponsors is the ability to illustrate and reinforce a transnational ideology.[18] Posting powerful images and videos to multiple online platforms ensures wide dissemination to multiple audiences. Images and videos enhance the ideological message, strengthening connections to the global community. "Social media heightens user awareness, connects a multitude of users at a global level, and distributes information to those users quickly and efficiently."[19]

The second advantage is the ability for potential fighters to connect to other fighters as well as the foreign sponsor. The internet creates seemingly strong bonds to the global imagined community.[20] Finding like-minded individuals online creates virtual social connections beyond traditional physical social groups. It also provides a bridge to the right human contacts to connect into the foreign sponsor's transnational resource networks. Direct peer-to-peer connections with established fighters enable potential recruits to relate emotionally to global events "as if they are living it."[21] These connections facilitate both recruiting and commitment to the transnational ideology.

Finally, the internet and social media can act as an echo chamber for increasingly extreme beliefs. Beliefs and ideas echo off like-minded users, mutually reinforcing and strengthening commitments to the global ideological cause.[22] The ability to interact directly with the foreign sponsor and its fighters heightens awareness of the transnational ideology. The foreign sponsor can more easily connect a potential

---

[18] Stevens and Neumann, "Countering Online Radicalization: A Strategy for Action," 12.
[19] Robin Thompson, "Radicalization and the Use of Social Media," *Journal of Strategic Security* 4, no. 4 (January 1, 2011): 171.
[20] Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 161.
[21] Thompson, "Radicalization and the Use of Social Media," 177.
[22] Stevens and Neumann, "Countering Online Radicalization: A Strategy for Action," 12.

recruit's local struggle to the broader global community, reducing moral aversion and strengthening commitment.

These advantages mean foreign sponsor and potential fighter activities have increasingly migrated online. However, this presents an opportunity for government agencies to intervene and interrupt the foreign fighter development process. Online activities leave digital footprints, which government agencies can track and exploit. While the internet can facilitate transnational ideology and social group connections to overcome psychological barriers, it can increase the relative impact of physical barriers.

Western governments have abundant resources and agencies dedicated to disrupting the foreign fighter process.[23] Traditional police work through informants and undercover agents is often required first to identify potential fighters. Once identified, law enforcement can monitor online activity and exploit communications. Increased online activity enables law enforcement to develop knowledge about radicalization and recruiting practices, funding, and travel coordination. Disrupting online development of transnational ideology and virtual social networks is difficult. However, natural chokepoints exist when fighters engage in physical activities, such as traveling.

A potential fighter's online travel arrangements, including times, locations, and means, are exploitable. Law enforcement can use these digital communications to apprehend fighters prior to traveling or prior to arrival at the destination. The increased online activity aids law enforcement's ability to increase physical barriers, thus complicating the development of foreign fighters.

---

[23] David C. Benson, "Why the Internet Is Not Increasing Terrorism," *Security Studies* 23, no. 2 (April 3, 2014): 303, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2014.9053533.

The internet also offers perceived anonymity, which government agencies can exploit. Long-term anonymity is difficult to achieve, since the architecture of the internet is designed to track where information originates and where it ends up. A Western government's abundant resources, combined with judicial powers to subpoena, facilitates discovery of supposedly anonymous individuals and groups.[24] Anonymity can also work in favor of a state. The ability to pose as potential fighters in chat rooms for sting-type operations exposes foreign sponsor networks to potential infiltration. These factors limit the internet's usefulness as a sole means of radicalization.

Conclusion

Becoming a foreign fighter necessitates overcoming both psychological and physical participation barriers. Table 1.1 outlines the process. Psychological barriers include moral and commitment issues. Physical barriers include legal, logistical, and capabilities challenges. Overcoming these barriers hinges on four factors: transnational ideology, close-knit social groups, a transnational resource network, and a foreign sponsor to integrate and facilitate the other three factors. This foreign sponsor must disseminate the transnational ideology through existing social groups, and link local struggles as part of the global ideological community. These beliefs are cultivated and reinforced through close-knit social group dynamics. Further, the foreign sponsor connects potential fighters to transnational resource networks to mobilize, recruit, and resource fighters.

The proliferation of the internet and social media has created advantages and challenges for both the foreign sponsor and potential fighters, as well as government agencies. The internet enables the foreign sponsor to orchestrate the interaction of the three factors online.

---

[24] Benson, "Why the Internet Is Not Increasing Terrorism," 305.

It reinforces transnational ideological beliefs through images and videos, creates direct connections between foreign sponsor and virtual social networks, and serves as an echo chamber for extreme beliefs. The nature of the internet also allows government law enforcement to track, exploit, and intervene in the development of foreign fighters. The process of action and counteraction online creates a shifting advantage, ensuring no one side can fully exploit the technology.

Table 1 – Impact of Globalization on Participation Barriers

Barrier	Psychological	Physical
Overcome By	Generating Will to Participate	Generating Ability to Participate
Through	Transnational Ideology Close-knit Social Groups	Transnational Resource Networks Close-knit Social Groups
Facilitated By	Foreign Sponsor	
Traditional Network	Local and Face-to-Face	
Globalization Network	Global and Virtual	

The following chapters analyze two foreign fighter cases. The first, the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, tests the theory developed in this chapter to demonstrate how the process works even without modern globalization technology. The second, Western fighters of ISIS, analyzes the theory including those tools. A comparative analysis of these two cases in the

conclusion will show the impact that the internet and social media have on the four factors.

Chapter 2 – The Abraham Lincoln Brigade

> *If it's an obligation, then why don't you and the others go to Iraq or Afghanistan (to fight Americans)?*
>
> *There's no organized network to get there. If there were, everyone would know, even the police. It's difficult to get there. It costs money, for one thing, it's expensive. I know that if I really wanted to, I could go. Everyone can find a way. But, you also need a lot of courage. Friends encourage and give courage to one another. It depends on your friends. (But) someone else has to guide you, to give you money and connections.*

<div align="right">Scott Atran interviewing Mushein al-Chaba</div>

Atran's interview with al-Chaba, a social worker in a poor Muslim neighborhood in Spain, highlights the layered challenges facing foreign fighters. Even with the will, physical barriers can keep potential fighters away. Although discussing how individuals become foreign fighters in the current day and age, Al-Chaba highlights nearly all the barriers Americans faced when getting to Spain in the 1930s: commitment, law enforcement, financing, travel, and lack of organized networks. He also hints at the elements necessary to overcome them – moral courage, mutual encouragement of friends through social networks, and external network connections.

This case study analyzes how the ALB members overcame barriers to fight in the Spanish civil war. This case study was chosen for two reasons. The first reason is the involvement of a large number of American citizens in a foreign war in which the US government was officially neutral. Second, it occurred before access to the internet and digital social media technology. The analysis addresses four central questions:

- What facilitated ideological development and linkage to the global community?
- How did close-knit social groups facilitate linking to both the transnational ideology as well as resource networks?
- How were individuals mobilized, recruited, resourced without the internet and social media?
- What was the role of the foreign sponsor?

Section I - Background of Spanish Civil War

The Spanish civil war was a microcosm of the global communist-fascist struggle eventually felt by the ALB volunteers in America. Spain was a constitutional monarchy from 1874 to 1931. The last monarch, King Alfonso XIII, oversaw the monarchy's demise, the roots of which originated during the First World War. Spain's neutrality during the war helped exacerbate contrasting conditions of wealth and abject poverty. The Russian Revolution provided a hopeful model to the workers of Spain that overthrow of the regime was possible. From 1917 to 1923, Spain was wracked by left-wing revolutions and the state's violent repressions. In 1923, the King suspended constitutionality in favor of securing control of the country through military dictatorship. The dictatorship ultimately failed by ruthlessly repressing the labor movements, and also falling out of favor with both the King and right wing forces in the military. In 1930, the King attempted to revive constitutionality, but those efforts failed. In April 1931, he decided to hold elections to allow the people to decide the fate of Spain. In all the large towns and cities, republican voters defeated supporters of the monarchy by a wide margin. In April 1931, the King left Spain in the hands of a new republican government.[1]

The seat of power would change hands multiple times leading up to 1936. The world economic crisis hit Spain hard, further exacerbating

---

[1] Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War: Revised Edition*, Rev Upd edition (Modern Library, 2013), 20–30.

the divide between wealth and poverty. The Republican government, led by middle class liberals and socialists, enacted sweeping changes including land reforms, secularization, and shrinking the military.[2] These reforms further drove a polarizing wedge between the labor class and liberals on one side, and the landowners, the church, and the military on the other. Conservative forces once again regained power in the 1933 elections. General Francisco Franco, appointed army chief of staff in 1935, crushed attempted revolutions in the name of the right-wing government. In February 1936, elections once again put the leftists in power, but only by the slimmest of margins.

The close division between the Left Wing and the Right Wing meant the two could not coexist peacefully.[3] The new Republic's continued progressive changes sparked fears from the right wing that Spain would become a Marxist state. To prevent this from happening, conservative elements of the military prompted General Francisco Franco, then banished to Morocco, to organize a revolt. On 18 July 1936, Franco issued his Manifesto calling on all Spanish officers to pledge their loyalty to Spain itself, instead of a particular government. Right-wing officers in support of Franco initiated uprisings all over Spain.[4] Franco's army was well equipped, backed by fascist dictators Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini.[5] It appeared as if fascism was on the march in Western Europe, and the international community was ill prepared to stop it.

In August 1936, twenty-seven nations, including the Soviet Union, signed a non-intervention agreement preventing the sale of arms to the

---

[2] Peter Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade: Americans in the Spanish Civil War*, 1 edition (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1994), 11.

[3] Vincent Brome, *The International Brigades: Spain, 1936-1939*, First Edition edition (William Morrow, 1966), 9–10.

[4] Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, 207.

[5] Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, 10–12.

Republic.[6] Although the United States did not sign, its government was nonetheless committed to neutrality on the issue.[7] The overt intervention of Germany and Italy prompted Stalin to renounce the non-intervention pact and support the Republic with arms.[8] Spontaneously formed workers' militias came to the defense the Republic. Similarly motivated anti-fascist French, German, Italian, Austrian, and Polish foreign fighters quickly came to defend the Republic.[9] This swell of European support against fascism prompted the Soviets to take advantage of the situation and formally establish International Brigades. The formation of International Brigades paved the way for American participation.

The war exploded in 1936 along political lines from at least two decades of struggle. The war's acute politicization reflected the broader climate of worker struggles in the Great Depression in other countries, including America. The Soviets took advantage of the situation to frame the war not as a local civil conflict, but as a global defense of liberal ideals and workers' rights against the rise of fascism. This framing helped Americans link their struggle and that of the Spanish to the same global ideological belief. The development of transnational ideology was the key for the ALB members to overcome psychological barriers.

Section II - Generating Will to Participate – Psychological Barriers

Cognitive consistency can explain how individuals come to radicalize over time based on their environment. Consistency refers to the strong tendency for people to see what they *expect* to see and

---

[6] David Malet, *Foreign Fighters: Transnational Identity in Civil Conflicts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 95.

[7] Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, 73.

[8] Svetlana Pozharskaya, "Comintern and the Spanish Civil War in Spain," *EBRE 38 Revista Internacional de La Guerra Civil 1936-1939* 1, no. 1 (2003): 49.

[9] Arthur H. Landis, *The Abraham Lincoln Brigade* (Citadel Press, 1968), xiv.

assimilate new information to pre-existing perceptions of their environment. Individuals usually form pre-existing perceptions early in life or during significant life events, such as a death, or a significant social or political injustice. Over time, individuals assimilate new information only through the lens of their pre-existing images, thus reinforcing their beliefs and becoming radicalized.[10] For ALB members, this process began well before the Spanish Civil War. Their participation was a natural evolution of their world beliefs.[11] The turmoil of the 1930s laid the foundation for their radicalization.

Development of Transnational Ideology

Mobilization potential is the group of people in a society who could be mobilized by taking a positive stand towards a social or political movement. The mobilization potential is the reservoir from which a movement can draw.[12] Four significant events happened in the span of only a few years in the 1930s, which helped create this radicalized mobilization potential. The Great Depression, the Popular Front movement, the labor struggle in America, and the rise of Fascism in Europe all played a key part in the ALB members' long-term radicalization process. As Carroll put it, placing the Spanish Civil War "within the context of lifelong commitments, we can better understand the motives and expectations, the values and beliefs, of those who put their lives on the line" to fight fascism in Spain.[13] Understanding how the members linked their local struggles and those in Spain to the same

---

[10] Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1976), 117.

[11] Robert A. Rosenstone, "The Men of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion," *The Journal of American History* 54, no. 2 (September 1, 1967): 330–331.

[12] Bert Klandermans and Dirk Oegema, "Potentials, Networks, Motivations, and Barriers: Steps Towards Participation in Social Movements," *American Sociological Review* 52, no. 4 (August 1, 1987), 519.

[13] Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, x.

transnational ideology is key to understanding how they overcame psychological barriers.

For many Americans, the 1930s was a difficult time. A look at a cross section of the ALB's membership helps to understand better how the events of the 1930s shaped their lives. Most historians who have written about the ALB have tried to build a profile of the average member. Due to the secrecy of membership, aliases, and destroyed records, a complete picture of all 2800-3000 members is difficult to construct. However, enough data exists to develop representative cross sections. Rosenstone identifies the "average volunteer" as predominately in his 20s (68%) or 30s (21%), living in either an industrial or urban center with access to unions and radical political groups. He was either a worker caught up in the struggle to unionize, or a student or artist attracted to the liberal ideals of the Popular Front. In most cases, he had direct experience with the hardships of the Great Depression. The volunteer would not necessarily be a full-fledged Communist, but predisposed to left-leaning ideals.[14] Gerassi's numbers vary slightly, showing a full 85% in their 20s.[15] Either way, the significant majority were in early manhood with the youthful energy to take on large political and social causes.

