Weapons of mass participation: Social media, violence entrepreneurs, and the politics of crowdfunding for war

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Abstract
Since 2012, North American and European civilians have regularly engaged in combat operations against the Islamic State in the globalized and decentralized battlefields of Iraq and Syria. This article focuses on two aspects of this phenomenon. First, I argue that these combatants represent a different kind of fighter from both private military contractors and battlefield laborers profiled in the private security literature insofar as capital is a means rather than an end in the innovation of violence. I refer to these fighters as violence entrepreneurs. The relevance and limits of Schmitt's writings on enmity and his theory of the partisan are examined in the context of these contemporary networks of security, mobility, and killing. My second argument centers on how online platforms for the distribution of small-scale donations to these fighters and their self-crafted missions facilitate hyper-mediated forms of patronage, where individual donors are both producers and consumers of security in ways that further distort distinctions between civilians and combatants. The imagined communities that support these combatants, both morally and financially, through the banal networks of Facebook and peer-to-peer funding platforms like GoFundMe suggest a radical deviation from conventional organizational structures and capacities for waging combat. Crowdfunding congeals these new geopolitical networks in the authorizing of individuals to determine their own singular forms of enmity, mutating the conditions of possibility for the sovereign decision.

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Introduction

In February 2016, Patrick Maxwell, a former US Marine, was arrested for beating, threatening to rape, then running over a 70-year-old taxi driver with her own car in Aruba. Grace Angela picked Maxwell up outside of a nightclub in Palm Beach, where he had asked to be taken to his hotel. When they arrived, he reportedly refused to leave the vehicle and demanded to be taken to a pharmacy instead, where he also refused to get out of the car. Angela described Maxwell as suddenly becoming violent, repeatedly hitting her in the face while threatening to sexually assault her, until a witness tried to intervene. Maxwell then stole Angela's car, running over her leg and torso in the process. She survived the attack with a broken nose and seven broken ribs (Geerman, 2016).

One year previous to the incident, Maxwell was profiled by the *New York Times* as an American "fighting ISIS" in Iraqi Kurdistan. The four-minute video documentary features Maxwell describing his use of Google and Facebook to decode how to travel to Sulaymaniyah, Iraq in order to engage in combat operations alongside the Kurdish Peshmerga (Bofetta and Philipps, 2015). In response to a question posed by the filmmakers (the question was not included in the audio), Maxwell ruminates: "I did hope … that there would be a chance to split some heads … yeah [sound of gunfire].… As a private citizen, I'm going to have an adventure, essentially, and that's my own business." What would inspire someone to believe they were Foucault's arcane sovereign, the decider of who lives and who dies, capable of declaring their own war? In stepping back from a horrific act of violence directed at an elderly woman working nights as a taxi driver, to the experience of possessing an extreme form of freedom to "split heads" without seeming limit or consequence in the nebulous warscapes of Iraq and Syria, there is a continuity in Maxwell's actions as his own army of one that links the causal violence of an assault in Aruba, and more explicit forms of combat in Iraq within the same sovereign subject.

My focus in this article is on North American and European civilians traveling overseas to engage in combat operations against the Islamic State in the globalized and decentralized battlefields of Iraq and Syria. In what follows, I outline two arguments. First, these combatants represent a different kind of fighter from private military contractors (PMCs) and other battlefield laborers profiled in the private security literature. For this new combatant, violence is not simply instrumental in the pursuit of capital, territory, or some other gain, but rather is an end unto itself in the innovation, enjoyment, and the metanoia of violence. Adapting Grove's (2016a) concept of the violence entrepreneur, I situate the emergence of these fighters within contemporary forms of globalized and mediatized warfare. My second argument is that the imagined communities who support these fighters — morally, affectively, and financially — through the banal networks of Facebook, online donations pages offered via web-content management systems, and 'peer-to-peer' funding platforms like GoFundMe suggest a radical deviation from conventional national and corporate organizational structures for waging combat.

Major debates in the literature on private security take place within a particular economy of violence, where violence is instrumentalized toward a goal, a form of compensation, survival, or some other end (see Abrahamsen and Williams, 2010; Avant, 2005, 2006; De Nevers, 2009; Leander and Van Munster, 2007; Spearin, 2008). In other words,

violence is effectual is some way insofar as this literature attempts to explain why combatants do what they do. For example, Avant's (2005) discussion of the historic role of private security, their proliferating forms and services within a "transnational market of force," and their linking with criminal networks positions private security actors within a particular relationship of monetary and other modes of exchange. In Krahmann's (2012) discussion of changing legal constructs and distinctions between mercenaries and private security actors, monetary gain is also a shared motivation among these actors. This is similarly true of what Danny Hoffman (2011: xii) refers to as laborers of the battlefield, or those individuals for whom armed conflict is one mode of work among limited or forced alternatives in an increasingly militarized global economy. The expression of violence as a means does not foreclose that PMCs or those exploited bodies drawn into colonial, political, and economic confluences of relations driving conflict around the world cannot possess complex motivations for doing what they do. The libidinal investment in work of all kinds is often complex. However, there are certain structural differences between self-styled "ISIS hunters" and other non-state combatants that turn on these differences, and suggest the emergence of new modes of combat that are already underway, but have been largely sidelined as a curiosity.

My emphasis on Schmitt's theory of the partisan as a framework for theorizing the violence entrepreneur is motivated, in part, by the regular invocation of the partisan as a concept and 'style' of warfare for understanding the contemporary exercise of sovereign power with regard to non-state violent actors, as well as shifts in the organization of contemporary combat (see Schulzke, 2016; see also Kochi, 2006; Shapiro, 2008; Slomp 2005; Werner, 2010). Further, the constituent elements of the partisan seem to prefigure coverage of anti-ISIS fighters in popular media, for instance, in their mobility, their negotiating novel modes of networked warfare, and in their willingness to engage in combat operations apart from state-led militaries. This prefiguring is given form in the common, but misguided reference to the anti-fascist Abraham Lincoln Brigade during the Spanish Civil War when attempting to give conceptual and legal context for understanding the activities of anti-ISIS combatants (see Hennessy-Fiske, 2017; Keating, 2011). As I will argue, anti-ISIS fighters lack the ideological coherence that would allow them to graft onto Schmitt's (2004: 21) "revolutionary activist."

