INFORMATION VS. PROPAGANDA:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE WASHINGTON POST'S REPORTING OF THE ISLAMIC STATE

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A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green
State University in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2016

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ABSTRACT

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Since the Islamic State's formation its prominence has soared, particularly in the area of communication where it has garnered a reputation for great skill with propaganda and social media. ISIS propaganda is an integral part of the narrative; however, the focus on propaganda and communication also reveals biases on the part of the United States. This study examines 50 *Washington Post* articles as a case study research questions dealing with war reporting and propaganda. In addition, it analyzes via both content and text the frequency of propaganda-related messages in the *Post,* while exploring the line between "pure information" and propaganda. The current events are informed by historical events from World War II through the two Gulf Wars. Ultimately, the results, which reveal some biases on the part of the *Post* in regards to the ISIS communication-related content, emphasize the need for awareness and active readership in an always political world, full of information.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the community at the School of Media and Communication, particularly my advisor and committee, who made the thesis process both manageable and even enjoyable.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1981, Edward Said concluded his book *Covering Islam* with a grave predication. If the knowledge of Islam in the West were to strictly remain tied to violence and conquest, Said predicted, "we will not only face protracted tension and perhaps even war, but we will offer the Muslim world, its various societies and states, the prospect of many wars, unimaginable suffering, and disastrous upheavals, not the least of which would be the birth of an 'Islam' fully ready to play the role prepared for it by reaction, orthodoxy, and desperation" (Said, 1981, p. 164). Said characterized this as "not a pleasant" possibility 35 years ago. With the 21st century rise of a group known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS, Islamic-inspired military conflict in the Middle East and Islamophobia in the west are on the rise, and an unpleasant reality is becoming increasingly apparent.

ISIS appeared seemingly out of nowhere in 2011, coincident with civil war and widespread chaos in Syria. It arose when many thought Iraq had stabilized after the American invasion launched in 2003 by U. S. President George W. Bush. Media accounts refer to the group variously as the caliphate, Daesh or Daiish, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) (Tharoor, 2014; Bennett, 2015). This study uses the terms ISIS or the Islamic State. Presently, the group and their black flag have become international bogeymen (Warrick). CNN anchors mistakenly reported seeing the ISIS flag at a London Gay Pride parade. Fox News has reported that Muslim refugees displaced by the civil war in Syria are really terrorists working for ISIS, a sentiment growing among populist and conservative Americans since the 2015 attack on Paris, as various states refuse to take in displaced civilians (Jauregui, 2015; Sargent, 2015).

ISIS is a frightening group. Their tactics are brazen, brutal, personal, and publicized immediately, due in part to the Internet, compared to atrocities committed during, for instance, the Holocaust of World War II or the 1994 Rwandan genocide, which became apparent after the murders. Like those responsible for the Holocaust, the leaders of ISIS have displayed a gift for propaganda and are particularly skilled using social media—Twitter principally (Gladstone, R., Goel, V., & Shane, S. 2015, p. A12.). When news sources in the United States discuss ISIS activities, the word "propaganda" and its implied evil are frequently noted. The very idea of propaganda invokes thoughts of brainwashing innocent civilians with an authoritarian message or streams of lies, although that is not universally the case. Messages characterized as propagandistic often contain information that can be considered "true" or "pure" but is otherwise framed perversely. Propaganda media have a complicated history. The latest version attributed to ISIS and its affiliates seems designed to shock its recipients through graphic depictions of beheadings, mass shootings, and other human atrocities, as well as destroying water supplies, oil fields, and ancient archaeological sites revered by many religious followers, whether ancient and no longer practiced, or modern and still observed.

Besides their more shocking content, ISIS messages have received note for their skill in positive propaganda and recruiting statements that offer an idyllic, pure, united existence for likeminded "Muslims," signifying that the members of ISIS are not true Muslims because their actions are considered by the broader Muslim population to be un-Islamic and corrupt. This sentiment is illustrated by the open letter to Dr. Ibrahim Awwad al-Badri, alias Abu-Bakr Al-Bagdhadi, the current head of ISIS, which is signed by notable and influential Muslim leaders like the Grand Mufti of Egypt, Shawqi Allam, and the Sultan of Sokoto Muhammad, Sa'ad Ababakar. Said also used quotation marks in his call to action, to signify that what he was

predicting would be a corrupted form of the religion. What makes this development particularly unusual is the connection to social media, which did not exist before the late 1990s.

Propaganda, whether subtle or overt, is a common feature of war; the tactic and the word itself are reviled and as much a slur as a genre of publication. Besides being pejorative, propaganda is sometimes criticized for being ineffective. *World War II: The Home Front*, a collection of documents published by the National Archives and Records Administration, includes a survey of business owners who expressed frustration with the sappy messages they felt obliged to play in their businesses to promote fundraisers, blood drives, and the war effort (Doc. 8, "Quotes of Complaints"). Carl Hovland found that Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* "documentary" series was more useful as an informational source than a motivation for soldiers (Rogers, 1994, pp. 369-371). The effects of propaganda are not as simple as a shot from a hypodermic needle; the reality is often more nuanced than an injection, even in the face of a seemingly obvious example. But using euphemism to describe the ways in which countries, or even corporations, spread their messages, changes nothing, even if the examples are not as brazen as, say, releasing hundreds of posters portraying foreigners as fanged monsters—a dehumanizing tactic often used during World Wars I and II and the Cold War, particularly in poster art and cartoons (Geisel, 1942).

Each side views events differently and tells stories differently, according to their values, and each side will likely include a kernel of truth in its messages, a very interesting aspect to a system often thought of as being wholly untrue, or, considering fanged monsters, unrealistic. Because propaganda is intrinsic to war, the U. S. State Department has a center devoted to counterpropaganda against ISIS, the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC). CSCC, established in 2011, works in six languages and strives "to counter terrorist

propaganda and misinformation about the United States" (2015, http://www.state.gov/r/cscc/). The center is small and allotted only six million dollars to prevent at-risk individuals from joining ISIS; however, its effectiveness often comes into question, especially because it also has a very small staff. Still, its existence sends a message. Social media are frequently laughed off as youthful narcissism, but the U. S. government recognizes its legitimacy as a form of propaganda that can be used either for or against American interests. Consequently, the U. S. government regards as threats ISIS's Twitter and other social media feeds.

Press coverage of ISIS activities, as well as U. S. policy, routinely assesses and reports on information and propaganda components in asymmetrical insurgency warfare. This study seeks to examine a component of that press coverage in the *Washington Post* to analyze how propaganda and information are treated. It focuses on propaganda's link to armed conflict to try to distinguish factual information embedded in propagandistic missives from informational framing and distortion, designed to mislead and persuade others to believe ideas or ideology in opposition to their own. In terms of ISIS propaganda and its information campaign, I am interested in separating information that is "pure," or "factual," from information that is contrived or framed with self-serving rather than neutral expository intent. For example, an international investigation into the crash of Malaysia Flight 17 over Ukraine in July 2014 revealed that it had in fact been struck by a missile. Specifically, it was a Russian-made missile with very distinctive shrapnel inside the head. It remains unclear who fired it and from where (Clark & Kramer, 2015). Assigning blame for the incident, however, leaves the realm of established fact and enters that of propaganda—particularly in the case of Ukrainian Prime Minister, Arseniy P. Yatsenyuk, who insisted that the missile had to have been fired by Russian soldiers, because "drunken separatists" would not be capable of operating a Buk missile system

(Clark & Kramer, 2015). Russia maintains its innocence in the tragedy. Until conclusive proof of guilt, which the Dutch board does not provide, the search for the fact of the matter will likely be debated extensively.

The importance of the question of fact versus propaganda arises because of frequent mentions in national and international news reports related to ISIS and their use of social media, novel recruiting methods employing social media, and the frequency with which news reports specifically mention ISIS in connection with social media and propaganda. This thesis examines ISIS as a case study in propaganda from the group's emergence on the international scene in 2011 to the present, looking in particular at the *Washington Post*. I will then compare ISIS propaganda with examples of World War II, (a conflict closely identified with propaganda dissemination), and other historical frameworks, (such as instances of insurgency, like Vietnam), to look for similarities, differences, patterns, and new emerging concepts. I intend to reveal the nature, contours, and pertinent details of the ISIS social media and propaganda campaign and to analyze ways in which ISIS propaganda or their messages are reported.

CHAPTER I: ISIS BACKGROUND AND REPORTED INFORMATION TACTICS

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS, has become a familiar name associated with terror, violence, and military power in the Middle East for the last several years. CBS News traced the group's roots to Camp Bucca, an American prison in Iraq. CBS describes Camp Bucca as a "pressure cooker of extremism," and quotes former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) case officer Patrick Skinner as asserting, "it's where they met, it's where they planned" (Ward, 2014). Quoting a former CIA official can in and of itself be considered propagandistic (he would have reason to put the government in a good light); however, he could also be correct in his assertions about Bucca, and the implied misstep in keeping so many extremists locked up together. But Joby Warrick, a *Washington Post* reporter and former Pulitzer Prize winner, also traces the ISIS origin story back to a prison, this one Jordan's infamous fortress Al-Jafr. Warrick blames the United States for creating the face of insurgency out of the dangerous figure known as Zaqarwi (about whom more will be said in the literature review). This gave followers a role model and rallying symbol.

Dexter Filkins of *The New Yorker* investigated an argument between presidential candidate and former Florida governor Jeb Bush and a student named Ivy Ziedrich at a 2015 town-hall meeting in Nevada (Filkins, 2015). Filkins found two focal points relating to the formation of ISIS: 2003, when President George W. Bush dissolved the Iraqi Army, and 2011, when President Barrack Obama withdrew American combat forces from the country, though a small number of non-combat troops remained. The news narrative that has emerged links the birth of ISIS to the U. S. invasion of Iraq, which upset the secularist regime, put hundreds of thousands of men with military training out of work; and imprisoned thousands before leaving.

The civil war in Syria was the spark that exploded this pressure cooker scenario, despite the fact that the then Prime Minister of Iraq, Nouri al-Maliki, also broke his promises to the United States and other world leaders to further democratize his country. In Syria, President Bashar al-Assad used force against peaceful protestors in his country during the Arab Spring (Montagne, 2011), which evolved into civil war. But before that, he had created unsavory conditions by humoring religious radicals and allowing jihadists to go to Iraq following the 2003 American invasion. By so doing, Assad made Syria a jihad-gateway point. Though al-Assad's party, the Syrian Ba'ath Party, is secular and typically discourages public displays of piety (of Muslims in particular), al-Assad himself seems to think of extremism as a way to manipulate policy to his own ends, however difficult to control (Neuman, 2014, p. 20). When the Syrian civil war erupted, a small group from the fledgling Islamic State of Iraq entered Syria and rapidly gained followers. The group harassed Assad's government and evolved into the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria by 2013 (Filkins, 2015). Although ISIS is taking and holding Syrian territory, they have not been troubled much by the Syrian military, which focuses most of its attention on putting down the rebellion against Assad's government. This has led to speculation that Assad still hopes to manipulate his way out of this crisis, or is even collaborating with ISIS, though the latter speculation seems less likely, given the loss of territory and sheer amount of collateral damage caused by the extremists. The same has been alleged about the United States collaborating with rebels or sitting governments not simply in the Middle East but in Central and South America as well, who then used support for terror and other nefarious purposes during the Cold War in particular (McSherry, 2002, p. 40).

From the beginning, news reports about the Islamic State's extremism has also alluded to their media preferences and skills. Searching for "ISIS" or "the Islamic State" on EBSCOhost

produces hundreds of thousands of hits, many related in some way to media or communication in general. (There are, however, also a number of irrelevant articles about the Egyptian goddess Isis, among other things.) Even limiting the results to a single source, like the *Washington Post,* still produces a significant body of work. Most of the reports about ISIS's communication seem to frame their messaging as propaganda. This study seeks to analyze whether such framing is justified. Reports about the act of killing a hostage when negotiations go sour is not necessarily propaganda by itself; filming it live or editing it first and uploading it to YouTube, though, sends a decidedly propagandistic message. It says, in effect, "We are powerful. Bad things will continue to happen until we get our way. We aren't backwards —we know how to use technology and you must take us seriously." As a letter to the editor of the *Washington Post* from August 2015 noted, intent matters when assessing the Twitter feed of the Islamic State in terms of its propaganda value (Lapan, 2015). For instance, a photo of a young man holding a jar of Nutella is probably just that, and should not be classified or framed as propaganda.

Social media, the most noted vehicle for ISIS propaganda, has a rich history intertwined with the conflict. Twitter played a large part in the Arab Spring uprisings—NPR called it a "Twitter revolution" in October 2011. The year before, 2010, Japanese journalist Kosuke Tsuneoka, who was a prisoner of the Taliban, tricked his captors into letting him set up a Twitter account for them; he instead tweeted that he was alive, being held prisoner, his location, and the name of his captors (Gentilviso, 2010). He was freed a few days later, ostensibly because he had converted to Islam, although he chuckled that his captors "never knew they were tricked" (Gentilviso, 2010). But the embarrassment of Tsuneoka's trick did not hinder ISIS's use of Twitter or its use of the platform.

Though Twitter tries to curb the use of their site by extremist groups—by shutting down accounts or blocking content—they cannot stymie the entire operation and often receive threats from the group's leaders. The *New York Times* notes that ISIS depends heavily on free Internet forums for Twitter's blocks to elicit such a response (Gladstone, Goel, and Shane, 2015). Another article from *Time* estimates there about 60,000 Twitter accounts associated with ISIS, compared to the U. S. government's much smaller official staff for counter measures (Altman, 2014). Twitter's lack of success at curbing the disruptive use of their product is a source of some contention, given that Facebook has had much better luck—although that could be because Facebook seems less suited to the task of selling life in the Islamic State; quite a lot of information is required for an account, and there is a policy of using one's "real name" absent "Characters from multiple languages" or "Symbols, numbers, unusual capitalization, repeating characters or punctuation," most of which are allowed on Twitter or other social media forums ("What names are allowed on Facebook?" 2016).

On the other hand, over the past few years some ISIS defectors have come forward to tell stories of why they left ISIS. Their reports have exposed cracks in the organization's propaganda rhetoric. ISIS promises a pure, united Islamic state, but defectors complain of racism, hypocrisy from leaders, infighting, and killing of other Muslims, such as the Sunni (Neuman, 2015, p. 1). That the actuality does not measure up to the promises laid out in recruiting media is hardly surprising, for instance, during the first Gulf War the U. S. Army claimed that Patriot missiles could destroy Scud missiles launched from Iraq 80 percent of the time, when the actual number was about 10 percent (Postol, 1992). Other inconsistencies distinguishing propaganda from measureable reality throughout times of conflict fill books devoted to the subject. Given the

worldwide influence of the Islamic State, it is therefore reasonable to assess its use of media and propaganda within broader contexts that include World War II, the Cold War, and the Gulf War.