The Great Depression was a significant life event not only for Americans but also for many all over the world. Growing up in the Depression influenced the ALB volunteers' perceptions of the world, which would color how they viewed subsequent events. Many became politically and socially aware in the aftermath of the market crash.[16] People came to see capitalism as a failed system, while at the same time saw the propaganda of full employment and productivity in the Soviet

---

[14] Rosenstone, "The Men of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion," 328–329.
[15] John Gerassi, *The Premature Antifascists: North American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-39: An Oral History* (New York: Praeger, 1986), 2.
[16] Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, 20.

Union.[17]   It was in this tumultuous environment that many men of the ALB cut their political teeth becoming "acutely politicized."[18]   Turning away from capitalism, they were open to different world views.

The Soviet Communist Party underwent significant transitions in 1930s. Communist International, or Comintern, was an instrument of Soviet foreign policy charged with spreading the communist message abroad. In 1935, Comintern devised a new strategy for communism in democratic capitalist countries, partly in response to Hitler's rise to power. It called for unification with social democrats and socialist workers in Western Europe and the United States. Comintern intent was to form a broad people's front against the rise of fascism through which the Soviet Union could build alliances against Germany. The union between radicals and socialists, and liberal democrats and progressive trade unions allowed the American Communist Party (ACP) to become "Americanized" and more mainstream.[19] During the Popular Front, ACP membership rose from less than 10,000 in 1929, to over 80,000 in 1938. Communist ideals suddenly appealed to a broad swath of American society by popularizing the evils of fascism. Many future ALB volunteers joined the ACP, the Young Communist League (YCL), or any number of left-leaning groups during the Popular Front.[20] In these local and face-to-face groups the Popular Front's ideals and anti-fascist beliefs were cultivated and reinforced.

The labor struggle for union representation in a variety of US industries also characterized the 1930s. Working-class solidarity was the message, and the impetus behind fighting for unionized workers' rights. From New York to Chicago, Detroit, and San Francisco, many

---

[17] Rosenstone, "The Men of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion," 329.

[18] Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, 13–14.

[19] Charlie Post, "The Popular Front: Rethinking CPUSA History," *Against The Current* 63 (August 1996), http://www.solidarity-us.org/node/2363.

[20] Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, 13.

eventual ALB members partook in violent demonstrations and witnessed death and confrontation in the workers' struggle. The ACP and YCL espoused labor militancy to fight for better working conditions.[21] The 1930s was a time for direct action, to force social change by demonstration and violence. Therefore, it was not much of a transition from the workers' struggle on a local level to a global level. The rise of fascism in Europe in the mid-1930s provided such a transition.

Comintern, the ACP, and its affiliates publicized the global dangers of fascism. It linked global events, such as Japanese aggression and German rearmament, into a coherent fascist plan for world domination. Edwin Rolfe, later historian of the ALB and writer for the *Daily Worker* wrote in 1934 "Socialist, Communist – all anti-fascist workers and all anti-fascist intellectuals must band together in a concerted drive against the Nazi pest – HERE AND NOW!"[22] The Popular Front's success during this time was uniting varied disparate communities under the common and global banner of anti-fascism.

The narrative was coherent and resonated with many audiences. The Popular Front appealed to liberal ideals, framing fascism as the mortal enemy to basic human rights and values. Research in many different sources, including testimony of ALB veterans, indicates this fight was bigger than just Communism. Herbert Matthews, correspondent for the *New York Times,* covered the ALB during the war. He wrote about how the men were conscious about fighting *against* fascism and *for* democracy. The vast majority fought for the highest of moral principles, and were not simple adventure seekers or mercenaries.[23] The most powerfully resonating Comintern tactic was propagating the anti-fascist transnational ideology through the Popular

---

[21] Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, 35.
[22] Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, 51.
[23] Arthur H. Landis, *Death in the Olive Groves: American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939*, Rev Sub edition (New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1988), 7.

Front, and linking the local plights of Spanish and American workers to that movement. As Rolfe put it, the one motivation common to most ALB members was "their profound anti-Fascist convictions, so profound and so deep-going that they were ready to die to stop the advance of Hitler's and Mussolini's invaders."[24]

The rise of the Popular Front in Europe contributed to electoral victories by the Left in France and Spain in 1936. When Franco's forces attacked in July 1936, there was little secret the fascist forces of Hitler and Mussolini were backing him. Comintern made a moral argument that the *global* Popular Front was duty bound to support the Popular Front government in Spain.[25] It was the logical outcome of years of anti-fascist framing. The imagined community of global anti-fascists was under attack; therefore, it was the responsibility of its members to render aid. The framing resonated with many eventual ALB volunteers who saw fascism as a real and immediate threat to America. Stopping fascism in Spain might preclude another global war against the forces of evil.[26] Framing the war not as a civil conflict in Spain but as a global battle against fascism – a good versus evil showdown – was the key to mobilizing and motivating potential volunteers. People viewed the situation in Spain as an extension of the workers' fight in America; therefore, it was not a big transition from the picket lines to the trenches. These beliefs were cultivated in multiple close-knit local social groups throughout America.

Close-knit Social Groups

Anti-fascist messaging and information reached Americans in a variety of means. Publications such as *The Daily Worker* and numerous

---

[24] Edwin Rolfe, *The Lincoln Battalion: The Story Of The Americans Who Fought In Spain In The International Brigades* (New York: Kessinger Publishing, LLC, 1939), 15.
[25] Landis, *The Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, xv.
[26] Harry Fisher, *Comrades: Tales of a Brigadista in the Spanish Civil War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), xx.

other Communist propaganda pamphlets were readily available, if one knew where to look. This material permeated through local groups of trade guilds, union halls, YCL branches, student groups, and artist communities. The dynamics of local and face-to-face social groups were necessary and allowed individuals to assimilate information against the pre-existing images of their environment. The interactions of the members of these groups reinforced their individual and collective beliefs such that volunteering became the next logical step in their fight for workers and human rights.

The YCL was a particularly important social group in terms of fostering political ideals. The impact of groups like the YCL highlights the true importance of local social group dynamics in the radicalization process. Milton Wolff, the last commander of the ALB, described the importance of the YCL. Primarily, it was a social community of friends. He stressed his discovery of self-worth, how he could contribute positively to the world. He also found political coherence in the group during a very turbulent time in America. Issues that did not make sense in broader society made sense inside the YCL. His political outlook found security and safety. He talked of discussing foreign affairs through the group and from *The Daily Worker*. When the recruitment message came down, the YCL offered the perfect venue to discuss and reinforce beliefs in fighting.[27]

Testimonials from ALB members themselves demonstrate the importance of transnational ideology and social group dynamics in generating will to participate. Harry Fisher, in his autobiographical work, links the events of 1930s America to those in Spain. He describes the importance of his group connecting the Spanish war to their local and personal struggles in America. This realization of a transnational

---

[27] Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, 44.

ideology was the key to seeing the front lines in Spain as a natural extension of the picket lines in America. In particular, he highlights:

> The events in which we had participated at home had had a direct influence on our decisions to go to Spain. We were trade unionists. We had worked with the unemployed and the poor. In many ways, we viewed the Spanish struggle as an extension of our fight against reaction at home. Most significantly, we wanted to focus the nation's attention on the growing threat of fascism, and the danger it posed to international peace. It was our fervent hope that by aborting the fascist takeover in Spain, we might prevent a second world war.[28]

Bob Reed, a Texas farmer who organized labor in Arkansas as well as Detroit, also linked local American and Spanish issues as part of the same global problem.

> I realized that there was an 'us' and there was a 'them' in America, as well as anywhere else. So when I heard, shortly after the big strike, in Detroit, that the 'them' and 'us' were at it with guns, in Spain, in what I thought would be the beginning of the final showdown, I decided to go.[29]

Herman Rosenstein's story represents the powerful forces of small social groups that Atran highlights as critical to radicalization and mobilization. In 1935, he joined a theater group that was also associated with the YCL. In this group, he became educated about socialist-Marxist theory and joined the YCL himself. Initially anti-war, group dynamics swayed his position.

> I would probably have not gone to war at all had my buddies, who had remained unemployed, not started talking about going to Mexico. I couldn't understand why they were going to Mexico. I was very naïve, but I finally understood. They weren't going to Mexico. I had heard and read that there were international

---

[28] Fisher, *Comrades*, xx.
[29] Gerassi, *The Premature Antifascists*, 42.

brigadeers going to Spain and that they were communists. My buddies were communists. They were unemployed. So they were surely going to Spain. Thus, one day I said, Hey, I want to go with you guys. I want to go to Mexico. I guess I wanted to go because they were going, so as not to be left out. Of course, I never regretted my decision.[30]

Lenny Lamb, member of the teacher's union in Brooklyn, participated in militant demonstrations against hunger, unemployment, and racism. His case highlights the importance of a group's cohesion around the anti-fascist movement.

I did not consider myself a Marxist, but I took very seriously the objective of fighting against fascism and for a better society. When I was asked by my fellow movement people, who were all in the party, if I wanted to go to fight in Spain, I said, Well, I want to see if I can take it, I guess. If I'm really serious about making a new society in this world and in this country, I've got to be able to show that I can take it and that I can participate in the actual dirty work of building, of doing it. And so, I decided to go to Spain.[31]

Moe Fishman, a Jewish-American living in New York, experienced anti-Semitism first hand. He joined the Young Men's Hebrew Association, where he and other like-minded Jews discussed their plight. He and a small group joined the YCL in 1934 and helped unionize poor working Jews of the neighborhood. He continued organizing and demonstrating until November 1936.

In November, we had gotten news that the international brigades had made their appearance in Spain and were playing a tremendous role defending Madrid. One day during a seaman's strike, in fact while we were on the picket line, word came down that any members of the YCL who wanted to go to Spain could do so, especially if they had any experience in military matters. I volunteered. In fact, the whole New

---

[30] Gerassi, *The Premature Antifascists*, 43.
[31] Gerassi, *The Premature Antifascists*, 44.

York County Executive Committee of the YCL volunteered.[32]

These ALB member testimonials highlight the important interaction of transnational ideology and close-knit social group dynamics in overcoming psychological barriers. The defining events of the 1930s helped formulate perceptions of their environment, and small group dynamics cultivated and fostered those beliefs. Subsequently, the organizational structures of Comintern, ACP, YCL and many other sub-groups publicized anti-fascist messages and global identity. Without the internet, these local and face-to-face groups were the key to communicating and solidifying highly politicized views. Identification of fascism as the diagnostically framed global threat was necessary for individuals to pick up arms in defense of the global community. They came to see killing and fighting as the morally right choice. This process allowed the ALB members to generate the will to participate, thus overcoming psychological barriers.

Not all ALB members who went were communists or member of the Communist party. However, they needed the organized network the ACP and Comintern had constructed to get to Spain. Carroll points out although the ACP controlled the passage of the vast majority of Americans to Spain, the Popular Front attracted non-Communist progressives to join. His categorization of 1,745 members shows that 999 were Communist party members, and 249 were YCL members – approximately 72% of the total. This leaves around 25% who claimed no political affiliation (or at least claimed to be non-Communist). The Socialist party in fact tried to organize a battalion itself, but they lacked the funding, membership, and organizational structure of the ACP. Thus, most Socialist simply joined the ACP-organized ALB.[33]

---

[32] Gerassi, *The Premature Antifascists*, 44–46.
[33] Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, 71–73.

Importantly, from all the research done on this case study, the authors as well as ALB members are steadfast in their belief that the ACP did not force anyone to go to Spain. None were "shanghaied into going" as Cecil Eby put it.[34] They were volunteers in the literal sense. The ACP was accused of sending men to die at the hand of vastly superior forces in Spain. However, Carroll points out after hundreds of interviews of ALB members, not one claims to have been forced to go. In fact, the ACP had to deny volunteers the opportunity to go to continue the class struggle in America. Party organizer Edward Bender explained how recruitment had to be "purely voluntary" to avoid any appearance of the ACP forcing men to fight. The sheer numbers of initial volunteers made this unnecessary.[35]

When the mobilization call went out, there was no lack of will to participate. The events of the 1930s, effective Comintern and ACP message framing, the development of a transnational ideology, as well as the effect of small group dynamics made that possible. The lack of the internet did not prevent information dissemination, at least not through dedicated communist groups and workers unions. Despite many willing to participate however, physical barriers still stood between the volunteers and Spain. Comintern's access to and facilitation of transnational resource networks were required to overcome the various physical barriers.

Section III - Generating Ability to Participate – Physical Barriers

As described in Chapter 1, overcoming physical barriers involves transnational resource networks. This involves the foreign entity mobilizing, recruiting, and resourcing willing participants.[36] Since

---

[34] Cecil Eby, *Between the Bullet and the Lie: American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War*, 1st edition (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), 5.
[35] Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, 109, 66.
[36] Klandermans and Oegema, "Potentials, Networks, Motivations, and Barriers," 520.

physical barriers are contextual, foreign entity involvement to identify the barriers as well as resources to overcome them is important. Individuals and local organizations do not normally possess sufficient resources to overcome all physical barriers. The American Socialist party is an example. The interaction of the foreign sponsor, with the necessary resources and organizational structures, is required to transport large numbers of fighters overseas. While the internet can help coordinate these efforts, the foreign sponsor must ultimately connect the various social groups to the transnational resource networks.

