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# Rethinking Counterinsurgency

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John Mackinlay, Alison Al-Baddawy

Prepared for the Office of the Secretary of Defense

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## Preface

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Although the United States has been a leader of grand alliances for more than half a century, it has for most of this time been less aware of its cultural isolation than its allies. In the present strategic era it is becoming a planning assumption that U.S.–led interventions will be international in composition, and greater integration, even with English-speaking partners, imposes the need to understand each partner’s military culture and national interests. This document sets out a British perspective. In doctrinal terms it explains where the British have come from and where they might be going. It also shows why the United States should not assume that the United Kingdom and its European partners share its convictions about the “war against terror.” In the particular case of the British, the attacks of September 11, 2001, were not a “year zero” in terms of their domestic experience of insurgent violence. Although the attack on the United States was shocking in its scale and visibility, the United Kingdom has endured more than 100 years of terrorism at home and abroad, including the murder of several members of its Royal Family and numerous bomb attacks against its urban populations. Together with the living memory of the destruction of their cities during the 1940s, this experience has compelled the British to absorb violence rather than seek immediate retribution. The British Army learned both in the colonies and in Northern Ireland that retribution is usually the desired response of the perpetrator. The failure to take revenge may be bitterly borne by people on the street and by populist newspaper editors, but at a more thoughtful level there is usually enough sense in the nation and the media to see that enduring

is the hallmark of a longer-term strategic process: “Though the mills of God grind slowly/Yet they grind exceeding small.” So although they are superficially similar to the U.S. military in language and certain aspirations, at a deeper level the British armed forces are characterised by some important idiosyncrasies.

The British population is also differently comprised and generally takes a more international view of itself (as Londonistan) and its linkages to the wider world. Most European states host significant Muslim minorities who maintain cultural and political linkages to their country of origin. In many cases they can reach their original North African homelands after only a few days by road and car ferry. British Muslims travel by air to South Asia frequently and increasingly cheaply. Despite the negative media focus on intercommunal violence in most European countries, there has been an active process of cultural integration. The United Kingdom’s immigrant communities are increasingly represented in its national personality, in politics, in national and local governments, in the evolution of the English language, in the arts, in the media, and even in British cuisine. However, integrating immigrant cultures into or with a host nation does not occur without pain and tension on both sides. The new structures of the UK Home Office reflect the growing recognition of this delicate process.

It should therefore not come as a surprise that the United Kingdom, in common with many European states, must maintain a guarded approach to the U.S. version of the war against terror. Nor should it be surprising that participation in operations in Iraq and Afghanistan inflames the host-immigrant tension among European Muslims, and especially British Muslims, whom Pew’s Global Attitudes Project recently judged the most anti-Western community in Europe.

These important differences between the United Kingdom and the United States are both the reason and the stepping-off point for this document. Its purpose is not to emphasize British cultural idiosyncrasies but to look forward to the next chapter of a counterinsurgent campaign that is driven by an internationally acceptable strategy and concept of operations. As General Sir Mike Jackson put it, “we are with the Americans but not as the Americans.”

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## Summary

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The contemporary international security environment has become a frustrating place for Western powers. Even with great technological and military advances, British and U.S. counterinsurgency (COIN) operations have been slow to respond and adapt to the rise of the global jihadist insurgency. Operational failures in Iraq and Afghanistan have highlighted the need for the West to rethink and retool its current COIN strategy. By analyzing past British COIN experiences and comparing them to the evolving nature of modern jihadist insurgencies, this document suggests a new outlook for future COIN operations. This strategic framework considers the political, social, and military aspects of an insurgency and likewise looks for a political, social, and military solution.

Historically, the United Kingdom has been successful in countering insurgencies faced at home and abroad. During the period of decolonization in Asia and Africa, the British government and military were faced with more insurgent activity than any other Western power. During this time, British forces proved proficient in defeating, or at least controlling, the rebellions rising throughout their empire. Most notable were the British successes in Malaya and Northern Ireland. However, these protoinsurgencies were far less complex and sophisticated than the jihadist insurgency faced today. Past insurgencies were primarily monolithic or national in form. Although the popularity of these past insurgent movements may have spread globally, the insurgencies were working for very specific local goals (like overthrowing a local government), and they derived most of their power from the local

population. With such a centralized base of power, previous insurgencies were vulnerable to strong military responses and were countered by triumphant British military campaigns. Although successful at the time, this old British strategy is not comprehensive enough to meet the challenges posed by modern jihadist movements.

Modern insurgent movements are characterized by their complex and global nature. Unlike past insurgent forms that aspired to shape national politics, these movements espouse larger thematic goals, like overthrowing the global order. Modern insurgencies are also more global in terms of their population and operational territory. The jihadist movements are sustained economically and politically not only through Arab and Persian populations, but also through the support of parts of the global Muslim community. This community is made up of immigrants and refugees in Western states, first- and second-generation immigrants who have become involved in various fundamentalist movements, and Western Muslims who share a sense of religious and cultural solidarity with jihadist insurgents. This paradigm shift has caused many problems for Western nations that are still aiming COIN operations at individual terrorist actors in specific geographic locations. While this type of response may quell a certain level of violence and unrest in one region, it does nothing to quell the overarching insurgency. Short-term, local victories celebrated by the West are being overshadowed by the growing strength and intensity of the global insurgency at large.

In order to counteract this growth, Western COIN operations must change to address longer-term political and social questions. Western security forces and insurgents are engaged just as intensely in a propaganda war as they are in a traditional military war. U.S. and British COIN operations must do more than pay lip service to “winning the hearts and minds” of a population. Instead, the U.S. and UK militaries must make fundamental cultural changes to the way they view COIN warfare and success. To successfully defeat modern jihadist insurgencies, the West must shed its desire for quick military victories and instead engage in the larger, underlying political and social dimensions of this global phenomenon.

## Acknowledgments

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## Abbreviations

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COIN	counterinsurgency
EU	European Union
FIC	federated insurgency complex
GOV	government
GWAT	global war against terrorism
I	insurgents
IRA	Irish Republican Army
MoD	Ministry of Defence [UK]
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
UOIF	Union des Organisations Islamiques de France [Union of Islamic Organizations in France]
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organisation
POP	population
SF	security forces
UN	United Nations





## Introduction

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The global war against terrorism (GWAT) has become a stalemate. The Coalition has reached a security plateau where it protects itself more reliably, but beyond its reach and observation the jihad continues to multiply and operate. Despite the energy of the Western effort and that effort's enormous cost, it is hard to be sure that the West is winning. Lists of achievements describing elections held, towns secured, amenities restored, and terrorists killed continue to appear, but the campaign has become too complicated to understand. There are too many perspectives, too many actors, and too many front lines to allow for the measurement of success or failure. Nevertheless, global jihad has altered Western lives, impinged on Western freedoms, restricted Western movement, and substantially raised the cost of Western security.

