

Countering Global Insurgency

A Strategy for the War on Terrorism

By

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This paper explores the nature of the War on Terrorism. It argues that the War is fundamentally a counterinsurgency, against a globalised Islamist insurgent movement that currently uses terrorism as its preferred tactic. Thus, traditional counterterrorism approaches are less relevant to the war than those of counterinsurgency. But classical counterinsurgency is designed to defeat insurgency in a single state, and is thus inadequate for defeating a globalised insurgency. Therefore, a viable long-term strategy for this war demands re-thinking classical counterinsurgency theory. Applying a re-evaluation of counterinsurgency theory based on complex systems analysis, the paper argues for a grand strategy of ‘disaggregation’. This strategic approach seeks to ‘dismantle’ the global *jihad* by attacking the links that enable Islamist movements to exploit disparate local grievances and insurgencies.

INTRODUCTION

We are not fighting so that you will offer us something. We are fighting to eliminate you.

Hussein Massawi, Hizbullah

Since the United States declared a global ‘War on Terrorism’ following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, some analysts have argued that terrorism is merely a tactic, thus a war on terrorism makes little sense. Francis Fukuyama’s comment, ‘the war on terror is a misnomer...terrorism is only a means to an end; in this regard, a war on terrorism makes no more sense than a war on submarines’¹ is typical. This view is irrelevant in a policy sense (the term ‘War on Terrorism’ is political, not analytical) but nonetheless accurate. Indeed, paraphrasing Clausewitz, to wage this war effectively we must understand its true nature: not mistaking it for, or trying to turn it into, something it is not.² We must distinguish Al Qa’eda and the broader militant movements it symbolises – entities that *use* terrorism – from the tactic of terrorism itself. In practice, as will be demonstrated, the ‘War on Terrorism’ is a defensive war against a world-wide Islamist *jihad*³, a diverse confederation of movements that uses terrorism as its principal, but not its sole tactic.

This paper argues that the present conflict is actually a campaign to counter a globalised Islamist⁴ insurgency. Therefore, counterinsurgency theory is more relevant to this war than is traditional counterterrorism. As the paper shows, a counterinsurgency approach would generate a subtly, but substantially different range of actions in prosecuting the War on

¹ See <http://www.brook.edu/dybdocroot/Comm/events/summary20030514.pdf> for a summary of Fukuyama’s comments, made at a Brookings Institution forum on the War on Terrorism in May 2003.

² “The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgement that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish...the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, not trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature. This is the first of all strategic questions and the most comprehensive”. Clausewitz, Carl 1989: *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, Princeton University Press, N.J p.88

³ This paper 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.

⁴ In this paper, the term ‘Islamist’ describes the extremist, radical form of political Islam practised 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 paper the term is used to refer primarily to Al Qa’eda, its allies and affiliates.

Terrorism. Based on this, the paper argues for a strategy of ‘disaggregation’ that seeks to dismantle, or de-link the global *jihad*. Just as the Containment strategy was central to the Cold War, likewise a Disaggregation strategy would provide a unifying strategic conception for the war – something that has been lacking to date.

Thesis

The paper’s thesis is this:

- The ‘War on Terrorism’ is actually a campaign to counter a global Islamist insurgency. So counterinsurgency, not counterterrorism, may provide the best approach to the conflict.
- But classical counterinsurgency is designed to defeat insurgency in one country. So traditional counterinsurgency theory has limitations in this context. Therefore we need a new paradigm, capable of addressing globalised insurgency.
- Although classical counterinsurgency uses systems analysis, traditional systems analysis cannot handle the complexity of insurgency. However, the emerging science of Complexity provides new tools for systems assessment – hence, complex systems analysis may provide new mental models for globalised counterinsurgency.
- Complex adaptive systems modelling shows that the global nature of the present Islamist *jihad*, and hence its dangerous character, derives from the links in the system – energy pathways that allow disparate groups to function in an aggregated fashion across intercontinental distances – rather than the elements themselves.
- Therefore, countering global insurgency does not demand that we destroy every Islamist insurgent from the Philippines to Chechnya. Rather, it demands a strategy of disaggregation (de-linking or dismantling) to prevent the dispersed and disparate elements of the *jihad* movement from functioning as a global system. Applying this approach to the war generates a new and different range of policy options and strategic choices.

The argument is in four parts. Part I demonstrates that a worldwide Islamist *jihad* movement exists, and Part II shows that it is best understood as an insurgency. Part III uses Complex Adaptive Systems theory to develop a systems model of insurgency. Based on this systems model, Part IV then proposes ‘Disaggregation’ as an appropriate strategy for countering the global Islamist insurgency. The paper ends with Conclusions and Recommendations.

I

ANATOMY OF THE GLOBAL *JIHAD*

A global movement

Usama bin Laden, leader of the World Islamic Front (commonly known as *Al Qa’eda*, ‘the Base’) declared war on the United States, Israel and by extension the rest of the liberal-democratic world on 23 February 1998, in a statement entitled ‘World Islamic Front Declaration of War against Jews and Crusaders’⁵. Bin Laden’s deputy Ayman al Zawahiri, former leader of Egyptian Islamic Jihad, subsequently published a strategy paper describing a two-phase strategy for global *jihad* against the West. Neither statement was treated particularly seriously at the time, but in retrospect each provides an insight into a developing global pattern of Islamist militancy.

⁵ Full text of this statement is reproduced at Appendix A.

Bin Laden's declaration of war announced a global campaign against the United States and the West. It issued a *fatwa* calling for *jihad* to all Muslims, thereby indicating that Bin Laden claimed religious and political authority as a Muslim ruler.⁶ Subsequent Al Qaeda statements refer to Bin Laden as the *Sheikh* or *Emir* (Prince or Commander) of the World Islamic Front, indicating a claim to temporal and military authority over Islamist militant fighters throughout the world. Thus Al Qaeda's statement declared a worldwide state of war against the West, and claimed authority over the forces engaged in that war. Unlike a traditional declaration of war, the declaration also claimed authority over a worldwide Islamist movement for *jihad*.

Zawahiri's statement, issued shortly after 9/11, announced a specific strategic program for the war. Zawahiri, identified as the principal Al Qaeda operational planner⁷, articulated a two-phase strategy. In the first phase, the global *jihad* would focus on the greater Middle East Area: '...this spirit of *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.'⁸ Thus the first stage of the campaign would re-establish the Caliphate, historical source of spiritual and temporal authority for all Muslims, which existed from the death of Muhammed (in AD 632) until AD 1924 when it was dissolved by the Turkish Republic after the fall of the Ottoman Empire.⁹

The second stage of the strategic plan would use this Caliphate as a launchpad for *jihad* against the West, in order to re-make the world order with the Muslim world in a dominant position. 'If God wills it, such a state...could lead the Islamic world in a *jihad* against the West. It could also rally the world 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.'¹⁰

A related document, the 'General Guide to the Struggle of Jema'ah Islamiyah' (*Pedoman Umum Perjuangan al-Jama'ah al-Islamiyah*, PUPJI) issued by Al Qaeda's Southeast Asian ally Jema'ah Islamiyah (JI) in 2001, articulates a similar interpretation of the Caliphate concept. PUPJI states JI's objectives as the establishment of an Islamic state in Indonesia, followed by the creation of a pan-Islamic state in Southeast Asia (*daula Islamiya nusantara*) covering Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Singapore. Once this Islamist super-state is created, JI's aim is to further the establishment of a global pan-Islamic Caliphate.¹¹

Many aspects of Al Qaeda's program could be disputed. The legitimacy of its claimed authority over Muslims and Islamist fighters, the veracity of its claim to have initiated the *jihad*, the viability of its two-phase strategy, the true extent of its intended pan-Islamic Caliphate, or the sincerity of its stated aims could be questioned, for example. Nevertheless, according to open-source information, Al Qaeda has a presence (in the form of sympathisers, sleeper cells, terrorist cadres or active fighters) in at least 40 countries. Earlier US statements claimed an Al Qaeda presence in 60 countries and, although disrupted by the destruction of its

⁶ 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 Lewis, Bernard 2003: *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror*, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, London. See also Bergen, Peter L. 2001: *Holy War, Inc: Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden*, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, London.

⁷ See 'The Operations Man: Ayman al-Zawahiri' in *The Estimate*, Vol XIII No. 17, September 21, 2001

⁸ Ayman al-Zawahiri, 'Knights under the Prophet's Banner', in *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 2 Dec 2001.

⁹ Lewis *op.cit* p xvi.

¹⁰ Ayman al-Zawahiri, *op. cit.*

¹¹ See Abuza, Zachary: 2004 *NBR Analysis: Muslims, Politics and Violence in Indonesia: An Emerging Islamist-Jihadist Nexus?* National Bureau of Asian Research, Seattle Wa. For a slightly different interpretation, see also International Crisis Group, 2003: *Jema'ah Islamiyah in Southeast Asia: Damaged but Still Dangerous*, ICG Asia Report No. 863, 26 August 03.

base in Afghanistan, recent assessments have concluded that Al Qaeda is still functioning globally.¹² Indeed, a recent article in the Al Qaeda military journal *Al-Battar* argued that the destruction of the Afghan sanctuary has enabled a global expansion for al Qaeda:

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.¹³

Islamist Theatres of Operation

This worldwide pattern of militant Islamist movements appears to function through regional 'theatres of operation' rather than as a monolithic bloc. Theatres are regions where operatives from one country cooperate with operatives from, or conduct activities in, neighbouring countries. Evidence suggests that Islamist groups within theatres follow general ideological or strategic approaches that conform to the pronouncements of Al Qaeda, and share a common tactical style and operational lexicon. But there is no clear evidence that Al Qaeda directly controls or directs *jihad* in each theatre. Indeed, as will be seen, rather than being a single monolithic organisation, the global *jihad* appears to be a much more complex phenomenon. The principal Islamist theatres so far identified are as follows:

- **The Americas.** North America is most prominent as the scene of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, but there has been significant other Al Qaeda activity in the Americas, including attempts to infiltrate the US from Mexico and Canada. Latin America has also been identified as a major centre for Islamist training, infiltration, supply and political subversion.¹⁴
- **Western Europe.** Western Europe (except the Iberian Peninsula, which seems to be linked more closely to the North African theatre) appears to function primarily as a theatre for political organisation, subversion and fund-raising. There has been little terrorist or insurgent activity linked to Al Qaeda, although terrorist cells and militant underground groups exist.
- **Australasia.** Australasia has seen no direct terrorist attacks, although Australians and New Zealanders suffered heavily in the October 2002 Bali Bombing. However, an Al Qaeda-linked JI cell has been uncovered in Australia, Australians fought with the Taliban and (in the 1980s) with Afghan *mujahidin* against the Soviets, and JI has used Australia for training, fund-raising and political subversion.
- **Iberian Peninsula and Maghreb.** The Iberian Peninsula and the *Maghreb* (Muslim Northwest Africa) appear to function as a single theatre, with North Africans implicated in the May 2004 Madrid Bombing and a subsequent Islamist attempted bombing and gun battle with police. Besides the Madrid attacks, this theatre has been fairly active with major terrorist bombings in Casablanca, Morocco; ongoing Islamist insurgencies in Algeria and Morocco; and terrorist attacks in Tunisia. Al Qaeda has a subordinate 'regional franchise' in this theatre, and the theatre is used for training and political subversion as well as active terrorism and insurgency.
- **Greater Middle East.** The greater Middle East – including Turkey, the Levant, Israel/Palestine, Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula and Iran – is by far the most active *jihad*

¹² See, for example, U.S. State Department 2004: *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2003*; and IISS 2004:

¹³ see <http://siteinstitute.org/bin/articles.cgi?ID=publications9504&Category=publications&Subcategory=0>

¹⁴ See Meir-Levi, David 2004: 'Connecting the South American Terror Dots' in *Front Page Magazine*, 9 August 2004

theatre. There are ongoing Islamist insurgencies in Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, Sa'udi Arabia, Yemen, Turkey, Lebanon and Israel/Palestine. Terrorist activity – including bombings, suicide attacks, kidnappings, beheadings and raids on expatriate housing – is frequent throughout the theatre. Al Qa'eda has designated regional affiliates in Iraq, Sa'udi Arabia, Egypt and Kurdistan and probably also has a presence in Iran, Yemen, Jordan and Israel/Palestine. But importantly, much of the insurgent and terrorist action in this theatre is not sponsored, directed or controlled by Al Qa'eda. Moreover, there is an entire separate (though inter-linked) pattern of Shi'a terrorism and insurgency across this region and some Shi'a groups – especially Lebanese Hizbullah – have global ambition and reach.¹⁵

- **East Africa.** Kenya and Tanzania suffered simultaneous terrorist bombings on US embassies in August 1998. These attacks were coordinated by Al Qa'eda from a base in the Sudan, which in addition to an Al Qa'eda presence has an ongoing Islamist insurgency against Christian and Animist Sudanese. Kenya suffered a subsequent attack on the Kikambala Palace hotel in Mombasa in 2002, and probably has an ongoing Al Qa'eda presence. Al Qa'eda has also claimed a presence in Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia. Muslim (although not Islamist) militias in Somalia and its separatist province of Puntland provide a 'failed state' environment favourable to the development of Islamist terrorist and extremist cells.
- **The Caucasus and European Russia.** The separatist insurgency affecting Chechnya, Georgia, Azerbaijan and other parts of the North Caucasus was initially nationalist rather than Islamist in character, but has been infiltrated and co-opted by elements allied to Al Qa'eda. After the 1994-96 Chechen War, Chechnya briefly enjoyed autonomous self-government, but became a haven for Islamist movements and a launching pad for terrorist attacks within European Russia. This led to the second Chechen War, commencing in 1999 and still ongoing, which has seen further Islamist infiltration of Chechnya, Georgia and Azerbaijan. Incidentally, the use of Chechnya as a terrorist haven during its period of self-rule compromised – perhaps fatally – the Chechen separatist cause, which is now seen largely as a cover for Islamist terrorist activity. Numerous terrorist attacks have occurred across European Russia, carried out by groups linked to the Chechen insurgency.
- **South and Central Asia.** The *Declaration of War* of 23 February 1998 was co-signed by leaders from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and South Asia has long been a key *jihād* theatre. Afghanistan was the principal Al Qa'eda sanctuary until October 2001. A symbiosis developed between the Taliban government and numerous Islamist groups which shared facilities, and allied themselves, with Al Qa'eda. Prominent among these was Lashkar e Toiba, which since the fall of the Taliban has become Al Qa'eda's principal South Asian ally. The Provincially Administered Tribal Areas (PATA) and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) on the Afghan-Pakistan border have become a haven for Al Qa'eda, who are cooperating with Taliban remnants fighting as guerrillas in the area. Pakistan itself has experienced Islamist subversion, agitation and terrorist activity, as has neighbouring India. The ongoing separatist insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir has been infiltrated by Islamist elements and Kashmir has become a major training and administrative area for Al Qa'eda affiliates. The neighbouring republics of former Soviet Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan) and the Xinjiang Uighur region of China have also seen Islamist subversion, terrorist activity and low-level insurgency.