As previously noted, World War II (WWII) holds the dubious honor of being the conflict most identified with propaganda— most conspicuously the Nazi film, *The Triumph of the Will,* one of the most effective examples of propaganda ever, directed by Leni Riefenstahl. Faced with such distinguished competition, the United States countered with propaganda of its own, such as the media campaign derived from Rosie the Riveter, Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* series, documentaries like *The Battle of Midway* and *The Battle of San Pietro*, and a few less well-regarded examples, such as the racist cartoon "Bugs Bunny Nips the Nips" (Ford, 1943, Huston, 1945, and Freleng, 1944). This cartoon is pure propaganda with no real information about the conflict, other than the social acceptability of dehumanizing the enemy. Often, however, propaganda is mixed with verifiable facts. Frank Capra and John Ford's war documentaries often mixed style with information about the war and the message they were selling. Riefenstahl argued she was merely capturing information in *The Triumph of the Will;* nevertheless, Hitler is depicted in a godlike manner, a decidedly propagandistic stylistic choice. And while WWII may seem like a giant leap from the detail of beheadings in the Middle East, there are striking similarities in terms of presentation. ISIS's actions are not dissimilar to those of the Third Reich (although their disorganization and lack of recognition make them more officially an insurgency, similar to the Viet Cong). They know how to tell a story, present themselves both heroically and idyllically, as well as fixate on ridding the world of impurities, meaning those who disagree with their ideas and methods.

An article about American radio in postwar Germany quoted columnist Jack Gould that "good propaganda may consist of doing the things we enjoy most and hence can do best rather

than trying to do less well those things we think others should like," which alludes to the need for subtle propaganda (Craig,1988, p. 9). During the Cold War, the period in which Gould would have been speaking, both superpowers, the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), produced massive amounts of propaganda, slamming the other and praising their own ideologies. They also excused their own actions. Nancy Bernhard (1999) noted in her book on TV news and Cold War propaganda that no "central conspiracy" existed between the U. S. media and government, but that Americans wanted to have it both ways by beating the Soviets and being champions for truth and liberty . . . and to make money at the same time (p. 79). As a result, media organizations gave its audiences stories about the good fight and cooperated with national security concerns to maintain good Washington contacts. They also glossed over undesirable details, especially at the onset of the Korean War, which TV networks were afraid would ruin them financially, assuming that people would turn to radio for news as they had during WWII. General Douglas MacArthur was pleased by the voluntary censorship borne by the U. S. press, noting he had "never seen the desired balance between public information and military security" so well aligned (Bernhard, 1999, p. 105). However, military officials complained when reporters detailed American defeats because of the embarrassing information. They later banned the word "retreat," reasoning that keeping morale high was of greater importance given the political conditions (Bernhard, 1999, p. 109).

The United States also emphasized religion, in particular Christianity, in contrast to the Soviet Union's official atheism. Even non-government propaganda followed suit—in 1955 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) remade their isolationist 1939 cartoon "Peace on Earth" as "Goodwill to Men" with the same basic plot of humanity wiping itself out with war and cute forest creatures taking over the world based on the Ten Commandments and Mark 12:13, the

"Love thy neighbor" verse (Hanna & Barbera). The remake emphasized religion more than before WWII. As disturbing as the woodland creature-made world is, taking place inside a bombed-out cathedral, the characters lead an idyllic existence, which is linked to their Christianity. The mice are true Christians; the men (humans), who were not, are destroyed. It is distasteful to draw comparisons to this cartoon and the way terrorism experts and news sources describe ISIS propaganda, promising an idyllic existence for the faithful, once there are no infidels, but the theme of "Goodwill to Men" and its nonviolence aside, does bear a resemblance.

The Gulf War's context in propaganda is particularly interesting. Besides the aforementioned Scud-versus-Patriot missiles storm, Saddam Hussein released a "contemptible," bizarre propaganda video during a pre-Gulf War hostage crisis that ultimately backfired ("1990: Outrage of Iraqi TV Hostage Show"). In mid-August 1990, several thousand foreigners were taken hostage, although Hussein insisted that they were in fact his guests. Hussein produced an awkward video to prove it, singling out in particular a young British boy, ruffling his hair, asking if he was getting his milk and cornflakes. The boy was clearly uncomfortable, and Hussein was forced to begin freeing the hostages, but the clumsy propaganda also cleared the way for military action by the United States against Iraq.

The Gulf War was CNN's moment. U. S. claims about the Patriot missile were about technology ("the U. S. has the tech power to win this war without touching the ground," even though that was not necessarily true). This narrative fed into how the war was covered. Cameras could be attached to bombs, leading to the famous video of a missile striking a factory via the smokestacks. Satellite technology made CNN's 24-hour coverage possible, yet the network relied heavily on U. S.-military sources for its content. The end result was subject to criticism for lacking balance—a spectacle of drama and patriotism rather than straight reporting, in other

words propaganda. Douglas Kellner, in a paper—available both as a standalone piece and in an anthology on war reporting—reflecting on his book *The Persian Gulf TV War*, notes the lack of balance in the manner of reporting, making the war coverage a "blockbuster" and ultimately as forgettable as a Hollywood action movie. Kellner also criticized the lack of balance in how support of the war was promoted, like the heavy reliance on the U.S. military for information, and the fact that CNN, a single network, was the major global supplier of news on the subject. Parallels spring to mind with the 2003 invasion of Iraq by the United States. After all, propaganda contributed massively to public support for the 2003 invasion of Iraq, under the guise of pure information, although certain journalists, such as Bob Simon of CBS and Warren Strobel of Knight Ridder Newspapers, interviewed for the documentary *Buying the War,* assert that a simple Internet search would have opened holes in the Saddam Hussein-is-harboring-terrorists argument (Kiousis, Mitrook, Popescu, Shields, Seltzer, 2006, p. 3; Hughes and Moyers, 2007).

The Oxford English Dictionary describes propaganda as "an organization, scheme, or movement for the propagation of a particular doctrine, practice, etc." and in a more hostile definition, "the systematic dissemination of information, esp. in a biased or misleading way, in order to promote a political cause or point of view. Also: information disseminated in this way; the means or media by which such ideas are disseminated (2015)." Conversely they define information as "the imparting of knowledge in general," making no mention of anyone's agenda or biases (2015). Most people would like to think their news is just imparting knowledge, but all information is colored by its culture, suggesting an inherent bias. Hobbs and McGee (2014) define propaganda as "the intentional sharing of facts, opinions, and ideas designed to change behavior or motivate action. Although this sounds less treacherous, it is also nonspecific, as

illustrated in a punch line from Jimmy Kimmel's show, where he thanks a stuntwoman who starred in a video hoax for "deceiving the world." This suggests a definition that is too broad (Hobbs and McGee, 2014, 56-57).

A better, more nuanced definition belongs to Jacques Ellul (1968), who theorizes propaganda as "a set of methods employed by an organized group that wants to bring about the active or passive participation in its actions of a mass of individuals, psychologically unified through psychological manipulations and incorporated into a system" (p. 61). Although this definition doesn't necessarily imply dishonesty or untruth, it still conveys a rather sinister tone, suggesting people can be manipulated without being lied to. It is broader in some ways, however, than the dictionary definition. It also separates the propagandist from a strictly government seat. In this context propaganda could be something like convincing women to take up smoking, which, as we eventually learned, was a very sinister, not to mention successful, propaganda campaign done by advertising companies. Propaganda can also originate from a non-government agency trying to maintain the status-quo, as in certain war movies, or change the status-quo, as members of an insurgency, including ISIS (Amos & Haglund, 2000, p. 4). Anyone can wield the means to send a message, after all, be it through words, pictures, or just noise—and send their agenda (and manipulations) along with it.

In seemingly routine news stories, words like "embattled president" or the inclusion of a speaker's "um's" could reveal hostility on behalf of the source and frame the issue in a negative light. Different words could just as easily be given a more positive spin. It all depends on the mood or position of the source. A historical article on domestic propaganda during World War II claims with its title that "News Is a Weapon," something very apt, especially in the context of the invasion of Iraq, although that is not its focus (Socolow, 2007). In the immediate aftermath of the

attack on Pearl Harbor, President Franklin Roosevelt wanted to establish government control over one of the major radio outlets (Socolow, 2007, p. 110). However, it ultimately proved unnecessary because the networks and journalists were mostly already doing what the government wanted to do. Also, it did not make sense to compete with CBS and NBC, the latter of which had even promised Roosevelt via telegram, "We await your commands," after hearing of the December 7, 1941 attack (Socolow, 2007, p. 112). More or less 60 years later, after the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, journalism responded in a similar way. Dan Rather, interviewed by Bill Moyers in *Buying the War*, appeared on a talk show on September 17, 2001, insisting that the president gave the orders, and that he would line up wherever the president told him to. (In a 2007 interview Rather said he only referred to lining up as a citizen, not as a journalist, but that he should have been patriotic by being a good journalist instead of what he, and many of his colleagues actually did in the wake of the tragedy.) (Hughes and Moyers).

Clearly every situation is not as grave as the choice to invade another country based on flimsy evidence, but it further underscores the point that all information has some form of bias, and acknowledging that fact is key to recognizing and resisting manipulation. With more information comes more propaganda, especially in the age of Internet and global-digital cable news. How do we process this in contemporary and contemporaneous contexts? Perhaps the best way is to think of propaganda as "framed information," or at least a more aggressive form of that category. In a way, this is uncomfortable because it significantly broadens what might fall under the category of propaganda, but it is a good deal more honest than labeling all propaganda as lies, or at least maliciously manipulated information, which is the reflex tendency. The broader category also allows for the notion that audiences exposed to framed information constantly have

a civic responsibility to process information with an active mind and try to determine what part of the message is propaganda, or take notice of when a source of information, like a newspaper or TV report, regardless of the network, digresses into commentary or editorial. In the case of ISIS, it is admittedly not particularly possible or advisable to seek out the source itself for purposes of comparison and fact-checking, but the claims made by domestic news sources certainly can be investigated. That is the focus of this study.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The sources on ISIS propaganda tend to fall into three categories—the genesis story (how the Islamic State came to be); incidents (such as beheadings and the destruction of cultural antiquities); and day-to-day operations (including strategy, fundraising, or the average time a woman remains single). Joby Warrick's book, *Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS*, offers a grand narrative of the insurgency's existence; these themes are also evident in his writing. Although at this point there are few academic sources about ISIS, the cases discussed above are reinforced by the popular press and in sources such as the *Washington Post* and other newspapers.

The ISIS Genesis Story

Black Flags offers the most detailed genesis story, but other sources, such as CBS News, also agree with Warrick's notes that the roots of ISIS lay in some of the Middle East's toughest prisons, most notably Camp Bucca in Iraq and Al-Jafr in Jordan. The former was described as a "pressure cooker of extremism" by former CIA case officer Patrick Skinner, who also asserted, "It's where they met, it's where they planned" (Ward, 2014). Al-Jafr housed Abu-Mohammed Maqdisi, a scholar who was very influential to Abu-Musab Zarqawi, the man who founded ISIS. Zarqawi, a former petty crook who became a very dangerous extremist, was relatively unknown and disliked by al-Queda until the United States chose to give him special emphasis. The result gave other would-be militants a role model and leader. This attention further distanced Zarqawi from Osama Bin-Laden; Zarqawi apparently had little interest in fighting America, despite claiming some of his actions were revenge for America's actions. Zarqawi's rise facilitated recruitment to his own ranks, which swelled dramatically, and the planning of much bolder attacks on his native Jordan and around Iraq.

The U. S. invasion of Iraq resulted in mass incarcerations of Iraqi nationals, which led to thousands of political and religious dissidents being in close quarters, humiliated, learning how to lead, and planning. Camp Bucca was likely not the only such place, but it did produce the current "caliph" of the Islamic State, Abu-Bakr al-Bagdadi, according to the *Washington Post*. *The New Yorker* explored two particular years that were also key to the formation of ISIS: 2003, when President George W. Bush dissolved the Iraqi Army, and 2011, when President Barrack Obama withdrew American forces from the country. The U.S. invasion had planted seeds for future dissent by upsetting the secularist regime, putting hundreds of thousands of men with military training out of work, imprisoning thousands, and then leaving without preparing for the future, as CBS's source, Skinner, notes in his interview. These inmate narratives lend themselves well to development of robust propaganda—liberators coming out of oppression, the opportunity for martyrdom, and grievances worthy of revenge.

ISIS Incidents

Various horrific incidents also take up some of those ideas, as well as new ones. Warrick noted the beheading of American inventor Nicholas Berg occurred before ISIS existed. The gruesome video gained Zarqawi even more attention through the millions of hits and downloads across the world. Zarqawi claimed the killing of Berg was revenge for the U. S. role in humiliating and photographing prisoners at Abu Ghraib. Another prominent videotaped beheading was that of journalist James "Jim" Foley, which President Obama said "shocks the conscience of the entire world" ("Remarks on the Death of James W. Foley in Syria From Edgartown, Massachusetts", 2014). The immolation of the caged Jordanian pilot, Mu'ath al-Kaseasbeh, by other extremists provoked the "Rasputin-like" Maqdisi to condemn the actions of ISIS and accuse them of being concerned only with violence, rather than religion (Warrick).

Beheadings, notes Warrick (2015), although frowned upon, were more or less in accordance with the Koran (and other Abrahamic texts). Destruction by fire, however, is supposed to be reserved for the divine, suggesting that ISIS goes above and beyond typical extremism (Warrick, 2015, Kindle loc. 5248).

Other notable incidents committed by ISIS include mass executions of Shiite Muslims, Christians, other religious minorities, as well as Kurdish and Yezidi men, as happened following the capture of Mosul, the second-largest city in Iraq. More than 1,000 inmates from the local prison were taken into the desert and as many as 670 were numbered off, made to kneel in rows at the edge of a ravine, insulted, robbed, and shot. Survivors interviewed by Human Rights Watch (2014) noted the incident was taped. Photos from the incident later surfaced, some of which were included in other news accounts of the event (Human Rights Watch, 2014). The UN noted in an all-encompassing report that between 50 and 100 Sunni Muslim prisoners were killed as well, along with a group that extremists accused of pretending to be Sunni. Deserters cited in Peter Neuman's (2015) report for the Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence complained of having to commit violence against the Sunni, as well as racism among the leaders, which comports with the persecution of different ethnic groups, like the Kurds and Yezidi.

ISIS Day-to-Day Operations

Reports about ISIS activities involving antiquities and archeological sites are interesting in that they insinuate into the day-to-day category of ISIS literature. One of their propaganda videos features a well-choreographed, if occasionally awkward, recreation (or perhaps appropriation) of ancient and medieval history involving conquests of the Muslim Empire, supposedly to cleanse the conquered lands of idolatry. For all the claims about icons and idols

being evil, however, the extremists create a seemingly endless supply of images glorifying themselves. According to the *Washington Post*, ISIS videographers include soldiers playing with kittens in their recruiting videos to show that life in the Islamic State is not all brutality (Harmanşah, 2015, pp. 172-173). Interestingly, some archeologists, according to Harmanşah, question the authenticity of the antiquities shown having been destroyed in the propaganda video, suggesting it is possible that some of their funding comes from antiquities trafficking. Whether ISIS smashed real antiquities or not, the message the iconoclasm (or "iconoclash") sends is real and in line with their brand or violence, technical and media-savvy, and willingness to humiliate those they see as opposed to them or simply happen to be in the way (2015, p. 176).

Antiquities bleed over into the more mundane details about ISIS, because they represent a fundraising source from black market sales. A few *Post* articles mention ISIS fundraising, including support from wealthy, pro-ISIS donors in the Middle East. Other *Post* articles mention ISIS's fundraising initiatives, which seem to fluctuate between traditional high-income benefactors and extortion, theft, and black market deals (Ignatius, 2014). At the same time, a myth-busting article notes, their money-making endeavors may be short-lived, because their showy violence and scorched-earth policies drive off people suited to running a society at more than a rudimentary level (Byman, 2014).