Winning cannot be measured in fragile democracies installed, armies returned home, and access restored to countries where Westerners now fear to travel. It must also include the frame of mind of affected Muslim populations that are spread among Muslim states as well as immigrant minorities from the Philippines, Niger, and beyond. "Winning" therefore means a Muslim world that lives more easily with itself, with non-Muslim states, and as minority communities within Western states.

This document suggests that the West has been surprised by the characteristics of global insurgency. The West's collective military experience and existing doctrine did not anticipate a campaign so energized by spiritual, global, and virtual dimensions; they were not prepared for the multifaceted characteristics of the international response

that the adversary has compelled. The initial stages of the U.S.–led counterstrategy have been counterterrorist in concept and physical in execution. The U.S. campaign can only succeed in achieving heavily enforced and expensive islands of security within which the citizens of the Coalition must increasingly live and move. The West needs to look beyond the current phase of attrition and design the next chapter of the campaign. Given the Europeans' experience of past insurgencies, it may turn out to be a long chapter that is measured in decades. To cross the threshold from stalemate to success will require a more nuanced understanding of the attacker, a reenergized political strategy, and a more multicultural coalition that confers a greater degree of legitimacy on Western interventions.

This document argues that in a longer campaign beyond Iraq, U.S.–led coalitions will have to become part of a mosaic of activities that are globally spread, politically driven, more internationally constituted, and manoeuvrist in concept. In a conflict that is fuelled by perceptions, the West must raise its game in the virtual dimension. A successful counterstrategy must therefore comprise several elements—political, military security, humanitarian security, development, and economic—and in its virtual representation have the same reach and pervasiveness as the forces it seeks to disarm. To turn the tide successfully it will have to make a more coherent and determined effort to dissuade or forcefully prevent sympathetic communities across the world from assisting the insurgency. This requires political and military leaders to understand and exploit the propaganda of the deed as a concept of operations in addition to the more traditional uses of political influence and force.

The second chapter of this document shows why the British, who arguably led the development of COIN doctrine, were conceptually unsighted at the end of the Cold War and revealed what turned out to be a very poor understanding of the Palestinian insurgency that transfixed the world in the following decade. The third chapter describes two dimensions of the prevailing environment, the Muslim community and the virtual dimension. In examining the relationship between these dimensions, the chapter explains why it is so difficult for the West to shape the campaign environment. The final chapter describes the

foreign policy problems associated with moving from counterterrorism into a genuine counterinsurgent strategy and summarizes the existing practical experience of coalitions.



## Successful Insurgencies and Counterinsurgencies

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This chapter argues that in the evolutionary period of insurgency after 1945, armies of industrial nations that were proficient in COIN did not always face insurgency's most virulent or most successful strains. This left them doctrinally unsighted when confronted by its recent evolutionary form.

The British definition of insurgency emphasizes three essential characteristics:

- Insurgency is a desperate expedient by activists who, at the outset of their campaign, are militarily weaker than the combination of governments and regular forces they seek to overthrow.
- To win power, these activists must persuade the masses to support them, which feat they achieve through a mixture of subversion, propaganda, and military pressure.
- The insurgents redress military weakness by exploiting their environment, which could be empty wilderness, a rebellious city, a disaffected community, or, in the prevailing era of mass communications, the virtual territories of the mind.<sup>1</sup>

Terrorism is an important part of the insurgents' inventory of tactics, but it is a tool that achieves a greater long-term effect when used together with subversion, agitation, and propaganda as part of a politi-

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<sup>1</sup> UK Army, Army Field Manual, Vol. 5, *Land Operations*, 1995, p. 1-1. See also Bard E. O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism, Inside Modern Revolutionary Warfare* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, [1990] 2000) p. 13.

cal strategy. On their own, the effects of terrorism are ephemeral. During the 1970s and 1980s, politically isolated groups (e.g., Animal Rights, the Red Army Faction) used acts of terror to publicize their beliefs. Although these attacks caused great disruption and attracted sensational headlines, without popular support, they were spectacular but short-lived. This document shares the UK Army's conception of "insurgency" and "terrorism": terrorism is a subordinate dimension of insurgency and is not the basis for a successful long-term campaign to overthrow a regime or society on its own.<sup>2</sup>

## The Evolution of Insurgency

In preindustrial societies, insurgents exploited the remote wilderness where they could overextend their opponents and defeat larger, more-powerful forces man for man and on their own terms.<sup>3</sup> In preindustrial societies, where the stranger was the exception and therefore easily identified, insurgents exploited populations that were almost impossible for the ethnically different colonial government forces to penetrate.<sup>4</sup> Later, industrial advances created an urban society in which the stranger became the norm; expectations altered, and these more concentrated populations were penetrated and animated by new ideologies. Insurgency also changed; activists relied less on military exploitation of terrain and more on the power of popular support. They exploited intensely felt grievances and supplanted unpopular regimes with their own ideology and political banners. Industrialization spread across continents, eroding the military significance of the wilderness with improved transport technology and concentrating populations into

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<sup>2</sup> UK Army, Army Field Manual, Vol. 1, *Combined Arms Operations*, 2001, p. A1-11.

<sup>3</sup> In "The Ballad of East and West" (1889), Rudyard Kipling describes the address of Kamal, the notorious clan chief of the borders, to the British officer who has caught up with him after a long and furious ride: "T" was only by favor of mine" quoth he "ye rode so long alive:/ There was not a rock for twenty mile, there was not a clump of tree/But covered a man of my own men with his rifle cocked on his knee."

<sup>4</sup> Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia* (London: John Murray, 1998).

urban areas. Cities expanded, joining together to become conurbations in which immigrant communities dispersed as individual families into lawless townships. During the 1970s, the techniques of insurgency continued to evolve; the “urban guerrilla” exploited this unstructured and ungovernable landscape together with changes in technology and weaponry. In the 1990s, the social significance of the petrol engine was overtaken by the proliferation of electronic communications. Urban areas continued to develop and spread physically at a pace that was by now familiar, but the social structures and the lives of individuals within them altered at a much faster rate. Satellite television and the Internet began to create communities out of like-minded individuals who were spread across the world. Society organized itself to reciprocate the different structures of the Internet. For the post-industrial insurgents, the virtual dimension that was now growing along with the proliferation of communications became a new environment for subversion and clandestine organization. They swiftly adapted to the Internet’s characteristics and used it to harness the violent energy that arose from “global” communities that were held together by common grievances and ideologies.

