

I. Reflexiones sobre seguridad

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INSURGENCY IN A TIME OF TERRORISM

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Resumen

¿Se puede escindir el terrorismo de la insurgencia armada? ¿Toda expresión armada es terrorismo? ¿El territorio es un método de acción o una lógica de acción? Este artículo presenta un análisis de la insurgencia a la luz de la era antiterrorista del nuevo siglo. Con la utilización del ejemplo de Vietnam el autor señala cómo la insurgencia armada ha sido señalada de "terrorista"; sin embargo, debe revisarse detenidamente de manera estratégica este concepto para entender mejor la naturaleza de la violencia de dos fenómenos diferentes: la insurgencia transnacional y el terrorismo transnacional.

Palabras clave

Terrorismo, insurgencia, subversión, conflicto armado.

Abstract

Is it possible to separate terrorism from armed insurgency? Are all armed manifestations terrorism? Is terrorism a

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method of action or a logic for action? This article purports to analyze insurgency in the midst of the anti-terrorist era of the new century. By using Vietnam as an example, the author points out how armed insurgency has as of lately been called "terrorist", yet stresses that this concept should be carefully and

strategically looked through in order to better understand the violent nature of two very different phenomena: transactional and trans-national insurgencies.

Key words

Terrorism, insurgency, subversión, armed conflict.

A distinction must be drawn between terrorism as a *method of action* and terrorism as a *logic of action*, Michel Wieviorka has written.¹ *Terrorism* is distinguished by the latter; *insurgency* incorporates the former.

The key element of *terrorism* is the divorce of armed politics from a purported mass base, those in whose name terrorists claim to be fighting. Little or no meaningful effort goes into construction of a counter-state,² which is the central activity of *insurgency*. In contrast, *insurgencies*, as Larry Cable observes, while also armed expressions of organic, internal political disaffiliation, use terroristic action principally as one weapon among many to facilitate construction of the counter-state.³

This is far from an academic matter. When all manner of internal warfare is lumped under the

rubric “terrorism,” crucial distinctions are lost.

Focusing upon perpetrators of terror themselves can be effective in cases of terrorism as a *logic of action*, often referred to as “pure terrorism,” because the perpetrators essentially are the movement. However, adopting such an approach when dealing with insurgents, those who use terrorism as a *method of action*, can be disastrous.

In particular, a focus upon rooting out “the terrorists,” as opposed to emphasizing political solutions to sources of conflict, often leads to abuse of the populace. This sets in motion a new dynamic, motivated by self-defense, that allows an operationally astute insurgent challenger for state power to mobilize additional support. It may even mobilize for pure terrorists a mass base where none hitherto existed.⁴

¹ See Michel Wieviorka, “Terrorism in the Context of Academic Research,” in Martha Crenshaw, ed., *Terrorism in Context* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 597-606. For Wieviorka’s seminal work, cf. *The Making of Terrorism*, trans. David Gordon White (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).

² Often referred to by the term “clandestine infrastructure,” the concept of the counter-state apparently entered into the literature of internal war in the 1960s. See e.g. Luis Mercier Vega, *Guerrillas in Latin America: The Technique of the Counter-State* (NY: Praeger, 1969). More recently, the concept has been used by Arthur Mitchell, *Revolutionary Government in Ireland: Dail Eireann 1919-22* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1995), as well as by Gordon McCormick, Naval Postgraduate School (NPS), Monterey, California, in unpublished work.

³ This insightful definition was coined by Larry Cable; see his “Reinventing the Round Wheel: Insurgency, Counter-Insurgency, and Peacekeeping Post Cold War,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 4/2 (Autumn 1993), 228-62.

⁴ This is a topic I examine explicitly in “Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE): Terrorism Within Insurgent Matrix,” forthcoming (U.S. Institute for Peace, USIP, Washington, DC).

Thus it seems necessary to revisit insurgency – a word which might have all but disappeared from our sights were it not for our imbroglio in Iraq. Ironically, in this, an age of terrorism, when “no more Vietnams” remains an operative maxim for at least one wing of the American political spectrum, knowledge of insurgency is as relevant as it has ever been.

Insurgency is Armed Politics

An insurgency is an armed political movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government, or separation from it, through use of subversion and armed conflict. It is a protracted politico-military struggle designed to weaken government control and legitimacy while increasing insurgent control. Political power is the central issue in an insurgency.⁵

Rising up against constituted authority has been a constant

throughout history. The causes for such uprisings have been as numerous as the human condition. Uprisings against indigenuous regimes have normally been termed “rebellions.” Uprisings against an external occupying power have normally been termed “resistance movements.” Historical particulars can at times conflate the two. Thus do we have the “rebellion of Robin Hood” against the authorities conflated with a “Saxon resistance movement” against “the Normans.”

Rebellions and resistance movements are transformed into “insurgency” by their incorporation into an armed political campaign. A popular desire to resist is used by an insurgent movement to accomplish the insurgents’ political goal. The insurgent thus mounts a political challenge to the state through the formation of a counter-state.

