

2.2.14-Do you have a proven track record of establishing and developing contacts in Arabic-speaking conflict-affected states? If so please provide details.

1. **General.** Yes. InCoStrat personnel, especially in the Syrian context of the last three years, have established lasting relationships from within different spheres of society: civil, military and political. Within these spheres, we have **relationships with: grassroots activists; civil society organizations, citizen journalists, regular soldiers; commanders; politicians; tribal leaders; businessmen among the Syrian diaspora; and regime sympathisers.** In the **Syrian context alone we have a database of over 400 names**, whom we have personally engaged with, some who wield influence among the diaspora and others inside the country, even parts currently under ISIS control. Our collective experience extends beyond Syria to **11 other Arabic speaking, conflict-affected states**, as well as Afghanistan, Pakistan and parts of central Africa. Most of the team are **fluent Arabic speakers (80%)** and/or have extensive experience working and living in the Middle East. This depth of intercultural understanding enables us to establish and develop lasting contacts across Arabic-speaking conflict affected states, as well as **save on the cost** of hiring an interpreter. We develop these relationships by understanding and employing appropriate levels of formality when engaging tribal leaders or catalytic change agents: from meeting mid-level tribal operators in coffee shops to later being **received by a tribal leader and other tribal dignitaries** at the leader’s home, to working with and through **women’s or youth groups** to create strategic social change. Our success in developing these contacts has **not relied on financial transaction**; instead it has been the **product of influence and perceived leverage, or shared experience, or trust built through the exchange of knowledge and skill sets.** We understand the need for building **sustainable relationships** with key individuals over time and therefore seek to maintain our staff in positions for long periods to build trust and understanding between key Arab influencers. As a result, our relations are deep and provide access into new Syrian groups and reliable advisors who understand the Syrian culture and context. **Our balance of male and female Arabic speaking personnel** enables us to be flexible when considering the best way of maintaining the relationship with a specific stakeholder.

2. **Supporting Evidence**

a) **Syria. NOTE: we have constant interaction with our Syrian contacts currently.**

1) Many of these relationships have been built up by providing embedded communications, political and media advisors to internationally supported Syrian entities: for example, the **Free Syrian Army (FSA)** and the **National Coalition (NC)**. By providing direct support to the Media Offices, including **bespoke training to stringers and spokesmen**, media platform development and liaison access to high-level US- and UK stakeholders, we have built a reputation as credible, reliable, trusted and effective interlocutors. Once trust is established, contacts readily volunteer information, which is often of use to the clients. For example, when the SMC leadership dispute happened in March 2014, our contact with field commanders and their deputies enabled us to deliver **real-time updates on their meetings to MOD and FCO.** Civilian and military actors regularly consult us. For example, the **FSA COS Al-Bashir** requested not only media support but also political advice from us to ensure he was fully prepared **for meetings with President Obama**



FSA COS AL-BASHIR BRIEFING PRESIDENT OBAMA IN MAY 2014

and the US Congress.

2) As most of us are **well known throughout the Syrian community**, new contacts are introduced to us at regular intervals, which facilitates the development of new networks. Training days with civil society organizations, activists, and NGOs have created a network of influential community change agents. We have therefore the means to start a two-way dialogue within different difficult-to-reach community groups. A recent example of this is the introduction to the **Chairman of the Syrian Council of Tribes** who is now very receptive to regular meetings and discussions about key issues, which we know are then passed on through his meetings with tribal sheikhs.

InCoStrat Director: AMIL KHAN, in his previous career as a journalist, established relationships with, and embedded himself into terrorist organizations in the UK and the Middle East. In building these relationships over time in such precarious and dangerous circumstances, he has gained unique insight into their narratives, communication methods, recruitment processes and management of networks.

b) **Libya.** In April 2011 a member of InCoStrat created and managed the Media and Communications (MCC) on behalf of the **National Transitional Council**, which ran until the end of the revolution. The partner subsequently established and managed a range of communications initiatives including capacity-building support to: the Tripoli Local Council; the **Libyan Stabilisation Team**; Libyan NGOs as part the Free Media Council; and women’s rights activists under the **Libyan Women’s Platform for Peace.**

c) **Sudan.** Another member established the Reuters bureau in Sudan in 2005 at the height of the civil war in Darfur. Based in Khartoum, the partner ran a network of 20 exclusive stringers, including inside Darfur and other contested areas. The partner built direct and lasting relationships across the spectrum: with **government officials (from the Presidential Office to Intelligence Bodies) and rebel leaders (key to securing access to rebel-held areas).**