For Schmitt, sovereignty is defined by the power to decide on the friend–enemy distinction, and the 'way of life' that defines the force that gives war meaning. This way of life and its opposition, the enemy, is the definitive entity in determining the structure of political conflict. Insofar as the friend–enemy distinction is determined by the state, it centers on a nationalist quality. The partisan's challenge to the state centers on the threat they pose to the state's monopoly over the political, or the ability to determine the friend–enemy distinction. Yet the partisan's lines of enmity are still premised on a collective way of life that bears a familiar resemblance to the national, even if not in state form. What differentiates Schmitt's partisan from the violence entrepreneur is that the violence entrepreneur does not acknowledge any government or national way of life, that is, any sovereign above the individual combatant, in determining the political and the contours of enmity.

This is not to say that violence entrepreneurs are post-political or without politics. Rather, social media has furthered the structural conditions for individuals to determine

their own relations of enmity, and to engage in fluid spaces of battle around any number of mercurial and self-crafted targets, from exorcising personal demons, to alleviating post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), to carrying out eschatological religious missions, to having 'real' experiences that would make for rousing stories back home. Here, sovereignty is not simply a trade-off of varying degrees between the state and the partisan, but rather materializes out of new forms of mediation and communication within geopolitical and informational spaces that are much more difficult to map.

This brings me to my second argument, which centers on how crowdfunding has become integral to the organization of contemporary networks of security, mobility, and killing. Today, the organization and distribution of small-scale donations to fighters and "missions" facilitate hyper-mediated forms of patronage that allow individual donors to become consumers and providers of security in ways that further distort the distinction between civilians and combatants. These new digital economies point to the reorganization of decision-making and the funding of military and combat operations from governments and the collection of tax dollars, to small-scale contributions funneled to single combatants or supporting initiatives of the donor's choice. Thus, platforms like GoFundMe allow for a form of collective action that states previously had a structural advantage over in terms of fighting wars. By tapping spare dollars, crowdfunding allows, in a limited capacity, for circumventing the classic collective action problem of national security.

As an intervention in the theorization of the partisan, crowdfunding congeals new geopolitical networks in the authorizing of individuals to determine and act upon their own relations of enmity, altering the material spaces in which that enmity can or should be expressed. For some fighters and their benefactors, crowdfunding platforms function as a kind of prosthesis that allows people to participate in wars within alter-nationalisms that exceed and evade existing state forms. As flexible imagined communities, these ad hoc collectives of anti-ISIS fighters and their supporters may articulate themselves as a Christian nation in one instance, a human nation in another, and the defenders of a Kurdish nation after that. These collective assemblages of identification possess remarkable plasticity and heterogeneity, while holding together sufficiently to finance and execute war-like operations. As such, they can exist in simultaneously looser territorial continuity and more exclusive community membership than that of traditional nation-states, where their flexible and comparably mobile morphology is made possible through polysemous discourses surrounding recruitment and 'duties,' information sharing, and the organization of material support through these new 'democratizing' platforms. While these activities do not fully displace the collective action benefits that states continue to possess in the form of taxation or nationalist mobilization, social media and crowdfunding allow for the introduction of a new iPhone-ready competitor on these networked battlefields.

I have drawn from a range of sources and literatures in my attempt to give conceptual form to violence entrepreneurs, including scholarship on private security (Avant, 2005, 2006; Avant and Sigelman, 2010; Krahmann, 2012), new media theory (Ettlinger, 2016; Lovink, 2016; Wark, 2012), 'dark' tourism or thanatourism (Lisle, 2004, 2016; Stone and Sharpley, 2008), US Senate Committee and US Department of Homeland Security reports (2008, 2016), documentaries and printed interviews

featuring anti-ISIS combatants, and original analyses of several websites, including crowdfunding campaign pages created by individuals attempting to travel, or who have already traveled to Iraq and Syria for the stated purpose of fighting ISIS. Rather than focus on violence entrepreneurs' individual motivations for fighting and their experiences on the battlefield, my aim is to map the cartography of bodies, communications, material resources, and the geopolitical imaginaries of globalized battlefields that organize collaborative ventures between violence entrepreneurs and everyday citizens. I am also interested in the new economies of violence that frame these relations, and exceed the state form without supplanting it entirely. In other words, I am interested in the conditions of possibility for violence entrepreneurs to actualize any particular desire to kill, rather than the origin or content of these desires.

I intentionally omit discussion of fighters sympathetic to the Islamic State, or any other 'Islamic' group in my analysis. My detour around what are referred to as "foreign jihadis" is meant to highlight how we experience the space and the stakes of violence marked by ISIS, and how this violence is framed a priori by discourses, affects, and technologies of mediation that distribute our attention toward "Arab" violence against the "West." This move is inspired by Rancière's (2009: 24) description of politics as:

> the configuration of a specific space, the framing of a particular sphere of experience, of objects posited as common and as pertaining to a common decision, of subjects recognized as capable of designating these objects and putting forward arguments about them.

As a provocation, I am interested in the anxieties that may emerge from the purposeful absence of ISIS fighters and the threat of 'jihadis' in this work, and want to resist conditioning the arguments presented here, even indirectly, through equivalences or concessions that identify ISIS as 'just as bad' or 'worse' in any effort to resolve that anxiety. Further, I find that the inclusion of 'foreign jihadis' does not complicate, nuance, nor further elaborate on the concept of the violence entrepreneur beyond a focus on North American and European "anti-ISIS" combatants; it contributes only to *who* can be a violence entrepreneur rather than what a violence entrepreneur *is*.