The desire to form a counter-state grows from the same causes that galvanize any political campaign. These causes can range

⁵ Definitions such as those discussed here are well within the mainstream of revolutionary studies, though they do not always mesh completely with official U.S. government definitions. The essence of what is provided in this article was included in my submission for Chapter 1, “Overview,” in the U.S. Army’s Interim Field Manual, FMI 3-07.22 *Counterinsurgency Operations* (October 2004). Necessarily, what was issued differed in many particulars from the draft. As per U.S. military “rules of the game,” the doctrine of subordinate organizations cannot contradict the published doctrine of superior organizations, which led to even the definition of insurgency being incomplete compared to that stated here. That such “rules” make reform or even accuracy not always possible hardly needs emphasis. Best single look at the doctrinal process with respect to insurgency is Wray R. Johnson, *Vietnam and American Doctrine for Small Wars* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 2001). Equally well done, for the U.S. Marines, is Keith B. Bickel, *Mars Learning: The Marine Corps’ Development of Small Wars Doctrine, 1915-1940* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001). Useful background to the material in both of these books is Andrew J. Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine 1860-1941* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, U.S. Army, 1998).

from the desire for greater equity in the distribution of resources (poverty alone is rarely, if ever, sufficient to sustain an insurgency⁶) to a demand that foreign occupation end.

Though insurgencies have historically been phenomena specific to individual nation-states, there have been any number of Trans-National Insurgencies (TNI). The Latin American liberation campaign against the Spanish in the early 19th Century illustrates this. Likewise, there have been efforts by external powers to tap general upheaval by coordinating national insurgent so that it takes on a TNI character. The activities of the Moscow-directed Communist International (COMINTERN) between the two world wars is possibly the best example.

Each insurgency has its own unique characteristics based on its strategic objectives, its operational environment, and available resources. Insurgencies

frequently seek to overthrow the existing social order and reallocate power within the country.

The goal of an insurgency, then, is to mobilize human and materiel resources in order to form an alternative to the state. This alternative, whatever its shape, is called the counter-state. The counter-state may have much of the infrastructure possessed by the state itself, but this must normally be hidden since it is illegal. Thus the counter-state is often referred to by the term "clandestine infrastructure."⁷

Successful mobilization provides active and passive support for the insurgency's programs, operations, and goals. This plays itself out thus:

- At the strategic level of war, mobilization grows out of dissatisfaction by some elite members (e.g. a group of school teachers) with existing economic, social, or political conditions.

⁶ An effort to explore all available quantitative efforts to relate insurgency to variables is Tom Marks, "Insurgency by the Numbers II: The Search for a Quantitative Relationship Between Agrarian Revolution and Land Tenure in South and Southeast Asia," *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 5/2 (Autumn 1994), 218-91. Content was not as narrow as implied by the title, which simply provided a means to examine the numerous studies that sought to explain quantitatively insurgency. At the end of the day, what emerged was that the universe of studies had been unable to establish relationships that would explain even as great a percentage of the variance as could be achieved by flipping a coin. Thus, qualitative measures were clearly key. This I discuss further in Thomas A. Marks, "Evaluating Insurgent/Counterinsurgent Performance," *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 11/3 (Winter 2000), 21-46.

⁷ Certainly the best known work examining a specific example is Douglas Pike, *Viet Cong: The Organization and Techniques of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1966). For post-Vietnam insurgencies of similar nature (as the Viet Cong), see Thomas A. Marks, *Maoist Insurgency Since Vietnam* (London: Frank Cass, 1996).

- At the operational level of war, these marginalized elite members (i.e. they have become alienated from the system psychologically) build links with followers by bringing them into the counter-state.
- At the tactical level of war, the recruitment is done by local movement representatives, called the cadre, who address local grievances. Of course, in its earliest stages, an insurgency will see “leaders” and “cadre” as one and the same; and they will be armed. Were such not the case, the phenomenon under examination would be a social movement as opposed to insurgency.

Signally, the local solutions are credited by the cadre to the insurgent movement. Loyalty is normally won through deeds rather than appeal to abstract principles, though the accomplishment of deeds may be explained through slogans (e.g. end hunger, eliminate poverty).

Hence the support of the people—*state legitimacy*—is the center of gravity. It must be gained in whatever proportion is necessary to sustain the insurgent movement (or, contrary wise, to

defeat him). As in any political campaign, all levels of support are relative. The goal is mobilization such that the enemy may be defeated. This necessarily will depend as much upon the campaign approach (i.e. operational art) and tactics adopted as upon more strategic concerns of “support.”

Operational and tactical use of violence as insurgent strategy has become increasingly commonplace, especially the use of terrorism (i.e. terrorism as a *method of action*). Violence (in whatever form) is the most potent weapon available to insurgents, but it is normally accompanied by a variety of nonviolent means.

Historically, astute movements have recognized the efficacy of both means to the extent that they have fielded discrete units charged with “nonviolent action” (e.g. strikes in the transportation sector) to supplement “violent action.” “People’s war” in its Chinese and Vietnamese variants did so.⁸

Insurgent movements therefore begin as “fire in the minds of men.”⁹ Insurgent leaders commit

⁸ For the Chinese case, cf. Monte R. Bullard, *The Soldier and the Citizen: Taiwan’s Military and Allegiance Warfare, 1950-1970* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1997); and Thomas A. Marks, *Counterrevolution in China: Wang Sheng and the Kuomintang* (London: Frank Cass, 1998). For the Vietnamese case, cf. Pike, *op.cit.*, as well as his *PAVN: People’s Army of Vietnam* (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1986).

