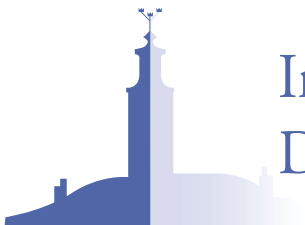


8th AMS-ISDP Joint Conference

“The Islamic State” and the Situation in the Middle East
May 28-30, 2015, Beijing



Institute for Security &
Development Policy



中国军事科学院与瑞典安全和发展政策研究所
第八次联合研讨会
The 8th AMS-ISDP Joint Conference

“伊斯兰国”与中东局势
“The Islamic State” and the Situation in the Middle East

中国军事科学院
Academy of Military Science, China

瑞典安全和发展政策研究所
Institute for Security & Development Policy, Sweden

中国·北京
Beijing, China
二〇一五年五月
May 2015

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This report summarizes the presentations and discussions during the 8th AMS-ISDP Joint Conference held in Beijing on May 28-30, 2015. It was edited and compiled by Alec Forss, editor at ISDP, with the assistance of Scott Sutherland and Sunul Chay.

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For editorial correspondence and enquiries, please contact Alec Forss at: aforss@isdpc.eu

About the Institutes:

The **PLA Academy of Military Science** is a center for military studies and the premier military research organization of the PLA. It answers directly to the Central Military Commission, and also directly receives tasks from the General Staff Department. AMS mainly carries out fundamental research on military science and important issues in defense and armed forces development, drafts and modifying military doctrines, regulations and laws, and provides strategic advice and consultation for military policymakers.

The **Institute for Security and Development Policy** is a Stockholm-based independent and non-profit research and policy institute. The Institute is dedicated to expanding understanding of international affairs, particularly the interrelationship between the issue areas of conflict, security, and development. The Institute's primary areas of geographic focus are Asia and Europe's neighborhood.

Foreword

It gives us great pleasure to introduce the summary report from our most recent joint conference, which was held in Beijing on May 28-30, 2015. The title for the 8th AMS-ISDP Joint Conference was “‘The Islamic State’ and the Situation in the Middle East.”

The disorder in the Middle East and the rise of Islamic State (IS), which has seen it control large parts of Iraq and Syria, is a pressing security concern not only for the region but the international community as a whole. Making use of social media to disseminate its message, individuals have flocked to join IS from more than 80 countries, including Sweden and China. At the same time, it is clear that it is a very different organization from those such as al-Qaeda encountered in the past. It assumes functions as a semi-state implementing jurisdiction (and employing brutal tactics) in the territories it controls, and further seeks to draw its legitimacy from its proclamation of a caliphate in June 2014.

With the region experiencing a dangerous destabilization, it is necessary more than ever to better understand the drivers behind the rise of IS, the threat it poses and its implications, as well as appraise strategies to effectively combat it.

The conference this year was comprised of six sessions over two days. Participants came not only from ISDP and AMS, but also included noted experts from other Chinese and European institutions. Presentations and discussions variously sought to understand the situation in the Middle East from a geopolitical perspective, including how Western intervention from colonial times to the 2003 invasion of Iraq has contributed to creating the disorder we see today. Other topics shed light on the history of Islam in China, the interlinkages between IS and militant groups in South Asia, as well as illuminating IS’s organizational structure and capabilities.

Notwithstanding the necessity of understanding of IS’s emergence within a broader context, the main theme of the conference was to consider strategies to counter it. In this regard, there was a consensus among many participants that this is a multi-dimensional question that cannot rest on a military solution alone. Thus while the merits of committing ground forces were debated, it was also argued that addressing the underlying grievances of the Sunni population, stemming recruitment, improving border control, and enhancing international efforts through better cooperation and intelligence sharing are all necessary.

While recognizing there is no panacea to the issue, we hope that this report proves informative and captures the range of viewpoints presented and discussed during the conference.

Dr. Niklas Swanström, ISDP Major General Wang Weixing, AMS

前 言

我们非常荣幸地推出2015年5月28-30日在北京举行的第8届中国人民解放军军事科学院与瑞典安全和发展政策研究所联合研讨会报告。会议主题为“‘伊斯兰国’与中东局势”。

中东乱局与“伊斯兰国”的兴起，对该地区来说是一个紧迫的安全忧虑，对整个国际社会同样如此。“伊斯兰国”控制了伊拉克和叙利亚大片领土，它利用社交媒体传播信息，吸引了包括中国和瑞典在内80多个国家的人员加入该组织。“伊斯兰国”与此前的恐怖组织如“基地”组织也有明显不同。“伊斯兰国”在其控制区域内，像半个主权国家一样行使着管辖权（采用残暴手段），并且为了进一步寻求其合法性，2014年6月宣布建立哈里发国家。

本次会议为期2天，共分6节。与会代表不仅来自军事科学院与瑞典安全和发展政策研究所，还有来自中国和欧洲其他学术机构的知名学者。会议的发言与讨论，力求从地缘政治角度理解中东局势，并分析了从殖民时代到2003年西方的干涉如何造成今天我们所见的乱局。发言还涉及了中国的伊斯兰历史，“伊斯兰国”与南亚军事集团之间的关联，讨论了“伊斯兰国”的组织结构及其能力。

尽管有必要在更宽泛的背景下来理解“伊斯兰国”为何会出现，会议的主题是讨论采取如何打击“伊斯兰国”。在这方面，很多代表都认为，打击“伊斯兰国”涉及很多领域，不能仅仅依靠军事手段。因此，虽然代表们讨论了运用地面部队会产生的效果，但同时也认为必须要采取措施，解决逊尼派民众生活疾苦等深层次问题，阻止恐怖分子招募，提升对边境线的管控，并通过加强合作与情报共享来提高国际合作。

没有什么灵丹妙药能够解决这一问题。不过，我们希望这份报告充分容纳了会议的发言与讨论观点，能对读者有所启迪。

中国人民解放军军事科学院 王卫星 少将

安全和发展政策研究所所长 施万通 博士

Conference Itinerary

5月28日（星期四） **Thursday, 28 May**

下午
Afternoon 代表报到并注册
Registration

18:30-20:00 欢迎晚宴（2层颐园餐厅）
致辞：瑞典安全和发展政策研究所施万通所长
军事科学院外国军事研究部王卫星部长
Welcome Reception at YIYUAN RESTAURANT
Welcome Reception speeches by:
Dr. Niklas Swanström, Director, ISDP
Maj. Gen. Wang Weixing, Chief, Department of Foreign Military Studies, AMS

5月29日（星期五） **Friday, 29 May**

地点：C座第三会议室 Venue: Meeting Room 3, Building C

08:40-09:00 合影（仅限会议正式代表，第三会议室门前）
Group Photo (Participants Only), in front of Meeting Room 3

09:00-09:20 开幕致辞：施万通所长、王卫星部长
Opening Speeches by: Dr. Swanström and Maj. Gen. Wang Weixing

09:20-10:30 第一节 **Session One**

主持人：施万通
Moderator: Niklas Swanström

发言人 Presenters:
1. Charlotte Jago: Impact of ISIL and the British Government's Response
2. Zhang, Guifen: The Rise, Characteristics and Trend of ISIS
3. Q and A

10:30-10:50 茶歇 Coffee Break

10:50-12:00 第二节 **Session Two**

主持人：李绍先
Moderator: Li, Shaoxian

发言人 Presenters:
1. Yin, Gang: The Impact of Extreme Islam Ideology on China: Realistic Pressure and Historical Lessons.
2. Fu, Xiaoqiang: The Threat of "the Islamic State" and the Counter-terrorism Situation Facing China
3. Q and A

12:00-14:00 午餐 Lunch

14:00-15:30

第三节 **Session Three**

主持人：菲里克斯·库恩
Moderator: Felix Kuehn

发言人 Presenters:

1. Li, Shaoxian: Why is it so Difficult to Reconstruct a New Order in the Middle East?
2. Halil Karaveli: Western Imperialism and Middle Eastern Disorder
3. Wang, Guifang: The Impact of “The Islamic State” on the Security Situation in Afghanistan
4. Q and A

