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STRATEGY AND TERRORISM

Countering Global Insurgency

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ABSTRACT This article suggests that the War on Terrorism is actually a campaign against a globalized Islamist¹ insurgency. Therefore, counterinsurgency approaches are more relevant to the present conflict than traditional terrorism theory. Indeed, a counterinsurgency approach would generate subtly, but substantially different, policy choices in prosecuting the war against Al Qaeda. Based on this analysis, the article proposes a strategy of ‘disaggregation’ that seeks to dismantle, or break, the links in the global *jihad*.² Like containment in the Cold War, disaggregation would provide a unifying strategic conception for the war – a conception that has been somewhat lacking to date.

KEY WORDS: Terrorism, insurgency, Al Qaeda, counterterrorism, counter-insurgency

Introduction

When the United States (US) declared a global War on Terrorism after the 9/11 attacks, some viewed the whole notion as logically flawed. Francis Fukuyama commented that ‘terrorism is only a means to an end; in this regard, a war on terrorism makes no more sense than a war on submarines’. Such views are irrelevant in a policy sense: the term ‘War on Terrorism’ was chosen on political, not analytical grounds. Nevertheless, to win this war we must understand it – ‘neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature’.³ Those prosecuting the war must clearly distinguish Al Qaeda and the militant movements it symbolizes – entities that *use* terrorism – from the tactic of terrorism itself.

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Anatomy of the Global *Jihad*

Osama bin Laden, leader of the World Islamic Front, *al-Qa'ida* ('the base'), declared war on the West on 23 February 1998. After 9/11, the senior Al Qaeda ideologue, Ayman al Zawahiri, published a strategy for global *jihad*. Both statements illuminate a global pattern of Islamist militancy.

Bin Laden's declaration announced a global war against the US and the broader Western-dominated world order. It issued a *fatwa* calling for *jihad*, indicating that bin Laden claimed religious authority (necessary to issue a *fatwa*) and political authority as a Muslim ruler (needed to issue a call to *jihad*).⁴ Subsequent Al Qaeda statements refer to bin Laden as the *Sheikh* or *Emir* (Prince or Commander) of the World Islamic Front, staking a claim to authority over a broad united front of Islamist militant fighters worldwide.⁵

Zawahiri's statement outlined a two-phase strategy. In the first phase, the '*jihad* would... turn things upside down in the region and force the US out of it. This would be followed by the earth-shattering event, which the West trembles at: the establishment of an Islamic caliphate in Egypt'. The second stage would use this Caliphate as a launch pad to 'lead the Islamic world in a *jihad* against the West. It could also rally the world [*sic*] Muslims around it. Then history would make a new turn, God willing, in the opposite direction against the empire of the United States and the world's Jewish government'.⁶

Al Qaeda has cells in at least 40 countries and, though disrupted by the loss of its Afghan base in 2001, is still functioning globally. A recent article in the Al Qaeda military journal *Al-Battar* asserted that:

In the beginning of their war against Islam, [the Crusaders] had announced that one of their main goals was to destroy the Al-Qaeda organization in Afghanistan; and now, look what happened? Thanks to God, instead of being limited to Afghanistan, Al-Qaeda broke out into the entire Islamic world and was able to establish an international expansion, in several countries, sending its brigades into every Islamic country, destroying the Blasphemers' fortresses, and purifying the Muslims' countries.⁷

Islamist movements appear to function through regional 'theaters of operation' where operatives cooperate, or conduct activities in neighboring countries. Evidence suggests that Islamist groups within theaters follow general ideological or strategic approaches aligned with Al Qaeda pronouncements, and share a common tactical style and operational lexicon. But there is no clear evidence that Al Qaeda directly controls *jihad* in each theater. Indeed, rather than a monolithic organization, the global *jihad* is a much more complex phenomenon.

Nine principal Islamist theaters have been identified, including the Americas; Western Europe; Australasia; the Iberian Peninsula and *Maghreb* (Muslim Northwest Africa); the Greater Middle East; East Africa; South and Central Asia; the Caucasus and European Russia; and Southeast Asia.

All but the first three theaters include active insurgencies. Indeed, there is a greater than 85 per cent correlation between Islamist insurgency and terrorist activity or Al Qaeda presence in a given theater. Except for 9/11 itself, all Al Qaeda-linked terrorist activity has occurred in theaters with ongoing Islamist insurgencies. Not all Islamist insurgency is linked to Al Qaeda – but most Al Qaeda activity occurs in areas of Islamist insurgency.

There is also a correlation between the geographical area of the historical Caliphate, the broader pan-Islamic Caliphate sought by Al Qaeda (which never fully existed in a historical sense) and Islamist insurgency. A glance at a map of current Islamist insurgencies (Figure 1) shows that virtually all are on the fringes of the historical Caliphate or on the ‘civilisational frontier’ between the Caliphate and surrounding non-Islamic peoples.

This seems to indicate that Al Qaeda is executing the strategy outlined by Zawahiri, of re-establishing an Islamic Caliphate then using this as a springboard to extend jihadist control over the globe. The reality is much more complex. But there is clearly a global spread