That society only functions on a rudimentary level within the Islamic State comes up in articles related to dissenters, their strategy, the threat level presented by extremists, and the role of women. Neuman's report on the deserters hints that westerners who joined and then ran away from ISIS were more motivated by the lack of electricity, running water, and other conveniences. Karla Adam's article for the *Washington Post*, which focuses on western women within the ranks of ISIS, expresses similar sentiments among this small population, but also notes concerns

about medical care (something the Neuman report does not mention), referring to one woman who suffered a miscarriage and was unable to communicate with the local doctors due to the language barrier (2015). Recent reports detail ISIS members forcing gynecologists to give up their practices, or simply killing them, so problems for women along those lines will likely get worse. And though most of the images created by the extremists, and which mostly cover up the dissenters' voices, are perhaps not positive by the standards of those unfriendly to the ISIS cause, they still create a powerful impression despite articles emphasizing the extremists' lack of readiness to govern. Harmanşah asserts in an article for *Middle East Quarterly* it will take effort on the part of the United States to destroy this group, and that expecting the Iraqis to take a leading role in the fighting is a mistake. Warrick also notes that ISIS controls a lot of infrastructure (oil, gas, water, etc.), which allows for a lot of intimidation, whether or not the administrators are good at their jobs.

Academic Literature on ISIS

The novelty of ISIS means that there are few academic articles related to the subject; however, news organizations—print, TV, and online—offer a plethora of reports, which is useful for a study of a particular newspaper, in this case the *Washington Post*.

Warrick's book, *Black Flags*, provides the most comprehensive narrative of the ISIS situation, going back to the late 1990s and ending in 2014, all in abundant, engaging, and literary detail. The book is supplemented by Warrick's two 2015 appearances on NPR's *Fresh Air* program—once to recap the book, and once in response to Russia's 2015 bombing campaign in Syria, both of which illustrate the political delicacies beside the action or inaction of various states against the insurgents and the history behind them.

ISIS stands apart from other military endeavors in the Middle East; it is an insurgency, rather than an organized military order of battle or a sitting government state. This results in the need for different kinds of propaganda to use against the Islamic State, in addition to traditional methods. The fact that ISIS makes ample use of the Internet and social media further upsets the traditional, given that the technology is still developing and has not quite been accepted or taken seriously. Insurgency propaganda, however, is recognized if it is not very well understood, for it has a history going back to the early Cold War and was notable in Vietnam. An article about the British in Malaya notes some of the complexities of winning over ordinary people during an insurgency situation—the words "hearts and minds" frequently come up, even in the title (Smith, 2001). The process of winning the hearts and minds of people during such a crisis calls for creativity and a lot of trial and error. Smith notes that the United States acknowledged that a similar policy was necessary during the Vietnam War, but how to effectively implement a hearts-and-mind campaign eluded allies fighting two battles at once, against North Vietnam's standing army and the Viet Cong insurgents. In the British Malay government, General Templer's strategy of airdropping anti-communist leaflets and making sure individual villages received attention proved particularly effective. Malayan communist organizations almost immediately made picking up a leaflet punishable by death, which, unsurprisingly, made the leaflets intriguing (Smith, 2001, p. 74). Defections and surrendering by individual insurgents also picked up impressively following the leaflet dropping, something that cannot be recreated during the current situation. ISIS territory is very hard to leave and there are few outside outposts to run to and expect safety. And even if a leaflet-dropping campaign took place, it would be difficult to know the right things to print.

A 2006 article, from *Washington Quarterly*, hints at a similar problem, although it is pre-Islamic State. Superficially, author Staniland disagrees with the hearts-and-minds idea from Malay and Vietnam, pointing out that with a transient, transnational group (not unlike ISIS), the enemy is always on the move, is hard to reach, and even harder to convince of a counter-idea. A side-note claims “fences, cooperation, and rhetoric may lack drama, but historically they produce better results” (Staniland, 2006, p. 22). It is ironic, given that cooperation and rhetoric get at the hearts-and-minds idea. General Charles Krulak, former commandant of the Marines Force—and son of “Brute” Kulak, who came up with the Spreading Inkblot Theory of the Vietnam War—seemed to agree with the note about cooperation when he told *Newsweek* "bullets help sanitize an operational area," but "they don't win a war” (Thomas, Nordland, Caryl, Barry, Dehghanpisheh, Hosenbal, 2004). In *Military Review,* Dauber (2009) also notes the importance of rhetoric and its two-fold nature, in particular the effect on American public opinion by whatever the insurgents’ message happens to be. The article quotes then-Colonel, now Lieutenant General Tovo noting that in Iraq, the situation is as much a media fight as it is a military fight, “It’s purely a fight for influencing the population [and] the U. S. population to lose heart and will, influencing the other international actors to drop support for the U. S. effort” (p. 15). Given the year in which the colonel was speaking, he may have been right, but since the United States withdrew from Iraq, things have changed, the media fight being among them. Dauber claims that U. S. media air insurgents’ messages with a he said/she said mentality and do not take a side, but in the case of a flagrant atrocity, it is hard not to take the side of the person who was beheaded, burned, or shot. A more sustainable argument is that simply labeling propaganda as such gets nowhere in combatting it (Dauber, 2009, pp. 22-23). The article

proposes greater visibility on the part of the U. S. military, which echoes Templer's individual attention to the villages strategy, and suggests a more hands-on approach to the current conflict.

The Internet can be an asset, too. Given that ISIS uses Internet forums and social media platforms to spread messages, one would expect that it could be used against them as well. In a study of the social media accounts of several western-born ISIS fighters, researcher Klausen (2015) argued that Twitter gives the (implied false) impression of "authenticity" and spontaneity of an activity, when special organizers control the output by (p. 1 &17). This may extend to intimidating Twitter employees who try to block extremist content; some have received threats. The *New York Times* notes that ISIS must be depending heavily on free Internet forums for Twitter's blocks to elicit such a response (Gladstone, Goel, and Shane, 2015). Another article, from *Time*, estimates there are approximately 60,000 Twitter accounts associated with ISIS, which the United States' counter measures compete with. The U. S. State Department attempts to target the perceived at-risk persons that might be tempted to join ISIS, rather than extremists themselves, whose minds have been made up (Altman, 2014).

Although not about ISIS, Said's *Covering Islam* looks at the biases of the west in viewing Islam. It could almost fit into the category of sources about propaganda. These biases are rooted in colonialism, which Said explains, the United States, despite a lack of colonizing behavior, inherited from its European parents and adopted as a form of Orientalism. These influences color the end result of a message and often result in an overly violent picture of the religion and the people who practice it, though Said is careful to note everything is not derogatory (1981, p. 4 and 136). Said also refers to caricatures of Muslims as terrorists or "a bloodthirsty, angry mob," and the frightening parallels to the contemporary era. ISIS invites these highly negative

interpretations because of their focus on extreme violence. Still, a largely ignorant American public perpetuates the old problem of believing simplistic stereotypes and acting out xenophobia.

Propaganda Sources

The literature on more traditional or historical propaganda is linked most strongly to conflict, although in their historical article, Hobbes and McGee (2015) argue that it is ubiquitous to contemporary communication in general (p. 56). Wars declared and undeclared in American history provide the best examples. A stalwart source, *Propaganda and Democracy: The American Experience of Media and Mass Persuasion*, by J. Michael Sproule (2007), takes on the task of exploring propaganda as far back as the eve of World War I, the war that awakened America's distaste for propaganda. This concise historical-critical resource closes with the "rediscovery" of propaganda post-Vietnam. Sproule's observations suggest a kind of pendulum in the history of framed information: it flourishes during times of tension and conflict, and then, during periods of peace, awareness increases, as does distaste for the subject matter. Then it happens again: the Cold War ended, and with it a great chunk of propaganda history, but it ultimately gave way to the post 9/11 hysteria, which led to the invasion of Iraq. After years of war in the Middle East, propaganda is simultaneously chic (to study and to accuse others of creating) and vile again (as if to say "look at the mess propaganda got us into"). Perhaps that is because propaganda played a large part in selling war to the American people, not only in the case of Iraq and the constant references about the weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) Saddam Hussein supposedly held, but also in Korea, which occupies several chapters in *U .S. Television News and Cold War Propaganda, 1947-1960,* a historical, and ultimately critical source. Nevertheless author Bernhard maintains there was no central conspiracy to dupe the public—just inexperience, because the television networks needed to establish themselves as serious sources

in comparison to radio, the WWII favorite, and newspapers. Bad judgment also played a part in the news media-government collaboration. Someone surely had to think it was a bit funny to laud freedom as the lack of government control while a reporter, editor, or network executive pushed for official government guidelines regarding the release of information. Some of that bad judgment would appear again after the Cold War, such as CNN's dramatic treatment of the first Gulf War, or the smoking-gun-mushroom-cloud mantra used by the George W. Bush administration and a lot of media outlets leading up to the invasion of Iraq (Kellner, 2004; Hughes and Moyers, 2007).

Faces of the Enemy by Sam Keen precedes the end of the Cold War. Keen investigates not only propaganda but the creation of "the enemy" that propaganda often opposes. Borrowing from psychology, Keen (1986) delves into the archetype, noting there is a kind of standard in which powers at war dehumanize their enemies, despite the changing situations or causes (p. 13). At the same time, Keen allows that occasionally circumstances are such that archetypes seem like reality. He uses the example of Hitler being a "perfect Devil," and in the 21st century, ISIS, although the extremists have not come close to Hitler's levels of deviltry, would likely stand as another example of a case where the "hostile imagination" produces something fairly close to that as it stands in the present, given the beheadings, burnings, rape, and other offenses (Keen, 1986, p. 13).

Theoretical and Methodological Literature

Several theoretical frameworks can be applied to ISIS, propaganda, and the United States' coverage of the ISIS insurgency. Jacques Ellul's theory of propaganda regarding "psychological manipulations and incorporated into a system" provides the clearest definition in Chapter 1 (1968, p. 61). Herman and Chomsky's theory refers to a kind of business model,

tracing money and power as stakeholders who route their messages via mass media, although Chomsky, in a 1997 essay, bluntly refers to it in the terms of advertising— to "control the public mind" (p. 227). Carl Hovland's theories refer to the sources through which messages come out, such as atom bomb designer Robert Oppenheimer as opposed to a Soviet newspaper, after he found that Frank Capra's WWII propaganda was more useful as information than as a method to motivate soldiers to fight and die—information he gleaned through experiment and surveys (Rogers, 1994, pp. 370& 275). Agenda Setting Theory touches on the framing of information when Maxwell, McCombs, and Shaw found that media did not necessarily tell people what to think, but instead what to think about, again by experiment (1972, 1975, and 1997). These theories have a great deal of merit, but especially so Agenda Setting. ISIS is frequently in the news. Its tech-savvy reputation is nearly as ubiquitous. While neither of these developments is necessarily bad or untrue, given that ISIS is a serious threat that deserves attention, perceptions of the Islamic State owe a great deal to framing, whether the perception is positive, negative, weak, or strong.

More useful, by far, is Elspeth Tilley's critical article about Australian propaganda, for it not only utilizes the Propaganda Model, but it also provides a very useful method of textual analysis for parsing out propaganda, which she sees as a simplifying mechanism—taking a situation of potentially great complexity and reducing it to a persuasive device. Researchers took various messages and analyzed them for familiar "devices," (Hobbs and McGee also referred to them extensively, calling them "The ABC's of Propaganda" and "the seven propaganda techniques"), such as Name Calling, Glittering Generalities, Band Wagon, as well as Manifest Destiny, all of which are used in political communication, often during political election campaigns (Tilley, 2005, p. 72; Hobbs and McGee, 2014, p. 59). These are only a few elements

of propaganda, but they are recognizable and good models on which to base this study, which has a similar goal.

Another method used in propaganda studies, besides textual analysis, is the more quantitative content analysis, which is "the systematic and replicable examination of symbols of communication, which have been assigned numeric values according to valid measurement rules and the analysis of relationships involving those values," and similarly could be of use in parsing out propaganda from "pure information" or as Tilley referred to it "truths" (Riffe, Lacy, and Fico, 2005, p. 25). Such studies, like mine, ultimately hope to cultivate some measure of skepticism or understanding that goes beyond just the reports, Twitter feeds, and other information sources, especially during times of conflict, when needed most. In the case of ISIS, constant news of the "extremists" both tells us to think of them, and, ideally, what to think of them, that its members are exceedingly violent, brutal people who barely recognize, or even outright ignore, the core tenet of the religion they claim to fight for (which is about peace). The reality is so intertwined with anti-ISIS propaganda that parsing out the propaganda and pure information is especially sticky. Perhaps it is a flaw in the goal of my study, or a justification of the pessimism present in the conclusion of Sproule's book, but ultimately, some information, even if its unadulterated status is murky, is better than none— especially if that information is accompanied by skepticism and recognition of the need for even-handedness when analyzing and weighting said information.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH DESIGN

The body of literature on the Islamic State, propaganda, theory, and method give rise to a number of pertinent research areas and topics of interest. These include the following general questions:

- What is the frequency of propaganda-related messages in American reporting on ISIS?
- What does content reveal in terms of propaganda-related messages in reporting on ISIS?
- What does reporting on ISIS reveal in terms of rhetorical messages related to propaganda?
- What distinguishes "pure information" (facts in evidence) from propaganda (framed information), as reflected in reporting on ISIS?
- How well does the current ISIS conflict serve as a model case study for research questions dealing with war reporting and propaganda?
- How does contemporary reporting on the ISIS conflict and its use of propaganda relate to previous experiences with propaganda in war coverage, such as WWII, the Cold War, and the Gulf Wars?
- To what extent does reporting on ISIS deal with America's candor regarding post-colonial impact on other nations?
- What does reporting reveal about U. S. propaganda related to ISIS?

The large number of press reports pertaining to ISIS as well as the number of media outlets available in several common databases exceeds the scope of this thesis. A Google search nets more than 200 million hits; Access Newspaper Archive 1.2 million; Google Scholar 612,000; EBSCOhost more than 320,000; *New York Times* more than 21,000 (March 8, 2016). Therefore, it is necessary to focus on a tightly drawn sample to analyze and characterize the nature of ISIS-

related reporting. Joby Warrick has published the most comprehensive narrative and historical study of ISIS to date. Warrick is also a member of the *Washington Post* reporting staff, which is a major U. S. news source for original reporting and well positioned in the seat of American government. This lends the *Post* a reputation of being "the voice of the country." It is a well-respected journalistic source with a reputation for candid and award-winning coverage of national and international events. This makes for a good contrast to the insurgent sources the articles cover—as an established, acknowledged free press versus the un-established, unacknowledged ISIS leadership and its information outlets. The *Washington Post*'s status has soared since its reporting on the Watergate scandal of the 1970s. Like any media outlet, it has a point of view and is not free of bias or propaganda; however, it did not experience the post-Iraq invasion criticism that plagued the *New York Times,* which has also devoted extensive coverage to ISIS. As a stalwart outlet of original U. S. reporting, the *Washington Post* is an appropriate source for drawing an analytical sample. Furthermore, in order to focus this study on original reporting and to be able to manage various analyses, the data sample is taken from the *Washington Post* from the period of January 1, 2011, the year of the origin of ISIS, through November 30, 2015, which includes coverage of the Paris bombings.

General questions of frequency and rhetorical content can be examined through a number of methods, but for journalism, content analysis offers a robust tool for addressing such questions. It is widely used and developed reliably by Riffe, Lacy, and Fico for various mass media studies, including propaganda studies of newspaper articles. Besides noting the quantitative information, such as the number of times propaganda is mentioned in connection with the conflict, I am also interested in assessing the quality and nature of the language in the *Washington Post*'s reports. This requires a second method using critical/rhetorical analysis of the

message content to investigate the questions noted above. In short, I am as interested in what is missing from the *Post*'s reporting on ISIS as much what is there.

