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## SUPPORT TO GRASSROOTS MEDIA ACTIVISM IN SYRIA

### PART A – METHODOLOGY

Given the UK's National Strategic Aim[1], we understand that the purpose of this project is support HMG Syrian oppositionist grassroots media activism, namely through human capacity-building and to assisting the sustainment of delivery platforms capable of reaching Syrian audiences. In doing so, the following objectives would be contributed to:

- Reinforcement of popular rejection of the Assad regime and extremist alternatives.
- Promotion of the moderate values of the revolution.
- Promotion of Syrian national identity.

We also note the existing resources and experience previously developed using HMG (and US and Canadian) funding. These include the dissemination of material and information through TV, FM radio, social media and print material (posters, magazines and comics) and the development of delivery platforms (such as FM radio). An active strand of this project is also the selection, training, support to and mentoring of Syrian oppositionist media activists.

### Capabilities

As set out in Section 15, a-c, the core capabilities required center around the ability to animate and grow local social, political and economic networks and develop and expand access to diverse delivery platforms.

### Brand

We would propose to build on but change the branding of the current Project Basma (http://www.basmasyria.com) and develop an alternative. There is some evidence that the Basma brand has been compromised following leaks about funding project aims. These include internal emails linking US and UK funding to the project, which were widely shared on social media and we believe they have damaged the credibility and trustworthiness of the existing branded platform. Credibility and trust are the key currencies of the activities envisaged and for this reason we consider it essential to refresh the approach if the content to be disseminated is to have effect.

### Networks

As already identified the ability to access diverse and relevant local Syrian networks, be they virtual or physical is the methodological 'center of gravity' of the whole project. Albany's experience in supporting the NC the Geneva peace talks enabled us to carry out a detailed analysis how Syrian activist networks operated and did or did not connect with those of ordinary Syrians. Our conclusion was that much of the activism operated in closed loops and what has not yet been achieved are the circumstances where they impact on the lives and opinions of ordinary Syrians simply trying to cope with living with the situation. We have identified and worked with a number of Syrian and other regional media activists who have the capacity to animate and cross pollinate existing networks and develop new platforms through which they can be informed and exploited to much greater effect than hitherto.

### Tasks

1. Campaigns. Support the development and delivery of communication campaigns with the following intent:
    a) Bolster the Values and Reputation of the Syrian Opposition
    b) Undermine the Assad Regime's Core Narrative and Legitimacy.

Through Albany's long experience of media development in conflict environments, we favor focusing on providing and improving compelling relevant content and disseminating through as broad and diverse local networks and platforms as possible. This includes press and media plans and building digital and social networks to ensure the widest and greatest possible exposure and impact of the presentation. Using our access to an extensive and resilient network of media activists inside Syria, we

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[1] A more stable and democratic Syria that better meets the needs and aspirations of its people and presents a significantly reduced threat to regional and international security and stability.

will reach the audiences required. In addition, we have a long track record in training in the sorts of disciplines required for this complex environment.

The key to success is to win and dominate the contest for the information space. This requires a relentless and innovative proactive effort. Experience in this field in Iraq, and against similar organisations such as al Shabaab, has shown that to do this requires that in addition to dynamic conventional media engagement, significant advantage can be gained by producing original news content in house that directly supports the desired narrative. News, and particularly international network news, is primarily told by images, either video or still, and stories invariably remain untold if they are not supported by appropriate and powerful pictures. IS's own propaganda thrives on this, both locally and internationally. It's through images and video that they terrorise their enemies and attract new recruits and fighters. Therefore, the enhanced newsroom approach seeks not only to generate its own content, but also to leverage local and regional networks, and citizen user, activist and NGO generated content and challenge and surpass that of the opposition. Below are the key points behind the methodology.

**Content and mechanisms -** The following sets out types of content and mechanisms we propose in order to develop and run campaigns to bolster the values and reputation of the Syrian Opposition, and to undermine the Assad regime's core narrative and legitimacy. These will be supported by our in-country production networks.