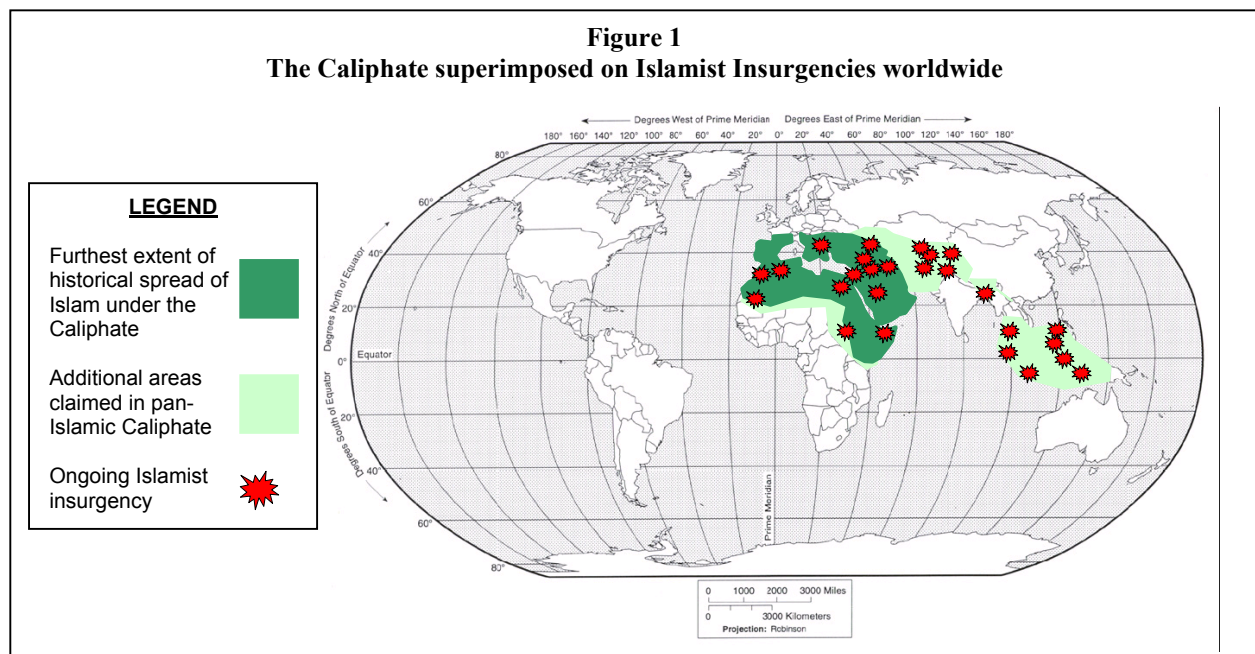
¹⁵ See Levitt, M. 2003: 'Smearred in Blood, Hezbollah Fingerprints All Over Globe' in *The Australian* 9 June 2003, and Karmon, Ely 2003: *Fight on All Fronts: Hizballah, the War on Terror, and the War in Iraq*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Washington D.C.

- Southeast Asia.** There are Islamist insurgencies in Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand, with substantial terrorist activity in these countries and in Singapore, Malaysia and Cambodia. There is also a broader pattern of Islamic militancy, Muslim separatist insurgent movements, and sectarian conflict. The principal terrorist grouping in the theatre is JI, which operates across the entire region, maintains links to Al Qa'eda and other global groups, cooperates with and co-opts local movements and grievances, and has links into other theatres including South Asia and the Middle East. As discussed above, JI has articulated a pan-Islamic agenda that aligns closely with that of Al Qa'eda. However, the two groups are better understood as allies, rather than seeing JI as an Al Qa'eda subordinate or franchise.

The first three theatres (the Americas, Western Europe and Australasia) do not have ongoing active insurgencies. Indeed, Australasia and Western Europe appear to be predominantly theatres of subversion, fund-raising and organisational development (representing Al Qa'eda's strategic hinterland) while America appears to be a primary target for terrorist activity.

The remaining six theatres, however, all include active Islamist insurgencies as well as Al Qa'eda presence and terrorist activity. Indeed, globally, there is a greater than 85% correlation between the presence of Islamist insurgency in a given theatre, and terrorist activity or Al Qa'eda presence in the same area. Thus, with the exception of the 9/11 attacks themselves, all Al Qa'eda linked terrorist activity has occurred in theatres with ongoing Islamist insurgencies. Thus, not all Islamist insurgency is linked to Al Qa'eda – but most Al Qa'eda activity occurs in areas of Islamist insurgency.

Besides this correlation with insurgency, there is a clear correlation between the geographical area of the historical Caliphate, the broader pan-Islamic Caliphate posited by Al Qa'eda, and Islamist insurgency. This is illustrated graphically at Figure 1.



Note: This map does not include Shi'a insurgencies, terrorist groups that have no known links to al-Qa'eda, or Muslim insurgencies that are predominantly separatist or nationalist in character.

This map seems to indicate that al Qa'eda is indeed executing the strategy outlined by al-Zawahiri, of re-establishing an Islamic Caliphate then using this as a springboard to extend Islamic control over the remainder of the globe. In fact, the reality turns out to be much more complex. Nonetheless, the map accurately portrays the existence of a global spread of Islamist movements seeking to overturn the world order through subversion, terrorism and insurgency.

Links between theatres

To demonstrate the existence of a global *jihad*, it is necessary to show that these dispersed Islamist terrorist and insurgent groups are linked in some way. Indeed, the links are critical because (as discussed in the next section) the global nature of the *jihad* actually resides in the links, not the individual groups themselves. There are eight basic types of links that join these theatres, and groups within them, into an aggregated pattern of global *jihad*:

- **Ideological Links.** Insurgent and terrorist groups aligned with Al Qa'eda have common ideological roots. They are broadly Salafi in orientation, and many follow variants of Saudi Wahhabism. Even groups such as the Taliban, which was Deobandi in origin, adopt a purist, authoritarian outlook. Ideologues such as Sayyid Qutb, Mawdudi and the mediaeval theologian Ibn Taymiyya are influential in their thinking. They tend to elevate the 'lesser *jihad*' (armed struggle against unbelievers) into a virtual sixth pillar of Islam. Besides Islamic influences, these groups are influenced by Communist revolutionary technique (adopting Soviet organisational methods and consciously acting as a 'vanguard party') and military theory. Many Islamist insurgents, particularly in Iraq, apply Che Guevara's concept of 'focoist insurgency', while Carlos Marighela's *Mini-Manual of the Urban Guerrilla* has also been very influential. Al Qa'eda applies 'leaderless resistance', first advanced by the American right-wing theorist Louis Freeh, to an unprecedented degree. Finally, concepts such as 'propaganda of the word' and 'propaganda of the deed', which originated with the 19th century European Anarchists, are influential. The most important element of ideological commonality is that the Islamist groups described (and illustrated on the map at Figure 1) all identify themselves with Al Qa'eda, subscribe to its strategic program, and seek a global pan-Islamic Caliphate as a prelude to remaking the Western-dominated world order.¹⁶
- **Linguistic and Cultural Links.** Because of their shared Islamic faith, *jihad* groups share Arabic as a common language.¹⁷ This allows groups from remote parts of the world to communicate effectively, train together, and share intelligence or planning resources. It also contributes to a shared consciousness – religious, political and cultural. They also share an Islamic civilisational overlay, providing a common language, social outlook and political theory for groups from diverse national cultures. Moreover, as these groups originate from specific subcultures within Islam, they share a common sense of alienation from mainstream traditions of quietism or political moderation.
- **Personal History.** The personal histories of individuals across the *jihad* movements are closely linked. Many older *mujahidin* fought together against the Soviets in Afghanistan during the 1980s, or trained together later in Afghanistan. Many key ideologues and leaders in the global *jihad* studied under Wahhabi clerics in Sa'udi Arabia and still maintain relationships with these mentors – for example, JI leader Abu Bakar Bashir maintains a close relationship with his former teacher and seeks guidance before most major decisions. The senior leadership of Al Qa'eda all share this experience, and many have links dating back to the 1970s and opposition to the Egyptian and Sa'udi governments. Later generations of *mujahidin* fought together in Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina or Chechnya. Even within one country many jihadists share a common military or personal history. For example, many JI members come from established families in the Dar'ul Islam movement (see below), went to school together, fought together in sectarian conflicts in Maluku or Sulawesi, and trained together in camps in the Philippines. Thus friendships, webs of

¹⁶ For a detailed discussion of the Islamic theorists mentioned, see Australian Government, 2004: *Transnational Terrorism: The Threat to Australia*, Canberra: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, pp. 21-24

¹⁷ The Qur'an is only read and studied in the original Arabic, and strict Islamic religious instruction worldwide is conducted predominantly in Arabic. Thus the Arabic language is a fundamental element in the Muslim worldview.

acquaintance and networks of mutual obligation stretch worldwide between and among groups. Similarly, within *jihad* theatres, groups cooperate and develop bonds of shared experience and mutual obligation.

- **Family relationships.** Unsurprisingly because of this shared history, many members of the global *jihad* movement are related to each other by birth or marriage. Often alliances between groups are cemented by marriage, as in the marriage of Usama bin Laden to the daughter of Taliban leader Mullah Omar. Similarly, many Indonesian jihadist leaders have wives from the Arabian Peninsula, particularly the Hadhramaut area on the Yemen/Oman border. Again, intermarriage is common among Southeast Asian, South Asian and Chechen *jihad* groups, cementing bonds of friendship and obligation between theatres. Sons of prominent leaders in the *jihad* movement often follow their fathers, and widows often avenge their husbands by becoming suicide bombers. This pattern has become so common in Chechnya and European Russia that such *mujahidat* (female *jihad* fighters), known as ‘Black Widows’, have been implicated in numerous attacks and have gained independent status as a distinct sub-category of *jihad* terrorist.¹⁸
- **Financial links.** Groups in different theatres frequently fund each other’s activities. For example, Al Qa’eda is suspected to have provided funding to JI for the 2002 Bali bombing, and is known to have funded terrorist groups in the Philippines. Similarly, some Islamic non-government organisations, including traditional Islamic *hawala* banking networks, charitable organisations and religious networks are used (wittingly and unwittingly) as conduits for funding between and within *jihad* theatres globally.¹⁹ Many of these non-government organisations are based in the Arabian Peninsula. Indeed, oil wealth in the Middle East has provided the bulk of terrorist and insurgent funding over time, making Arabia a central hub in the web of financial links joining dispersed movements. In addition, there is an intricate network of private patronage, financial obligation and mutual commitment that links dispersed groups and individuals in geographically dispersed regions.
- **Operational & Planning Links.** As this analysis shows, al Qa’eda is not a central headquarters or ‘high command’ for the global *jihad*. Al Qa’eda does not issue directives to ‘subordinate’ groups, tasking them to conduct insurgent or terrorist action. Rather, planning and operational tasking appears to happen through a system of sponsorship and financing, with Al Qa’eda providing funding, operational advice, targeting data and specialist expertise to allied regional and local groups. Similarly, local groups appear to gather intelligence and targeting data and share it across theatres in the *jihad*. For example, the planned JI attacks in Singapore in 2002 were foiled through the discovery of targeting data in an Al Qa’eda safe house in Afghanistan. A recent terrorist alert in the US 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 centralised 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 Qa’eda provide encouragement, tactical support, finance and intelligence for specific high-value operations.²⁰
- **Propaganda.** Al Qa’eda exploits events in *jihad* theatres across the world for propaganda purposes in its communiqués and media materials. Groups across the *jihad* contribute to a

¹⁸ See Overseas Security Advisory Council *Chechen Female Suicide Bombers*, at www.ds-osac.org

¹⁹ Australian Government, 2004: *Transnational Terrorism: The Threat to Australia*, Canberra: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, p. 43, 94.

²⁰ For detailed open-source descriptions of Al Qa’eda planning and operational methods see Bergen, Peter L. 2001: *Holy War, Inc: Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London. See also Gunaratna, Rohan 2002: *Inside Al Qa’eda*, Columbia University Press; Corbin, Jane, 2003: *The Base: Al-Qaeda and the Changing Face of Global Terror*, Pocket Books, London.

common flow of propaganda materials, supporting each other's local causes and sharing grievances. For example, the website *Jihad Unspun* is managed by a Canadian convert to Islam, and provides reportage, analysis, comment and 'spin' on issues across all theatres of the *jihad*.²¹ Al Qa'eda issues a fortnightly propaganda bulletin on its official website, *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.²² Imagery purporting to portray the oppression of Muslims in Israel/Palestine, Chechnya, Iraq and the Balkans is also used to stir up resentment and motivate *mujahidin* in other theatres. The Zarqawi network inside Iraq is also believed to maintain a media section, responsible for the production of propaganda materials including videos of the beheading of Western hostages. 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*.