15:30-15:50

茶歇 Coffee Break

15:50-17:20

第四节 **Session Four**

主持人：刘琳

Moderator:Liu, Lin

发言人 Presenters:

1. Yu, Shujie: ISIS Development and Approaches to Strike ISIS
2. Felix Kühn: Impact of ISIS in South Asia
3. Q and A

17:20-19:00

晚餐 Dinner

5月30日（星期六） **Saturday, 29 May**

地点：C座第三会议室 Venue: Meeting Room3, Building C

09:00-10:30

第五节 **Session Five**

主持人：哈里奥·卡拉维利
Moderator: Halil Karavelli

发言人 Presenters:

1. Georg Nachstheim: Military and inter-agency cooperation in facing militant insurgency
2. Liu, Linzhi: The “Islamic State” and Global Non-traditional Security Challenges
3. Q and A

10:30-10:50

茶歇 Coffee Break

10:50-12:00

第六节 **Session Six**

主持人：傅小强
Moderator: Fu, Xiaoqiang

发言人 Presenters:

1. Zheng, Shouhua: A Study on International Joint Efforts against ISIS
2. Li, Xiang: Assessing US Military Strategy to Address ISIS

3. Q and A

- 12:00-14:00 午餐 Lunch
- 14:00-17:00 圆桌讨论（仅限会议正式代表）
Roundtable Discussion (Participants Only)
- 14:00-15:30 圆桌讨论 Roundtable Discussion
主持人：施万通
Moderator: Niklas Swanström
- 15:30-15:50 茶歇 Coffee Break
- 15:50-17:00 圆桌讨论 Roundtable Discussion
主持人：袁杨
Moderator: Yuan, Yang
- 17:00-17:20 闭幕致辞：
施万通所长、聂送来副部长
Closing Speeches by: Niklas Swanström, Director, ISDP
Maj. Gen. Nie Songlai, Deputy Chief, Department of Foreign Military Studies, AMS
- 18:00-19:30 闭幕晚餐（9层西山一号厅）
致辞：施万通所长、聂送来副部长
Farewell Dinner: Xishan No.1 (9th Floor), XiangshanYihe Hotel
Speeches by: Niklas Swanström, Director, ISDP
Maj. Gen. Wang Weixing, Deputy Chief, Department of Foreign Military Studies, AMS
- 5月31日（星期日） **Sunday, 31 May**
外国代表回国
Departure of the participants

Editor's Note: Titles of presentations in the above program may be at slight variance with titles given in the sessions.

List of Participants

Overseas Participants

- Daniel Chen, Senior Advisor to the U.S. Defense Attaché Office, Beijing
- Mats Fogelmark, Captain (Navy), Defense Attaché, Embassy of Sweden
- Alec Forss, Editor, Institute for Security and Development Policy
- Charlotte Jago, Second Secretary, Foreign and Security Policy, British Embassy, Beijing
- Halil Karaveli, Senior Research Fellow, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute/ISDP
- Felix Kühn, Independent Researcher and PhD Candidate, King’s College London
- Angeliqa Lejonberg, Second Secretary, Embassy of Sweden, Beijing
- Simon Levey, Brigadier, Defence Attaché, British Embassy, Beijing
- Georg Nachtsheim, Major General (ret.), German Federal Defence, former Chief of Staff HQ Eurocorps
- Niklas Swanström, Director, ISDP

Chinese Participants

- Fu Xiaoqiang, Research Fellow, Director of Security and Arms Control Institute, China Institute of Contemporary International Relations
- Li Shaoxian, Deputy President, China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations
- Li Xiang, Major, Assistant Researcher, Office of American & Oceanian Military Affairs, Department of Foreign Military Studies, AMS
- Liu Lin, Colonel, Associate Researcher, Office of Asian & African Military Affairs, Department of Foreign Military Studies, AMS
- Liu Linzhi, Major, Assistant Researcher, Office of Asian & African Military Affairs, Department of Foreign Military Studies, AMS
- Wang Guifang, Senior Colonel, Researcher, Office of National Security Strategy, Department of Military Strategic Studies, AMS
- Yin Gang, Research Fellow, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences
- Yu Shujie, Senior Colonel, Researcher, Office of European Military Affairs, Department of Foreign Military Studies, AMS
- Yuan Yang, Senior Colonel, Office of Asian-African Military Affairs, Department of Foreign Military Studies, AMS
- Zhang Guifen, Lieutenant Colonel, Office of European Military Affairs, Department of Foreign Military Studies, AMS
- Zheng Shouhua, Senior Colonel, Director, Center of Military Operation Other Than War Studies, AMS

‘IS wants the West to send ground forces so as to unite and rally Sunnis around an ensuing clash. This ‘trap’ should be avoided.’



Photo: UNHCR Photo Unit, licensed under Flickr Creative Commons

A Syrian refugee arrives in a Lebanese town together with his baby daughter. It is estimated that over 3.9 million people have fled the conflict in Syria to neighboring countries. Turkey has received the most number of refugees with nearly 1.8 million having fled over the border; Lebanon is the second-largest recipient with approximately 1.2 million refugees (see graphic on p. 35). With many living in conditions of absolute poverty and insecurity, UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres has called it the “worst humanitarian crisis of our era.”

SESSION ONE

The Impact of ISIL and the British Government’s Response

Charlotte Jago



Charlotte Jago is Second Secretary, Foreign and Security Policy, at the British Embassy in Beijing

Charlotte Jago’s presentation initially sought to outline the threat that Islamic State poses, ranging from its violations of women and its wiping out of entire communities to the destruction of cultural heritage. In addition to highlighting the refugee crisis, with over 3.9 million Syrian refugees having fled into neighboring countries as a result of the conflict there, she also emphasized the resource dimension of IS’s threat and how other countries such as Yemen and Libya are becoming increasingly vulnerable.

“We need to consider a broad approach to combating IS that includes not only airstrikes but also bolstering Iraqi governance and its representation of Sunnis.”

A focus of her presentation was the impact of IS on the United Kingdom and what the UK is doing to combat the threat. She stated that

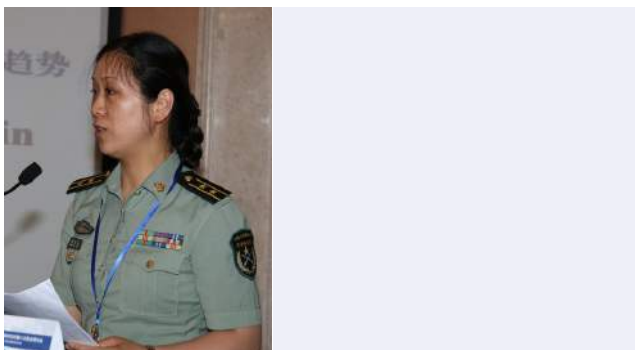
returning foreign fighters represent a major risk with the current official threat level in the UK rated as “severe.” She proceeded to outline a number of measures that the UK government is undertaking both at home and abroad. She informed the audience that the UK has participated in coalition efforts to cut off the flow of finance and people to IS, and how that the UK has some 800 military personnel stationed in Jordan and Lebanon. In addition to a capacity building program focused on providing training in responding to community needs, especially those of women and children, teams are also involved in training Lebanese troops. One successful impact of this is that 30 percent of the border between Lebanon and Syria has now been secured. Furthermore, the UK has taken part in 375 combat missions employing airstrikes against IS.

Her presentation also touched upon the issue of UK-born fighters such as media reports of two young girls from Manchester who had been recruited by IS. While the motivations of such individuals were hard to pin-point, Jago argued that more needed to be done to understand—and thus stem—such recruitments. In concluding her presentation, she reasoned that responding to IS requires a broad approach that relies not only airstrikes, but also thwarting individuals from joining IS and enhancing Iraqi governance so as to achieve the greater representation of Sunnis.