- Short audio-visual clips or longer-form documentaries;
- An 'internet wall' for the posting of resistance videos;
- 'Write-in' campaigns that 'lionise' resistance cadres in art and poetry;
- Create fictional material e.g. radio drama and digital 'comic' strips, for internet deployment;
- Use relationships with local/regional media to develop 'news-and-feature slots';
- Online news magazine (12/15 per month) replaying 'tales from the resistance' - internet warriors, ambulance drivers, food distribution workers, doctors and offers advice on resistance techniques;
- Identify international platforms on which our 'resistance heroes' tell their story;
- Nominate heroes for international humanitarian and peace awards;
- Parallel Jihadi sites and JustPasteIt edicts (sheiks/leading figures within Jihadi orbs operating in Syria) that mimic yet refute the current viewpoints of ISIS and create rifts between JN, ISIS, and AQ; development and production of video products (16 videos/produced twice monthly) that falls under the ISIS brand that mimic yet refute current viewpoints of ISIS and further cause rifts between JN and ISIS; creation of Facebook pages as repositories of FB content; Twitter aggregators that promote the mimicked content;
- Emotional response: Development of that creates the narrative of the everyday heroes and contrasts it to the violence caused by both the regime/VE groups, featuring the heroes of the current conflict, the Real heroes help Syrians, not kill Syrians;
- Counter Jihadi 'Cool' by offering alternatives that are 'more cool': an online campaign that utilizes the voices of disaffected fighters; online vignettes of former fighters that dispel the notion of the "coolness" of war and extremist groups and promotes the humanitarian 'cool' in its place; development of supplementary radio pieces to complement the vignettes, broadcast on Syrian-based radio channels;
- Anti-Sectarianism: utilizing public faces, of differing backgrounds and sects, namely artists, to repeat the Free Syria message. Through our networks we can access such figures;
- Using pictorially-heavy and creatively designed printed material in refugee camps and liberated areas to promote key messages, especially as inhabitants typically move from place to place;
- Dedicated channels ie NC / FSA channel, plus capacity for media buy and appearance fee for talking heads who counter CVE / regime narratives;
- Building an electronic army - if VE view the media as a form of Jihad, then so must resistance though media, too, must be lionised as a heroic activity;
- Create links with Staffan de Mistura and promote a negotiation process / political resolution with international support, and plan for 'Day After' Training - preparing for government after-Assad.

**Media consumption and landscape**  A variety of media continues to be consumed (dramas, documentary, music etc) but there is an insatiable appetite for news – mainly TV and online, national and international. TV, a highly politicized mode of consumption, is the leading medium (Pan-Arab followed by Lebanese networks that cater to specific religious/political inclinations, then Jordanian

networks). Smart mobile services are also significant, and then friends and family. Mobile services are often trusted more than TV, especially in camp communities, as the diaspora and those within Syria are plugged into friends and family (whom they trust). For campaign planning purposes: (1) Online news channels – e.g. pro-Revolution All4Syria.com; Zamanalwasel.com; Citizen Journalists/Activists/Bloggers in the Diaspora,or pro-Regime: Syria-news.com; Newspapers Online, i.e. Al Baath Tichreen, Al Thawra, Sanaa- Official Syrian Arab News Agency; (2) Facebook pages of revolution coordination committees; FB represents the only free mass space where people can share thoughts and content; (3) YouTube is highly utilized for its ability to host uncensored reports from within Syria; dangers are in the production and dissemination of the videos by local producers; (4) Pan-Arab Television stations are watched by majority (Al-Arabiya, Al-Jazeera, France 24), plus Lebanese and Jordanian networks. There is insufficient space to examine this further in this document, however. An understanding of what we describe as the "information ecology" of Syria is crucial.

**Delivery and platforms**

Albany will establish a newsroom near to the networks, most likely in Gazientep. We have agreed with Mahmoud Rawashdeh, Middle East Editor at Dubai-based Arabiyah TV, and Afaf Saudi, Middle East Editor at Aljazeera Arabic, to become their content provider of exclusive news, analysis and coverage related to the campaign. This will include (1) Access to grassroots video coverage in Syria (2) Access to pro-campaign speakers and analysts (3) Provide them with flow of news items related to the campaign and Syria in general. We also aim at providing TV productions to Almustaqbal TV (Future TV) that acts as news agency of the revolution. Two key principles of content generation are:

1. Press and media relations office providing mainstream media access: international networks have difficulty in accessing the areas in question. Stories and images from Iraq and Syria are especially difficult so facilitating access to the story is a key service to provide the global media;
2. Newsroom production: project Electronic News gathering (ENG) teams produce original content, video news releases, for distribution to news networks and agencies. Alerts go out to all relevant broadcasters, with headline, synopsis and a key-frame taken from the video. These would focus on compelling stories and imagery that is not available from anyone else, and the comprehensive and innovative use of digital networks and social media. The newsroom would require an experienced news editor and assistant who can task, collect, collate and review the material, package that which supports the narrative and distribute it via multiple platforms.