Insurgents are therefore a product of an environment and a population, and to be successful their *modus operandi* has to be continuously sympathetic to their surroundings. The insurgent-environment relationship is constant, but the environment changes, and some countries are more industrialized than others. Although the evolutionary process is linear, successive iterations do not exclude previous forms. This means that an insurgency, which thrives in a preindustrial society and exploits its grievances, can coexist with postindustrial forms.<sup>5</sup> It is also possible that several different forms of insurgent violence, arguably representing different evolutionary eras, may be manifested in the same

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<sup>5</sup> In Afghanistan and Pakistan, for example, global, national, and local insurgents attack Coalition forces, their diplomatic and cultural buildings, and their individual nationals in the contemporary paradigm of a complex insurgency. In neighbouring Nepal, a 1950s version of Maoist insurgency is flourishing.

state and in the same town. This is particularly the case in states that have become proxy war zones in the U.S. war on terror.<sup>6</sup>

## The Evolution of Counterinsurgency

In the period relevant to this study, insurgencies have been opposed by Russian, U.S., British, French, Portuguese, Spanish, Indian, and Israeli soldiers. For several reasons, there is a stronger sense of continuity in the evolution of insurgency than in the corresponding development of COIN doctrine. Successful insurgents maintain a constant relationship to their environment. However, national security forces change for different reasons. They update, modernize, and restructure themselves due to shared technology, standards imposed by military alliances, and the competitive pressure of rival states. The forward-looking element of a military staff anticipates potential enemy capabilities and the physical limitations of geography and environment, but usually does not consider the emerging chemistry of a society that might in the future become the epicentre of an insurgency. A COIN response is therefore reactive, a private affair influenced by culture, national values, and respect for individual freedoms. Nations learn from the insurgencies they directly experience and rarely from the doctrine or institutional wisdom of others.<sup>7</sup> It is possible to trace the evolution of insurgency and its direct and logical relationship to changes in a particular society, but the narrative of COIN has a ragged continuity related to the directly experienced campaigns of a particular nation.

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<sup>6</sup> Afghanistan is the obvious example. In addition to Taliban insurgents, fighters have come from European Union (EU) countries as well the Gulf region to support an insurgent campaign that is sustained by the techniques of the complex insurgent.

<sup>7</sup> This was a point made by Sir Robert Thompson about the U.S. failure in Vietnam to accept the important lessons of British experience. See Robert Grainger Ker Thompson, *No Exit from Vietnam*, by Robert Thompson (New York: McKay, 1969). See also John A. Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam: Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).



## The Significance of British Experience

The British experience should be precisely understood but not overestimated. Historically and institutionally, the British appear to be well positioned to serve as a global repository for COIN experience. It could be argued, therefore, that their institutional memory, regimental structure, and long-term experience through late 1990s should have provided the continuity that was missing from the narrative of COIN. But for reasons explained below, this was not the case.

In 1825 the British Army was reorganized into a two-battalion system known as the “Localized and Linked Battalion Scheme.”<sup>8</sup> Its purpose was to keep one battalion in the United Kingdom and a sister battalion in the colonies (most members of this second battalion had direct experience of low-level conflict). The impact was twofold: First, the British army thought as battalions,<sup>9</sup> rather than as brigades or divisions, except in the infrequent event of mobilization for a general war. Second, because of the institutional continuity of the regiment, operational experience was to some extent captured regimentally in battalion orders, standing procedures, and the continuity of its regimental staff. The structures that provide a British battalion with its operational intuition today are to some degree the surviving relics of this system.

The size and spread of the empire compelled British regiments to continuously experience insurgency and COIN. As the empire evolved, their task evolved, from territorial conquest to maintaining law and order. The relevant period of British experience began after 1945 as each colony exercised its urge for self-determination against a global background of imperial collapse. From the perspective of a colonized population, the Maoist concept of the “people’s war” provided an off-the-shelf formula for irresistible insurrection. In many countries the rebellious energy that Mao described in his strategic defensive phase was already building up, and the Maoist concept provided a roadmap

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<sup>8</sup> Correlli Barnett, *Britain and Her Army, 1509–1970: A Military, Political and Social Survey* (London: Allen Lane, 1970).

<sup>9</sup> Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*.

that could be adapted to national circumstances.<sup>10</sup> Mao's "special ingredients" were a political banner and a methodology to mobilize the population against the combined strength of a national government and its security forces.<sup>11</sup> His strategy was similar to a judo wrestler's (the opponent's gross weight and power are used against him to throw him to the ground). Mao's political strategy was to mobilize an entire population and, village by village, secure its territory, supplant the structures and officials of the opposing regime, and introduce a new egalitarian system that seemed to redress the burdens and grievances of the liberated population. Mao was foremost among the postwar revolutionary leaders to understand that the population was his vital ground and that he had to win the people over to his side to succeed. He overcame the natural recalcitrance of peasant communities and understood the compelling nature of raw military power, but was resolved to subordinate this power to his own political control. His concept of operations was to woo the population with visions of resurgent nationalism and of a better, richer, more secure life. When those promises failed to motivate, he was willing to forcibly remove individuals or entire communities that stood in the way.<sup>12</sup> At the tactical level, he also understood the lexicon of guerrilla techniques.<sup>13</sup>

The British defeat of the Maoist insurgency in Malaya was doctrinally significant. The Malaya campaign demonstrated that despite the dark predictions of domino theorists, the Maoist formula for people's war was not after all irresistible. Malaya did not change the course of history, but at a national level it gave the British a *modus operandi* for their subsequent operations in North Borneo, Oman, Northern Ireland, and beyond, reinforcing the United Kingdom's position in the small group of nations with COIN expertise.

In Malaya, the British initially succumbed to the military obsession with large formations to flush out the terrorists from vast tracts

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<sup>10</sup> Mao Tse-Tung, *Selected Works* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1958).

<sup>11</sup> Peter G. Zarrow, *China in War and Revolution, 1895-1949* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> Zarrow, *China in War and Revolution, 1895-1949*.