Editor’s Note: For the sake of consistency, the name Islamic State (IS) has been used throughout this report except for certain presentation titles which have been left unaltered.

The Rise, Characteristics, and Trends of ISIS

Zhang Guifen



Lieutenant Colonel Zhang Guifen is a researcher at the Office of European Military Affairs, Department of Foreign Military Studies, AMS.

Zhang Guifen's presentation first sought to provide a profile of IS. She noted that the organization is more ambitious than al-Qaeda and has very different goals. Whereas the latter has seen the West as its main target and is an underground movement, she argued that IS differs in regard to its employment of sectarian violence, its aim to establish a global caliphate, and that it controls territory which is run by an administrative regime. In this way, she argued, IS is distinct from "traditional" terrorist organizations.

"Islamic State is more ambitious than al-Qaeda and in controlling territory run by an administrative regime is distinct from 'traditional' terrorist organizations."

Her presentation then went on to describe IS's means of financing as well as assessing its combat capability. She stated that IS has variously received a large amount of money from

oil fields under its control, from selling cultural heritage, undertaking kidnapping for ransom, as well as staging a robbery of the Central Bank of Iraq in Mosul, from which it is estimated to have stolen over US\$ 400 million. She further provided examples of IS's combat capability such as using suicide attacks to achieve strategic goals. Particularly noteworthy in her view was its defeat of the 9th armed division of the Iraqi army in western Anbar in mid-2014.

In appraising at efforts to counter IS, Zhang noted that territory under IS control has been reduced somewhat, and that half of the senior commanders of IS had been killed. One particular success, she said, was the recapturing of the city of Tikrit by Iraqi government forces in April 2015. She further argued that the operational space of IS would likely be significantly squeezed in Iraq with the reform of government and the easing of the conflict between Sunni and Shia. On a more critical note, she said that the U.S. is not willing to go beyond targeted airstrikes and deploy ground forces, and that it instead was relying on Iraqi government forces (as well as Kurdish forces) to counter IS. Also of concern is that IS has greater potential for expansion in Syria—where the U.S. is unwilling to work with the government administration, where IS already controls half of the country's territory, and where Sunni tribes in the north of the country could potentially ally with IS. In finishing, she also noted a "spillover" of IS to other parts of the world such as Southeast Asia and its expansion of influence on a global basis.

Discussion

One of the key questions asked in the discussion session (as well as the other sessions) concerned what China can do to contribute to countering IS. It was noted that Chinese citizens are fighting alongside IS in Iraq and Syria, and that China is itself threatened by the rise of IS. An answer provided by a Chinese participant was that China would be “cautious” and “preventive,” working within the framework of the UN to assist in controlling and squeezing the operational space of IS. Domestically, it was also pointed out that China is trying to prevent fighters from leaving China and joining IS. Another participant elaborated that measures involved tightening border control (including cooperating with Turkey), pursuing an education campaign, taking financial measures, and cooperating with Interpol. In these efforts, it was stated that the Security Department is more involved than the PLA.

A further question concerned the effectiveness of military operations and what non-military solutions needed to be pursued. It was observed by one participant that the Turkish-Syria border has remained insufficiently controlled and that, counterproductively, assistance by the U.S. in terms of weapons to anti-Assad opposition groups in Syria has fallen into the hands of IS and thus served to bolster it. In answering the main question, it was reiterated by the presenter that a military solution (through airstrikes) is a key part of any response, as well as dissuading recruitment to IS, but that there is also a need to assist Iraq in stabilization efforts and to try to find a political solution in Syria.

Specifically regarding the UK, a question was asked concerning the driving forces behind British citizens going to fight for IS and what the British government could do to prevent this. It was answered that the UK is pursuing a “prevent strategy” so as to stop radicalization at its roots, which entails working with religious leaders, and by passing a new bill that would allow for greater scrutiny of extremist religious organizations in the UK. It was also stated that there is a counter-terrorist dialogue taking place between the UK and China.

Niklas Swanström moderated the session.

*“There is no alternative to timely preventive military action ...
the later one goes, the more damaging the cost”*



Photo: Mingjia Zhou, licensed under Flickr Creative Commons

A mourner bows before a shrine to commemorate the 29 victims of a fatal knife attack in March 2014 at Kunming railway station in China's Yunnan province. Uighur Muslim separatists from Xinjiang were blamed for the attack. While battling their own separatist insurgency, Chinese authorities are also increasingly concerned by linkages with Islamic State, with 300-500 Chinese citizens estimated to have left for Iraq and Syria to fight alongside IS.

SESSION TWO

The Impact of Extreme Islamic Ideology on China: Realistic Pressure and Historical Lessons

Yin Gang



Yin Gang is Research Fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

Yin Gang started his presentation by underlining the main features of IS. He observed that it is already a “functioning” state of sorts, albeit lacking international recognition, and is aimed at establishing a caliphate. While Islamic ideology is the seed for the organization, he argued, factors such as poverty and external interference constitute the soil from which it has flourished. While raising the question of whether the Islamic world should not also reflect on its own “defects,” he also noted that the modern history of jihad started a hundred years ago and had on certain occasions been instrumentalized by international powers who bear a portion of responsibility for the situation today. He asserted that China would not get involved in clashes in what he termed the “monotheistic sphere” surrounding the Mediterranean, but that China has had its own experiences in deal-

ing with Islam.

“Islamic ideology is the seed but external interference and poverty, among other factors, is the soil from which Islamic extremism has flourished.”

A large part of the presentation focused on the history of Muslims in China and the lessons that can be drawn. He argued that Muslims came to different parts of China via three main routes (the main one going to present-day Xinjiang), and how that China had already in the nineteenth century, under the Qing Dynasty, experienced “Muslim rebellions.” He also placed emphasis on Muslim leaders and the influence they had exercised. He further asserted in this context that the situation of IS had in fact already occurred in China, notably in the mid-nineteenth century when conflict boiled over into a series of uprisings, with as many as four million people estimated to have died in the 1862 Tong Zhi Revolt alone. The lessons he drew from this was that radicalization of moderates may only be a short process, and that history teaches us there is sufficient reason and evidence for international cooperation to counteract Islamic extremism, which he termed a “millennial threat to global society.”

The Threat of “Islamic State” and the Counter-terrorism Situation Facing China

Fu Xiaoqiang



Fu Xiaoqiang is Research Fellow and the Director of Security and Arms Control Institute at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations

Fu Xiaoqiang began by outlining the characteristics of IS, arguing that it can be conceived of as a hybrid of the Taliban and al-Qaeda, and that it functions as a semi-state by being both a state and non-state organization. He proceeded by outlining the main threats posed to China by IS.

He noted that while IS is distant from China, it is estimated that 300-500 Chinese citizens had travelled to Iraq and Syria to fight alongside IS. He argued that the model of IS constitutes an attractive ideology for some young Chinese Muslims. He raised the prospect of these individuals returning to China as trained militants and who may try and set up local organizations to carry out attacks in China. He noted in this regard that China has already faced terrorist attacks not only in Xinjiang but also in other provinces of China, notably the Kunming railway station incident in which 29 people were killed in 2014 in a knife attack.

“It is estimated that 300-500 Chinese citizens have travelled to Iraq and Syria to fight alongside IS.”

China is also concerned by the spillover effect of IS in South and Central Asia including connections with the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and with groups in other countries such as Uzbekistan. He also noted that IS had branches in North Africa and Southeast Asia. Another area of concern, asserted Fu, is if IS pursues the acquisition of Weapons of Mass Destruction. He argued that this could also see IS wielding a 9/11- type of threat, similar to al-Qaeda.

He also illustrated that China faces a double threat from Uighur Muslims with Islamic fundamentalism combining with secessionist movements in Xinjiang Province, a situation that exacerbates and complicates the problem. An imminent challenge for China in this regard was seen to be the East Turkestan Liberation Organization.