⁹ See James H. Billington, *Fire in the Minds of Men: Origins of the Revolutionary Faith* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2004).

themselves to building a new world. They construct the organization to carry through this desire. Popular grievances became insurgent causes when interpreted and shaped by the insurgent leadership.

The insurgency grows if local insurgent representatives (the cadre) can establish a link between the insurgent movement and the desire for solutions to grievances sought by the local population. If the cadre are able to indoctrinate and control the mobilized local manpower, the insurgency will be strategically and operationally unified, with independent tactical action responding to higher commands. If the opposite is true, the insurgency will remain an uncoordinated, decentralized organization.¹⁰

The most potent immediate cause for insurgent mobilization is self-defense. Thus the behavior of security forces is critical. Indiscipline leads to alienation and enhances the insurgent ability to recruit.¹¹ Consequently, specific insurgent tactical actions

are frequently planned to elicit over-reaction from security force individuals and units. Over-reaction can extend to poorly drawn Rules of Engagement (ROE) and even strategic and operational planning that encourages brutalization of the population.

Whatever the precise causes that galvanize an insurgent movement, the result is one of two forms of insurgency:

- Offensive insurgency – the insurgents systematically construct a counter-state that ultimately takes the place of the state.
- Defensive insurgency – the insurgents already possess a counter-state (e.g. an ethnic group or a tribal homeland) and hence seek separation from the state.

Insurgent Doctrine

Insurgent doctrine is critical in determining how the insurgents will actually implement the two

¹⁰ Specifics may be found by examining the cases (Thailand, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Peru) in my *Maoist Insurgency Since Vietnam*.

¹¹ Indispensable reading on this subject, though she is discussing “pure terrorism,” is Donatella della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Her research finds the interaction between social movements and the state, later violent splinters and the state, the most salient variable in determining the trajectory of those who choose to challenge the state through violent means. A masterful *précis* of her thought is Donatella della Porta, “Left-Wing Terrorism in Italy,” in Crenshaw, *op.cit.*, 105-59. This may be usefully augmented by examining Donatella della Porta and Herbert Reiter, eds., *Policing Protest: The Control of Mass Demonstrations in Western Democracies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

types of insurgency. A defensive insurgency has much in common with a resistance movement, since the counter-state already exists, and will normally adopt overt techniques necessary for self-defense.¹²

An offensive insurgency, on the other hand, is faced with the task of creating the counter-state from scratch. To do this, there are two basic approaches.

- A first approach is to emphasize mobilization of the masses. This course of action places a premium upon political action by the cadre in local areas, with strategic and operational directives coming from above. The insurgent movement that results will resemble a pyramid in its manpower distribution, with the combatants the smallest part of the movement (the apex of the pyramid).
- A second approach emphasizes armed action. This course favors violence rather than mass mobilization and normally results in an inverted pyramid, with the combatants themselves the bulk of the

movement. Cadre play a much more limited role than in the mass mobilization approach (and may be completely absent, especially in the early stages of movement action).

The first approach will be sustained by a mass base. The second approach will have only a much smaller support base. The support base will not have the numbers of the mass base generated by the mobilization approach.

Mass Mobilization Approach

A mature insurgent organization of the first approach, built upon mass mobilization such as found in the “people’s war” model of the Chinese and Vietnamese, normally consists of four elements: the leadership; the combatants (often deployed, whatever the terminology, as main forces, regional forces, local forces); the cadre (often called, “the militants”); and the mass base (the bulk of the membership). The proportions relative to the larger movement depend upon the strategic approach adopted by the insurgency.

¹² Bard E. O’Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: Inside Modern Revolutionary Warfare* (Herndon, VA: Brassey’s 1990), divides insurgency into seven “types” – anarchist, egalitarian, traditionalist, pluralist, secessionist, reformist, and preservationist – a division Cable, *op.cit.* (p. 229) usefully simplifies in observing: “While insurgency exists in two forms, offensive and defensive, with the distinction being drawn upon the basis of the overarching political goal, a radical restructuring of the social-political matrix in the case of the former or the assertion of autonomy by a distinct social, cultural linguistic group with respect to the latter, the process which produces the end result of armed conflict is the same.”

To the extent state presence has been eliminated in particular areas, the four elements can exist openly. To the extent the state remains a continuous or occasional presence, the elements must maintain a clandestine existence.

If we examine each of the elements, we find:

- Leadership figures engage in command and control of the insurgent movement. They are the idea men and the planners. They see solution to the grievances of society in structural terms. Only altering the way the institutions and practices of society fit together will result in real change. Reforms and changes in personalities are deemed insufficient to “liberate” or “redeem” society.
- The combatants do the actual fighting and are often mistaken for the movement itself. This they are not. They exist only to carry out the same functions as the police and armed forces of the state. The combatants maintain local control, as well as protect and expand the counterstate. Combatants who secure local areas are the local forces. Combatants who link local areas and provide regional security are the regional forces. Both of these elements normally are tied to specific AORs (areas of responsibility). Main forces, in contrast, are the “heavy” units of the insurgent movement and may be deployed in any AOR. Rather than engaging in terror (the main activity of local forces) and guerrilla warfare (the main activity of regional forces), they engage in mobile warfare and war of position, both subsumed under the “conventional warfare” rubric but different in emphasis when used by insurgents.
- The cadre are the political activists of the insurgency. This does not mean they are unarmed but that they are concerned first and foremost with mass mobilization activities. They are called militants since they are actively engaged in struggling to accomplish insurgent goals. Following guidance and procedures provided by the insurgent movement, the cadre assess the grievances in local areas and carry out activities that satisfy those grievances. They then attribute the solutions they have provided to the insurgent movement itself. Deeds are the key to making insurgent slogans meaningful to the population. Larger societal issues, such as foreign presence, facilitate such action, because these larger issues may be blamed for life’s smaller problems.

