ISIS Use of Social Media

As a Force Multiplier

In U.S. Attacks

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“Our obligations to our country never cease but with our lives.”
John Adams
Letter to Benjamin Rush
18 April 1808

Introduction

ISIS has proven very adept at using social media tools to win power, influence, recruits and strategic advantage over their opponents. So far, they’ve used social media tools (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Google+ and others) to celebrate and publicize their strategic, battlefield, psychological and opponent success after they have achieved them.

Here, I will examine how they could use social media as a significant force multiplier if they coordinate their assault with their social media skills to cause panic, chaos, death and destruction in the United States. To do so, I will highlight how easily ISIS or an ISIS clone can create widespread panic through the use of social media tools as a force multiplier if they use these tools in tandem with an actual physical assault within the United States.

A social media force multiplier as I use the term here is an individual or small team who, through the use of special tactics, can do the damage of a much larger force. It is easy to understand that a skilled sniper is a force multiplier on the battlefield. Why? Because snipers are capable of force multiplication without ever directly engaging the enemy, they are a commonly known force multiplier.

Where we use social media tools as ways to share information, fun, family, and find and build friendships, ISIS uses them as a weapons platform. In reality, social media is the ultimate dual use technology. And ISIS has figured out a way to use as a weapons platform to attract recruits, to transmit their ideology, tactics, battles, blood lust and psychological operations, on a scale that is exponential, not linear.

That is what they have already done in just a few years since the Obama Administration’s dystopian so called, “Arab Spring” I propose that they will come at the American people with a battalion-sized unit of jihadi social media “snipers” who will create chaos, death, destruction, and panic to millions of American civilians on the level that will be 9/11 times 1,000. Enter “#ISIS” as a search term in Twitter, or YouTube, or Google+, or in any social media platform. You will be amazed at the number of entries that display when you do, and most of those entries support them.

For example, when I did so on December 4, 2014, the very first entry of the majority that all supported ISIS or had no idea what religion they were evident.
US more violent than ISIS? UC Berkeley students seem to think so
By Fox News @FoxNews

I set out to find out how much the Berkeley student body knows about ISIS (or at least their deductive abilities) and who is responsible for the current death and destruction in Iraq and Syria.

http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2014/12/03/us-more-violent-than-isis-uc-berkeley-students-seem-to-think-so/?cmpid=cmtv_twitter_fn

Or, if you prefer, use the acronym for the Islamic State in the Levant, enter “#ISIL” as a search term in Twitter and you will get similar results.
More remarkable, when these same USC Berkeley students were asked who was responsible for the bloodshed in the Middle East, the vast majority blamed the United States.

If you think that ISIS confusion and outright support is unique to UCS Berkeley, a majority of Harvard University students also say the U.S. is a bigger threat to world peace than ISIS. [http://www.foxnews.com/us/2014/10/08/twisted-ivy-harvard-students-say-us-bigger-threat-to-world-peace-than-isis/]
If we read the other posts about ISIS on Twitter, this same misinformation about who ISIS is and how they accomplish their goals is widespread.

“So what?” you might ask. So a few students are misinformed or misguided about ISIS. After all, ISIS is in the Middle East and hardly a threat to us here in the U.S. thousands of miles away.

Well, the 9/11 Commission reached a number of conclusions about what we had done wrong in the years leading up to that disaster, but their number one finding was that our intelligence community suffered from a “lack of imagination.”

That lack of imagination continues.

With social media tools, whatever safety we enjoyed once behind oceans and land masses is gone. Hacker’s daily strike at our government, our corporations, and our infrastructure. As they are after specific information, be it financial, military, or otherwise, they generally do not destroy the servers or data or destroy electronic, digital, water, financial or other networks.

But what if ISIS were to strike those same networks? And what if they used their substantial knowledge of social media as a force multiplier to increase their destructive capability to justify their actions to the world?

They’ve already proven themselves to be very adept at using their social media tools to recruit and train candidates from dozens of nations. They’ve uploaded their combat and recruitment films to Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. Their assault on Syria and Iraq was probably the first combat operation that was carried live on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and other social media.