Research Questions

Based on my review of the literature, the general questions and sample, and the selected methods for conducting this analysis, this study formalizes the following research questions (RQs):

Research Question 1: What is the frequency of propaganda-related messages in reporting by the *Washington Post* during the designated period and related to ISIS?

Research Question 1a: To what extent do specific terms reveal propaganda-related messages related to ISIS in *Washington Post* reporting during the designated period?

Research Question 2: What does reporting by the *Washington Post* during the designated period on ISIS reveal in terms of rhetorical messages related to propaganda?

Research Question 2a: What distinguishes "pure information" (facts in evidence) from "propaganda" (framed information), as reflected in reporting by the *Washington Post* during the designated period?

Research Question 2b: To what extent do specific content or lack of content indicate U. S. attitudes regarding the use of propaganda and references to citizens in ISIS-affected countries?

Research Question 3: What indicators depict the current ISIS conflict as a case study for research questions dealing with war reporting and propaganda?

Research Question 3a: How do contemporary reporting on the ISIS conflict and its use of propaganda relate to previous experiences with war coverage, such as WWII, the Cold War, and the Gulf Wars?

Regarding RQ1—What is the frequency of propaganda-related messages in reporting by the *Washington Post* during the designated period and related to ISIS—I am interested in measuring how many articles mention or otherwise indicate the history of colonialism, imperialism, and cultural imperialism experienced by the region as affected by the rise of the Islamic State. Similarly, I am interested in how the language used in the articles includes strong words like brutal, horrific, barbaric, savage, and others compared to more positive words like idyllic, utopic, and lightning-quick. The use of such qualifiers reveals more than straight reporting in an immediate message even though the facts are similar, "40 people died" differs from "40 people suffered horrible deaths." The statement "ISIS uses propaganda to recruit troops" is also complicated; it is a statement of fact and also a propagandistic message by virtue of the term "propaganda," which carries historic, emotional baggage.

While these questions are more difficult to quantify (especially the inflammatory language), they can still be unpacked and the evidence analyzed rhetorically and critically. The use of inflammatory words, whether they can be quantified and proved statistically significant, can and often does influence an audience. The choice of words, especially in a newspaper article, is very important to how it colors intent. Although the purpose of a newspaper is generally thought of as a tool to inform readers—which traces to its roots of relating the business of the Roman senate—its editorial purpose is also to persuade (Acta, 2015). The *Wall Street Journal* would not be known as one of the most conservative papers in the United Sates if not for the staff that produces the text and its editorial management. Biases can also change. It's a half-serious joke in *Citizen Kane* when the disillusioned Jedidiah Leland (Joseph Cotten) asks if the staff Kane had just hired away from a rival newspaper hadn't been just as devoted to the old

paper's politics last week as they were now to Kane's; the answer being yes, but that's the business (and not something Leland is supposed to worry about). These differences between reporting factual, empirical evidence versus shaping, framing, and embellishing reports lie at the heart of the issue of pure information versus propaganda (or framing), regardless of whether the reporter is signaling his/her bias, is following the employer's lead, or doesn't care one way or the other, or, in the case of one of the articles analyzed, cannot go against the higher up's wishes (Miller, G. & S. Mekhennet, 2015).

In terms of parsing out propaganda from pure information, there is no perfect way to isolate these two, deeply intertwined concepts. However, a few methods exist. One is to search for a repeated idea, phrase or slogan that represents a campaign: "make the world safe for democracy," "do not let the smoking gun be a mushroom cloud," "the master race," "no life without jihad," and so forth. These can come from any source, including domestic ones like the *Post*. Another is to search for loaded terms that glorify, dehumanize, or otherwise editorialize a message or verifiable fact. Outright fabrication, of course, would be an obvious example, and so perhaps is theatricality, all of which can come from anywhere. Both Warrick and Harmanşah note ISIS heads' obsessions with history, particularly conquests by Muslim warriors during the Middle Ages. Some of their videos are choreographed reenactments of historical events (Harmanşah, 2015, p. 170). This conforms to Ellul's (1968) definition of propaganda by reenacting history in such a humiliating manner that psychologically unifies, or at least attempts to, through psychological manipulations (p. 61). Most instances will not be so obvious, especially if one is surveying a reputable source.

Tilley (2005) describes another method of distinguishing propaganda from information through the work she and her assistants used in their research (p. 71). This method is to

familiarize oneself with certain tropes, such as glittering generalities like "I stand for freedom," or card-stacking, which is a piece of information that paints someone or something in a certain light but omits key details, like a politician not voting for a certain law because she/he felt the law was not strict enough, and then attempting to recognize them in media content. Similar to the other methods named, it is still subject to the limitations in that most examples will not be obvious, or at least not obvious to everyone, which alludes to its subjectivity and the possibility of error. However, all of the methods described lead to the same state—awareness, or perhaps being an active rather than passive consumer of information of any sort, be it television, Internet, or newspaper, as is the case here.

Narrowing the Sample

Preliminary research via EBSCOhost uncovered hundreds of thousands of articles related to the Islamic State. The *New York Times* had more than 21,000, and Al Jazeera, depending on how the search was worded, netted up to 1,500. In the beginning I found more than 1,000 *Washington Post* articles related to ISIS or the Islamic State, even with irrelevant articles excluded, from 2011 to the present, although most of them were written and published from 2014 on. (As of February 2016, the number has doubled and will likely continue to grow). The analysis takes note of 50 articles selected randomly and according to title and content dated from 2013, only a few articles about ISIS were published before 2013, the earliest were from 2011, and none of them fell into the sample, to just after the November 2015 attacks on Paris and Beirut, to be analyzed with SPSS a pretty standard program for statistical analysis, and that use words like propaganda, and terms that allude to ISIS's communication tactics, such as video, Twitter (tweet, etc.), PR, and other social media platforms. (See Table 1—*Washington Post* Sample Articles, 2011-2015 in the appendix.**)** Other miscellaneous buzzwords or repeated

phrases (including those not necessarily related to propaganda or communication in general) have their own category, including devices used by the writers and editors, because coverage of propaganda can be propaganda as well.

Terms and Analysis

The SPSS portion of the study compares data by collecting means and standard deviations, but also compares them via ANOVAs, or analyses of variance. They compare the difference of two or more means—in this case the terms defined for analysis. (See Table 2—Operationalization and Definitions of Terms Chosen for Analysis.)

Term	**Operationalization**
Propaganda	The exact word, includes "counter propaganda," were marked for statistical analysis.
Twitter	Includes Twitter, "tweet", "Twitterfeed" and other mentions of the platform. Not "hashtag."
OtherComm	All mentions of other forms of communication: email, audio, banners, flyers, other forms of social media, videos, etc.
Miscellaneous (Misc.)	Terms of interest that do not fall into the other categories like "Jihadi John/Jane," beheadings, burnings or repeated phrases or sentences across several articles

Table 2—Operationalization and Definitions of Terms Chosen for Analysis

The quantitative analysis informed the rhetorical analysis. The rhetorical analysis began by looking for explicit mentions of the Islamic State by its various names, including its Arabic

name Daesh or Daiish, and when the article writer refers to them as "the al-Qaeda inspired group" or makes use of other obvious stand-ins for the name. They were highlighted in yellow, and the subsequent analysis took place within the confines of those sentences.

The next stage of the analysis began with phrases that were simple statements of fact about ISIS not related to their communication and recruitment. There were denoted in single underline. Phrases that frame information (including western "counter-intelligence") and referred to ISIS's communication, brand, and terms like "Cyber Caliphate" and "hashtag jihadi" were double-underlined. Terms were also noted like "heinous," "hideous" and other inflammatory (or strong positive) modifiers or headline terms that appear meant to color the reader's expectations of what they are about to read.

The coded variables included the word "propaganda" the name "Twitter," expanded to include "tweet" and similar words (though not "hashtag," which is not unique to Twitter and can be used on nearly every social media platform), "Other Communication" exclusive of Twitter, and "Misc." which includes terms like "Cyber Caliphate" or specific but repeated terms (which will be elaborated on in chapter 4). "Other Communication" consists of other social media brands (Facebook, Telegram, and so on), mentions of videos, web forums, chat rooms, and other means of relaying a message. The analysis first took the mean, median, mode, and standard deviation of each of the coded variables. They were further analyzed by ANOVAs. Regressions plotted the spread of data.

Articles that offered nothing in terms of keywords— no mention of propaganda, Twitter, other communication, or miscellaneous terms of interest— were included in the analysis and not nullified, because zero is a number and an answer of interest. In fact, most of the articles did not

qualify in every category (fewer than five did), and fewer than ten articles had none of the keywords chosen for analysis, including terms like “Cyber Caliphate” or “Jihadi John.”

If some articles offered little quantitatively, each article offered something in qualitative terms. Even if the word propaganda was not mentioned in a given article, “Islamic State” always was, and within the sentences dedicated to it, the rhetoric offered pertinent information. This allowed me to determine whether the articles were mostly reporting or mostly framing, and the framing pointed, whether anti-ISIS, neutral, or pro-ISIS. (See Table 1—*Washington Post* Sample Articles, 2011-2015.) This assessment included analysis about which way the conflict will go, explaining why ISIS must be destroyed, how it can be destroyed, or how it can win. This analysis allows for a more analytical approach to the rhetorical portion of the study. And perhaps a future researcher can use this method to draw her/his own conclusions about how much of an article is explicitly about ISIS, and whether the article is pro-ISIS. In terms of full disclosure, none was expected, given the antagonism between the United States and the Islamic State; no pro-ISIS articles appear in the sample; anti-ISIS references appear in slightly more than half of the sample, or are neutral. Some of the articles in the neutral category could have been categorized as anti, although the articles that referred directly to or merely reported about the Islamic State tended toward the statement of fact, not related to the group’s communication tactics. Listing the insurgency’s various names was a common informational sentence throughout the sample, especially given that most of the articles were written after Syria emerged as a more prominent place in the conflict.

Until the November 2015 Paris and Beirut attacks, the Islamic State’s major efforts had been confined to the Middle East, most notably inside Iraq, although they were in Syria, Jordan and other countries as well; a few lone-wolf incidents had occurred on western soil. The Paris

attacks clearly marked a change in the nature of the conflict. Most of the sample articles came from 2013 on, which is when the group gained international prominence as a coherent, dominant force, as opposed to news of frequent suicide attacks around Iraq, affiliate groups taking on the ISIS label, and becoming more than just an Iraqi issue—literally, because "and Syria" is part of the acronym ISIS. Since then, updates on the situation occur constantly across various media, especially given the refugee crisis created by the extended conflict in Syria.

In conclusion, though hampered by some limitation, these methods produced interesting and unexpected results to the research questions, and raised new questions for future research.

CHAPTER IV: EVIDENCE AND CASES USING CONTENT ANALYSIS

What made the results describable as "unexpected" came from the way the data set evolved throughout the course of the project. A preliminary sampling of twelve (out of 50) articles from the *Washington Post* selected from online archives (done shortly after the November 30, 2015 cutoff date for the article collection) quickly showed a pattern. First, the dozen articles analyzed used the word propaganda 22 times—nearly twice (1.83 times) per article. One article is coy about calling an audio message released by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (the current head of ISIS) propaganda, but also seems to imply that the content is. Videos by ISIS and the United States were mentioned 20 times (about 1.7 times) per article. Social media was only referred to a handful of times, but Twitter is referred to directly six times. (See Table 3—Coding.)

Some articles could fall under types of cases, such as "beheadings," particularly in reference to the death of James Foley. Perhaps they would also be subdivided into a narrative case, as came up in about half the set. The Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC) strives to debunk the ISIS narrative of a pure utopia, because negative propaganda (or the scare tactics) do not always work or work to the extent that positive propaganda does, which ISIS is aware of as well. Deserters and neglected war-widows negate that narrative, although they can get overshadowed by more positive extremist propaganda, like the smashing of antiquities, or even (though hardly positive) ISIS's documentary *The Flames of War*, which shows the immolation of the caged Jordanian pilot and, according to a deserter of the media team, Abu Hourraira al-Maghribi, plays constantly in a kind of movie theater near the University of Mosul (Miller, G. & S. Mekhennet, 2015). Other forms of propaganda are the calls to action, and sometimes specifically to a kind of sisterhood often associated with the British

"terror twins" Salma and Zahra Halane, who are active in recruitment activities and adept at dodging online authorities by constantly changing their handles (Adam, 2015).

A smaller number of sample articles mentions ISIS fundraising, calling it "mob-like" (meaning like the Mafia) because it employs "coercive methods," or illegal oil sales, black market antiquities trade, and thefts of Toyota pick-up trucks and SUVs or the use of middle-men to buy vehicles to circumvent a company's policy of not selling their product to militants (Ignatius, 2014). At the same time, another article notes ISIS money-making endeavors may be short-lived, because their showy violence and scorched-earth policies repel people suited to run a society at more than a rudimentary level (Byman, 2014).

Results

These preliminary findings informed the design of this study's complete content analysis (and the answer to RQ1), using the full sample. (See Table 3—Coding.) Table 3—Coding shows the number of times each term appears per article, organized alphabetically by author (see Appendix B— "Articles Analyzed for more details").

Analysis of Variables

These terms, however, emerged as an imperfect barometer for the rest of the content analysis. "Propaganda" was mentioned approximately 1.68 times per article (SD = 3.91), which, while not very much, certainly implies that propaganda is associated with ISIS and that people who read the *Post* are introduced to ISIS and propaganda in the same piece, often with the implication that the insurgents are masters of that particular (and negatively viewed) practice. Also worth noting is nearly every time an article mentions propaganda, it refers to the Islamic State. The United States' anti-ISIS measures are only occasionally referred to as propaganda or counterpropaganda.

"Twitter" was also mentioned only a handful of times in connection with the U. S. government, but greatly more so in connection with the Islamic State, coming in at 2.1 cites per article (SD = 6.65). A surprisingly important player in the statistical analysis, Twitter, with its bluebird icon, well-outpaced "propaganda" in terms of direct referrals. In fact, its prominence in the sample was something of a surprise. It was initially planned that Twitter reside in the "OtherComm" category (M = 6.56, SD = 13.35), with social media platforms like Facebook and Telegram, but its prominence suggests its own category.

Miscellaneous terms came in averaging only .82 per article (SD = 2.14). However, their infrequency did not take detract much from the interesting questions they sometimes raised, which will be elaborated on later.