Desafíos, Bogotá (Colombia), (12): 10-34, semestre I de 2005

- The mass base consists of the followers of the insurgent movement, the population of the counter-state. Mass base members are recruited and indoctrinated by the cadre. Mass base members may continue in their normal positions in society, but many will lead either second, clandestine lives for the insurgent movement, or even pursue new, fulltime positions within the insurgency (e.g. combatants normally begin as members of the mass base before becoming armed manpower).

What results, as in any armed conflict, is a contest of resource mobilization and force deployment. In the mass mobilization approach, the combatants exist to facilitate the accomplishment of the political goals of the insurgent movement as defined by the leadership.¹³

In local areas, terror (i.e. terrorism as a *method of action*) and guerrilla warfare are used to eliminate resistance, either from individuals who are opposed to the movement or from the local armed representatives of the state, normally the police. Main force units, which are guerrilla units that have been “regularized,” turned into rough copies of government units, are used to deal with the inevitable deployment of the military by the state.

The purpose of main forces is to engage in “mobile (or maneuver) warfare.” The intent is force-on-force action, to destroy government main force units. This allows the insurgents to secure and expand their counter-state (which may be clandestine in all or parts). The intent of mobile warfare, however, is not to seize and hold position as in conventional warfare. This occurs only in “war of position.”

- Classic mobile warfare was that fought by the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and Viet Cong (VC) against the United States in the 1965-73 period. US forces frequently faced battalions and regiments (i.e. brigades), even as terror and guerrilla action continued.
- Classic war of position was seen in the Vietnam War three times: the Tet Offensive that occurred in January-February 1968; the Spring 1972 “Easter Offensive,” which resulted in the permanent alienation of portions of South Vietnamese territory; and the Spring 1975 offensive, which saw the fall of South Vietnam and its absorption into the larger unified Vietnam. In all of these battles, enemy divisions and even corps were

¹³ Benchmark work on this subject is James C. Scott, “Revolution in the Revolution: Peasants and Commissars,” *Theory and Society*, 7/1 & 2 (Jan-Mar 1979), 97-134.

utilized, with terror and guerrilla action assuming the role of special operations in support of operations.¹⁴

- More recently, in El Salvador, where the US successfully supported the counterinsurgency, government forces twice, 1981 and 1989, had to beat back “war of position” offensives designed to seize widespread areas, including portions of the nation’s capital.¹⁵ In Colombia, where the US is similarly involved in support of the counterinsurgency, the insurgents of FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*) initiated their mobile warfare phase in 1996. There followed a string of Colombian Army (COLAR) defeats that culminated in a FARC “war of position” attack that seized a department capital, Mitu, in mid-1998. The relief of Mitu galvanized a military reform effort that led to government success in a

half dozen major mobile war battles fought between 1998 and 2001. The largest of these involved a FARC force of eight battalion equivalents engaged by an equal number of COLAR counterinsurgency battalions (BCG). FARC consequently returned to an emphasis upon terror and guerrilla action.¹⁶

In Nepal, where US assistance has played an important role in government counterinsurgency, the people’s war approach adopted by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), or CPN(M), has progressed in classic fashion. Widespread use of terror and guerrilla action has been complemented by mobile warfare to overrun government positions up to company strength. Mobile warfare targets have been chosen operationally (i.e. as part of campaign planning) to position the CPN(M) for anticipated “war of position” offensives, notably against major population centers.¹⁷

¹⁴ For a single source that deals cogently with the Vietnamese examples used here, see Rod Paschall, “Low-Intensity Conflict Doctrine: Who Needs It?” *Parameters*, XV/3 (Autumn 1985), 33-45. This may be usefully supplemented by Merle L. Pribbenow, “North Vietnam’s Master Plan,” *Vietnam* (August 1999), 30-36. For the best single treatment of Vietnamese “war of position,” see Dale Andrade, *America’s Last Vietnam Battle: Halting Hanoi’s 1972 Easter Offensive* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001). Andrade is presently in the process of completing an article, tentatively titled “Westmoreland Was Right: A Reexamination of America’s Vietnam War Strategy, 1965-66,” which will include consideration of the classic three strategic phases of revolutionary war.

¹⁵ Cf. David Spencer and Jose Angel Moroni Bracamonte, *Strategy and Tactics of the Salvadoran Guerrillas* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995).

¹⁶ For details, see Tom Marks, “Colombian Army Counterinsurgency,” *Crime, Law & Social Change*, 40 (2003), 77-105.

¹⁷ Cf. Thomas A. Marks, *Insurgency in Nepal* (Carlisle, PA: Army War College, 2003).

Armed Action Approach

Significantly, if emphasis is upon the second approach, armed action, the political goal is to be accomplished primarily by violence rather than mass mobilization. The insurgents attempt to inflict such a level of casualties and destruction that the counterinsurgent is incapable or unwilling to continue (and its foreign supporters unwilling to stay the course).