- **Doctrine, Techniques and Procedures.** Terrorist and insurgent groups worldwide can access a body of techniques, doctrine and procedures that exists in hard copy, and on the Internet, primarily in Arabic but also in other languages. It includes political guidance (like PUPJI, described earlier), military manuals (like the encyclopaedic *Military Studies in the Jihad Against the Tyrants*, discovered by Police in Manchester in 2002²³), and CD-ROM and videotaped materials. In addition, Al Qa'eda publishes a fortnightly online military training manual, *Al-Battar*.²⁴ There is thus a common tactical approach across Islamist groups worldwide, and tactics that first appear in one theatre permeate across the global movement, via the Internet and doctrinal publications.

Local, Regional and Global Players

Within each country in a *jihad* theatre there are local actors, issues and grievances. Many of these have little to do with the objectives of the global *jihad* and often pre-date the *jihad* by decades or hundreds of years. 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 several hundred years. Local insurgent and terrorist groups – in some cases, little distinguishable from bandits – continue to operate in these areas, often with no connection to the global *jihad*.

But what is new about today's environment is that, because of the links described above, a new class of regional, or theatre-level actors has emerged. These groups *do* have links to the global *jihad*, often act as regional allies or affiliates of Al Qa'eda, and prey on local groups and issues to further the *jihad*. For example, in Indonesia the regional Al Qa'eda affiliate, JI, has fuelled, exacerbated and fostered sectarian conflicts in the Poso region of central Sulawesi in order to generate recruits, anti-Western propaganda, funding and grievances that can be exploited within the Southeast Asian theatre. In general, Al Qa'eda seems not to have direct dealings with local insurgent groups, but to deal primarily with its regional affiliates in each theatre.

Sitting above the regional, or theatre-level actors, are global players like Al Qa'eda. But Al Qa'eda is simply the best known of several worldwide actors. Al Qa'eda has competitors, allies and clones at the global level who would be able to step into the breach should Al Qa'eda

²¹ See www.jihadunspun.net for details.

²² Personal communication, confidential source.

²³ See <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/docs> for a series of extracts from this manual.

²⁴ See <http://www.siteinstitute.org/terroristpublications.html> for a series of translated summaries of *al-Battar*.

be destroyed tomorrow. For example, the Shi'a group Hizbullah has global reach, has worked closely with Sunni movements worldwide, sponsors approximately 80% of Palestinian terrorism (including by Sunni groups such as Hamas) and has strong links to Iran. Hizbullah is one of several groups that could replace Al Qa'eda in its niche of 'top predator', as the *jihad* evolves.²⁵ 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 Qa'eda itself.

In essence, then, this analysis indicates that there *is* a global movement, but it comprises a group of aligned independent movements, not a single unified organisation, and not all Islamist terrorism or insurgency is linked to it. 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 theatre has operational players who are able to tap into the global *jihad*, and these tend to be regional Al Qa'eda affiliates. Saudi Arabia is a central factor, with greater 'reach' than Al Qa'eda itself, although Saudi influence is a systemic effect, not necessarily based on conscious activity. As Al Qa'eda is disrupted, its clones and competitors will probably tend to move into its niche and assume some of its role.

Understanding the *Jihad* Phenomenon

So far, this paper has shown that a globalised network of Islamist groups exists, that this network tends to operate through distinct regional theatres, and that there are multi-dimensional links that connect the operations of dispersed groups across theatres. In other words, the multifarious groups and activities of Islamists – including terrorists, subversives, political activists and insurgents – in fact form a single global system. But we have also seen that this *jihad* is not a single unified movement or a hierarchical organisation. Al Qa'eda is not the headquarters for a unified worldwide organisation. Indeed, many of the links that unite the dispersed movements are personal, private, historical or ideological – not hierarchical.

In seeking to understand the *jihad*, Western analysts have often struggled to characterise it. Is it a formal organisation? Is it a mass movement? Is it a loose confederation of allies? Is it – as Peter Bergen argues – a franchised business model with centralised corporate support and autonomous regional divisions?²⁶ Is it – as others have argued – merely a myth, a creation of Western counterintelligence agencies and authoritarian governments?²⁷ The picture of the *jihad* that this paper has drawn suggests that, far from being a mythical bogeyman, the network is all too real, global in reach and unprecedented in scale. But Western models – mass movement, hierarchical organisation, business structure – are unable to fully describe it. Rather, the analysis would suggest, traditional Islamic or Middle Eastern social models may be more applicable.

Karl Jackson (during fieldwork in 1968) and this author (during fieldwork in 1995-97) have independently demonstrated that a model of traditional patron-client authority relationships is applicable to Islamic insurgent movements.²⁸ Under this model, the global *jihad* could be seen as a variant on a traditional Middle Eastern patronage network. In this construct, the *jihad*

²⁵ For a detailed discussion of Hizbullah's global reach see Karmon, Ely 2003: *Fight on All Fronts: Hizballah, the War on Terror, and the War in Iraq*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Washington D.C. and Levitt, M. 2003: 'Smearred in Blood, Hezbollah Fingerprints All Over Globe' in *The Australian* 9 June 2003

²⁶ Bergen, *op.cit.*

²⁷ See for example Chomsky, Noam, 2001: *9-11*, Seven Stories Press, N.Y.

²⁸ See Kilcullen, D.J. 2000: *Political Consequences of Military Operations in Indonesia 1945-2000*, unpublished Ph.D dissertation, University of New South Wales; and Jackson, Karl D. 1980: *Traditional Authority, Islam and Rebellion*, University of California Press, Berkeley Ca.

comprises an intricate, ramified web of dependency²⁹ and, critically, it is the patterns of patronage and dependency that are its central defining features, rather than the organisational groupings – the insurgent cells, or their activities. Many analysts have tended to see the marriage relationships, money flows, alumni relationships and sponsorship links in the *jihad* as weakly subordinate to a military core of terrorist activity. Rather, this analysis would argue, the military activity is actually subordinate, being merely one of the shared activities that the network engages in, while the core is the patronage network.

As described, we tend to apply Western models to the *jihad* – mass movement, hierarchical organisation, franchised business structure. In fact, the *jihad* appears to be more like a tribal group, an organised crime syndicate or an extended family, than it is like a military organisation. Many Bedu tribes traditionally raised camels: but the essence of the tribe was its web of traditional authority structures, family allegiances and tribal honour, not the essentially secondary activity of camel herding. Thus, the Islamist network resides in the pattern of relationships itself – *jihad* is simply one activity that the network *does*, not the network itself.

II

GLOBAL ISLAMIST INSURGENCY

The first section demonstrated the existence of a globalised Islamist *jihad* network, forming an intricate web of dependencies and patronage, and oriented (as a loose confederation of allies) toward the overthrow of the world order and its replacement with a pan-Islamic Caliphate. As this section will demonstrate, this Islamist *jihad* is best understood as a global insurgency.³⁰

Insurgency can be defined as ‘a popular movement that seeks to overthrow the *status quo* through subversion, political activity, insurrection, armed conflict and terrorism’³¹. By definition, insurgent movements are grass roots uprisings that seek to overthrow established governments or societal structures. All are popular uprisings that employ the weapons of the weak (subversion, guerrilla tactics, terrorism) against the established power of states and conventional military forces. Many, including the Islamist *jihad*, draw their footsoldiers from deprived socio-economic groups and their leadership from alienated, radicalised élites.

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.³² Western analysts tend to distinguish insurgency from terrorism as research disciplines, but for practitioners this distinction is, literally, academic. 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.

By this definition, the global *jihad* is clearly an insurgency – a popular movement that seeks to change the *status quo* through violence and subversion, while terrorism is one of its key tactics. But whereas traditional insurgencies sought to overthrow governments or social structures in one state or region, this insurgency seeks (as we have seen) 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

²⁹ I am indebted to Ehud Yaari for the term ‘a ramified web of dependency’, which he applied to Hizbullah activities in the Palestinian Territories. See Yaari, Ehud, 2004: ‘Unit 1800’ in *Jerusalem Report*, 18 October 2004.

³⁰ For a detailed discussion of this idea, see Vlahos, Michael, 2002: *Terror’s Mask: Insurgency within Islam*, Occasional Paper, Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory, Laurel Md.

³¹ This definition and the definition of terrorism that follows were developed specifically for this paper. Both were derived through synthesising several definitions used in the Western intelligence and security communities.

³² See Marks, Thomas A. 2004: ‘Ideology of Insurgency: New Ethnic Focus or Old Cold war Distortions?’ in *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol 15, No. 1 (Spring 2004) p.107

realm of Islam (*Dar al Islam*) to all human society. The stated Islamist strategy³³ is to provoke a clash between the West and Islam, generate a world Islamic front, and so mobilise Muslims – whom the Islamists see as oppressed victims – to overthrow the global *status quo*. The scale of the Islamist agenda is new, but their grievances and methods would be familiar to any insurgent in history.

The *jihad* is, therefore, a global insurgency. Al Qa'eda and similar groups feed on local grievances, integrate them into broader ideologies, and link disparate conflicts through globalised communications, finances and technology.

In this, Al Qa'eda resembles the Communist Internationale (Comintern) of the 20th century – a holding company and clearing-house for world revolution. But there is a key difference. The Comintern was a state-sponsored support organisation for local revolutions and insurgencies, but the global *jihad* is itself an insurgent movement. As described, the tools of globalisation – the Internet, globalised communications, international finance, freedom of movement – allow tactics, intelligence, personnel and finances to be shared between groups across the *jihad*. Likewise, the global insurgency exploits events in one theatre for propaganda in others³⁴. Moreover, whereas the Comintern was sponsored by the Soviet Union, the Islamist *jihad* (as discussed later) is itself a virtual state.

Thus the distinguishing feature of the Islamists is not their use of terrorism, a tactic they share with dozens of movements worldwide. Rather, it is that they represent a global insurgency against the world order, which – like all other insurgent movements – uses terrorism, besides other tactics ranging from subversion and propaganda to open warfare.

Competing Paradigms – Terrorism and Insurgency

The study of Terrorism, as an independent academic discipline, emerged in the 1970s in response to the growing phenomenon of international terrorism.³⁵ Prior to the 1970s, terrorism was seen primarily as a component within localised insurgencies. The term was used to label an insurgent as illegitimate, or portray an insurgent's methods as 'beyond the pale'.³⁶ British use of the term 'terrorists' to describe insurgents in Northern Ireland, Cyprus and Malaya served to underline this point. Indeed, in Malaya the principal counter-*insurgency* manual was entitled 'The Conduct of Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya', indicating that the two activities were seen as synonymous.³⁷ In this period, insurgency and terrorism were seen as practically the same phenomenon – the term 'Terrorism' was primarily of political and propaganda value.

But the international terrorism that emerged in the 1970s included groups such as the Baader-Meinhof Group (the Red Army Faction), the Italian Red Brigades, the Japanese Red Army and other groups with little apparent link to any mass movement or insurgency. Rather they were 'disembodied' terrorist groups comprising small cells of alienated individuals within Western society, rather than insurgent movements with definite achievable aims. In analysing these groups, a new paradigm emerged which has since been highly influential in public discourse.

³³ As expressed in statements by Osama bin Laden, particularly the *World Islamic Front Declaration of War against Jews and Crusaders*. See also comments in Davis, Paul K. and Jenkins, Brian Michael, 2004: 'A System Approach to Deterring and Influencing Terrorists' in *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 21:3-15, 2004.

³⁴ Websites like Jihad Unspun (www.jihadunspun.net) are good examples of this tactic.

³⁵ Sahni, Ajai 'Social Science and Contemporary Conflicts: The Challenge of Research on Terrorism' at *South Asia Terrorism Portal* www.satp.org accessed 10 November 2004. See also Schorkopf, F. 2003 'Behavioural and Social Science Perspectives on Political Violence' in Walter, C; Vöneky, S; Röben, V and Schorkopf, F. (eds) *Terrorism as a Challenge for National and International Law: Security versus Liberty?*, Springer Verlag, Berlin/Heidelberg.

³⁶ Vlahos, Michael, 2002: *Terror's Mask: Insurgency within Islam*, Occasional Paper, Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory, Laurel Md.

³⁷ See Federation of Malaya, 1958: *The Conduct of Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya*, 3rd Edition, Kuala Lumpur.

Under this paradigm, 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 equally 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 we have sought to apprehend Osama bin Laden, and some commentators regard the failure to catch him as evidence of failure in prosecuting the war. Likewise, Australia’s response to the Bali Bombing of 2002 has been primarily focussed on ‘bringing the terrorists to justice’ – hence the central role of police agencies in a case-based, legal evidence-based approach.

The insurgency paradigm is completely different. Under this approach, insurgents are regarded as representative of deeper issues or grievances within society. We seek to defeat insurgents primarily through ‘winning the hearts and minds’ of the broader population, a process that by necessity often involves compromise and negotiation. We regard insurgents’ methods as unacceptable, but their grievances are often seen as legitimate, provided they are pursued peacefully. This is why mainstream society often accepts insurgents who renounce violence but seek the same objectives through political means – individuals like Nelson Mandela and Gerry Adams. Similarly, under this paradigm, we see insurgents as using violence within a carefully 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 key objective is to defeat or marginalise the insurgent’s strategy, rather than to ‘apprehend the perpetrators’ of specific acts.

Figure 2 – Terrorism and Insurgency as Competing Paradigms

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

The insurgency paradigm provides a better mental model for the current conflict than does the terrorism paradigm. Indeed, current actions in the War on Terrorism 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, containment of North Korea and Iran) appear unrelated to an anti-terrorism agenda and are thus viewed with suspicion by some. However, if viewed through the lens of counterinsurgency, these actions make perfect sense. They fit neatly into three streams of classical counterinsurgency: pacification, winning hearts and minds, and the denial of sanctuary and external sponsorship.

