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THE ISLAMIC STATE'S IDEOLOGY AND PROPAGANDA

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. McCANTS: Good morning, everyone. My name is Will McCants, I direct the Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World, here at the Brookings Institution. I'm very happy to welcome you here today.

We are launching two papers this morning. The first is by Cole Bunzel, it's called, *From Paper State to Caliphate*: *The Ideology of the Islamic State*. And the second paper is by J.M. Berger and Jonathon Morgan, called *The ISIS Twitter Census: Defining and Describing the Population of ISIS Supporters on Twitter*. We are just going to have a conversation this morning with the authors, and one of our invited discussants.

I'm going to introduce them. To my left is Anastasia Norton, who a Manager at Monitor 360, and an expert in Counterterrorism Strategic Communications. To her left is Cole Bunzel, who is a PhD Candidate in Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University. To his left is Jonathon Morgan, who is a Data Scientist and a Senior Developer at Ushahidi.

And J.M. Berger to his left; rounding us out, is a Nonresident Fellow, here at Brookings, and author of a new book, *ISIS the State of Terror*, which you can hear more about this month. We are doing a book launch on March 24th; that you are all invited to.

So, welcome, to all of you. This morning you can follow the conversation on Twitter, our hash tag is up there, it's #ISISpropaganda. We'll also be taking questions online, polite questions, or not so polite. You can tweet them @USIslanm, that's our Twitter handle.

I don't know if any of you have had a chance yet to read the papers, they are both really marvelous pieces of research, each in their own right. Cole Bunzel's Paper looks at a lot of the primary source documents from the Islamic State, stretching back for years to the time before the Islamic State was called Islamic State, and went by

al-Qaeda in Iraq.

JM and Jonathon's paper compiles a lot and creates a lot of new data on the ISIS Twitter population online, and I think it's the most thorough look at that population that we've had.

We are going to start with Cole's paper this morning. Sort of -- I've asked Cole to give us an overview of ISIS's ideology, because for many people it's still not clear. There's a vague sense that they are global Jihadists in some way related to al-Qaeda's vision, but on the other hand, I'm sure many of you have heard that the Islamic State has been fighting with al-Qaeda as well.

So, if Cole -- I'd appreciate if you could take 15 minutes to kind of walk us through your paper and, perhaps, as you are doing it, to give us the sense of some of the sources that you used in putting it together, because it goes far beyond your usual media accounts, and digs into a lot of obscure Arabic text, and synthesizes it, I think, in a way that's really accessible to readers. Cole?

MR. BUNZEL: Thanks, Will; and of course for inviting us and for commissioning our papers. And thanks to my Fellow Panelists for being here. I'm going to talk about the development and ideology of the Islamic State or ISIS. Since I only have 15 minutes, I'll just dive right in.

By way of introduction, I should note that the starting point of my analysis, as Will mentioned, is the importance of the Islamic State's own sources. Of understanding the group on its own terms, and I stress this at the outset of the paper for two reasons.

One is that the Islamic State takes a great deal of pride in its intelligibility, in the clarity of its message. When we discussed what makes this group attractive to potential recruits, which is not really something that my paper addresses; I think the intelligibility factor matters a great deal.

The Islamic State leaders are at great pains to make this point. The group's current official spokesman, a man named Abu Muhammad al-'Adnani, said in May 2012, if one wants to get to know -- if one wants to get to know the program of the Islamic State, its politics and its legal opinions, one ought to consult its leaders, its statements, its public addresses, its own sources. I do not like this man, but I do agree with his point.

The second reason that I stress the importance of the Islamic States' own sources, is that there are just so darned many of them. It's really quite astonishing. To be clear, I'm not referring to the daily output from the group, that we are used to seeing today, but rather the group's ideological production that goes all the way back to 2006.

This includes, for example, 17 hours of audio statements from the group's first two leaders, issued between 2006 and 2010, it also includes a 90-page document from 2007; that is something of the group's Founding Charter. Likewise, there have been scholarly debates among Jihadis over the legitimacy of this group, going back to 2007.

So what does all this material, all these speeches and all this literature tell us? For the purposes of this discussion, I'll try to focus on just three things. The first concerns ideology. What I call the Islamic State's brand of Jihadi Salafism. A lot has been written recently, as I'm sure you all know, about just how Islamic is the Islamic State. I've seen little discussion, however, of how the group, in its own words, inscribes itself into the Islamic tradition.

It does claim, of course, to represent authentic Islam generally, but it also inscribes itself within a very specific and a very narrow tradition of Islamic political thought that is called, and it calls it itself, Jihadi-Salafism, which encompasses both al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, and it's their term that the Jihadis use themselves.

Just to give an example, the Islamic State leaders have described themselves as, "Part of the current of Jihadi-Salafism," and appealed to "all the Sunnis and to the young men of Jihadi-Salafism in particular." So, in my opinion, we are not really at war with violent extremism, whatever that is, but rather with this particular ideology.

To give a little more background, Jihadi-Salafism is a school of Sunni Islamic political thought that, in my opinion, emerges in the later 20th Century, that combines elements of both Muslim Brotherhood activism, such as the emphasis on restoring the Caliphate, with elements of Salafism or Wahhabism; such as the aversion to Shihs and the desire to root out all manifestation of idolatry.

Over time, however, Jihadism, or Jihadi-Salafism has increasingly emphasized this Salafi dimension. Salafism or Wahhabism, as you may know, is the Purist Movement that is largely native to Saudi Arabia, and the Islamic State today emphases, its most violence and exclusivist attributes, and really claims the mantel of Wahhabism.

It uses, very often, Saudi Arabia's own sources against itself. So this very harsh version of Jihadi-Salafism begins with Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, the Jordanian Founder of al-Qaeda and Iraq founded that group in 2004, and his heirs in the Islamic State today have consistently espoused this brand of his ideology. Well, al-Qaeda in comparison, offers an ideology that might be called something like Jihadi-Salafism Light. Or what the Arab press is now starting to call Moderate Jihadi-Salafism. I'm not -- I couldn't believe my eyes.

But what makes this even a little more complicated is that the Jihadi-Salafism Light, or Moderate Jihadi-Salafism of al-Qaeda is actually, in my opinion, more threatening to the United States, being focused as it is on attacking the so-called far enemy, meaning us, whereas the Islamic State brand of Jihadi-Salafism is more

threatening to the Middle East, being focused on the so-called near enemy, meaning them, or Middle Eastern regimes, in particular. I can talk more about this in the Q&A.

The second thing that emerges from examining the Islamic State's own sources is that the group is actually a great deal older than one might think. It did not emerge in 2013, but rather as born as the Islamic State of Iraq, on October 15, 2006. Precisely 3,071 days ago, and we know the exact number of days because since 2007, the Jihadi forums that are online today and will, of course, read, have featured a banner counting the number of days elapsed since this crucial founding moment.

Today this banner reads, and I'll quote it, "3,071 days have passed since the announcement of the Islamic State, and the coming hope of the Muslim community, and it will persist, God willing." And you should note that -- you should notice that it doesn't say, the Islamic State of Iraq, it says, the Islamic State. So even though the official name of this group was, in 2006, the Islamic State of Iraq, it was also known in shorthand, just as the Islamic State, the same Islamic State that exists today, or will be like they call ISIS or ISIL.