They have demonstrated a professional grasp of messaging and messaging tools. They understand that the optics as captured in social media is as important to their victory as anything they achieve on the battlefield.

So…let’s take just one scenario.

Let’s assume that for a year or two they accumulate weapons and explosives inside the U.S. If they preposition operatives and supplies in just 300 (or 100 or even 50) U.S. neighborhoods, they have a rather formidable force.

Then, they pick a day for a coordinated attack and hit hard.

But knowing how powerful social media can be as a force multiplier, they not only stock piled arms and explosives. They also set up hundreds of accounts on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and other social media, and preprogrammed smart phones to spread their message rapidly…all as a force multiplier.
As in Syria and Iraq, they have one operative with a cell phone recording every action. As fast as it happens, it is uploaded to social media. And they comment about it all, enjoying the element of surprise and the advantage of first report without counterviews reported.

Now our misinformed USC Berkeley and Harvard University students are useful multipliers for ISIS. A recognized tenet of social media marketing is trust. Anyone who markets a product or a service on social media must have their customers trust to assure that their message is recognized and broadcast to a wider customer base.

So, too, with ISIS. They need others to identify with their message and to transmit it once they upload it. Given the indicated sympathy of the USC and Harvard students, they have a trust base outer ring. Their own committed sympathizers assure they get to the inner ring who can then multiply the impact of their propaganda to a much wider ring.

With a terrorist journalist assigned to each strike force, they could quickly disseminate their message. A violent, coordinated, well executed attack on a large number of American neighborhoods accompanied by a professional social media campaign, in addition to causing a large loss of life and significant damage to property, could accomplish the penultimate goal of every terrorist organization: panic.

And they have mastered this ability already. One Tweeter named Mahdi under the name “Shami Witness,” an executive from Bangalore, India:

“…spent his mornings, afternoons and evenings sending thousands of tweets of propaganda about the Islamic State militant group, acting as the leading conduit of information between jihadi’s, supporters, and recruits.

His tweets…were seen two million times each month, making him perhaps the most influential Islamic State Twitter account, with over 17,700 followers.”

And how do we roll back these live terrorist tweets? Well, the Islamic terrorist strike in Sydney, Australia at a Lindt café and chocolate store at the height of the Christmas shopping in the heart of the financial district. What did the Sydney police tweet?

FredZeppelin retweeted

Sydney @Sydney843  now3 minutes ago

@ABCNewsLive @ABC @9NewsAUS Sydney police have requested NO Tweets. Lives in danger; don't want to provide gunmen with info they don't have
This was excellent counter intelligence by the Sydney police. They knew the right information to tweet, and did so.
Remember, in contrast to prior terrorist hostage takings going all the way back to when the Palestine Liberation Organization would hijack planes in the 1970’s when all hostages were silenced, the terrorists at the Lindt store allowed their hostages to keep their phones. Why?

Why would they do that when doing so would provide an opportunity for them to communicate with their families and the media?

For precisely that reason. The terrorists had some hostages call news outlets and try to get on the air. Again, why? I argue they know by now very how powerful a force multiplier can be and they deliberately used it. While misguided, uninformed or defeatist analysts in the West may label these actors “lone wolfs,” they are well aware they are part of a larger 1,400 year long tradition of martyrs bent on global domination.

Here is Marcia’s social media post from the Lindt Café that was also meant as a force multiplier.
Marcia is inside the Cafe- Please share this.  
Channel 9 Seven News Sydney

Marcia Mikhael
24 minutes ago

Dear friends and family I’m at the Lindt Cafe at Martin Place being held hostage by a member of the ISI. The man who is keeping us hostage has asked for small and simple requests and none have been met. He is now threatening to start killing us. We need help right now. The man wants the world to know that Australia is under attack by the Islamic State.
The demands are:
1. Send an IS flag into the cafe and someone will be released
2. To speak with Tony Abbott via live broadcast and 5 people will be released
3. Media to tell the other 2 brothers not to explode the bomb. There are 2 more bombs in the city.
Has our foreign policy elite identified the ISIS social media weapons platform threat or developed policies to eliminate it?