**Support to Grassroots Activism Media Development**

Utilizing existing media portals, we will support activists through concentrated training on professional media development that seeks to enhance rebel/oppositionist media. Currently Facebook, and other social media/mobile applications are vehicles for activist media this needs to be further leveraged by building citizen journalist and indigenous production capacity and professionalism. The modules we train in will serve as the basis of the media professionalization strand under our brands / campaigns. The courses will be conducted in Amman, Beirut, and in Istanbul, and will focus on coordination mechanism, enhancing current dissemination strategies, physical and digital security and branding of their media. In this area, Albany partner with Lapis/MOBY media professionals who create and brand media for some of the most successful channels in Southeast Asia and the Middle East. Similarly, mentors will be provided in order to keep the trainings sustainable throughout the process.

**Training Schedule and Frequency**

It is envisioned that the training schedule will allow for four (4) sessions of various courses during each quarter of a year of training. This will allow 30 activists to be trained within each quarter on the topics outlined above. This will also allow for the diffusion of the branding through the training schedule. Mentors will be provided throughout the year to work specifically with the activists on production and conceptual issues within their given contexts. Following the training, activists, and portals associated with the oppositionist media, will be tasked with creating reportages, and media that can be used to disrupt the narratives of a divided opposition. These pieces will be used as a guerrilla style campaign to create buzz around the branding. It is envisioned this campaign will result in 20 x 1-minute guerrilla media pieces that seek to diffuse tensions around oppositionist forces, while countering extremist narratives. The 20 guerrilla video pieces will also be used as audio on SoundCloud, a popular audio sharing site that visit artists have used to disseminate songs about the uprising. This will create cross-pollination between YouTube for video, and SoundCloud for audio. We will also conduct grassroots development of What's App, which currently plays a central role in the Syrian diaspora in the host countries.

## 2. Contribute to Counter-Violent Extremism (C-VE).
BRAND CONCEPT - THE LIONS OF RAQQA

Our brand strategy is designed to attract a following, provide diverse product options and stimulate engagement and behaviours within the intended target audiences. Building this brand platform will involve establishing a symbolic visual identity and a set of specific values and associations, focused on portraying our target audience as they would like to think they could be. We will use the brand to drive a master narrative and related 'stories', and we will deliver those 'stories' largely through the internet, and using a diverse range of communications products. We believe that a brand-led approach will offer the following advantages. It will:

- Inject a new and exciting element into the information space.
- Provide an immediate campaign focus to our activities.
- Accelerate our ability to get campaign traction rapidly.
- Establish a more defined platform for clear, measurable outcomes.

BRAND THEME

We have developed a central brand theme that we believe, on the basis of preliminary advice from our cultural and creative advisers in Syria, will have significant resonance with target audiences (see below for audience segmentation). Further brand testing will be necessary to stress-test these preliminary assumptions. The central theme will be – "heroic resistance", with the huge iconic sculptures of twin Lions in Raqqah that were destroyed by ISIS as the symbols of the campaign. We shall use these symbols to 'resurrect' the 'Lions' and 'bring back to life' what the millenarian ISIS death cult has physically destroyed, and the Assad regime has emotionally undermined.

**Geography:** We will work in eight regions. (1) Damascus Countryside (Damascus, Easter/Western Gouta, South Damascus, Kalamoun, Al-Zaidani); (2) Deraa (Deraa and countryside, Qunaytera and countryside, Suwaida); (3) Homs (surrounded Homs, Wa'ar, Homs countryside); (4) Hamah (and countryside); (5) Idleb (and countryside); (6) Aleppo (and countryside); (7) Coastal (Ladkiya and sountryside, Jableh, Banyas, Tartous); (8) Eastern Province (Dair Azzour and countryside, Hasaka and countryside, Raqqa and countryside).