In this approach, the combatant force rarely moves beyond terrorism (as a *method of action*) and guerrilla warfare, with units small and more specialized, frequently no more than squad or platoon strength. Sympathizers provide recruits for the support base but are generally involved actively only occasionally, though they are often central to the information warfare component of the insurgent campaign.

- Illustration of this approach was “The Troubles,” 1968-98, in Northern Ireland (Ulster). An initial mass mobilization approach followed by the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) allowed state penetration and hence was abandoned in favor of a cellular “Active Service Unit” (ASU)
- More recently, this approach has been used by the insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan.

methodology. At normally no more than 300-man strength, the ASU network engaged almost exclusively in terroristic actions and was sustained by a support base that numbered but in the thousands, of a total 1.5 million population in an area the size of Connecticut. Sympathizers came overwhelmingly from a minority within the Catholic community, thus from a minority within a minority. At its peak, however, this sympathetic base proved capable of mustering 17% of the votes in democratic elections and served to keep open to question the legitimacy of British rule, which was actually favored by a substantial majority. That terrorism remained throughout a *method of action* as opposed to a *logic of action* is precisely the reason why most sources, whatever popular and official “terrorists” terminology, maintained that PIRA was analytically best assessed as an insurgency. Certainly it was counterinsurgency that was the British response, with counterterrorism as a significant sub-campaign.¹⁸

¹⁸ For two excellent works, see Richard English, *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA* (NY: Oxford, 2003); and J. Bowyer Bell, *The Secret Army: The IRA*, 3rd ed. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1997).

Terrorism (as a *method of action*) and low-level guerrilla warfare have been focused upon indigenous supporters and infrastructure of the new regimes in Baghdad and Kabul.¹⁹ Simultaneously, attacks upon US forces have sought to inflict casualties to break the will of the US public to continue. It is recognized by the insurgents that the indigenous regimes can not continue in the short-term without US backing and assistance. Neither, as the US begins to withdraw, will the new regimes be able to continue if their populations can be suitably terrorized into sullen neutrality.

It is necessary to point out that an approach such as that of Che Guevara and his *foco* theory, while purporting to engage in mass mobilization through the example and reality of guerrilla action conducted by the revolutionary organization, in reality was a variant of the armed ac-

tion approach. Without even an adequate support base (much less a mass base), the *foco* was inevitably decimated and Che executed in the 1967 Bolivia fiasco.²⁰ That *focismo* was not “terrorism” stemmed from the conscious effort to avoid terrorism as a *logic of action*, indeed, to avoid attacking civilians altogether. That insurgency was the cause of their deaths was a distinction of little meaning to Che’s victims, and so he was labeled a “terrorist.”

Recent insurgencies have often passed through common phases of development. Not all insurgencies experience every phase, and progression through all phases is not a requirement for success. The same insurgent movement may be in another phase in other regions of a country. Successful insurgencies can also revert to an earlier phase when under pressure, resuming development when favorable conditions return.

¹⁹ It is significant that there apparently are no articles or books (on either of these cases) that have yet emerged as accomplishing our purposes of illustration.

²⁰ Quick reference may be made to David Rooney, *Guerrilla: Insurgents, Patriots and Terrorists From Sun Tzu to Bin Laden* (London: Brassey’s, 2004), 199-220 (chapter entitled “Che Guevara and Guerrilla War”). See also Paul J. Dosal, *Commandante Che: Guerrilla Soldier, Commander, and Strategist, 1956-1967* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), *passim*. For Che’s benchmark work, Che Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, ed. Brian Loveman and Thomas M. Davies, 3rd ed. (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1997). On approach, cf. Matt D. Childs, “An Historical Critique of the Emergence and Evolution of Ernesto Che Guevara’s *Foco* Theory,” *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 27/Pt. 3 (October 1995), 593-614; for the death, Henry Butterfield, *The Fall of Che Guevara: A Story of Soldiers, Spies, and Diplomats* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1998). For the relationship between the urban and rural guerrilla components: Roman L. Bonachea and Marta San Martin, *The Cuban Insurrection 1952-1959* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1974); and Julia E. Sweig, *Inside the Cuban Revolution: Fidel Castro and the Urban Underground* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

The conceptualization generally followed by insurgents is drawn from that postulated by Mao Tse-tung. It is not that taught since World War II in U.S. special operations courses. Regardless of its provenance, the Maoist conceptualization has been used by movements as diverse as communist or Islamist insurgencies, because it is logical and based upon the mass mobilization emphasis.²¹

It states that insurgents are first strategically on the defensive (Phase I), move to stalemate (Phase II), and finally go over to the offensive (Phase III). Strategic movement from one phase to another incorporates the operational and tactical activity typical of earlier phases. It does not end them. The Vietnamese explicitly recognized this reality in their “war of interlocking” doctrine, which held that all “forms of warfare” occur simultaneously, even as a particular form is paramount (“is the driver” might be the current terminology).

Political organization occurs throughout. While on the defensive, however, in Phase I as per Mao, a movement will necessarily fight the “war of the weak,” emphasizing terrorism (as a *method of action*) and guerrilla warfare. It is through main force action that stalemate, Phase II,

is achieved. This allows Phase III, “war of position,” to unfold. It may be noted that the terminology is drawn from Western, especially Soviet, usage. Nevertheless, US sources in particular insist upon conceptualizing the process as “organization, guerrilla, conventional warfare,” which misrepresents what occurs. Except as illustrated by tactical exceptions, insurgent organization does not occur without violence, certainly not at the operational or strategic levels. Insurgency is by definition an armed political movement.