Well, to judge by one major white paper on the topic put out by the well-funded and prestigious Brookings Institution called, “The ISIS Twitter Census: Defining and describing the population of ISIS supporters on Twitter” by J.M. Berger and Jonathon Morgan, the answer is yes to the first question but no to the second.

The Brookings report examines the phenomena of ISIS social media skill on Twitter, just one of multiple social media weapons platforms they use, only to conclude with bizarre recommendations about nuance and gender, such as:

“Government, for its part, must do something it has not traditionally excelled at: fully address a complex situation and attempt to find a nuanced approach…”

“...There are many attendant questions that should be of interest to civil libertarians. These include, for example, whether suspensions disproportionately impact people of certain genders, races, nationalities, sexual orientations, or religions. Twitter in particular discloses literally no information about the accounts it suspends, yet this activity takes place every day. Again, this is an area in which companies would be well-advised to consider proactive measures, and it is an area where government oversight may eventually come into play.”

After monitoring ISIS terrorists’ thinking, their websites, their enablers, supporters and members, trust me...NONE of them are nuanced. None worry about civil liberties, gender, or sexual orientation. They are equal opportunity killers. And they are very clear when they say: “We have been at war for 1,400 years. You forgot. We didn’t.”

The Brookings analysis reminds me of the monks of Lindisfarne debating theology as the Vikings arrive who debated with their broad axes. That is a metaphor for what we face today with ISIS, whatever politically correct psycho-babble Brookings and our foreign policy elites generate as “analysis.”

The pattern of ISIS, their daily atrocities, from enslaving and selling Christian, Yazidi and other women, their hanging bodies from gantries of towns they conquer, their cutting off human heads, their killing of prisoners, their destruction of ancient cultural treasures, their use of children as soldiers, their throwing gays off roofs, their burning of churches and homes...well, their savagery is endless, it is real, and it continues to grow. But it is not nuanced.
Conclusion

Orson Wells in his famous 1938 drama “War of the Worlds” achieved massive citizen panic in the United States using just his voice and an earlier social media tool, the radio. ISIS has far more sophisticated tools at its disposal, and it knows how to use them.

Once underway, this kind of large-scale citizen panic is difficult to contain. As they have already cut off captives heads, engaged in mass murder and mass rape, enslaved thousands, turned Christian churches into prisons, recruited, trained and activated suicide bombers and engaged in other widespread and repeated hyper-violent behavior, their launching multiple attacks inside the United States to continue their attack patter is easily imaginable.

Given their proficiency and experience coordinating their attacks with social media propaganda, ISIS using social media as a multiplier force is also easily imaginable.

The full impact of that attack is not imaginable, although their use of these social media tools for the past several years in the Middle East and globally shows they are proficient in their use.

We can shut down ISIS social media tools BEFORE their use of them results in large numbers of death, panic, mayhem and destruction. Twitter has finally begun to shut down thousands of jihadi accounts, but thousands of others spring up when they do.

Maybe the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, and the dozens of other intelligence agencies the taxpayers give billions to each year can assist Twitter, YouTube, Google+, Facebook and the other social media tools ISIS uses as a weapons platform to eradicate their social media tools and attacks locally and globally.

The consequences of waiting until AFTER this social media force multiplier is used on a larger scale are unimaginable. We can connect the dots on this one now. We can also take care of this threat to civilization now if we show the wisdom, courage, and action that our ancestors showed and that our future depends upon.

The fight against ISIS and will take place on many fronts. The social media front is one we created and mostly dominate. There is no reason we cannot win this one. As they recently stated when claiming responsibility for killing tourists in Tunisia, “Wait for the glad tidings of what will harm you, impure ones, for what you have seen today is the first drop of the rain” They are clear that they will continue to attack. We need to master the counterattack in many areas, including social media.
Background Resources


http://isisstudygroup.com/


Footnotes