<sup>13</sup> Mao Tse-Tung, *Basic Tactics*, trans. Stuart Sharm (London: Pall Mall Press, 1967).

of rubber trees and primary rainforest; this proved counterproductive. They were saved from a bad situation that was rapidly approaching its tipping point by an experienced caucus of colonial civil servants and military officers. This cadre revised the political strategy so that it addressed the importance of the Chinese population and the tension between their inclination to support the insurgency and the need for the government of Malaya to win them over to its side. The plan was to address the swamp rather than the mosquitoes that emerged from it. The concept was to exploit the isolation of the Chinese and put pressure on the linkages between them and the insurgents. It was a long-haul campaign that finally succeeded in closing down the transfer of food, logistic support, information, and family contact between the insurgents and their supporting population. Operations were intelligence-led at all times and coordinated through the (multiagency) security committees that met on a daily or weekly basis at every level of the government's administrative structure. At the district level, for example, the district officer led the executive committee and was therefore able to directly maintain the long-term political objectives of military operations. Each committee comprised representatives from key sectors of the government (i.e., police, finance, civil administration, community leaders, special intelligence, and the local British battalion commander).

The enduring lessons from this British COIN experience included the following:

- The people's war concept of mobilizing the population was hard to combat through military means alone.
- Once a population had been mobilized successfully by insurgency, there was a tipping point in the escalating situation after which no lawful counterstrategy was likely to prevail.<sup>14</sup>
- The two essential requirements for success were (1) a political strategy whose outcome related to winning the support of the

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<sup>14</sup> This implies that the techniques used later by the Soviet Union to suppress the Warsaw uprising or by the Russians in the city of Grozny were unlawful and therefore should not be considered even though they proved initially successful.

“vital” population and (2) an operational capability that was multi-agency and multifunctional, under civil control, and capable of implementing a nuanced political strategy.

- At the tactical level, the quality of junior military leaders was crucial. COIN in Malaya and Borneo was a company commander’s war, and in Northern Ireland a corporal’s war.
- Low-level tactics and procedures were, in principle, much the same for each operation. Many were also applicable to peace support operations in the 1990s.<sup>15</sup>
- At the lowest level, intelligence-led operations required a risk-benefit approach to patrolling; this is the antithesis of the “send the bullet and not the man”<sup>16</sup> dictum for dominating territory.

It is worth noting that British success in Malaya also depended on a caucus of talented British officials with considerable experience of the country and its culture, language, and environment. This type of hands-on, field-experienced, political personality, the would-be campaign director, was the product of a colonial service that no longer exists. Therefore, this element of success cannot easily be reproduced, at least not in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

The value of this experience was that the British developed and practiced with some success a set of principles that stood up to a Maoist form of insurgency. The limitation of the experience was that, like other NATO armies, the British had only encountered a monolithic or national insurgent form. The experience can be explained by the following equation, where *I* represents *insurgents*, *POP* represents *popula-*

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<sup>15</sup> In the United Kingdom, British units preparing for Northern Ireland were trained by the Northern Ireland Training Assistance Team. Those destined for peace support operations were trained by the UN Training Assistance Group. Interestingly, these establishments have merged to become one unit (the Operational Training Assistance Group). Moreover, in 1998 the UK Ministry of Defence (MoD) published a single manual (the *Tactical Handbook for Operations Other Than War*) to replace *Peacekeeping Operations and Tactics for Counter Insurgency Operations*.

<sup>16</sup> See Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*, “Westmoreland” section. Also General Sir Mike Jackson’s dictum on the “cost-benefit” principle of intrusive patrolling so as to make personal contact with the local population is an important principle. General Sir Mike Jackson, interview with the authors, Bosnia, September 1999.

tion, *SF* represents the *security forces* of the opposing regime, and *GOV* represents the *government* of the opposing regime:  $I + POP > SF + GOV$ . The aim of the Maoists was to subvert the population to their side of the equation.

In the case of the insurgencies encountered by the British, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Americans, and Indians, each element represented in this equation was based in and related to one particular nation. The Vietnamese, Colombian, Northern Irish, Basque, and Tamil insurgents may have given and received support from international diasporas and financial systems, but fundamentally they were concerned with the overthrow of a particular government of a particular state by a population of that state.

In the context of more-recent, complex, and multilayered forms of insurgency, the monolithic version proved a limiting perspective. The British, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and Commonwealth experiences of insurgency had failed to equip these actors with the strategic breadth of vision that was needed to counter a globally organized insurgency. They had no concept with which to address an insurgency whose actors came from different regions and sometimes were not based in a defined territory at all. However, the methodology whereby to arouse a globally dispersed well of supporters had nevertheless become highly visible during the same period in which Western armies encountered and learned to cope with a purely national insurgency.

## The Significance of the Palestinian Insurgency

In the context of global jihad, Western analysts seem unable to see things from the perspective of a culture that has a need for self-denial.<sup>17</sup> In particular, the Western appetite for industrial targets

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<sup>17</sup> Steve Tatham describes what is known as the “great Middle East self-denial experience,” referring to the habit of intelligent Middle Eastern figures to deny the realities of their situation or to invent new ones which they then believe. While this behaviour is complete anathema to the achieving-white-protestant ethic associated with the West, it is a necessary form of escapism for societies trapped by extremes of humiliation and persecution, and is a balm

and the constant measuring of success against a stated outcome has obscured the significance of the Palestinian insurgency against Israel. From the West's perspective, the Palestinian movement is still an insignificant rabble of counteracting factions that have little hope of achieving a narrow, national objective. But this characterization fails to see the evolutionary importance of the Palestinian insurgency: Its methodology represented the progression of insurgency across the threshold of a new chapter of development. This document argues that the recognition of the importance of the Palestinian insurgency is essential to an understanding of how the concept of the propaganda of the deed was later adapted to the needs of the global jihad, and to an understanding of why formulators of Western COIN doctrine failed to respond to this development.

In the 1960s, while Western armies were still facing monolithic insurgencies in Vietnam, North Africa, North Borneo, Aden, and Oman, the Palestinians began to assume a crucial significance in the history of insurgency. Their exodus from what is now Israel began in 1948 as a trickle of displaced farmers moving to existing communities in the surrounding Arab states. After the 1967 wars and the Israeli seizure of the West Bank and Gaza, the trickle increased to a torrent that headed instinctively for closer sanctuaries in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. In 1970 the Palestinians were expelled from Jordan and most resettled in existing camps in southern Lebanon. This population of 400,000 Palestinians in Lebanon formed the nucleus of a diaspora. In the four decades that followed, while the major powers were combating nationalist insurgencies, the Palestinians (probably by instinct rather than design) developed a version of popular activism that provided the methodological linkage to global insurgency.<sup>18</sup>

During the period in which the Palestinian population fled and then recongregated, a leadership cadre emerged among the refugee

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that makes the ghastliness of reality bearable. See Steve Tatham, *Losing Arab Hearts and Minds: The Coalition, Al-Jazeera and Muslim Public Opinion* (London: Hurst & Company, 2006), Preface.

