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Wargaming

Countering Transregional Threat Organizations Wargame Executive Summary (EXSUM)

1. **Purpose.** This wargame was conducted to analyze how US organizations, specifically geographic combatant commands (GCC) and theater special operations commands (TSOC) can counter transregional threat organizations that operate across the gaps and seams of GCC boundaries. The primary threat considered in this wargame was the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and how the US can prevent it from spreading to other areas both within and across GCC boundaries. The wargame was sponsored by U.S. Special Operations Command Central (SOCCENT) and conducted by students in the Department of Defense Analysis at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, CA.

2. **Background.**

a. The US faces a rapidly changing and evolving threat in transregional organizations, such as ISIS, that do not recognize the boundaries of countries or military organizations. As these threats move across GCC boundaries, the GCCs and TSOCs must be prepared to counter their efforts and prevent these organizations from exploiting weaknesses in the GCC structure that would allow them to spread.

b. This wargame consisted of two separate scenarios. The first scenario considered the present-day situation, with ISIS attempting to move fighters to safer areas due to the impending loss of one of its major population centers in Mosul. The second scenario was similar, but took place several years in the future, with ISIS isolated within its de facto capital of Raqqa, Syria but having lost its major cities in Iraq. The second scenario also gave ISIS significant control of Libya and significant influence in Yemen.

c. The results of this wargame are scenario and player specific. Insights provided from this wargame are generic in nature as only certain players were replicated, limiting the ability of the wargame to represent all the interactions present in the real world. It is our recommendation that multiple wargames and simulations be conducted to provide more specific recommendations and holistic recommendations for countering transregional threats. Additionally, any subsequent wargames should be conducted at the UNCLASSIFIED level if possible in order to include players from partner nations as applicable. Information and facilities available precluded this wargame from being conducted below the SECRET level.

3. **Study methods.**

a. This wargame was conducted using a seminar method with closed planning and open execution. The players simulated for this wargame were US Africa Command (AFRICOM) and Special Operations Command Africa (SOCAF), US Central Command (CENTCOM) and Special Operations Command Central (SOCCENT), the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and the Houthi rebels in Yemen. Each entity was represented by players with the following background:

- i. AFRICOM / SOCAF – Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) Special Forces (SF) student with broad geographic experience.

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- ii. CENTCOM / SOCCENT – NPS O-6 faculty member with experience at multiple command levels and an NPS student with deployed experience in SOCCENT area of responsibility.
- iii. ISIS – Naval War College Monterey faculty member whose doctoral dissertation focused on the political worldview of the ISIS organization.
- iv. Houthi – NPS student who had researched the Houthi organization.

b. The planning phase of each turn of the wargame was conducted in a closed manner with each entity given its own space to plan. This was designed to keep friendly and enemy players in separate spaces to avoid each team “gaming the system” as they built their strategies. The exception to this was the US elements, who could meet and coordinate as they deemed fit.

c. The execution phase of the wargame was conducted in an open style with a “layered” approach. The players were asked to present their courses of action (COAs) to the white cell in the following order: Houthi, ISIS, AFRICOM, CENTCOM. When the Houthi player presented, he was the only player in the room, but he stayed in the room as the other players presented their plans. The same was true for each succeeding player. This resulted in the enemy players hearing the friendly plans, but kept the friendly players from hearing the enemy plans. This structure simulated the fact that while friendly forces may not know the exact plans of threat organizations, the threat organizations will most likely be able to gather some information about US plans based on troop movements and press statements. Keeping the friendly players from hearing the enemy plans also prevented the friendly players from altering their plans prior to presenting them to the white cell.

d. After all players had presented their plans, the game moved into full open adjudication. This final phase was conducted by a white cell facilitator posing questions to each of the players to determine their reaction to a given situation.

4. **Study findings/recommendations.** The findings from this wargame are classified SECRET. For further information, contact SOCCENT J5 Levant (Mr. Rob Gwinner, DSN 312-968-7975, robert.gwinner@soccent.centcom.mil) or SOCCENT J3 Levant (MAJ Bob Miske, DSN 312-968-6486 Robert.miske@soccent.centcom.mil).

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