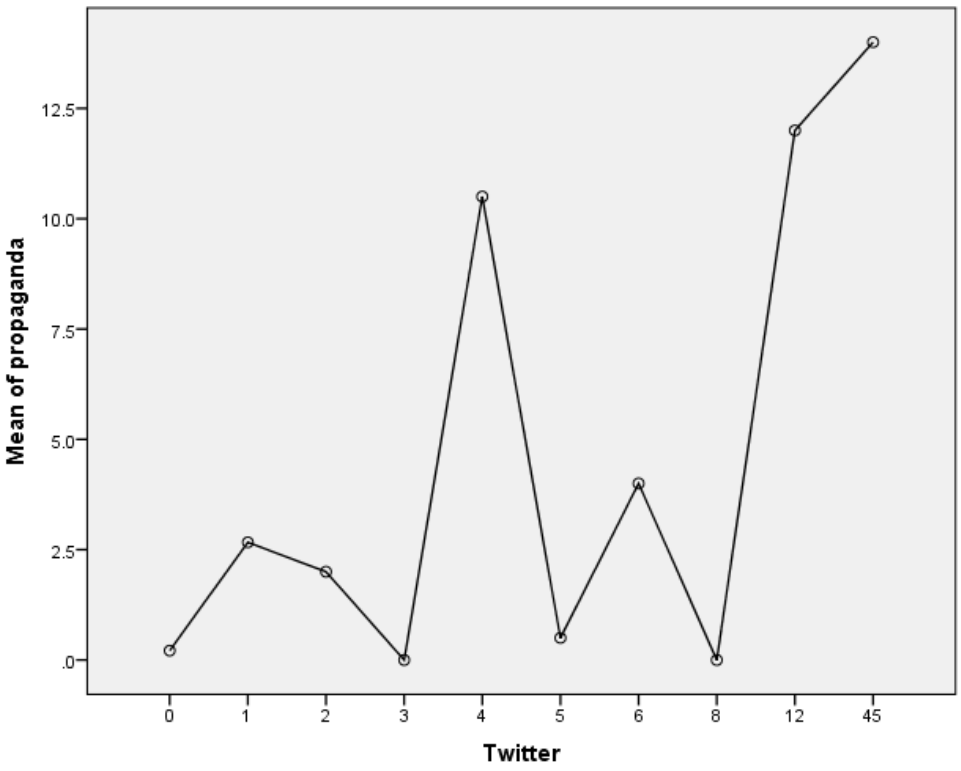

Figure 1—"Propaganda" Cites compared to "Twitter"

Due to Twitter's prominence as a search term, I conducted an analysis of variance (ANOVA) to evaluate the relationship between the social media outlet and the term "propaganda"—comparing instances of propaganda to instances of Twitter to determine if there was a significant difference between the sets of data from the content analysis. Twitter mentions stood as the independent variable and propaganda the dependent, since that is the more judgmental word choice, as well as the focus of the study rather than Twitter (see Figure 1—"Propaganda Cites compared to "Twitter"). The ANOVA was significant, $F(9, 40) = 8.26$, $p = 0.00$. (A larger F value means these values are less likely to have been achieved randomly than if they were very close to one, and p = is the opposite, the smaller its value the better.) Twitter was mentioned significantly more times than propaganda—something just looking at the list of variables in the SPSS document would suggest. However, as often as propaganda and Twitter appeared in the sample set, they significantly lag behind the category "OtherComm," which occurs on average 6.78 times per article. Obviously, these figures contain a few outliers, especially given that seven articles had no mention of any of the terms propaganda, Twitter, OtherComm, and Misc.; but they still set a tone for the data set, and for the information put out by the *Washington Post*.

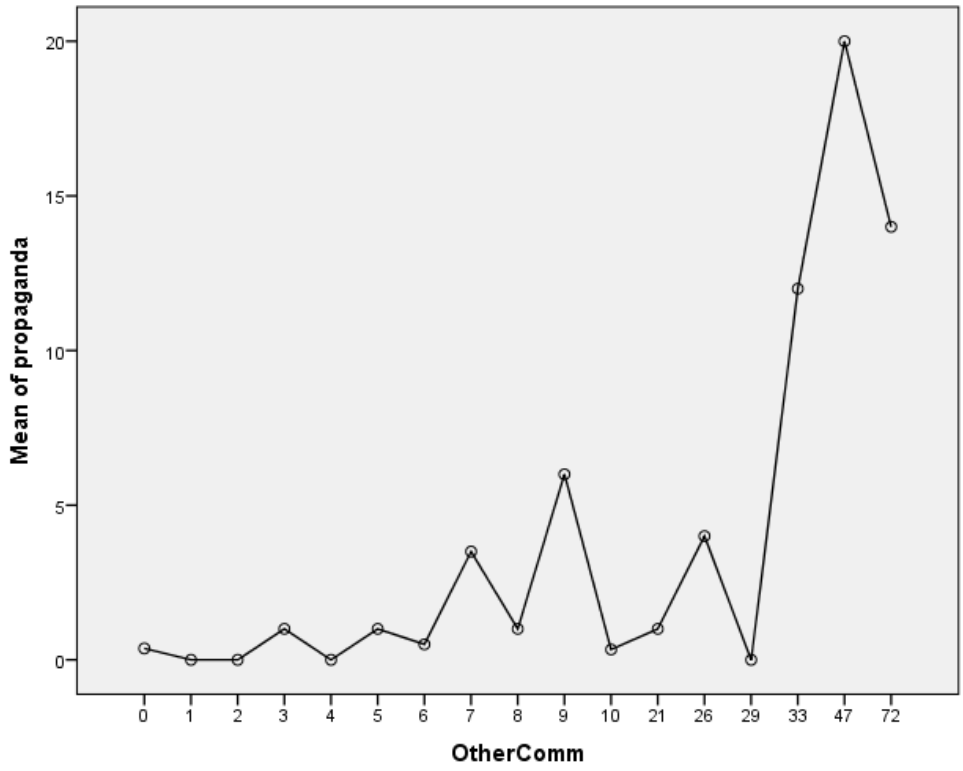

Figure 2—"Propaganda" Cites compared to "OtherComm"

The ANOVA (analysis of variance, a variance being the squared differences of the mean) compares the instances of OtherComm as an independent variable within the sample, again because "video" and "Facebook" are neutral nouns, against mentions of the word propaganda or counterpropaganda illustrates a significant trend. (See Figure 2—"Propaganda" Cites compared to "OtherComm.")This ANOVA demonstrated significance with $F(16, 33) = 22.11$, $p = 0.00$. As with the previous ANOVA, references to video, chatrooms, email, audio messages, and social media generally outpace explicit mentions of propaganda. But as in the case for Twitter, propaganda is implied to be close to OtherComm, even if the word is not actually used. For example, consider the title of an article from May, 2015: "Islamic State leader seems to resurface to urge Muslims to fight" (Naylor). The article refers to an audio message by Bagdhadi, where he uses the occasion of a religious holiday to try to unify a population against an outside threat (all

the world's Muslims, not simply the people who follow him in the Islamic State). This could reasonably be labeled as propaganda, even though Naylor (or an editor) chose not to take that step. However, it is easy for the reader to fill in that particular blank for themselves.

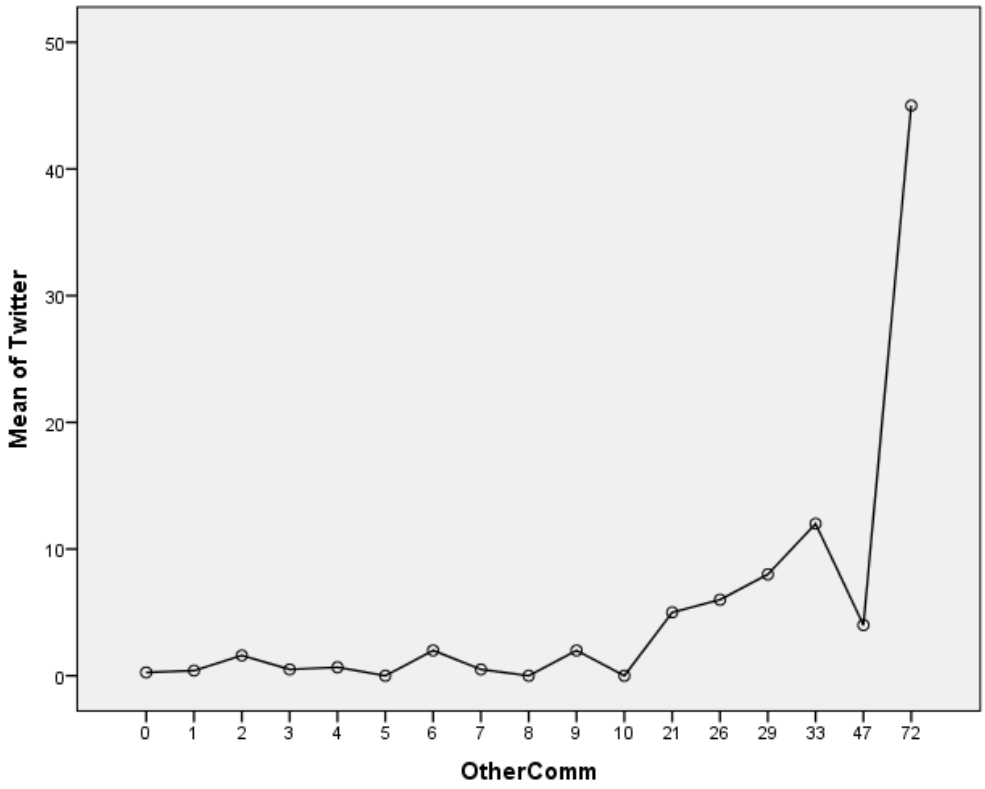

Figure 3—"Twitter" Cites compared to "OtherComm"

Finally there is the analysis of uses of Twitter against the mentions of OtherComm. (See Figure 3—"Twitter" Cites compared to "OtherComm.") Twitter was chosen as the dependent variable due to its surprising importance in the narrative of ISIS communication. It has been amply noted as a favorite of the group because its only requirement for creating an account is an email-address; it also permits the use of special characters in usernames, which allows users of accounts that get shut down to quickly create a new profile (Gladstone, Goel, & Shane, 2015). This ANOVA shows significance at $F(16, 33) = 109.5$, $p = 0.00$. This was something of a surprise, even though fewer than 20 articles lack any mention of some form of ISIS

communication. As much as Twitter is talked about, everything else related to communication is ultimately more significant to the propaganda narrative, especially given that ISIS members are beginning to turn to newer, less regulated social media outlets.

Misc. terms revealed an interesting trend, besides revealing names and terms that emerged during the study, such as "hashtag jihadis," a term used by Richard Stengel. Except for two articles, the infrequent mention of Misc. terms obviated the value of running ANOVA. This trend, while admittedly very small (only coming up in 2/25 of the data), was a particular sentence—referring to the Islamic State's "slick propaganda" depicting a positive adjective (often "idyllic") existence for those inside it. "Idyllic" is of less interest than the descriptor "slick," which, as an unusual adjective. This dated term can be viewed positively—"He looks slicker than the path to hell in that suit"—but it also implies negatives, such as dishonest, oily, or untrustworthy. At any rate it is specific, and each time used by a different author or authors (Adam, Byman &Shapiro, Miller & Higham, and Sly). This could be boilerplate, although that raises the question of who produces it, and it could be an editor's choice and not really reflective of the writers at all. However, that still raises questions with implications that cannot be fully unpacked here.

The articles in the data set indicate a definite message—ISIS is good at propaganda on social media. This indicates an attempt at agenda setting on the part of ISIS in its simplest form, as well as agenda setting on the part of the *Washington Post*, by presenting ISIS in connection with social media as a propaganda tactic. The audience, readers in this case and the *Post*'s online readership, can fill in their own ideas, perhaps that no one is safe from this group which must be destroyed (Lulofs, 2013). Heavy anecdotal evidences suggsts only people who have joined the

Islamic State seem to view it favorably; even its parent/affiliate al-Qaeda regards ISIS with disdain (Warrick, 2015, Kindle loc.4800; Ryan, 2015).

Other terms not quantified or statistically insignificant still said a lot about the position of the *Post* and the west and played a large role in answering the second research question (RQ2), which asked about the rhetoric related to the Islamic State. Former UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown writes about the "antidote" to ISIS in the form of education for children in the Middle East, especially those displaced by the current conflict. Comparing anything to a poison is a clear-cut propagandistic act, which makes Brown's argument that education will counteract propaganda ironic, even if his theory about education for displaced children being a viable solution to stopping the crisis turns out to be correct.

Even stronger perhaps is the metaphor chosen by FBI Director James Comey to describe ISIS's propaganda in May, 2015. He said, "There is a device—almost a devil on their shoulder—all day long, saying: 'Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill'" (Higham & Nakashima, 2015). His words appear in several articles categorized as "Anti." Comey conjures the idea of a shoulder angel (with the United States and its messages of "you won't have a female slave if you join the Islamic State, you'll only kill innocent Muslims" holding the halo), versus a devil figure arguing over the fate of one's soul. It is also very likely influential in how ISIS is perceived by the American public, even though the image of the FBI is not what it was in the 1950s when the organization was the de-facto savior of the numerous Cold War-fueled science fiction movies like *Them!* And *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. Comey's statement is also a simplistic version of the hypodermic needle approach to communication. It has been argued within the rest of the literature, by Edward Said in particular, that there are more factors at work when a person decides to join an organization (Said, 1981, p. 164), which would include one like the Islamic

State. Some may be swayed by propaganda; others likely have pre-existing inclinations. A photographer interviewed in an article about the "ISIS Propaganda Machine" was active in online jihadi circles for years before he chose to join and later fled the Islamic State (Miller & Mekhennet, 2015). People who have made up their minds to join terrorist organizations will not be easily swayed by U. S. counterpropaganda, particularly the much-derided *Welcome to ISIS-Land* video, which offers yet more violent content and which might be what U. S. detractors want to see (Gearan, 2014).

Inflammatory Terms

Inflammatory terms, while not coded, were still noted. There were 75 found throughout the 50 articles, so they came in just under mentions of propaganda, at about 1.5 times per article. However, there is a key difference in that all of the inflammatory words were directed at ISIS. Several articles criticized or derided the CSCC's anti-ISIS attempts, but they never used words that implied the American government was poison, medieval, brutal, or fascist (Miller & Higham, 2015 and Sly, 2015). Being an American newspaper, this is understandable—a newspaper is also a business and would not want to alienate customers with such harsh criticism—but the inclusion of such words in connection to ISIS shows the *Post*'s position, and played a key role in deciding whether an article was anti-ISIS, neutral, or pro-ISIS.

Beyond single words and strings of terms, however, emerges overarching themes in the sample that contribute to answering RQ2a how to distinguish propaganda from pure information, or simple statements of facts. For instance, of the 50 articles, 27 were categorized as anti-ISIS; the remaining 23 were neutral. In each of those categories certain trends emerge and begin to throw light onto how to dissolve such a sticky issue. One of the most common themes found in the more overtly anti-ISIS reporting is forecasting or warnings. Sometimes it's of a cat-and-

mouse variety—A could happen if Saudi Arabia does this, which would cause events B and C, unless Iran does D instead—all of which usually are dedicated to predicting how the United States and its allies could defeat the Islamic State. However, the levels of enthusiasm vary. Former CIA head, John McLaughlin, was notably pessimistic in his article, from the necessary diplomacy to the state of the Iraqi Army, and the ethnic and political tensions already existing on the area (2015). On the other hand, Richard Stengel, while still admitting difficulties related to the Iraqi Army and preexisting tensions, projected more certainty about the Islamic State's failure to survive as a governing body, although he does not explicitly say so in his article, which is really about how ISIS propaganda is not as sinister as it is made out to be. One gets the impression that Stengel expects the extremist regime to collapse due to inefficiency.

Analysis of Other Terms

Other articles focus on potential strategies to use against the insurgents, both militarily and unconventionally. One particularly interesting anti-ISIS article came from David Ignatius, who acknowledges that it might be the spy novelist in him (as the author of *Body of Lies* and *Agents of Innocence*), and who went on to suggest unconventional warfare to defeat the Islamic State—inciting paranoia. Ignatius' proposed strategy suggests the Smith article on Malaya—he described an incident where a Twitter account posted a flyer that offered a $5,000 reward for information on spies inside the Islamic State and suggests that while maybe the flyer was real, it could also have been planted as a way to break morale and sow discord. It is not the same as air-dropping propaganda leaflets and letting the local government blunder by making the leaflets forbidden fruit (by promising death to anyone who picked them up), but one can see the similarities (Smith, 2001, 74 & Ignatius, 2014). More evocative of the Cold War is the suggestion from Clint Watts, "a former Army officer and FBI special agent" Ignatius quotes at

length, that the United States should try to alienate foreign fighters in ISIS from the Middle Eastern fighters, and also seek to alienate the criminal types attracted to the Islamic State's violence from the religious zealots (2015).