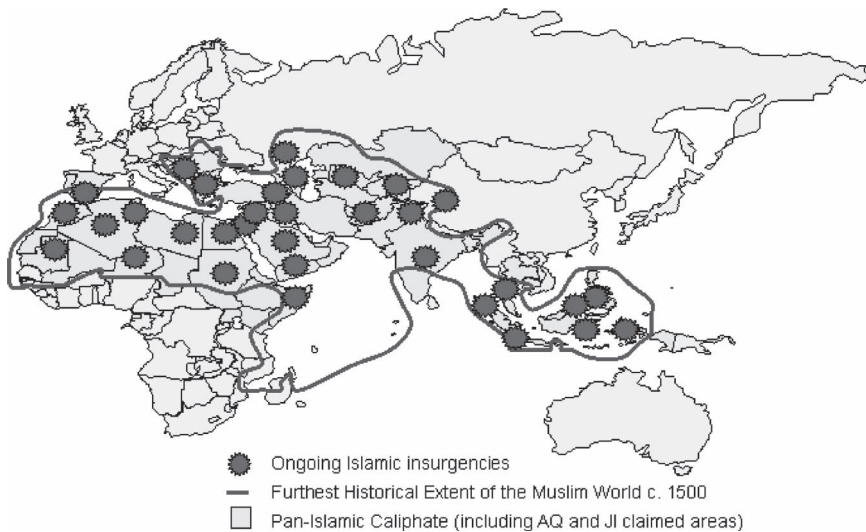


Figure 1. Insurgencies, Terrorism and the Caliphate.
 Sources: Insurgency and terrorism data from *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2004*;
 boundary of the Islamic world from <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/~rs143/map6.jpg>

of Islamist movements seeking to overturn the existing Western-dominated world order and replace it with a jihadist vision, through subversion, terrorism and insurgency.

Links between Theaters

These theaters, and groups within them, are connected through a nested series of links into an aggregated pattern of global *jihad*. Links include common ideologies, shared languages, cultures and a common Islamic faith.⁸ Moreover, as these groups originate from specific subcultures within Islam, they share a common sense of alienation from mainstream traditions of political moderation.⁹

The personal histories of individuals across the *jihad* movements are also closely linked. Many fought the Soviets together in Afghanistan. Many studied under Wahhabi clerics in Saudi Arabia and maintain relationships with these mentors. Later generations of *mujahidin* fought together in Kosovo, Bosnia or Chechnya. Many went to school together, fought together in sectarian conflicts and trained together in terrorist camps. Webs of friendship and networks of mutual obligation stretch worldwide between and among groups.

Unsurprisingly, many members of the global *jihad* are related by birth or marriage. Alliances between groups are cemented by marriage, as in the marriage of Osama bin Laden to the daughter of Taliban leader Mullah Omar. Sons of jihadists often follow their fathers, and widows often avenge their husbands by becoming suicide bombers. This pattern has become so common in Chechnya that such women, known as 'Black Widows', have gained independent status as a distinct sub-category of *jihad* terrorist.¹⁰

Financial links also abound. Groups in different theaters fund each other's activities. Non-governmental organizations, including traditional *hawala* banking networks, charitable organizations and religious orders become witting or unwitting conduits for funding. Many of these organizations are based in the Arabian Peninsula. Middle East oil has provided the bulk of terrorist and insurgent funding, making Arabia a hub in the web of financial links joining dispersed movements. An intricate network of private patronage, financial obligation and mutual commitment links groups and individuals in geographically dispersed regions.

The evidence is that Al Qaeda is not a central headquarters or 'high command' for the global *jihad*. Bin Laden does not issue directives for insurgent or terrorist action to 'subordinate' groups. Rather, planning and operational tasking seems to occur through a sponsorship system, with Al Qaeda providing funding, advice and specialist expertise to allied groups. Meanwhile, local groups gather intelligence and targeting

data and share it across theaters in the *jihad*. For example, the planned attack on Singapore by Al Qaeda's regional affiliate Jema'ah Islamiyah (JI) in 2002 was foiled through the discovery of targeting data in an Al Qaeda safe house in Afghanistan. A recent terrorist alert was sparked by the discovery of targeting data on American schools and public buildings on a captured terrorist's computer in South Asia. So although there is no centralized command and control hierarchy, it appears that local groups plan and conduct their own operations, but cooperate within and between regions. Simultaneously, global players like Al Qaeda provide encouragement, tactical support, finance and intelligence for specific operations.¹¹

Groups across the *jihad* contribute to a common flow of propaganda materials, supporting each other's local causes and sharing grievances. For example, the English-language website *Jihad Unspun* is managed by a Canadian convert to Islam, and provides reportage, analysis, comment and 'spin' on issues across all theaters of the *jihad*. Al Qaeda issues a fortnightly propaganda bulletin, *Sawt al-Jihad*, and publishes a jihadist women's magazine, *al-Khansa*. Similarly, a flow of cassette tapes, videos and CDs, many depicting so-called 'martyrdom operations', terrorist bombings or the execution of infidel prisoners, moves throughout *jihad* groups worldwide. For example, the *Russian Hell* series of videos, many depicting the torture and execution of Russian troops captured in Chechnya, is popular viewing across South Asia, the Middle East and Indonesia, and is current among certain militant extremist sub-cultures within the Australian Muslim community.¹² Imagery portraying oppression of Muslims worldwide is also used to stir up resentment and motivate *mujahidin*. The Internet has become a potent tool for groups to share propaganda and ideological material across international boundaries, contributing to a shared consciousness among dispersed groups within the *jihad*.¹³

Terrorist and insurgent groups worldwide have shared access to a body of techniques, doctrine and procedures that exists in hard copy, and on the Internet, primarily in Arabic. It includes political tracts, military manuals, and CD-ROM and videotaped materials. Al Qaeda also publishes a fortnightly online military training manual, *Al-Battar*. This creates a common tactical approach and operational lexicon across Islamist groups worldwide: tactics that first appear in one theater permeate across the global movement, via the Internet and doctrinal publications.¹⁴

Local, Regional and Global Players

Within each theater there are local actors, issues and grievances. Many have little to do with pan-Islamic objectives, and often pre-date the global *jihad* by decades or centuries. For example, Russians have been

fighting Muslim guerrillas in the Caucasus since the 1850s, while there has been a Moro separatist issue in the Philippines for more than a century. Local insurgent and terrorist groups – in some cases, little distinguishable from bandits – continue to operate in these areas.