For example, the Iraq campaign seeks to re-structure the milieu that created the *jihad*, by removing underlying anti-democratic tendencies that cause Islamist unrest (pacification). It also addresses the principal grievances raised by Al Qa'eda in its *Declaration of War* – which mostly related to the sanctions regime against Saddam's Iraq (winning hearts and minds)³⁸. Action against Iraq also allowed the removal of US troops from Saudi Arabia (another key Al Qa'eda grievance), and sent a key message to state sponsors of terrorism (denial of sanctuary and sponsorship). Moreover, at a strategic level, the campaign in Iraq has allowed Western forces to fight the *jihad* on ground of our choosing, within the Caliphate. This has given the West the strategic initiative – jihadists are focusing on Iraq, not on attacking the West directly. One might argue with the competence or wisdom of the Iraq enterprise, or the honesty with which its objectives were communicated to the public, as many analysts and political opponents of the United States have done. Nevertheless, Iraq undeniably fits better into a counterinsurgency paradigm than a traditional counter-terrorist one. The same applies to action against North Korea (denial of sanctuary and sponsorship – in this case transfer of nuclear and chemical technology to Islamists)³⁹ and other apparently disparate actions in the campaign.

If the War on Terrorism is a global insurgency, then the counterinsurgency paradigm (which, as noted above, includes action against terrorism as a subset of insurgency) is a better mental model for the war than is counter-terrorism. Indeed, the key to defeating global *jihad* may not lie in traditional counter-terrorism (police work, intelligence, special operations, or security measures) at all. Instead, counterinsurgency theory may provide the most useful insights. As explained below (in Part IV) a counterinsurgency approach would generate a subtly, but substantially different range of actions in the War on Terrorism.

Counterinsurgency *Redux*

Although counterinsurgency is more appropriate than counterterrorism in this conflict, traditional counterinsurgency techniques from the 1960s cannot simply be applied to today's problems in a simplistic or mechanistic fashion. This is because counterinsurgency, in its 'classical' form, is optimised to defeat insurgency in one country, not to fight a global insurgency. The 'best practice' counterinsurgency techniques, which emerged from the 'Wars of National Liberation' of the 1950s–1970s, attacked insurgency through unified military, intelligence, political, socio-economic, 'hearts and minds' and security measures. For example, pacification programs in classical counterinsurgency 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 (political, military, social and economic) in the hands of a single 'Supremo' is recognised as a key element.⁴⁰

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 classical counterinsurgency in the Americas, Africa and Asia has been closely tied to improvements in governance, integrated administrative systems and joint inter-agency action.

³⁸ See Appendix A.

³⁹ On 10 Dec 02, Spanish naval forces intercepted a North Korean ship smuggling Scud-C missiles to Yemen. Actions against North Korean exports of missile technology have since been stepped up through the multi-national Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI). See <http://www.state.gov/t/np/c10390.htm> for details.

⁴⁰ See Hoffman, Bruce 2004: *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq*, Rand, Santa Monica, for a discussion of this concept in relation to counterinsurgency in Malaya and Cyprus.

At the global level, no world government exists with the power to integrate the actions of independent nations to the extremely close degree required by traditional counterinsurgency theory, nor can regional counterinsurgency programs be closely enough aligned to block all insurgent manoeuvre. This is particularly true when the enemy – as in this case – is not a Maoist-style mass rural movement, but a largely urban-based insurgency operating in small cells and teams with an extremely low ‘tactical signature’ in the urban clutter of globalised societies. In today’s international system, a unified global approach – even only in those areas directly affected by Al-Qa’eda sponsored *jihad* – would be intensely problematic. It would demand cooperation far beyond anything yet achieved between diverse states.

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.⁴¹ While this division persists, under the international system as currently constituted, any national 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 against Islamist insurgents or their state sponsors. It would tend to 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 – in its classical form, with a single Supremo coordinating actions – is problematic when applied at the global level.

Similarly, classical counterinsurgency seeks to deny enemy sanctuaries, prevent infiltration into theatre, 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 described above). This allows geographical sanctuary for insurgents, while international flows of information and finances provide ‘cyber-sanctuaries’ (like the Al Qa’eda Internet presence described above) where insurgents can operate.

So a globalised 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 globalised insurgency.

II

A SYSTEMS MODEL OF INSURGENCY

The last section argued that global insurgency renders the traditional counter-terrorism paradigm largely irrelevant, but that it has strained the classical counterinsurgency paradigm. This section re-appraises counterinsurgency through the emerging science of Complexity.

Systems Thinking

The modern understanding of war is underpinned by systems thinking. This has been increasingly influential since the 1920s, when Tukhachevskii proposed the theory of ‘deep operations’ (*glubokaia operatsiia*)⁴², which viewed friendly and enemy forces as competing

⁴¹ See Kagan, Robert 2003: *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order*, Knopf, NY. See also Kagan, Robert 2004: *America and the World: The Crisis of Legitimacy*, 21st Bonython Lecture, 9 November 2004 at www.cis.org.au

⁴² For a detailed discussion of Tukhachevskii see Glantz, David M, 1991: *Soviet Military Operational Art: In Pursuit Of Deep Battle*, Frank Cass And Company, London.

systems, and sought to dislocate the enemy at the systemic level. Indeed, familiar concepts like *Blitzkrieg*, strategic bombing, air-land battle, manoeuvre warfare and effects-based operations are all systems approaches to warfare.

Classical counterinsurgency is also a systems approach. It seeks to identify key processes in an insurgent system, and coordinate countermeasures at the systemic level. The most sophisticated example of classical counterinsurgency, under Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara during Vietnam, used highly developed quantitative statistical analysis. Led by an Office of Systems Analysis, this approach broke down the insurgent system into component processes, analysed each component, and reassembled the components into a net assessment of progress. This (as will be seen) was a highly Cartesian approach to systems analysis, and proved incapable of handling the complexity of the insurgency.⁴³

But a parallel development – the emerging science of Complexity – has created a new understanding of systems and a new language for describing systems behaviour. Counterinsurgency is a field in which Complexity theory offers fresh possibilities. It is a complex, problematic form of conflict that straddles the boundaries between warfare, government, social stability and moral acceptability. Hence, it has tended to defy the Cartesian, reductionist analysis traditionally applied to conventional warfare.⁴⁴ The new understanding of complex systems might be the tool we need to overcome this problem.

This paper is not the first to suggest that the war on terrorism is an insurgency, or to propose analysing insurgency through complexity theory. Several papers have appeared in the academic literature and within the intelligence and strategic policy communities, including complexity-based systems analyses of single-state insurgencies⁴⁵. The new insight in this paper is that the War on Terrorism, as a *global* counterinsurgency, demands reappraisal of classical counterinsurgency theory, which was based on Cartesian systems analysis of insurgency in a single state. Because complexity theory provides new tools for systems analysis, it may provide a new approach to countering globalised insurgency.

Insurgencies as Systems

A system is a set of related or interacting variables that function together for a specific purpose. In the most general sense, a system is a group of independent but interrelated elements comprising a unified whole⁴⁶, a good description both of human societies, and the warlike ‘system states’ within societies, which we know as irregular wars.

Counterinsurgency theory, as described, has long understood that insurgencies are social systems. Complexity theory takes this understanding further by showing that social systems (and hence, insurgencies) are *organic* systems. That is, social systems share characteristics with living systems like cells, organisms or ecosystems. They comprise interdependent parts, inputs, processes and outputs, which exist in a pattern of relationships that define the extent of the

⁴³ See McMaster, H.R. 1998: *Dereliction of Duty: Johnson, MacNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that led to Vietnam*, Harper Perennial, NY. See also Kelly J.D. and Kilcullen D.J., 2004 ‘Effects Based Operations: A Critique’, forthcoming in *Australian Army Journal* Vol 2 No. 1, June 2004.

⁴⁴ Reductionist, or Cartesian, analysis approaches complex problems by reducing them to their component parts, seeking to understand each part, then reassembling the parts to produce an overall analytical result. The assumption is that the characteristics of the whole can be inferred from the characteristics of the parts, and valid deductions can be drawn about the whole by examining the parts. Military analysis methods – most notably the Military Appreciation Process and the Tactical Decision-Making Process – are highly Cartesian.

⁴⁵ See Coyle R.G and Millar C.J. 1996: ‘A Methodology for Understanding Military Complexity: The Case of the Rhodesian Counter-Insurgency Campaign’ in *Small Wars and Insurgencies* Vol 7, No 3 (Winter 1996) pp. 360-378.

⁴⁶ This definition is based on the definition proposed by the Princeton University cognitive sciences laboratory at <http://www.cogsci.princeton.edu/cgi-bin/webwn?stage=1&word=system>

system and work together for the whole. So the branch of Complexity theory dealing with ‘living’ systems is an appropriate start point for a complex systems analysis of insurgency.

Organic systems (including social systems like insurgencies) are ‘complex and adaptive. Their behaviour results from the interactions and relationships between the entities that make up the *system in focus* and the *environment*, [that is,] the larger system of which the “system in focus” is a part. For example, the body is composed of subsystems such as the nervous system and cardio-vascular system, while at the same time it is part of an environment with an ecosystem and a social system.’⁴⁷

Importantly, the argument is not that insurgencies are *like* organic systems, or that organic systems are useful analogies for understanding insurgency. Rather, the argument is that insurgencies *are* organic systems, in which individual humans and organisational structures function like organisms and cell structures in other organic systems. Insurgent systems share many features with other organic systems:

- **Insurgencies are social systems.** They form in a society, when pre-existing elements (grievances, individuals, weapons, and infrastructure) organise themselves in new patterns of interaction involving rebellion, terrorism, and other insurgent activity. The *elements* in an insurgency are pre-existing, but the *pattern* is new – like waves in water, the insurgency resides in the pattern of interaction rather than the elements themselves. Thus, though we tend to ‘objectify’ insurgencies as if they were separate from parent societies, this is not the case. Rather, insurgency is a ‘system state’ – a particular arrangement of pre-existing elements. It has no existence independent of its parent society, any more than a wave has an existence independent of the water in which it moves.
- **Insurgencies are energetically open but organisationally closed.** Insurgencies are open to energy flows from the environment. That is, matter and energy flow into the system as inputs like recruits, sympathisers, weapons, grievances, and doctrine. These inputs are transformed within the insurgent movement (through processes like indoctrination, intelligence collection, operations, and logistics) and emerge as outputs: casualties, social dislocation, destruction, further grievances and media coverage. Like other organic systems, insurgencies maintain a distinct organisational boundary with their environment. Insurgent movements are networks composed of nodes (individuals, units, locations) and links (communications channels, causal linkages, demographic and spatial connections). There are detectable boundaries between the movement and its environment. Successful insurgent systems exhibit *homeostasis*, the ability to maintain relatively stable internal conditions despite fluctuations in the external environment. Again, this is characteristic of organic systems – a healthy human body maintains a stable core temperature, whatever the weather outside.
- **Insurgencies are self-organising systems.** In insurgent systems, outputs from one system element become inputs for another. For example, some groups feed off the anguish and dislocation created by other groups; the outputs of the overall insurgency become inputs for counterinsurgent action. The existence of one system element allows the existence of another, and *vice versa*. This interdependence creates *autopoiesis*, where ‘the function of each component is to participate in the production or transformation of other components in the network’⁴⁸. The circular causal relationships – ‘feedback loops’ or ‘vicious circles’ – generated by this interdependence provide the driving force that maintains the insurgency.
- **Insurgencies are non-equilibrium, dissipative structures.** Insurgencies are non-equilibrium systems that exist on the ‘edge of chaos’. That is, they depend on inputs of

⁴⁷ See www.changezone.co.uk/glossary/

⁴⁸ Capra, F. 1996: *The Web of Life: A new scientific understanding of Living Systems*, Anchor, N.Y. p 95-99.

energy and matter from the external environment. Deny these inputs, and the feedback loops driving the insurgency lose energy, until the overall insurgency breaks down. Insurgencies are *dissipative structures* that depend for stability on a throughput of energy. The more energy (violence, grievances, insurgent action) circulating in the system, the more stable it becomes, and the less effective countermeasures become. Once energy is drained from the system it becomes chaotic, its structure begins to collapse, inroads can be made into disrupting it, and the underlying drivers can be addressed.

- **Insurgencies are greater than the sum of their parts.** Like other organic systems, insurgencies exhibit *emergence* – characteristics and behaviours that emerge at a given level of analysis, which could not be predicted by analysing the component parts. Emergence is a common qualitative property of systems. For example, the taste of sugar emerges at the molecular level: analysing the component atoms (carbon, hydrogen, and oxygen) gives no clue to the taste of the sugar those atoms form. This means that ‘stakeholder analyses’, beloved of intelligence operators and military planners, provide some but not all the answers. It also explains why Cartesian approaches to insurgency (like McNamara’s approach in Vietnam) often fail – analysing the parts gives an incomplete understanding of the whole.
- **Insurgent theatres are ecosystems.** A theatre of irregular warfare is an ecosystem in which many groups and entities interact (like organisms in a biological ecosystem); outputs from one become inputs for another and contribute to emergent systems behaviour. For example, as discussed, some groups in a theatre feed off outputs from others, using these as inputs for their own purposes. This creates feedback loops that drive insurgent theatres in particular directions, regardless of the subjective intentions of local groups. So, localised groups who subjectively compete can actually be ‘cooperating’ at the systemic level. For example, until recently, Al Qa’eda and the Zarqawi network of *Tawhid wal Jihad* competed for the allegiance of Sunni insurgents in Iraq. Although Zarqawi and Al Qa’eda competed and disliked each other, their actions were mutually reinforcing at the ‘ecosystem’ level, in terms of overall effects.⁴⁹
- **Insurgent theatres have an adaptational, evolutionary dynamic.** In insurgent theatres, a ‘survival of the fittest’ dynamic emerges. Because multiple groups compete for control over population and terrain, adaptability in changing circumstances is at a premium. As discussed later, the most dangerous insurgents in a theatre may not be the strongest, but rather the most adaptable, the best able to leverage an asymmetric advantage – hence the most survivable. And we know from systems analysis of biological adaptation that the more diverse a system’s elements are, the greater its ability to adapt.

