MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

SUBJECT: Executive Summary (EXSUM) of the Counter - Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) Wargame on 10 December 2015

BLUF: The NPS Counter-ISIL Wargame held on 10 December 2015 revealed multiple broad courses of action and topics for future study for SOCOM in its efforts to combat ISIL around the world. Among these topics are: 1) the potential positive impacts of SOF deployments in the Syrian periphery; 2) the lack of US focus on Cyber efforts; 3) ISIL vulnerabilities from Oil and Gas volatility, as well as the possible SOCOM actions to exploit those vulnerabilities; 4) the negative effects of the US/Turkey/Russian divide; and 5) the ability of Russia and Europe to control information operations and the lack of US authorities to conduct similar messaging.

1. **Study Background:** In Fall of 2015, the Defense Analysis Department at the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) offered an unprecedented opportunity for students to conduct a pilot Wargaming Course in conjunction with a real-world sponsor. Our Wargame is the result of this unprecedented joint effort between the SOCOM J35 future operations section and our group of NPS students. Our ISIL Wargame examines a broad swath of potential Islamic State strengths and vulnerabilities, with the role players within the game testing potential actions to combat Islamic State activities throughout the world. This end-product presents SOCOM with a range of topics for further study based on subject matter expert role playing, analysis, and discussion of the problem.

2. **Purpose of the Wargame**: The Project Team at NPS was in constant contact with the SOCOM J35 jointly developing the objectives for the wargame. After a rigorous examination of the Project Team's capabilities and available timeframe, the J35 and Project Team identified the following objectives:
   - Identify the factors that enable ISIL (and future hybrid VEOs) to recruit, radicalize, and mobilize human capital.
   - Identify potential courses of action for SOCOM, in conjunction with the wider DoD enterprise, other US government entities, and allied foreign government entities, to positively influence the situation.

3. **Wargame Scenario**: Our Counter-ISIL Wargame looks at the ISIL problem as it exists in the real world. We presented the players with a brief summary of the major ISIL related events that occurred between 2014-2015. This in-brief is shown below:

"The Islamic State is a hybrid jihadist group. It has appropriated the radical Islamist ideology of al-Qaeda while implementing the centralized command model of the paramilitary Hezbollah and some tactics from the Taliban's local Governance structures."[1] The Islamic State executed a

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[1] Lina Khatib, "The Islamic State's Strategy: Lasting and Expanding," Carnegie Middle East Center, July 2015, 3.

lightning campaign in Iraq in the summer of 2014, seizing large tracts of territory North and West of Baghdad. The US responded with a small contingent of US Special Operations and Conventional troops in a training/advising role. These troops are still operating in the country. US action in Syria has so far been limited.[2] Russia entered the Syrian conflict directly on 1 October 2015 on order from the Russian President.[3] ISIL claims responsibility for a downed Russian airliner immediately after, recently releasing a photo of the purported method.[4] Russia is set to respond. ISIL claimed responsibility for an elaborate terrorist attack in Paris on 13 November 2015.[5] The French have responded with airstrikes, and are poised to do more.

4. **Topics of the Wargame:** This Wargame focused on four specific topics for the players to discuss. These topics represent the efforts and danger areas that ISIL currently exploits:

- – Topic #1: Foreign Fighter Flow
- – Topic #2: ISIL Cyber Efforts
- – Topic #3: Threat Finance
- – Topic #4: European Migration

Following the discussion on these topics, the game director presented the players with scenario injects to continue to drive the discussion. These injects were:

- – Inject #1: Significant Decrease in the Price of Oil
- – Inject #2: Major Terrorist Attack in Russia, prompting Russian Response
- – Inject #3: ISIL responds to the world situation at end of the game