Recruitment Networks

Comintern, as the foreign sponsor, was the key element making the Spanish Civil War truly international.[37] In doing this, Comintern collaborated with the highest levels of Soviet leadership. Georgi Dimitrov, Comintern head under Stalin, was one of the key actors in the decision to form International Brigades in July 1936. Stalin recognized Spain's importance as a front against Nazi aggression, but was cautious not to give the appearance of direct involvement of his government. Therefore, Stalin instructed Comintern to create the IBs under the guise of defending Spain, and not as vanguards of global communism.[38] Stalin's globally broadcast plea in October 1936 emphasized this defense of Spain: "Working People of the Soviet Union fulfil only their duty doing what they can to help the revolutionary masses in Spain. They realize that liberation of Spain from fascist reactionaries' oppression is not a private affair of Spaniards but common cause of the entire progressive mankind."[39] Comintern quickly set about creating the organizational structure to make the IBs a reality.

---

[37] Pozharskaya, "Comintern and the Spanish Civil War in Spain," 48.
[38] Brome, *The International Brigades*, 14–15.
[39] Pozharskaya, "Comintern and the Spanish Civil War in Spain," 48–50.

Initial construction of the IBs was anything but a well-orchestrated Communist plan. Comintern was reacting to the phenomenon of thousands of Eastern Europeans flooding into Spain since July. Men like Josip Broz (later Tito of Yugoslavia) created secret IB headquarters in Paris, under the cover of trade union recruitment centers.[40] Broz formed a "secret railway" providing passports and transportation to formalize Eastern European volunteers into IBs. 22 October marks the official date of IB formation, a week after Stalin's address.[41] This same clandestine structure would aid the first Americans in getting into Spain by the end of December.

American Recruitment

To mobilize and recruit in Western countries, Comintern utilized its existing networks. "The communist parties of the various countries of the world created the vehicle and the means whereby volunteers could fight in the defense of the Spanish republic."[42] In America, this vehicle was the ACP.

In early November, only a few weeks after official formation of the IBs, the ACP's New York State committee received instructions from Moscow. "The Comintern in Moscow has sanctioned the formation of a military brigade to defend the Spanish Republic against the recent fascist rebellion." Moscow was urging the Americans to contribute forces. The ACP's New York leadership knew nothing of recruiting military forces. Therefore, they turned to "rank and file" party organizers to go out amongst the union halls and meeting places to get the word out.[43]

The ACP spread the recruitment word through local networks as it had other messages throughout the 1930s. Taking advantage of its

---

40 Brome, *The International Brigades*, 16.
41 Pozharskaya, "Comintern and the Spanish Civil War in Spain," 51.
42 Landis, *The Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, xv.
43 Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, 9–10.

increased numbers since the Popular Front, its messaging focused on uniting the "workers of the world" against the common enemy, fascism. The Spanish war provided a tangible opportunity to put action behind words. The ACP's local district organizers publicized recruitment through "waterfront docks and the fur trades, from union halls and ethnic associations, from bread lines and Communist party cells." The response was swift and numerous.[44] Each of these local and face-to-face groups, with their own specific interests and political desires, exhibited a common unifying message. The danger of fascism, as framed by Comintern and ACP against the backdrop of the 1930s hardships, linked these smaller groups into an imagined global anti-fascist community prepared to overcome any barrier.

Resourcing Fighters

The specific physical barriers ALB faced included domestic and international law, financing and travel to Spain, and lack of capabilities such as military provisions and training. Comintern intervention and coordination with ACP to resource fighters was required to overcome all these physical barriers. In practice, the barriers overlapped and were interconnected. For example, the necessity to avoid legal intervention dictated the methods and means of travel into Spain. Legal and logistical barriers will be treated separately in this section, while capabilities barriers are discussed throughout.

Legal Obstacles

ALB members faced legal issues on both sides of the Atlantic. Circumventing US neutrality laws was most pressing. The Roosevelt administration was determined to stay neutral, although it privately

---

[44] Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, 12.

favored Franco's rebellion.[45] Roosevelt and the State Department wanted to keep any interested Americans away from the battlefield. Penned in 1794 with little change since, the US Criminal Code makes criminal "to accept or take any commission to serve a foreign prince or state in war, enlisting or hiring of others to enlist, or any military expedition from the United States."[46]

This action only becomes illegal however if a foreign state actively recruits on American soil. When word of war reached the US in July-August 1936, hundreds applied for combat visas through the Spanish Embassy in Washington and consulate in New York. Since it was illegal for Spain to recruit based on US Code, they turned volunteers away.[47] When ACP started recruiting for the foreign war, all its activities had to be clandestine for fear of violating US law.

ACP's recruitment activities included carefully screening applicants. Each volunteer had to understand the political underpinnings of the anti-fascist struggle. They were highly concerned about the possibility of government agents or fascist spies infiltrating their ranks. ACP told recruits little about travel plans until after acceptance.[48] Face-to-face recruiting (versus recruiting over the internet) allowed the ACP to weed out undesirable candidates or potential threats. This helped ensure the ALB consisted of true anti-fascists, not mercenaries or adventure seekers. It also made the government's job more difficult. Without any internet traffic to monitor, the FBI would have to infiltrate the networks.

---

[45] Gerassi, *The Premature Antifascists*, 14.

[46] Democratic Thinker, "History of the Neutrality Act," *Democratic Thinker*, June 26, 2010, https://democraticthinker.wordpress.com/2010/06/26/history-of-the-neutrality-act/.

[47] Gerassi, *The Premature Antifascists*, 13.

[48] Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, 66.

Whether the ACP's fears of government infiltration were well founded is unclear. It was certainly not illegal to travel to France. It also was not illegal for individual citizens to volunteer with a foreign military, as long as those citizens were not fighting against the US. Based on these reasons, there were no concerted domestic law enforcement operations as there is presently to stop Americans from joining ISIS.

Once overseas however, the Americans did face potential legal challenges in the form of the Non-Intervention Pact and Committee, and US Embargo Act of 1937. French authorities were on heightened alert for foreign fighters crossing their border into Spain, and eventually closed it in early 1937. The US also stamped passports with "Not Valid for Travel in Spain."[49] Even when threatened with "fines, prison sentences, and perhaps even loss of citizenship" by the US consulate in Barcelona, the first US volunteers in Spain were not deterred. Once in Spain the volunteers knew there was little US officials could do to stop them. However, the State Department did not extend any legal protections to US citizens in Spain who violated the conditions of their passports.[50] This added yet another layer of risk, but the fighters remained steadfast due to their commitment to the global fight against fascism.

Comintern set up the IB structure in Paris to circumvent these legal obstacles and get fighters into Spain. In this case, the lack of the internet was an advantage. Without digital footprints for a state to track and exploit, the ACP could recruit effectively if they maintained secrecy. The transportation networks arranged by ACP in America and Comintern in Europe were built to avoid legal hurdles.

Logistical Challenges

---

49 Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, 77.
50 Eby, *Between the Bullet and the Lie*, 2–3.

ACP and Comintern created an intricate network of secret meeting places, safe houses, and travel restrictions. ACP coordinated passports, military clothing and gear, and travel to Europe. Once abroad, Comintern assisted in evading law enforcement, travel via multiple means through multiple countries, and arrival at the IB training location in Spain. A few individuals might be able to get to Spain successfully. However, to get nearly 3,000 in a coordinated fashion required organized networks both domestically and internationally--all while using word of mouth and written instructions through guides and intermediaries.

Domestic Logistics

ACP's organization and efforts were key to getting the ALB to Spain. Secrecy was the driving concern. Fisher describes ACP instructions not to tell anyone where they were going, not even family. They had to remain inconspicuous at all times for fear of government agents or fascist spies.[51] When the initial round of volunteers were selected by the ACP in late November, the immediate tasks were to secure passports as well as tickets for passage on ships to France. ACP funding was extremely limited, so they relied on "front" organizations whose members didn't know they were actually supporting the formation of a fighting brigade.[52] Without ACP connections however, securing funds would have been difficult for individuals.

The ACP issued each man money and provided instructions on how to obtain passports. The men created aliases as well as creative stories for getting out of the country – visiting relatives in South Africa, or studying in Poland.[53] For artists and students, obtaining tourist passports was straightforward, but not for the unemployed or manual laborer. The ACP arranged for them to stow away on European-bound

---

[51] Fisher, *Comrades*, 17.
[52] Eby, *Between the Bullet and the Lie*, 5.
[53] Eby, *Between the Bullet and the Lie*, 6.

ships with the help of sympathetic crews. Once underway they would pay for their voyage with ACP funds.[54]

To coordinate travel, the ACP instructed the men to obtain tickets through the World Tourist Travel Agency in Manhattan. They specialized in tours to the Soviet Union and usually catered to ACP leadership. The Party provided the funds, with reimbursement from the Spanish Republic. The initial round of recruitment happened so fast that it took weeks to coordinate final approval from Comintern offices in Paris. The coordination might have happened faster with internet-based communication, but also would have allowed government organizations to surveil and potentially intervene. During the weeks-long delay in December 1936, ACP arranged for rudimentary military training as well as provisions.[55]

ACP instructed the men to procure army uniforms and boots from various army-navy surplus stores throughout New York.[56] Each night for several weeks, hundreds of recruits met at various hired union halls throughout the city. Security was a major concern, as these mass meetings were anything but inconspicuous. The men would drill with broomsticks, led by anyone with the most basic of military experience. Right before Christmas, ACP separated 80 of the best recruits and informed them of their travel plans. They would sail on 26 December aboard the *Normandie* for France.[57]

The ACP's local networks were crucial to organizing the recruitment, provisioning, training, and travel for thousands of recruits – while maintaining secrecy. The long delays waiting for passage tested the commitment of the men. However, ACP coordinated nightly lectures

---

54 Gerassi, *The Premature Antifascists*, 83.
55 Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, 67.
56 Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, 67.
57 Eby, *Between the Bullet and the Lie*, 8-9.

from Party leadership conveying the importance of the mission, thus reinforcing anti-fascist beliefs. The men formed bonds and built strength through one another. The strong will to participate, combined with ACP's organizational capabilities, provided necessary ability to depart for Europe. However, more barriers awaited once they got there.

International Logistics

For the first group of Americans, disembarkation at Le Harve, France on 31 December was relatively easy. Even though France signed the Non-Intervention Pact, the initial group found most French authorities sympathetic. Comintern officials met the men and guided them through a series of safe houses and travel through France. They would travel by train to Paris and IB headquarters while awaiting final travel to Spain. Further trains would take them to Perpignan in southern France just north of the border. [58] The initial groups traveled by bus, taxi, and train into and through Spain to the IB assembly area at Albacete. Once there, IB leadership more formally organized them into fighting units and trained them before going to the front. The entire way either Comintern guides or Spanish Republic soldiers led them. On January 8 1937, the first Americans had arrived to fight in Spain.[59]

The first group's trip was relatively straightforward, but soon after French authorities tightened their security. They closed their border with Spain and became more aware of potential fighters trying to cross. It was now more difficult to get into Spain, and the men also risked more penalties since the US stamped passports "not valid for travel in Spain."[60] Comintern networks adapted and found alternative ways into Spain.

---

[58] Gerassi, *The Premature Antifascists*, 83.
[59] Eby, *Between the Bullet and the Lie*, 13–18.
[60] Fisher, *Comrades*, 21.

Harry Fisher was in the first American group to climb the Pyrenees in February 1937. They traveled to Perpignan as previous groups, but this time met guides to hike across the mountains. Comintern guides shuttled them in small groups by bus to the base of the mountains by nightfall. They had to cross the mountains in a single night while avoiding French border guards. The mid-winter night climb over the steep snowy hills of the Pyrenees was at times treacherous. The men, not experienced climbers or in the best physical shape, drove on with every step closer to Spain.[61] Fisher's group, like hundreds more after him, had made it into Spain. Not all were so lucky. After the war, border security found the remains of over 200 men who fell from the steep cliffs.[62]

As daunting as the Pyrenees were, other routes were just as dangerous. Comintern also arranged ship travel via the Mediterranean from France into Spain. Most made it safely. French coastal authorities apprehended other groups and held them in violation of the non-intervention pact.[63] Some groups, like the 250 internationals aboard the *Ciudad de Barcelona*, met their ultimate fate. On the night of 30 May 1937, an Italian submarine sank the ship, and fifty of the men including twelve Americans lost their lives.[64]

Despite all these dangers, many thousands traveled successfully to Spain. Approximately 40,000 foreign fighters in total made it, including the 2,800 Americans of the ALB.[65] The massive numbers would not have been possible without Comintern connecting fighters to transnational resource networks. The networks of contacts, safe houses, travel routes

---

[61] Fisher, *Comrades*, 21–26.
[62] Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, 125.
[63] Brome, *The International Brigades*, 36–41.
[64] Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, 125.
[65] Landis, *Death in the Olive Groves*, xvi.

and timetables, funding, and above all secrecy helped the fighters generate the ability to participate by overcoming physical barriers.

Conclusion

The ALB case analyzed specific ways fighters generated will and ability by overcoming both psychological and physical barriers. This case demonstrated how the interaction of the three factors, facilitated by a foreign sponsor, was required to develop foreign fighters. The tumultuous events of the 1930s and close-knit social groups contributed to the linkage of local American and Spanish struggles as part of the same transnational anti-fascist ideology. ACP and Comintern involvement as the foreign sponsor were required to both disseminate and develop the transnational ideology through the myriad of social and ideological groups in America. These close-knit social groups cultivated and reinforced ideological beliefs, which helped overcome moral aversion to killing, as well as strengthen commitment to the global ideological community. ACP and Comintern involvement was also necessary to connect the potentially mobilizable individuals to the transnational recourse networks required to overcome physical barriers. They used the same close-knit social groups to mobilize and recruit, and provided the domestic and international resourcing to transport the volunteers to Spain.