Elements of the Insurgent System

Based on this model, insurgencies as organic systems comprise seven elements:

- **Nodes.** Nodes are physical components and structures. They include individual fighters, units, cells, sympathisers and intelligence assets; social groups like tribes or clans, or infrastructure. These may or may not be open to counterinsurgency measures.
- **Links.** Links define patterns of interaction in the insurgency. They include communication channels (Internet, satellite, radio, couriers), causal links (where actions by one element cause actions by others) demographic or geographic links (spatial or ethnic patterns within an insurgency). Some links are internal, others connect the insurgency to external support.

⁴⁹ *Tawhid Wal Jihad* (Monotheism and *Jihad*), the group headed by Abu Musa al Zarqawi, pledged allegiance to Usama Bin Laden on 17 October 2004 and changed its name to *Tanzim Qaedat Al-Jihad Fi Bilad Al-Rafidayn* (Organization of al-Qaeda for Jihad in the Land of the two rivers [i.e. Iraq]).

Because insurgencies are networks, links are critical. Interdict the links, and the insurgency's energy, structure and resilience dissipate. Again, some links are vulnerable; others are not.

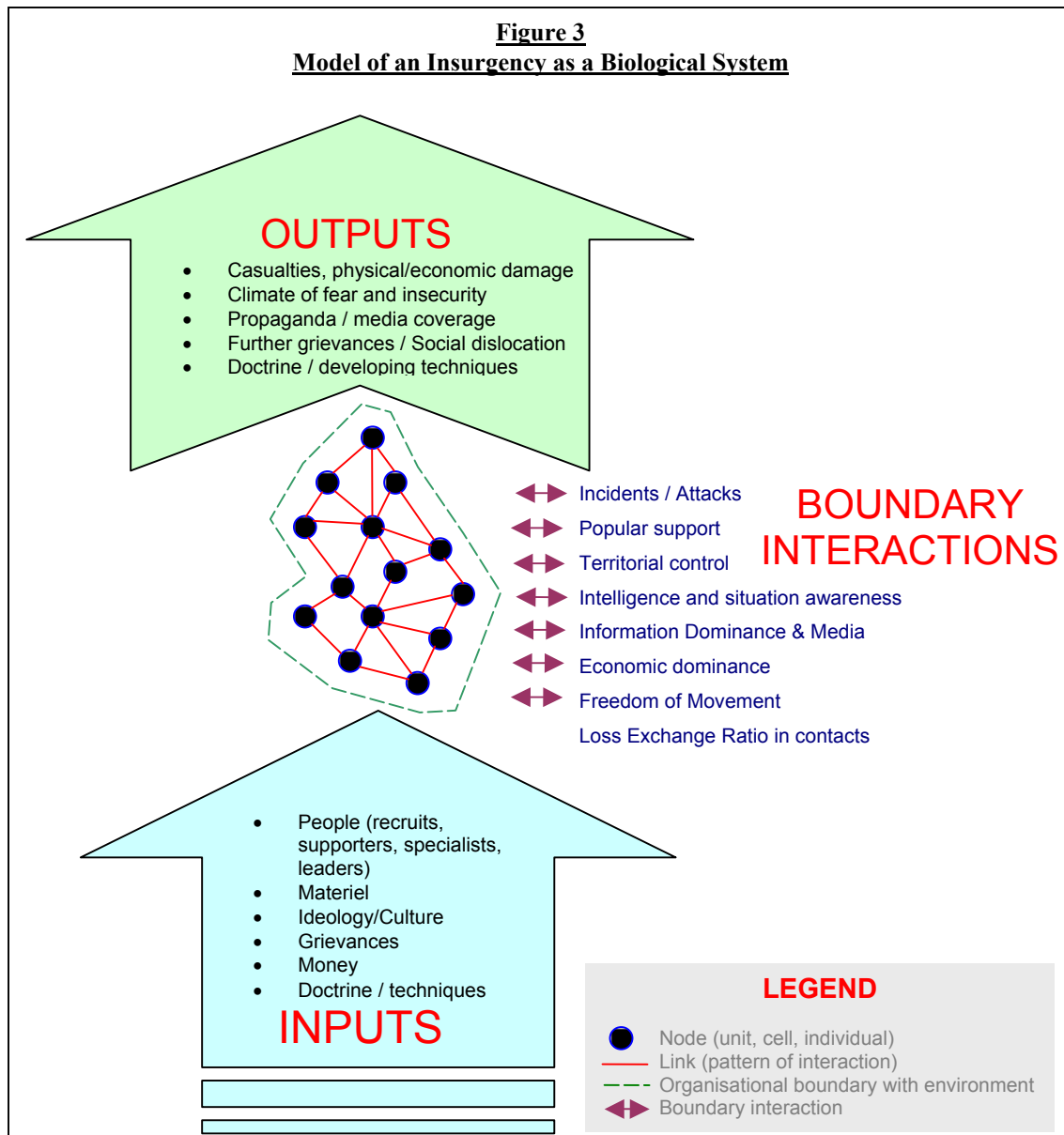
- **Boundary.** The insurgency's boundary defines the limit between the insurgent movement and its environment. This boundary may be permeable, but it is distinct – there is a definite 'inside' and 'outside' to an insurgent movement. Because the insurgency depends on energy and matter from the environment, attacking the boundary may deny energy to the insurgency and ultimately cause it to collapse.
- **Sub-systems.** Insurgent systems may include sub-systems. Within a movement, there may be logistics, intelligence, propaganda, recruitment, planning and operational subsystems, among others. These are 'systems within systems', and the thousands upon thousands of nested interactions of subsystems with the parent insurgency are key elements in its strength.
- **Boundary interactions.** Boundary interactions are the day-to-day events in the insurgency. These include incidents, attacks, popular support, territorial control, intelligence collection, information and media dominance, economic dominance, freedom of movement, and loss exchange ratios in combat. Because these are the physical manifestations of the insurgent system, they tend to receive the greatest attention from security forces – hence, most traditional means of attacking insurgencies focus on denying or disrupting boundary interactions. This is akin to treating the symptoms of an illness and, just as microbes develop drug resistance, so insurgents evolve and adapt to deal with these forms of attack.
- **Inputs.** Inputs are the energy and matter the insurgency takes up from its environment. These include people (recruits, leaders, supporters, specialists) and materiel (ammunition, weapons, money, medical supplies). Grievances, ideology, religious belief, doctrine and tactics, techniques and procedures (TTP) are also inputs. Denying inputs is a method of reducing energy in the system, making it easier to suppress.
- **Outputs.** Outputs are waste products or results that emerge from insurgent action. These include casualties, physical destruction, social and economic dislocation, new grievances, propaganda or media coverage, and techniques that emerge as insurgents learn by experience. Choking off the outputs of an insurgent group may or may not affect that group, but may deny those outputs to other groups that would otherwise feed off them. Hence, at the 'ecosystem' level, choking outputs can weaken an insurgency. This model of an insurgency as a biological system is shown graphically in Figure 3 (on the next page).

Systems Dynamics in the Global Islamist Insurgency

As argued, the War on Terrorism can be understood as a global Islamist insurgency. One insight arising from the organic systems model of insurgency is that the global *jihad* exhibits a series of nested interactions – systems within systems. For example, the global *jihad* comprises linked but interdependent *jihads* in Southeast Asia, the Middle East and South/Central Asia including the Caucasus. Each regional *jihad*, in turn, comprises linked but interdependent localised insurgencies – for example, the Middle Eastern *jihad* includes insurgencies in Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and others. Each local insurgency is driven partly by local issues, partly by factors in the broader *jihad*. Each local insurgency comprises linked but interdependent insurgent movements – for example, the Iraqi insurgency comprises Kurdish, Sunni, Shi'a, Ba'athist and tribal groups. Each insurgent movement, in turn, comprises linked but separate cells, units, factions or local groups. For example, the Sunni insurgency in Iraq includes anti-Saddam Sunni nationalists, former regime loyalists, elements with links to the Muslim Brotherhood, tribal groups motivated by loyalty to local sheikhs, criminal elements and

foreign fighters linked to Al Qa'eda or Zarqawi. Many patterns within the *jihad* are repeated, on different scales, at several levels of analysis – giving the *jihad* fractal-like characteristics.

At each level of analysis– local, district, national, regional, global – there is emergence, as new characteristics and behaviours appear. Adaptation and evolution occur across and within all levels and regions. For example, bomb-making techniques in Iraq appear to originate from Palestinian and Chechen groups, as well as homegrown Iraqi techniques. Methods used in Iraq have also proliferated to other regions and groups, through a body of jihadist doctrine and techniques distributed on the Internet and through electronic communication. Hence, members of the global *jihad* have a distinct tactical ‘style’– so while individual attacks may not be predictable, overall preferences and approaches are detectable.



As Marc Reuel Gerecht has argued, the ‘foundation myth of al Qaeda [is] that a transnational body of Muslim militants can effectively wage holy war against the United States without having a Muslim state grant it safe harbor’.⁵⁰ Since the destruction of its Taliban-sponsored safe haven in Afghanistan, the leaders of the global *jihad* have been putting this concept to the test, attempting to function as an insurgent pseudo-state. Although Al Qa’eda does not use the

⁵⁰ Gerecht, Marc Reuel ‘The Long, Hard Slog’ *On the Issues*, American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 14 November 2003. See http://www.aei.org/include/pub_print.asp?pubID=19473

term itself, in essence the global *jihad* represents a federated virtual state.⁵¹ The notion of ‘parallel hierarchies’ or ‘insurgent states’ is central to classical counterinsurgency.⁵² Indeed, Sir Robert Thompson’s influential view that a counterinsurgency is a ‘competition for government’ with an insurgent ‘shadow state’ is based on this idea.⁵³ But in a globalised insurgency, the insurgents’ parallel hierarchy is a *virtual* state: it controls no territory or population, but exercises control over distributed systems that, taken together, represent many elements of traditional state power. Moreover, it is not a single hierarchy but a federated network of linked systems that function as an ‘insurgent state’ and compete with world governments. This is clear if we consider the global *jihad* using a national power model⁵⁴, as in Figure 4.

The Islamist virtual state, like the insurgent state of classical counterinsurgency, engages in a ‘competition for government’: it must be defeated through measures addressing all elements of national power. But unlike the traditional insurgent state, the Islamists ultimately cannot offer the material benefits of statehood – protection, stability, and economic prosperity – and thus cannot compete with nation-states for the long-term allegiance of uncommitted populations. Conversely, the Islamists are not subject to many restrictions affecting nation-states, giving them greater short-term tactical freedom of manoeuvre.

A Cold War analogy is appropriate. In classical counterinsurgency, competition for government is a binary struggle between the insurgents and the government. As described, at the global level, there is no ‘world government,’ so many classical counterinsurgency measures do not apply. But that does not make the conflict unwinnable. During the Cold War, a fanatical ideology aiming at world revolution was defeated by a diverse collection of states that all valued pluralism and liberty, despite individual differences. Competition for global domination between Communism and the West did not require a world government. But it did require leadership from the US, and long-term support from the rest of the world’s democracies. Such leadership and support are equally necessary here.

Figure 4 <u>A National Power Model of the Islamist Virtual State</u>		
<u>Element of National Power</u> ⁵⁵	<u>Traditional Nation-State</u>	<u>Islamist Virtual State</u>
Geography	Exercises exclusive legal and administrative control over a definite geographical territory. Is vulnerable to attacks on its territory.	Controls no territory, but exists in the interstices between territories controlled by nation-states: tribal areas, failed states, un-administered areas.
Resources	Exercises control or outright ownership over the natural resources within its territory, enables its citizens to access these resources, trades resources with other states and exploits them for economic and military power.	Controls no natural resources but exploits flows of international resources, through the international banking system, Islamic <i>hawala</i> banks and charitable funds. Acts to affect the flow and trade of natural resources (e.g. oil).
Population	Derives strength from the size, composition and skills base of the population (of all nations) within its territory, and of its citizens throughout the world. Must protect its population.	Derives strength from the size, composition and skills base of its adherents, regardless of where they reside. Must protect key nodes, but has no requirement to protect an overall population.
Economic	Manages and develops a national economy that	Controls no national economy but accesses economic benefits

⁵¹ I am indebted for this insight to Dr Mike Brennan, Scientific Advisor to the Australian Army.

⁵² See Kilcullen, DJ, 2000, *Political Implications of Military Operations in Indonesia 1945-2000*, unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of New South Wales, for a discussion of this concept in relation to the Islamic insurgency Darul Islam, the forerunner of Jema’ah Islamiyah.

⁵³ See, among other works, Thompson, Sir Robert 1966: *Defeating Communist Insurgency: Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*, Chatto and Windus, London.

⁵⁴ I am indebted, for the idea of using a national power model to analyse the virtual Islamist state, to Colonel Don Freeman, Director of Combat Development, Australian Army headquarters.

⁵⁵ There are many models of national power. This is not the model taught in Australian war colleges, but is used because it allows a fuller breakdown of relevant factors. For a fuller discussion of the model used, see Jablonsky, D, 1997: ‘National Power’ in *Parameters*, Spring 1997, pp.34-54.

	enables a standard of living for the population, funds government, finances military power and supports trade relationships with other states. Is vulnerable to attacks on its economy.	through its adherents' wealth. Cannot guarantee economic benefits for its people, but is free of the responsibility and vulnerability of having an economy.
Political	Seeks to maintain effective government through political unity, legitimate exercise of state power, and political institutions that maintain and enhance its stability.	Seeks to influence local, regional and global politics through insurgent action. Has no requirement to govern a territory, but enforces political unity and coherence on its followers.
Military	Maintains regular armed forces to defend its territory and population, and further its interests.	Maintains irregular forces to further its interests. Has little need to defend territory or population.
Psychological	Maintains national will and morale, political resilience, national character and integration. Acts to maximise the nation's psychological determination in pursuit of its objectives.	Maintains morale, determination and resilience through ideology based on (1) specific interpretations of Islam and (2) a geopolitical analysis of power relationships between the Islamic and non-Islamic worlds. Loses and gains adherents continually.
Informational	Maintains communications and informational presence on the national, regional and global levels. Maximises the effectiveness of its communications to further its interests.	Maintains informational presence through world media, internationalised communications and the Internet. Uses informational power to further its propaganda aims.