The third thing that we learn is that the Islamic State was intended from the beginning to do really exactly what it has done since 2013. It was founded as the banner that I've quoted suggests, with a view to becoming this long-awaited Caliphate, it would begin as proto-caliphal state, the kernel of the renaissance caliphate, and expand from its base in Iraq to announce itself ultimately as the full-fledged caliphate, expanding across the world.

So, in my view, partly what makes the Islamic States leaders so tenacious today, so persistent, and so violent, is that for nearly eight years, until 2013, their State building project was a failure and it was mocked as a joke. So only now are they fulfilling their original caliphal plan, and they are not going to let go of that long-won success very easily.

I should add also that, it's not just the Islamic State sources that show how old the Iraq-based Caliphate strategy is, but also official al-Qaeda documents, some of which were never intended for us to see, -- Okay. So, indeed there was actually a kind of joint Zarqawi, al-Qaeda project for developing a Caliphate in Iraq, that goes back to as late as 2001.

MR. McCANTS: Can you say something quickly about what the Caliphate is?

MR. BUNZEL: Yeah. The Caliphate is the word that in Islamic law is kind of coterminous with the global Islamic Empire. It's supposed to be a unitary state that is expansionary, and it is, you know, described in the legal books as the kind of ideal Islamic polity that would have one leader, one head, and ultimately would kind of go across the world, and the -- it's also kind of coterminous with the original Islamic State founded by the Prophet Muhammad in Arabia in the 7th Century. But it has had also very different meanings across time. I can't get into all that.

So what I wanted to say was that this plan for the Caliphate, the renewed Caliphate, was conceived in late 2001, or early 2002, by Zarqawi and by al-Qaeda in, of all places, Iran. Following the Afghanistan invasion, the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, Zarqawi, who was not a member of al-Qaeda at the time, he fled Afghanistan to Iran, and he discussed his plans there to relocate to Iraq, and to found there a proto-caliphal state.

He spoke with a man named Sayf al-'Adl, who is a senior al-Qaeda operative, an Egyptian, and according to Sayf al-'Adl, they both agreed at this time that Zarqawi should go to Iraq and found this state. So, from 2002 to 2006, both Zarqawi and al-Qaeda were really on the same page when I came to this Caliphate Strategy. And it would ultimately, they said, become the Caliphate, first starting as a state in Iraq and then expanding.

And in 2005, as I've been able to find, three al-Qaeda leaders wrote

Zarqawi urging him, establish this state in Iraq; Sayf al-'Adl Ayman, al-Zawahiri, and a man named Attiya Allah al-Libi, or Attiya ad Rahan. And Zarqawi himself spoke repeatedly about setting up the state, and in April 2006, he even said in a video that I hope within three months to be able to found an Emirate in Iraq.

Within two months, however, he was killed, nonetheless the Caliphate strategy went ahead. The state was founded in October 2006, it was known, as I said, the Islamic State of Iraq, but it was also seen as a larger project, as the Islamic State that just happened to be in Iraq for the moment, but would ultimately expand farther.

MR. McCANTS: So the ambiguity was deliberate, in a way? This play on the Islamic State of Iraq versus in Iraq, is it the Caliphate, or is just a state that's confined to these national borders, that was intentional?

MR. BUNZEL: Yeah. I think so, and the original leader of the group, a man named Abu Umar al-Baghdadi, he was, he took the title amir al-mu'minin, or the Commander of the Faithful, which is in Islamic history the term used for caliphs. So what he didn't say in 2006; look, I'm the Caliph, he certainly wore a kind a caliphal garb used caliphal nomenclature. There was a lot of ambiguity there.

To get back to this stuff; the reason, however, we see the Islamic State not as having been founded in 2006, it's that until 2013 we tended to call this group al-Qaeda in Iraq or AQI. And conventional wisdom tended to hold that AQI, really just changed its name to the Islamic State of Iraq in 2006; that nothing really fundamentally had changed. And that the Islamic State of Iraq was really just a front for al-Qaeda, and both regional and western media, insisted on an AQI label, and if you listen to the speeches of these leaders at the time, they are actually quite furious that they are not getting any recognition for being a state.

They complained; stop calling us al-Qaeda, we are a State now, even I mean, as Zawahiri said; look, there's no such thing al-Qaeda in Iraq, the state-building

project has commenced. However, they evidently did not get any recognition as a state, and even Jihadis ridiculed them at the time for being what they called a "Paper State" which is exactly really what it was.

It was an insurgent group masquerading as a polity, until of course the events that we are familiar with, the expansion to Syria in April 2013, the conquest of Iraq, or much of Iraq, the summer of 2014, and the Caliphate Declaration at the end of June. And the upshot of all this is, well, I'll finish with three things.

The first is that the Caliphate Declaration in 2014 was a long time coming. Will has mentioned this point before, so I'm plagiarizing him, briefly. It was shocking, yes, but what it really did was to bring to fruition a plan that was conceived 12 years prior. It formalized the Islamic State Caliphal status which, since 2006, had been ambiguous.

The second point is that the Islamic State is not really, and this is where I think I disagree with Will, it's not really, in my opinion, and al-Qaeda offshoot or a spinoff, as it is commonly described. At the very least the situation is much more complicated. The relationship between al-Qaeda and Zarqawi, and his heirs, has always been very troubled, as I document in the paper. In addition, Zarqawi and now ISIS, they've always represented this much more severe form of Jihadi ideology than al-Qaeda has.

Something that that is evident as far back as the 1990s, when Zarqawi set up a training camp on the other side of Afghanistan, from Bin Laden, and seemed rather wary of being too close with him, partly because he didn't think that Bin Laden was willing enough to hereticize -- pronounce that fear on the Saudi family. Today the Islamic State claims and possibly with justification that it never pledged to fealty to al-Qaeda or *bay'a*. It might be more accurate to say then, that it is actually al-Qaeda that walked away from the Islamic State, and not the Islamic State that walked away from al-Qaeda.

The third and final point I'll make concerns leadership. The Islamic

State's success since 2013, while contingent on numerous factors from the Arab Spring to the Syrian Civil War, that seems to me to be inconceivable really, without the current level of leadership that the group has, and I don't think this gets sufficient attention.

I mean, the impressive quality of the current leaders. The so-called Caliph Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī, the speaker, Abu Muhammad al-'Adnani; and the young Bahraini ideologue, Turki al-Bin'ali; these men are, objectively speaking, learned, eloquent, and most important, effective; whereas, their predecessors, Abu Umar al-Baghdadi, and Abu Hamza al-Muhajir who died 2010, were none of these things.

These men didn't even really pronounce Arabic very well. I've listened to all their speeches, and made notes in margins of all of the errors that they made. It's remarkable. The current leaders would never do -- make such errors. Also the first Baghdadi, Abu Umar al-Baghdadi, was for years rumored to be a fictional character played by an actor. And even the U.S. Military bought into this at one point.

So if you listen to his speeches, he's often saying; look, you recognize my voice, I'm not a fictional character, I'm a real person, and it's just astounding. So I highly doubt that these incompetent men were still in charge of the Islamic state today, that the group would have done so well, since 2013, which is to say that Jihadi leaders are not billiard balls, it matters who is in charge, and that it would be significant if these men were eliminated.

MR. McCANTS: Thank you.

MR. BUNZEL: Thanks.