But what is new about today's environment is that, because of the links provided by tools of globalization like the Internet, global media and satellite communications, a new class of regional or theater-level actors has emerged. These groups *do* have links to the global *jihad*, often act as regional allies or affiliates of Al Qaeda, and prey on local groups and issues to further the *jihad*. For example, in Indonesia the regional Al Qaeda affiliate, Jema'ah Islamiyah, has fuelled sectarian conflicts in Sulawesi in order to generate recruits, anti-Western propaganda, funding and grievances that can be exploited for *jihad* purposes. In general, Al Qaeda seems not to have direct dealings with local insurgent groups, but to deal primarily with its regional affiliates in each theater. This makes the regional-level players in the *jihad* a critical link.

Sitting above the regional actors are global players like Al Qaeda. But Al Qaeda is simply the best known of several worldwide actors. Al Qaeda has competitors, allies and clones at the global level who could step into the breach should Al Qaeda be destroyed. For example, Hizbullah has global reach, works closely with Sunni movements worldwide, sponsors approximately 80 per cent of Palestinian terrorism (including by Sunni groups such as Hamas) and has strong links to Iran.¹⁵ Hizbullah is one of several groups that could replace Al Qaeda in its niche of 'top predator', as the *jihad* evolves. Similarly, financial, religious, educational and cultural networks (based largely on Saudi Arabia) function at the global level in unifying the effect of disparate actors across the *jihad*, and often have greater penetration and influence than Al Qaeda itself.

Clearly, therefore, there *is* a global jihadist movement, but it comprises a loosely aligned confederation of independent networks and movements, not a single unified organization. Global players link and exploit local players through regional affiliates – they rarely interact directly with local players, but sponsor and support them through intermediaries. Each theater has operational players who are able to tap into the global *jihad*, and these tend to be regional Al Qaeda affiliates. Saudi Arabia is a central factor, with greater 'reach' than Al Qaeda itself. As Al Qaeda is disrupted, its clones and competitors will probably tend to move into its niche and assume some of its role.

Understanding the *Jihad*

Western analysts often struggle to characterize the *jihad*. Is it a formal organization, a mass movement or a loose confederation of allies? Is it a

franchised business model with centralized corporate support and autonomous regional divisions? Is it merely a myth, a creation of Western intelligence services and authoritarian governments? On the contrary, the emerging picture of global *jihad* suggests that the network is all too real. But Western models may not be able to fully describe it. Rather, analysis suggests, social and ethnographic models may be more applicable.

Karl Jackson (during fieldwork in 1968) and this author (during fieldwork in 1995–97) independently demonstrated that a model of traditional patron – client authority relationships is applicable to Islamic insurgent movements.¹⁶ Under this model, the *jihad* is a variant on a traditional Middle Eastern patronage network. It is an intricate, ramified web of dependency and, critically, the patterns of patronage and dependency are its central defining features, rather than the insurgent cells or their activities. Analysts have sometimes seen the marriage relationships, money flows, alumni relationships and sponsorship links in the *jihad* as secondary, subordinate to a military core of terrorist activity. But fieldwork analysis indicates that jihadist military activity may actually be merely one of the shared activities that the network engages in, while the core is the patronage network. In fact, the *jihad* appears to function more like a tribal group, organized crime syndicate or extended family, than like a military organization.¹⁷ Many desert tribes traditionally raised camels: but the essence of the tribe was its web of traditional authority structures, family allegiances and tribal honor, not the essentially secondary activity of camel herding. Thus, the Islamist network appears to reside in the pattern of relationships itself – *jihad* is simply one activity the network *does*, it does not define the network itself.

Global Islamist Insurgency

This globalized *jihad* network is best understood as an insurgency. Insurgency can be defined as ‘a popular movement that seeks to overthrow the status quo through subversion, political activity, insurrection, armed conflict and terrorism’.¹⁸ By definition, insurgent movements are grassroots uprisings that seek to overthrow established governments or societal orders. They are popular uprisings that employ subversion, guerrilla tactics and terrorism against the established power of states and conventional military forces. Many, including the Islamist *jihad*, draw their foot soldiers from deprived socio-economic groups and their leadership from alienated, radicalized elites.

Conversely, terrorism can be defined as ‘politically motivated violence against non-combatants with the intention to coerce through fear’, and is in the tactical repertoire of virtually every insurgency. Terrorism is a component in virtually all insurgencies, and insurgent

objectives (that is, a desire to change the status quo through subversion and violence) lie behind almost all terrorism.¹⁹

By this definition, the global *jihad* is clearly an insurgency – a popular movement that seeks to change the status quo through violence and subversion. But whereas traditional insurgencies sought to overthrow established governments or social orders in one state or district, this insurgency seeks to transform the entire Islamic world and remake its relationship with the rest of the globe. It looks back to a golden age, seeking to re-establish a Caliphate throughout the Muslim world and, ultimately, expand the realm of Islam (*Dar al Islam*) to all human society.²⁰ The scale of the Islamists' agenda is new, but their grievances and methods would be familiar to any insurgent in history.

The *jihad* is, therefore, a global insurgency. Al Qaeda and similar groups feed on local grievances, integrate them into broader ideologies, and link disparate conflicts through globalized communications, finances and technology. In this, Al Qaeda resembles the Communist Internationale of the twentieth century – a holding company and clearing-house for world revolution. But whereas the Comintern was a state-sponsored support organization for local revolutions and insurgencies, the global *jihad* is itself an insurgent movement. Moreover, whereas the Comintern was sponsored by the Soviet Union, the Islamist *jihad* seeks to form the basis for a new supra-national state.

Thus the distinguishing feature of the jihadists is not their use of terrorism, a tactic they share with dozens of movements worldwide. Rather, it is that they represent a global insurgency, which – like other insurgent movements – uses terrorism, subversion, propaganda and open warfare.

Competing Paradigms – Terrorism and Insurgency

The study of terrorism, as an academic discipline, emerged in the 1970s in response to the growing phenomenon of international terrorism.²¹ Before then, terrorism was seen primarily as a component within localized insurgencies. Indeed, in Malaya in the 1950s the principal British counter-*insurgency* manual was entitled 'The Conduct of Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya', indicating that the two activities were seen as synonymous.²² In this period, insurgency and terrorism were seen as practically the same phenomenon—the term 'terrorism' was primarily of political and propaganda value. The term was used to label an insurgent as illegitimate, or portray an insurgent's methods as 'beyond the pale'.