Discussion

In the discussion session, some of the participants expressed the opinion that Islam itself needed to be “reformed” and that the imposition of strong secular power was necessary. Indeed, one participant saw a gulf between Islam and modern society. However, it was also argued by others that Islam and the Koran were “irreformable” and that there were in any case

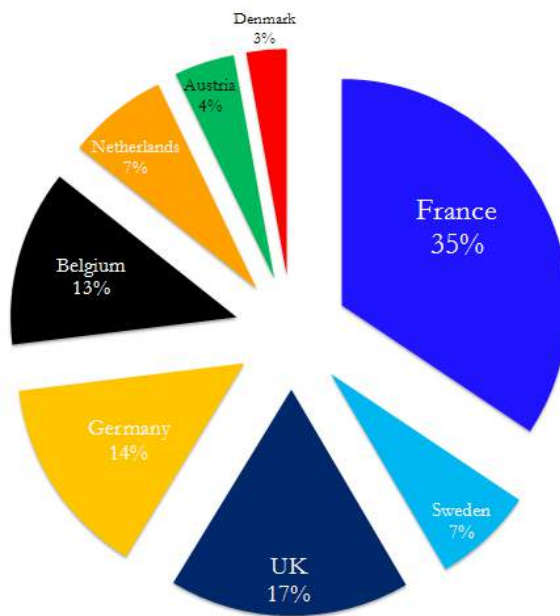
different interpretations of it. Some participants took issue with pinning blame on Islam itself, emphasizing for example that the Sufi school of Islam could not be considered fundamentalist, and that, in any case, even Christianity has its own fundamentalists.

A further question posed was whether China’s “hard strike” policy in Xinjiang involving crackdowns, whilst being effective, had possibly generated a lot of long-term resentment against

both the state and ethnic Han population on the part of Uighur Muslims. It was posited that this could radicalize certain elements. It was answered that this is indeed a concern for China and that a softer approach involving balanced education and economic development as well as reform is also required.

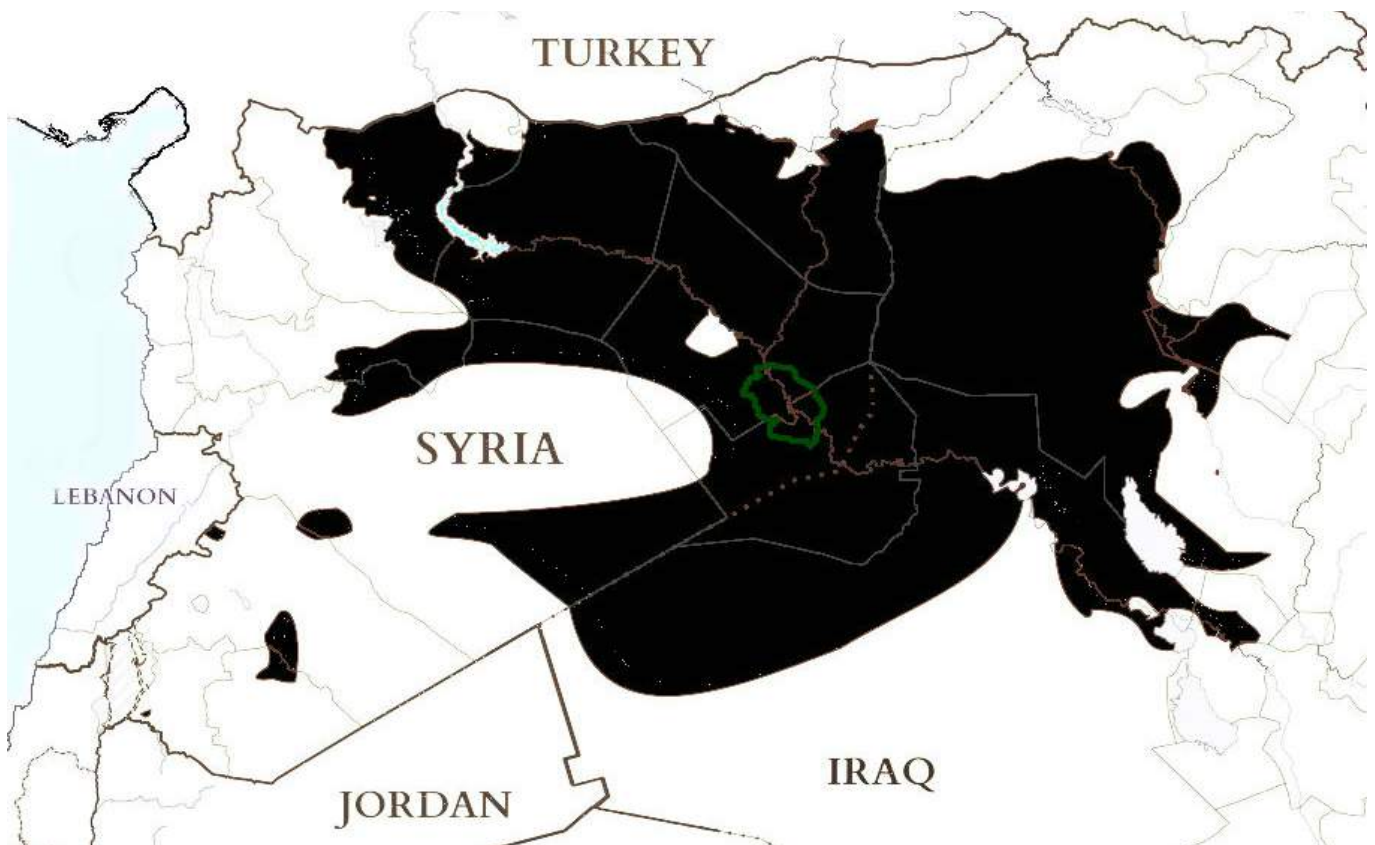
Li Shaoxian moderated the session.

Home Countries of ISIS Fighters from the EU



Source: Radio Free Europe

“IS has emerged from the collapse of the old order in the Middle East ... it needs to be eliminated by rebuilding a new order”



Map: Licensed under Wikimedia Commons, adapted by Scott Sutherland.

The map above depicts the territories Islamic State is estimated to control in the Middle East, including approximately 50 percent of the total area of Syria. While most of the land consists of desert, some 10 million people are estimated to reside in the captured territory. IS imposes an administrative regime in the areas it controls, which includes applying Sharia law as well as provision of services such as health and education. The green-bordered line shows the al-Omar oil field in the east of Syria which IS seized in July 2014.

SESSION THREE

Reconstructing a New Order in the Middle East

Li Shaoxian



Li Shaoxian is Deputy President of the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations

Li asserted in his presentation that the old order in the Middle East had collapsed and that stability could only be achieved through constructing a new order. In this regard, the rise of IS was seen as symptomatic of this breakdown of order. Li went on to illustrate how the old order, which had lasted for a hundred years, was created by the carving up of the Ottoman Empire between Britain, France, and Russia. This, however, has changed, with Syria since 2011 plunged into civil war and unlikely to return to a state of unity, and the status of Iraq also endangered because of the Sunni-Shia split and the rise of Kurds vying for independence.

“Islamic State needs to be eliminated by rebuilding order in the Middle East.”

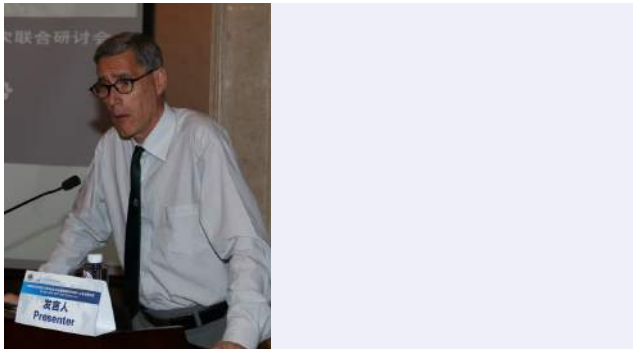
He identified two main reasons for the col-

lapse of the order. The 2003 Iraq war, he argued, upset the geopolitical balance. This not only altered domestic dynamics in Iraq by marginalizing the Sunnis, thereby inverting the previous structure, but it also boosted the status of Iran by creating a “crescent belt of Shias” through to Syria and Lebanon. The second main cause is what he termed the negative implications of the “Arab Change” (Arab Spring). He noted that with the partial exception of Tunisia, most Arabic countries are in crisis. These two developments, argued Li, have not only contributed to the collapse of the old order but also have allowed room for IS to emerge out of the ensuing chaos. Li went on to argue that without the intervention of Western countries, IS would not have risen to such prominence, and that it has also taken advantage of the collapse of order in Syria with, furthermore, weapons provided by the West to the Syrian opposition falling into the hands of IS.