MR. McCANTS: JM, another factor -- that's often cited in the media for ISIS's success, particularly in attracting foreign fighters, has been its use of social media, especially Twitter. Do you agree with that, with that assessment? I mean, has Twitter had that big of an impact, or is just had an impact in shaping Western perceptions of the ISIS threat.

MR. BERGER: I think it really has had a big impact, and not just Twitter, but media, all media, going from their propaganda releases, their written text, obviously Twitter is kind of the easiest one to get your head around in a lot of different ways, both technically and conceptually. But certainly, you know, they are also on Facebook, they are on Instagram, they are on Tumblr, everything but My Space, so I think that --

MS. NORTON: They even have a Pinterest page.

MR. BERGER: That would not surprise me at all actually.

MR. McCANTS: A Blogspot too.

MR. BERGER: Yeah. Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. And more, and they are trying to create their own, and media is important to them. Projection is important to them. One of the things that I've come to conclude over the course of the last six months, and sort of sitting down to write the book, and be really intensely invested in this, and thinking about it for so long as that, the projection of an image of strength is critical to the success that they are having, and I think that the caliphal dressing is also obviously a crucial part of that.

But their ability to put that message out, and to project an image of invincibility, and an image of power is the reason we see ISIS succeeding in ways that al-Qaeda didn't. And I think that it's very deliberate, and I think it -- you know, their underpinning this is a decision to invert the traditional extremist narrative.

So, the extremist groups, identify groups, like this, that have a very high level of exclusion and violence toward outsiders, over the course of time, over the last 100 years, 150 years, what we've seen is those groups, generally, are built on a narrative of weakness. So we are under attack. Our identity group, whether it's White people, or Muslims, or a particular ethnic group in a country, it's we are under attack, we need to defend ourselves, we need to use these extreme tactics because we are not strong enough to fight back and take control ourselves.

And ISIS has turned all of that its head. They are keeping the exclusionary identity, but they are saying; sign up with us because we are winners. And the contrast to that is pretty sharp. When you look at the messaging of al-Qaeda, when you look its external messaging, propaganda, you know, people who are interested in Jihadism have never had a message like that before.

And then it's combined with this extreme level of violence which is going to be exciting and agitating to a certain -- certain potential clients and recruits, and the ability to project that message is part of this. So you can have the world's greatest propaganda piece, but if nobody reads it, who cares?

And so, that's where social media comes in, and Twitter has been the most visible place that this has happened. Twitter has risen to the fore for a couple of reasons, first off, out of all these different large social media platforms it has been the least inclined to interfere with the activities of its users. So, Facebook and YouTube came under fire earlier in this process, because they've been around for longer.

Around the time that Emeril Lagasse videos were really exploding, and that, sort of, forced them to have their crisis of confrontation with this, and what are we going to do about the presence of material advocating violence on our platforms? So they have mechanisms now that are built in that involve terrorism. You can flag a Facebook post, or a group, or a YouTube video for supporting terrorism, and that's grounds for suspension.

Twitter does not -- still does not have a specific category of offense that is related to terrorism, that you can report an account and have it suspended. So, as the pressure increased on all these other platforms, ISIS supporters moved to Twitter in very large numbers, and they were supported in that they had a very -- they have a very smart strategy. The people who run it, are technically-minded, they understand social media, they use a lot of manipulative tactics to get their message across.

They understand how to game the system, and they have enough numbers to do that. So, as a -- it's set out to, sort of, define this group for the paper, and because for some time now, people have been talking about this at a very loud volume sometimes without any -- really having any kind of concrete numbers that were derived in any kind of transparent way. So you tune into a story, and some company says; oh, ISIS has 100,000 supporters on Twitter, but you don't know where that number comes from, or what they mean by supporters.

And in addition to that Twitter, in September of last year, started to really crack down on these accounts, after the James Foley beheading video was released. And they began a program of suspensions, and it sort of renewed a debate that's been going on for some years now, really going back to the forum days, about whether it's better to take these guys offline somehow. Or whether it's better to leave them online for -- so we can collect intelligence from them, and do suspensions do any good at all in the first to suppress their message.

This is an often heated discussion that is almost never informed by real substantial data, and since Twitter is very friendly to understanding it in the context of data, this is a good opportunity for us to sort of pick this up and look at that question.

So we found, unfortunately, that if we had started two months earlier, we would have had a perfect comparison set pre-suspensions and post-suspensions. Unfortunately Twitter started suspending these accounts about a couple of weeks before we started collecting information on them. So what we have is early suspension data versus later suspension data. So it's not -- we didn't get a perfect comparison, but what we did see is that there are really some patterns going on.

So, we found a total -- from the amount of time it took us to collect the data and analyze it was about a month, a little bit more than a month, and over that period of time, we were able estimate there were about 46,000, a minimum of 46,000

ISIS support accounts active on Twitter. That included some accounts that were suspended and subsequently returned. So it wasn't like on any given day there wasn't necessarily 46,000 accounts.

MR. McCANTS: JM, is there a person behind each account, or are some of those --

MR. BERGER: We didn't try to tackle that problem, there are ways that you can sort of address it, but certainly some of these accounts have multiple -- one user keeping up multiple accounts. I don't think it's a statistically significant percentage but the most active accounts and the most visible ones that we end up talking about a lot are often going to be that kind of situation.

So, you know, where you would see that more often is, in this group of users that ISIS calls the Muchtar IDM, these are the industrious users, there are about 500 to 3,000 at any given time, Twitter accounts that tweet all day. They tweet hundred of tweets a day. The tweet the same material over and over and over again, very consistently, and those users, are the whole reason that we talk about this at all.

They are the ones who are able to make videos disseminate through the network very quickly. They are the ones who were, before the suspension started, able to, you know, insert ISIS content into unrelated hash tags. So, last June, if you were searching for woolcop hash tag in Arabic you would get pictures of ISIS executing prisoners. If you searched in Baghdad in Arabic, after Fall of Mosul, you got a banner that said; we are coming Baghdad.

That kind of activity is really fueled by those 500 to 3,000 accounts and a lot of those accounts are probably single-user controlling multiple accounts. So, those accounts we found, were also the ones that were being target most heavily by this -- in the suspensions, which is probably organic, it probably, we don't know for sure how, exactly how these suspensions are coming about.

To some extent users are reporting it, there are organized campaigns of people who've reported ISIS accounts now, and then flag them for suspension by Twitter. I tend to think that Twitter is also taking some initiative in suspending these accounts, but however it's coming about, and I think it's probably organic, these Moshe Tahidoon accounts are the ones that are really getting slammed.

We found that on average, the accounts that were getting suspended had about twice as many accounts -- as followers as the ones that didn't get suspended, and they received 10 times as many retweets and they tweeted about four times as often. So, a good way to get suspended if you are an ISIS supporter is to have a lot of followers, tweet all the time, and get a lot of retweets, to be very popular.

So this stuff is having an effect on the network, and again, you know, with serious caveats for imperfect comparisons, what we found was that the network was functioning less efficiently. We saw that retweets received from people inside the network dropped pretty substantially, and retweets from people outside the network increased slightly from October to about January.

When I say out of network what it means is people who were not -- when we analyzed these retweets we would like -- we collected the people, we knew where ISIS supporters and all of their friends, and that's the network, so when you get network -- in-network retweets you are getting more retweets from ISIS supporters basically. Out of network retweets in this case, does not necessarily mean they are not ISIS supporters, these are also new accounts, because of the amount of time it takes us to do the analysis. Some new accounts that popped up would show up as out-of-network.