**Target audience segmentation** Indicative/to be optimised following analysis post-commencement

| SEGMENTATION | FOCUS AREAS | CHANNELS |
|---|---|---|
| <ul><li>ISIS</li><li>ANF</li><li>Other Islamist groups</li><li>Regime</li><li>Muslim Brotherhood</li><li>FSA, RFS other MAO</li><li>National Coalition</li><li>Minority (eg Christians, Alawites etc)</li><li>ISIS-occupied</li><li>Regime-occupied</li><li>Refugees and IDPs</li><li>'Moderates'</li></ul> | <ul><li>'Free Syria' core narrative incl. counter extremism</li><li>Countering IS propaganda, building 'defiant heroes'</li><li>Questioning legitimacy motives, actions, hypocrisy</li><li>Strengthening Syrian CVE voices</li><li>Counter foreign fighters in Syria</li><li>Security issues & forming united pro-Revolution front</li><li>Peace, stabilisation, reconciliation</li><li>Political process to advance cross-community cohesion, reassurance of minorities</li><li>Women's and children's rights</li><li>Media freedoms</li><li>Cultural and traditional values</li></ul> | <ul><li>Internet (main focus) + TV/radio programming</li><li>VNRs to local and pan-Arab media</li><li>Social media platforms (Facebook,Twitter, YouTube,JustPasteIt, Whatsapp,Sound Cloud)</li><li>Print publications</li><li>SMS messaging</li><li>KLE where possible</li></ul> |

**Sustainability** Network personnel are Syrian and therefore vast majority of staff are Syrian. The general audiences identified as beneficiaries are Syrian internal. With mentoring, this leaves behind enhanced, empowering staff better placed to handle crises without recourse of outside help. Many digital and other media products will remain, as well as the skills used to develop them, wherever Syrians were trained or skillsets were enhanced.

**Outputs:** The following sets out an analysis of the outputs (desired effects) in section 11 of the SoW. Greater detail will be included following precise research and meetings.

| Indicator | Baseline | Target (including date) | Source of information & who will collect |
|---|---|---|---|
| Increased number of followers on Twitter and likes on the Facebook page; Increased publication and rebroadcasting of project outputs - Newsmarket and Flickr searches | Nil – new activity | Baseline 5/1/15 - 19/1/15<br>Interim monthly assessments;<br>Six-month trend tracking analysis (c. 5/6/15); One year trend tracking analysis (c. 5/12/15); | Platform analytics; Albany |
| Increased traffic to the dedicated website (unique visitors); Increased downloads from the Newsroom Vimeo platform; Enhanced capacity in the Newsroom | Nil – new activity | Baseline 5/1/15 - 19/1/15<br>Interim monthly assessments;<br>Six-month trend tracking analysis (c. 5/6/15); One year trend tracking analysis (c. 5/12/15);<br>Final analysis (5/3/16) | Platform analytics and internal institutional capacity analysis; Albany |
| Perception of FSA / RSF as effective force; strengthening support for an inclusive opposition as evidenced by opinion polling | Nil – new activity | Baseline 5/1/15 - 19/1/15<br>Interim monthly assessments;<br>Six-month trend tracking analysis (c. 5/6/15);<br>One year trend tracking analysis (c. 5/12/15);<br>Final analysis (5/3/16) | Media monitoring, polling and final analysis by third party organization; Albany / Syria Conflict Pool to be clarified |
| Reduction in sectarian incitement; Increase discussion about negotiation process / political resolution with international support | Nil – new activity | Baseline 5/1/15 - 19/1/15<br>Interim monthly assessments;<br>Six-month trend tracking analysis (c. 5/6/15);<br>One year trend tracking analysis (c. 5/12/15);<br>Final analysis (5/3/16) | Media monitoring, polling and final analysis by third party organization; Albany / Syria Conflict Pool to be clarified |
| Increased critical discussion about the Regime's core narrative and legitimacy; Increased discussion about the "Day After" and transition needs inside Syria.<br>Contributions to C-VE evaluated and impact assessed. | Nil – new activity | Baseline 5/1/15 - 19/1/15<br>Interim monthly assessments;<br>Six-month output tracking analysis (c. 5/6/15);<br>One year output tracking analysis (c. 5/12/15);<br>Final analysis (5/3/16) | Media monitoring, polling and final analysis by third party organization; Albany / Syria Conflict Pool to be clarified |