Chapter 3 examines the current problem of ISIS and Western foreign fighters. This case considers the interaction of the same four factors with the incorporation of global and virtual networks facilitated by the interent and digital social media technologies.

Chapter 3 – ISIS Foreign Fighters

"Come O Muslims to your honor, to your victory. By Allah, if you disbelieve in democracy, secularism, nationalism, as well as all the other garbage and ideas from the West, and rush to your religion and creed, then by Allah, you will own the earth, and the east and west will submit to you."

ISIS Spokesman al Adnani

"The State is a state for all Muslims. The land is for the Muslims, all the Muslims. O Muslims everywhere, whoever is capable of performing hijrah (emigration) to the Islamic State, then let him do so, because hijrah to the land of Islam is obligatory."

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi

Extremist groups are making deliberate and strategic decisions to enable the foreign fighter process through social media and the internet. The Syrian civil war has created a hotbed of various extremist groups and factions vying for different regional goals. Most attract foreign fighters with varying degrees of success. Perhaps no group has done this more effectively, or more shockingly, than ISIS.

This case analyzes how ISIS uses the internet and social media to facilitate the interaction of transnational ideology, close-knit social groups, and transnational resource networks. The process of overcoming psychological and physical barriers is the same; the digital electronic medium enabling global interactive communication is different. This case is useful for two main reasons. The first reason is the relative similarity in numbers of fighters. The ALB was able to field approximately 3,000 American fighters. Today, ISIS and other extremist groups have attracted approximately 3,400 individuals from Western

countries.[1] In this way, the cases are relatively comparable. Second, this case highlights a sharp distinction in terms of the use of social media and the internet.

This case study analyzes how the online interaction of the three factors, facilitated by ISIS, enables potential fighters to overcome psychological and physical barriers. The following questions were asked:

- What facilitated ideological development and linkage to the global community?
- How do close-knit virtual social groups facilitate linking to both the transnational ideology and resource networks?
- How are individuals mobilized, recruited, and resourced online, including government ability to intervene?
- What was the role of the foreign sponsor?

Section I - Background of Syrian Civil War and ISIS

As of May 2015, the Syrian civil war is still ongoing. Originating from the March 2011 Arab Spring uprisings, the war has devolved into multiple competing factions vying for different political goals.[2] The Assad regime is officially secular and the initial uprisings protested his anti-democratic authoritarian rule. However, the war quickly became sectarian. Terror groups, internal militias, and their external state supporters helped fuel the religious elements. A Sunni-Shia fight quickly took hold with groups lining up on either side. The Sunni groups include the Islamic Front, Al Qaeda's Jabhat al-Nusra, and ISIS. Fighting to remove Assad's regime as well as to establish an Islamic state, they often fight with each other over how to accomplish these goals. The Shia elements include various pro-regime militias of the National Defense Force, backed by Iran's Al-Quds forces as well as Hezbollah. A fundamental issue is the treatment of Muslims in general, and Sunnis in

---

[1] UN Says '25,000 Foreign Fighters' Joined Islamist Militants," *BBC News*, April 2, 2015, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32156541."
[2] "Syria Profile - Timeline," *BBC News*, February 18, 2015, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14703995.

particular, of Assad's regime as well as Iraq's former Shia Prime Minister Maliki. ISIS, predominantly Sunni, is fighting to end Sunni atrocities and establish their version of an Islamic State.[3]

ISIS and Apocalypse – Developing the Transnational Ideology

ISIS excels at framing its struggle in world-historical terms.[4] Whether ISIS is truly an Islamic organization or merely perverts Islam's teachings is up for debate and will be for some time. Recent books and articles argue for either interpretation. A March 2015 *Atlantic* article claims ISIS is "very Islamic", bent on "returning civilization to a seventh-century legal environment, and ultimately to bringing about the apocalypse."[5] A counter-argument however presents ISIS as merely using religion to justify their brutal actions.[6] It is difficult to know whether Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi truly believes in the apocalyptic messaging, or if he and other leaders are using these prophecies to attract recruits. What is indisputable is their strategic use of this transnational ideology to link separate local struggles as part of the same global community.[7]

Whatever the truth to religious claims, the perception in the eyes of the world is what matters. A violent criminal organization holds less sway with a potentially mobilizable audience than does an apocalyptic army in a religious war of good versus evil.[8] ISIS demands that true

---

[3] Elliot Friedland, "Who's Who in the Syrian Civil War | Clarion Project," *ClarionProject.org*, May 7, 2014, 5, http://www.clarionproject.org/factsheet/whos-who-syrian-war.

[4] Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror* (New York, NY: Regan Arts., 2015), 242.

[5] Graeme Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants," *The Atlantic*, February 15, 2015, 4, http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2015/02/what-isis-really-wants/384980/.

[6] Mehdi Hasan, "How Islamic Is the Islamic State? Not at All," *The New Republic*, March 12, 2015, http://www.newrepublic.com/article/121286/how-islamic-islamic-state.

[7] Jessica Stern, and J. M. Berger. *ISIS: The State of Terror*. New York: HarperCollins, 2015, 230.

[8] Stern and Berger, *ISIS*, 224.

Muslims come to the defense of the ideology's sacred values. This type of intentional framing – whether born out of true religious ideals or not – resonates with a wider global audience. It is a similar tactic employed by Comintern in the 1930s to depict the Spanish civil war as part of the global struggle against fascism. ISIS' diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing presents a sensational, foundational message, delivered through global and virtual networks. ISIS specifically frames to mobilize and recruit different audiences on multiple levels, specifically religious fundamentalism, adventure-seeking, and promise of a communal society. All are linked as part of the wider transnational ideological jihad.

ISIS relies on Islamic apocalyptic hadiths (prophetic teachings) of the Prophet Muhammad for legitimacy and credibility. The Prophet described an end-of-times battle between Christians and Muslims at Dabiq, Syria. The hadith details the defeat of crusader armies at Dabiq, and after victory, an Islamic caliphate would replace the illegitimate regimes in the Arab world.[9] Their whole message revolves around the belief that the only true Islamic society existed during the time of the Prophet Muhammad. In their eyes, every Islamic society since has been illegitimate. They seek to return at least a portion of the world to a true Islamic society. This message intends to appeal emotionally to a younger generation looking for action over words, and to cement their place in history.[10] To people searching for identify, especially young Westerners disillusioned with democratic ideals, this message resonates. This represents the core of the transnational ideology.

---

[9] Weiss and Hassan, *ISIS*, 174–5.
[10] Michael Ryan, "Hot Issue: Dabiq: What Islamic State's New Magazine Tells Us about Their Strategic Direction, Recruitment Patterns and Guerrilla Doctrine," *The Jamestown Foundation*, August 1, 2014, http://www.jamestown.org/programs/tm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=42702&cHash=0efbd71af77fb92c064b9403dc8ea838%22%20%5Cl%20%22.U-JY7FYkhZg.

ISIS intentionally pits non-Muslim and illegitimate Muslim regimes against it in a global defense of the true Islamic society. Combined with the atrocities committed against Sunnis in the current war, the global good-versus-evil message intends to rally the Muslim world to the defense of the caliphate.[11] This message is particularly attractive to recent converts to Islam, as many Western fighters are. Converts can be especially vulnerable to extreme messages, as they combine newfound enthusiasm with lack of knowledge of religious doctrine.[12] ISIS uses similar framing tactics as Comintern did during the Spanish civil war. ISIS links the local Syrian war, the situation of Sunni Muslims in Iraq, and the plight of persecuted Muslim communities as part of the same transnational apocalyptic ideology. ISIS did not create the apocalyptic prophecy, but they market and propagandize it online using visually powerful framing.

ISIS also frames messages on a level beyond the apocalyptic belief. Unlike the Spanish civil war, where Comintern and ACP carefully screened anti-fascists, ISIS levies no such similar ideological requirements. They intentionally target vulnerable Western youth who do not necessarily have deep seated religious beliefs. Instead, they advertise adventure and depict the jihad in Syria as fun.[13] They also go beyond the defensive struggle depiction. ISIS plays up their strength and military conquests, highlighting military action and the nobility of martyrdom. They also depict training camps in a summer-camp like atmosphere, appealing to Western youth.[14]

---

[11] Michael Ryan, "Hot Issue: Dabiq."
[12] Stern and Berger, *ISIS*, 81.
[13] Scott Atran, "Jihad's Fatal Attraction," *The Guardian*, September 4, 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/sep/04/jihad-fatal-attraction-challenge-democracies-isis-barbarism.
[14] "Hashtag Terror: How ISIS Manipulates Social Media," August 21, 2014, http://www.adl.org/combating-hate/international-extremism-terrorism/c/isis-islamic-state-social-media.html.

Finally, ISIS depicts its Islamic state as a communal, benevolent, and legitimate society. They appeal to Westerns by showing normal activities, such as eating pizza with friends and playing PlayStation. ISIS published a series of YouTube videos called "Mujatweets," designed to depict ISIS as a charitable organization beloved by local citizens for whom it cares. They visually depict life in the Islamic state as pleasant.[15] Most importantly, they offer a sense of family and belonging, a chance to bring meaning and purpose to the lives of Western youth. They visually depict camaraderie and friendship, boosting self-esteem of individuals lost in secular Western society. While the underlying transnational ideology is jihad, ISIS frames it in such a way as to resonate with many different audiences.[16]

The use of the Syrian civil war to establish a regional caliphate and the duty to defend it, the adventure of jihad, and the normalcy of the Islamic society describes the transnational ideology that ISIS promotes. They are extraordinarily adept at visually framing messages for specific audiences, whether persecuted Sunnis in the Middle East, or the disaffected youth of the West. In terms of propagandizing a cause, ISIS breaks no new ground. However, their distribution of the visual message through global and virtual networks to break down psychological and physical barriers of potential fighters is significantly new. ISIS intentionally and strategically uses the internet and social media to link local struggles to the global transnational ideology on a global and virtual scale.

---

[15] Alyssa Bereznak, "Terror Inc.: How the Islamic State Became a Branding Behemoth," *Yahoo News*, February 18, 2015, http://news.yahoo.com/terror-inc---how-the-islamic-state-became-a-branding-behemoth-034732792.html.
[16] Husna Haq, "ISIS Excels at Recruiting American Teens: Here Are Four Reasons Why," *Christian Science Monitor*, October 22, 2014, http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/USA-Update/2014/1022/ISIS-excels-at-recruiting-American-teens-Here-are-four-reasons-why-video.

55

Section II - Using Social Media/Internet to Generate Will and Ability

During the 1930s, Comintern modified its practice and messaging during the Popular Front to appeal to a wider base of Westerners. They used, and helped generate, the social justice and workers' fights of the time to mobilize support. Likewise, ISIS is using the technology of the time – technology that has become part of seemingly everyone's lives – to integrate the three foreign fighter factors. With so many youth living their lives on and through social media and the internet, ISIS can affect a wide and impressionable mobilization base. The three foreign fighter factors are still the same. ISIS has just integrated them using virtual and global networks.

ISIS Virtual and Global Networks

In the early days of the internet, Al Qaeda used forums and password protected chat rooms to communicate and disseminate messages. Entry barriers into these forums were high, and vetting was a laborious process to keep out law enforcement. The internet allowed Al Qaeda to upload media, instead of sending out propaganda on VHS tapes. However, uploading videos took time and dissemination was limited to inner circles.[17] The advent of social media technologies in the mid-2000s, primarily Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, revolutionized the way jihadis link local social groups together under the transnational ideology.

ISIS' strategy for using social media is currently unfolding and adapting rapidly. They employ "massive, sophisticated online media campaigns to promote jihad, communicate, recruit, and intimidate." In terms of accessibility and speed, Twitter provides a level of usability above even Facebook and YouTube. From the creation of their first

---

[17] Bereznak, "Terror Inc."

56

official Twitter account in October 2013, ISIS has been providing rapid updates to unlimited numbers of viewers.[18]

A wealth of analysis on ISIS' Twitter use has been conducted. A March 2015 Brookings report contains the most detailed demographics of ISIS twitter networks thus far. During the research period in the fall of 2014, no less than 46,000 individual *overt* ISIS supporter accounts were identified. The upper estimate is over 90,000 accounts of active supporters. Of the 46,000, researchers compiled detailed demographics on 20,000 accounts. Of those, 93.2% were *overtly* in support of ISIS.[19] On a global scale, these numbers pale in comparison to celebrity accounts whose followers are in the millions. The big difference is activity. The activity of the average ISIS supporter is more than double that of an average Twitter user.[20] This means that when online, ISIS supporters are extremely active and flood the networks with tweets and hashtag campaigns. Where Al Qaeda used to lurk in the shadows of the internet, ISIS overtly participates as an intentional part of their strategy.