This is all the more visible if the insurgents adopt the second approach, a strategy of armed action. In this case, the phases just discussed do not necessarily apply. Emphasizing the combatants envisages “level of pain” as the “driver” throughout the insurgency. There will be no need to form main force units. In this approach, campaigns (operational art) dictate tactical action, with an active support base used to make armed action possible.

Funding Integral to Insurgency

Insurgent doctrine, as illustrated above, is critical in determining how the insurgents will actually

²¹ Complete discussion may be found in Thomas A. Marks, *Maoist People's War in Post-Vietnam Asia* (Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point, forthcoming).

conduct themselves. Emphasis upon mobilization of the masses requires a greater level of resources, both human and material, than emphasis upon armed action. The former requires the resources necessary to construct and maintain a true counter-state; the latter requires only that which is necessary to sustain an armed campaign with minimal counter-state apparatus.

Distribution of effort (as measured by man-hours or “profit” gained from activity) must necessarily be in harmony with operational and tactical reality as driven by strategic approach. It is the ability to reap “windfall profits” that makes illegal activity so attractive to insurgents. While taxation of a mass base is inherently low-return, kidnapping, extortion, and drugs – to cite three prominent illustrations of activities favored by insurgents – are “high return.”

- Activities of FARC in Colombia serve well to illustrate this, with profits from single kidnappings often totaling in the millions (US \$). Drugs, of course, retain the highest potential for large profits for any level of investment.²²

- In the case of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), CPN(M), taxing the mass base directly proved much inferior to other criminal forms of “revolutionary taxation.” Small shopkeepers in Rolpa in April 2003, for instance, cited payments of NPR 50 per month (about US 66 cents). In contrast, amounts realized from kidnapping-for-ransom were an order of magnitude greater. A case, not atypical, in Rolpa involved a small innkeeper held until ransomed by his family for NPR 30,000, or nearly US \$400. Extortion proved equally lucrative for the movement, with businesses associated with the commercial economy bearing the brunt. It is this activity, extortion, that has grown completely out of control in 2004, to the extent that it is forcing the shut-down of field activity of even donor-funded projects. Demands as high as 10 percent of contract value have been reported, with contract value often in the millions if measured *in toto*.²³

It stands to reason that any insurgent movement that increasingly devotes exceptional amounts of time and effort to fund-raising (i.e. sustenance) must of neces-

²² Most recent public data is the excellent “FARC Inc.,” *Semana* (2 February 2005), unpaginated [web download] <http://semana2.terra.com.co/opencms/opencms/Semana/articulo.html?id=84464>.

²³ For further details, cf. Marks, *Insurgency in Nepal, passim*.

sity short-change ideological (or even armed) action. Just where this leads in the case of any particular movement is at the heart of debate in characterizing movements as diverse as the PIRA in Ulster, which long has been involved in all manner of criminal activity, yet certainly remains committed to its ideological aims; or FARC in Colombia, which, through its involvement in the drug trade, has apparently become the richest self-sustaining insurgent group in history and continues to claim pursuance of “Bolivarian” and “socialist” ends (with Secretariat members continuing to speak of “socialism” as meaning “Marxist-Leninism”). FARC activities, though, have increasingly been labeled “narcoterrorist” or simply criminal by a variety of critics.

What must be measured, of course, is the “drivers” of any movement. The activities of Pablo Escobar in Medellin, for instance, at times took on an insurgent-like character, with a counter-state effectively in place and a proto-ideological agenda. These activities did not become actual insurgency, any more than did the similar proto-ideological activities of segments of the Italian *Mafia* in the 1990s (which at times required the deployment of the Italian armed forces in stability operations).

FARC is significant, because it continues to espouse an ideologi-

cal agenda and to adopt pseudo-specialization of manpower, with some Fighting Fronts (*Frente de Guerra*) dedicated overwhelmingly to narcotics activity in the *llanos*, an apparent majority of Fighting Fronts committed to more “traditional” insurgent activity in the *sierra*, where they are required to be self-sustaining and hence must rely heavily upon kidnapping and extortion. The relationship between the two modes of operation has not been well documented but revolves around the use of mobility corridors (*corridors de movilidad*) and bases/base areas to move manpower and logistical support throughout the battle space.

A full descent into criminality negates the essence of “insurgency” as an analytical category. There is a decided tendency since “9-11” —particularly as memory fades of the copious Vietnam Era research on insurgency— to lump all “internal war” phenomena — whether terrorism, rebellion, insurgency, or actual revolution — into the same category, thus to return us to precisely the point of confusion and conflation we were at as the 1960s began.

Indeed, the similarity between that era and now is striking, with the significant difference that a significant number of policy makers and military personnel “then” had actual experience with, minimally, guerrilla warfare

Desafíos, Bogotá (Colombia), (12): 10-34, semestre I de 2005

(which necessarily included terrorism as *method of action*), maximally, actual revolutions with their attendant insurgent action (e.g. the Chinese Revolution). Throughout history, there has been no shortage of insurgencies that have degenerated to criminality, particularly as the “movements proper” have disintegrated, and elements have been cast adrift.