<sup>18</sup> O'Neill calls this popular activism "trans-national terrorism." See O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism*, passim.

camps in southern Lebanon. Its purpose was to improve the lives of refugees and represent their case to the rest of the world. The Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) was founded in 1964 to restore Palestine to its former lands in Israel. Within its structure of executive committees and under the loose control of Yasser Arafat were an array of *fedayeen* assault groups designed to strike Israel's population, territory, and interests. Their concept of operations tended to be retrospectively articulated, suggesting that the driving impulse was instinctive retribution rather than a formal strategic plan. They struck across the Israeli borders against fortified kibbutz systems, Israeli military units and the public, and (more randomly) against civil aircraft, cruise ships, embassies, and even Israeli sports teams travelling overseas. Although this list of targets appears disjointed, many of the attacks were connected in an important way: In their final stages, the attacks became highly visible, and reporters, press photographers, and television and film crews were encouraged to cover the emerging story. The attacks were irresistible as news stories because they were visually sensational and because they were carried out with such desperate conviction. The advent of the suicide bomber seemed to further emphasize the conviction and the cause of the terrorists. The desperate young men dressed like kamikaze pilots and prepared to kill themselves became the story within the story; the plight of the Israeli victims shrank in prominence as a result.

The Palestinians sought this extreme visibility to publicly articulate (usually impossible) demands or conditions related to their ongoing campaign. But their demands often turned out to be less interesting than the aura of celebrity surrounding the act itself. This celebrity, initially generated by the nature of the incident, was ramped up to a much higher pitch by the "headline treatment" it received around the world. Individual hijackers like Laila Khaled became international figures. In addition to notoriety and celebrity, the media spread effective messages about the Palestinian situation. The media circus was communicating to groups that the Palestinian leaders considered important audiences: large numbers of their own nationals in foreign countries, Arab states, the Muslim community worldwide, and Western states (some of which preferred not to think about Palestine). In Arab and Muslim communities, the sense of deprivation and desperation tapped into Arab and

Muslim feelings of nationalism and religious solidarity. Even in Western nations the Palestinian narrative became a public issue, inspiring design icons, books, drama, films, and even an opera. There were also material benefits for the Palestinians; sympathetic states offered them cash, weapons, training, logistic support, international places of refuge, and diplomatic protection. The PLO began to develop an international personality and became conspicuous at the United Nations (UN) General Assembly among the nonaligned members. In its quasimilitary relationships the PLO also became an accepted part of the transnational club of terrorist groups, which gave it access to the related assets of the Soviet Union, China, Libya, and North Korea.

In the context of 1970s and 1980s contemporary thinking, which was shaped by the realities of nationalist insurgencies, the Palestinian groups were terrorists. In contemporary British practice, counterterrorism implied a purely kinetic approach that involved police, special forces, extra security measures, extra protection of buildings, an increased intelligence effort, surveillance alerts, and (in some countries) the possibility of extrajudicial executions of “hostile operatives.” Counterterrorism focused on the mosquitoes, not the swamp. It did not recognize political grievances, which in the case of the Palestinians would one day become sufficiently unbearable to ignite an entire region (and, later, the entire Muslim world). While acknowledging that the PLO were successfully promoting a cause, Bard O’Neill felt that “it was clear to all but the most biased observers that the (Palestinian) armed struggle within the framework of a protracted Popular War strategy was a failure.”<sup>19</sup> Israeli countermeasures prevented the PLO from creating a shadow government in the occupied area and the movement itself was beset by disunity and therefore unable to function as a government. In the 1980s the success of an insurgency in orthodox terms was measured in territory controlled, government forces physically defeated, and shadow regimes installed.

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<sup>19</sup> O’Neill, of the U.S. National War College, has been an influential figure in U.S. and UK doctrine development. His contribution to UK Army Field Manual, Vol. V, *Counter Insurgency Operations*, is acknowledged in the text of UK Army, Army Field Manual, Vol. 5, *Land Operations*, 1995. See also O’Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism*, p. 97.



In the modern era of violent activism, which accepts the ascendancy of the propaganda of the deed over the military value of the deed itself, it is interesting to reevaluate the Palestinian campaign. In the 1970s and 1980s, analysts recognized that the PLO had succeeded in getting itself and the Palestinian issue onto the global agenda. The PLO's attacks were so widely supported—clandestinely by Arab states and overtly by radicalized Muslim communities—that they should not have been regarded as the acts of politically isolated extremists; however, many people failed to understand the element of success, however intuitive, in the Palestinian strategy. During the 1990s several writers explained the armed propaganda effect,<sup>20</sup> but the West's perspective of national COIN, informed by the British experience, was too strong to allow it to alter its doctrine. By the standards of orthodox Maoism, the Palestinian campaign had failed.<sup>21</sup>

By today's standards, however, the random attacks successfully exploited the individual's sense of what was happening. It scarcely mattered that millions of Arabs across the region were not themselves aroused to become activists because, like football supporters watching their teams on television, they were participating by proxy. The PLO's goal-scoring moments also became theirs. In their version, with the balm of self denial, the appalling nature of the attacks and the catastrophic brawling within the PLO hierarchy were airbrushed away. Fanaticism and notoriety were seen as conviction and celebrity; viewers saw what they wanted to see. The images, print stories, and the international level of the drama became a mobilizing energy, boosting the morale of Arab communities and acting as a call to arms for young men seeking to escape from the grinding misery of refugee camps.

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<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Barry Rubin, "The Origins of the PLO's Terrorism" in Barry Rubin, ed., *Terrorism and Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991); Martin Kramer, "Moral Logic of Hizbollah," in Walter Reich, *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998); and George Gerbner, "Symbolic Functions of Violence and Terror," in Yonah Alexander and Robert G. Picard, eds., *In the Camera's Eye: News Coverage of Terrorist Events* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 1991).

<sup>21</sup> Attempts to publish a new British doctrine in 1995 were postponed indefinitely.