But the international terrorism that emerged in the 1970s included groups such as the Baader-Meinhof Group, the Italian Red Brigades and the Japanese Red Army with little apparent link to any mass movement or insurgency. These were 'disembodied' terrorist groups

comprising cells of alienated individuals within Western society, rather than insurgent movements with definite achievable aims. In analyzing these groups, a new paradigm emerged in popular thinking about terrorism.

Under this paradigm, shared by many Western legislators and policy-makers although not by terrorism specialists, terrorists are seen as unrepresentative aberrant individuals, misfits within society. Partly because they are unrepresentative, partly to discourage emulation, 'we do not negotiate with terrorists'. Terrorists are criminals, whose methods and objectives are both unacceptable. They use violence partly to shock and influence populations and governments, but also because they are psychologically or morally flawed ('evil') individuals. In this paradigm, terrorism is primarily a law enforcement problem, and we therefore adopt a case-based approach where the key objective is to apprehend the perpetrators of terrorist attacks.

This paradigm has been highly influential in our approach to the War on Terrorism—largely because of the word 'terrorism' in the title. Thus the US seeks to apprehend Osama bin Laden, and some commentators regard the failure to do so as evidence of failure to prosecute the war effectively. Likewise, Australia's response to the Bali bombing of 2002 focused on 'bringing terrorists to justice' – hence the central role of police work in a law enforcement-style approach.

The insurgency paradigm is different. Under this approach, insurgents are regarded as representative of deeper issues or grievances within society. We seek to defeat insurgents through 'winning the hearts and minds' of the population, a process that involves compromise and negotiation. We regard insurgents' methods as unacceptable, but their grievances are often seen as legitimate, provided they are pursued peacefully. This may be why mainstream society often accepts insurgents—like Nelson Mandela and Xanana Gusmao – who renounce violence but seek the same objectives through political means. We see insurgents as using violence within an integrated politico-military strategy, rather than as psychopaths. In this paradigm, insurgency is a whole-of-government problem rather than a military or law enforcement issue. Based on this, we adopt a strategy-based approach to counterinsurgency, where the objective is to defeat the insurgent's strategy, rather than to 'apprehend the perpetrators' of specific acts.

Figure 2 provides a summary of the principal differences identified between the terrorism and insurgency paradigms. However, as noted, the terrorism paradigm largely represents a popular stereotype, not the views of most specialist analysts who tend to regard terrorism as a subset or sub-category of insurgency.

The insurgency paradigm supports a different interpretation of the current war than does the terrorism paradigm. Indeed, actions in

<u>Terrorism</u>	<u>Insurgency</u>
Terrorist is an unrepresentative aberration	<i>Insurgent represents deeper issues in society</i>
No negotiation with terrorists	<i>Winning hearts and minds is critical, and often involves negotiation</i>
Methods and objectives are both unacceptable	<i>Methods are unacceptable; objectives are not necessarily so</i>
Terrorists are psychologically and morally flawed, with personal (psychopathic) tendencies toward violence	<i>Insurgents use violence within an integrated politico-military strategy – violence is instrumental not central to their approach</i>
Terrorism is a law-enforcement problem	<i>Insurgency is a whole of government problem</i>
Counterterrorism adopts a case-based approach focused on catching the perpetrators of terrorist actions.	<i>Counterinsurgency uses a strategy-based approach focused on defeating insurgents' strategy – catching them is secondary.</i>

Figure 2. Terrorism and Insurgency as Competing Paradigms

the war appear disparate if viewed through a terrorism paradigm. Some (like international law enforcement cooperation and actions to counter terrorist financing) fit the terrorism paradigm neatly, while others (the Iraq War, counter-proliferation initiatives, building influence in Central Asia, policies toward North Korea and Iran) appear unrelated to an anti-terrorism agenda. However, viewed through the lens of counterinsurgency, these actions fit neatly into three streams of classical counterinsurgency: pacification, winning hearts and minds, and the denial of sanctuary and external sponsorship.

If the War on Terrorism is a global insurgency, then the counterinsurgency paradigm (which includes action against terrorism as a subset of insurgency) is a better mental model for the war than is counterterrorism. Indeed, the key to defeating global *jihad* may not lie in traditional counterterrorism (police work, intelligence, special operations or security measures) at all. Instead, counterinsurgency theory may provide the most useful insights.

Counterinsurgency *Redux*

Despite its relevance to this conflict, traditional counterinsurgency techniques from the era of the ‘Wars of National Liberation’ of the 1960s cannot merely be applied to today’s problems in a simplistic fashion. This is because counterinsurgency, in its ‘classical’ form, is

optimised to defeat insurgency in one country, not counter a global insurgency. For example, pacification programs in classic counter-insurgency demand the ability to coordinate information operations, development, governance, military and police security operations, and overt and covert counter-guerrilla operations across a geographical area – often a province or region. At the national level, control of all counterinsurgent actions in the hands of a single ‘supremo’ is recognized as a key element.²³

This *can* be achieved in one country: Malaya, Northern Ireland and other campaigns demonstrated this. But to achieve this level of integration requires excellent governmental stability, unity and restraint. Moreover, it demands extremely close coordination and integration between and within police, intelligence, military, development, aid, information and administrative agencies. For example, the successful Malayan campaign rested on an overall supremo with combined military, political and administrative powers, supported by an intricate system of federal, state, district and sub-district executive inter-agency committees. Likewise, successful classic counterinsurgency in the Americas, Africa and Asia has been closely tied to improvements in governance, integrated administrative systems and joint inter-agency action.