Also, as in most counterinsurgencies, it is critical to defeat the insurgency without radicalising or alienating the population to the point that the security forces become recruiting agents for the insurgents. Hence a 'battle of ideas' for the hearts and minds of the world population is central to the War on Terrorism. Fortunately liberal democracies have significant power in this area, albeit there is a need to coordinate this power more effectively to counteract the Islamist message.

The role of Culture

Cultures are common assumptions and norms about the nature of the world, and how things should be. Culture develops in ethnic groups, organisations and clan or tribal structures. In systems terms, cultures provide protocols: agreed patterns that enhance the efficiency of system interactions. Thus cultures form links, and important individuals, locations and beliefs form cultural nodes in a system.

In an insurgent ecosystem, numerous cultures are present. These include the national or ethnic culture of the country where the insurgency takes place, the tribal or regional subcultures within it, the urban and rural cultural structures, and – most importantly – the organisational cultures of insurgent movements and counterinsurgency forces. In globalised insurgency, all these cultures are still present but there is also a cultural pattern relating to the overall *jihad* at the systemic level. So, in any *jihad* theatre where members of the global insurgency are present, the behaviour of certain insurgent or terrorist groups will be conditioned by local cultural norms, while others will act according to cultural patterns established in the global *jihad*.

This is a key source of conflict between insurgent groups – for example, local groups may disagree with methods adopted by 'globalised' jihadists. The Beslan School siege of September 2004 is a good example of this. While some Chechen groups supported the attack, there was also condemnation by several local Chechen separatist groups. Similarly, in 2002 the relationship between the Taliban in Afghanistan – a pseudo-conventional force that fought using light-cavalry tactics – and Al Qa'eda came under strain due to disagreement over methods. By 2004 the original Taliban had undergone cultural evolution under the pressure of coalition counterinsurgency operations, while Al Qa'eda had pulled back into a training and advisory role.⁵⁶ As a final example, when the author was living with members of *Negara Islam Indonesia* in West Java in 1996 conducting fieldwork for a Ph.D on insurgency, the group underwent a cultural shift. Some members joined *Jema'ah Islamiyah* (part of the global *jihad*)

⁵⁶ See Grau, Lester W. 2004: 'Guerrillas, Terrorists and Intelligence Analysis' in *Military Review*, July-August 2004, p 42 ff.

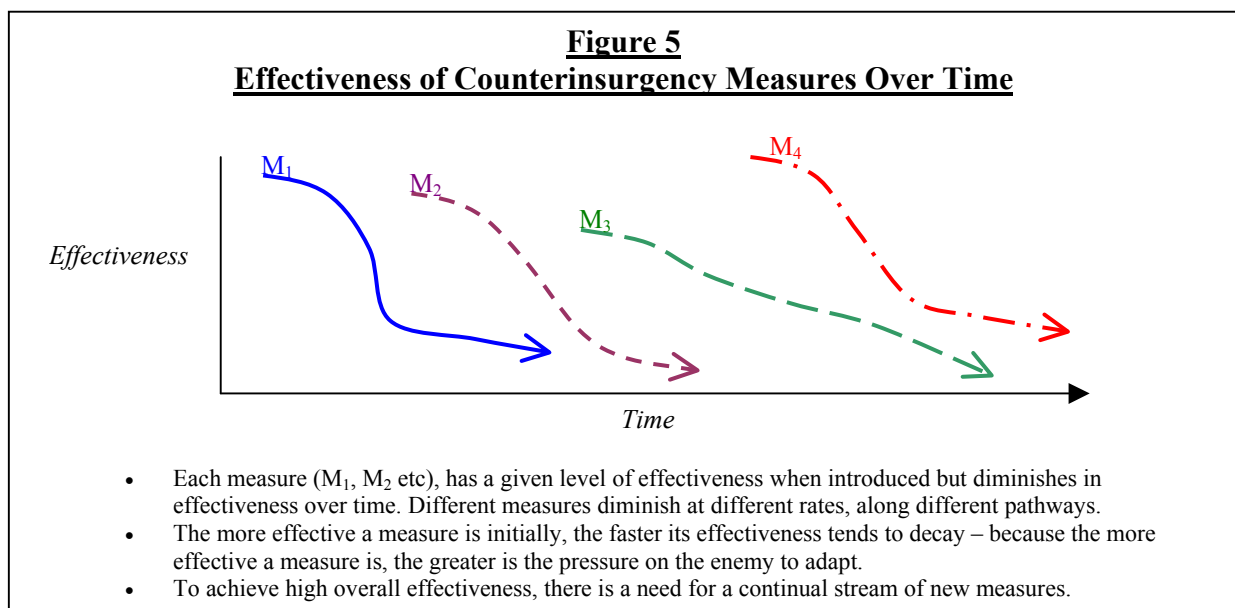
and took on a new cultural outlook. Others preferred a regional separatist approach based on their traditional allegiance to *Dar'ul Islam*, a local guerrilla group active in the 1960s. This cultural shift resulted in intense disagreement and even bloodshed between former allies.⁵⁷

As discussed later, security forces can use culture to develop leverage in insurgent theatres and disrupt insurgent systems. But this requires excellent linguistic and cultural competence.

Adaptation and Evolution in Insurgent Groups

As noted, the most common method of attacking an insurgency is to target its boundary interactions or 'symptoms'. This *may* be effective, but is unlikely to succeed unless combined with measures that address the overall insurgency at the systemic level. As discussed, boundary interaction attacks impose evolutionary pressure on the insurgents. Weak or unlucky cells and individuals are destroyed; but the insurgency learns and adapts to the challenge. At the systemic level, the overall insurgency becomes stronger.

One solution is 'operational surprise', where measures are introduced to which the insurgents cannot adapt in time to survive. Changing political strategies, altering tactical methods, or varying operational patterns are ways of seeking operational surprise. Surprise tends to be more effective than shock because it seizes the initiative, forcing insurgents to react to security forces.



But, to be effective, this demands constant innovation in new measures, as shown in Figure 5.

Another method is 'operational shock', a manoeuvre concept that involves dislocating the insurgency at the systemic level, making it cease operating as a system so that components can be destroyed piecemeal. In practice this is problematic because much insurgent infrastructure is hidden or invulnerable to military manoeuvre. Moreover, as noted, insurgents are federations of loosely allied (even competing) local groups. Thus, insurgents are more resistant to operational shock than regular forces, which have C2 systems and hierarchies that can be readily attacked.

So insurgencies are not only complex systems, they are (like other organic systems) complex *adaptive* systems. They are relatively invulnerable to operational shock, so most conventional manoeuvres (which use operational shock as a defeat mechanism) are ineffective. They are more vulnerable to surprise, but this demands continuous innovation: there will never be a

⁵⁷ See Kilcullen, op. cit. and Kilcullen D.J. 2002 'The Indonesian Approach to Counterinsurgency' in *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution of Australia* 2002.

single optimal solution. Indeed, the more effective a measure is, the faster it will be obsolete, because it will force the enemy to adapt more quickly. Ruth Margolies Beitler, analysing the Palestinian intifada in 1995, argued that ‘the repression of a group’s most effective tactic... will cause an increase in overall conflict activity... Sanctions which can be effective at the outset of violence may lose their deterrent effect over time.’⁵⁸ We find these conclusions intuitively correct, having watched insurgent groups adapt at first hand in East Timor and Bougainville. The same conclusions are supported by current reporting from Iraq, and by substantial academic research.

Another insight is that, in insurgent theatres, the most dangerous group is not necessarily the largest or best armed. Rather, the most adaptive groups are the most dangerous. For example, there are numerous *jihad* groups in the Philippines. But the largest groups may not be the most dangerous. Rather, groups with a high proportion of Arabic linguists, Internet communications, and personal connections to the Middle Eastern *jihad* may be better able to tap into the Islamist virtual state. These groups may prove most adaptable, hence most dangerous in the long term.

Attack methods in counterinsurgency

Given the systems elements shown in Figure 3, there is a finite number of ways to attack insurgencies. One can (1) attack nodes, (2) interdict links, (3) disrupt the boundary, (4) suppress boundary interactions, (5) choke off inputs, (6) deny outputs, or (7) use a combination of methods. Because of the adaptational dynamic, variety and continuous development of new methods are needed. Attacks that target a combination of elements simultaneously are more effective, since they give less opportunity for insurgents to adapt in response. A historical survey demonstrates that most successful counterinsurgencies use a variety of methods, and coordinated efforts against multiple elements in the insurgent system are indeed most effective. Figure 6 summarises the data, with attack types coded according to the list above.

Figure 6 Summary of Historical Case Studies			
Insurgency	Counterinsurgency methods	Types of attack	Comments
Malaya 1948-60	Resettlement program Use of surrendered enemy personnel (SEPs) Special forces deep penetration patrols Framework security operations Key infrastructure protection Hearts and Minds Program Political concessions to independence	3, 4, 5 1, 2 1,2,3 4,5,6 4 5,6 5	Measures covered a good spread of methods. These were initially ill coordinated but improved dramatically with central coordination. Socio-political measures became effective once security measures began to ‘bite’.
Darul Islam, Indonesia 1948-62	Pagar betis (civilian cordon operations) Village Defence Organisation P4K (pacification) strategy Civic action programs Decapitation strikes RPKAD deep penetration patrols Infrastructure/route security ops	2,3,4,5,6 3,4,5 1,2,3,4,5 5,6 1 1,2 2,3,4	Measures addressed most areas, with a preference for coopting civil populations, harsh collective punishments and decapitation strikes. Most successful in 1959-62 when integrated at theatre level.

⁵⁸ Margolies Beitler, Ruth 1995: ‘The Intifada: Palestinian Adaptation to Israeli Counterinsurgency Tactics’ in *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol 7 No 2 (Summer 1995) p. 69.

Vietnam 1959-73	Strategic hamlet program Phoenix Program CORDS program Combined Action Platoons (CAP) Search and Destroy / Sweep and Clear ops Interdiction of supply routes (HCM trail, Rung Sat, Mekong Delta) Sanctuary denial ops (DMZ, Cambodia) Montagnard Strike force operations Pacification operations Winning Hearts and Minds (WHAM)	3,4,5, 1,2 2,3,4,5 3,4,5,6 1,2 2, 5 5 1,2,3,4,5 3,4,5,6 5,6	Somewhat counter-intuitively, Vietnam War methods appear to address the full spread of attack methods, with those actions (CORDS, CAP, Montagnard ops) that address most issues being most effective. Coordination was initially poor but improved dramatically in 1968-72.
Palestinian (Al Aqsa) Intifada (2001 to present day)	Decapitation strikes (targeted killings) Palestinian territories security barrier Settlement demolition/resettlement Restrictions on Palestinian leaders' movt Incursions into refugee camps Border control operations Route, infrastructure and key point security	1 3,4,5,6 3,4,5 1,2 1,2,3,4,5 4,5 2,3,4	Measures cover a full spread of options, with a preference for attacks on nodes and links rather than territorial control, civic action or hearts and minds. Measures appear well coordinated.
Northern Ireland (1969 to present day)	Framework security operations Province reaction force Intelligence-led covert operations Political concessions Key infrastructure and route security Border control operations Use of informants and locally-raised forces	3,4,5,6 1,2,4 1,2,3,4 5 2,3,4 4,5 1,2,3,4	Measures cover the full range, with a preference for denying the boundary interactions, penetrating and disrupting links, and political concessions to undermine the insurgent cause.

As can be seen from this table, successful counterinsurgency (at the strategic level) depends largely upon generating an effective political solution, while tactical actions to counter the insurgency buy time for the political solution to be implemented. All the examples of successful counterinsurgency in this table attacked a wide range of elements in the insurgent system, with a combination of measures. The most effective examples also attacked links, disrupted subsystems and sought to undermine the insurgency at the systemic level. However, most examples still exhibited a heavy focus on attacking boundary interactions. The least effective examples occurred where (as in Vietnam, the Palestinian Territories and Northern Ireland) an effective political strategy could not be generated, often because of interference by external actors who could not be effectively dealt with. Under these circumstances, the best that security forces could achieve was to contain the insurgency indefinitely.

Vietnam is worth examining in a little more detail, because of its continuing influence over the US approach to insurgency⁵⁹. One insight from this survey is that counterinsurgency in Vietnam was highly effective. Given the ultimate US defeat in Vietnam, one might expect to see problems in the application of counterinsurgency in the war – poor coordination, a focus on nodes and links to the exclusion of other attack methods, or failure to prevent enemy adaptation. In fact, the opposite is true: counterinsurgency in Vietnam covered a wide range of methods, was well coordinated, and produced excellent overall results. Ironically, winning the counterinsurgency in South Vietnam the US provoked cross-border invasion from North Vietnam. Thus, the very success of counterinsurgency measures provoked a wider war.⁶⁰ Because of a loss of political will, resulting from casualties sustained in the earlier phases of the war, US forces were unavailable to meet this invasion, because they had been withdrawn.⁶¹

Record and Tyrell have pointed out that the differences between Vietnam and Iraq far outweigh the similarities (albeit their analysis considers Iraq only from the standpoint of classical, single-

⁵⁹ See Vlahos, *op. cit.*; see also Metz, Steven 2004: 'Unlearning Counterinsurgency' in *Strategic Studies Institute Newsletter*, November 2004, <http://www.carlisle.army.mil/ssi/newsletter/oped.cfm>

⁶⁰ For example, Record and Tyrell (2004) estimate that 'by the early 1970s the war and US and South Vietnamese military and pacification initiatives had crippled (though not destroyed) the original insurgency in the South. Record, Jeffrey and Tyrell, W. Andrew 2004: *Iraq and Vietnam: Differences, Similarities and Insights*, Strategic Studies Institute, Carlisle Pa., p. 6, 8 ff.