So we saw different -- you know, we looked at a lot of different metrics, and we saw, essentially, it looked like -- to us -- like there was a drop off in most of the -- most of the metrics that you would use to measure success here. Except for one, which was the number of followers they had, and I'm going to come back to that in a second.

What we also saw was that all this hash tag spamming activity has pretty much come to an end. They'll still try and do it, but they can't do it anymore, they can't generate the volumes that are required to show in a search result or get your hash tag aggregated.

In fact, the last time I saw the ISIS hash tag being aggregated, was when an army of Japanese spam box started feeding malware into the system, on the official ISIS hash tag last week, at a very high level of volumes. ISIS is now, as opposed to June, last June at their peak, this was a really powerful force of large, active accounts that were mostly untouchable and operating at a very high volume, and they were able to dominate discussion.

And what we see now is that they vulnerable to trolling and spamming, and we are seeing a lot more people do that. So there are companies in the Persian Gulf that sell retweets, and we are seeing like retweets in Arabic that says; a bunch of (inaudible) guys got killed today; ha-ha-ha. And then somebody pays to get, you know, 10,000 retweets of that tweet, and it pumps it into that network.

So ISIS is often getting outperformed on its own hash tag on a daily basis now, and sometimes by 4 or 5 to 1. So, I mean, that really, to me, is one of the most dramatic impacts of this. We also saw that new account creation has dropped off, although there's some up and down with it. In September, when the suspensions really started in earnest, there was a spike in the creation of new accounts.

So, you know, we counted doing the first set of 20,000 accounts that we use for our demographics analysis, we counted about 3,000 accounts that had been created in September; and a lot of those were probably new accounts that were being created in response to suspensions. Since then, it's dropped, the exact numbers we don't have a comparison set, but we basically saw it drop to about a third of the level that it was in September, and then started to creep back up in January and February and

suspensions got more aggressive again.

We don't know, completely know how many suspensions have occurred. We were able to count 1,000 suspensions that we were sure were ISIS supporters, and then there were 18,000 suspensions that, because they were suspended at a certain point in our process, we weren't able to get enough data to tell if they were ISIS supporters.

Based on a statement that Twitter made to the *New York Times* last week, I'm inclined to think that most of those suspensions are ISIS supporters and certainly, given that a lot of these accounts will pop and get knocked down very quickly, there's probably even more than that. So by any measure, if you look at that estimate, if you take the 19,000 estimate as a low-end kind of figure, and you compare it to the accounts created and to just, you know, assume that we are not capturing all the accounts created, suspensions are outpacing new account creation.

And so when we went to recreate the network, we tried to do a -- you know, to create this comparison group, we wanted to create a very similar group, and so we used similar starting point to try and collect a new network, and what I found was, is that I had to keep widening the criteria for the starting point to get any kind of concrete numbers.

So, where in the first one we used about 450 seed accounts, we collected everybody they followed, and that gave us 49,000 accounts out of which we were able to estimate about 30,000 were ISIS supporters. So when I went back with a similar number of seeds that were selected in the same way in January, I got 15,000, and then I did it again and I got 20,000, and then I got 22,000.

So the network is shrinking, you know, and we don't -- one of the reasons for doing this paper was to sort of propose a methodology where you could create a set that we could monitor on an ongoing basis, and create truly good

comparison data. So, I mean, I think that's a next step ahead in the research, is to sort of take this and then implement it on an ongoing basis.

But what we see so far, I mean, it's very encouraging. Now, the one thing, you know, possible dark side in this, aside from, you know, the many complicated issues around suspensions that everybody has. Opinions about it, you know, there's a free speech kind of issue, there's also a perception issue. A lot of -- I've gotten a lot of pushback on our assessment. Did suspensions work? Which reminds me of discussions over climate change; it's like, it's snowing outside my window, so global warming doesn't exist.

You know, the data here is not the perfect data set that I would have liked to have, but its way more data than anybody else has looked at on the subject. So, you know, just because you are following some ISIS accounts that are tweeting successfully, doesn't mean the suspensions aren't accomplishing something.

One thing that they are accomplishing that may not be desirable for us, is it's pushing these guys into a box, so as you suspend these accounts, when they come back, they are more and more focused. They follow the essential ISIS accounts, they are not going to follow as much noise, they are not going to spend as much time building up a follower list, because they know they are going to get suspended again.

So, essentially what we are seeing is they are talking more and more to each other, and less and less to outsiders. And ISIS is a very extreme group. It's not as susceptible to outside influences other groups would be to start with, but the social dynamic would be creating an environment in which it's much more risk of radicalization once you get into the network.

So it's harder to get into the network, the content is not being broadcast out, they are not drawing in curiosity seekers, in the same that they used to, but if you get into the network, you are entering a giant echo chamber of epic proportions. And you are

-- essentially, you know, it's becoming a much more insular community online, and I think that, you know, one area that I would suggest is, a good place to study going forward would be to really look at how accounts that enter the network behave.

How quickly they follow other accounts. You have to be able to sort of distinguish, I think, there's a pretty distinct pattern at this point when you see an account coming back from suspension we could tag those pretty quickly by the speed which they accrue followers. But if a new account enters the network, you know, what's the path for that person? And to sort of look at that and see if, you know -- letting them be on here at a reduced level, so that we can preserve or intelligence gains, but keep them from broadcasting as effectively as they used to.

Is it going to have some side effects? It's essentially social engineering. When you manipulate some of these social network, it's an act of social engineering, and we have to understand the behaviors will change as a result of that, so I mean, I would like to see or do some study of that going forward and see some of those effects.

MR. McCANTS: Thank you. Jonathon, I have two questions for you, one is, just doing the nuts and bolts research for the paper, you know, the big buzz phrase that's gone around, at least in the government for the past few years, is big data, and it's particularly talked about in the context of social media. My first question is, would you describe this project as a big-data project?

And my second question is more abstract, and really in many ways impossible to answer, but nevertheless I'm going to ask it.

MR. MORGAN: I'll give it a shot though.

MR. McCANTS: Does any of the stuff -- any of this propaganda going out on social media, does it have any real effect on radicalization? And how would you be able to tell?

MR. MORGAN: Well, to answer the first question it's difficult to put big

data in context, because it's such a widely-used term. So for shorthand, let's say, it's anything that you couldn't do on your laptop. You'd need some complicated computing machinery. And for me, we are right at the edge of that. And I think what we'd like to talk about in these sort of questions is -- or in these sorts of problems, is that what you are doing regardless of whether you'd like big data or not, start with a question, and then get the right amount of data to answer your question in the most simple way.

And so for us, I don't know that I would label this as a big-data exercise, because we didn't need to get into that territory in order to capture the data that we did, and reach the conclusions that we were able to reach. I'd say, to take this further, to do an even more expansive look at a much larger network, then we'd be approaching -- we'd be approaching something that would be more like big data and then it would be a more complicated procedure.

The reason that I think that kind of research would be important, it kind of leads right into your second question, is that I do think that there's a clear relationship between the type of propaganda that ISIS is publishing, and the degree to which they are able to target vulnerable individuals, who are sort of ripe for radicalization.