As an additional provocation, we should consider how the phenomenon of global "ISIS hunters" reflects more than just an internalization of North American and European strategies of decentralizing and externalizing the enterprise of security overseas. Critical perspectives on private security have compellingly elaborated on how the outsourcing of security as "the new Western way of war" (Shaw, 2005, cited in Hoffman, 2011: 255) emerges as a cultural logic of violence within domestic territorial boundaries (see also Abrahamsen and Williams, 2010; Verkuil, 2007). Civilian militias continue to construct narratives about themselves as defenders of their nation against an internal, primarily (but not exclusively) Muslim, enemy and have been increasingly emboldened to act in this capacity, for instance, in the patrolling and bombing of mosques, and in concert with the rise of fascist elements in the US, the UK, and Europe. It is important to consider how the media work to depoliticize the actions of violence entrepreneurs in Iraq and Syria by focusing on their sentimental motivations, and on sensationalist lines of questioning that center on whether or not they have killed members of ISIS (a common question in interviews).

These discourses function to normalize the privatization and individualization of combat with different effects and consequences. One consequence, I speculate, may be the increasing breakdown between conventional understandings of domestic policing and the purview of national armed forces, where armed individuals and citizen militias continue to 'fill in' where they determine the government's failure or inability to act in a particular capacity. The ambivalence toward civilian militias and anti-ISIS combatants should be considered alongside other historic forms of colonial and settler violence, and how these forms of violence resonate with, for instance, US border patrol groups like the Minutemen, the French Génération Identitaire's crowdfunding campaigns to target refugee boats (Townsend, 2017), and state responses and engagements that run the spectrum from casual tolerance and disavowal, to active collaboration (Brown, 2010), to criminal prosecution (Agence France-Presse in The Hague, 2016; Froelich, 2017).

Put simply, violence entrepreneurs may overlap with these groups but they are not limited by any particular construction of the political, nor are they motivated by any notion of a nation linked to a state. They are ideologically fractalized but not post-political. To understand this new fighter more substantively beyond discursive formations that position them as either vigilantes or civilizational warriors requires interrogating what is new and transformative about social media in the so-called "age of terror" alongside the formation of new publics, political techniques, and practices of mediation.

The "connective morphologies" of the violence entrepreneur

Regardless of the details of their personal narratives, as a contemporary media figure, violence entrepreneurs have taken on a kind of mythical quality in the international 'fight against ISIS.' The proliferation of these combatants in Iraqi Kurdistan and Northern Syria appears to coincide with the 'official' end of the US war in Iraq on December 18, 2011, and later with the intensification of the Syrian conflict in 2012. Early coverage of these combatants' activities frequently coalesced around a group of American and European "volunteers" with the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), called the Lions of Rojava. Facebook played a major public relations and organizational role for the group; their original page garnered tens of thousands of 'likes' from around the world, and was actively used to recruit foreign fighters to combat zones where the YPG was active. Facebook also functioned as a communal space where supporters could inquire about providing and coordinating material resources for these fighters, as well as commiserate about not being able to travel overseas themselves.

Over the last five years, anti-ISIS combatants have since been featured on daytime talk shows, in local news stories, in documentaries, and in other publications including the *New York Times* (Philipps and Brennan, 2015), *CNN* (Lister and Ward, 2015), the *BBC* (Yildiz, 2015), *New York Magazine* (Wiedeman, 2017), *The Washington Post* (Sly, 2017), *VICE News* (Hume, 2017), *The Daily Beast* (De Visser and Dickey, 2014), and *Rolling Stone* (Harp, 2017), among many others. A film adaptation of the *Rolling Stone* (2017) article "The Anarchists vs. the Islamic State," produced by and staring actor Jake Gyllenhaal, is underway at the time of writing. The film, framed as both a "Middle Eastern drama" and a "true story," centers on a "ragtag team of American volunteers,
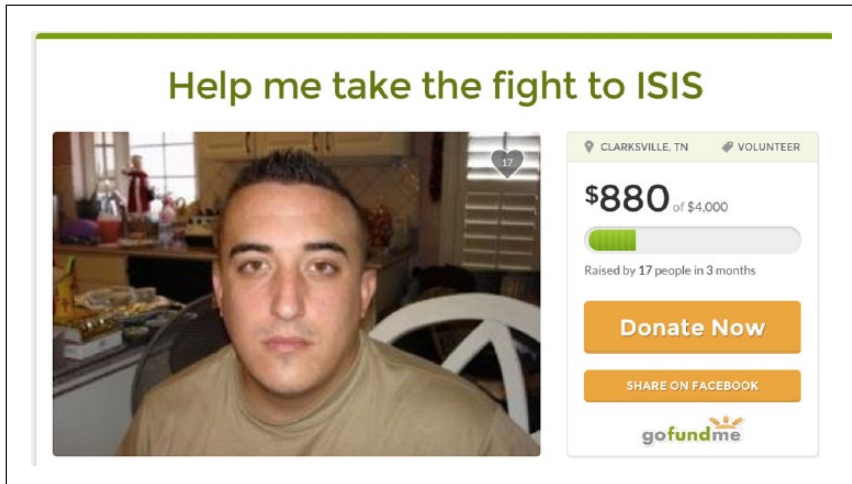
Figure 1. Author screenshot of individual campaign page (August 2015).

socialists, and outcasts" who aim to "beat ISIS" and set up an anarchist collective "amid the rubble of war" (Kit, 2017).

Media coverage has tended to focus on these fighters' personal experiences in battle, with attendant narrative structures usually depicting them either as soldier-heroes (Miller, 2015) or, alternatively, as picaresque rogues (Percy, 2015). Anker's (2005) articulation of melodrama as a mode of popular cultural narrative framing the events of September 11, 2001 is helpful for understanding how these combatants' actions have been staged as a battle between good and evil amid the hyper-amplification of media coverage of the Islamic State's recruitment efforts online, which has been to the detriment of more substantive engagements with this *other* ambiguous phenomenon. Further, the specter of the domestic radical in support of ISIS has eclipsed the hundreds, perhaps thousands of foreign fighters who have or are designing their own missions and rules for combat.

Today, online threads for coordinating such combat ventures abound on survivalist sites (*Max Velocity*, 2014), Reddit threads, and even in "How To" articles on viral websites describing step-by-step guidelines for joining foreign fighters abroad (see Didziulis, 2016). Many of these fighters have also used crowdfunding sites like GoFundMe to solicit small-scale financial contributions from individual donors for the purchase of plane tickets, weapons, and armor, and also to solicit monetary support upon their return as payment for their self-crafted missions (see Figure 1).