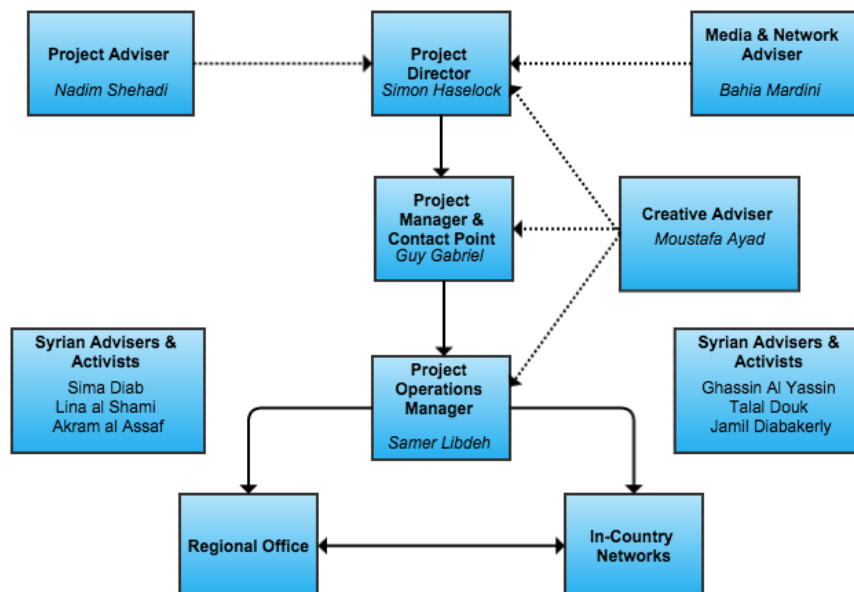| | |
|---|---|
| Do you understand the potential risks and have the knowledge and experience to develop an effective risk plan for your staff? Do you have the capability to manage their Duty of Care responsibilities throughout the life of the contract? | Yes |
| Are you prepared to work collaboratively with other HMG implementing partners when required | Yes |

**Part B - TECHNICAL AND QUALITY DELIVERY**

Albany's experience with risk management has been gathered in some of the most difficult environments in the world. For example, Somalia is one such place, where we have been operating successfully since 2009, at a time when virtually no international organisations would operate there due to the risks. Currently, for example, we are working in Darfur, Libya, DRC, South Sudan, and many others across the Middle East and Africa. Our approach to risk management is similar to that of other organisations, such as DfID and other international funders in that it incorporates sector-wide best practice and hard won local, on-the-ground experience. Please see initial Framework documentation for further details (2.1.6).

| Risk | Likelihood | Impact | How we will mitigate risks | Risk owner |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Timeline - in environments such as the Syria of today, it is possible that events or activities may be subject to delay, such as disruptions to supply chains, cancellation of meetings, events or interviews, or impassability of certain key roads. | High | Medium | Such occurrences will be dealt with as they arise, with alternative suppliers, means of communication and routes planned wherever possible. Our experienced team staff and suggested structures (eg alterative networks) reduce the potential for delay, but it cannot be eliminated. | Albany |
| Impact: Solutions offered may achieve weaker effects than desired; lack of audience interest | Low | Medium | Using tried and tested techniques, excellent network research & preparation and trusted human networks. Syrians inherently have a large appetite for information and news. | Albany |
| Regime and ISIS media machine strong and functional, a formidable opponent. | Medium | Low | Clear comms strategy with flexibility built in, excellent research into regime and ISIS methodology, and innovative counter measures deployed. Using Syrian developers and Syrian deliverers. | Albany |
| Changes can occur to the political discourse - such as change in likelihood of Peace Talks restarting, change in Russian or Iranian stance towards Syria - requiring tweaking to the strategy. | Medium | Low | Part of the ongoing M&E for the campaign is to monitor the political environment in which it is taking place, and track the discourse describing it. Each set of activities will be presaged by an evaluation of appropriateness and relevance to the time and place. | Albany |
| Senior media buy-in: Senior management in media organisations are not supportive of the programming. | Low | Medium | Preliminary and encouraging discussions have taken place with eg al Arabiya, other regional Arabic language outlets. Offering quality production encourages broadcast by media organisations. | Albany |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Networks don't produce as fully as necessary due to access reasons or instability. | Low | High | The overarching strategy is designed to be flexible, meaning that the overall coherence and momentum of the campaign is not lost as a result of reasonable and unforeseeable delays. Risk is spread by large choice of locations and using networks animated by trusted figures; local Syrian organisations well organised at the micro level and digital networks are well established and innovative. | Albany |
| Difficulty operating physically. | Low | Medium | Digital strategies to mitigate problems; clear local advice sought at all time, and experienced operators used. | Albany |
| Digital platform and branding fails to take off. | Low | Low | Digital element of comms strategy clear and robust, with promotion across many other channels; regular M&E and analytics to check on progress and remediate as necessary. Product testing to ensure resonance. | Albany |
| Technological issues arise on platforms | Low | Med | Professional technical support is included to backstop on demand; servers held outside of Syria in areas easy to service. Different digital methods in place to ensure continual flow of information. | Albany |
| Security risks to personnel. | Low | High | Outside Syria staff operating in generally stable environments eg Turkey, Jordan; staff in Syria operate only under security conditions which permit it; digital engagement strategies to help mitigate instability in areas; majority of staff from the region; regular security updates. | Albany |