5. **Study Method**: This Wargame follows a "Seminar Wargame" format. For our game model, our Team adapted the Canadian "Army of Tomorrow" seminar wargame. This game incorporates multiple "role players" who assume a real-world position (such as the US President) and puts these players in the same room to discuss potential solutions to problems within a hypothetical scenario. From the "Army of Tomorrow" handbook: "Seminar war games resemble "informal discussions around a map" but with some additional rigor. The Army of Tomorrow Seminar War Game will more resemble "informal discussions around a map" than wargaming that uses computer-based simulations like JANUS, JCATS, and OneSAF. However there is additional rigor of seminar wargames that raises them above mere "discussions." This rigor comes from two sources: greater adherence to a structure and a methodical approach to collecting the observations and insights of participants. In both of these respects the game director is the ultimate arbiter of issues over methodology."[6]

6. **Key Roles:** The Counter-ISIL game focuses on the potential real world leaders and organizations that have the most at stake in terms of combatting ISIL. After play-testing and evaluating the flow of the game, our Project Team decided on the follow roles:

    SOCOM Commander – Commander of US SOF. Assumed to have positive relationships with the interagency. Represents the Military element of US national power for this game.

[2] "Battle for Iraq and Syria in Maps." BBC News, November 17, 2015, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27838034
[3] "Russia joins war in Syria: Five key points." BBC News, October 1, 2015. http://www.bbc.com/ news/world-middle-east-34416519
[4] "ISIL posts 'bomb' photo alleging it downed airliner." Al Jazeera News, November 19, 2015. http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/11/isil-claims-norwegian-chinese-captives-killed-151118151736976.html
[5] Walt, Vivienne. "ISIS Claims Responsibility for Paris Attacks as Arrests Are Made." Time Magazine, November 15, 2015. http://time.com/4112884/paris-attacks-isis-isil-france-francois-hollande/
[6] "The Army of Tomorrow," Seminar Wargame Handbook, 2006, 20.

National Security Council – An amalgamation of the interagency NSC representatives, focusing on the Secretaries of State & Treasury and the Director of National Intelligence. Represents the Diplomatic, Intelligence, and Economic elements of US national power for this game.

European Union – Player acts in the role of the European Union as a singular organization, as well as the roles of individual European governments when necessary. Assumes that he has the broad consensus within the EU to take actions.

Russian Federation – Represents the power of the Russian executive branch, which currently exercises great control over all elements of Russian national power.

Islamic State – Player represents both the Caliph of IS, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, as well as the State power as a whole. Has very broad and powerful authority over Islamic State actions and messaging.

7. **Recruited Role Players**: Our Project Team was fortunate to get a team of very highly qualified role players to fill each position. These role players were:

SOCOM Commander – COL Guy Lemire – SOF Chair at NPS. Acts as the SOCOM Commander's personal representative at NPS and is the senior Active Duty military service-member in the Defense Analysis Department.

National Security Council – LTC Gordon Landale – Director of the CORE lab at NPS. LTC Landale has experience in multiple embassies in Central Asia and operational assignments throughout the US Central Command Area of Responsibility.

European Union –Colonel (GS) Peter Frank, German Army - Associate Military Professor in the Department of National Security Affairs at the Naval Postgraduate School. He has held a variety of national and international leadership and staff Positions at the tactical, operational und national ministerial level as well as in NATO operations.[7]

Russian Federation – Dr. Alex Bordetsky –Director of the Center for Network Innovation and Experimentation (CENETIX) at NPS. Dr. Bordetsky is also a naturalized US citizen, having been born in Russia during the Soviet period. He brings exceptional technological and cultural understanding to the Russian role.[8]

Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant – Dr. Craig Whiteside - Craig Whiteside is an associate Professor of National Security Affairs for the Naval War College Monterey (located at the Naval Postgraduate School). His dissertation investigated the political worldview of the Islamic State movement.[9]

8. **Game Structure:** As a seminar wargame, the structure of this game was mostly in terms of facilitating discussion. Gameplay proceeded through a series of "Turns" representing the start and completion of a single topic of discussion. The methodology is shown below:

1) The game focuses on the interaction between the Players of the game in terms of specified topics, referred to in this game as "Turns," to represent transition from one topic to the next.
2) At the beginning of each "Turn," the game director presents the players with a problem, such as "What cyber efforts can the players take to affect ISIL online recruitment efforts?"
3) The first player discusses his "action" to address the problem. The director will then

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[7] "COL (GS) Peter Frank,"Biography on NPS Website, http://www.nps.edu/Academics/Schools/SIGS/DegreeProg/NSA/Faculty/frank.html
[8] "CENETIX," Official CENETIX Website on NPS, http://cenetix.nps.edu/cenetix/
[9] "Dr. Craig Whiteside," author biography on *War on the Rocks* website. http://warontherocks.com/author/craig-whiteside/

pose the same or different questions to other players in response.