As an instrument to mobilize a dispersed and dispirited nation, the methodology of the Palestinian insurgency was something of a success; “arriving” became less important than the morale-boosting experience of the “journey.” The idea that the virtual impact of an act of terrorism had become more important to a movement than the kinetic effects of the act itself also challenged existing definitions of an insurgency.<sup>22</sup> By 2001 British doctrine recognized the “dangers of Islamism”<sup>23</sup> and, under a separate heading, the exploitation by insurgents of the media, with particular reference to radio, television, and the press.<sup>24</sup> At this stage, however, there was no doctrinal acceptance of the future potential of what was arguably the successful dimension of the PLO campaign, nor was any connection made to the PLO’s exploitation of a rapidly evolving media communications technology. According to the UK July 2001 COIN doctrine, some insurgencies still aimed for “a straight-forward seizure of power,” while others attempted to establish autonomous states.<sup>25</sup>

The problem was that recognizing the PLO’s exploitation of the virtual dimension as a worthwhile objective for insurgency would have had several awkward consequences. First, it would have significantly altered the definition of insurgency. Moreover, the orthodox Maoist equation would no longer be valid. A new model would have to show the following:

- **Insurgents (I).** There were multiple Palestinian cells spread throughout the region, and these cells followed no commonly accepted long-term strategy.
- **Population (POP).** It was not just the Palestinians in Israel who were involved. The entire Palestinian diaspora, Arab nations, the

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<sup>22</sup> In the mid 1970s, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) successfully manipulated the domestic press using a propaganda of the deed campaign. In concept and reach, however, it was a very minor aspect of their overall campaign and therefore it was also a very minor dimension of the British counterstrategy.

<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, this was the same draft that was postponed in 1995.

<sup>24</sup> UK Army, *Combined Arms Operations*.

<sup>25</sup> UK Army, *Combined Arms Operations*.

Muslim community worldwide, and the populations of many other third-party states were included in this element.

- **Security forces (SF).** This element was becoming increasingly obsolete, since security forces, especially the armed forces of Israel, were realistically less and less often the target of the PLO.
- **The government (GOV).** This element now referred primarily to the governments of third-party countries rather than to the PLO–Israel matrix.

The prototype of this equation was now complicated by multiple actors and the insurgency's international scope. The Palestinian strategy was to sustain an oblique campaign against the Israeli state and its population by continuous attacks on U.S. and Israeli interests. Latterly, the attacks were planned for maximum visibility, not for territorial or military value; the strategic instinct was to keep Palestine in the news. More and more it was the nature of the media itself, rather than a deliberately planned Palestinian promulgation, that became the propagator of the Palestinian message. Success was therefore no longer a matter of overthrowing the Israelis (i.e., was no longer a matter of overcoming *GOV + SF*).

Although the highly kinetic and retributive nature of the Israeli counteraction was admired in some quarters of the United States, it taught the West nothing about how to deal with what was in effect a progression in the evolution of insurgency. A successful counterstrategy needed first a long-term political plan that could remove or disarm the Palestinian sense of grievance and at the same time be acceptable to the Israelis and to the Arab states. This has proven impossible to achieve. At a more operational level, it also needed a cooperative campaign involving many different states and international agencies to diminish the virtual ascendancy of the insurgent, and to promote the actors that might have been trying to restore individual security to the populations at the front lines of the conflict. These areas now seem enormously difficult to the West because it failed to become effectively involved in, or hugely committed to, the resolution of the Palestinian insurgency.

The PLO campaign is relevant because it was both a laboratory for and a forerunner of a much more virulent form of insurgent

energy. Although the Palestinian insurgency began 30 years ago, the West learned nothing from it. The Israeli response has been kinetic in approach and often motivated by retribution. Although the British have arguably had the most continuous exposure to insurgency's different evolutionary stages, they, like the Israelis, failed to learn how to cope with an adversary who exploited the propaganda of the deed to the extent achieved by the Palestinians. The last iteration of British doctrine reflects an orthodox view of both insurgency and COIN. The British experience nevertheless provides two abiding requirements for a successful COIN campaign: (1) the primacy of the strategic plan, whose long-term purpose must be to address the swamp rather than the mosquitoes and (2) the accompanying need for an effective operational capability, in this case a multiagency COIN instrument that is politically led and fully under the command of the campaign director.

In the post-9/11 era, global jihad and the U.S. GWAT represent two different conflicts, two unrelated operational concepts striving to seize different objectives. The jihadists succeed in reinforcing their strategic centre of gravity by exploiting the propaganda of their deeds and by reaching and animating the widest audiences. They are stimulated by the journey but careless of their arrival. Their goal-scoring moments arouse revulsion and sadness, but allow an important minority to retrieve self respect and a moment of escape from the degradation of living in a refugee camp or an immigrant ghetto. On the other side, the outcome-fixated West seems to be fighting a different war. It measures success by territory seized, democracies implanted, and terrorists killed. The West's public personality and information policy vary by country and by contingent; its target audiences are principally domestic. In Maoist terms the West has adopted the mode of the losing side (*GOV + SF*); the massive strength of the wrestler is being used against him, and each ponderous move seems to reinforce and emphasize the tiny adversary's propaganda aims. The Fox News footage of the U.S. one-day brigade raid probably boosts the morale of middle America, but the same clip shown on Al Jazeera has a negative effect in relation to the stated long-term aims of the U.S. campaign.

## Defining the Environment

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The purpose of Chapter Three is to explain that the environment that sustains global insurgents is influenced by two factors: a globally dispersed structure of populations that share the Muslim faith (the Muslim dimension) and a proliferation of communicating systems (the virtual dimension) that allows the radical elements of these populations to develop a common perspective of events.

### The Muslim Dimension

In the evolution of insurgency, the generic insurgent has moved smoothly from the national to the multinational form. But for the armies involved in COIN, the transition has been a shock, and the doctrinal supertankers of the U.S.-led coalitions will take several years to alter course. Maoist insurgency emphasized the importance of the population, which in military terms constitutes the vital ground. In a global insurgency, the population is still the vital ground, but there is not just one population—there are many.<sup>1</sup> In the prevailing situation, they comprise Muslim populations who live in and around spaces that are directly involved in the conflict (so-called operational spaces). Further afield there are the concerned populations of Muslim states, the coalition states, and Muslim immigrants who live as minorities in

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<sup>1</sup> This is explained in more detail in John Mackinlay, *Defeating Complex Insurgency: Beyond Iraq and Afghanistan* (London: Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, Whitehall Paper 64, 2005) p. 13.

foreign countries. Each of these populations plays an important role in the insurgent and counterinsurgent campaigns. Their support is part of the strategic centre of gravity of both sides. It is not their physical support that largely sustains the campaign, but rather their political or emotional support. The Palestinian experience shows that when insurgents have strong emotional support, finance and logistics follow. Today, emotional and political support is gained and lost through the interpretation of events rather than the events themselves. A map plotting the locations of the populations concerned in the Iraq campaign would show a vital ground that is hugely dispersed. This dispersion places a great significance on the means by which the insurgents and counterinsurgents alter the beliefs and opinions of these populations in their favour.