New "non-profit security providers" that focus on recruiting and providing support to those who wish to "volunteer" in the "fight against ISIS" have also emerged. These violence entrepreneurs, in the form of the firm, coordinate production processes, vet and deploy recruits, procure capital, and make strategic decisions with regard to their own individual combat activities in Iraq and Syria. One such organization, Sons of Liberty International (SOLI), was founded by Matthew VanDyke, a self-proclaimed "freedom fighter" and Christian solider against ISIS. VanDyke had previously 'volunteered' with a

Libyan militia to overthrow Qaddafi, and later recruited US combat veterans to "train" the Nineveh Protection Unit (NPU) in Iraq against the Islamic State (McLaughlin, 2015; Pizzi, 2015). SOLI, which was profiled on the *History Channel*, claims to be the first security contracting firm run as a non-profit. It openly engages in international recruitment activities, and runs independent missions to Iraq to provide "security training and consulting" to "vulnerable populations" that allows them to "defend themselves against terrorist or other insurgent groups" (www.sonsoflibertyinternational.com).

A second and related example is the 1st New Allied Expeditionary Force (NAEF), an organization founded by Ian Bradbury, a former Canadian Forces infantry non-commissioned officer, which coordinates logistical support for anti-ISIS fighters. The NAEF is currently run by a rogues' gallery of former military and private contractors, including two other former Canadian infantrymen, a US Marine Corps Reserve Officer, a US Combat Military Police Officer, a former Canadian Forces Warrant Officer, and a former US military contractor who "served" in Iraq (www.1naef.com). In a 2014 interview with Canada's *National Post* (Bell, 2014), Bradbury explains that he started the NAEF to assist his friend Dillon Hillier, a retired corporal who left the Canadian Army to join the Kurdish Peshmerga in Iraq to fight ISIS. In Bradbury's words, the NAEF "serves to provide individuals [who] have made the decision to go volunteer in Iraq with secure information, and secure contacts to minimalize their risk upon arrival." The NAEF also enlists its own screening process for potential "volunteers." As Bradbury describes: "They have to have at least military training and deployment. They have to have functioned in a conflict environment before and proven to be able to deal with those stresses." Bradbury continues: "we definitely didn't have the expectations for it to be what it is … it was a small venture that was started to support a few friends and from there it's turned into what it is right now" (Bell, 2014). In the interview, Bradbury claims that in 2014, he was contacted by more than one hundred people asking for his assistance to enlist with Kurdish forces after *The Post* ran an article about a former Canadian infantryman leaving Alberta to fight ISIS. According to Bradbury, the majority of these individuals were Canadian, however others were distributed across the US, the UK, Australia, New Zealand, and Norway.

These sovereign acts of killing are not without historical precedent. Grove (forthcoming, 2018) references early antecedents of the violence entrepreneur in his discussion of Bernardo de Vargas Machuca's (1599) *The Indian Militia and Description of the Indies*, often cited as the first counterinsurgency manual, and the "freelance" paramilitaries who tasked themselves with eliminating indigenous resistance to Spanish colonization alongside Vargas Machuca in the 16th century. Vargas Machuca's translator, Kris Lane, describes these paramilitaries as "roaming the American backcountry from New Mexico to Chile" and participating in "punishments" or *castigos* against "indigenous rebels, thieves, and fugitives." The environment of the Indian in the manual functions as a total space for war, one in which successful settlement and governance of the colonies is predicated on warlike relations, and where the imagined geographies of the "savage" at the edge of state control allow for direct forms of killing and violence that would have been proscribed elsewhere, and when done to others (Bjork-James, 2015).

According to Lane, these militiamen increasingly saw themselves as part of a new professional class, an identification that emerged from designing their own violent

missions of conquest, often in the hopes of eventually being recognized by the king in an official capacity through acquiring post hoc payments or government posts. As Grove (forthcoming, 2018) remarks, Vargas Manchuca wrote *The Indian Militia* as a kind of "job application," one that would create counterinsurgency as both a means and an ends in the colonization of the Americas, and thus invent a "new world" through particular forms of violence that would be legitimated after the fact, and not before. What differentiated early iterations of the violence entrepreneur from other mercenaries and freelance privateers was not only that they sought out and defined their own conflicts rather than being hired to fight or provide protection, but that they also considered their actions to be informed by the 'spirit' of the sovereign, even when not acting directly in the service of the sovereign.

Other proto-forms of the violence entrepreneur can be found in the organization of untrained settler militias and "local volunteers" to replace white American soldiers at border forts, and along the boundaries of what was considered "Indian Country" (Weigley, 1973). Many of these settlers took up their own missions, engaged in organized massacres, and expanded the range of territory through brutal forms of colonization beyond the official borders of the Sioux, Cheyenne, and Kiowa nations. Upon the return of the Regular Army in 1865–1866, a permanent Indian Country border was no longer feasible as a policy (Weigley, 1973:155–156). Consequently, these marauding missions, while not acting directly in the service of the state, paved the way for other forms of state building and annihilation that included the westward expansion of the Union Pacific and Kansas Pacific Railroads, and the actualization of America's homestead policy in the 1860s (Weigley, 1973:156).

These early settlement tactics were "practically and conceptually normalized" as a means of state warfare in, for example, the direct targeting of cities and agricultural resources in later iterations of 20th century colonialism and during both World Wars (Grove, forthcoming, 2018). Further, these forms of violence resonate tactically and in forms of intensity with groups like the Ku Klux Klan, militia groups like the Oath Keepers, and even in the passive response by Canadian police to Soldiers of Odin anti-immigrant foot patrols (Lamoureux, 2016).