In conclusion, Li argued that IS needs to be eliminated by rebuilding order in the Middle East, which in Iraq will also necessitate that Sunnis resist the spread of IS and that in Syria reconciliation is achieved between the government and rebel groups. He also noted that while IS is small compared to the international community’s resources and forces, the U.S. has not demonstrated enough willingness to sufficiently counteract it.

Western Imperialism and Middle Eastern Disorder

Halil Karaveli



Halil Karaveli is Senior Research Fellow at the Silk Road Studies Program of ISDP and Editor of the Turkey Analyst.

Following on from Li Shaoxian's presentation, Halil Karaveli also placed emphasis on the disorder in the Middle East, arguing that the real root of the problem lay in Western "meddling." He traced the problem back to the foundation of modern Iraq in 1920 by British colonial administrator Sir Percy Cox—which ensured governance of a Sunni minority over the Shia—and the inverting of this order through the invasion of Iraq in 2003, which resulted in Sunni disempowerment and their ruthless repression at the hands of the Maliki administration. This, he claimed, resulted in thousands of deaths (a fact which he stated was underreported in the Western media). Karaveli also found fault with U.S. policy in Syria which had led to the empowerment of Sunnis so as to check the power of Iran. Indeed, he asserted that at the center of the situation in the Middle East is a power struggle between the U.S. and Iran. In sum, he argued, the legacy of Bush-Obama policies has been the oppression of Sunnis and the implosion of Syria—and that IS is

subsequently a product of this.

“At the center of the situation in the Middle East is a power struggle between the U.S. and Iran.”

Karaveli argued that IS achieved its first territorial gains in Syria with the vacuum there affording it the opportunity to expand. He also spoke of the brutal tactics such as beheadings used by IS, claiming that they are designed to shock the West and that IS wants the West to engage in battle so as to unite and rally Sunnis around an ensuing clash. The “trap” of sending in ground forces should therefore be avoided, he argued. Another aspect that his presentation highlighted was how destructive jihadism and far right Islamophobia were two sides of the same coin that fed into each other. He noted worryingly in this regard that Muslims are being strongly discriminated against in many parts of Europe. Given the history of Western interference in the region, he said that a lot of soul searching needs to be done in the West before moralizing about Muslims in the Middle East.

In finishing, he summarized three main points that need to be considered: American ambitions to rule over the Middle East; the exacerbation of sectarianism in the Middle East; and the interlinkage between jihadism and Islamophobia. In looking to the future, he argued that some kind of order needs to be established; however, that it is also a very difficult question of bridging sectarian differences which have been exacerbated, and further, that Iraq has de facto ceased to function as a state within its current borders. This is a fact which may necessitate a redrawing of the political map, he concluded.

The Impact of “the Islam State” on the Security Situation in Afghanistan

Wang Guifang



Wang Guifang is a Senior Colonel and Researcher in the Office of National Strategy, Department of Military Strategic Studies, AMS.

Wang Guifang asserted that Islamic State represents a new development in international terrorism. In general she attributed its rise to complex political changes in the Middle East and the flux in the order in the region. While arguing that IS is not a state actor, she said that it could become one as it consolidates.

Her presentation proceeded to focus on the links between IS and Afghanistan. She explained how IS has also begun to be active in Helmand province in southern Afghanistan, and how over a thousand fighters from Afghanistan had joined IS in Syria. Characterizing Afghanistan as a failed state, she argued that the expansion of IS could impact and intensify the security situation in Afghanistan. With a frail political framework and weak domestic forces, she saw it as necessary for the international community to

work together to bolster the Afghan state.

“Preventing the growth of IS necessitates not only containing it but also employing political and economic means to address the underlying causes.”

In addressing what should be done to counter IS and Islamic extremism more generally, she argued a number of points. The first was to bolster international cooperation and to go beyond merely an anti-terrorist narrative. Asserting that the Middle East has been the site of major power confrontation and U.S. intervention which has created the situation we see today, she advocated for establishing a multipolar world order. She also argued it was necessary to more carefully and objectively study the history of Islam and shed prejudices and biases. Recognizing that China also faces Islamic extremism, she said it was necessary to understand the underlying causes which, she contended, are probably also rooted in grievances and a “lack of acceptance.” In preventing the growth of IS, she argued it will be a longer term approach that needs to not only be contained but addressed through political and economic means.

Wang concluded by noting that there is a need to promote reconciliation between civilizations—and just as the internet and social media have been used as a tool to promote extremism, they can also be used to promote understanding and reconciliation.

Discussion

In response to the presentations, a key point of discussion concerned what the desired new order in the Middle East should look like and what the future prospects are. One response was that there is realistically no way of resurrecting the old order, and that Iraq and Syria as nation-states within their present boundaries are imperilled.

It was further argued that Saudi Arabia and Iran are two key actors determining the future of the Middle East. One presenter argued that Saudi Arabia is an “invisible hand” controlling events and, in so doing, it was trying to eliminate risks to its security; and that Iran is also a highly influential regional actor. Accordingly, he argued, it was necessary to find a balance in relations and consensus between these two “hostile” countries. It was further argued that with Iran on the way to being “pacified” (given the JCPOA negotiations on its nuclear program) and with Saudi Arabia already a “client state” of the U.S., a new American order is being established. In this context, it was reasoned that with its “enemies” gone, it would be in the interest of the U.S. to turn attention to the issue of sectarianism by “giving Syria to the Sunnis and Iraq to the Shias”—which would thus create a new balance. In view of this, it was argued that the phenomenon of Islamic State is just a “parenthesis” in the larger picture. However, it was questioned whether this “new order” would be of benefit to the people living in the Middle East.

In looking to the future, another presenter

argued that while he was pessimistic in the short run, three long-term “needs” could be identified: that the Arab countries themselves find a way out of their crises; that Saudi Arabia and Iran find consensus; and that agreement is found among international stakeholders who need to learn from past mistakes in Middle East policy.

Felix Kühn moderated the session.



*Major Generals Nie Songlai and
Georg Nachtsheim*



*Niklas Swanström and Senior Colonel Yuang
Yang chairing the private roundtable discussion*



*Brigadier Simon Levey, British Defense Attaché
in Beijing, and Senior Colonel Zheng Shoubua*





Major General Wang Weixing making the opening speech



Three of the presenters taking notes during the first session



*Professor Li Shaoxian,
Deputy President of CICIR*

‘IS has been successful in promulgating a ‘new brand’ in the universe of militant Islamism that holds appeal for many’



Photo: Brian Hillegas, licensed under Flickr Creative Commons

A Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected vehicle stands in front of a mosque in Iraq. The capability of Iraqi troops to effectively combat Islamic State has been thrown into doubt. While some insist on the necessity of deploying U.S.-led ground forces in addition to airstrikes to counter IS, others argue that doing so would play in the hands of IS and forge a broader Sunni alliance.

SESSION FOUR

ISIS's Development and Approaches to Combat It

Yu Shujie



Senior Colonel Yu Shujie is a Researcher in the Office of European Military Affairs of the Department of Foreign Military Studies, AMS

Departing from the theme of the geopolitical context of the Middle East and IS in the previous session, Yu Shujie's presentation sought to take a more micro-view of IS as an organization. She started by tracing the origins of IS to both internal and external factors which led to its rise and declaration of the establishment of a caliphate in June 2014. She argued that IS exhibits a very strong organizational structure. Under the leadership of al-Baghdadi are two deputies who served as senior officials in Saddam Hussein's regime and who are responsible for the provinces under IS jurisdiction. The third level of organization she outlined are the Sharia committees monitoring religious ideology and which are further divided into six sub-committees responsible, among others, for security, finance, and propaganda. In summing up, she characterized IS to be a semi-state practising jurisdiction in areas under its control and

that its main strategic priority was to control more territory.