The decentralized nature of Twitter is very effective for quickly disseminating information. ISIS essentially "crowd sources" their message, using existing social media platforms to disseminate and popularize their message. Typical releases follow a recognized pattern using tiers of supporters. First tier official ISIS members authenticate and post media, whether beheading videos or digital magazines. Then a second tier of ISIS supporters, called *mujtahidun* (industrious), retweets links with hashtags. These *mujtahidun* are essentially decentralized

---

[18] Rita Katz, "Follow ISIS on Twitter: A Special Report on the Use of Social Media by Jihadists," *Insite Blog*, June 26, 2014, http://news.siteintelgroup.com/blog/index.php/entry/192-follow-isis-on-twitter-a-special-report-on-the-use-of-social-media-by-jihadists.
[19] J. M. Berger and Jonathon Morgan, *The ISIS Twitter Census: Defining and Describing the Population of ISIS Supporters on Twitter*, (Brookings Institute, March 2015), 9. http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2015/03/isis-twitter-census-berger-morgan.
[20] Berger and Morgan, *ISIS Twitter Census*, 29–31.

cyber warriors, using tactics to increase ISIS' reach and exposure online. They retweet each other's tweets, and send new tweets, all with the same hashtags. *Mujtahidun* can be anywhere in the world, hiding behind the safety of their keyboard. A third tier of activists, *ansaw muwahideen* (general supporters) would then repeat this process on an even larger scale, moving the message further beyond the inner group of supporters.

This activity usually floods Twitter's servers, causing the hashtags to register on Twitter's "Active Hashtags" page, thus further increasing reach.[21] Automatic bots and apps such as the Dawn of Glad Tidings app supplement human activity. These automatic apps provide news feeds, send out tweets from user accounts, and provide links to ISIS media. Bots spam out links to ISIS materials from Twitter accounts, further increasing visibility and giving the impression of a bigger social media presence than actually exists.[22] Using this decentralized strategy, ISIS has "maximized control of its message by giving up control of its delivery."[23]

In charge of ISIS' overall information and propaganda strategy is the Al-Hayat Media Center. Their main role is to focus on mobilizing and recruiting foreign fighters, tailoring language and culturally specific releases based on region. This enables them to link many distinct local struggles as part of the global ideological community. As of January 2015, Al-Hayat has coordinated the production of over 250 official ISIS products published online.[24] ISIS recruits and uses highly skilled media

[21] Stern and Berger, *ISIS*, 155–156.
[22] Stern and Berger, *ISIS*, 148–151.
[23] Richard Barrett, "The Islamic State" (The Soufan Group, November 2014), 51, http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/TSG-The-Islamic-State-Nov14.pdf.
[24] Nicholas Rasmussen, *Countering Violent Islamist Extremism: The Urgent Threat of Foreign Fighters and Homegrown Terror* (Washington, D.C. 2015), 2, http://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/testimonies/209-congressional-testimonies-2015/1172-national-counterterrorism-center-director-nicholas-j-rasmussen-statement-for-the-record-before-the-hhsc.

and technical specialists to produce their high quality videos and publications. Al-Hayat coordinates with about twenty other branches, located throughout their claimed territory. Each branch takes its cue from Al-Hayat, but can tailor and produce location-specific media. Al-Hayat also focuses on Western recruits, publishing a high quality digital magazine titled *Dabiq*. The title reinforces the transnational apocalyptic ideology to English-speaking audiences.[25]

This brief glimpse into ISIS' media network reveals a carefully calculated strategy. The strategy is, in their own words, "don't hear about us, hear from us."[26] Social media, especially Twitter, allows a wide-ranging audience to hear directly from ISIS about their transnational ideology – religious struggle, the adventure of jihad, and the Islamic society. ISIS twists reality to resonate with specific audiences. Their employment of this medium allows ISIS to connect multiple, distinct, and local social groups to global virtual networks as part of the wider transnational ideological community.

Facilitating Virtual Close-Knit Social Groups

The internet and social media allow ISIS to distribute their orchestrated propaganda through a variety of virtual networks. However, the biggest difference in mobilizing and recruiting foreign fighters, as compared to the Spanish civil war, is the fighters themselves. In the 1930s, prospective ALB volunteers had to rely on local social groups to develop and connect to the transnational ideology. Newspaper reports from the front lines were available, but they were slow and lacked the

---

[25] Bereznak, "Terror Inc."
[26] Weiss and Hassan, *ISIS*, 170.

ability to connect recruits with fighters in an emotional way.[27] Social media has fundamentally changed this process.

ISIS' strategic employment of social media depends in large part on current foreign fighters connecting directly with potential recruits anywhere on the globe. ISIS fighters can report every detail of their lives in the Islamic state, as it's happening, directly to prospective fighters in the West. Moreover, it's not simple one way reporting, it is communicating and interacting with recruits anytime and anywhere. This peer-to-peer mobilization and recruiting, without any filtering or intermediary, represents a truly unique aspect of social media and the internet. Intimate peer-to-peer interaction through virtual and global networks builds connection to the transnational ideology as well as to resource networks.

ISIS is continually searching for ways to reach potential recruits directly. One innovative way is through the cell phone app and website Ask.fm. Based in Latvia, Ask.fm hosts 60 million worldwide users on an anonymous question and answer platform.[28] Being a foreign-based company and offering privacy settings allows virtually uninhibited ability to discuss all aspects of the jihad. ISIS fighters "have live conversations with potential recruits about why they've chosen to fight for the cause, what life in the Islamic State is like and how you can join."[29] Questions include everything from how to get to the region, to overcoming fear in battle, to what kind of food they eat. For even more privacy, fighters can respond directly to potential recruits through a mobile chat platform called Kik. This unprecedented access – anywhere, anytime – to real

---

[27] Julie Prieto, "Partisanship in Balance: The New York Times Coverage of the Spanish Civil War, 1936- 1939" (Standford University, 2006), 2, http://www.alba-valb.org/search?SearchableText=partisanship+in+balance&submit.x=0&submit.y=0.
[28] Ben Makuch, "Want to Chat with a Western Jihadist? Try Ask.fm," *Motherboard*, May 8, 2014, http://motherboard.vice.com/read/want-to-chat-with-a-western-jihadist-try-askfm. 60 million users at time of article writing, May 2014.
[29] Bereznak, "Terror Inc."

fighters on the front lines helps build transnational ideology and greatly facilitates recruitment.

The virtual network links fighters with potential recruits anywhere on the globe, without the filter of an intermediary recruiting network. These virtual connections help create the same effects as close-knit *physical* social groups. This helps builds a direct emotional connection with ISIS fighters as real, ordinary people who have volunteered for the same transnational ideology. The personal interactions help potential fighters overcome psychological barriers. Current fighters usually stress how they are ordinary people, not remarkable – "I just decided to come, if I can do it, you can do it."[30]

Twitter also allows direct interaction with fighters. ISIS occasionally allows its fighters to tweet out raw imagery and footage from battle, without Al-Hayat's editing. This type of media allows an authentic and real view of what it is like to fight for and in the Islamic state.[31] Analysis of Twitter activity is also telling. During a one-month period from April to May 2014, researchers analyzed tweets originating in the Middle East. 44,000 tweets were about non-Syrian civil war issues (sports, politics, energy) and 22,000 tweets directly related to foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq. The analysis shows the 44,000 non-war tweets included very few replies to original tweets, indicating very little interaction. However, the direct replies to the original 22,000 war tweets far exceeded the number of original posts and reposts. This indicates

---

[30] Shiraz Maher, "From Portsmouth to Kobane: The British Jihadis Fighting for Isis," *New Statesman*, November 6, 2014, http://www.newstatesman.com/2014/10/portsmouth-kobane.

[31] Bereznak, "Terror Inc."

that whatever issues foreign fighters are posting, the back and forth interaction shows a high degree of interest and engagement.[32]

The online engagement and interaction by Western youth indicates another issue where virtual and global recruiting may have an advantage. The issue for many young Western Muslims is reconciling the messages they receive from local imams with what they absorb online. For many eventual fighters, the even-tempered messages from the older generation are not enough to satisfy religious or adventurous curiosity.[33] Exposure to the apocalyptic stance and media of ISIS and its fighters online can prove more seductive to youth trying to find meaning and purpose. The opportunity to take part in a 1,400-year-old prophecy of an end-of-times battle and be a part of history can be attractive, especially if communicated by the fighters themselves.[34] Before the internet, the opportunity of experiencing such impactful rhetoric was limited, unless already a part of the right social groups. Now, if individuals do not like the messages they receive in their local circles, they can simply go online and in minutes be talking to fighters on the front line anywhere in the world.

The process of generating will to participate by breaking down psychological barriers is the same whether face-to-face or virtual. A key difference is the ability for current ISIS fighters to mobilize, recruit, and resource potential recruits directly and intimately from the front lines. Combined with ISIS' massive online media network and products, the process can occur anytime and anywhere. Overcoming physical barriers occurs through the same virtual and global networks. Peer-to-peer virtual connections facilitate usage of transnational resource networks.

---

[32] Richard Barrett, "Foreign Fighters in Syria" (The Soufan Group, June 2014), 19, http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/TSG-Foreign-Fighters-in-Syria.pdf.
[33] Maher, "Portsmouth to Kobane."
[34] Barrett, "Foreign Fighters in Syria," 18.

Virtual Transnational Resource Networks

Peer-to-peer interaction facilitates information sharing to overcome legal and logistical barriers. Fighters can learn about ISIS message, as well as how to circumvent law enforcement and travel to Syria and Iraq in the same conversation. In the 1930s, Comintern set up elaborate networks of transportation, safe houses, and guides to get fighters to Spain. Besides the final destination, many ALB members had little idea where they were going or how they would get there. Peer-to-peer interaction through the internet and social media enable individual fighters to gather all this information themselves to make the journey. However, the digital communications introduces drawbacks into the process. Law enforcement agencies have more ability to monitor and intervene in the online process. Therefore, the internet and social media can reduce physical barriers, while simultaneously increasing chances potential fighters will be caught enroute.

There are a number of parallels from the 1930s in terms of traveling to the front lines. Initial travel was relatively straightforward for the ALB members, but as security tightened, travel became more daunting and diverse. Likewise, in the initial days of ISIS' rise, travel involved a flight to Turkey and a hike across a porous border. However, in 2014, many Middle Eastern and Western countries enacted legislation and practices to stem the tide of emigrating foreign fighters.[35] This security crackdown on both the domestic and international side has caused fighters to take a fragmented journey, including "multiple stopovers, bribery, and getting smuggled over the border."[36] The ability to get up to date travel information and guidance online from both official

---

[35] Nicholas Rasmussen, *Countering Violent Islamist Extremism: The Urgent Threat of Foreign Fighters and Homegrown Terror* (Washington, D.C, 2015), 3.

[36] Alessandria Masi, "How Foreign Fighters Joining ISIS Travel To The Islamic State Group's 'Caliphate,'" *International Business Times*, March 3, 2015, /viz/8f251178-c12e-11e4-87ac-0e853d047bba/embed_map.

ISIS sources as well as its fighters is especially important to circumvent aggressive state counteractions.

In February 2015, ISIS published an e-handbook titled *Hijrah to the Islamic State.* The subtitle to the fifty-page handbook accurately describes its contents – "What to Packup, Who to Contact, Where to Go, Stories and More!" Released through the Twitter networks with links to file sharing sites, it provides seemingly everything a prospective fighter would need. It provides guidance on how to remain inconspicuous when traveling, how to avoid online surveillance, how to falsify tourist visas to avoid suspicion. Most importantly, it provides the Twitter account info for fifteen ISIS members and supporters (both men and women) to contact for guidance.[37] It provides guidance on what clothing and amenities to pack, including gender-specific items. It also includes travel specific tips. The guide recommends buying a round-trip ticket to Turkey, or flying into Greece or Spain and then driving to Turkey. It also includes a link to a classified CIA manual published on Wikileaks detailing how to get through airport security. The book concludes with testimonies from successful travelers, as well as links to other useful guides and blogs. The ultimate point of the handbook is to convince would-be fighters that it can be done, and successfully, by average, ordinary people.[38]

There are numerous blogs where ISIS supporters and fighters update information on how to travel. One such site is a female-oriented Tumblr blog called *Diary of a Traveler* (complete with a picture of doves carrying the flag of ISIS into the blue sky). The blog has 111 entries from September to November 2014, and one so far in 2015. The topics contain everything from marriage advice in the Islamic state, health care,

---

[37] Sebastian Brady and Cody Poplin, "The ISIS Guide to Holy War, or Lonely Planet: Islamic State," *Lawfare*, March 27, 2015, http://www.lawfareblog.com/2015/03/the-isis-guide-to-holy-war-or-lonely-planet-islamic-state/.
[38] Brady and Poplin, "The ISIS Guide."

and a list of considerations for making the hijrah. For example, the blogger documents how female fighters are kept initially in safe houses called makkar. It urges patience while waiting in the makkar for ISIS members to arrange travel and assimilate them into the organization. Another blog post includes four different ways to contact an ISIS member (Twitter, Kik, Surespot, Tumblr) to receive detailed guidance on hijrah.[39] ISIS' virtual and global network provides many more options for potential fighters with the will to fight to generate the ability to fight.

The most effective utility of the handbook and blogs is in connecting potential fighters with actual ISIS members and fighters. In researching this paper, the author found both relatively quickly with a few Google searches. However, online *interaction* with actual contacts is key to getting into Syria and Iraq. ISIS online recruiters facilitate travel details, as well as provide intermediary contacts in Turkey. The intermediaries guide the fighters through safe houses in Turkey, as well as smuggle them across the border into Syria to connect with ISIS fighters.[40] Some fighters even make the journey on their own accord, without arranging prior contacts. They will travel to Turkey close to the Syrian border, and then use Twitter to ask someone to take them across. In France, Comintern had organized networks of safe houses and guides arranged to transport men into Spain. ISIS and its supporters have similar, yet informal, physical networks. However, in the 1930s one had to be vetted specifically by ACP to be allowed in. Now, all an individual needs is a cell phone and a Twitter app.