And what's really interesting -- what's really interesting about the types of data that we were able to collect from a group that operates so heavily on a social network like Twitter, is that we can, in effect, reduce radicalization to a numbers game. So we are quantifying behavior in a way that wasn't possible before.

MR. McCANTS: And can you -- Jonathon, can you see people on the -- sort of the margins of the network moving towards the center over time?

MR. MORGAN: We can definitely recognize and quantify behavior, just that, and that's what sort of interesting about this I think is I think there's a certain amount of reading of tea leaves when you are digesting messaging only, only content, but if you can actually observe an individual's behavior in some way, then to me, that's a very clear

indicator of their path.

MR. McCANTS: Their behavior in relationship to people we know who are hardcore, it's supporters of an insurgent group, or a terrorist organization?

MR. MORGAN: Yeah. Absolutely, because these are network structure, so my proximity to a particular group of people and my interactions with them as that --

MR. McCANTS: Online.

MR. MORGAN: -- online -- and my proximity to their network online, and as that sort of user moves closer and closer to that group and behavior changes, that's a quantifiable difference and that's sort of where this -- I think that would be a valuable next step for this sort of research, is to look at that trajectory over time, and really understand how it is that somebody becomes radicalized in a quantifiable way, not just -- maybe in addition to the more qualitative discussion that we usually have about this sort of thing.

MR. McCANTS: Yeah?

MR. BERGER: I wanted to add to that. I mean I think the evidence for radicalization in social media is pretty overwhelming at this point. We have, you know, dozens to hundreds of cases for people who were introduced as material of social media recruited and made their plans to travel, and coordinated their travel, and all of that happening on social media. So that part, I mean, is pretty straightforward.

I think, you know, one thing that we need to think about when we start creating a typography for the next stage of kind of research on this, is creating a bestiary of different kinds of accounts, because not every account is going to follow the same track in the same way that not every person follows the same track on radicalization.

So, some people will gravitate into sort of the centrality of the network, whereas other people, for instance, I looked at the Belgian sleeper cell suspect who was being a couple of months ago, and he maintained multiple of accounts, some of which were way on the fringe of the network, and others which were very deep in the network.

So understanding when we know who some of these people are and we can go back and look at their networks and we can build a profile that we can use to look at new people coming in.

MR. McCANTS: Right. And so, Anastasia, that brings me to my question, which is about how the government uses this kind of data. I mean, I remember when I was at the State Department, and asking the intelligence community for a sense of how members of extremist organizations were promoting themselves and their causes online and how they were connecting to one another.

There was an appreciation in the intelligence community for that kind of data, but I also got the sense that oftentimes a lot of those agencies weren't -- that wasn't their primary focus, and they were still pulling in other sources of data. Not open source, to inform the kind of analyses they were doing.

And I wonder if you can talk about, in a general way; how the government and how the analytical community on the outside has to adjust its way of thinking about extremist organizations, given that they are connecting with one another in real time online, in full public view, because this is different than what I was working on just 10 years ago, where a lot of these discussions were happening behind password-protected forums, that were owned by extremist communities themselves.

They had a lot more control, now you see a lot of these same folks moving into privately-owned social networks owned by companies, how does this change the way that we study these groups?

MS. NORTON: Yes, I think -- well, that's sort of the key question for me. I would say over the last decade the intelligence community, the national security community, had gotten really good at what I would say -- I'll borrow an analogy from a really good friend of mine -- hunting at night, they got really good at sort of developing tools to uncover clandestine networks, whoever those were online, in the physical space

as well.

And that requires a particular toolset, so you can imagine like really powerful flashlights that kind of shine in dark corners and figure out, you know, who do we need to look at? Who is important in this network? Who is having an impact?

But I will say, with ISIL's rise over the last several years, and the extremist communities' move to social networks to these very visible places, we've now, I think, shifted into this area of hunting during the day. And hunting during the day requires a completely new skill set and completely new tools to be able to use to sort of shine a light, and we don't need lights anymore, right.

We now need a way to separate signal from noise, and I think sort of the work that my fellow (inaudible) have done, really helps us sort of think through that. The company that I'm with now, Monitor 360, we've been trying to really think about this and figure out what are the tools that we can use in this open source environment to help us distinguish between all of the noise, like there are a lot of people online now talking about ISIL, spreading ISIL propaganda, but for what purpose? And can we really point to a change in offline behavior?

And so that's one of the things that I'm really interested in sort of thinking through. A couple of questions that I just wrote down, that I think are incredibly important for the national security community, and for analysts outside as well. Who and what matters online? What tools can be used to triage information in this online space? How do we discover influential networks and nodes? And what do we mean by influence?

How can we measure effectiveness and resonance of extremist propaganda? How do we get better at predicting where rhetoric may actually translate into action? So, where propaganda or what I'm seeing online may actually cause me to travel to Syria, or to sort of take over -- doing attack in my own country? And then how do I -- and this is one of the places I think is richest for investigation -- How do we identify

the different roles online?

So if you can think of terrorism as a system, right, we understood the system in the outside world, right? You've got leaders, and foot soldiers, and funders, and facilitators and trainers, that's what exists in the sort of terrorist system. What does that terrorist system look like online? Who are the people that are initiating the propaganda? And I think JM's paper gets to this, right.

The official accounts, but then who are the ones that curate that information, that spread that information. So really thinking about the different roles someone may play online, and then how you go about countering that most effectively. Also looking at, sort of, role movements, what you just mentioned, the ability to move from one part of a network to another, do we see that translating into offline behavior?

At Monitor, we are really trying to think through these methodologies and to try to couple social network analysis, with content analysis, with longitudinal analysis, and with sentiment analysis, right. How can we combine all of these different tools we have access to, to understand the online space in any way? Does that -- you know, can we develop methodologies that really help us understand influence? Who is influential, not just someone who gets retweeted, but someone that can actually inspire and motivate me to travel to a conflict zone, for example.

MR. McCANTS: Thank you. Cole, one of the things that's really striking about ISIS, particularly in contrast with the other al-Qaeda affiliates, is it's not really pitching its message to the masses. I mean, it is much more narrow-casting, and in using acts of extreme brutality, one is a deterrent, to outside enemies, but two, as kind of a calling card to attract young people who would be interested in that kind of extreme violence.

You went through a lot of the Islamic State's documents where they were trying to justify these extreme acts, and they pull a lot on the Islamic tradition to do so.

And I won't ask you a big question about how Islamic the group is, but I wonder if we can get at it another way. What is the specific tradition, religious tradition within Islam that they are drawing on, to justify their actions?

And in what ways are they departing from tradition, in order to justify extreme acts of brutality that don't always -- are oftentimes seem to be in direct contravention of Islamic norms of warfare?

MR. BUNZEL: Sure. And that's a big question. If you read the ideologues, both the official ideologues of the group, and the ones who are more amateur, amateurish ideologues, many of whom and anonymous online, and have Twitter accounts, they are very, clearly trying to appeal to Salafism. They identify as the only true Salafi Muslims, and they often use a lot of the literature that is produced in -- has been produced in Saudi Arabia since the 18th Century, which tends to focus on things; like the necessity of killing all the Shi'a, the importance of destroying any kind of manifestation of idolatry.

Just to give an example of the way that they have appealed to Islamic tradition and defending their brutality, there are a lot of accounts -- I'm not sure how much you guys deal with these, because I'm mostly interested in ideology, there are accounts dedicated solely to ideology, and their productivity is really astounding. They produce so much material it would be impossible to read all of it.