At the global level, no world government exists with the power to integrate the actions of independent nations to the degree required by traditional counterinsurgency theory; nor can regional counterinsurgency programs be closely enough aligned to block all insurgent maneuver. This is particularly true when the enemy – as in this case – is not a Maoist-style mass rural movement, but an insurgency operating in small cells and teams with low ‘tactical signature’ in the urban clutter of globalized societies.

As Robert Kagan has argued, the current ‘crisis of legitimacy’ affecting US efforts to exercise global leadership in the War on Terrorism is a symptom, rather than a cause, of a deepening geo-strategic division between Europe and America.²⁴ While this division persists, under the international system as currently constituted, any nation powerful enough to act as a global counterinsurgency supremo would tend to lack legitimacy. Conversely, any collective or multinational grouping (such as the UN Security Council) that could muster unquestioned legitimacy would tend to lack sufficient power to act effectively. It would be fatally constrained by the very factors (sovereign equality of states, non-intervention in the internal affairs of states, multilateral consensus) that generated its legitimacy. Thus the entire concept of counterinsurgency is problematic when applied at the global level.

Similarly, classic counterinsurgency seeks to deny enemy sanctuaries, prevent infiltration into theater, and isolate insurgents from support. A global insurgency has limited vulnerability to many of these measures,

because of the phenomenon of failed and failing states, and under-administered areas between states (such as the tribal areas on the Pakistan/Afghan border). This allows geographical sanctuary for insurgents, while international flows of information and finances provide ‘cyber-sanctuaries’ (like the Al Qaeda Internet presence described above) for insurgents.

So a globalized insurgency demands a rethink of traditional counterinsurgency. What is required is counterinsurgency *redux*, not the templated application of 1960s techniques. Both counterterrorism and counterinsurgency provide some answers, but an integrated approach is needed that draws on both disciplines, modifies them for current conditions, and develops new methods applicable to globalized insurgency. How might ‘counterinsurgency *redux*’ look?

The Problem of Strategy

US strategy for the overall War on Terrorism remains vaguely understood. Indeed, despite substantial policy work in the national security community, some have seriously questioned whether the US actually *has* a coherent overall strategy for the war and, if so, what it is.²⁵

In fact, analysis of action in the war so far indicates a *de facto* strategy of ‘aggregation’ – lumping together all terrorism, all rogue or failed states and all strategic competitors. This *de facto* strategy creates several problems. It runs the risk of creating new enemies, and fighting simultaneously enemies that could have been fought sequentially. A strategy of aggregation tends to the logical outcome of a war against all terrorists or – far worse – all Muslims simultaneously. This creates enormous potential for overstretch, exhaustion of popular will, and ultimate failure.²⁶

Moreover, such a strategy undermines US legitimacy (and thus effectiveness as global counterterrorism supremo), because it tends to link apparently disparate conflicts, giving the appearance that the war is an attempt to settle old scores. Similarly, it encourages support for morally dubious regimes and undermines opportunities for common cause with other democracies.

But if the global *jihad* is best understood as a globalized insurgency, this suggests an alternative – indeed, a diametrically opposed – strategy for the War on Terrorism, namely ‘disaggregation’.

Disaggregation Strategy

As described, dozens of local movements, grievances and issues have been aggregated (through regional and global players) into a global *jihad* against the West. These regional and global players prey upon,

link and exploit local actors and issues that are pre-existing. What makes the *jihad* so dangerous is its global nature. Without the ‘series of nested interactions’ this article has described, or the ability to aggregate dozens of conflicts into a broad movement, the global *jihad* ceases to exist. It becomes simply a series of disparate local conflicts that can be addressed at the regional or national level without interference from global enemies such as Al Qaeda.

Indeed, it can be argued that the essence of jihadist ‘operational art’ is the ability to aggregate numerous tactical actions, dispersed across time and space, to achieve an overall strategic effect. This was the conception behind the 9/11 attacks, the Bali bombing, the 1998 African embassy bombings, the Christmas 2000 bombings in Indonesia, and various attempted or planned attacks including the so-called ‘Operation Bojinka’ – which sought to hijack simultaneously up to a dozen airliners over the Pacific Ocean.

A strategy of disaggregation would attack this operational method, by breaking the links that allow the *jihad* to function as a global entity. In this strategy, victory does not demand that we pacify every insurgent theater from the Philippines to Chechnya. It demands only that we identify, and neutralize, those elements in each theater that are linked to the global *jihad*. For example, Chechen separatism pre-dates the involvement of Islamists in the Caucasus. Disaggregation does not demand an immediate resolution to the Chechen insurgency, rather it demands that we deny the Chechen *jihad* its links to the global movement, then support Russia in addressing Chechen separatism. Similarly, disaggregation does not demand that we resolve the Moro separatist issue in the Philippines. It requires only that we isolate groups like Abu Sayyaf from the global *jihad*, and assist the Philippines to resolve its conflict with groups like the Moro National Liberation Front which, although composed of Islamic separatists, is seeking regional self-government not endless global *jihad*.

Thus, although dozens of local insurgencies contribute to the global *jihad*, victory under a disaggregation strategy does not demand the destruction of all local insurgents. Rather (systems analysis indicates) counterinsurgency at the systemic level is a matter of de-linking local issues from the global insurgent system, as much as it is about dealing with local insurgents themselves.

At the global level, disaggregation would interdict the Al Qaeda core leadership’s ability to influence regional and local players – by cutting off their communications, discrediting their ideological authority, and global operations to keep them off balance. At the regional level, disaggregation would isolate theater-level actors from global sponsors, local populations and local insurgent groups they might seek to exploit in support of *jihad*. This would involve regional campaigns in locations

such as Southeast Asia, the greater Middle East, North Africa and Central/South Asia. At the local level, disaggregation would involve creating a local security framework by training, equipping and enabling partner states, to prevent the overthrow of responsible governments by Al Qaeda-linked movements, influence oppressive or weak states to improve their governance, and ensure that local governments were strong enough to outlast the jihadist threat.