As of March 2014, the US National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) claimed the lack of identified organized recruitment efforts to

---

[39] Bird Of Jannah, "A-Z : HIJRAH AND LIFE IN THE ISLAMIC STATE (Part 1)," *Diary of a Traveler*, accessed March 21, 2015, http://diary-of-a-muhajirah.tumblr.com/post/98456313069/a-z-hijrah-and-life-in-the-islamic-state-part.
[40] Masi, "How Foreign Fighters Joining ISIS'"

target Americans. The Deputy Chief of Homeland, Cyber, and Countering Violent Extremism claims US fighter recruitment is thus far based on peer-to-peer relationships or self-selection.[41] Perhaps the Western conception of organized recruitment efforts has to be reconsidered. The availability and connectivity of peer-to-peer recruiting through social media seems to optimize current capabilities without the need for traditional organized recruiting networks.

When the ALB members travelled to Spain, they had little detailed information on travel. What they did know they got from ACP party members, who had not made the journey nor did they have any practical experience. Today's peer-to-peer networking afforded by social media gives prospective fighters unprecedented ability to travel themselves, pack appropriately, contact the right people along the way, and stay virtually connected the entire time. Connecting to real fighters with recent travel experience through social media better enables individual fighters to make the journey. However, it also leaves them vulnerable to government monitoring, intervention, and apprehension.

Section III - Drawbacks and Limitations of Social Media/Internet

The internet and social media allow individuals to generate ability to participate online by connecting them to transnational resource networks. However, the very same online process increases the chances of apprehension either before departure or enroute to Syria. Digital footprints increase government agencies' options to disrupt the process. This includes blocking online access to information, exploitation for intelligence, and surveillance to intervene and apprehend potential fighters. However, traditional police work is still required. Often, law enforcement needs to know where to look online in the first place in

---

[41] Shaarik Zafar, "Western Foreign Fighters in Syria: Implications for U.S. CVE Efforts," March 14, 2014, 3, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/western-foreign-fighters-in-syria-implications-for-u.s.-cve-efforts.

order to surveil and exploit potential fighters. This means that online information can augment traditional police work, but cannot replace it.

Social Media's Fight against ISIS

ISIS has been as active on other social media sites such as Facebook and YouTube as on Twitter. A main reason for its affinity to Twitter over others is due in part to the social media companies' response to their activity. Facebook and YouTube eventually relented to US government requests that they police their sites for terror-related content. There are morality and free speech considerations with these requests which themselves demand an entire research project. Eventually, pressure from governments as well as the public required these companies to act.

YouTube was the first to act from government and public pressure, and put the onus on its users. To avoid the outright appearance of the morality police, it added a capability for users to flag inappropriate content. If subsequent review by YouTube found content to "depict gratuitous violence, advocated violence, or used hate speech" YouTube would remove it. Facebook relented in 2009, and took a more active role against jihadist pages. Facebook itself would "actively monitor, seek out, and terminate pages and groups devoted to terrorist content." While ISIS supporters quickly rebuilt pages with different user names, Facebook would take them down just as quickly. Twitter was different, more stringently resisting any government requests to limit free speech or block user accounts.[42] Ultimately worried about its bottom line, its executives weighed the costs of blowback from the public against those of limiting free speech.

---

[42] Stern and Berger, *ISIS*, 136, 134.

ISIS' supporters and the *mujtahidun* grew tired of rebuilding networks on Facebook, so they gravitated towards Twitter in early 2014.[43] Twitter's continued refusal to suspend accounts meant its users could get away with all sorts of activity. During the first half of 2013, Twitter had received 60 official governmental requests to shut down terrorist-related accounts. After the Al Shabab Westgate Mall incident played out in near real time over Twitter, those requests increased to 377 by the end of 2013. Although not officially linked to any government's request, Twitter began slowly and quietly shutting down Al Shabab accounts. It then turned towards ISIS in early 2014.[44]

ISIS' release of the high quality propaganda video "The Clanging of the Swords Part 4" in May 2014 marked a determined campaign to limit the influence of ISIS on Twitter. By the summer of 2014, after ISIS' declaration of a caliphate publicized via social media, Twitter made it clear that it would not tolerate any official ISIS accounts.[45] The ongoing Twitter campaign against ISIS has numerous effects both in terms of intelligence as well as on ISIS networks.

From an intelligence standpoint, there is always a balance between completely cutting off mobilization and recruiting networks, and using those networks to exploit and disrupt. During research into ISIS Twitter networks in the fall of 2014, counterintuitive results appeared. The most visible ISIS accounts usually contained "noise." Followers were not only ISIS supporters but also journalists, researchers, and mildly interested actors. The most valuable intelligence usually comes from quieter accounts (accounts with fewer followers) such as the *mujtahidun* which flow information from obscure accounts to the larger ones.[46] When Twitter suspends one of the larger noisier accounts, an interesting

---

[43] Stern and Berger, *ISIS*, 162, 172.
[44] Stern and Berger, *ISIS*, 163–164.
[45] Stern and Berger, *ISIS*, 167.
[46] Berger and Morgan, *ISIS Twitter Census*, 55.

phenomenon ensues. State agencies are able to watch for new accounts as they rebuild. The first individuals that follow rebuilt accounts are usually the most motivated ISIS members and supporters, with access to know how to find the new accounts. The newly formed accounts initially have less noise, making it easier to derive actual intelligence.[47] A fine line exists between sufficiently degrading the networks, while not completely pushing ISIS users off the medium.

Specific effects to the Twitter networks have been numerous. First, ISIS supporters and *mujtahidun* have to spend more time rebuilding the same networks. After Twitter started suspending accounts in more numbers towards the end of 2014, more than eight percent of ISIS twitter activity has been to rebuild networks. Researchers also observed drops in network activity, such as replies and retweets. Above all, the suspensions and subsequent need to rebuild accounts resulted in networks that are more insular. ISIS has less overall influence outside its immediate circle of supporters. ISIS supporters increasingly follow and are followed by each other, fearing suspension and the need to rebuild.[48] This could have negative effects in terms of recruiting, especially if ISIS relies on virtual peer-to-peer networking. Only time will tell if this network disruption is having the desired effect.

The online struggle to limit influence and gather intelligence continues. Ultimately, this makes ISIS' work to mobilize, recruit, and motivate more difficult as they spend more time and effort rebuilding networks. Specific state actions have also played an important role. Not only have numerous governments pressured social media companies to act, they've also strengthening their own capabilities to disrupt foreign fighter actions both domestically and internationally.

---

[47] Stern and Berger, *ISIS*, 144.
[48] Berger and Morgan, *ISIS Twitter Census*, 55-56, 58.

State Counteractions

In February 2015, NCTC Director Nicholas Rasmussen briefed House and Senate committees on countering violent extremism, including how to deal with the foreign fighter problem. In 2014, the international communities suffering most from this phenomenon have enacted stricter counterterrorism laws, increased border security, and increased information sharing.[49] Adopted in September 2014, United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2178 creates new policy guidelines and legal frameworks to combat this phenomenon. Specific obligations require member countries to "prevent and suppress recruiting, organizing, transporting, and equipping of foreign fighters, and the financing of travel and activities," as well as increased information sharing.[50] It focuses broadly on ways to increase the physical (legal and logistical) participation barriers, including domestic and international online tracking and monitoring. One country stands out as especially important.

Turkey, as France was in the 1930s, is perhaps the most important country in stemming the foreign fighter flow. While there is no single route into Syria, most air, sea, and land routes involve Turkey in some fashion. Turkey's visa-free travel arrangements with over 69 countries administratively limit the need for travel screening, facilitating foreign fighter travel. To combat this, Turkey has increased participation with origin countries, creating a "Turkish Banned from Entry List" which includes over 10,000 names. Electronic information sharing is key, and the recent terror attacks in Western Europe have generated new urgency to share.[51]

---

[49] Rasmussen, *Countering Violent Islamist Extremism*, 2.
[50] "Fact Sheet: UNSCR 2178 on Foreign Terrorist Fighters," *US Mission to the UN*, Fact Sheet, http://usun.state.gov/briefing/statements/232071.htm.
[51] Rasmussen, *Countering Violent Islamist Extremism*, 3.

Specifically in the US, the NCTC has reemphasized the importance of the Terrorist Identities Datamart Environment (TIDE). This electronic database serves a variety of functions. First, it acts as the central repository for terrorist identities collected from numerous US government agencies as well as international partners. Second, it is an analytical tool to identify, track, and share information with numerous agencies and governments on known and suspected terrorists. Thus far, it has been an effective tool in tracking and sharing online information on suspected foreign fighters.[52]

Governments and agencies can bring considerable resources to combat this problem. US agency efforts have resulted in numerous apprehensions of potential foreign fighters both in the US as well as abroad. These actions directly indicate how the excessive use of the internet and social media can increase physical barriers for Americans wishing to fight in Iraq and Syria. However, the internet does not fix all of law enforcement's problems. They still have to know where to look online. Usually this involves performing traditional police work to identify potentially radicalized or radicalizing individuals, and then tracking them online.

Western Foreign Fighter Apprehensions

Since the end of 2013, the US has charged or detained 29 Americans prior to getting to Syria. The most common charge is providing material support to a foreign terrorist organization. The apprehensions result in part from tracking online activity, and occurs either inside the US, or en route to Syria.[53] There have been more

[52] Rasmussen, *Countering Violent Islamist Extremism: The Urgent Threat of Foreign Fighters and Homegrown Terror*, 3–4.

[53] Scott Shane, "From Minneapolis to ISIS: An American's Path to Jihad," *The New York Times*, March 21, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/22/world/middleeast/from-minneapolis-to-isis-an-americans-path-to-jihad.html.

apprehensions since 2013, including three Denver teen girls in October 2014, three Brooklyn men in February 2015, one former USAF airman in March 2015, and most recently an Army national guardsman and his cousin from Illinois. All represent cooperation between NCTC, DHS, the FBI and other national and local agencies using online capabilities.[54]

One of the most detailed reports in terms of FBI online surveillance involved three New York men arrested in February 2015. The three men are residents of New York, but two (Abdurasul Hasanovich Juraboev and Abror Habibov) are citizens of Uzbekistan and one (Akhor Saidakhmetov) of Kazakhstan. At two of the men's arrangements, the federal prosecutor said the two confessed to wanting to wage violent jihad in Syria.[55] The three were "influenced by videos posted online by the Islamic State, inspired by messages on social media and felt compelled to act after months of becoming increasingly radicalized."[56] The complaint in support of the arrest warrant for the three men provides revealing information into their use of social media and the internet to breakdown psychological and physical barriers – all under government surveillance.

Over the period from August 2014 until their arrest in February 2015, the men were under various forms of FBI surveillance. The three frequented an Uzbek-language website titled Hilofatnews.com. This website propagates ISIS news and ideology, and calls for its Uzbek-speaking audience to join ISIS. This is a specific example of ISIS' efforts to produce and distribute culture and language-specific propaganda. The men made numerous posts to the website pledging their allegiance to

---

[54] Zafar, "Western Foreign Fighters in Syria," 7.

[55] Edmund DeMarche, "3 Arrested in New York City for Allegedly Conspiring to Support ISIS," Text.Article, *FoxNews.com*, (February 25, 2015), http://www.foxnews.com/us/2015/02/25/3-arrested-in-brooklyn-for-allegedly-consipring-to-support-isis/.

[56] Marc Santora and Stephanie Clifford, "3 Brooklyn Men Accused of Plot to Aid ISIS' Fight," *The New York Times*, February 25, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/26/nyregion/3-men-in-brooklyn-charged-supporting-isis.html.

ISIS, asking how to travel to the Islamic State, and how to wage jihad in the US if they could not travel. The FBI tracked an IP address obtained from Hilofatnews.com to the men in Brooklyn. [57]

The men were also surveilled making repeated contact with an ISIS representative through the website Islamic State News, which disseminates ISIS propaganda. The men received prodding to travel, as well as guidance on how to get across the border. The men discussed amongst themselves through electronic means how to travel and that they needed a contact who knew them to take them across the border.[58] Their ISIS contact emphasized that travel through Turkey was getting more difficult, and they would need to go by foot. He also told them they should make a circuitous route to Turkey with round trip tickets. Throughout the fall and winter, the FBI used a variety of surveillance means, including a confidential informant who often physically met with the men.[59] When learning of the details of their purchased airline tickets, the FBI arrested two at JFK Airport, and a third back at his apartment. This case demonstrates how the three men utilized various parts of ISIS' virtual and global network to generate both the will and ability to fight. However, it is also clearly demonstrates the advantages afforded to law enforcement agencies to track, exploit, and apprehend potential fighters.

Another example of the simultaneous benefits and drawbacks of the internet and social media is Nicholas Teausant. FBI online surveillance of his various activities played a large role in their criminal complaint against Teausant. A 20-year-old recent convert to Islam, Teausant's online footprint was massive. He maintained Facebook

---

[57] "Complaint Charging 3 in Brooklyn With Aiding the Islamic State," *The New York Times*, February 25, 2015, 3-4, http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/02/25/nyregion/criminal-complaint-charging-3-in-brooklyn-with-aiding-isis.html.

[58] "Complaint Charging 3 in Brooklyn With Aiding the Islamic State," 7–9.

