

### **UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACTS WMD/WME ATTACKS ON PATTERNS OF MILITANT GROUP ALLIANCE FORMATION, INFIGHTING, OUTBIDDING, AS WELL AS CIVILIAN AND RANK-AND- FILE SUPPORT**

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#### **ABSTRACT:**

Contemporary violent conflicts are rarely contests between two sides; rather, complex militant networks create the context in which these conflicts unfold. Non-state actors in these regions (or even government groups which are largely un-regulated) operate in anarchic environments, and state and militant groups' relationships lie at the center of these decentralized conflicts. In these settings, WMD/WME use becomes less predictable, and arguably more likely, due to increasing uncertainty, unpredictable leadership, short-sighted time horizons, and the absence of mutually assured destruction. This grant application proposes an evaluation of the impacts of WMD/WME use in asymmetric conflicts – as seen recently in Syria and Iraq. Areas of examination include the impacts of WMD/WME use on: (a) patterns of militant group tactical cooperation, alliance formation and infighting; (b) pushing other groups towards violence via competitive “outbidding” (groups use escalating violence to garner resources or support from other players); and (c) shifts in the ideological extremism of groups in the network.

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