This would demand a re-conceptualization of the war as a three-tier campaign at the global, regional and local level. Importantly, it would also allow us to define the war in terms of what it *supports* rather than solely what it *opposes*. If the war is truly a global counterinsurgency against a movement that seeks to overthrow the existing world order in favor of a pre-modern Islamist super-state, then it is not just a negative campaign against non-state terrorist actors. Rather, it is a positive campaign in support of the modern world order of responsibly governed nation-states linked by an increasingly globalized world economy and robust international institutions. While many countries are suspicious of the US agenda for the war as currently presented, every democracy in the world has an interest in preserving effective governance against the threat of nihilist terrorism. Thus a disaggregation approach would create a substantially larger pool of potential allies – including the world’s mainstream Muslim communities. A strategy of disaggregation would focus on:

- Attacking the ‘intricate web of dependency’ – the links that allow the *jihad* to function effectively.
- Interdicting links between Islamist theaters of operation within the global insurgency.
- Denying the ability of regional and global actors to link and exploit local actors.
- Interdicting flows of information, personnel, finance and technology (including WMD technology) between and within *jihad* theaters.
- Denying sanctuary areas (including failed and failing states, and states that support terrorism) within theaters.
- Isolating Islamists from local populations, through theater-specific measures to win hearts and minds, counter Islamist propaganda, create alternative institutions and remove the drivers for popular support to insurgents.
- Disrupting inputs (personnel, money and information) from the sources of Islamism in the greater Middle East to dispersed *jihad* theaters worldwide.

In a global insurgency, this strategy requires that regional counter-insurgency campaigns be conducted so as to reduce the energy level in

the global *jihad*. It also demands that legitimate Muslim aspirations are addressed through a constitutional path, and military forces adopt an enabling, rather than a dominant, role. Military force is still essential and will probably be applied in large-scale counterinsurgency style tasks, not limited counterterrorist operations. Nonetheless military force can only create pre-conditions for non-military measures to succeed.

In practical terms, disaggregation does not provide a template of universally applicable counterinsurgency measures. Indeed, such a template probably does not exist and, if it did, the proven adaptiveness of our jihadist enemy would render it rapidly obsolete. Instead, much like containment during the Cold War, a strategy of disaggregation means different things at different times or in different theaters, but provides a unifying strategic conception for a protracted global confrontation. Nevertheless, several practical insights arise from this strategic conception.

A Global ‘CORDS Program’

As explained, the enemy in this war comprises a multifarious, intricately ramified web of dependencies that – like a tribal group or crime family – behaves more like a traditional patronage network than a mass guerrilla movement. *Jihad* is what the network does, not the network itself.

Disrupting this network demands that we target the links (the web of dependencies itself) and the energy flows (inputs and outputs that pass between actors in the *jihad*) as the primary method of disrupting the network. An exclusive focus on attempting to stop terrorist attacks or catch terrorists themselves simply imposes an evolutionary pressure that makes insurgents adapt and improve.

The concept of ‘de-linking’ is central to disaggregation. It would target the insurgent infrastructure in a similar fashion to the maligned (but extremely effective) Vietnam-era Civil Operations and Rural Development Support (CORDS) program, headed by Ambassador Robert Komer. Contrary to popular mythology, CORDS was largely a civilian aid and development program, supported by targeted military pacification operations and intelligence activity to disrupt the Viet Cong Infrastructure. A global CORDS program is a useful model for understanding how disaggregation would develop in practice.²⁷

A Constitutional Path

A key technique of classic counterinsurgency is to counter the grievances on which insurgencies feed, denying energy to their recruiting

and propaganda subsystems, and ultimately marginalizing them. For example, in Malaya the British countered the Communist appeal to nationalism by setting a date for independence and commencing a transition to self-government. Over time, this marginalized the insurgents – people saw their grievances being peacefully addressed anyway, so why support the insurgency? Similarly, strong anti-Communist trade unions were a key development in the Cold War. These provided a ‘constitutional path’ for workers seeking a better life and legitimized their aspirations, while de-legitimizing the Communist revolutionary methods. Instead of a stark choice between revolution and poverty, trade unions gave workers a constitutional path – accessing justice through the labor movement, without recourse to (or need for) extra-legal means.

A constitutional path is needed, but lacking, to counter global *jihad*: most measures so far have been ‘all stick and no carrot’. For Muslims in much of the world, there is no middle way: only a stark choice between *jihad* and acceptance of permanent second-class citizenship in a world order dominated by the West and apparently infused with anti-Islamic values. For many self-respecting Muslims, the choice of *jihad* rather than surrender is both logical and honorable. So a constitutional path is critical – one that addresses Muslim aspirations without recourse to *jihad*, thus marginalizing Islamists and robbing their movement of energy.

It would require a separate article to articulate such a path in detail. But key elements might include exporting elements of the Malaysian and Turkish approaches to representative government in Muslim societies; addressing the role of women, education and governance; and building effective representational bodies for the world’s Muslims. Measures like the Middle East Free Trade Zone, the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative, and the proposals canvassed in the UNDP’s Arab Human Development Report series would represent moves in the right direction, but ‘these ideas have so far been ineffectual for a range of reasons. Their limited funding and haphazard administration suggests an uncertain commitment on the part of the US’²⁸ – implying the need for greater commitment to this aspect of the War on Terrorism.

Cultural Capability

Cultures – organizational, ethnic, national, religious or tribal – provide key links in the global *jihad*. Cultures determine how each actor in an insurgency perceives the actions of the others, and generate unperceived cultural boundaries that limit their freedom of action. Culture imbues otherwise random or apparently senseless acts with meaning and

subjective rationality. Hence, it may be impossible for counterinsurgent forces to perceive the true meaning of insurgent actions, or influence populations and their perceptions, without access to local culture. Many links in the *jihad* – and virtually all the grievances and energies that circulate within it – are culturally determined. Culture is intimately connected with language, since humans use language to make sense of reality and communicate meaning. Therefore, in counterinsurgency, linguistic and cultural competence is a critical combat capability. It generates a permissive operating environment and enables access to cultural centers of gravity, situational awareness and interaction with the population.