It produced every week, books, essays and poems, defending just about everything they did. So following the immolation of the Jordanian pilot recently, I've counted at least 12 essays, the longest one being about 50 pages that have been issued by these sort of amateur Twitter media agencies, and one of them is called The Strangers Media Agency. It's the most popular and today is on its 15th account.

And they dip into scripture and to the legal history, and they often -- you know, they do adhere to -- or try to adhere to a very particular Islamic tradition. But that

tradition is mostly theological. So it's about, you know, what is God, and what are His attributes, and things like that. But when it comes to brutality and acts of brutality, they will just look at any Islamic Jurist over the 14 centuries of Islam who might have said something favorable about immolation, for example.

And there are a lot of them, and so they quote all these things, and they say to the Islamic State opponents, how could you possibly accuse us of not adhering to tradition, it's right here, it's in the law books. And in one instance, they even republished an essay on the permissibility of immolation, that had been published previously by a scholar and I think it was the Islamic University Madinah, in Saudi Arabia, and just said; look, we are not even worse than these people.

MR. McCANTS: And JM, and I'll throw it open after this one, but JM are the ISIS fan boys online, are they just constantly pushing ISIS talking points? Or do they ever generate their own, to kind of make it up, the organization? And also do you see any give and take with the outside world? Do you see any ISIS supporter saying; hmm, I hadn't thought of it in that way. Maybe I'm changing my mind. Or are they all pretty much in lockstep?

MR. BERGER: So, basically, as far as the first part of the question, the fan boys are pretty copiously full of ideas. So they are always pitching; it rarely, rarely gets up to the top level; usually the stuff that trends within this closed community is stuff that's being pushed by their social media team, and their social media activist. There are certainly some of their -- for instance there's varying degrees of officialness to their media outlets.

So African is official, official. And then you have like as A Ready media that's not really official, but it's super, super popular, and that's, out of all of them, probably the most influential of the not-officially sanctioned accounts, and that doesn't mean that he's not actually officially sanctioned, but he just not claim to be officially

sanctioned.

So in terms of sort of the more inside, outside, you know, are there signs of dissent in here? The fan boys are pretty consistently on message, and the most visible accounts and the most prolific accounts are pretty consistently on message. There are clusters of smaller accounts where actual conversations happen, and where a certain amount of doubt is expressed.

But it's pretty unusual to see that reach any kind of critical mass. So you'll see little perturbances of controversy here and there, along the fringes of the network. In the inside of the network, really in the interior where a lot of this interaction is taking place not so much. When it does happen they flock over -- I mean, you know, they swarm over the guy. So I think it's pretty difficult to be an ISIS dissenter.

I was really interested in the thought that Cole translated last week on Jihadica, because that's sort of -- in a way is much more clear sign of where some of these internal fault lines probably exist than what their people feel comfortable saying in public or on social media, because I presume that a lot of these thoughts came from people asking questions. Like, can I go home now? And that was like, how many of those fellows were; no, you can't go home.

SPEAKER: Three.

MR. BERGER: Three, so you know, more than one persons asking questions, so they are -- it's not a real tolerant group.

MS. NORTON: You can tag along.

MR. McCANTS: I'm going to throw it open for questions, now, we've got one right here.

MR. SHORT: My name is Steven Short. It is, I believe, not an uncommon phenomenon for people -- typically young men to believe they have found absolute truth and risk their lives in the name of a sacred cause. Whether this is people

like Lafayette in the American Revolution, or the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in the Spanish Civil War. But always there is a, what I call, the-God-that-failed syndrome, of people who, however fervently they believe, come to see the error of their ways. And I wonder if the U.S. Government has any means of debriefing people who have reached the-God-that-failed, state of mind.

MR. McCANTS: Thank you. And I'm going to take two more questions, and then we'll come back to the panel. Yes, here?

MR. PLIS: Hi. My name is Ivan Plis, and I'm a Reporter at the Daily Caller News Foundation. I wonder if anyone on stage heard about the latest attempted move to platform. There is a Khilafa Book that, you know, some ISIS supporters tried to start up, on a sort of do-it-yourself social media platform, and was taken down, I think, less than a day later; Anonymous may have been involved.

Are you sort of seeing something like this, or sort of other attempted realignment moves to other platforms as Twitter is becoming increasingly policed? Or sort of -- if you've heard about this in particular, I'd love to hear your take on it as well.

MR. McCANTS: We'll move right behind.

SPEAKER: I'm (inaudible) with American Security Project. My question involves questions of credibility both in counteracting the ISIL and ISIS (inaudible) messaging, and whether or not those counter narratives are considered credible? Whether they come from other parts of the Muslim Community, or whether they come from, say, U.S. Government, for instance?

MR. McCANTS: Okay. So we have three question, one is sort of and exit ramp question, another do-it-yourself, social media, can it work; and then counter narratives. JM, I'm going to start down with you, and if any of you want to wave off, just wave off, I'll skip you. JM, go ahead.

MR. BERGER: As far as the exit ramps, I think we are doing -- we have

some capacity to debrief somebody who leaves ISIS, we don't have any capacity to help people who want to leave ISIS.

MR. McCANTS: We, meaning the United States?

MR. BERGER: Yeah. And there's some variation among different countries, but I think ISIS presents a much more difficult challenge for everybody on this because of the nature of the extremity of what they do. You know, most notably in my experience with talking to Omar Hammami --

MR. McCANTS: Who is?

MR. BERGER: Who was the American who joined Al-Shabaab and then split with them and was afraid for his life. And at various points of my discussions with him online, I was trying to encourage him to try and cut a deal. And at the same time and when I talk to people in Government, even if he's not going to take it, you guys should offer him a deal, because he's not an offender in a way that is irretrievable, and you want to kind of set a precedent that people can leave al-Qaeda, without having spent their whole lives in jail, and there was no interest in that, zero interest.

In fact, in the middle of my conversations with people about that, they announced a $5 million reward for his capture or death, so that's where that stands right now.

MR. McCANTS: Jonathon? Oh, do you want to --

MR. BERGER: I just want to say that on the Khilafa Book, it's this -- every two months or more often, they come up with their new -- they are going to start their own social network, they all pretty much go like this.

MR. McCANTS: Yeah. John, what about the do-it-yourself social network?

MR. MORGAN: I was also going to speak to that as well. I think (a) those are difficult to do, and so they often fail. But (b) it also kind of misses the point.

There's a real utility in having these conversations in public, if the goal is to radicalize foreign fighters to come join your fight. So there's really no -- this idea that we would go set up our own social network, and that would have some utility for the organization, I think, is kind of a misstep in the first place.

So that's another reason why it think that they don't do particularly well, is because they don't attract the attention from outsiders. That was really the point of being on Twitter and Facebook and YouTube in the first place; perhaps. I mean that's a little bit outside of my expertise, quite --

MR. BERGER: These things, it's like, the Khilafa Book, and I think they had one called Muslim Book before it, are not official ISIS operations, they are done by supporters on their own initiative. There are official ISIS OPSEC-related websites and forums that they use, that are separate from this.

MR. McCANTS: Cole, do you want to speak to any of those?

MR. BUNZEL: Not on exit ramps or the platform.