My point here is not to suggest a developmentalist trajectory between Vargas Manchuca and anti-ISIS militants. Rather, I want to gesture toward what Grove calls a "connective morphology" between different mutations in warfare. That states may eventually supplant or envelop the violence entrepreneur, or that their interests may overlap at times, does not mean that the violence entrepreneur is bound by this convergence. Instead, the innovation of new forms of violence is enlivened by reverence for a cause or order that is neither incidental to nor coincidental with the state. In addition, given the significant variance across states in Europe and North America in response to the activities of these 'freelance' combatants, it is difficult to substantiate any one particular approach by states to the actions of violence entrepreneurs in light of the diversity of these actors, their motivations, and operations.

We should, however, consider why governments have been so ambivalent about giving up their monopoly on the use of force with regard to said combatants. Even in those examples where criminal prosecution has been pursued, popular support has complicated clear lines of legitimacy and illegitimacy. Such was the case with Dutch citizen Jitse

Akse, who was arrested in 2016 on suspicion of killing ISIS militants, then released amid public protests against the Dutch prosecution service (Agence France-Presse in The Hague, 2016). What is clear is that these combatants challenge the presumption of a zero-sum balancing of sovereignty between states and foreign fighters, which often frames contemporary applications of the theory of partisanship, and reveal how states have and continue to maintain ambiguous relationships to such irregular combatants through flexible relations of permissibility, cooperation, and discipline.

While the critical theoretical intervention here, as I discuss in more detail in the next section, is how violence entrepreneurs restructure the conditions of the sovereign decision, there are other mechanisms that they share in common. One, I would argue, is their investment in exploiting imbalances and discrepancies in the institutional conditions and opportunities for committing extreme forms of violence that would otherwise be illegal or impermissible in either civil or martial contexts. In other words, they are defined, in part, by their willingness to take advantage of opportunities for experimenting with acts of violence that emerge out of discrepancies in legal and other institutional checks on combat and killing to pursue their own ends, or their own sovereign decisions on enmity.

Negotiating pure uncertainty, I would wager, may also be part of the appeal of engaging in these particular iterations of violence. Violence entrepreneurs present themselves as specialists in taking risks and bearing certain forms of uncertainty, but their specialization is in the direction of violent life insofar as they are assumed to bear the financial, legal, and moral obligations of their actions. In their risk-bearing capacities, violence entrepreneurs must make decisions based on certain forms of speculation. They must assume that they will be able to reach their destinations and gain access to weapons, that these battlegrounds will remain open to them, and that they will not be killed. They must also assume that they will be able to circumvent possible legal and/or economic consequences for their actions. For instance, while the author is not aware of any US or Canadian citizen who has faced charges after returning from engaging in combat in Iraq and Syria, Danish citizen Joanna Palani, who reportedly killed 96 "ISIS militants" in 2014, is said to face charges for violating Danish anti-terror laws after returning to fight with the YPG in 2015 when she had been explicitly banned from doing so (Froelich, 2017). The pleasure of participating in extreme forms of interpersonal violence exists, in part, because this mode of killing takes place within a volatile and shifting landscape of security, and within gaps of state control over security environments, broadly conceived. The lucky fighters, like Jordan Mattson, a US Army veteran, get to revel in their violent adventures on BBC News, while the unlucky ones, like Canadian John Gallagher, who was killed in 2015 while fighting with the YPG, have their coffins saluted on Canada's "Highway of Heroes" (Miller, 2015).

The heterogeneity of enmity

Combatants "taking the fight to ISIS" pose challenges to state-centered notions of sovereignty that compare to traditional partisans. Yet despite popular attempts to locate them on the front lines of a hyper-civilizational conflict, these fighters do not, in fact, share a 'way of life.' Consider, for example, Hanna Bohman, a "fashion model-turned-freedom fighter," who fought in Rojava with the YPG. In an interview with CTV Vancouver, Bohman describes her reason for fighting: "I needed to do something with my life. I was

bored" (Wells, 2017). In the same interview, Bohman emphasized that she had originally wanted to fight in the Crimea conflict, but then later chose to fight in Syria because she had the time and money to travel. Compare Bohman to Jordan Matson, a Fox News favorite, who fought in Rojava. Matson articulated his own reasons for traveling to Syria in a recent interview around his disappointment in not being deployed to Iraq because of personal issues with another soldier. His inability to "follow in the footsteps" of his father, who served two tours in Afghanistan, drove him to Syria: "I felt like I had not completed what I had set out in life to do. I had set out to do a deployment and serve my country" (Handelman, 2016). Interviews with other fighters similarly reveal a heterogeneity of motivations for killing that seem to unravel and then refortify, giving way to aggregate fragments of identity that coalesce around an incentive to violence rather than any one particular political goal.

What nascent political commitments do exist among these fighters rarely adhere to any of the three forms of enmity that Schmitt theorizes. The political, for violence entrepreneurs, is not structured around what Schmitt (2004: 7) calls the "conventional enmity of the contained war" of states against states. In this particular formation, the limits of enmity lie in the classical law of nations. In fact, a common reason that anti-ISIS combatants give for undertaking these missions is the failure of states to adequately respond to the global threat that ISIS poses. The political for these fighters also does not correspond to what Schmitt terms "real enmity," which frames the partisan struggle. The limit of real enmity is territory, that is, the defense or liberation of a homeland. Most of these fighters do not articulate their motivation for fighting ISIS in the context of a commitment to the formation of a Kurdish state, which complicates aligning violence entrepreneurs with the terrestrial character of the conventional partisan, and their connection to an organic sense of place.

Schmitt's third notion of absolute enmity describes the idea of war as unlimited in the sense that one's enemy becomes an abstraction, and where war is no longer instrumental, but rather is absolute insofar as it is no longer directed at any one particular enemy or opponent (Schmitt, 2007, 2004; see also Chandler, 2009: 255). The partisan of an absolute nature points to the loosening of their telluric character, which is supplanted by the global reach of the partisan's zealotry. Schmitt gestures toward Marxist insurgents committed to global revolution, where the combination of absolutist ideology corresponds to an absolute enmity that would annihilate all opposition to this particular way of life. Brace Belden, an untrained combatant featured in the aforementioned *Rolling Stone* article and self-described *lumpenproletariat*, may arguably fit within this category of enmity in his efforts to defend a "socialist enclave" in Rojava. There is more that could be said here about the privilege of mobility and political 'experimentation' that allow these particular fighters to chose whom, where, and when they fight. Still, other anti-ISIS fighters who similarly expand the global reach of the partisan have means and ends that are sporadic and partial, despite their transnational reach. What is important to note here is that violence entrepreneurs, in their excessive investment in their own 'way of life,' which is itself constituted by singular decisions over enmity in the form of whom they target and why, demand that we dilate Schmitt's distinction between the individual and the state. The diversity of anti-ISIS fighters shows a wide array of individualisms, as well as singularities that are committed to collective, although diasporic, communities.