This is true of both traditional and globalized counterinsurgency. But in globalized counterinsurgency, security forces must work at several cultural levels simultaneously. For example, forces in Iraq must understand local Iraqi culture, jihadist organisational culture, cultural pressure points for tribal and sectarian groups in the population, cultural triggers for opinion in neighboring countries and the culture of foreign fighters in theater. They must also understand the implications of actions within Iraq upon events culturally different theaters elsewhere, and the overall systemic culture of the global *jihad*. Identifying cultural pressure points of this kind is critical in generating deterrence and influence against insurgents.²⁹

Linguistic and cultural competence must exist at several levels within a counterinsurgent force. At the most basic level, everyone in the force – regardless of role – must have a basic degree of cultural awareness. This demands basic language training, understanding cultural norms and expectations, and – most importantly – understanding how local populations and insurgents think. At the intermediate level, planners, intelligence personnel, civil-military operations teams and advisers need higher levels of cultural understanding. This involves more advanced language capability, an ability to ‘fit in’ with local groups, and to perform effectively while immersed in local culture. At the highest level of cultural capability, key personnel need an ability to use culture to generate leverage within an insurgent system. Commanders working with local community and government leaders need such capability. It is also needed by personnel working in the intelligence and covert action fields, and in key nation-building programs. At this level, individuals are bilingual and bi-cultural, and can exploit cultural norms and expectations to generate operational effects.³⁰

No nation’s regular armed forces will ever be able to generate more than a small number of individuals with this capability, but only a small number are actually needed – provided they are developed and employed effectively. This is difficult within the organizational culture of regular armies, and such officers are likely to be mavericks:

'renaissance men' in the mould of T.E. Lawrence, Orde Wingate or Edward Lansdale. They often emerge from an 'inter-agency' background and have experience working in several related fields. For example, Orde Wingate was an Arabic linguist, desert explorer, member of the Sudan Civil Service and highly successful leader of irregular troops in Israel, Sudan and Ethiopia before embarking on his Burma campaign as leader of the Long-Range Penetration Group (the 'Chindits'). Similarly, Ambassador Robert Komer was a former US Army Lieutenant Colonel who subsequently served with the CIA, the Foreign Service, the US Agency for International Development and the RAND Corporation – combining a range of highly relevant skills for his task of leading the CORDS effort in Vietnam.

Whatever the cultural capability of a deployed force, it will never be able to dispense with extensive use of, and reliance on, local populations and security forces. Only locals have the access to the population, and deep understanding of a particular insurgency, necessary to combat it.³¹ Conversely, those directing the war against Al Qaeda must understand issues across the three tiers (global, regional and local) of the *jihād* – so key personnel need cultural agility. As noted, there is a distinct jihadist culture. Jihadists do not operate in a completely savage and random fashion. Indeed, there are very specific self-imposed limitations on their operational and targeting methods. Understanding and exploiting these limitations is important in global counterinsurgency. It should go without saying, but unfortunately does not, that every key operator in the War on Terrorism needs a comprehensive understanding of Islam, *jihād*, Islamist ideology and Muslim culture. Achieving this would be an important step toward victory.

Conclusions

In summary, this article has proposed a new strategic concept for the Global War on Terrorism.

As explained, the war is best understood as a globalized insurgency, initiated by a diffuse confederation of Islamist movements seeking to re-make Islam's role in the world order. They use terrorism as their primary, but not their sole tactic. Therefore counterinsurgency rather than traditional counterterrorism may offer the best approach to defeating global *jihād*. But classic counterinsurgency, as developed in the 1960s, is designed to defeat insurgency in a single country. It demands measures – coordinated political-military responses, integrated regional and inter-agency measures, protracted commitment to a course of action – that cannot be achieved at the global level in today's international system. Therefore a traditional counterinsurgency paradigm will not work for the present war: instead, a fundamental

reappraisal of counterinsurgency is needed, to develop methods effective against a globalized insurgency.

Applying the counterinsurgency model generates a new strategy for the War on Terrorism – disaggregation. Like containment in the Cold War, a disaggregation strategy means different things in different theaters or at different times. But it provides a unifying strategic conception for the war. Disaggregation focuses on interdicting links between theaters, denying the ability of regional and global actors to link and exploit local actors, disrupting flows between and within *jihad* theaters, denying sanctuary areas, isolating Islamists from local populations and disrupting inputs from the sources of Islamism in the greater Middle East. It approaches the war as a three-tier problem at the global, regional and local levels – seeking to interdict global links via a worldwide CORDS program, isolate regional players through a series of regional counterinsurgencies and strengthen local governance through a greatly enhanced security framework at the country level.

If one key message emerges from this study, it is that the modern world order of responsibly governed nation-states *can* defeat the threat from Islamist terrorism. The jihadist enemy is neither inscrutable nor invincible; Al Qaeda methods have flaws that can be exploited, and global *jihad* cannot ultimately offer the world's Muslim population the security, prosperity and social justice that can only come through good governance at the level of nation-states. Therefore victory, in the long-term, is both possible and likely. But there are enormous challenges on the way. Counterinsurgency practitioners – strategists, soldiers and intelligence operators – must re-build our mental model of this conflict, re-design our classical counterinsurgency and counterterrorism methods, and continually develop innovative and culturally effective approaches to meet the challenge of new conditions. This process must go well beyond addressing today's immediate problems, to ultimately transform our whole approach to countering global insurgency.