The theological concept that every Muslim is part of the *Ummah* (“one Muslim nation”) was used as far back as the 10th century in an attempt to bring some unity to support the Sunni creed. This concept has gained great currency in contemporary political Islamist movements. It means that if any Muslim comes under attack, it is the religious duty of others to defend him or her in whatever way is appropriate, including in the military sense. Consequently, whatever happens to Muslims in one part of the world is felt by Muslims worldwide, so that an attack on a Muslim state or population has repercussions that resonate throughout the entire Islamic world. In addition, since the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, Western policy in the Middle East has suggested that the West is engaged in a war against Islam. Radicals exploit this idea, and countering their message to strategically significant populations poses enormous challenges. In this document, we divide the *Ummah* into the minority populations, Muslim states, and Muslim populations in the operational space.

## Minority Populations

The failures of the postindependence nationalist states of the Middle East, North Africa, and the Indian subcontinent resulted in large numbers of Muslims migrating to Europe and other parts of the developed

world. The first waves of immigrants came in the 1950s and 1960s in search of work and tended to keep religion a private matter. They came mainly from poor, rural areas where national cultural traditions held more sway than religious identification. During the 1980s and 1990s, an Islamic revival began to take hold in the Middle East in response to the stagnant rule of corrupt elites. At that time, more-politicised immigrants began to arrive in the West after having sought to articulate their resistance to their own national regimes through Islamist ideology. Their repression and migration transplanted the internal conflicts of the Middle East into Europe. A number of these new arrivals, veterans of the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan, were displaced after the fall of Kabul in 1992 and had nowhere else to go. Europe's proximity to the secular nationalist countries that were determined to stamp out Islamist activism resulted in the arrival of militants from countries such as Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Syria, and Algeria. Thus, Europe provided a convenient location for them to rally for jihad. Because the conservative monarchies of the Gulf were more relaxed, radicals from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and (to a certain extent) Morocco were able to move in and out of their own countries.

Political consciousness was developing among Muslim communities in the West due to the presence of national Islamist insurgent groups such as the Algerian *Groupe Islamique Armée*, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, and the Egyptian *Al-Jihad*, as well as more-moderate organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood and the Tunisian *An-Nahda* party. Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states also injected money into these communities to spread their own rigid Wahabist interpretation of Islam. As a result, western Europe became a free space where radicals spread their ideology and openly called for jihad, especially in Bosnia, Chechnya, and Kashmir. At the same time, members of more-moderate Islamist groups set up mosques and developed organizations such as the Muslim Council of Britain, the *Unione Comunità Islamiche Italiane* in Italy, and the *Union des Organisations Islamiques de France* (UOIF) in France. Many were fronts for the Muslim Brotherhood, an international organization that concentrated primarily on securing religious rights (e.g., halal slaughtering, Muslim burial, and

the *hijab* [veil]) and legislating for their own Muslim communities within the host state.

Muslim immigrants include a hugely diverse group of different nationalities and ethnicities, from Islamist militants to moderates to nonpracticing peoples. Identifying the numbers of Muslim immigrants has been extremely difficult because host countries often do not use religion as an identifier. The vast majority of immigrants focus on making enough money to survive and support families in their country of origin. Many dream of return, although this dream is rarely fulfilled.

Since the 1980s the only organized groups within Muslim immigrant communities have been those advocating political Islam. By the 1980s the failure of the secular and left-wing movements of the 1960s and 1970s reflected a similar demise in the Islamic world. With financial support and backing from the Gulf throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the Muslim Council of Britain, the Muslim Association of Britain, the UOIF, and others have been able to position themselves as the main representatives of Muslim minority communities in the West. These groups broadly advocate a conservative salafist interpretation of Islam. After 9/11 they condemned terrorism but continued to emphasize differences between Muslims and the wider host population; in some cases they consider jihad a religious duty. They capitalized on the post-9/11 climate and put themselves forward as the main intermediaries between the authorities of the host state and the Muslim communities. This inflated their role and influence in the host state above their real standing in their own communities. Radicals tend to accuse them of having sold out to the host authorities.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, as intermediaries these groups are highly vocal, media savvy, and likely to promote the idea that the West is engaged in a war against Islam. They also raise awareness of conflicts around the world that involve Muslims, including Iraq, Afghanistan, Chechnya, and Kashmir.

Despite the concept of an *Ummah*, there are significant divisions among these groups. These divisions occur between nationalities and

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<sup>2</sup> Author interviews with a range of respondents from Muslim communities in Europe, 2002 to 2006.



between Arab Muslims and Muslims from the Indian subcontinent. Even radicals who are apparently fighting one global jihad can be deeply divided over, for example, whether to focus on their own national priorities or take a broader, more-internationalist approach.

The majority of Islamist militant terrorist operations in the West, including the Madrid bombings, the second failed London bombings, and the 9/11 attacks, were undertaken by immigrants. Moreover, most of those arrested on terrorism-related charges across Europe have been immigrants, many of whom had a long history of involvement in Islamist activism dating back to the Soviet war in Afghanistan. In addition, the majority of those who have left Europe to join the jihad in Iraq or who have been arrested and accused of recruiting for the cause have been immigrants. Immigrants are therefore of the utmost importance when considering the relevance of Muslim minorities in any counterstrategy.

First- and second-generation immigrants are of increasing concern. They are particularly relevant in the case of countries with long-established traditions of immigration. France, for example, has large numbers of first- and second-generation immigrants, many of whom are of North African descent. They have demonstrated a willingness to engage in terrorist activity against Westerners as far back as the 1990s.<sup>3</sup> More recently, first-generation Pakistani immigrants were involved in the London bombings of July 2005. Belgium and Germany also have significant first-generation Muslim immigrant populations. Although this phenomenon has yet to affect countries such as Spain and Italy due to the fact that immigration is a relatively recent phenomenon there, it is likely to be an issue in the future.