[59] "Complaint Charging 3 in Brooklyn With Aiding the Islamic State," 12, 10.

postings pledging allegiance to Allah's army. He blogged and provided links through his Google+ account. He discussed his recent conversion to Islam and how the Church no longer provided direction. His Tumblr account also provided details about his troubled decision to convert. He frequented Ask.fm to inquire about how to get to Syria. His whole process of radicalization could be traced through his social media postings. His online activity led him to an FBI informant, part of an online sting operation which eventually captured Teausant as he tried to cross the Canadian border on his way to Syria.[60]

The case of three Denver teenage girls apprehended in Germany before making it to Syria is an example how influential and pervasive online interaction can be. The girls were likely not hard-core jihadis; instead they had fallen prey to ISIS' message of adventure and a chance to do something extraordinary. Their case also illustrates the limits of government online surveillance. Three seemingly normal teenage girls usually do not raise FBI flags. Their apprehension came about only after their parents discovered them and their passports missing. After informing law enforcement, the FBI was able to track their passport numbers and apprehend them in Germany.[61]

The three girls, and particularly the eldest, had been radicalized online over the course of a year prior to trying to travel to Syria. They were extremely active on Twitter and other social media apps. The FBI discovered after the fact the girls had been interacting with Western fighters recently added to the ISIS fold. As indicated above, ISIS Westerners provided the girls through social media a how-to guide to travel from Denver to Syria. Investigation revealed over 9,000 Tweets

[60] Adam Serwer, "Accused Student Terrorist Was a Social Media Oversharer," *MSNBC*, March 25, 2014, http://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/instagram-social-media-terrorism-teausant.

[61] Michael Daly, "How ISIS's Colorado Girls Were Caught," *The Daily Beast*, October 22, 2014, http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/10/22/how-three-colorado-teen-girls-headed-for-isis-and-were-caught.html.

from one of the girls showing more radical leaning over time. Experts from the SITE Intelligence Group note social media as a factor in their radicalization process. In the months leading up to the trip, friends of the girls noticed changes, from care-free high school girls to more devout Muslims rejecting old friends. The problem, as indicated by the FBI, is the lack of structured recruitment networks in the US.[62] The decentralized peer-to-peer mobilizing and recruiting presents problems in terms of intervention and disruption. The FBI and other agencies have to know where to look first.

The internet and social media are not panaceas for ISIS to mobilize and recruit unabated. Governments have brought considerable resources to bear to combat the problem. The internet and social media have afforded ISIS a fluid, amorphous medium with which to recruit in a decentralized manner. Individual apprehensions of fighters are not as costly to ISIS as breaking up ACP recruiting rings would have been to Comintern. Since there are effectively no recruiting rings to break up, ISIS continues to promulgate its message, and allows its fighters to interact with potential recruits virtually and globally. When social media companies respond by blocking and suspending accounts, ISIS counteracts by rebuilding networks or moving to different platforms. The true difference in social media and the internet from local and face-to-face recruiting rings is the cat and mouse of shifting advantage. When governments act to disrupt online networks, ISIS changes its tactics and platforms to rebuild networks and continue recruiting. The decentralized and peer-to-peer networks produces continually shifting advantage as both sides make actions and counteractions. However, complete disruption is unlikely.

---

[62] Vicky Collins, "Denver Teens Chatted Online With ISIS Recruiter" *NBC News*, October 30, 2014, http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-terror/denver-teens-chatted-online-isis-recruiter-report-says-n237666; Evan Perez, Pam Brown, and Ralph Ellis, "Officials: U.S. Wants to Know How ISIS Recruited 3 Denver Teens" *CNN*, November 13, 2014, http://www.cnn.com/2014/11/12/us/isis-teen-recruitment/index.html.

Conclusion

This case demonstrates how the internet and social media affect the foreign fighter process. Individuals are able to generate will and ability through online interaction of transnational ideology, close-knit social groups, and transnational resource networks. ISIS, as the foreign sponsor, facilitates the interaction of the three utilizing a variety of online platforms.

Development of transnational ideology is still the most important factor. ISIS frames its overall message of jihad around apocalyptic prophecies, adventure-seeking, and idealistic Islamic society. They use this multi-faceted transnational ideology to link the local struggles of individuals from 100 countries and multiple different languages as part of the same global ideological community. Online capabilities make dissemination to this vast and varied audience possible. The internet and social media lessen the need to create multiple face-to-face and local networks in numerous countries to accomplish the same effect.

Peer-to-peer networking over social media attempts to create the same kind of emotional and personal bonds as with face-to-face social groups. Reading jihadist propaganda online is a one-way process and lacks personal interaction. Peer-to-peer networking, however, enables prospective recruits to directly interact and connect emotionally with ISIS fighters. The wide variety of social media tools, including Twitter, Ask.fm, and private messaging apps allows potential fighters to interact whenever and wherever they choose. The online social interaction and emotional connectivity, linked by the transnational ideology, are the key factors to overcoming psychological barriers.

The same peer-to-peer virtual and global networks connect individuals to transnational resource networks. Online recruiting in the case of ISIS is less physical and more decentralized than that of ACP in

76

the 1930s. Online social groups help connect individuals with the right contacts in ISIS to vouch for them and get them into ISIS territory. Recent Western arrivals to ISIS inform potential fighters on how to travel, how to avoid law enforcement, and what to bring. ISIS-produced materials such as travel handbooks, and ISIS supporter blogs further advance essential information to individuals preparing to travel.

However, social media and the internet are just as available to government agencies as they are to extremist organizations. Governments have to find the right balance between effective intelligence collection, while sufficiently disrupting networks to limit information dissemination. Digital footprints left by social media interactions can enable law enforcement agencies to monitor, exploit, and intervene in the mobilization and recruitment process. Therefore, while social media interactions can reduce physical barriers, it simultaneously can increase the chances that potential foreign fighters will be apprehended. Ultimately the online cat and mouse process will continually shift the advantage as both sides make actions and counteractions. No one side can claim the internet as a sanctuary.

Findings and Conclusion

The foreign fighter phenomenon remains a pervasive issue in international affairs. Even though the world has advanced technologically, the fundamental process remains the same. Case analysis using the theory developed in Chapter 1 demonstrates the necessity of the enduring role of the four factors, regardless of the availability of the internet and social media.

This chapter summarizes the key findings from both cases, and then compares them to highlight the key changes introduced by online capabilities. Lastly, it introduces new findings and areas for further research not covered by the theory.

Abraham Lincoln Brigade Major Findings

The Americans who volunteered to fight in the Spanish civil war identified with the same transnational ideology. They might not all have been devoted communists, but they were motivated by strong anti-fascist beliefs. These beliefs developed during the tumultuous events of the 1930s. The key was not simply possessing similar beliefs. Rather, it was the ability to link local struggles in America and those in Spain as part of the same transnational anti-fascist ideology. Comintern, as the foreign sponsor, framed the conflict as an existential threat to the sacred values of the Popular Front and called for all global members to come to the defense of those values in Spain. Without taking up arms, fascism could rule Western Europe and encroach on America. With this framing, the moral aversion to killing and fighting was overcome, and commitment to the cause was strengthened.

These beliefs took hold through close-knit local and face-to-face social groups. ALB members grew up fighting for the same causes in

local unions, workers guilds, social clubs, and communist groups such as the YCL. These close-knit groups were instrumental in developing and cultivating a shared sense of belonging, friendship, and devotion to workers' rights and anti-fascist beliefs. Many of the men took to the streets in violent protest in support of American workers' rights, so fighting in Spain for the same cause was a natural transition. Comitern and the ACP leveraged these same close-knit groups to connect fighters to the required resources to get to Spain.

The ACP utilized its local networks to recruit, train, provision, and transport fighters out of America. Comintern utilized similar networks in France and Spain to secretly house and transport fighters to avoid French law enforcement and border patrol. Strong commitment to the cause enabled individuals to overcome arduous travel, personal safety, and legal issues to get to Spain.

The interaction of the three foreign fighter factors, facilitated by the foreign sponsor, were important in overcoming psychological and physical barriers. This generated the will and ability required to participate in the foreign war. This same interaction currently takes place involving the foreign fighters of ISIS. The major difference is much of the interaction takes place online, utilizing the internet and social media.

ISIS Foreign Fighters Major Findings

The biggest difference in the ISIS case is its ability to facilitate the integration of all three factors through global and virtual networks. Individuals are able to overcome psychological and physical barriers, but the majority of the processes happen online. ISIS utilizes powerful images, videos, and digital publications to link apocalyptic prophecy, adventure, and Islamic society as part of the same transnational jihad ideology. They compel true Muslims everywhere to defend the caliphate

against external threat. ISIS uses broad and decentralized online networks to link multiple separate communities together as part of the same transnational ideology.

An important aspect which ISIS has implemented is the use of virtual peer-to-peer *interactions* to generate similar emotional and personal connections as face-to-face social groups. ISIS encourages its fighters to reach out and interact with potential recruits to convey is transnational ideology. Continued virtual interaction with like-minded people on the front lines helps reduce psychological barriers. This interaction is supplemented by many ISIS supporters online cultivating its message and encouraging supporters to travel and fight. This might not have been possible even a decade ago. With society becoming increasingly connected online, developing personal relations through virtual connections is becoming more mainstream.

ISIS uses the same online interactions which develop transnational ideology to recruit and resource potential fighters.   This interaction provides recruits with experience, guidance, and motivation to travel. It also enables them to connect to the right physical contacts for the final stage of travel into Syria. The virtual and decentralized processes means government agencies will not be able to fully degrade ISIS' ability to integrate the three factors. The key in the ISIS case is their ability to integrate all of the foreign fighter factors to overcome barriers predominantly through global and virtual networks.

Case Comparison and Conclusions

Comparing the cases directly highlights how globalization affects the three factors. The internet and social media affect each of the factors slightly differently. They also affect the foreign sponsor's ability to integrate them. In general, the ALB case proves the internet is not required to enable individuals to become foreign fighters. However it can

enhance an individuals ability to overcome psychological barriers and some physical barriers, while simultaneously making other physical barriers more difficult to overcome.

The key to transnational ideology is the foreign sponsor's ability to link multiple local struggles as part of a global community. Framing a conflict as a defense of global sacred values helps build a sense of global brotherhood amongst separate local communities. In the 1930s, Comintern and ACP had to utilize local and face-to-face networks. The Popular Front Americanized communist and anti-fascist beliefs, but this had to take place through physical interactions inside America. ISIS, through its use of social media and the internet, has transitioned this process to virtual and global networks. They can reach a global audience without having to physically leave their territory. While communist propaganda was widely utilized in the 1930s, it was typically only available through communist circles. ISIS dissemination of graphic images and videos to anyone with a cell phone or internet connection can reach a much wider audience. It has publicized their fight to form the caliphate, as well as call all true Muslims to join and defend it against both Muslim and non-Muslim enemies. The key difference in ISIS' ability to generating transnational ideology is that an individual does not have to be part of the right social group. ISIS markets to the world, to whoever wants to listen. If an individual is not intentionally looking for ISIS's message, he most likely will not be exposed to it in his daily life. However, its online availability means that an individual *can* find whatever he is looking for, as well as a community of like-minded believers, much more easily online. Being exposed to similar ideological messages in close-knit physical social groups, where knowing the right people first matters, is more difficult.

Close-knit social groups are perhaps the most important element in the radicalization process. They help cultivate and reinforce

81

ideological beliefs through social interactions of family and friends. These processes were essential to ALB members developing connection to the transnational ideology and generating mutual will to participate. There has been a wealth of research done to demonstrate the primary importance of face-to-face social group interaction as compared to online. However, ISIS has introduced a new element to online radicalization. Social media and other internet platforms enables their fighters to directly connect with potential recruits and *interact* with them. Virtual peer-to-peer interaction with actual fighters on the front lines and inside ISIS helps develop emotional and personal connections. With so many of society's youth living their lives on and through social media, ISIS takes advantage of individuals already susceptible to developing intimate online relationships. While face-to-face interaction is still part of the process, ISIS' strategy and the normalcy of online relationships today may be changing the traditional understanding of radicalization.

The same social groups which facilitate connection to the transnational ideology also provide a connection into transnational resource networks. The foreign sponsor uses the same social and network connections it used to motivate individuals to its message to recruit and resource those same individuals. At the time, ACP was a legitimate US organization, and utilized its existing physical networks to illicitly recruit and transport individuals to Spain. Had US law enforcement been so inclined, the break up of a few ACP recruiting networks might have stopped the ALB before it ever formed. However, ISIS is anything but a legitimate organization. It does not posses any of the infrastructure inside the US which the ACP had. Therefore, it must rely on online recruiting through the same networks it uses to spread its transnational ideology. Virtual peer-to-peer recruiting enables new fighters to pass knowledge and expertise of how to travel and avoid law enforcement to potential recruits. It conveys a sense that ordinary

individuals are able to make the journey. Whereas ACP and Comintern needed structured networks in multiple countries to transport fighters, ISIS online networks enables individuals and small groups to travel on their own. But this advantage is simultaneously a weakness, as government agencies can monitor online communication and use it to apprehend potential fighters.

Government intrusion however is still dependent on traditional police work. They usually have to know where to look first to be able to exploit online communications, intervene, and apprehend. The ability to close off ISIS social media networks is difficult since ISIS and its supporters modify and adapt their tactics. This can limit their influence, but not completely deny their capabilities. This cat and mouse game of continually shifting advantage is likely to continue as a characteristic of the online foreign fighter process into the future.

In summary, use of internet and social media *can* enable more individuals to develop transnational ideological connections to causes, if they are so inclined to look for it. The personal and emotional connections developed through face-to-face close-knit social groups remain important. However, those same connections can be replicated through online *interaction* with actual fighters inside the foreign sponsor's organization. This same interaction better enables individuals and small groups to travel without the need for structured physical networks to guide them the entire way. That guidance takes place online. Even though this increases the ability for government agencies to intervene and apprehend individuals, the loss of a few potential fighters is not that costly. The online structure which enables fighters to travel to the front remains essentially intact.