From the state’s perspective, it has normally been held that such disintegration is desirable, because it takes what is truly dangerous, an ideologically inspired body of disaffiliated individuals motivated by ideology, and replaces it with what is less dangerous, a more diverse body normally of very uneven character. The former is a security threat; the latter a law-and-order concern. Still, this should not be interpreted as denigrating armed capacity of a law-and-order threat, as the various movements in the Gold Coast area of Africa would appear to illustrate.²⁴

The African groups appear to raise another issue: Criminal “warlordism,” while it may exist in a strategic posture of estrangement from the state—

which some have labeled “insurgent” — should not be confused with actual insurgency. Were we to make such an analytical leap, we would be conducting “insurgent studies” on alienated, disaffiliated impoverished areas the likes of East Los Angeles or Rio de Janeiro.²⁵

What has long been discussed is the capacity of such areas for mobilization by insurgent actors, much as Afghanistan was appropriated by Taliban and then used as a platform of operations by AQ (be it “terrorist” or TNI). In the event, it has proved exceptionally difficult for insurgents to establish presence in these areas worldwide where they remain integrated into the larger state (even if “failed” or “failing”), precisely because of the barriers stand-alone criminal activity throws up to ideological mobilization.

Yet most insurgent movements have at one time or another, particularly in their early phases, established relationships with criminal elements (e.g. Mao Tse-tung in the 1920s). Ideologically sound movements regularly move against elements that seek to exploit criminal activity for

²⁴ See e.g. William Reno, “The Failure of Peacekeeping in Sierra Leone,” *Current History* (May 2001), 219-25. Therein, Reno makes the challenging assertion, “Conflict in collapsed states is fundamentally different from wars between ideological rivals who mobilize mass followings and build ‘liberated zones’ to practice their ideas of governance.”

²⁵ Cf. Thomas A. Marks, “Urban Insurgency,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 14/3 (Autumn 2003), 100-57. See esp. n. 56 for sources.

personal as opposed to movement gain. Ascendance of criminality creates an altogether different level of concern and would seem to dictate stability operations (as presently conceptualized) rather than counterinsurgency (as recently discussed in the US Army's Interim Field Manual 3-07.22). Reduced to bare bones, stability operations and counterinsurgency have much in common, but the latter certainly must place greater effort upon the classic "hearts and minds" activity that serves to divide insurgent leadership from manpower. It is precisely the ideological inspiration of insurgent leadership figures that separates insurgency from traditional rebellion and resistance.

Counterinsurgency Approach

Having examined insurgency, it is necessary to close by examining the counter – which should not be confused with *counter-terrorism*. *Counterinsurgency* is the neutralization by the state of the insurgency (with one component terrorism as a *method of action*) and its effort to form a counter-state.

Counterinsurgency contains an inherent contradiction, because it is imperfections of the existing system that feed the insurgency. Simply returning to the status quo is therefore not an option. Reform is necessary, but reform is a matter for the state, utilizing all of its human and material resources. Security forces are only one such resource. The response must be multifaceted and coordinated, yet states typically charge their security forces with "waging counterinsurgency." This, they can not do alone.

To the contrary, *the state* first decides upon its goal (restoration of legitimate government writ), then produces a *plan* to accomplish that end.²⁶ *All elements of national power* are assigned their roles in carrying out the plan. The *legal framework* is put in place to enable plan implementation, and *command and control (C2) arrangements* are established.

- The legal framework normally includes a series of extraordinary measures as are associated with emergency situations or even martial law. It frequently will expand

²⁶ Excellent illustration of a national planning approach and implementation to counterinsurgency is that presently being used by the Alvaro Uribe administration in Colombia. For details see Thomas A. Marks, "Colombian Military Support for 'Democratic Security'," forthcoming (NDU Press). Details of the successful Peruvian approach may be found in David Scott Palmer and Thomas A. Marks, "Radical Maoist Insurgents and Terrorist Tactics: Comparing Peru and Nepal," *LIC and Law Enforcement*, forthcoming.

military powers into areas delegated solely to the police in “normal times.”

- Historically, effective C2 architecture has involved setting up local coordinating bodies with representation from all key parties. These run the counterinsurgency campaign in the area of responsibility (AOR) concerned, though one individual will have the lead. Minimally, such a coordinating body includes appropriate representatives from civil authority, the military, the police, the intelligence services, and (though not always) the civil population. The most effective use of coordinating bodies has given permanent-party individuals (e.g. a district officer) responsibility for counterinsurgency C2 in their AORs and given them control over any assets, whether civil or military, sent into their AORs. Reinforcing intelligence bodies, in particular, have been assigned as permanent party.

All operational and tactical elements of the multifaceted approach support the accomplishment of the strategic goal. Individual campaigns, such as attacking insurgent financing, must be coordinated and weighted as appropriate to the circumstances. There is inherent danger in mistaking an operational center of gravity (e.g. insurgent

generation of funding) for the strategic center of gravity (i.e. legitimacy).

Security forces, sent into an area to engage in counterinsurgency, perform as follows:

- Strategically, they serve as the shield for carrying out reform.
- Operationally, they systematically restore government control.
- Tactically, they eliminate (through either death or capture) insurgent leadership, combatants, and cadre so that that local populations (who also provide the insurgent mass base) are secure and able to engage in normal activities.

