Albany Associates presents a proposal in response to the SOR for Syrian Moderate Opposition Resilience (MOR) Strategic Communications Project that is carefully designed to respond to the significant risks of operations in Syria and the risks inherent to strategic communications programming in conflict environments. We anticipate four primary challenges; (1) a rapidly changing political and military landscape with a large number of actors and conflict drivers, (2) the entrenched and particularly brutal nature of this war – a reality that renders discussions of moderation delicate, (3) developing and disseminating effective communications in a consultative manner with Syrian partners within very constrained time-frame, and (4) the significant legal, regulatory, and business difficulties in basing operations from the bordering countries.

Albany, with many years of dedicated experience delivering strategic communications for HMG and others in conflict environments, responds to this challenge in three ways. First, Albany has assured a project team, including research and community liaison, geared to foresee, predict, and mitigate political change. Second, by selecting partners like Saatchi and Enab Baladi who have very broad capabilities and reach – and a strong understanding of the context, Albany has assured that the project will have first-hand on-the-ground knowledge of the operational context and be able to shift and calibrate in response. The ground-truthing ability is enhanced by collaborative partnerships with others working in communications such as Chemonics and IREX. Third, through a regular schedule of audience insight data collection and analysis combined with consultative meetings with Syrian partners, HMG, and other stakeholders, the project will be able to shift gears as necessary.

It is a reality that the extreme violence that has characterized the Syrian conflict has served to challenge moderate values. It is hard for people to hold on to views of negotiated solutions and inclusive settlements when they have lost so much and have been so brutalized. It is also hard in the face of the powerful and pervasive messaging of the extremist elements, who are very present. It is exactly against these two forces that the MOR project must push. In responding to the challenge of a traumatized people, Syrian conceived, designed, and delivered communications informed by the best practices and experience that the Albany consortium partners can bring to bear can be nuanced and appropriate to resonate and influence. Furthermore, skilfully designed communications aimed at different community cohorts including women and children, armed actors, and community influencers and decision-makers, delivered across a wide range of platforms have proven impact in preserving and widening the space of public opinion.

HMG expects the MOR project to stand and deliver immediately, while also incorporating Syrian knowledge and input. Albany will be able to meet this expectation by building a consortium that includes existing networks, including networks currently working under HMG programming, Enab Baladi with its existing and well-respected platforms and networks, and Saatchi and Saatchi who are already engaged in Syria communications from their Beirut offices. The project will resource these assets and enrich them with training and consultatively developed content. It is particularly important that the project build on existing networks and highly credible Syrian voices and actors if messages are to effective.

Three of the countries neighbouring Syria, Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan, the most likely platforms for project response are increasingly difficult regulatory environments in terms of registration, banking, work permits and cross-border access. Rather than setting up a brick-and-mortar Albany office, the project will operate from the standing legal operations (and production hubs) of partners Saatchi and Enab Baladi, assuring that any project staff have work permits. To address the question of work permits in the Turkey context, Albany has budgeted staff in order to assure all taxes and social security payments are met,

according to law. Albany, furthermore, proposes leaning on staff, Syrian and international, who are internationally based – recognising that all work inside Syria is conducted remotely meaning that technical expertise and liaison can be conducted from anywhere on the globe with periodic visits to the production hubs. This is a departure from very traditional 'central office' based approaches and takes advantage of the efficiencies and cost effectiveness of not mobilizing staff and establishing offices where staff spend the vast majority of the day at the computer or on the telephone.

Albany has already begun the work of externally coordinating approaches, arranging collaboration with a broad range of communications actors implementing with funding from a variety of donors, including CSSF, US, and Canada. In close consultation with HMG, the Albany-implemented MOR project will leverage other projects and investments, seeking to amplify messages across the portfolio, for example assuring British investments in moderate, effective Local Councils are dovetailed between projects.

To internally coordinate cross the project components, Albany Associates has selected a very experienced project manager (description including communications expert with regional experience and Arabic language skills – however rusty) who will be responsible for coordinating activities across the project. An experienced Engagement Liaison will provide the access and relationship management with the moderate armed opposition groups, working closely under the supervision of the project manager with the production manager, whose technical team will support the actual communications work. Supported by Albany Associates, the project manager will assure organizational capacity building and individual training inputs are organized and delivered effectively across the project components.

