FY2014 MINERVA RESEARCH INITIATIVE TOPIC #1

Belief Propagation and Movements for Change

Recent developments in South Asia, West Africa, and the Middle East highlight the need for improved understanding of influence and mobilization, especially when leading to violence. Decreasing terrorism and political violence requires an understanding of the underlying forces that shape motivations and mobilize action. The United States and its partners must consider these cultural dynamics to effectively craft communications and operations that fulfill their intended purposes while mitigating potential unintended consequences.

Regions of interest include South Asia, Middle East/ North Africa, West Africa, Latin America

Subtopic 1-A: Belief formation and influence

Research on belief formation and emotional contagion may help analysts, policy makers, advisors, and trainers better understand the impact of operations on seemingly disparate populations. This research may also inform the development of countermeasures to help reduce the likelihood of militant behaviors.

Themes of interest include:

- Intracultural variability in belief systems (including comparative assessments with belief systems in the United State) and its applicability to decision making processes.
- Trends in processes that spreading ideologies across culturally diverse populations and beyond membership in specific organizations.
- Factors that make specific individuals influential within a particular cultural context.
- Factors impacting perceived credibility, trust, and internal and external security in a society. How might foreign policy actions or engagement strategies generate or undermine this credibility or trust?
- The influence, if any, of social networks, social media, and traditional media on collective behavior.
- The emergence of Internet-based culture and identity as factors shaping individual beliefs.
- Mixed model approaches to measurement and validation of the effectiveness of mechanisms of influence, (e.g., change in attitude distributions across a population. Under what context might counterinsurgency strategies like providing economic assistance or investment in local infrastructure and services effectively result in long-term shifts in the local population's objectives, behavior, or beliefs?

Subtopic 1-B: Group identity, cultural norms, and security

It is commonly understood that beliefs and behaviors are strongly shaped by cultural context, and these relationships can help inform policy-making. The Department of Defense seeks research to

rigorously test the impact of cultural factors, to include identity and local norms, on beliefs and behaviors. Proposals providing contextualized analysis beyond modelization are encouraged.

Themes of interest include:

- The role, if any, of identity in building or undermining political unity and coalitions, especially across disparate communities and religious groups, and independent of formal political or geographical boundaries.
- The impact of globalization, if any, on individual and group identities and social structures (e.g., role transitions, identity crises, merging and division of networks).
- Indicators (behavioral and otherwise) of the strength of group identity and the relationship, if any, between solidified identity and effective mobilization toward change.
- The relationship, if any, between religious ideologies and the behavior of sub- or trans-state actors bound by ethnic, tribal, and regional identities.
- Social and political dimensions of beliefs — e.g., the role, if any, of:
  - The state in defining or politicizing religion.
  - Religion and culture in modulating social, economic, and political vulnerabilities across regions of interest.
  - Religion and culture in jurisprudence and maintaining rule of law.
- Culture-specific spoken communication mechanisms to garner credibility, express knowledge and uncertainty, or communicate =.
- The impact, if any, of culture on a society's definitions of credibility, corruption, and legitimacy.
- Indicators of the susceptibility to types of corruption for a given group or region.
- The impact, if any, of U.S. culture and U.S. military service subcultures in shaping cross-cultural interactions with allies, coalition partners, host nation personnel, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and others.
- Other trends driving change in group identities and cultural norms, and the impact of these changes on conflict and security in local, regional, or global settings.

<u>Subtopic 1-C</u>: Mobilization for change

The Department of Defense is interested in better understanding what drives individuals and groups to mobilize to institute change. In particular, models that explain and explore factors that motivate or inhibit groups to adopt political violence as a tactic will help inform understanding of where organized violence is likely to erupt, what factors might explain its contagion, and how one might circumvent its spread.

Themes of interest include:

- Factors that foster or inhibit an individual's transition from passive support of fringe social movements to active political mobilization.
- The role, if any, of traditional communication mechanisms and new media technologies for influence and political mobilization, including radicalization, de-radicalization, and terrorist

recruitment.

- The role, if any, of diaspora and displaced persons and communities within movements.
- Factors that differentiate those who join violent organizations from other prepared individuals who do not. Similarly what factors differentiate those who disengage from violent organizations from engaged participants who do not?
  - The role, if any, of non-ideological factors (e.g., profit, shame, trust) in mobilizing or deterring political violence.
  - Drivers of disengagement from extremist and violent groups compared to those from extremist but non-violent groups.
  - Factors leading formerly violent actors to return to violent organizations. Is ease of disengagement role-dependent?
- Differences between violent group and "lone-wolf" instantiations of political violence.
- Factors distinguishing repressive, destabilizing, violent, and reform-oriented organizations and movements.
- The use of established social, cultural, political, and religious institutions and symbols to justify violence or promote resilience to emergent movements.
- Community or state level variables that promote or inhibit the popularity of violent ideologies and tactics.
- Measurements of the impact and efficacy of various government approaches (e.g. legal, technical, operational, education and training) to counter transnational criminal organizations.
- Novel models and statistical methods to predict relatively rare events relative to the total size of any given population, such as acts of terrorism and social conflict.
- Threat finance and illicit networks.
- Other approaches exploring mechanisms for and contributors to political mobilization.

<u>Subtopic 1-D</u>: The structural dynamics of disruptive organizations

Themes of interest include:

- Analyses of the topology, power structure, productivity, merging and splitting, and overall resilience of change-driven organizations.
- Factors differentiating roles within change-seeking organizations, especially those groups utilizing violent tactics.
- Dependency network analyses to identify key relationships for conflict mitigation and, in the developing world, to inform selection of development strategies.
- Increasingly the world has witnessed the expansion and merging of various groups such as violent extremist organizations (VEOs) and transnational criminal organizations. Such unifications/collaborations are believed to take place largely for reasons both tactical (e.g., money, arms, training, connections) and strategic (e.g., promise of growth, competitive advantage) rather than ideological. Analyses of interest include:
  - Characteristics of groups that merge and the conditions under which they merge. When

do mergers succeed or fail and why?

  - Who are the decision makers and what are the consensus mechanisms within these "blended" organizations? What cognitive systems lie beneath these decision-making processes?
  - What ideological, operational, and strategic goals, if any, are most likely to change after a merge or transition, and why?
- Other approaches exploring the structural dynamics of insurgent organizations and how and why they merge, collaborate, compete, or divide.

Research Topic Chiefs:

- Topics 1-A, 1-B, 1-C:
  Dr. Harold Hawkins (Office of Naval Research), harold.hawkins@navy.mil, 703-696-4323
- Topic 1-D:
  Dr. John Lavery (Army Research Office), john.e.lavery4.civ@mail.mil, 919-549-4253