MR. McCANTS: What about counter-narrative stuff, particularly religiously discrediting ISIS. I mean they are pretty awful, they are pretty beyond the pale for most right-thinking folk; regardless of religious persuasion. I mean, do we need to exercise or does anyone really need to go after them on religious grounds?

MR. BUNZEL: I think, yeah, I think it is important to address their religious claims. Particularly because one of their talking points that I read every day is that; look, we are actually dealing with scripture, and we are actually, you know, drawing on the legal text, and our opponents are just calling us unbelievers, and just saying that we are not Muslim. And there is probably a point to what they are saying in that, it would be more effective if people could argue with them, chapter and verse, instead of just with slogans.

I also think it's probably mistake for the U.S. Government to try and

discredit the groups, and the Islamic credentials. Particularly the President's comments several months ago, to the effect that, the Islamic State is neither Islamic nor a State, that's gotten enormous play among ISIS supporters, who are -- very want to call Obama the -- this is their words -- the mule of the Jews.

It doesn't, I think, help to have somebody like that, with that perception trying to basically talk about, act as if as they say, he's a mujahid, as if he is -- unlearned, is not the scholar capable of determining who is and who is not within the bounds of Islam.

MR. McCANTS: Thank you. And Anastasia, do you want to tackle either of those?

MS. NORTON: Yeah. A couple of them, and I'll start with the credibility issues, and we were just talking about that. A couple of things; one, I think you are absolutely right, I don't think the U.S. Government is necessarily the best credible voice on talking about who is and who is not (inaudible). I do think however, that if we shift the frame to be not about countering belief, but instead countering behavior or trying to influence behavior; it becomes less an issue of credibility, and more an issue of influence.

So I think, you can imagine a lot of areas where the U.S. Government or U.S. Government communicators might be influential, they might not be credible without audience but they -- you know, when the President comes on the TV and talks about, you know, sort of different policies that we are going to take in a particular area, or how we are going to react to particular things, you know, he's got a lot of credibility there, and potentially that can have influence on someone's behavior, even though it may not have influence on someone's belief.

But I think too often, we fall into the sort of linear trap where belief is the beginning and behavior is the end, and I don't think that's necessarily the best way to look at it, I think that behavior -- belief is often used to justify behavior so we can start

with the behavior and end with the belief. So I think that's something really, really important to keep in mind, when we talk about what is the best way to counter groups, like ISIL and their messaging.

As far as disillusionment and the ways that we can think about exit ramps, and how to use that in strategic communications in particular, I think that's a very rich area, and it also leads to this credibility issue. Someone who has become a part of the Islamic State, and then has left, and has really clear grievances about that, they are credible on that issue, and I think anyway to amplify those messages. I think some of our European Government partners, are thinking really, really long and hard how best to do that. But I think those are the things that we need to explore. Yeah.

MR. McCANTS: All right. Thank you. I'll take some more questions from the room. Yes, in the blue?

MR. SPETH: Thank you. My name is Andrew Speth, I teach in an American University, and Fellow at FPRI. Excuse me. I have kind of two questions both related to production. So the first has to do with the idea of ambiguity versus intelligibility. I'm just wondering if you can talk more about, this is probably for Cole, but for anybody; if you can kind of discern where the message is particularly intelligible, versus where there is ambiguity, right? Because we heard that there is -- both of these kind of at play in terms of the production of ISIS's message. And so ambiguity over what the state is, intelligibility over the ideology; how does it fall?

And then the question on projection, has to do with one of the purposes of projection, right, which is legitimacy, it's not the only purpose, but one of them. And we heard about kind of producing a message of strength, and then we also heard about producing a message of religious legitimacy, right, but then one of the others has to do with competence and governance, and so I'm just wondering if you can speak to that, as part of the production of the message competence and governance? Thank you.

MR. McCANTS: In the green?

SPEAKER: In ISIS's discussion about the Caliphate, how important is having a single caliph?

MR. McCANTS: Thank you. All right, over here.

SPEAKER: Regarding ISIS leadership, in many of the polls many people think that the leader is --

MR. McCANTS: Could you speak up, sir?

SPEAKER: Many people think that the leader of ISIS, the face of ISIS, Baghdadi, is not the real leader. One of the former Jihadist said that while meeting with Abu Hamza al-Muhajir, you mentioned him. He told them that we choose a caliph, we chose Amir al-mu'minin, but we can change him anytime you like, if you don't like him. Is that true? Thank you.

MR. McCANTS: Thank you. And then a few from (inaudible)--

SPEAKER: Hi. We have a Twitter question from someone watching the live feed from Belfast. And he asks, "Is the degree of violence that ISIS employs and transmits, as much to ensure loyalty of its current members as it is to taunt the West?"

MR. McCANTS: Okay. Thank you. All right. So, Anastasia we'll start with you this time, and we'll go down the line again. So, we've got a question -- two questions about messaging, where is it ambiguous, where is it clear, also what do they have to say about governance, and the other question about their message is what's the purpose of broadcasting these high def videos of violent acts and snuff films, and so on and so forth.

And then another question, or series of questions about the caliph, is this -- how important is it to have a single caliph, and also is this -- is the current Baghdadi, just a prop like his predecessor, or is he a person of flesh and blood? So, Anastasia, you can have a shot at any of those you want.

MS. NORTON: Sure. Well actually, I'll try to cover the messaging questions a little. I think that one of the things ISIL is most adept at, are developing and tailoring different messages to different audiences, right, and so they are able to hit a variety of motivations, because they do draw on religious justifications, their strength, their ability to govern, so they hit a wide variety of motivations that may be attracting people to --

MR. McCANTS: Cole, do you want to tackle the caliph question?

MR. BUNZEL: Yeah. Well, there were a couple; first on intelligibility versus ambiguity, the point really I was trying to make is that, when the group first set up its state in 2006, it portrayed its status as ambiguous, whether or not it was the Caliphate, and that seemed to be a very deliberate strategy, but after the Caliphate Declaration in late-June, 2014, all of that ended, and that's why, if you read the Appendix to my report, I have an initial list of -- which is kind of a creed the group has distributed since 2007, and all of those 19 elements are still very intelligible, and unchanging things.

But then there are a few other things that only apply once the ambiguity ended, and the Caliphate was declared. But interestingly now, its Ayman al-Zawahiri, and al-Qaeda that has sort of adopted this ambiguous Caliphate strategy, and now since 2014, since December 2014, al-Qaeda has presented Afghanistan, or what he calls the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan Taliban, as the ambiguous seat of the Caliphate, and almost at the exact same way, that the Islamic State of Iraq did this to itself from 2006 to 2014.

The question of a single caliph; there's a legal maxim in Islamic law that says if there are two -- if there's one caliph and the second caliph is giving a (inaudible) to fealty, you kill the second. So ideal -- and this wasn't always applied, and people justified the presence of there being more than one caliph, but when it comes to this group it's definitely following the one caliph model.

As for the (inaudible), you know, we changed the caliphs. The point that the gentleman made it's absolutely right when it comes to the first, Amir al-mu'minin, or proto-caliphal, Abu Umar al-Baghdadi, and will write about this in his new book that's coming out. The real leader, probably, of the Islamic State of Iraq was the Egyptian who is known as the War Minister, Abu Hamza al-Muhajir, and he wrote in a letter to the al-Qaeda leadership that; yeah, we just kind of chose some guy and, you know, we'll call him Abu Umar al-Baghdadi, but if he doesn't work out we'll just replace him with another Baghdadi.