Within the dynamics of our consortium, each partner must do their bit to **mitigate the risk that activists or brands put out messages not in line with the project outcomes during and following the end of the project**. We have found in the past that a mutual system by which we manage this risk as a whole can be effective. M&C Saatchi must educate groups on how a single communications narrative is more effective, thus incentivising all to toe the line. Albany will manage grassroots groups carefully, including constant monitoring of output of all groups. We will keep in consistent dialogue with them to guide them along and recalibrate if need. Enab Baladi would only amplify content that we as a consortium deem to be on message. If they go off brief, then they lose this amplification tool/support. Through monitoring and evaluation, ORB potentially pick up any chatter from the target audience that says a group is putting out messaging we don't support, performing a backstopping role by picking up anything we potentially have missed. However, the truth is that we can't stop groups saying whatever they want. What we can do though is stop it from being amplified by our abilities, networks and expertise. It's also possible that what is behind the question is, 'by educating groups to be more professional and strategic in how they approach communications, do we risk enhancing their abilities without retaining control of what they say, possibly leading to them at worst case becoming radical (instead of moderate) and producing a load of Isis-esque propoganda'? Yes, this is a risk. Free speech is what it is. Avoiding this issue comes down to careful choice of which groups we select for our programme (given they will receive our training and support) and then constant monitoring and management of those groups as we work with them ongoing.