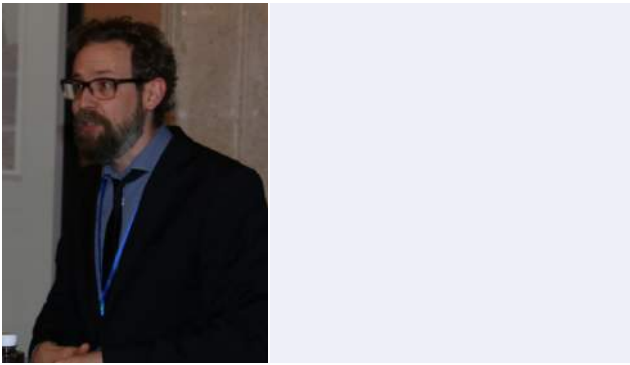
“More efforts need to be made to clamp down on illegal financial transactions and cut off sources of revenue for Islamic State.”

In remarking on its strengths, she reasoned that IS has highly skilful commanders and trained soldiers with 46 training camps and a force of some 15,000 soldiers from over 80 countries. She also claimed that it controls 70 percent of oil refineries in Iraq, which generate it a daily income of approximately US\$ 2 million dollars. However, it also exhibits weaknesses. She argued that its military strategy is gratuitously bloody which has a serious negative impact on its image; that there is dissatisfaction among populations over whom it rules; and that people have sought to escape IS after joining.

The last part of her presentation appraised the strategy taken so far to combat IS. While joint military strikes were being conducted and steps taken to prevent people from joining IS, she contended that financial measures to squeeze IS had been neglected. She therefore saw it as necessary to strengthen intelligence gathering to monitor and clamp down on financial transactions and so cut off sources of revenue. At the same time, she reasoned that airstrikes alone could not fundamentally defeat IS. Yu therefore called on the U.S. to dispatch ground forces as Iraqi government forces alone lack sufficient military capability. As well as strengthening defense lines to prevent the inflow of people to IS, she also held that more needed to be done to combat IS's online activities.

Impact of ISIS in South Asia

Felix Kühn



Felix Kühn is an independent researcher and PhD candidate at King's College London

Felix Kühn argued that IS's declaration of a "caliphate" in June 2014 was a turning point that has resonated widely. He quoted a study that estimated that there were some 20,000 foreign fighters who have joined the conflict in Syria and Iraq (though this number could be considerably higher) with around 4,000 fighters coming from Western Europe alone. Addressing the pull factors of joining IS, he argued that Syria and Iraq were comparatively easier to access than Afghanistan and Pakistan; that IS was seen as successful in promulgating a "new brand" in the universe of militant Islamism that held appeal for many; and that, thirdly, for some potential fighters, the overall living standards within the territory of the Islamic State are arguably better than in their home countries. Kühn also raised the issue of foreign fighters returning to their countries of origin to commit terrorist attacks, quoting Thomas Hegghammer who estimated that potentially 1 in 15 or 20 fighters would do so. However, he also cautioned that such figures needed to be viewed with circumspection.

“Militant groups in Pakistan are predominantly motivated by local concerns rather than by global jihadism.”

In looking at the more global picture, he stated that at least 35 groups worldwide have pledged allegiance to IS, and there are likely many more from different regions. His presentation then focused on militant groups in Pakistan and their interlinkages with IS. He proceeded to show a map of Pakistan's border areas and the various groups operating there, ranging from just 30-40 individuals to over three thousand. He estimated that combined there are approximately 6-7000 militants in Pakistan who have pledged allegiance to IS. At the same time, he argued that it was important to understand what "allegiance" actually entails. In so doing, he maintained that militant groups in Pakistan are predominantly more motivated by local concerns rather than by global jihadism and that, as such, Pashtun cultural norms hold greater significance than broader-based Islamic identification. This makes it very difficult for foreign militants to infiltrate Pashtun-inhabited areas such as Waziristan in northern Pakistan.

In summing up, he argued that any impact of IS in Pakistan was not as a result of IS's strategy per se but rather a symptom of local concerns with individual networks courting IS. In any case, he cautioned that it is hard to determine to what extent they are "integrated" and that overemphasizing the degree of association with IS would be unwise.

Discussion

One of the questions following the presentations concerned the distinctions between the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and IS. In response, it was clarified that there exist important differences between the groups. These were outlined as follows: that there are important theological differences, including understanding of Sharia law; that the Afghan Taliban are predominantly nationalist and are not opposed to international relations compared to IS which has expressed no interest in cultivating diplomatic or political relations; furthermore that al-Qaeda, in contrast to IS, is opposed to sectarianism. A further distinction was made between the Afghan and the Pakistan Taliban. It was argued that the situation of the Afghan Taliban was relatively more stable than in Pakistan and, moreover, that it would be very unlikely for the former to make any “big” allegiance to IS; rather that it wants to negotiate with the government in Kabul. While it was contended in this regard that there are better chances for IS to make inroads and connections in Pakistan, it was maintained that IS is more internationalized while the Pakistani Taliban is much more localized and tribal in nature.

Another question was whether China should assist with deploying ground forces. It was mentioned in this regard that a Chinese white paper had been issued outlining that China would look after its interests abroad and could deploy troops with a host nation’s approval. A Chinese participant answered, however, that sending out Chinese troops is strictly restricted by Chinese law. While conceding that China thinks that

dispatching ground forces would more effectively combat IS, the issue was raised why the U.S. has been unwilling to send forces. Furthermore, in reference to Islamic militant groups in Pakistan, it was argued that addressing local grievances such as through educational programs and minority rights (including greater provisions for self-rule) would be more effective than a military response.

A further question by a Chinese participant sought to clarify whether the chaos in the Middle East is the result of Western intervention, and what could be done to address the root causes of the problems. While it was answered that the West had played a significant role in causing the situation we see today, it was contended that the picture was more complicated still. It was also questioned to what extent the meeting of Sunni grievances would actually resolve the issue. In this regard, doubts were expressed that it was primarily an issue of addressing Baathist grievances emanating from their ousting from power in Iraq in 2003; rather that the situation had evolved to IS growing a new constituency of followers.

Liu Lin moderated the session.

“We need to tackle the problem from its roots ... it is necessary to address the underlying grievances and issues concerning the Sunni population”