It is also important to note how anti-ISIS fighters have emerged at the nexus of decentralized warfare and what Foucault (2008: 160) identified as the "formalization of society on the model of enterprise," or the selective withdrawal of the state from social welfare, and the proliferation of normative and institutional demands to adopt entrepreneurial modes of behavior at every junction of contemporary life. The violence entrepreneur reflects a cartography of libidinal investments and displays of force that organize and innovate violence around models of entrepreneurial behavior, and, as such, reference the limits of Schmitt's position that private individuals have no political enemies (Schmitt, 2008: 51). Where certain constituent elements of the partisan intertwine with those of violence entrepreneurs, their willingness to propel themselves into battle overlaps with global economic imperatives for workers to increasingly self-organize, to find ways of economizing their "productivity" and capabilities, and to extend models of enterprise to violent forms of life.

For Foucault (2008: 219), the collapsing of labor and human capital allows for the extension of economic analysis and interpretation to bleed into all forms of life previously thought to be outside the realm of the economy. Thus, any action that one takes to achieve a desired end can be read as investing in one's own human capital, from attaining an advanced degree to purchasing new body armor. As Read (2009: 30) suggests, this allows us to situate the generalization of the 'entrepreneur' and its correlate notions of speculation, risk, and investment as part of a politics of neoliberalism and as a mode of subjection. Here, antagonisms produced from social and economic insecurity can be redirected toward the individual, while maintaining existing distributions of wealth and relations of exploitation under capitalism.

Contra Foucault's (2008: 225–226) focus on the new self-motivated subject of entrepreneurial individualism as the driver of their own decisions about risk and action in a neoliberal order, Schmitt (2008: 29–30) remains concerned with the problem of sovereignty, and the sovereign decision being located within the state as "an organized political entity that determines the friend–enemy distinction." This distinction is resolutely not constituted in what he terms the "private-individualistic sense" that reflects an individual's emotional or habitual state (Schmitt, 2008: 27–28). For Schmitt (2008: 28), "an enemy exists only when … one fighting collectivity of people confronts a similar collectivity," and this enemy is "solely the public enemy." Thus were the friend–enemy distinction to disappear, so would political life vanish altogether. However, insofar as self-styled anti-ISIS fighters organize violence around an entrepreneurial sensibility toward combat and killing, they angle off from constituent elements of Schmitt's partisan in profound ways. One critical insight is that while anti-ISIS combatants may fight for a 'way of life' similar to Schmitt's core animating force of enmity and the political, the violence entrepreneur does not require the consistency of ideology found in, for example, the Marxist insurgent to be capable of fighting beyond the territorial confines of the state while also remaining political. Another is that the processes that Schmitt describes are also indebted to racialized and civilizational cartographies that territorialize and deterritorialize violence in unevenly distributed ways.

Moreover, the assemblage of ad hoc imagined communities built online through social networks and funding initiatives, and the mobility and lethality of individual fighters, complicates the chain of causality between partisans and the sovereign decision as

articulated by Schmitt. In Schmitt's formulation, the source of meaning and enmity is established prior to the partisan; in some sense, it is the constitutive condition of possibility for the partisan. Schmit does not account for how the partisan and the sovereign decision over enmity would or could coincide. However, for violence entrepreneurs, causality is more ambivalent and less decisionistic at an instant. Here, a complex relay of resonances, affects, goals, decisions, *ressentiments*, traumas, and interests come to make a decision even if *what* or *who* decides is the assemblage, rather than a single enunciative point that one might call a sovereign (see Grove, 2016b).

The addition of the exotic structure of the assemblage is necessary here to see how the political emerges in the mediated and globalized milieu of anti-ISIS fighters and their actions. Additionally, the notion of individualized enmity coheres the violence entrepreneur as a category of combatant that allows us to trace the conceptual resonance between fighters like Jordan Mattson and Hanna Bohman, when the rhetoric of "fighting ISIS" presents only one layer in the radical heterogeneity of 'ways of life' that these individual combatants seek to articulate in shared combat zones. If it is possible for private persons to have enemies, and for new forms of communication and mobile finance to create other zones of the political apart from what Schmitt had envisioned, then this necessarily disrupts the sequence and priority of the causal chain from the sovereign, to the political, to war. Otherwise, anti-ISIS fighters would be rendered mere criminals, and we see that they are not. If each act of killing is merely murder, then there is no reason to investigate further. Yet, violence entrepreneurs continue to function as the drivers and symptoms of a mutating field of the political and war. Thus, more than simply pointing to a tension in Schmitt's logic whereby the "source" of enmity in the global partisan becomes murky, the violence entrepreneur demonstrates something much more than a conceptual lack. They demonstrate an empirical mutation in the sovereign decision.

Crowdfunding for war

I have suggested that is it more than just the violence entrepreneur's resolve to intervene that is changing the nature of contemporary warfare. New digital economies have also led to transformations in how security is desired, experienced, and organized. Today, platforms like GoFundMe and other manifestations of the crowdfunding economy have allow for information, energies, bodies, money, and other "assets" to move between geographical distances through interactive online communities (Langley and Leyshon, 2017). What I am interested in here is how the proliferation of crowdfunding platforms and related forms of digital economic exchange are also restructuring warfare insofar as these platforms allow for violence entrepreneurs to act on their own atomistic constructions of enmity.