And that does seem to have been the case for the first iteration of the group, but I don't think that that's the case with the current leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

MR. McCANTS: Jonathon, do you want to take a shot at any of those?

MR. MORGAN: Yeah. I can speak to the messaging question I think. I think it's also important to remember who the intended audience is, for those of us consuming messaging from ISIS in the West. And I think that narrative actually ends up being relatively clear, both to the capacity for state building, through to the very extreme violence that's projected across social media and other channels, is that, for the sort of person who is vulnerable to radicalization, this is a very compelling narrative.

So you are talking about somebody who is in the position where the extreme violence is very exciting and this black and white world view, where things could be simpler, things could be better for me, in an established, in a state where everything is functioning properly at some sort of an idealized version of an Islamic State. I think that's where -- that's the through line for a lot of this messaging, and I think it's important to remember who the intended audience is, for those of us consuming their media in the West.

MR. McCANTS: JM, you and Jessica Stern, are writing your new book about this strange combination of two themes that don't -- you wouldn't think go together.

One is ultra-violence, and one is civil society, and you can see both of those as themes that run through their messaging. How do they reconcile them, or are they trying to?

MR. BERGER: Well, I think, you know, what Jonathon said, is very true. I think that what you have is you have a sort of image of this perfect society that is carefully constructed in some of their propaganda, and some of their propaganda is focused primarily on, you know, this is how we govern, this is what it's like to live here. Everybody is so happy here. And then you have this extreme violence, and they are self-justifying, so because it's this perfect society, we are justified in doing extreme things to prevent it, which is a recipe for attracting psychopaths which is something that the Islamic State seems to be pretty good at.

They also have different streams of messaging for different audiences. So, you know, there is the big videos that get attention in the headlines. Such as yesterday, the latest video they issued showing a child executing an alleged spy. Then there is a constant daily output of updates from different towns, and then these are all designed to sort of reinforce the legitimacy of the government.

This is like, here's the nursing home. Here's the police station. Here's the market, look at all the food we have. Fish, I think is one that was going the other day, I kept seeing pictures of fish going across my Twitter feed, because there were fish at the market. And so those are for a local audience, and some of the extreme violence content is also for a local audience.

So the clanging of the swords being most obviously showing how this can work. It's not necessarily, I don't think they are trying to keep their dedicated membership in line, I think they are trying to keep the people who live -- who are unfortunate to live there, in line, and the armed forces that might oppose them, so.

MR. McCANTS: I think we've got time for two quick questions; all the way in the back.

SPEAKER: Thank you. Mohammad (Inaudible). I just wonder, do you really, in your analysis and understanding on Arabic material? So, the Panelist, do you speak Arabic and read sophisticated Arabic, or you are only on translated English material?

MR. McCANTS: All right. And then one more quick one; yes, please?

SPEAKER: I'd like to ask about the role of the Sunni grievances in Iraq and the larger Middle East regarding the receptivity of the message, itself. It will be for Cole. As far as I understand ISIS is more like a revolutionary or social movement group having terrorist acts, in which we do see a clear land claim of a land, and concrete goal, and so it is related with a clear message for the involvement.

So could you please make some comments on the Sunni grievances? So, let me just put this note, maybe not convinced that the Mohavi message, but convinced that the Shi'as, the Shi'a danger has demonized in their mindset.

MR. McCANTS: Okay. So we have a narrower question about Cole's cred as an Arabic reader. Okay, so he can read it. And then a broader question about the grievances that are fueling the rise of the Islamic State, or at least making the environment easier for them to move in; particularly in Western Iraq. And Cole I'll start with you, but anyone else, who wants to weigh on the grievances question.

And also personally would be interested in hearing about the other side of the world, the Europeans that have flocked to the Islamic State. Are there some of the things that they cite as grievances different than what's being talked about from the foreign fighters that come from the Arabic-speaking part of the world. But, Cole, you first.

MR. BUNZEL: Yes. I speak Arabic, I studied Arabic for more years than I'd like to admit. I lived in Syria for more than a year, just studying classical Arabic. All of my -- almost all of the sources relayed on my paper are primary Arabic sources. Almost all of which had not been reviewed previously, and when there are translations available,

I tend not even to look at them. And at the end of my paper there's a whole lot of translated material that's all translated by me.

MR. McCANTS: The grievances, question?

MR. BUNZEL: Grievances, yeah, so it is, you know, about Wahhabism, I definitely think, at least equally important is the narrative which fits Wahhabism, or fits Salafisms

, anti-Shih biases. So one of the narratives, probably a grand narrative that ISIS peddles is that there is a short of Shih plot to take over the Arab -- the Sunni Arab Middle East and to keep the Sunnis from really taking power, and they also think that the United States is complicit in this plan.

They think that our invasion of Iraq is really just a way of handing power to the Shi'a in Iraq. They think that the nuclear deal that we are currently negotiating with Iran is really just a way of kind of formalizing Iran's Shih hegemony over the area. They perceive the United States to be bombing, exclusively Sunni Militants, but never, ever bombing a Shih, so it's a huge part of their narrative, and it's extremely effective.

MR. McCANTS: And Jonathon and JM, how does this compare with the grievances that are being cited by, say, the European foreign fighters who are coming to fight under the ISIS banner?

MR. BERGER: I mean, there are definitely different streams of messaging and complaint, and one of the things that's really, you know, and I'm sure you've had this conversation a million times, as I have; it's like, you know, people want to have simple explanations of why radicalization happens, and there aren't any.

There are clusters of causality, so in Iraq Sunni disenfranchisements, a huge issue that allowed ISIS to gain a critical strategic advantage. But then, you know, when you start to expand the circle out to include, you know, they have this remarkable (inaudible) in Europe, and in the West, where those issues are not forefront. And we

went -- we had some pretty rousing arguments in writing the book about this issue, and we dragged a lot of our friends into -- and you know, we ended up with a kind of minimalist discussion of it, because it was impossible to settle it.

There is really -- I'm sort of toying with an idea that needs to be fleshed out about changes, basically, like cultures in society, where there is a change in status; for good or for ill. Society is in transition being the place where radicalization can thrive, and we would have to do how you accept that transition. Whether you perceive that there is an increasing amount of persecution on you, or you perceive that your identity group is on the rise. And those are the kinds of -- you know, in as much as you can tease out any kind of consistent thread, I think it's somewhere in there.

MR. McCANTS: Anastasia?

MS. NORTON: Yeah. Just to sort of build on that; I think there's a lot of opportunity analytically to really think through how are we going to use narratives, right? So narratives as a unit of analysis, but narratives also as a way to frame how we are looking at this problem; and I think one space in particular that is very useful for thinking about how to best counter groups like ISIL, is the idea of framing the analysis to understand what is the overlap between these different narratives, say, and indigenous population, the audience that ISIL is trying to appeal to.

And then ISIL is there. It's, where are the overlaps? Where are the potential overlaps where you may see resonance? But what are also -- what are the friction points, where do you see divergence? What are things that we can amplify in those different spaces that increase those friction points, and where we can see the divergence? And I think that is a really fruitful area for continuing --

MR. McCANTS: Okay. Well, please join me in thanking the Panel. I think it's been a great discussion. (Applause)

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