	RISK / Resulting effect	GROSS RISK			EXISTING MITIGATION	NET RISK		
		Impact	Likelihood	Risk Level		Impact	Likelihood	Risk Level
1	**Strategic Risks**							
	Moderate civilian and armed groups do not see a value to strategic communications	4	2	L	The project will be founded on a broad community consultation approach, focusing on benefits to the moderate communities. Hire Syrian staff with established positive relationships with key players. Capacity buildingwill be focused on success stories.	4	1	L
	Strategic communications fail to impact attitudes and beliefs	5	2	M	Research and audience insight will help the project pitch its strategic communications at the optimum level initially; ongoing research and feedback loops with ensure strategy and approaches remain consistent with intent and changing environment of the target audience.	5	2	L
2	**Operational Risks**							
	Remote nature of the work and difficult access prevent development of well-consulted communications	5	3	H	Project strategic direction sits above the different networks and mechanisms used to facilate access and broad consultation. Use of electronic platforms for communications and consultations. Syrian staff with strong, well-established and active networks. Continued cycle of surveying, monitoring and feedback loops. Involvement of a major Syrian media organization, Enab Baladi.	5	2	M
	Western nature of CSSF and Consortium provoke suspicion and an uwillingness to cooperate	4	4	H	Consortium is experienced in keeping profile of western funding and implementers low, in a support role. Syrian staff, journalists, emerging Syrian media, stringers, and photographers will be the face of the work. Communications strategy and narrative will be Syrian developed and owned.	4	2	M
	Training and capacity building inputs cannot be delivered due to access difficulties	5	3	M	Training inputs selected and designed to be deliverable via electronic platforms. Build on already existing experience in terms of remote training in Syria. Identify skilled trainers when possible who are already in Syria.	5	1	L
	Moderate armed groups debilitated and defeated by regime or extremist groups	5	4	H	Dedicated Syrian staff member closely tracking trends and providing regular, current analysis. Project based on a narrative / 'master story' with communications and stories flowing in support of 'moderate armed opposition' - not based on one particular group of another. In extremis, consult with HMG about the possibility of refocusing the project on civilian messaging.	5	3	M
	Impossible to operate legally in Turkey due to registration and work permit issues	3	2	L	Small number of staff resident in Turkey are hired by Consortium member Saatchi's well-established operation in Istanbul. Enab Baladi a registered and legal organization in Turkey will issue work permits for all project staff. Project designed to make a virtue of the reality of remote management for Syria by placing staff and operations off shore and mobile.	3	1	L
	Moderate armed group partners radicalize during or after the project	3	3	M	Project focus on the narrative, as opposed to a particular groups' messages, means that if a group does radicalize after being involved with the project, the narrative still stands unimpinged. Dedicated staff member monitoring the armed groups, providing liaison and regular, current analysis which will allow project management to take steps early in consultation with HMG if a group appears to be shifting	3	1	L
3	**Consortium members**							
	Member(s) of the Consortium fail to perform	4	1	L	Clear terms of reference and management relationships reduce likelihood of non-performance. Consortium members selected for their demonstrated abilities and performance histories. Certain redundancies built into the design mitigate in case of poor performance, including production capacity in Dubai (Saatchi) and Istanbul (Enab Baladi), multiple capacity building inputs from a range of sources (Albany, IREX, bespoke, Enab Baladi), multiple and overlapping stringer networks.	4	1	L
	Difference in opinions on messaging supported by the project causes work slow downs	3	1	L	Clear management lines, with ultimate decision making held by Consortium lead, Albany Associates. Narrative/master story that guides and frames all messages and communications of the project will be agreed at project inception in a consultative process. Stories and communications to feed the narrative will be produced by Syrians and curated by Albany, Saatchi, and Enab Baladi. ORB will regularly survey and conduct audience insight analysis to allow a consultatively agreed calibration of narrative and/or messaging.	3	1	L
	Consortium members' staff do not adhere to project principals supporting moderation	5	2	M	All staff will sign a clearly explained Code of Conduct in circumstances of 'informed consent'. The Code of Conduct will make clear the expectations in terms of communications, messaging, and behavior by Consoritum member staff eschewing violent or extreme approaches. Breaches of the Code of Conduct, will be disciplinary and Albany Associates as the lead will assure that all Consortium members are appropriately attentive to enforcement of the Code of Conduct.	5	1	L
4	**SECURITY**							
	Albany or Consortium member staff are threatened or harmed by extremist elements	5	2	M	The proposed methodology for the MOR project depends on low profiles for Consortium members, working from existing regional facilities, careful surveillance and analysis of the environment, and a mobile, remote management style that enhances flexibility and access for key project staff but reduces 'fixed target' qualities. The project is not explicitly CVE focused and to be effective, communications must to acceptable to a broad range of the population meaning that while work that is in support of moderate approaches ipso facto opposes extremist philosophy and practice, the MOR project has room to navigate.	5	1	L
	Syrian partner/networks are threatened or harmed by extremist elements	5	5	C	All Albany Consortium members are familiar with the risks of working in Syria and other conflict environments and have highly developed safety and security procedures, exercise Duty of Care for staff including training and SOPs designed to protect them. Journalists backgrounds will be checked to make sure they don't have particular problems with extremists so they won't be targets. Albany has proposed a staff member who is trained and experienced in managing the safety and security of staff on the ground in Syria, and who hold relationships with a range of groups that can assist in mitigating risks. Risks are recognized as variable across Syria with Idlib being currently the most dangerous area, as compared to the south or rural Damascus.	5	3	M
	Project assets are diverted by extremist or designated organizations/persons	5	2	M	The project proposes working with known emerging Syrian media organizations, journalists, and actors. Therefore all payments will be to individuals and organizations that have proven, verifiable track records and who have been fully vetted. Furthermore investment in very careful monitoring of the operational environment and the actors within itis proposed. Significant assets in terms of equipment and funds are not proposed to be transferred.	5	1	L
	Project communications provoke threats of violence or community backlash	4	3	M	The Consortium proposes a methodology which starts off with a consultation with emerging Syrian media, journalists, local council, moderate armed opposition groups, and other stakeholders, based on the HMG TAA and our relationships and knowledge of the operational environment. The goal of this consultation is to agree a narrative or master story which will guide project work. This consultative process and Syrian ownership will reduce the possibility of backlash	4	2	L
	Cyber attacks stall project activities	4	3	M	We have built in the services of a cyber security expert who will establish and enforce sound information and system security policy and maintain an organisation to manage all information and system security. The expert will conduct regular security reviews throughout the life of the project.	4	2	L
5	**POLITICAL CONTEXT**							
	A political or security event occurs which significantly radicalizes the population	4	4	H	The Consortium has proposed retaining a full time analyst whose Terms of Reference are acting as the liaison with the moderate armed opposition and providing regular and timely monitoring and analysis of the security and political environment. This integrated process within the Consortium, combined with the on-the-ground information sources of our networks and consortium partner Enab Baladi, means that we will be able to track trends and mitigate challenges that come with shifts. The very flexible methodological approach of the project, which provides a broad frame for communications, will enable communications responses that are sensitive and nimble.	4	3	M
	A political or security event occurs which makes planned communication messages obsolete	5	3	M	The Consortium has proposed an approach which relies on a broad, consulted narrative into which are fed stories, communications, photos and messaging. This approach will enable the project to take on board major shifts in the environment, mitigate against obsolescence, and keep the work fresh. Also proposed is a regular schedule of audience insight data collection, analysis and consultation which will allow for recalibration at short notice if necessary.	5	1	L
	Changes in FCO posture/strategy require reworking of project delivery	4	2	L	The entire construct of the MOR project as proposed by the Consortium flows to being flexible and adaptable because the environment is volitale and human communications are in their very nature also highly iterative. The structure of an agreed overarching narrative, staff which are flexibly placed, partners and networks that have both range and redundancy, and a regular rhythm of data collection-analysis-consultation spells a project easily able to shift gears.	4	2	L
6	**Financial**							
	Syrian partner organization/individuals s unable to document performance in order to receive payment	4	2	M	The Consortium is proposing partners with clear track records and a dedicated member of the team to manage the financial and adminstrative side of working in Syria. In addition, all Consortium members have rigorous controls and practices, honed through years of work in Syria and other remote management and high risk areas including Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, and Libya.	4	2	L
	Moving funds in and out of Turkey is impeded	4	2	L	Consortium member Saatchi has registered offices in Istanbul, as does Enab Baladi. Both will be able to receive and disburse funding in Turkey.	4	1	L