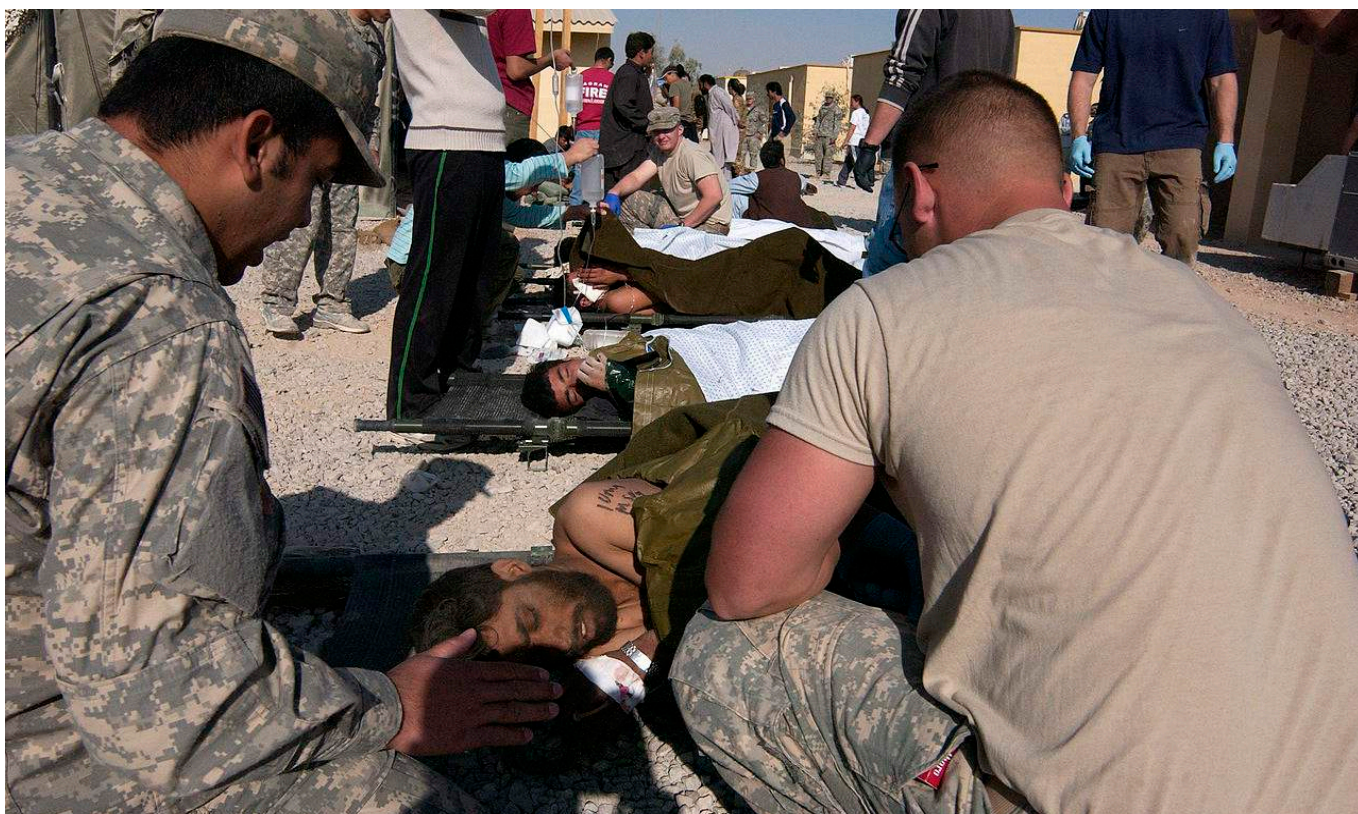


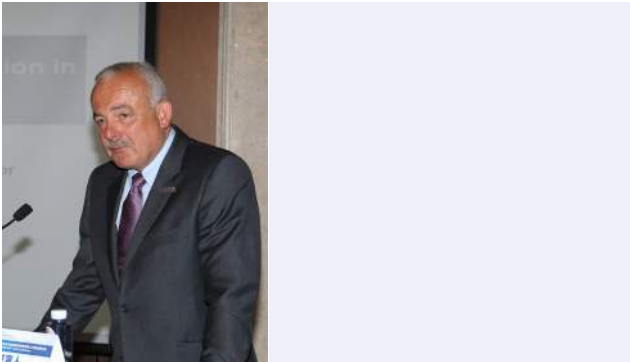
Photo: U.S. Air Force, licensed under Wikimedia Commons

A U.S. serviceman attends to a victim in the aftermath of a suicide bomb explosion on the streets of Farah province in Afghanistan. The joint response saw cooperation between members of the Farah Provincial Reconstruction Team, the 82nd Airborne Division of the U.S. Army, civilian contractors, Italian Special Forces, and the Italian Task Force South. Enhancing inter-agency cooperation is key in responding to modern insurgencies and their consequences.

SESSION FIVE

Military and Inter-agency Cooperation in Facing Military Insurgency

Georg Nachtsheim



Major General Georg Nachtsheim is former Chief of Staff “HQ” Eurocorps and Deputy Commander CRR France

General Nachtsheim’s presentation outlined the complexities and challenges for international actors in facing modern military insurgencies. He started by defining different kinds of military insurgencies ranging from civil wars to “rear area” partisan fighting, arguing that, insurgencies often are a mix of all of these. He then went on to describe inter-agency cooperation and that, in the modern context, besides the military combating modern insurgencies involves many different stakeholders—from the UN and its corollary agencies, governments, NGOs, aid and relief organizations, to the police, judiciary, and border control, among others. He explained that although they often share the same operational space, they do not always share the same concerns (often they are competing), and that the relationship between different stakeholders and the military is often unclear. A

further complicating factor is that they operate in a media environment under a lot of scrutiny which poses its own unique set of challenges.

“There is no alternative to timely preventive military action ... the later one goes, the more damaging the cost.”

While arguing the need for cooperative crisis management, in a situation of a multitude of actors, cultures, and interests the issue becomes how to unify all of them at the same time while following the provisions of international law. He further pointed that, unfortunately, the military often finds itself with inadequate means and facing a situation of sub-optimal coordination. He also stressed that it is very important to understand the context of the conflict one is engaging in—and that this applies not only to commanders but to the individual soldier. Given all of this, and the need for a comprehensive approach, he argued that the situation today regarding inter-agency cooperation is much more difficult than in the past. He asserted that it is not simply enough to be kinetic (i.e. using lethal force) but that it is necessary to conduct a “three block” operation: that it is, to conduct full-scale military action, peacekeeping operations, and humanitarian aid within the space of three contiguous city blocks or wider spaces. This entails coalition building and comprehensive planning. In this regard, Nachtsheim put emphasis on U.S. General David Petraeus’s development of the COIN Manual (FM 3-24) as constituting the guiding principles for fighting insurgencies and how this has been translated to the grand strategic level.

Major General Nachtsheim finished his presentation on a personal conclusion that there is no alternative to timely preventive action: that the later one intervenes, the more damaging the cost. Furthermore, he emphasized that there is no substitute for the rule of law, and that once intervention is decided upon, we must be prepared to stay until the mission is complete.

The “Islamic State” and Global Non-traditional Security Challenges

Liu Linzhi



Major Liu Linzhi is Assistant Researcher in the Office of Asian & African Military Affairs of the Department of Foreign Military Studies, AMS.

Liu Linzhi started his presentation by outlining different kinds of non-traditional security challenges. Arguing that security is increasingly multidimensional, combining both traditional and non-traditional threats. He said that the phenomenon of IS is well-representative of such a trend, and proceeded to examine the aims and characteristics of IS. He argued that as an organization it is more radical

than al-Qaeda even, and discussed how it uses social media to promote terror, as well as how its membership is composed of many different nationalities. Liu paid particular attention to the refugee crisis created by the conflict and the serious consequences of this. He noted several impacts in this regard, including the depleting of populations in Syria and Iraq, the causing of a serious humanitarian crisis, the danger that terrorists could be mingling with refugees, and a rise in Islamophobic sentiment in Europe.

“Combating IS is a battle of values and ideas, it being necessary to defeat the ideology of IS.”

He also put emphasis on the threat posed by IS to cultural diversity and how different communities from Shias and Yezidis to Kurds were being targeted and persecuted, and how cultural relics not consistent with IS ideology were being destroyed. Other important points mentioned were the spread of extreme ideas in the Internet era and how IS was also influencing “lone wolf” attackers who are very difficult to stop. He furthermore asserted that combating IS is a battle of values and ideas, with it being necessary to defeat the ideology of IS.

In summing up, Liu argued that while military strikes may be effective at containing IS, they cannot eliminate the non-traditional security challenges emanating from IS; and that it is thus necessary to tackle the problem from its roots. Talking of “eliminating” IS in this regard is unhelpful, he argued, as there will always be something to replace it unless the underlying issues are addressed.

Discussion

One of the questions posed was whether American troops should have stayed on in Iraq and if early intervention in Syria would have been advisable. While arguing against speculation, it was maintained by one participant that stepping in late means that a “situation” has already developed for the worse. At the same time, it was clarified that it is not always the military that has to stay on but rather the international community at large. It was contended in relation to Syria that everyone saw what was evolving but did nothing about it, with the UN Security Council unable to come to a decision.