The counterinsurgency plan will secure the critical infrastructure of the state and the government's centers of power. It will detail the scheme to reclaim what has been lost. Priority of effort and timeline are established. A key part of the scheme will be a sub-campaign against terrorism (as a *method of action*).

As a general principle, the government moves from strength to weakness, “holding” in areas of lesser priority while successively concentrating assets in priority areas.

For the security forces, the strategic counter to insurgent or-

Desafíos, Bogotá (Colombia), (12): 10-34, semestre I de 2005

ganization and operational patterns is to address the insurgent approach in a correct and sustainable fashion.

- A correct approach will balance elimination of grievances (i.e. reform) and security force action that eliminates the insurgents. The security forces provide the protection necessary for the restoration of government presence and control.
- A sustainable approach is defined by the state itself. It must be willing to bear the human and fiscal cost of the approach it seeks to implement.

With a correct and sustainable approach in place, the counterinsurgent “plays for the breaks,” those shifts in the internal or external situation that work against the insurgent and favor the state. This normally involves an extended period of time, a “protracted war.” This makes it difficult for democracies to sustain counterinsurgent campaigns, particularly in the present world-environment where there is little agreement upon strategic ends and means,

much less operational and tactical concerns.²⁷

A state is challenged by a counterstate. No objective force level guarantees victory for either side. It is frequently stated that a 10:1 or 20:1 ratio of counterinsurgents to insurgents is necessary for counterinsurgency victory. In reality, no firm ratios exist. As in conventional war, in insurgency all correlations of forces depend upon the situation. Of necessity, however, counterinsurgency is manpower intensive.²⁸

Time, which often works on the side of the insurgent, consequently often places serious constraints upon counterinsurgent courses of action.

Conclusions

It is evident that the approach above has many elements in common with a counter-terrorist campaign. Insurgents, in fact, have often been labeled “terrorists” for the integral role terroristic action plays in their campaign for power. Yet it should be evident that terrorism as a *logic of*

²⁷ This formulation was outlined for me by the legendary Sir Robert Thompson shortly before his death. For transcript of interview, see Tom Marks, “The Counter-Revolutionary: Sir Robert Thompson – Grand Master of Unconventional Warfare,” *Soldier of Fortune*, 14/10 (October 1989), 58-65/77-80. Thompson’s seminal text remains as useful today as when it was written, regardless of the precise ideology adopted by the insurgents: *Defeating Communist Insurgency* (NY: Praeger, 1966).

²⁸ My introduction to this reality I also owe to Thompson.

action – that is, terrorism as an analytic and strategic category – because it is devoid of a substantive effort to form a counter-state, is more an issue of security than of “root causes.”

The present threat of international terrorism certainly would seem to challenge this conclusion, but does not. Rather, it engenders the heated debate concerning the nature of the violence: transnational terrorism (i.e. terrorist groups rooted in local causes and bases but seeking to carry out international actions) or international insurgency (i.e. an insurgency located in an area so extensive that national boundaries have little meaning to its essence). In contrast, it would probably be accurate to cite Vietnam as an illustration of what might be called “transnational insurgency” (i.e. an insurgent group rooted in local causes and bases but one which extends its actions across state boundaries).

It seems almost trite to highlight, whatever one calls the present threat, that the need for a strategic approach that embodies the elements of counterinsurgency. Entire countries must be treated as theatres of operation in the same manner that tradi-

tional counterinsurgency, waged within a nation-state, deals with affected areas.

Hence, to use an example, Pakistan’s dysfunctional educational system, which results in tens of thousands of young people being indoctrinated in Islamist sectarianism, must be addressed as a necessary component of the present GWOT (Global War on Terrorism). That Pakistan should take the lead is axiomatic; that foreign powers can and should assist is also virtually self-evident. The alternative is assistance that will be required when matters grow much worse.²⁹

Be all this as it may, it is in fact rare that either states or their foreign backers act in timely manner to address budding insurgency. Since it is in weak states (a category which includes the “failing” and “failed” state terminology³⁰) that insurgencies blossom, some sort of external involvement is virtually inevitable. In the extreme, this will take the form of actual involvement in the counterinsurgency campaign.

Foreign participation in the counterinsurgency of a host na-

²⁹ For details on this particular case, cf. Hassan Abbas, *Pakistan’s Drift Into Extremism: Allah, the Army, and America’s War on Terror* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2005).

³⁰ Useful for details is I. William Zartman, *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1995).

tion – e.g. the US role in Colombia, Afghanistan, and Iraq – must assist the host in implementing a sustainable approach. To the extent that the host nation has intact its basic institutions and security forces, the burden upon foreign personnel and resources is lessened. To the extent that the host nation is lacking basic institutions and functions, the burden upon the reinforcing state is increased.

In the extreme, rather than building upon what is, foreign assistance will find itself creating elements (e.g. local forces) of the society it has been sent to assist. By nature of expeditionary action, external forces often are given the lead. This involves them in a host of activities that do not normally fall within their mission profile, from supervising elections to restoring power and conducting schooling.

What is fundamental, beyond all else, is to have a plan for approaching the threat. This naturally presupposes that both state and foreign benefactors will have carried out what Clausewitz called “the first of all strategic questions and the most comprehensive”: “to establish... the kind of war on which they are embarking; nei-

ther mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature.”³¹ Simple in concept, even distinguishing between *insurgency* and *terrorism* has proved a challenge in the present dangerous environment of the GWOT.

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³¹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 88-89.

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