⁶¹ Note that this analysis does not purport to be a comprehensive assessment of Vietnam, merely an evaluation of the relative effectiveness of counterinsurgency measures based on an organic systems analysis.

country counterinsurgency)⁶². Nonetheless, at the tactical level measures from Vietnam – Combined Action Platoons, the CORDS program, use of locally-raised irregular forces under US leadership, Accelerated Pacification and the Strategic Hamlet Program – may have potential in Iraq, provided the conditions of globalised insurgency are factored in. The conditions that allowed North Vietnam to invade the South (a superpower sponsor, sanctuary areas, ethnic similarity, historical legitimacy, multiple covered infiltration routes) do not apply in Iraq. There is no neighbouring state – not even Iran – for whom these conditions apply. It follows that methods from Vietnam may succeed in Iraq, and the US needs to make a priority of denying neighbouring states the motivation, means and opportunity to invade or infiltrate Iraq. It also follows that the greatest threat to victory in Iraq would be a loss of political will in the US, followed by premature withdrawal leaving Iraq incapable of standing alone.

The next section applies this analysis to develop a proposed strategy for the War on Terrorism.

IV

THE STRATEGY OF DISAGGREGATION

The Problem of Strategy

Despite the publication in mid-2002 of the *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, the US strategy for the overall War on Terrorism remains vaguely understood. Indeed, at several closed-door meetings with senior military personnel, analysts and intelligence officials in October 2004, individuals seriously questioned whether in fact the United States actually *had* a coherent overall strategy for the war, and if so what it was.⁶³ In part, this vagueness results from the application of a terrorism paradigm to what is essentially a counterinsurgency, as discussed above. But there are other reasons for this.

Despite the lack of clarity in some US statements about the War, analysis of US actions so far indicates a *de facto* strategy of ‘aggregation’ – lumping together all terrorism, all rogue or failed states, and all strategic competitors who might potentially oppose US objectives in the war. This *de facto* strategy creates several problems.

First, as Jeffrey Record argues,

Moreover, such a strategy undermines US legitimacy (and thus, as we have seen, its self-appointed role as global counterterrorism Supremo). This is because it tends to link obviously disparate conflicts, giving the appearance that the US is using the war as an excuse to settle old scores. Similarly, it causes the US to support morally dubious regimes and (by creating suspicion as to US motives) undermines opportunities for common cause with other democracies – notably the Europeans.

On a practical note, a strategy of aggregation tends naturally 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. As Record notes..

Based on the preceding analysis of the global *jihad*, and the organic systems nature of globalised insurgency, this section offers an alternative – indeed, a diametrically opposed – strategy for the War on Terrorism, namely ‘Disaggregation’.

⁶² Record and Tyrell, op. cit.

⁶³ Personal communication, in confidence.

Operational Concept

Complex systems analysis shows that active fighters are only the ‘tip of the iceberg’ in insurgent systems and, therefore, counterinsurgency must address the whole system in a coordinated fashion. It also demonstrates that, because the elements of insurgency are pre-existing but the pattern of interaction is new, victory consists not in eliminating these elements but rather in returning them to a normal mode of interaction. That is, if insurgency resides in the pattern of relationships, victory consists in rearranging this pattern into a stable and peaceful ‘system state’. Merely destroying elements without changing patterns of interaction may be counterproductive. This gives rise to the following operational concept:

The aim in counterinsurgency is to return the parent society to a normal, peaceful mode of interaction – on terms favourable to ourselves.

The caveat (terms favourable to ourselves) is necessary because, in at least some campaigns, the insurgent aim is also to return parent society to normality, provided certain conditions or demands are met. Therefore the counterinsurgent objective includes an assessment of the post-conflict societal order we seek: it is not simply a matter of crushing the insurgents. As insurgency is a political, social and military problem, military measures alone cannot succeed in this aim. Rather, the role of military forces is to dominate the environment and reduce the energy in the insurgency, taking it ‘off the boil’ to allow other elements of national power to become effective. Thus military force alone can only contain and disrupt insurgent systems – but this is an essential first step in allowing other non-military measures to succeed.

Defining ‘normality’ is essential in this context. Different societies exhibit different normal, chronic levels of armed violence.⁶⁴ Victory does not demand that we reduce violence to zero, or establish peace and prosperity in absolute terms. It only demands that we return the system to what is normal – for that society, in that region, in this period in history – so that society can re-establish normal pre-insurgency patterns of interaction.

This operational concept does not preclude change in societal order: for example, although the British won the Malayan Emergency, the people of Malaya still gained independence. The British defined victory as resistance to Communist takeover and transition to a self-governing democratic state, rather than retention of Malaya as a colony in the British Empire. However, such societal change had to be achieved through peaceful, constitutional means. By contrast the Dutch in Indonesia in 1945-49 sought to retain the Netherlands East Indies as a colonial possession – their definition of victory precluded peaceful societal change and gave insurgents no constitutional path to redress their grievances⁶⁵.

In a global insurgency, this operational concept requires that individual counterinsurgency campaigns be conducted so as to reduce the energy level in the global *jihad*. It also demands that legitimate Muslim aspirations be addressed to provide a constitutional path, and military forces adopt an enabling, rather than a dominant role. Military force is still essential and must 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. Practical insights arising from this operational concept are as follows:

⁶⁴ For example, when the author commanded an infantry company on counter-militia operations in East Timor, rules of engagement initially allowed ‘armed’ civilians to be engaged with lethal force. But in the border region of East Timor, adult males in certain tribal groups always carry spears and large knives. ‘Normality’ did not demand these people be disarmed – this would have created dozens of firefights and alienated the population. Instead, the decision was made to engage only individuals carrying firearms, not edged weapons. Returning a system to ‘normality’ demands a clear understanding of what is normal – for locals, not security forces.

⁶⁵ See Kilcullen, 2000, *op. cit.* for a more detailed discussion of Dutch counterinsurgency methods in Indonesia, and the subsequent effect of these methods on Islamic insurgents, during the Indonesian War of Independence, 1945-49.

A Common Strategic Understanding

As noted, the world system does not enable a global Supremo for counterinsurgency. But the role of a Supremo in classical counterinsurgency was to generate unity of effort. The same effect can be generated through a common strategic understanding, and common ‘best practice’.

A first step toward a common understanding for the present campaign is to clearly articulate its nature. This allows governments to discuss the problem in common language, adopting local measures that become mutually reinforcing at the systemic level. To borrow a phrase from the environmental movement (another attempt to coordinate action on a diffuse organic problem by disparate governments), a common understanding would allow us to ‘think globally, act locally’.

For political reasons, no government has acknowledged this campaign as a war against a global Islamist insurgency. This unwillingness to speak the enemy’s name creates ambiguities and apparent policy contradictions. As a result, much of the world’s population remains unconvinced of the seriousness of the Islamist threat, confused by the ‘red herring’ of Terrorism, or suspicious of Washington’s strategic agenda. Without popular support, no democracy can sustain protracted irregular warfare against a diffuse enemy – so convincing populations of the threat is critical. This demands vastly increased, nuanced and effective strategic Information Operations: a non-trivial issue. Victory (as over the Comintern) will come through the ability of democracies to outbid and outlast the appeal of extremist ideology – military measures are merely holding actions in a protracted civilisational confrontation.

A Constitutional Path

As shown, a key counterinsurgency technique is to counter the grievances on which insurgent systems feed, denying energy to their recruiting and propaganda subsystems, and ultimately marginalising them as irrelevant to the population’s aspirations. 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 marginalised 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 legitimised their aspirations, while de-legitimising the Communist revolutionary methods. Instead of a stark choice between revolution and poverty, trade unions gave workers a constitutional path – accessing justice through the labour 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 infused with anti-Islamic values. For many self-respecting Muslims, the choice of *jihad* rather than surrender is both logical and honourable. So a constitutional path is critical – one that addresses Muslim aspirations without recourse to *jihad*, thus marginalising Islamists and robbing insurgent systems of energy.

It would require a separate paper to articulate such a path. Elements might include exporting 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 UNDP’s Arab Human Development Report 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'⁶⁶ – implying the need for greater commitment to this aspect of the War on Terrorism.

The Insurgent Ecosystem

Another insight is that insurgencies are part of larger 'insurgent ecosystems'. In classical counterinsurgency, the ecosystem was the nation-state. In globalised insurgency, the ecosystem is all of world society. Therefore liberal democracies are inside, not outside the *jihad* ecosystem. We are part of the system of global *jihad* – we provide inputs that sustain the insurgency, are affected by its boundary interactions and outputs, and are actors in the broader environment.

This means that the adaptational dynamic ('survival of the fittest') also applies to us: we must adapt and evolve faster and better than the Islamists in order to survive. Our armies must be flexible, versatile and agile, but adaptability goes far beyond the military sphere: our whole approach to counterinsurgency must be characterised by continual innovation.

It also means that methods which treat the enemy primarily as a target set – seeking to destroy key nodes and hoping this will unhinge the insurgency – cannot work. These approaches (typical of conventional warfighting) address the insurgency's boundary interactions, links and nodes, but do not interdict inputs or outputs. Instead, we must focus on taking the insurgency 'off the boil' by denying it energy, thus reducing the coherence and stability of Islamist movements and allowing non-military measures (governance, development, the 'middle way') to have an effect.

Two practical implications arise from this. First, a decapitation strategy aimed at eliminating key Islamist leaders will not work here. Decapitation has rarely succeeded in counterinsurgency, with good reason – efforts to kill or capture insurgent leaders inject energy into the system by generating grievances and causing disparate groups to coalesce (consider the unifying effect on Somali clans of US efforts to capture Mohamed Farah Aided in Somalia). Moreover, although leaders are key nodes, their destruction would do little damage to the linked but separate groups in the global *jihad*. Rather, their martyrdom would inject energy into the system and allow a new class of leaders to emerge. System dynamics would also predict that, because these new leaders would emerge at a time of great evolutionary pressure on the insurgency, processes of natural selection might well generate even more capable and adaptive leaders than at present.

Secondly, and encouragingly, victory does not demand that we pacify every insurgent theatre from the Philippines to Chechnya. It only demands that we identify, and neutralise, those elements in each theatre that link to the global *jihad*. For example, Chechen separatism pre-dates the involvement of Islamists in the Caucasus. Global counterinsurgency does not demand that we solve the Chechen insurgency, rather that we deny the Chechen *jihad* its links to the global movement, then support Russia in addressing Chechen separatism. Similarly, global counterinsurgency does not demand that we resolve the centuries-old Moro separatist issue in the Philippines. It only requires that we marginalise groups like Abu Sayyaf that link into the global *jihad*, and assist the Philippines to contain groups like the Moro National Liberation Front who, although Islamic separatists, are seeking regional self-government not endless global *jihad*.

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

⁶⁶ Billingsley, A. 2004: 'The Native Scene' in *The Diplomat*, Aug/Sep 2004, p. 23.

Understanding the ‘System in Focus’

As shown, the global *jihad* is a series of nested interactions – insurgencies within insurgencies. So it is important to understand which is the ‘system in focus’: an individual group, a localised insurgency, a regional *jihad* or global insurgency as a whole. Most analysis of Iraq treats the problem in terms of single-country classical counterinsurgency. That is, the ‘system in focus’ for most analysts is the Iraqi theatre, and links to the broader Middle Eastern *jihad* or global insurgency are secondary. Lacking a complex systems perspective, some analysts appear to assume that the ‘system in focus’ is all that exists, whereas (as shown) the true danger of individual *jihad* theatres is their aggregated effect at the systemic level as a global insurgency.

This is important because counterinsurgency must be conducted with an eye to its long-term systemic effects. Measures that are highly effective in one theatre may simply export problems to other regions, or breed more insurgents for subsequent iterations of the insurgent cycle. For example, Western support for Islamist *mujahideen* in Afghanistan in the 1980s made good sense if the ‘system in focus’ was the Soviet-Afghan war alone. But the boost to Islamists arising from victory in Afghanistan proved highly dangerous at the systemic, long-term level. Likewise, counterinsurgency in Iraq must be evaluated in terms of global *jihad*, not just the Iraqi theatre.

Tailored systems analysis

A further insight is the need for detailed, situation-specific analysis of each counterinsurgency. Systems analysis shows that there is no universally applicable template for counterinsurgency: on the contrary, the better a method is, the quicker it is out of date. So constant innovation is needed, and this must largely be generated ‘from the bottom up’, by practitioners in day-to-day contact with the insurgents. Each local counterinsurgency must be based on a detailed, local analysis – allied to a systemic perspective on how each theatre affects the global *jihad*.

This demands intelligence collection and analysis capability at the lowest possible tactical level. Local commanders must have the means to analyse and understand their own environment, diagnose key local system elements and the best means of attacking them, and communicate this understanding across the force. Higher commanders must generate unity of effort through a common understanding of the campaign and broad situational awareness of the overall conflict.

Specific past techniques may still work – for example, Combined Action Platoons working with Iraqi Civil Defense Corps irregulars may be highly useful in Iraq. But such techniques must be applied with a full understanding of *why* they worked in the past, what specific conditions contribute to success, and how they can be applied in today’s environment. We must also be prepared to discard techniques as soon as their effectiveness wanes, not clinging (for the sake of familiarity) to techniques to which the enemy has already adapted.

Cultural Capability

The final insight concerns culture. As we have seen, cultures – organisational, ethnic, national, religious or tribal – provide protocols for system behaviour. Cultures determine how each actor in an insurgent ecosystem perceives the actions of the others, and generate unperceived cultural boundaries that limit their freedom of action. Cultures may differ radically between areas within an insurgent theatre, or among different groups in it. 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, boundaries and boundary interactions in insurgent systems – and virtually all the grievances and energies that circulate within them – 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 centres of gravity, situational awareness and interaction with the population.