Areas for Further Research

The biggest area for further research involves the media and ISIS' message. How much of ISIS propaganda images and videos would actually be known to the general public without the mainstream media focusing attention on it? The theory assumes the foreign sponsor's messages reaches a sufficient number of individuals through their own organic processes to create enough people willing and able to fight. However, media attention on the most graphic propaganda may push awareness to audiences beyond which the organic foreign sponsor networks could reach on their own. Most Western citizens probably do not actively seek out ISIS propaganda online. But media coverage draws their attention to it. For example, the Spanish civil war was extensively covered through traditional media outlets. How much support for the Spanish struggle was generated through this media coverage and the highlighting of major events such as Guernica, as opposed to ACP's and Comintern's networks and messaging? Did they rely on and take advantage of highlighted media attention? The media's role in the foreign fighter process is sufficiently important to warrant further research.

Another area for potential research involves the slippery slope of restricting free speech and access to social media for certain groups. As indicated during the research, Twitter initially resisted government requests to block access to ISIS and its supporters. The issue involves government identification of groups it deems threatening. Most Americans view ISIS and their tactics as deplorable, and believe they should be limited to the maximum extent. However, what happens when the case is grayer? How does a government define which groups are a threat and which are not? When does a government decide certain groups should not be able to participate on social media? As social media continues to become a prevalent part of society, this issue will continue to be problematic and deserves further research.

84

Bibliography

"A Call to Hijrah." *Dabiq* 1, no. 1 (Fall 2014).
        http://media.clarionproject.org/files/09-2014/isis-isil-islamic-
        state-magazine-Issue-1-the-return-of-khilafah.pdf.

Atran, Scott. "Jihad's Fatal Attraction." *The Guardian,* September 4,
        2014.
        http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/sep/04/jihad-
        fatal-attraction-challenge-democracies-isis-barbarism.

———. *Talking to the Enemy: Faith, Brotherhood, and the (Un)Making of
        Terrorists.* 1 edition. New York: Ecco, 2010.

Barrett, Richard. "Foreign Fighters in Syria." The Soufan Group, June
        2014. http://soufangroup.com/wp-
        content/uploads/2014/06/TSG-Foreign-Fighters-in-Syria.pdf.

———. "The Islamic State." The Soufan Group, November 2014.
        http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/TSG-The-
        Islamic-State-Nov14.pdf.

Benford, Robert D., and David A. Snow. "Framing Processes and Social
        Movements: An Overview and Assessment." *Annual Review of
        Sociology* 26, no. 1 (2000): 611–39.
        doi:10.1146/annurev.soc.26.1.611.

Benson, David C. "Why the Internet Is Not Increasing Terrorism."
        Security Studies 23, no. 2 (April 3, 2014): 293–328.
        doi:10.1080/09636412.2014.905353.

Bereznak, Alyssa. "Terror Inc.: How the Islamic State Became a Branding
        Behemoth." *Yahoo News,* February 18, 2015.
        http://news.yahoo.com/terror-inc---how-the-islamic-state-
        became-a-branding-behemoth-034732792.html.

Berger, J. M., and Jonathon Morgan. *The ISIS Twitter Census: Defining
        and Describing the Population of ISIS Supporters on Twitter.*
        Analysis Paper. US Relations with the Islamic World. Brookings
        Institute, March 2015.
        http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2015/03/isis-
        twitter-census-berger-morgan.

Brady, Sebastian, and Cody Poplin. "The ISIS Guide to Holy War, or
        Lonely Planet: Islamic State." *Lawfare,* March 27, 2015.
        http://www.lawfareblog.com/2015/03/the-isis-guide-to-holy-war-
        or-lonely-planet-islamic-state/.

Brome, Vincent. *The International Brigades: Spain, 1936-1939.* First
        Edition edition. William Morrow, 1966.

Carroll, Peter. *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade: Americans in
        the Spanish Civil War.* 1 edition. Stanford, Calif: Stanford
        University Press, 1994.

Chenoweth, Erica, and Maria J. Stephan. *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict.* Reprint edition. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.

collins, Vicky. "Denver Teens Chatted Online With ISIS Recruiter, Report Says." *NBC News*, October 30, 2014. http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-terror/denver-teens-chatted-online-isis-recruiter-report-says-n237666.

"Complaint Charging 3 in Brooklyn With Aiding the Islamic State." *The New York Times*, February 25, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/02/25/nyregion/criminal-complaint-charging-3-in-brooklyn-with-aiding-isis.html.

Dalgaard-Nielsen, Anja. *Studying Violent Radicalization in Europe I: The Potential of Social Movement Theory.* Copenhagen, Denmark: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2008. http://subweb.diis.dk/graphics/Publications/WP2008/WP08-2_Studying_Violent_Radicalization_in_Europe_I_-_The_Potential_Contribution_of_Social_Movement_Theory.pdf.

Daly, Michael. "How ISIS's Colorado Girls Were Caught." *The Daily Beast*, October 22, 2014. http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/10/22/how-three-colorado-teen-girls-headed-for-isis-and-were-caught.html.

DeMarche, Edmund. "3 Arrested in New York City for Allegedly Conspiring to Support ISIS." Text.Article. *FoxNews.com*, February 25, 2015. http://www.foxnews.com/us/2015/02/25/3-arrested-in-brooklyn-for-allegedly-consipring-to-support-isis/.

Eby, Cecil. *Between the Bullet and the Lie : American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War.* 1st edition. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969.

"Fact Sheet: UNSCR 2178 on Foreign Terrorist Fighters." *US Mission to the UN*, Fact Sheet. http://usun.state.gov/briefing/statements/232071.htm.

Fisher, Harry. *Comrades: Tales of a Brigadista in the Spanish Civil War.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999.

Friedland, Elliot. "Who's Who in the Syrian Civil War | Clarion Project." *ClarionProject.org*, May 7, 2014. http://www.clarionproject.org/factsheet/whos-who-syrian-war.

Gerassi, John. *The Premature Antifascists: North American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-39 : An Oral History.* New York: Praeger, 1986.

Haq, Husna. "ISIS Excels at Recruiting American Teens: Here Are Four Reasons Why." *Christian Science Monitor*, October 22, 2014. http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/USA-Update/2014/1022/ISIS-excels-at-recruiting-American-teens-Here-are-four-reasons-why-video.

Hasan, Mehdi. "How Islamic Is the Islamic State? Not at All." *The New Republic*, March 12, 2015. http://www.newrepublic.com/article/121286/how-islamic-islamic-state.

"Hashtag Terror: How ISIS Manipulates Social Media," August 21, 2014. http://www.adl.org/combating-hate/international-extremism-terrorism/c/isis-islamic-state-social-media.html.

Helfont, Tally. "The Foreign Fighter Problem: Recent Trends and Case Studies." *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, November 2010. http://www.fpri.org/articles/2010/11/foreign-fighter-problem-recent-trends-and-case-studies.

Jannah, Bird Of. "A-Z : HIJRAH AND LIFE IN THE ISLAMIC STATE (Part 1)." *Diary of a Traveler*. Accessed March 21, 2015. http://diary-of-a-muhajirah.tumblr.com/post/98456313069/a-z-hijrah-and-life-in-the-islamic-state-part.

Jervis, Robert. *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1976.

Katz, Rita. "Follow ISIS on Twitter: A Special Report on the Use of Social Media by Jihadists." *Insite Blog*, June 26, 2014. http://news.siteintelgroup.com/blog/index.php/entry/192-follow-isis-on-twitter-a-special-report-on-the-use-of-social-media-by-jihadists.

Klandermans, Bert, and Dirk Oegema. "Potentials, Networks, Motivations, and Barriers: Steps Towards Participation in Social Movements." *American Sociological Review* 52, no. 4 (August 1, 1987): 519–31. doi:10.2307/2095297.

Landis, Arthur H. *Death in the Olive Groves: American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939*. Rev Sub edition. New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1988.

———. *The Abraham Lincoln Brigade*. Citadel Press, 1968.

Maher, Shiraz. "From Portsmouth to Kobane: The British Jihadis Fighting for Isis." *New Statesman*, November 6, 2014. http://www.newstatesman.com/2014/10/portsmouth-kobane.

Makuch, Ben. "Want to Chat with a Western Jihadist? Try Ask.fm." *Motherboard*, May 8, 2014. http://motherboard.vice.com/read/want-to-chat-with-a-western-jihadist-try-askfm.

Malet, David. *Foreign Fighters: Transnational Identity in Civil Conflicts*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Masi, Alessandria. "How Foreign Fighters Joining ISIS Travel To The Islamic State Group's 'Caliphate.'" *International Business Times*, March 3, 2015. /viz/8f251178-c12e-11e4-87ac-0e853d047bba/embed_map.

McCauley, Clark, and Sophia Moskalenko. *Friction: How Radicalization Happens to Them and Us.* 1 edition. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Mendelsohn, Barak. "Foreign Fighters - Recent Trends." *Orbis* 55, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 189–202.

Perez, Evan, Pam Brown, and Ralph Ellis. "Officials: U.S. Wants to Know How ISIS Recruited 3 Denver Teens - CNN.com." *CNN*, November 13, 2014. http://www.cnn.com/2014/11/12/us/isis-teen-recruitment/index.html.

Post, Charlie. "The Popular Front: Rethinking CPUSA History." *Against The Current* 63 (August 1996). http://www.solidarity-us.org/node/2363.

Pozharskaya, Svetlana. "Comintern and the Spanish Civil War in Spain." *EBRE 38 Revista Internacional de La Guerra Civil 1936-1939* 1, no. 1 (2003): 47–56.

Prieto, Julie. "Partisanship in Balance: The New York Times Coverage of the Spanish Civil War, 1936- 1939." Standford University, 2006. http://www.alba-valb.org/search?SearchableText=partisanship+in+balance&submit.x=0&submit.y=0.

Rasmussen, Nicholas. *Countering Violent Islamist Extremism: The Urgent Threat of Foreign Fighters and Homegrown Terror.* Washington, D.C: Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2015. http://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/testimonies/209-congressional-testimonies-2015/1172-national-counterterrorism-center-director-nicholas-j-rasmussen-statement-for-the-record-before-the-hhsc.

Rolfe, Edwin. *The Lincoln Battalion: The Story Of The Americans Who Fought In Spain In The International Brigades.* New York: Kessinger Publishing, LLC, 1939.

Rosenstone, Robert A. "The Men of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion." *The Journal of American History* 54, no. 2 (September 1, 1967): 327–38. doi:10.2307/1894809.

Ryan, Michael. "Hot Issue: Dabiq: What Islamic State's New Magazine Tells Us about Their Strategic Direction, Recruitment Patterns and Guerrilla Doctrine." *The Jamestown Foundation*, August 1, 2014. http://www.jamestown.org/programs/tm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=42702&cHash=0efbd71af77fb92c064b9403dc8ea838%22%20%5Cl%20%22.U-JY7FYkhZg.

Sageman, Marc. *Understanding Terror Networks.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.

Santora, Marc, and Stephanie Clifford. "3 Brooklyn Men Accused of Plot to Aid ISIS' Fight." *The New York Times*, February 25, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/26/nyregion/3-men-in-brooklyn-charged-supporting-isis.html.

Serwer, Adam. "Accused Student Terrorist Was a Social Media
    Oversharer." *MSNBC,* March 25, 2014.
    http://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/instagram-social-media-
    terrorism-teausant.

Shane, Scott. "From Minneapolis to ISIS: An American's Path to Jihad."
    The New York Times, March 21, 2015.
    http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/22/world/middleeast/from-
    minneapolis-to-isis-an-americans-path-to-jihad.html.

Stern, Jessica, and J. M. Berger. *ISIS: The State of Terror.* New York:
    HarperCollins, 2015.

Stevens, Tim, and Peter Neumann. "Countering Online Radicalization: A
    Strategy for Action." International Centre for the Study of
    Radicalisation and Political Violence, 2009. http://icsr.info/wp-
    content/uploads/2012/10/1236768491ICSROnlineRadicalisation
    Report.pdf.

"Syria Profile - Timeline." *BBC News,* February 18, 2015.
    http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14703995.

Thinker, Democratic. "History of the Neutrality Act." *Democratic Thinker,*
    June 26, 2010.
    https://democraticthinker.wordpress.com/2010/06/26/history-
    of-the-neutrality-act/.

Thomas, Hugh. *The Spanish Civil War: Revised Edition.* Rev Upd edition.
    Modern Library, 2013.

Thompson, Robin. "Radicalization and the Use of Social Media." *Journal
    of Strategic Security* 4, no. 4 (January 1, 2011).
    doi:<p>http://dx.doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.4.4.8</p>.

"UN Says '25,000 Foreign Fighters' Joined Islamist Militants." *BBC News,*
    April 2, 2015. http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-
    32156541.

Weiss, Michael, and Hassan Hassan. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror.* New
    York, NY: Regan Arts., 2015.

Wood, Graeme. "What ISIS Really Wants." *The Atlantic,* February 15,
    2015.
    http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2015/02/what-isis-
    really-wants/384980/.

Zafar, Shaarik. "Western Foreign Fighters in Syria: Implications for U.S.
    CVE Efforts," March 14, 2014.
    http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-
    analysis/view/western-foreign-fighters-in-syria-implications-for-
    u.s.-cve-efforts.