Notes

- 1 In this article, the term 'Islamist' describes the extremist, radical form of political Islam practiced by some militant groups, as distinct from 'Islamic', which describes the religion of Islam, or 'Muslim', which describes those who follow the Islamic religion. In this article the term is used to refer primarily to Al Qaeda, its allies and affiliates.
- 2 This article uses the short form of the Islamic term *jihad* to mean 'lesser *jihad*' (armed struggle against unbelievers), rather than 'greater *jihad*' (*jihad fi sabilillah*), i.e. moral struggle for the righteousness of God.
- 3 Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP 1989) p.88.

- 4 Muslims disagree over precisely who can issue a *fatwa*. It is generally agreed, however, that only an Islamic cleric can issue such a religious ruling, and only the legitimate ruler of a Muslim state can issue a call to *jihad*. In this sense, by issuing a call to *jihad* in the form of a *fatwa*, bin Laden was claiming both religious and temporal authority. For a detailed discussion of these issues, see Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson 2003). See also Peter L. Bergen, *Holy War, Inc: Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson 2001).
- 5 See collected Al Qaeda statements available at <www.siteinstitute.org> for a variety of references to bin Laden as *emir* or *sheikh* in official Al Qaeda communiqués.
- 6 Ayman al-Zawahiri, 'Knights under the Prophet's Banner', in *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 2 Dec. 2001.
- 7 See <<http://siteinstitute.org/bin/articles.cgi?ID=publications9504&Category=publications&Subcategory=0>>.
- 8 The Qur'an is read and studied only in the original Arabic, and strict Islamic religious instruction worldwide is conducted in Arabic. Vernacular translations of the Qur'an are not considered to be genuine copies of the Book. Thus Arabic language is fundamental in the Muslim worldview.
- 9 Michael Vlahos, *Terror's Mask: Insurgency within Islam* (Laurel, MD: Occasional Paper, Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory 2002).
- 10 See Overseas Security Advisory Council, *Chechen Female Suicide Bombers*, at <www.ds-osac.org>.
- 11 For detailed open-source descriptions of Al Qaeda planning and operational methods see Bergen (note 1). See also Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda* (NY: Columbia UP 2002) and Jane Corbin, *The Base: Al-Qaeda and the Changing Face of Global Terror* (London: Pocket Books 2003).
- 12 *Pers. Comm.* confidential source, May 2004.
- 13 For a listing of Islamist propaganda websites and produces, see <www.internet-haganah.com>.
- 14 See <www.fas.org/irp/world/para/docs> for a series of extracts from Al Qaeda's operational manual. See <www.siteinstitute.org/terroristpublications.html> for a series of translated summaries of *al-Battar*.
- 15 For a detailed discussion of Hizbullah's global reach, see Ely Karmon, *Fight on All Fronts: Hizbullah, the War on Terror, and the War in Iraq* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy 2003).
- 16 See Karl Jackson, *Traditional Authority, Islam and Rebellion* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1980).
- 17 Recent research on Al Qaeda operational patterns tends to support this view. See David Ronfeldt, 'Al Qaeda and its Affiliates: A Global Tribe Waging Segmental Warfare?', in *First Monday* 10/3 (March 2005), at <http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue10_3/ronfeldt/index.html>.
- 18 This definition and that of terrorism, which follows, were developed specifically for this article. Both were derived through synthesising several definitions used in the Western intelligence and security communities.
- 19 See Thomas A. Marks, 'Ideology of Insurgency: New Ethnic Focus or Old Cold war Distortions?', in *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 15/1 (Spring 2004) p.107.
- 20 As expressed in statements by bin Laden, particularly the *World Islamic Front Declaration of War against Jews and Crusaders*. See also comments in Paul K. Davis and Brian Michael Jenkins, 'A System Approach to Deterring and Influencing Terrorists', in *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 21 (2004) pp.3–15, 2004.

- 21 Ajai Sahni, 'Social Science and Contemporary Conflicts: The Challenge of Research on Terrorism' at *South Asia Terrorism Portal* <www.satp.org> accessed 10 Nov. 2004. See also F. Schorkopf, 'Behavioural and Social Science Perspectives on Political Violence' in C. Walter, S. Vöneky, V. Röben and F. Schorkopf (eds), *Terrorism as a Challenge for National and International Law: Security versus Liberty?* (Berlin/Heidelberg: Springer Verlag 2003).
- 22 Federation of Malaya, *Conduct of Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya*, 3rd edn (Kuala Lumpur: Government Printer 1958).
- 23 See Bruce Hoffman, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND 2004), for a discussion of this concept in relation to counterinsurgency in Malaya and Cyprus.
- 24 See Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (NY: Knopf 2003). See also Robert Kagan, *America and the World: The Crisis of Legitimacy*, 21st Bonython Lecture, 9 Nov. 2004, at <www.cis.org.au> .
- 25 Pers.comm., senior US government official, Oct. 2004.
- 26 For a detailed discussion of these concerns see, Jeffrey Record, *Bounding the Global War on Terrorism* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute 2003).
- 27 For detailed discussion on the Phoenix Program and the broader CORDS system, see Steven Metz, *Counterinsurgency: Strategy and the Phoenix of American Capability* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute 1995). See also B.R. Brewington, 'Combined Action Platoons: A Strategy for Peace Enforcement' at <www.smallwars.quantico.usmc.mil/search/Papers/brewington.pdf>; and S. Metz and R. Millen, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in the 21st Century – Reconceptualizing Threat and Response* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute 2004).
- 28 A. Billingsley, 'The Native Scene' in *The Diplomat*, Aug./Sept. 2004, p.23.
- 29 Davis and Jenkins (note 20).
- 30 These insights are based on the author's experience as an advisor with Indonesian Special Forces in 1994–95 and as an instructor with East Timorese irregular troops in 2003. However, almost every military advisor, SF team leader and training team member whom the author has debriefed has raised the same points.
- 31 For example, in Sept. 2004 the author debriefed an intelligence officer serving in Baghdad, who indicated that local Iraqi security forces' insights into the origins of foreign fighters revolutionized that operator's approach to the problem. Local insights, combined with broader understanding of issues in the global *jihad*, create powerful synergies.