This is true of both traditional and globalised counterinsurgency. But systems dynamics demonstrate that in globalised 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 neighbouring countries, and the culture of foreign fighters in theatre. They must also understand the implications of actions within Iraq in culturally different theatres 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.⁶⁷

Linguistic and cultural competence must exist at several levels within a counterinsurgent force:

- **Cultural awareness.** Everyone in the force, regardless of role, must have a high degree of cultural awareness. This demands basic language training, understanding cultural norms and expectations, and – most importantly – understanding how local populations and insurgents think. A recent US Army proposal ('Every Soldier a Sensor')⁶⁸ explicitly recognises that in counterinsurgency most actionable information, and most key interactions with the population, occur at the individual soldier level. Systems dynamics predicts that progress in counterinsurgency will reflect the aggregated effects of thousands of nested individual interactions – experience 'on the ground' by practitioners confirms this. Importantly, non-combat elements (truck drivers, medics, engineers) are as important, if not more important than combat forces in terms of their interactions with the population.
- **Cultural understanding.** Planners, intelligence personnel, civil-military operations teams and those working with local security forces 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. Training teams, or military advisors working with local forces, must achieve this level of understanding which covers much more than simple military issues.⁶⁹ The capabilities required are akin to those of Rudyard Kipling's Colonel Creighton – a deep knowledge of language, ethnography, geography and history.⁷⁰ US Forces currently seek this level of capability through the Foreign Area Officer system. Australian forces have traditionally relied on intensive linguistic, area and cultural training for selected personnel⁷¹, but (rather than maintaining a separate career stream) these personnel are mainstream officers whose knowledge permeates the wider force.
- **Cultural leverage.** The highest level of cultural capability is the ability to use culture to generate leverage within an insurgent system. Such capability is needed by commanders working with local community and government leaders. It is also needed by personnel

⁶⁷ See Davis, Paul K. and Jenkins, Brian Michael, 2004: 'A Systems Approach to Deterring and Influencing Terrorists' in *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 21:3-15, 2004.

⁶⁸ Association of the United States Army, *ES2: Every Soldier is a Sensor*, discussion paper, August 2004

⁶⁹ This insight is based on the author's personal experience as an advisor with Indonesian Special Forces in 1994 and 1995. However, almost every military advisor, SF team leader, and training team member whom the author has debriefed has raised the same points.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Hoffman, op. cit. See Kipling, R. 1937: *Kim*, Macmillan and Co. London, for greater detail.

⁷¹ For example, the author's language course in 1993 included residential fieldwork in the target country, total immersion language training for twelve months, and detailed area studies on history, geography, archaeology, civilisation and military culture. This is the norm for Australian personnel undergoing intensive training in preparation for cross-cultural tasks – but these are mainstream rather than specialist personnel.

working in the intelligence and covert action fields, and in key nation-building programs. At this level, individuals are bi-lingual and bi-cultural, and can exploit cultural norms and expectations to generate operational effects. The ‘Political Officers’ of the Northwest Frontier of British India, Edward Lansdale’s performance in the Philippines Insurgency of the 1950s, or T.E. Lawrence’s operations with the Arab Revolt are examples of this capability. Indeed, Lawrence’s comment that ‘Arabs could be swung on an idea as on a cord’⁷² reflects this level of cultural competence. No professional Army will ever be able to generate more than a small number of individuals with this capability, but only a small number are needed – provided they are developed and employed effectively. This is difficult within the culture of regular armies, and such officers are likely to be mavericks: ‘renaissance men’ in the mould of Lawrence, Orde Wingate or Roger Trinquier.

Because of the processes of cultural evolution and adaptation identified earlier, cultural capability must be maintained in an up-to-date fashion, taking into account current developments in a given theatre. Regular refresher and continuation training for key personnel is essential.

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.⁷³ Conversely, those directing the global counterinsurgency must understand issues across the breadth of the *jihad* – 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. These cannot be discussed here, but 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, *jihad*, Islamist ideology and Muslim culture. Achieving this would be an important step toward victory.

CONCLUSION

This paper has proposed a new approach to the global War on Terrorism.

The paper argued that the War is best understood as a global insurgency, initiated by a diffuse grouping of Islamist movements that seek 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 *jihad*. But classical counterinsurgency, as developed in the 1960s, is designed to defeat insurgency in a single country. It demands measures – coordinated political-military response, 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 here: instead, we need a fundamental reappraisal of counterinsurgency in order to find methods that work against a globalised insurgency.

Now, counterinsurgency in its traditional guise is based on systems analysis. But Cartesian systems analysis, as McNamara’s experience in Vietnam shows, cannot handle the complexity inherent in counterinsurgency. Fortunately, since the 1960s we have developed new approaches to systems analysis, based on the emerging science of Complexity, which *does* provide means

⁷² T.E. Lawrence 1935: *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Jonathan Cape, London p.42

⁷³ For example, in September 2004 the author debriefed an intelligence officer who indicated that local Iraqi security forces’ insights into the origins of foreign fighters, revolutionised that operator’s approach to this problem. Such local insights, combined with broader understanding of issues in the global *jihad*, give powerful synergies.

for handling this complexity. Therefore complex systems analysis of insurgent systems may be the tool needed to develop a fundamentally new version of counterinsurgency for this War.

Applying the branch of complexity theory that deals with organic systems, the paper develops a model of insurgencies as biological systems. This model identifies key system elements and means to attack them. It also allows insights into the systems dynamics of global insurgency, the enabling role of culture in insurgent systems, evolution and adaptation in insurgent groups, insurgent ecosystems, and the nature of the Islamist 'virtual state'. A historical survey of five previous counterinsurgency campaigns provides a tentative validation of this systems approach.

Applying this model generates an operational concept: the aim of counterinsurgency (hence the war aim in this campaign) is to return the insurgency's parent society to its normal mode of interaction, on terms favourable to us. This demands an understanding of what 'normality' is for a given society, and a realisation that military measures only create preconditions for other elements of national power to resolve underlying issues. The systems model also generates practical insights – the need for a common strategic understanding, a constitutional path to address legitimate grievances, understanding of the global insurgent ecosystem and our role in it, a tailored analysis of each insurgency, and improved cultural capability.

This paper represents only a first tentative step toward re-building counterinsurgency theory into an effective tool for global counterinsurgency. Nevertheless, the analysis does demonstrate that a complex systems approach, which treats insurgencies as organic systems, can produce new insights and practical recommendations for the War on Terrorism. The need now is for an in-depth, extended study of current operations that reassesses them in the light of this model and produces specific policy options for government and the military.

If there is one key message that emerges from this study, it is that Western democracies *are* capable of winning the War on Terrorism – provided 'victory' is defined appropriately. Our Islamist enemies are neither inscrutable nor invincible, their methods have flaws that can be exploited, and global *jihād* 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. As counterinsurgency practitioners, soldiers and intelligence operators must re-build our mental model of this conflict, re-design our classical counterinsurgency and counterterrorism methods to meet the challenge of new conditions, and continually develop innovative and culturally effective approaches. Because Iraq is now the centre of gravity, the key focus of the global *jihād*, Iraq is the place to start. But the process must go well beyond Iraq, to ultimately transform our whole approach to countering the global Islamist insurgency.

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GLOSSARY

Autopoeisis. 'Self-making': a property of living systems whereby each element in the system participates in producing, and is itself produced by the existence and actions of, the other elements.

Cartesian Analysis. Reductionist, or Cartesian, analysis approaches complex problems by reducing them to their component parts, seeking to understand each part, then reassembling the parts to produce an overall analytical result. The assumption is that the characteristics of the whole can be inferred from the characteristics of the parts, and valid deductions can be drawn about the whole by examining the parts.

Dissipative Structures. A form of structure that emerges as a stable pattern within a flowing or dissipating medium. For example, the vortex that develops as water goes down a plughole is a dissipative structure: the structure is stable although individual water molecules are constantly passing into, through and out of the system.

Homeostasis. A property of living systems whereby the system maintains relatively stable internal conditions despite fluctuations in the external environment.

Insurgency. Insurgencies are movements that seek to overthrow the *status quo* through subversion, political activity, insurrection, armed conflict and terrorism. Insurgent movements seek to overthrow established governments or societal structures.

Irregular Warfare. A form of warfare where one or more sides consists of irregular troops, or adopts irregular methods. Irregular troops are any combatants not formally enlisted in the armed forces of a nation-state or other legally-constituted entity. Irregular methods are any methods not sanctioned by the Laws of Armed Conflict or the usages of human society.

Islamist. An individual who follows the extremist, radical form of Islam practised by some militant groups, as distinct from 'Islamic', which describes the religion of Islam, or 'Muslim', which describes those who follow the Islamic religion. Some, but not all, Islamist groups seek the establishment of a global Caliphate uniting all Muslims into a single theocratic state or confederation of states. Others seek the adoption of Islamic *shari'a* law as the sole source of law. In this paper the term is used to refer primarily to Al Qa'eda, its allies and affiliates.

Jihad. The obligation upon all Muslims to struggle for the righteousness of God. In this paper, the short form of the Islamic term *jihad* is used to mean 'lesser *jihad*' (armed struggle against unbelievers), rather than 'greater *jihad*' (*jihad fi sabilillah*), i.e. moral struggle for the righteousness of God.

Terrorism. Terrorism is politically-motivated violence, directed primarily against civilians or non-combatants, undertaken with the intention to coerce societies through fear.

Al Qa'eda Declaration of War, 23 February 1998

The source of this English translation is at <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/980223-fatwa.htm>

The original Arabic text of the declaration, which appeared in the London Arabic newspaper Al-Quds al-Arabi on 23 February 1998, is at <http://www.library.cornell.edu/colldev/mideast/fatw2.htm>

The statement is as follows:

Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders

World Islamic Front Statement

23 February 1998

Shaykh Usamah Bin-Muhammad Bin-Ladin
 Ayman al-Zawahiri, amir of the Jihad Group in Egypt
 Abu-Yasir Rifa'i Ahmad Taha, Egyptian Islamic Group
 Shaykh Mir Hamzah, secretary of the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Pakistan
 Fazlur Rahman, amir of the Jihad Movement in Bangladesh

Praise be to Allah, who revealed the Book, controls the clouds, defeats factionalism, and says in His Book: "But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the pagans wherever ye find them, seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war)"; and peace be upon our Prophet, Muhammad Bin-'Abdallah, who said: I have been sent with the sword between my hands to ensure that no one but Allah is worshipped, Allah who put my livelihood under the shadow of my spear and who inflicts humiliation and scorn on those who disobey my orders.

The Arabian Peninsula has never -- since Allah made it flat, created its desert, and encircled it with seas -- been stormed by any forces like the crusader armies spreading in it like locusts, eating its riches and wiping out its plantations. All this is happening at a time in which nations are attacking Muslims like people fighting over a plate of food. In the light of the grave situation and the lack of support, we and you are obliged to discuss current events, and we should all agree on how to settle the matter.

No one argues today about three facts that are known to everyone; we will list them, in order to remind everyone:

First, for over seven years the United States has been occupying the lands of Islam in the holiest of places, the Arabian Peninsula, plundering its riches, dictating to its rulers, humiliating its people, terrorizing its neighbors, and turning its bases in the Peninsula into a spearhead through which to fight the neighboring Muslim peoples.

If some people have in the past argued about the fact of the occupation, all the people of the Peninsula have now acknowledged it. The best proof of this is the **Americans' continuing aggression against the Iraqi people using the Peninsula as a staging post, even though all its rulers are against their territories being used to that end, but they are helpless.**

Second, despite the great **devastation inflicted on the Iraqi people** by the crusader-Zionist alliance, and despite the huge number of those killed, which has exceeded 1 million... despite all this, the Americans are once again trying to repeat the horrific massacres, as though they are not content with the protracted blockade imposed after the ferocious war or the fragmentation and devastation.

So here they come to annihilate what is left of this people and to humiliate their Muslim neighbors.

Third, if the Americans' aims behind these wars are religious and economic, the aim is also to serve the Jews' petty state and divert attention from its occupation of Jerusalem and murder of

Muslims there. The best proof of this is their **eagerness to destroy Iraq**, the strongest neighboring Arab state, and their endeavor to fragment all the states of the region such as Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Sudan into paper statelets and through their disunion and weakness to guarantee Israel's survival and the continuation of the brutal crusade occupation of the Peninsula.

All these crimes and sins committed by the Americans are a clear declaration of war on Allah, his messenger, and Muslims. And ulema have throughout Islamic history unanimously agreed that the jihad is an individual duty if the enemy destroys the Muslim countries. This was revealed by Imam Bin-Qadamah in "Al- Mughni," Imam al-Kisa'i in "Al-Bada'i," al-Qurtubi in his interpretation, and the shaykh of al-Islam in his books, where he said: "As for the fighting to repulse [an enemy], it is aimed at defending sanctity and religion, and it is a duty as agreed [by the ulema]. Nothing is more sacred than belief except repulsing an enemy who is attacking religion and life."

On that basis, and in compliance with Allah's order, we issue the following fatwa to all Muslims:

The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies -- civilians and military -- is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque and the holy mosque [Mecca] from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim. This is in accordance with the words of Almighty Allah, "and fight the pagans all together as they fight you all together," and "fight them until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in Allah."

This is in addition to the words of Almighty Allah: "And why should ye not fight in the cause of Allah and of those who, being weak, are ill-treated (and oppressed)? -- women and children, whose cry is: 'Our Lord, rescue us from this town, whose people are oppressors; and raise for us from thee one who will help!'"

We -- with Allah's help -- call on every Muslim who believes in Allah and wishes to be rewarded to comply with Allah's order to kill the Americans and plunder their money wherever and whenever they find it. We also call on Muslim ulema, leaders, youths, and soldiers to launch the raid on Satan's U.S. troops and the devil's supporters allying with them, and to displace those who are behind them so that they may learn a lesson.

Almighty Allah said: "O ye who believe, give your response to Allah and His Apostle, when He calleth you to that which will give you life. And know that Allah cometh between a man and his heart, and that it is He to whom ye shall all be gathered."

Almighty Allah also says: "O ye who believe, what is the matter with you, that when ye are asked to go forth in the cause of Allah, ye cling so heavily to the earth! Do ye prefer the life of this world to the hereafter? But little is the comfort of this life, as compared with the hereafter. Unless ye go forth, He will punish you with a grievous penalty, and put others in your place; but Him ye would not harm in the least. For Allah hath power over all things."

Almighty Allah also says: "So lose no heart, nor fall into despair. For ye must gain mastery if ye are true in faith."