Some of the neutral articles were among the shortest ones. (One notable exception is "Inside the ISIS Propaganda Machine," which reads neutral, particularly the sentences highlighted for rhetorical analysis. The article notes an arrest of a person or persons for pro-ISIS tweets, for attempting to join the Islamic State after tweeting about it, or the articles were simply noting the number of troops trained, or the number of casualties after a bombing, battle, or other incident, without commentary.) One such example is "Drone strikes kill key Islamic State figures in Afghanistan," which mostly focuses on explaining who the "key Islamic State figures" actually were—former Taliban spokesman for Pakistan Shahidullah Shahid and a commander named Gull Zaman—as well as detailing the situation in Afghanistan, where ISIS is outpacing the Taliban in claiming territory.

Surprisingly, there were only two antiquities-centered articles in the sample, and they were split between categories, as their titles suggest; "Islamic State Destroys a Treasured Site in Syria" clearly has more of an agenda than "Ancient Syrian City Falls to the Islamic State." Both titles are active, but the first one implies greater loss. The focus, similarly, is more on why the city in question, Palmyra, would be an ISIS target. The surrounding area teems with oil and natural gas, both valuable commodities. Palmyra had been seized, sustained casualties, and a number of people displaced. The article spends little time on communication, appealing to emotion, making judgments about the Islamic State, or speculating what ISIS members will do to the city now that they control it, aside from the note about gas and oil—both of which are long-

term money-makers, and are far more reliable than robbing banks, and other expedient means of obtaining capital.

Background and historical information on the situation is a recurring theme in the more neutral articles, although that is not to say that the more anti-ISIS articles lacked the genesis story or other details for the average reader (the very anti-ISIS, and aptly named "Catching Up in the Middle East" provided a cohesive background of the conflict). Overall, the more anti-ISIS articles focused on two things—communication (meaning propaganda in the case of the Islamic State), and the future. "Neutral" articles tend to focus on the past and present; future-oriented articles picture a world without ISIS, or an "unthinkable" scenario where ISIS "wins." Articles that focus on the present and past evoke worries and deal less in the realm of prediction (McLaughlin, 2015). Prediction often accompanies some kind of agenda—such as the need to defeat the Islamic State.

The end results of the cases of events noted in Chapter 3—beheadings and burnings, antiquities, religion and government, finance and day-to-day operations—revealed surprising results. (See Table 4—Cases in Appendix A.)

Each category was open to either side (ISIS and the west), so unsurprisingly, "religion and government" had the most articles out of any category—18, with many focusing on the United States' anti-ISIS policies. Beheadings and burnings, the first category, contained eight articles, while the destruction of antiquities had only two. Finance and day-to-day operations, a category expected to be larger, holds eleven articles, putting it in third place. The second largest group of articles (twelve) were those that didn't fit neatly into any of the cases described, such as "Teen in ISIS Case Showed Potential," which details the arguments about whether a 17-year-old boy who tended to stretch the truth on his LinkedIn account could have knowingly been helping

other people get plane tickets to Syria for the purpose of joining ISIS, or if he was scammed (Zapotsky, 2015). “On Iraqi TV, Laughing in the Face of Brutal Extremism” by Loveday Morris (2015) also proved difficult to categorize, although, for the qualitative argument, it fit neatly in anti-ISIS. The article is about a daring TV show that makes fun of the Islamic State (many of the actors hide their identities), but also gets at realities of life inside the Islamic State. A supposed rule that forces grocers to make sure that the male-looking vegetables (like cucumbers) are kept far away from female-looking vegetables (such as tomatoes) provides some of the show’s jokes—an annoyance (for the shopkeepers and perhaps for the shoppers) that Warrick also notes in *Black Flags* (2015, Kindle loc. 2838). However, the article, not being directly about ISIS, remained uncategorized.

Also, “Inside the Surreal World of the ISIS Propaganda Machine” by Miller and Mekhennet (2015) could fit into several categories—burnings and beheadings because of the attention paid to the ISIS film *The Flames of War*, and because the interviewed convicts were former members of the Islamic State’s media team that filmed mass executions, among other mundane tasks, like market scenes. The article could also fit under “finance and day-to-day operations.” This is not only because it describes the intricacies of the media team—how they received their instructions and how they were divvied up into photography, social media, and so on, as well as descriptions of the continuous screenings of propaganda films like *The Flames of War* and how often people came to see it—but also the article makes clear that for some of the men interviewed, the incentive to join ISIS was monetary. The article provides a glimpse as to how officers, at least, live, because the media team seems to be on more or less equal footing with the higher-ups in the Islamic State’s military (Miller & Mekhennet, 2015). One photographer groomed for the media team went from living in a shack with no water source to

having a villa with a garden, a car, equipment, a handsome salary (by the standards of the region), no taxes, and an expense account for clothing and groceries. How he was chosen was not stated, and now that he has left the Islamic State, having expressed discomfort with prisoners being stripped for execution; he is currently incarcerated in Morocco, his wife and children have returned to their shack (Miller & Mekhennet, 2015).

The "beheadings and burnings" group also contains articles about hostages, mass executions, and other human rights violations. Interestingly, none of the articles was specifically about James Foley, the American journalist who was beheaded by Jihadi John in 2014. Neither was any of the articles specifically about the film *The Flames of War*, although both the death of Foley and the movie (specifically the burning of the Jordanian pilot) were referred to frequently throughout the eight articles. The only article about one particular beheading referred to Kenji Goto, a journalist from Japan who was captured and killed while trying to rescue a friend, Haruna Yukawa, who had previously been captured (Fifield, 2015). Given the luridness of the Islamic State's acts of violence, it is surprising that this category came in second-to-last, but it remains another frequently mentioned issue, if rarely the focus of the piece.

As noted, the fewest cases were stories that focused on the destruction of antiquities: just two out of the sample. Other articles refer to the destruction of archeological sites and the black market sale of artifacts and antiquities, but it was not usually the subject of the articles themselves. This illustrates, at least for the purposes of this study, that archeology, while important, is not a priority (beheadings and burnings, for instance, had more articles dedicated to those subjects, eight, signaling its greater importance to the narrative from the *Post*'s standpoint). The antiquities, besides archeological interests, might also be considered as a way to cut off the

Islamic State's funding, because ideally, a state should not be able to fund itself based on the black market, a sentiment often reflected throughout the ISIS literature.

That articles focused on military strategy do not espouse simply carpet-bombing the ISIS-controlled territory, a course of action "that creates as many enemies as it kills," suggests an evolution in U. S. military thought (Ignatius, 2014). Unlike WWII or even the Korean War, the conflict against ISIS is not a battlefront war against a monolithic enemy (like the Axis Powers of Nazi Germany, fascist Italy, and empire of Japan). It is a conflict of door-to-door insurgency, akin to Vietnam and Algeria, with two entities that are not nation-states (the Islamic State and the Taliban), both having an antagonistic relationship with the United States, and who are also at odds with one another. A variety of tactics different from the battle-line methods of WWII and more conventional wars are needed to address such a situation, because there is no monolithic force, and though these articles themselves tend to be manipulative, they suggest that, to an extent, counterinsurgency strategy is improving, at least since the initial invasion of Iraq in 2003.

An unconventional war also calls for a different kind of solution, including a different kind of propaganda. The United States is beginning to realize this, especially after the badly received *Welcome to ISIS-Land* propaganda video created by the State Department, intended to dissuade people from joining the insurgents.

CHAPTER V: ISIS AND HISTORY

At the beginning of the research process, it was my intention to compare the current crisis involving the Islamic State to World War II (WWII). While there are still clear parallels, it became apparent that the ISIS conflict has more in common with the Cold War than originally thought. This is related to the evolution in military thinking described in Chapter 4, but there are other explanations, including error of judgment, at play there as well.

The use of ethnic cleansing by ISIS is an obvious comparison to WWII. ISIS targets Shiites, Christians, Kurds, Yazidis, and anyone else who can fit under the term "infidel." This likeness and similarity to the Third Reich is never far from most discussion about ISIS, particularly as the United Nations looks into charging them with genocide and other war crimes (Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, p. 15, which addresses the human rights situation in Iraq in the light of abuses committed by the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and associated groups). Also similar to the Nazis' reign is the Islamic State's universal unpopularity. The Nazis were not taken particularly seriously at first, particularly before the crash of 1929; ISIS's story is similar in that they were disorganized, their leaders were often imprisoned, and they were considered the lesser evil when compared to al-Qaeda. Nazi Germany did have its moments of popularity, and its economic policies are sometimes thought of as being very efficient as opposed to the Weimar government; however, this is actually incorrect; the Nazi government system, like ISIS's was inefficient (Overy, 1996, pp. 198-205).The Islamic State, according to some reports, pays its foreign troops with arbitrary fines on locals in conquered cities, like Raqqa, or through criminal activities like protection rackets, neither of which are particularly sustainable at a large scale. They have nonetheless amassed enough wealth to pay their militants more than any other jihadist organization in the

area (Miller and Mekhennet, 2015 and Warrick, 2015, Kindle loc. 4875). The Islamic State has always been regarded as the evil that Nazi Germany became after the beginning of WWII, due no doubt, to the preference for such violent communication and no desire at all to hide their atrocities.

"Propaganda" has been amply covered by commentary in popular and academic literature. However, the positive Islamic State propaganda does not get the same attention. This is also reminiscent of Nazi Germany in its representation of itself as an ideal. ISIS shows model markets, soldiers cuddling kittens, and inspectors smilingly reminding people how to wear their religious garb (Gearan, 2014). One does have to be careful, however. During the analysis described in Chapter 4, I noted a passage describing ISIS's advance in lightning terms as anti-ISIS, because it evokes the blitzkrieg (lightning-war) strategy used by the Nazis during WWII. ISIS similarly advanced and captured a good-sized swath of territory very quickly. However, "Nazi" is one of the handiest insults to a person, ideology, or organization. And here again stands a situation where a phrase can be both a statement of fact (they are like the Nazis in their lightning-quick military advance), and propagandistic (an embodiment of hatred and evil).

One thing that greatly differs in the current conflict involving ISIS and the United States and WWII is that during WWII both sides had very distinct aesthetics in their propaganda; in an article, admittedly about WWI, Kaminski (2014) notes, for instance, that American propaganda, while occasionally morbid and dark, was generally much less dark than its German counterparts—a trend that continued in to the second World War (p. 79; Hahner, 2014 pp. 41-44). Both portrayed their own people heroically and the opposing forces as monsters, but the German artwork was more expressionistic and focused on their own purity, while the American propaganda emphasized ethnic diversity and Allied unity. John Ford's *Battle of Midway* short,

for instance, showed white and black service-members grieving their fallen comrades together after the battle (1943); a Nazi poster showed a white woman chatting and looking quite friendly with a black woman but decried "the loss of racial pride" ("Black People", 2013). But at the moment, the U.S. is struggling to find its own aesthetic in the current propaganda war. The "ISIS Land" video was met with ridicule for its ironic tone ("Run, do not walk to ISIS-Land"), criticism for trying to copy ISIS's violent style, which at some level validates the Islamic State's efforts, and for essentially giving at-risk persons a video invitation to do what they were inclined to do already—run to ISIS-Land (Miller & Higham, 2015). That the U.S. government felt it necessary to copy their adversary's style shows a level of discomfort with the task, and the smallness of the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC) suggests that there is a ways to go before the United States finds its aesthetic. But this uncertainty makes a certain amount of sense—during WWII, the government was fresh from Works Progress Administration projects that had a distinctive aesthetic of their own. The United States was facing a clear-cut, monolithic force. That is not the case now. There is no single style to choose from, and the foe is, for all the similarities noted above to Nazi Germany, quite distinct from the infamous historical entity.

The Korean War was, for all intents and purposes, also a battlefront war, like the world wars. However, it was different in that the Chinese and Russian-supported North Korean forces were viewed as a monolithic communistic force, not unlike the Axis Powers during WWII. But it was not monolithic. The United States tended to think of the Soviet Union, China, and the other Asian communist countries (at that moment only North Korea, though later Vietnam would be included) in the same breath, but they were not a united front; the Soviet Union was not friendly with China and North Korea. Journalists and war correspondents expecting more of the same,

Bernhard noted, received quite a shock. A visiting Edward R. Murrow, for instance, was nearly shot as a spy by the Americans, until someone recognized his voice from *Person to Person,* and the networks, ultimately, began requesting censorship to regain order (Bernhard, 1999, 105). Collaboration between the press and the federal government was not new, nor was censorship and self-censorship during WWII. It was a fairly common joke in cartoons promoting the war, like "Falling Hare," a cartoon that pits Bugs Bunny against a gremlin, which opens with a mock censored news piece about a new Air Field opening or for cartoons made especially for the troops, like Private Snafu, one of which was explicitly called "Censored." It featured the inept soldier trying and failing to write a letter that wouldn't get blacked completely out to his girlfriend. Although censorship is not necessarily the contemporary problem, news outlets cooperating too much with the government can have very serious consequences, such as the journalistic failings post 9/11 that contributed to the 2003 invasion of Iraq—the conflict which played so large a role in the formation of the Islamic State.

The Cold War offers more telling comparisons. In the *Oxford Book of Propaganda*, Nicholas Cull (2013) describes Vietnam in terms of sales—selling the puppet South Vietnamese regime to the Vietnamese people and the conflict to the world, not just to the American people (p. 139). It was a hard sell, one that was ultimately a colossal failure. Aside from the Gulf of Tonkin incident, American propagandists could not agree on how to handle Vietnam and turn it into "a reliable non-communist ally" and as such resorted to intimidation, which would seem less likely to create any sort of ally at all (Smith, 2001, 11). This was the irony of the hearts-and-minds philosophy, as depicted in the Peter Davis' film, *Hearts and Minds* (1974). Interestingly, this is a problem that American soldiers faced in Iraq and Afghanistan. Not knowing how to interact with the locals, many relied on intimidation, something the Counterinsurgency (COIN)

Academy sought to remedy with its genesis. This was also a problem that Warrick noted in *Black Flags*, quoting one U. S. soldier who had second-thoughts as he searched a house in the middle of the night, "We're still thinking of ourselves as liberators," but a few minutes later "what if this was my house" (2015, Kindle loc. 2211).

Images and the easy availability of the ugliness of the war also link the two conflicts, Vietnam and ISIS, and affect morale of both troops and civilians. Dauber quotes soldiers afraid to go back into conflict without some kind of battle-cam after instances of the aftermath being manipulated to make one side look good or evil (2009, 13-14). It speaks to the power of images, and evokes the controversy in Vietnam surrounding the photo of the burned girl: Who dropped the napalm? Who made the napalm? Did the bombers know there were civilians nearby? This is not to question the legitimacy of the Vietnam photo, but to illustrate its power and how those answers could be framed to support one side or the other. The United States might have seen itself as a liberator in Vietnam, in Iraq, and so on, but that is only one point of view. It is easy to step into the role of invader, especially, as in Vietnam, when the decision-makers are uncertain of how to conduct themselves or how to sell their position in a new setting, or are otherwise unable to achieve a consensus, as described in the Smith article.