The use of crowdfunding for self-crafted missions in Syria and Iraq parallels similar patterns in the adoption of Big Data and crowd technologies by different forms of governance in providing public goods. Today, new "civic crowdfunding" models have emerged as a means of organizing public service provisions through "market-like bidding mechanisms" and social platforms for planning, funding, and implementing investments in public infrastructure and other forms of community development (Ashton et al., 2017). More directly related to the question of warfare, insofar as security is considered a

national public good, there is no shortage of debate over how the commodification of and multiplicity of providers of security has displaced this provision from the modern state (see Stern and Öjendal, 2010, citing Zedner, 2009; Williams, 2010). These arguments resonate with the concerns of some of Schmitt's interlocutors, who assume that irregular combatants reflect a trade-off of sovereignty insofar as they threaten the state's monopoly over determining the structures of enmity (see Slomp, 2005).

Yet, the practice of crowdfunding *self*-crafted missions for combat is more radical in scope than either of these examples suggest. It is true that 'peer-to-peer' funding platforms are altering conditions on the battlefield around the exercise of state power, a dynamic that raises important questions about capability, responsibility, and legality. However, they are also altering the conditions for the sovereign decision itself by exploiting entrepreneurial and collaborative logics of platform participation to reorganize the interstitial spaces of permissible and impermissible killing.

This happens, in part, through the ways in which violence entrepreneurs and their 'supporters' position themselves relative to imaginaries of state and market failure, and how these networks emerge within what Çalişkan and Callon (2010: 14–16) call "market encounters" in digital space. In Langley and Leyshon's (2017: 5) terms, the notion of market encounters suggests that platforms do not simply create markets through software codes that allow for the management of distance between users. Rather, platforms themselves play an affective role in the "co-creation" of value between users, and in the coordination and curation of networked connectivity. Put differently, crowdfunding platforms allow combatants and donors to imagine and make manifest new 'national' communities around the provision of atomistic violence that mutate the sovereign decision over enmity, but within a larger ecology of technological sociality.

Consider, for example, "Jamie Lane ISIS Hunter's" individual GoFundMe page (see Figure 2) and the attendant description of the campaign: "Jamie Ray Lane took it upon himself to take the fight to ISIS on his own … the least we can do is pull some cash together to get him back on his feet." In the campaign description, Lane's former status in the US Marine Core (USMC), and his previous tours in Iraq from 2004 to 2008 function as part of a marketing strategy, where his competence to deliver a particular product — "hunting" members of ISIS — is but one among many forms of security provision. These narratives are complemented by other images of Lane in his USMC fatigues, as well as commentary from donors about "counting on your Marine family" and "sending cookies," which patterns a US tradition of sending care packages to soldiers overseas.

Like other violence entrepreneurs, Lane is distinguished from ordinary combatants in his willingness to "go it alone" and in acting outside of the institutional constraints of a state military. Lane's campaign page also draws on the familiar vernacular of both private security and popularized forms of vigilantism in his pursuing individual forms of enmity and creative violence. Yet, what is particularly innovate about the use of these digital economic platforms and 'democratizing' technologies in this instance is how platforms make it possible for micro-decisions and micro-actions to accrete into sovereign decisions.

Similarly, non-profit security firms like SOLI and the NAEF disrupt the causality and scale of the sovereign decision as imagined through regulated combat populated by national militaries, state-contracted private security actors, and battlefield laborers. These groups, also supported via crowdfunding individual donations online, are shifting the
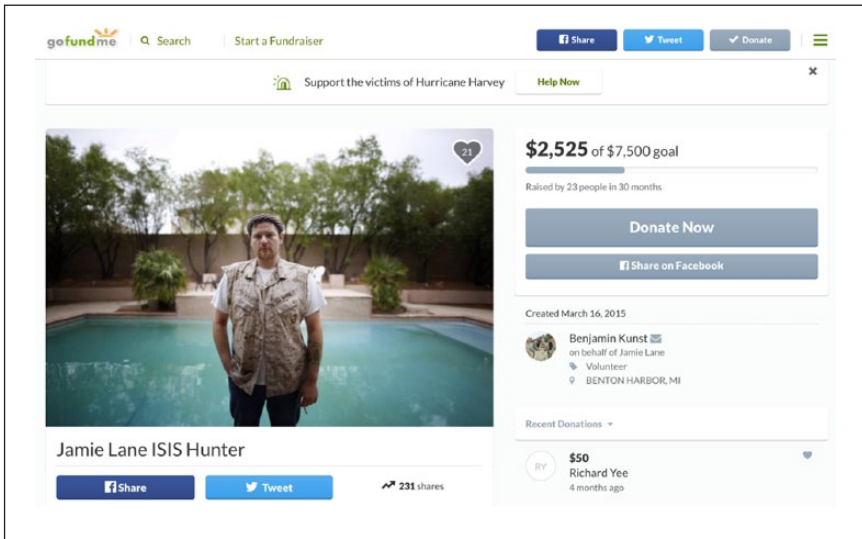
Figure 2. "Jamie Lane ISIS Hunter" crowdfunding page. Author screenshot, September 2017.

organization of decision-making and the funding of military and combat operations from governments and international institutions, to individuals and small clusters of 'freelance' combatants. Drawing on the organizational structure of the firm, they frequently adopt the vernacular of 'human security' and humanitarian intervention, while providing individual donors opportunities to direct their pledges to specific "missions," or toward equipment of the donor's preference, including shooting targets, body armor vests, and GoPro cameras "to capture high quality video … of battles against ISIS" (see Figure 3). Certainly, in aligning themselves with traditional partisans such as the YPG, in seeking out contracts with local actors, or by calling one's cluster of fighters a "non-profit security provider," these firms are attempting to tap into existing languages of security provision in order to circumvent the possible moral threat of vigilantism and accusations of war crimes. Further, these funding platforms allow for a form of collective action that states previously had a *normative* monopoly over in terms of fighting wars.

Crowdfunding platforms do not simply shrink the distance between funders and volunteers through networked communication. They are, in fact, a driving factor in the emergence of new types of security actors and infrastructures. Transformations in data storage and encryption may allow the general public to feel more comfortable participating in these kinds of activities, which can work to normalize peer-to-peer microlending in the context of combat operations. Yet, even more pressing is their impact on the reorganization of the sovereign decision, and how the exchange of information and words of support create distinct communities around campaign initiatives that gesture toward an excessive value and a libidinal investment in supporting particular modes of violence that actualize the everyday public's desire to be "part of the action."