**Part C - RESOURCE**
We propose a dedicated core project team for this requirement. This section sets out the key elements of Project Management. To avoid accusations of sectarianism, input into the project will require individuals representing all major ethnicities and sects, though this is not necessarily represented in this brief space. Albany, as a commercial entity, operates strictly under the auspices of ISO 9001:2008. Organogram:

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┌────────────────┐        ┌────────────────┐        ┌────────────────┐
│ Project Adviser │·······▶│    Project     │◀·······│ Media & Network │
│                 │        │    Director    │        │    Adviser      │
│  Nadim Shehadi  │        │ Simon Haselock │        │  Bahia Mardini  │
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                          ┌────────────────┐        ┌────────────────┐
                          │    Project     │◀·······│ Creative Adviser│
                          │  Manager &     │        │                 │
                          │ Contact Point  │        │  Moustafa Ayad  │
                          │  Guy Gabriel   │        └────────────────┘
                          └────────────────┘
┌────────────────┐                │
│ Syrian Advisers │               ▼                 ┌────────────────┐
│ & Activists     │      ┌────────────────┐         │ Syrian Advisers │
│   Sima Diab     │      │    Project     │         │ & Activists     │
│  Lina al Shami  │      │  Operations    │         │ Ghassin Al Yassin│
│ Akram al Assaf  │      │   Manager      │         │   Talal Douk    │
└────────────────┘      │  Samer Libdeh  │         │ Jamil Diabakerly │
                        └────────────────┘         └────────────────┘
            ┌────────────────┐    │    ┌────────────────┐
            │ Regional Office │◀──────▶│  In-Country    │
            │                 │        │   Networks     │
            └────────────────┘        └────────────────┘
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**Syrian Networks and Media Adviser**
*Bahia Mardini* is a journalist and media adviser to the Syrian National Coalition and served as Chief of Staff for the delegation of the Syrian National Coalition at the Geneva II peace process. She has reported for Al-Arabiya, Nesf Al Dounia Magazine and Al Hurra TV. Fluent in English and Arabic, she has an extensive network of contacts in the political, humanitarian and journalistic fields in Syria and the region.
**Project advisor**
*Nadim Shehadi* is director of the Fares Centre for Eastern Mediterranean Studies at Tufts University, and an associate fellow of Chatham House. With expertise in Syria, Lebanon and the Middle East Peace Process (Refugees), he is also a consultant to several governments and international organizations. He has produced several publications and contributes regularly to media coverage of Middle Eastern affairs.
**Mapping and analysis advisers**
*Nico Prucha* is a fellow at the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy (IFSH), University of Hamburg. His research focuses on textual and audiovisual content analysis of al-Qa`ida activity online, specifically focusing on jihadist Shari`a law interpretation of hostage taking and executions. He has written frequently on the subject, such as for Jane's and blogs at Jihadica.
*Dr. Ali Fisher* is an adviser, strategist and author on methods of achieving influence across a range of disciplines including public diplomacy and strategic communication, counterterrorism, child protection, human security, and public health. Authored Collaborative Public Diplomacy published earlier this year.
*Aron Lund*, editor of [Syria in Crisis](#) at the Carnegie Endowment for Peace, has published extensively on Syrian opposition movements and military dynamics. Regular contributor to various journals and newspapers, Lund has published two books and many reports on Syrian militias and opposition politics.
**Bell Pottinger Communications USA LLC (BPCUSA)**
A wholly owned subsidiary of The Kestrel Group LLC operating from Tampa, Florida with Top Secret facility clearance, they have eight years of successful past performance with the US Government (USG), and have completed five contracts with the USG (USSOCOM and USCENTCOM) in the Middle East supporting similar strategic communications objectives.