Another point raised was why, in contrast to Germany and Japan after World War II, the U.S. has been unable to bring about peace and development in the aftermath of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Discussion also touched upon how the erstwhile enemies of France and Germany had after the war become strong cooperation partners, with the Franco-German Brigade making up the largest body of troops in Eurocorps—an intergovernmental army corps that has participated in various missions including to Kosovo and Afghanistan.

Following on from this, a question was asked concerning international law with the point made that certain actions and interventions have not adhered to international law, with the operation to kill Bin Laden offered as a case in point. The response argued that the application of a specific international law varies according to theater and area: for example that the UNC-

LOS (Law of the Sea) obviously does not apply to operations in the Balkans. A further dilemma mentioned in today’s operations is the problem of determining hostile from friendly forces; that is, not knowing for instance whether an individual may be a suicide bomber.

Halil Karaveli moderated the session.

“Conflicting goals and self-interests have thwarted the forging of a unified philosophy and strategy to combat IS”



Photo: A still taken from a YouTube video in October 2014, posted by Karl-Ludwig Poggemann, Flickr Creative Commons

The photo above purportedly shows an IS “boot camp” with recruits receiving weapons training. Fighters have flocked from more than 80 countries to join IS including from many European countries. Figures on the number of fighters IS has at its disposal vary widely with estimates ranging between 30-100,000.

SESSION SIX

Features of IS Operations

Zheng Shoubua



Senior Colonel Zheng Shoubua is Director of the Center of Military Operations Other than War Studies at the AMS

Zheng Shoubua's presentation sought to outline the main features of IS operations as well as appraise the effectiveness of and challenges for international efforts to counter it. He started off by noting how IS has taken advantage of sectarian conflict, captured land and resources, uses terror as a means of war, and employs social media for recruitment.

“A major challenge for international action in combating IS is to forge a unified philosophy and agenda that transcends conflicting goals and private agendas.”

He then went on to identify the problems with hitherto international efforts against IS. He argued accordingly that the U.S. is not firmly committed to “wiping out” IS and that it is unwilling to commit troops as it is afraid of incurring casualties. Nevertheless, he saw it as

incumbent on the U.S. to take more action “as he who makes the knot should untie the knot,” noting that the situation in the Middle East has been created in large part by U.S. intervention. He also quoted former U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates's recent statement that the fight against IS needs a change in strategy. Other weaknesses pin-pointed were the lack of joint actions and coordination. Not only are the Iraqi forces too weak to counter IS but other forces such as Syrian and Kurdish forces are seeking benefit for themselves, with the latter pre-occupied with maintaining its own territories. He saw this as indicative of conflicting goals and self-interests.

Following on from this, he identified the main challenges of international action which include as follows: combining forces from different countries; forging a unified philosophy with the same goals and no private agendas; setting out a unified plan for military action with a combined command center with strict rules and restrictions on behavior; and adhering to the UN Charter and principles of international law. Moving on to how to actually fight IS, he argued that it is not enough to simply defeat IS but to “wipe it out” through the introduction of ground forces. In this regard, he asserted that neither airstrikes alone are sufficient nor the targeted elimination of IS leaders. In terms of prevention, moreover, he argued that the international community should do more to stem the outflow of terrorists, that border control is crucial including setting up of more check-points, and that information gathering and sharing should be enhanced for more effective monitoring and surveillance of IS activities.

Assessing U.S. Military Strategy to Address IS

Li Xiang



Major Li Xiang is an Assistant Researcher in the Office of American and Oceanian Military Affairs of the Department of Foreign Military Studies, AMS

Li Xiang’s presentation followed on from the previous one by outlining her own analysis of the effectiveness of the U.S. strategy in fighting IS, as well as highlighting some of the latter’s strengths that have made it difficult to combat. In so doing, she illuminated a number of issues. Firstly that there is a lack of alignment between political and military strategies; secondly that air strikes and drones are insufficient to counter IS without the introduction of ground forces, with the U.S. instead relying on local forces to conduct operations and which complicates coordination; and thirdly that there is a lack of synergy in understanding of the root cause of IS and how it has become entrenched in the ideology of local people and their grievances.

Following the above analysis, she went on to consider the sources of IS’s effectiveness. She noted in this regard that IS does not rely on external support for financing but rather that it has managed to exploit internal resources, so

making it harder to cut off. Furthermore, that is has employed an effective propaganda strategy and exhibits a coherent organizational structure around which it can mobilize. Another observation made was that it has managed to secure a large amount of weaponry and other assets.

“President Obama has underestimated Islamic State and overestimated the capability of the Iraqi government forces to counter it.”

In summing up, she argued that Obama has underestimated IS and overestimated the capability of the Iraqi government forces. She also laid fault at the door of the U.S.’s strategic shift or rebalance to Asia-Pacific and how this has led to a certain “neglect” of the Middle East. In any case, she viewed IS to be a long-term problem with the issue of military operations against IS continuing to dominate the agenda of the next U.S. administration.

Discussion

One of the participants in this discussion session took issue with the necessity of committing ground forces in Syria and Iraq to combat IS. He instead argued that it would make no strategic sense for the U.S. to do this as it would cause a wider Sunni mobilization around IS, and that doing so would be falling into the trap that IS has laid. In this sense, he argued that IS

wants to provoke such a confrontation.

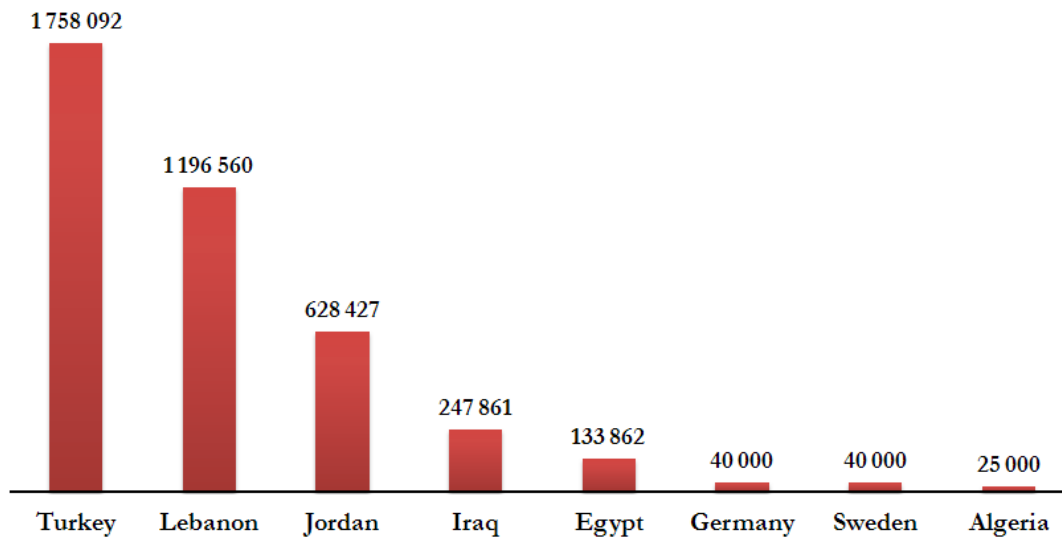
As in other sessions, questions were asked about China's participation in efforts to combat IS. It was asserted in this context that China does not need to commit forces and was "taking part in a different way," encompassing a campaign to stop and prevent extremists and undertaking arrests. It was further argued that while China is not a member of the international coalition, it is nonetheless desirous of preventing and resisting the threat posed by IS.

Another participant also took issue with the

notion of "wiping out" IS and asked whether this was possible if IS's emergence could be traced to grievances among the local Sunni population. In response, it was upheld that tackling IS as an organization is nevertheless necessary and which necessitates, among other measures, the targeted elimination of its leaders. It was added that ground forces are essential, as continuing to delay their deployment would only lead to greater instability.

Fu Xiaoqiang moderated the session.

Estimated Numbers of Syrian Refugees in Various Countries



Source: UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response