In a very basic sense, the use of these platforms for funding foreign fighters overseas still attests to their horizontalizing and 'democratizing' function. Yet, by rendering
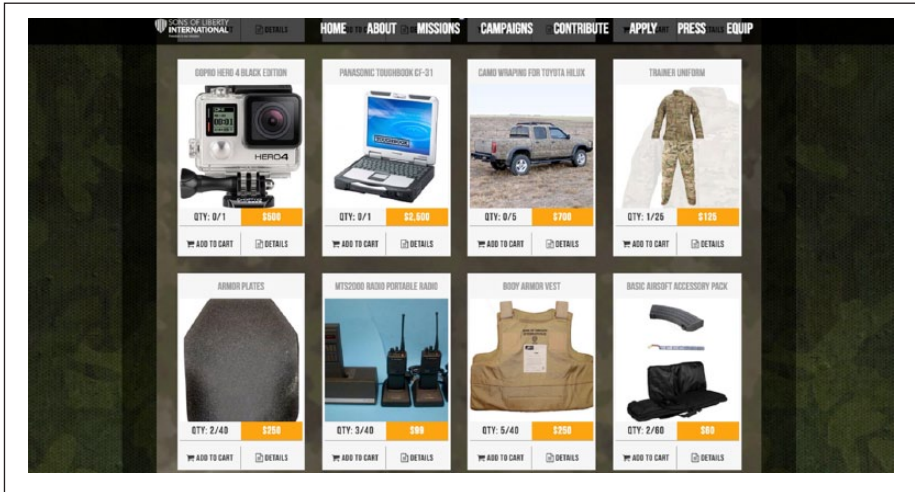
Figure 3. SOLI donation page. Author screenshot, April 2017.
Source: www.sonsoflibertyinternational.com/app/equipment.

their politicization visible, we see that their structural function does not exclude the organization of warfare. Crowdfunding can just as easily be organized to help a friend after a flood or support an independent film as it can for arming an anti-government militia or treating another country as a recreational battle-park. We should consider how sites like GoFundMe, as new technological appendages to the violence entrepreneur, produces an ideological flattening effect where there is no differentiation between helping to offset someone's medical expenses, and donating US$10 to a Kalashnikov-toting avatar in Northern Syria.

In sum, the crowdfunding story is more than a functionalist argument about capability. The communities that use these platforms are also created by them, thus circulating the affective inspirations for intervening in particular conflicts to begin with. Kaempf's (2013) consideration of the structural shift from multipolar to heteropolar mediascapes, and the impact of this transformation on the experience and mediatization of warfare is a useful framework for considering how shared experiences of simultaneity become nearly instantaneous rather than just imagined, where conflicts that are thousands of miles away unfold in real time. The affective connections charged by these immediate communications and the swarm of new socialities and publics that emerge around them inspire new identities and alter-nationalisms that take shape around galvanizing events. For example, a "mission" can seem urgent amid the constant barrage of enraged and conspiratorial warnings of the impending imposition of Sharia law in places like Kentucky. Further, the circulation of capabilities, new collectives, fear, anger, desires for meaning, and impending crises of which decisions over enmity take place further complicate the decisionistic and individualized image of sovereignty proposed by Schmitt. The assemblage and the points of singularity that emerge from the violence entrepreneur constitutes a political that comes to define forms of combat significant at the scale of geopolitics.

Conclusion

Governments have always gone to great lengths to homogenize and channel enmity within what Althusser (2014) calls the ideological state apparatus. Here, the heterogeneity of enmity found within any singular bounded territory is subordinated and arranged in ways that allow for the expression of those impulses for the good of the nation or group. Further, insofar as states and non-state organizations provide opportunities and resources for the expression of individual forms of enmity, what the Islamic State or anti-ISIS fighters can and cannot capture as structures of enmity themselves rely on a state/non-state binary as a means of exercising whatever form of enmity a fighter may possess. Escaped forms of enmity, like Patrick Maxwell, may break away from the organizational structures of state militaries, or from the protocols and directives of PMCs in contemporary combat zones. However, new communications technologies and platforms for mobile finance mean that states and non-state organizations are no longer necessary to the construction of the political. Individuals, in their expression of singular forms of enmity, do not need to follow either the strategic or affective jurisdictions of states and non-states.

Violence entrepreneurs demonstrate how persisting attachments to state-centrism and the individual as actor obscures new arrangements of sovereignty and the political built by contemporary forms of networked communication and combat. While people have always maintained heterogeneous reasons and motivations for going off to war, new digital economies and participatory media are converting motivation into novel organizational types of combatants and communities that support and inspire them. Temporary, idiosyncratic, and, at times, singular forms of enmity are created in ways that challenge our inherited presumptions about the unity of the sovereign in the sovereign decision-making over friends and enemies. Today, novel ways of life, often disconnected from discrete territories or nationalities, have armies ranging from lone warriors to those with capabilities competitive with nation-states.

What makes violence entrepreneurs political in the Schmittian sense is that all of these fighters are trying to repel or even eliminate another way of life. Even if a particular way of life does not reach the level of a 'civilizational' conflict, the organizing logic of enmity still requires the decision of us versus them, of friend and enemy. Matthew VanDyke's eschatological religious mission against ISIS, and the kind of 'bro' libertarianism that motivates American students to treat Syria like their own recreational battlefield (Taub, 2013) are not more or less political. In all of these cases, and in all of the varieties of violence entrepreneurs discussed here, the sovereign decision comes from somewhere exterior to the state, in either the complex assemblages and ad hoc imagined communities of crowdfunding networks, or the autopoetic singularity of a one-man army in Aruba. Each group or singularity thrives on the milieu of lawlessness, risk, and a willingness to kill and be killed. Telescoping from the first dollar raised for the plane ticket to Iraq, to the last time a "volunteer" pulls the trigger, we see that the hundreds, if not thousands, of actions — from fundraising to killing — require an image of the political and its animating way of life as the condition of possibility for the violence entrepreneur.

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