Interestingly, the government's response to the ISIS videos is something like the communist Malayan government's misstep in responding to the British airdropped propaganda, punishing interactions with it by death (Smith, 2001, 74). While American government does not go to that extreme, it is still frowned on, and in countries like the United Kingdom, a crime to view ISIS' most infamous communication, like the beheadings and other staged executions, on the Internet (Elgot, 2014). Obviously, some stipulations and exceptions are made for informational purposes—the last photo of James Foley, staring at the camera before his

beheading, is a well-distributed and memorable image and appeared more than once in the *Washington Post* sample.

On the subject of well-distributed and memorable images, one has to think of the American coverage of the first Gulf War. In fact, a lot of the coverage of the war, globally, came from CNN, which had crews and cameras in Baghdad, Israel, conference rooms, and places where a development could be announced. With that kind of exposure, it is unsurprising that the conflict established CNN as a major news outlet, although their style, and method of filling the demand for 24-hour news coverage (often getting information directly from the U.S. military, which is somewhat reminiscent of the journalistic problems in WWII and Korea) raised eyebrows (Kellner, 2004). The young network was also very well advertised during the conflict.

It is ironic that the action-movie style of American news coverage of the Gulf War is favored by the Islamic State's own "brand." But in fairness, the term action-movie is far more applicable to ISIS than CNN's marketing was. For instance, Zarqawi made himself out to be something of an action star, being photographed or filmed with assault rifles and creating other heroic images of himself. The outtakes caused some embarrassment when they fell into American hands, because they showed him losing control of the gun; an assistant shrieks in pain when he accidentally burns his hand on the just-fired weapon (Warrick, Kindle loc. 3580-3582). This bit of unintended comedy was replicated in 2013, seven years after Zarqawi's death, when one of his mentees attempted to create a similar propaganda reel including karate moves, a rather ironic choice for a radical Islamist video, given that it is a Japanese martial-art intended more for self-discipline than for combat (Warrick, Kindle loc. 4746).

No discussion of propaganda and the first Gulf War would be complete without mention of the Patriot vs. Scud missiles episode. The Patriot missiles were said to have an incredibly high

success rate, but its actual performance was lackluster (Postol, 1992). It was outright deception on the part of the American government, without any clear need for deception, such as morale, which was an excuse used in past conflicts, such as WWII, Korea, and Vietnam. But whatever the excuse, it was deception on the part of Saddam Hussein, that helped clear the way for military action against the country. His clumsy attempt at showing the world that a group of hostages were in fact his guests was universally decried, and one can't help but wonder why his video was even released at all.

In the current conflict with ISIS, much is being made of the Islamic State's deception in attracting potential recruits. The counterpropaganda makes a fuss about it, as does the Neuman report on the sixty-some defectors. I mention the cracks in the ISIS propaganda myself. It is important to take note of and be aware of deception, especially when it could save lives. However, as with Patriot and Scud missiles, the government is guilty of its own deceptions. It played a very large role in the 2003 invasion of Iraq, which in turn played into the formation of ISIS. This is a cycle that will repeat itself, since propaganda is a constant of war, regardless of whether it takes place in the United States, Vietnam, Israel, or Iraq.

On the note of Vietnam, Israel, and Iraq, it is interesting to note that all of the Middle Eastern countries affected by the Islamic State crisis have some kind of history with occupation by colonial powers, or other forms of imperialism, yet there is very little of that narrative (colonialism, imperialism and cultural imperialism) included in the information about ISIS. The *Washington Post* articles used in the analysis were silent on the subject. Edward Said writes about the United States having inherited colonialist and imperialist ideals from its European parents, but *Covering Islam* was written at the time of the Iranian Hostage Crisis, and though he very nearly prophesizes the rise of the Islamic State, it is a stretch to count his book among those

sources, useful though it is (1981, 4 and 136). That being said, Dauber does refer indirectly, via a quote, to Algeria and Vietnam—how the media were present in both cases but less "ubiquitous," and the effect this had on the morale of the French and the Americans (2009, 15). It is not spoken of again after that brief appearance, and in that is practically an afterthought. The article is not historical, however, so the lack of a more in-depth analysis of a colonial past is not particularly surprising.

Although there is a plethora of historical comparisons that can be made to the current situation in the Middle East, it would be short-sighted to choose just one and say that ISIS is a modern version of the other event. Parallels exist, but there are too many other new forces affecting the outcomes, one of the major ones being the advances in technology. This creates a unique situation in the quandary of parsing out truth from propaganda. Video is so mainstream that people want to trust it, in ways that they don't necessarily trust the written word, yet it has been shown to be easily manipulated through technology, acting, or other means. And with so many hands and minds having the means to create and disseminate their own information according to their own positions, it really underscores the new era for communication of all kinds, as well as the importance of the distributors—even social media, the new medium for a contemporary kind of conflict. It's fitting, in a way, because new methods of conveying meaning (photography, radio, film, and television) have all influenced the way war is portrayed, and how it is remembered. One of the historical articles, "News is a Weapon" was noted for the aptness of its title. In a way, that's another parallel to WWII, perhaps even truer today. The earlier observation about the technology of war propaganda did not include the technology in weapons, which have evolved perhaps more impressively, but they are often part of the same cycle.

CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Based on this study's analysis and previous explanations, the research questions are as follows.

Propaganda is mentioned almost twice per article (1.68 times), which is consistent enough, especially when including Twitter and OtherComm (2.1 and 6.56) to imply that all of ISIS' communication is tainted with propaganda. Just over half of the *Washington Post* sample (27 to 23 articles) was anti-ISIS. The more anti-ISIS articles tended to focus on the future and contained more inflammatory language than their more neutral counterparts, which made them easier to pick out and label, although they contained information and reporting, too, and not just framing. This illustrates the stickiness of parsing out "pure information" from "propaganda," although the differences can be seen, even if they vary from person to person. And while the articles do offer a lot of information, not many address the affected area's history beyond the rise of ISIS, or focus on the people in that territory. In terms of a case study, the *Post*'s reporting shows some bias, but also some criticism of the U.S. government and a turning point, perhaps, in war reporting with social media and the Internet becoming increasingly important—much more so than they were in 2003 at the invasion of Iraq.

The ultimate purpose of this study is to come to terms with "evidence" versus "framed interpretations," based on a case study of ISIS propaganda and references in the U.S. press, specifically the *Washington Post*, about ISIS information methods. U. S. officials seem to have few reservations about referring to ISIS videos as propaganda (although, it was noted in the course of collecting articles that the more current they became, the less the word propaganda tended to be used). This tactic, freely using the propaganda label, complies with Ellul's

theories—by psychologically uniting the country against an outside threat. Us against the evil propagandists, is essentially the message in this case.

The United States also employs its own counterpropaganda efforts, labeled as correcting misinformation; although, it tends to be viewed as greatly outmaneuvered by the Islamic State's efforts (the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications CSCC, 2015; Miller and Mekhennet, 2015). Meanwhile, some U. S. news networks and campaigns are considered propaganda in the international community and by some domestic audiences. This is a common criticism leveled against Fox News (and to a somewhat lesser extent MSNBC), for instance, but similar cases have occurred throughout history and are not unique to the 21st century, such as the self-imposed censorship of the Korean War described by Bernhard (1999, 109). The action-movie journalism adopted by CNN during the first Gulf War stands as another example that is perhaps less sinister in that they were not collaborating with the government, but is still distasteful in terms of journalistic policy—putting ratings and markets first.

Propaganda is inseparable from war, perhaps from all communication even in times of peace and stability, but it is especially prevalent in times of conflict—even going back to the time of Shakespeare and even further to the Ancient world, although the twentieth century is most famous for it. During World War II the Axis powers and the Allies produced massive amounts of propaganda. The American press cooperated with the U. S. government to the point that a single propaganda radio station (and idea of Roosevelt's) was superfluous and never created. Sometimes mass media makers, like movie studios, worked directly with the government to create propaganda, or to simply document the war for historical purposes. This illustrates certain parallels between the past and present—the current action movie *London Has Fallen* (to Middle Eastern terrorists, making the American president a literal man of action in the

chaos), certainly shows signs of being propagandistic, although it likely has no more than the usual collaboration with the Pentagon, which is how filmmakers get access to things like fighter planes, warships, and so on, provided the script is approved—*Apocalypse Now* was, for instance, "dead on arrival" in terms of Pentagon assistance due to the film's very critical look at Vietnam and portrayal of the American military (Tarabay, 2014). What is implicit and explicit in the present study is addressing whether social media and modern digital communications are reframing what constitutes propaganda, or if it is merely a new distribution channel.

Limitations and Further Research

One limitation is of this research is the exclusive focus on one news source, the *Washington Post.* Future studies will need to consider other U. S. media producers, print, broadcast, and online, as well as international outlets, to gain a better, more complete picture of how ISIS propaganda tactics are covered, or not.

Another limitation of this study is its proximity to the origins of the ISIS conflict. As of 2016, there is still relatively little academic work on ISIS, although there is plenty of popular coverage. Events are still unfolding, and the directions the conflict can take might render these findings either more or less relevant in the longer term. Also the hindsight of studying the situation perhaps 20 years down the road as history instead of a current event informed by history adds a more sophisticated perspective than one that takes place as events unfold. Similarly, choosing to not analyze any articles published after the end of November, 2015 is limiting in its own way, although it also makes sense for the study. This informational issue could, however, be addressed by revisiting it in the future with more experience and a larger pool of resources from which to draw.

Something that the future will not likely remedy, however, is the issue of bias in research on the subject of the Islamic State. Most of my sources were anti-ISIS (arguing strategies against them, suggesting an "antidote" to their continued existence, and so on), and although I try not to let my own feelings color my research, my distaste for the methods and tactics of the Islamic State is probably apparent to the reader (Brown, 2015). The fact that ISIS seems to be universally unpopular (even among other militant groups like the Taliban, and not simply for poaching their recruits—many higher officials in these other organizations find ISIS "unseemly" and resent the Islamic State leaders' disregard and outright contempt for the older organization's advice), does not necessarily excuse this lapse in objectivity, but it still is noteworthy (Warrick, 2015, Kindle loc. 1215 and 400). No doubt this particular limitation will continue to color more studies than just mine.

Over the course of this study, I have seen many opportunities for future research. Some are simply doing a similar study but with different (newer) mediums of publication, like exclusively online sources or television. It would also be interesting to do a similar study through the lens of another culture, perhaps analyzing only articles from *Al Jazeera*, a respected news outlet that is physically and culturally closer to the story than the *Washington Post*. But more analyses of news sources are not the only possibilities. A study devoted entirely to insurgency propaganda and counterpropaganda, perhaps using Vietnam as a more specific historical context, could also be very rewarding. Also interesting and worthy of study is the possibility of a generation gap between the U.S. policy makers, and the leaders of ISIS in terms of technology and strategy.

Conclusion

Though social media and the Internet have changed the way propaganda disseminates (rumors and "shout-outs" can traverse the globe in minutes rather than weeks, especially with tricks like corrupting a neutral hashtag—one related to the World Cup, or a birthday, for instance), which does create new problems and other changes, things have still stayed very much the same. New mediums and new kinds of war always affect how the message is relayed—television greatly impacted the coverage of war in the post-World War II world, especially during Vietnam, for better and for worse, as it has been noted. The situation with the Islamic State highlights these changes, and the need for evolution in combatting such situations, most dramatically.

Throughout history and likely in the future as well, the same tricks continually appear—dehumanizing the other (and with their fondness for masks, ISIS makes that very easy), uniting against an outside threat, creating paranoia by suggesting that no one is safe from danger, infection, etc., appealing to positive emotions as well as negative, and name-calling among other tactics, including outright lying to the public. The Internet, however, is unique in that it does allow a skilled user to operate with elusiveness that would likely be envied by historical figures, although the possibility still exists of getting caught, and people are caught by local governments for ISIS-related activities online, among other illegal activities. There is a new kind of *paper* trail that can be left with online activity, even though there is no printer to pay off (to use the example of distributing pamphlets in earlier times). Internet cookies and other software can lead investigators to the doorstep of a "hashtag jihadi" or someone doing something else illegal. But because the Internet also effectively removes the traditional liaison, message distributors enjoy a good deal more leeway, especially if one uses a vehicle that operates on the platform of anonymity, like Telegram or even Yik Yak. It evokes the Latin saying about the wolf changing

its skin but not its nature—the Internet, and drones, for that matter, have altered the appearance of war but by making it more accessible not really its behavior. Sides demonize and kill each other.

This depressing thought only underscores the need for more active audiences, thinking about the messages they take in from their information sources. If propaganda really is ubiquitous with all communication, it is better taken in with both eyes open, rather than one passive eye. This raises the issue of civic responsibility again, because so much is made of the United States being "the land of the free" and "the best country in the world," but that cannot be true with a population in the dark either through apathy or through a press more concerned with readership and not wanting to alienate customers with potentially unpopular content regarding the government or the country in general. They need to feel safe printing the truth, or as close as humans with biases can write it, and the only way for them to have that safety is through the people at large holding both the government and the press accountable for their words and actions. This makes a certain level of skepticism, activity, and basic knowledge all the more important, because they are all of great importance if the media and government are to be held accountable for their publications. Every situation is not a war, and there is no cookie cutter to predict how a war will be handled or what its outcome will be, but when it happens, a country needs a confident, informed population behind it, rather than one characterized by ignorance, desperation, and fear, because the media and audiences support each other, and as such can tear each other down.

In the imagined situation described above, with the ignorant, desperate population, a good many unpleasant things would undoubtedly result, and actually the rise of ISIS speaks to their preexistence on both sides of the conflict. It was an oft-stated complaint in the articles

sampled that the people who join ISIS are ignorant of their religion and its principles, while many in the United States are inclined to lump all Muslims in the same category with the small extremist population. It is a situation that requires change, and while increased awareness and activity on the part of media consumers is important, it is not a panacea that can be implemented overnight. This is what makes the civic responsibility of awareness and skepticism regarding information, and context, so drastically important across history and around the world.

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Zapotsky, M. (2015, March 3). Teen in ISIS Case Showed Potential. *The Washington Post*.