4) After a back and forth discussion of the issue between players and their actions, the director attempts to facilitate a consensus between all players of where the world stands at the conclusion of player actions. Ideally, each Turn will last approximately 15 minutes or less. The game recorder records the results

5) The game director then opens discussion on the next topic.

6) Once all issues are complete, players take a break, and then play through the same topics but with an updated world situation and injects that will affect player decisions.

7) The game ends at approximately two hours and wraps up with a "hot wash" discussion of what just happened in the game.

9. **Findings and Observations**: Following the game execution, the Project Team examined the records, after action review comments, and key discussion points of the seminar game. This analysis led to the following findings and observations:

Finding #1: (Foreign Fighter Flow) SOCOM efforts to reduce Foreign Fighter flow will require more focused efforts in the "Area of Influence" around Syria.
- Current efforts are insufficient and only focused on Syria. SOF must expand their reach and aperture on the problem. Can work with Allied governments but this will require increased diplomatic coordination with US State Department.

Finding #2: (Cyber Efforts) A lack of US Cyber & Information Operations coordination is preventing the US from executing a solid counter-cyber campaign against ISIL.
- Russia is able to bring a full suite of well-researched and direct cyber capabilities to the fight against ISIL. Europe executes this as well, but not in the same organized way. The US does very little cyber because there is little infrastructure and authority to support it.

Finding #3: (Threat Finance) ISIL Finances present an exploitable weak point IF the Allies can cooperate
- ISIL's economic model is unsustainable over the long run if the countries neighboring Iraq and Syria come together to crack down on illegal oil. ISIL is also very vulnerable to a major downturn in Oil/Gas prices. SOCOM can exploit this vulnerability.

Finding #4: (European Migration) We will not stop Refugees, but we can make it less beneficial for ISIL Information Operations
- This presented probably the most difficult problem for the European player. The SOCOM player wanted no direct involvement, seeing it as a potential minefield for SOF. With that said, there is an opportunity to effectively counter the ISIL narrative by accepting refugees and advertising how it shows the failure of ISIL to effectively govern.

Finding #5: (All Topics) The Russian/US divide makes fighting ISIL more difficult
- The divide between Russia, the US, and Turkey is a boon for ISIL. ISIL will attempt to exploit this divide wherever it can. The players quickly realized within the context of the game that shared intelligence and liaison officers would reduce friction tremendously, having a wide positive effect on operations.

Finding #6: (All Topics) The Air Campaigns of the US Coalition and Russia present significant IO opportunities for ISIL to exploit

- ISIL is very happy that Russia initiated its own air campaign because it presents him with the opportunity to exploit Russian inaccuracy and collateral damage. This directly feeds ISIL narratives. The Russians, however, do well by using Syrian and Russian press to discuss their targets and effects. This mitigates ISIL messaging. The US does nothing similar.

*For further analysis and discussion on these topics, see the full analysis report, which includes the complete record of all Game Turns as well as the analysis for each.

8. **Conclusion**: In presenting our findings, we by no means intend to present them as 100% true. These findings are based off of the discussions and potential actions of some very smart people examining a tremendously hard problem in a time constrained environment. The purpose of this wargame is to examine new ideas and test them against the potential real world repercussions. Ultimately, we wanted our participants to see this problem from a different angle, and potentially adjust how they see that problem.[10]

8. POC for this memorandum is the undersigned at crthiele@nps.mil.

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[10] Peter Perla, *The Art of Wargaming*, 182.