APPENDIX A : TABLES

No. / Byline	Date	Title	Anti/ Neutral/Pro ISIS
1. Warrick, J.	2013, Dec. 17	In Syrian war, extremists train 'children of al-Qaeda'	Anti
2. Ignatius, D.	2014, June 25	The charismatic leader of ISIS	Anti
3. Booth, W. & Luck, T.	2014, June 29	In Jordan, Concern Over the Allure of ISIS	Neutral
4. Byman, D.	2014, July 3	5 Myths About ISIS	Anti
5. Hauslohner, A.	2014, July 6	Islamic State head makes rare speech, video shows	Neutral
6. Gearan, A.	2014, Aug. 9	U.S., militants fight for hearts, minds, clicks	Anti
7. Ohlheiser, A.	2014, Sept. 19	Islamic State uses hostage in new video	Neutral
8. Nakamura, D. & Gearan, A.	2014, Sept. 23	At U.N., Obama hopes to rally 'the world versus ISIL'	Neutral
9. Morris, L	2014, Sept. 29	On Iraqi TV, laughing in the face of brutal extremism	Anti
10. Pincus, W.	2014, Sept. 30	Islamic State: Barbarity with a strong PR effort	Anti

No. / Byline	Date	Title	Anti/ Neutral/Pro ISIS
11. Byman, D. & J. Shapiro	2014, Oct. 10	Why we should let terrorists keep on tweeting	Anti
12. Ignatius, D.	2014, Dec. 3	Paranoia as a weapon	Anti
13. Lakshmi, R.	2014, Dec. 12	India police arrest man accused of pro-Islamic State tweets	Neutral
14. Lamanthe, D.	2015, Jan 13	Islamic State loyalists hack U.S. military social media	Neutral
15. DeYoung, K.	2015, Jan. 28	U.S. hopes Islamic State loss sends message to potential recruits	Anti
16. Fifield, A.	2015, Feb. 1	Islamic State video appears to show beheading of Japanese journalist	Neutral
17. King, C. I.	2015, Feb. 21	Catching Up with the Middle East	Anti
18. Zapotsky, M.	2015, March 3	Teen in ISIS Case Showed Potential	Neutral
19. Adam, K.	2015, April 29	Islamic State's Western women not just brides	Anti
20. Miller, G. & S. Higham	2015, May 10	U.S. struggles to degrade terrorists via Twitter	Anti
21. Washington Post	2015, May 10	The Propaganda Wars Since 9/11	Anti

No. / Byline	Date	Title	Anti/ Neutral/Pro ISIS
22. Washington Post	2015, May 12	A naive war fought on Twitter	Anti
23. Naylor, H.	2015, May 15	Islamic State leader seems to resurface to urge Muslims to fight	Neutral
24. Salim, M. & Naylor, H.	2015, May 17	With brutal tactics, Islamic State expands hold on Iraq's Ramadi	Neutral
25. Ryan, M.	2015, May 18	U.S. sends interrogation team to Iraq to question first Islamic State detainee	Neutral
26. Morris, L.	2015, May 21	Ancient Syrian city falls to Islamic State	Neutral
27. Washington Post	2015, May 23	Two Calif. men charged with trying to join Islamic State	Neutral
28. McLaughlin, J.	2015, May 27	How the Islamic State Could Win	Anti
29. Sly, L.	2015, June 10	Syrian activists turn tables on Islamic State	Anti
30. Sly, L.	2015, July 7	Rout shows weaknesses of ISIS, and U.S. strategy	Neutral

No. / Byline	Date	Title	Anti/ Neutral/Pro ISIS
31. Nakashima, E.	2015, July 9	FBI Chief: ISIS Using Encrypted Communication	Neutral
32. Raghavan, S. & Craig, T.	2015, July 10	Drone strikes kill key Islamic State figures in Afghanistan	Neutral
33. Demirjian, K.	2015, July 12	In Tajikistan, incentive to join Islamic State is monetary	Neutral
34. Higham, S. & E. Nakashima	2015, July 19	Balancing security against free speech	Anti
35. Stengel, R.	2015, July 24	Beating the Hashtag Jihadis	Anti
36. Washington Post	2015, Aug. 1	On social media, the intent of communications matters	Anti
37. Morris, L. & Salim, M.	2015, Aug. 14	60 Dead in Blast Claimed by ISIS	Neutral
38. Whitlock, C. & Miller, G.	2015, Aug. 27	Pentagon probing claim of skewed ISIS intelligence assessments	Neutral
39. Stalinksy, S.	2015, Aug. 28	Kicking jihadists offline	Anti
40. Sly, L.	2015, Aug. 31	Islamic State destroys a treasured site	Anti

No. / Byline	Date	Title	Anti/ Neutral/Pro ISIS
		in Syria	
41. Ryan, M.	2015, Sept. 10	Al-Queda says ISIS is Poaching Militants	Neutral
42. Adam, K.	2015, Sept. 22	Report aims to publicize stories of Islamic State defectors	Anti
43. Ryan, M.	2015, Oct. 10	Pentagon plans major shift in anti-Islamic State effort in Syria	Neutral
44. Stern, J.	2015, Oct. 10	The Jordanian thug who gave us the Islamic State	Anti
45. Nakashima, E.	2015, Oct. 17	Hacker accused of giving troops' data to ISIS	Neutral
46. Miller, G.	2015, Oct. 30	Islamic State, other militants throng less-governed social-media platform	Anti
47. Davison, J.	2015, Nov. 1	Syrian rebel alliance launches offensive against Islamic State	Neutral
48. DeYoung, K.	2015, Nov. 13	Kerry defends U.S. efforts in Syria, calls ISIS the 'gravest extremist threat'	Anti
49. Miller, G. & S.	2015, Nov. 21	Inside the Surreal World of the ISIS Propaganda Machine	Anti

No. / Byline	Date	Title	Anti/ Neutral/Pro ISIS
Mekhennet			
50. Brown, G.	2015, Nov. 30	The antidote to ISIS: School for refugee children	Anti

Table 1—*Washington Post* Sample Articles, 2011-2015

Article	Propaganda	Twitter	OtherComm	Misc.
Adam	7	1	6	0
Adam	2	1	0	1
Booth	0	0	0	0
Brown	2	0	0	0
Byman	0	0	0	0
Byman & Shapiro	1	5	16	1
Davison	0	0	0	0
Demirjian	0	0	4	0
DeYoung	1	0	8	0
DeYoung	0	0	0	0
Fifield	0	0	4	4

Article	**Propaganda**	**Twitter**	**OtherComm**	**Misc.**
Gearan	6	2	7	0
Hauslohner	0	0	10	0
Higham	14	45	72	10
Ignatius	0	3	2	0
Ignatius	0	1	0	0
King	0	0	0	0
Lakshmi	0	5	2	0
Lamanthe	3	1	3	0
McLaughlin	0	0	0	0
Miller & Higham	12	12	33	2
Miller	4	6	26	0
Miller & Mekhennet	20	4	47	10
Morris	0	0	2	2
Morris	0	0	0	0
Morris	0	0	1	0
Nakamura & Gearan	0	0	0	0
Nakashima	0	2	4	0
Nakashima	0	2	1	0
Naylor	0	0	2	0

Article	**Propaganda**	**Twitter**	**OtherComm**	**Misc.**
Ohlheiser	0	0	6	1
Pincus	4	0	5	0
Raghavan & Craig	0	0	1	0
Ryan	0	0	0	0
Ryan	0	0	2	0
Ryan	0	0	0	0
Salim & Naylor	0	0	7	0
Sly	1	4	6	2
Sly	0	0	0	0
Sly	1	0	0	0
Stalinsky	0	8	29	0
Stengel	0	0	8	3
Stern	0	0	1	1
Warrick	1	1	9	4
Washington Post	3	0	0	0
Washington Post	1	0	0	0
Washington Post	0	0	0	0
Washington Post	1	0	3	0
Whitlock	0	0	0	0
Zaportsky	0	0	1	0

Table 3—Coding

Case	Author	Article Title
Beheadings and Burnings	Fifield, A.	Islamic State video appears to show beheading of Japanese Journalist
Beheadings and Burnings	Miller, G. & S. Mekhennet	Inside the Surreal World of the ISIS Propaganda Machine
Beheadings and Burnings	Morris, L. & Salim, M.	60 Dead in Blast Claimed by ISIS
Beheadings and Burnings	Ohlheiser, A.	Islamic State uses hostage in new video
Beheadings and Burnings	Pincus, W.	Islamic State: Barbarity with a strong PR effort
Beheadings and Burnings	Stern, J.	The Jordanian thug who gave us the Islamic State
Beheadings and Burnings	Warrick, J.	In Syrian war, extremists train 'children of al-Qaeda'
Beheadings and Burnings	The Washington Post	The Propaganda Wars Since 9/11
Destruction of Antiquities	Morris, L.	Ancient Syrian city falls to Islamic State

Case	Author	Article Title
Destruction of Antiquities	Sly, L.	Islamic State destroys a treasured site in Syria
Religion and Government	Adam, K.	Report aims to publicize stories of Islamic State defectors
Religion and Government	Booth, W. & Luck, T.	In Jordan, Concern Over the Allure of ISIS
Religion and Government	Byman, D.	5 Myths About ISIS
Religion and Government	Davison, J.	Syrian rebel alliance launches o≠ensive against Islamic State
Religion and Government	DeYoung, K.	U.S. hopes Islamic State loss sends message to potential recruits
Religion and Government	DeYoung, K.	Kerry defends U.S. efforts in Syria, calls ISIS the 'gravest extremist threat'
Religion and Government	Gearan, A.	U.S., militants fight for hearts, minds, clicks
Religion and Government	Hauslohner, A.	Islamic State head makes rare speech, video shows
Religion and Government	Higham, S. & E. Nakashima	Balancing security against

Case	Author	Article Title
		free speech
Religion and Government	Ignatius, D.	The charismatic leader of ISIS
Religion and Government	McLaughlin, J.	How the Islamic State Could Win
Religion and Government	Miller, G. & S. Higham	U.S. struggles to degrade terrorists via Twitter
Religion and Government	Nakamura, D. & Gearan, A.	At U.N., Obama hopes to rally 'the world versus ISIL'
Religion and Government	Raghavan, S. & Craig, T.	Drone strikes kill key Islamic State figures in Afghanistan
Religion and Government	Ryan, M.	Al-Queda says ISIS is Poaching Militants
Religion and Government	Sly, L.	Rout shows weaknesses of ISIS, and U.S. strategy
Religion and Government	Whitlock, C. & Miller, G.	Pentagon probing claim of skewed ISIS intelligence assessments
Religion and Government	The Washington Post	A naive war fought on Twitter.
Finance and Day to Day	Adam, K.	Islamic State's Western

Case	Author	Article Title
		women not just brides
Finance and Day to Day	Byman, D. & J. Shapiro	Why we should let terrorists keep on tweeting
Finance and Day to Day	Demirjian, K.	In Tajikistan, incentive to join Islamic State is monetary
Finance and Day to Day	Lamanthe, D.	Islamic State loyalists hack U.S. military social media
Finance and Day to Day	McLaughlin, J.	How the Islamic State Could Win
Finance and Day to Day	Miller, G. & S. Mekhennet	Inside the Surreal World of the ISIS Propaganda Machine
Finance and Day to Day	Nakashima, E.	FBI Chief: ISIS Using Encrypted Communication
Finance and Day to Day	Naylor, H.	Islamic State leader seems to resurface to urge Muslims to fight
Finance and Day to Day	Salim, M. & H. Naylor	With brutal tactics, Islamic State expands hold on Iraq's Ramadi
Finance and Day to Day	Sly, L.	Syrian activists turn tables

Case	Author	Article Title
		on Islamic State
Finance and Day to Day	Warrick, J.	In Syrian war, extremists train 'children of al-Qaeda'
Other	Brown, G.	The antidote to ISIS: School for refugee children
Other	Ignatius, D.	Paranoia as a Weapon
Other	King, I.	Catching Up with the Middle East
Other	Lakshmi, R.	India police arrest man accused of pro-Islamic State tweets
Other	Miller, G.	Islamic State, other militants throng less-governed social-media platform
Other	Morris, L.	On Iraqi TV, laughing in the face of brutal extremism
Other	Ryan, M.	Pentagon plans major shift in anti-Islamic State effort in Syria
Other	Stalinsky, S.	Kicking jihadists offline
Other	Stengel, R.	Beating the Hashtag Jihadis
Other	The Washington Post	Two Calif. men charged with

Case	Author	Article Title
		trying to join Islamic State
Other	The Washington Post	On social media, the intent of communications matters
Other	Zaportsky, M.	Teen in ISIS Case Showed Potential

Table 4—Cases

APPENDIX B: ARTICLES ANALYZED

Adam, K. (2015, April 29). Islamic State's Western women not just brides. *The Washington Post.*

Adam, K. (2015, Sept. 22). Report aims to publicize stories of Islamic State defectors. *The Washington Post*.

Booth, W. & Luck, T. (2014, June 29). In Jordan, Concern Over the Allure of ISIS. *The Washington Post*.

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DeYoung, K. (2015, Nov. 13). Kerry defends U.S. efforts in Syria, calls ISIS the 'gravest extremist threat'. *The Washington Post.*

Fifield, A. (2015, Feb. 1). Islamic State video appears to show beheading of Japanese journalist. *The Washington Post.*

Gearan, A. (2014, August 9). U.S., militants fight for hearts, minds, clicks. *The Washington Post.*

Hauslohner, A. (2014, July 6). Islamic State head makes rare speech, video shows. *The Washington Post.*

Higham, S. & E. Nakashima. (2015, July 19). Balancing security against free speech. The *Washington Post.*

Ignatius, D. (2014, June 25). The charismatic leader of ISIS. *The Washington Post.*

Ignatius, D. (2014, Dec. 3). Paranoia as a weapon. *The Washington Post.*

King, C. I. (2015, Feb. 21). Catching Up with the Middle East. *The Washington Post*.

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McLaughlin, J. (2015, May 27). How the Islamic State Could Win. *The Washington Post.*

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Miller, G. (2015, Oct. 30). Islamic State, other militants throng less-governed social-media platform. *The Washington Post.*

Miller, G. & S. Mekhennet. (2015, Nov. 21). Inside the Surreal World of the ISIS Propaganda Machine. *The Washington Post*.

Morris, L. (2014, Sept. 29). On Iraqi TV, laughing in the face of brutal extremism. *The Washington Post.*

Morris, L. (2015, May 21). Ancient Syrian city falls to Islamic State. *The Washington Post.*

Morris, L. & Salim, M. (2015, Aug. 14). 60 Dead in Blast Claimed by ISIS. *The Washington Post.*

Nakamura, D. & Gearan, A. (2014, Sept. 23). At U.N., Obama hopes to rally 'the world versus ISIL'. *The Washington Post.*

Nakashima, E. (2015, July 9). FBI Chief: ISIS Using Encrypted Communication. *The Washington Post.*

Nakashima, E. (2015, Oct. 17). Hacker accused of giving troops' data to ISIS. *The Washington Post.*

Naylor, H. (2015, May 15). Islamic State leader seems to resurface to urge Muslims to fight. *The Washington Post.*

Ohlheiser, A. (2014, Sept. 19). Islamic State uses hostage in new video. *The Washington Post.*

Pincus, W. (2014, Sept. 30). Islamic State: Barbarity with a strong PR effort. *The Washington Post.*

Raghavan, S. & Craig, T. (2015, July 10). Drone strikes kill key Islamic State figures in Afghanistan. *The Washington Post*.

Ryan, M. (2015, May 18). U.S. sends interrogation team to Iraq to question first Islamic State detainee. *The Washington Post.*

Ryan, M. (2015, Sept. 10). Al-Queda says ISIS is Poaching Militants. *The Washington Post.*

Ryan, M. (2015, Oct. 10). Pentagon plans major shift in anti-Islamic State effort in Syria. *The Washington Post*.

Salim, M. & Naylor, H. (2015, May 17). With brutal tactics, Islamic State expands hold on Iraq's Ramadi. *The Washington Post*.

Sly, L. (2015, June 10). Syrian activists turn tables on Islamic State. *The Washington Post*.

Sly, L. (2015, July 7). Rout shows weaknesses of ISIS, and U.S. strategy. *The Washington Post*.

Sly, L. (2015, Aug. 31). Islamic State destroys a treasured site in Syria. *The Washington*

Post.

Stalinksy, S. (2015, Aug. 28). Kicking jihadists offline. *The Washington Post.*

Stengel, R. (2015, July 24). Beating the Hashtag Jihadis. *The Washington Post*.

Stern, J. (2015, Oct. 10). The Jordanian thug who gave us the Islamic State. *The Washington Post.*

Warrick, J. (2013, December 17). In Syrian war, extremists train 'children of al-Qaeda'. *The Washington Post.*

The Washington Post. (2015, May 10). The Propaganda Wars Since 9/11. *The Washington Post.*

The Washington Post Staff. (2015, May 12). A naive war fought on Twitter. *The Washington Post.*

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Zapotsky, M. (2015, March 3). Teen in ISIS Case Showed Potential. *The Washington Post*.