As European nationals, first- and second-generation immigrants reasonably expect the same rights as the rest of population. However, some are uncomfortable with the cultural values of their host society. Many have taken on an Islamist agenda, embracing what they describe as a “pure Islam” that is free from the cultural traditions of

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<sup>3</sup> For example, three young French Muslims from the suburbs shot a group of tourists in Marrakech in 1994. Terrorists carried out a bombing campaign in France in the mid-1990s in an attempt to stop French support of the military-backed regime in Algeria.

their parents' generation. This is a utopian alternative. For these individuals, commitment and loyalty to the *Ummah* are more important than loyalty to the state or to the concept of nationality.<sup>4</sup> Some appear to see Islam as a means of challenging the marginalisation they feel within their own societies. Groups such as Hizb ut Tahrir, with an all-encompassing, multiethnic approach to Islam, therefore attract first and second generations.

Converts to Islam represent a small minority within the Muslim population. The majority convert for reasons of marriage or religious conviction. However, within this group there are a number of highly politicized and motivated individuals who view Islam as a means of challenging the status quo. Like the first- and second-generation immigrants, they tend to be in search of a pure form of Islam.<sup>5</sup> Converts have been involved at the very violent end of the radical spectrum; examples include Richard Reid (the UK shoe bomber), Jason Walters (of the Hofstad Group in the Netherlands), Germaine Lindsay (a London bomber), and Muriel Degauque (a Belgian who undertook a suicide attack in Iraq). Although a small group, they are important because they consider themselves part of the *Ummah*.

Winning over the hearts and minds of this range of Muslim communities, whose varying degrees of disaffection and discontent can be exploited by radical elements, is an extremely challenging task. Despite being in the West, many radicals and moderates continue to look to the Middle East for guidance and scholars. The majority of Islamic institutions are still run by immigrants, and even some of the institutions that have been developed to cater specifically to Muslim communities in the West are still headed by people in the Middle East.<sup>6</sup> As such, these

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<sup>4</sup> Author interviews with a range of respondents from Muslim communities in Europe, 2002 to 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Author interviews with converts to Sunni Islam in the United Kingdom, 2005 to 2006.

<sup>6</sup> This includes the European Council of Fatwa and Research that is based in Ireland. This organization, which gives religious advice on living in the West, is run by Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, an Egyptian who resides in Qatar. Most of the council's leadership is also based abroad. A *fatwa* is a decree or legal opinion proclaimed by an Islamic religious leader.

politically and religiously active communities cannot be considered in isolation from Muslim states.

## Muslim States

The actions of coalition nations in Muslim states fuel anger and resentment that feeds radicalism more widely within the region. The regimes of the Middle East are acutely aware of this and many are trying to strike a difficult balance between keeping the support of their Western backers whilst not aggravating their own populations, who are largely fiercely opposed to Western interventions.<sup>7</sup> Although protest is forbidden in these countries, autocratic regimes have tended to use these crises as opportunities for populations to demonstrate and let off steam. The same regimes have also been willing to turn a blind eye to recruits going to fight the jihad abroad.<sup>8</sup> Arab regimes have acted in a similar vein toward the war in Iraq. Although unwilling to support the insurgency publicly, the official media continue to refer to the insurgents as the “resistance,” imams are allowed to preach jihad, and their nationals travel freely to the front lines.<sup>9</sup>

Due to Arab nationalism and a perceived need to defend Sunni Islam against the Shi’ites, the Iraq conflict has had a much greater impact on the Arab world than the current crisis in Afghanistan. Ba’athist Iraq has been regarded as the eastern gate of the Arab world and Saddam Hussein was considered the defender of the Sunnis against Persian influence. Similarly, the crisis in Kashmir is likely to mean more for Muslims on the Indian subcontinent and local issues in Southeast Asia are central to Muslim populations in that part of the world. Consequently, the majority of foreign fighters in Iraq come

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<sup>7</sup> For example, there were significant demonstrations across North Africa against the U.S. bombing of Iraq during the 1990–1991 Gulf War.

<sup>8</sup> In the 1980s the Egyptian regime released militant Islamists from prison on the condition that they leave the country to fight in Afghanistan.

<sup>9</sup> The highly influential official religious establishments in Saudi Arabia and in Egypt continue to be extremely antagonistic toward the West’s role in the conflict and could arguably be seen as tacitly assisting the insurgency.

predominately from Sunni Arab countries (i.e., Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen). The Iraq crisis has had other repercussions. For example, the increasing conflict between Sunni and Shi'a Islam has prompted attacks on Shi'ites in predominantly Sunni Pakistan, where replica tensions have been festering for many years.

Western intervention in a Muslim state therefore prompts young men to travel to the battle zone, which escalates and complicates the conflict. Although hatred for the West has long existed in the Islamic world, interventionist strategies and the perceived double standards of Western powers fuel anger and generate support for more-militant solutions.

## **Muslim Populations in the Operational Space**

Muslim populations at the epicentre of a conflict or in the states that surround it represent a third and important category. Each surrounding Muslim state has its own particular agenda. Syria, for example, is avowedly secular and Ba'athist in orientation. Nevertheless, to indulge its antagonistic relationship with the United States, it has been willing to allow Islamic radicals to use Damascus as a hub and base from which to enter Iraq to join the insurgency. The regime's willingness to allow insurgents to move across the border into the war zone has significantly degraded security in Iraq. Shi'ite Iran exercises its influence in Iraq because of traditional concerns related to a neighbouring element of Sunni power. Jordan is deeply troubled by the prospect of a Shi'ite-dominated Iraq. Moreover, Syria, Turkey, and Iran all have Kurdish minorities and all three countries are concerned that a more powerful and articulate Kurdish community in the new Iraq would encourage their own Kurdish minorities to become increasingly confident.

These are clearly highly complex issues that go beyond questions of Muslim identity and are related to issues such as ethnicity and sectarianism. However, they demonstrate the role of strategically significant populations in the resolution of an insurgency.

## The Process of Radicalisation

Understanding the process of radicalisation among Muslim minority populations is an imprecise science in view of the small number of radicals and the limited information that is available. Each experience is unique, but key trends show what motivates radical elements and what factors contribute to the radicalisation process.

### Cultural Grievances

Many immigrants bring with them the cultural baggage of their own societies, which includes forms of anti-Westernism that have been a feature of Islamic society for generations. These prejudices are used by nationalists and Islamists alike to rally support and strengthen their own positions. Conservative monarchies enhance this disaffection by supporting the West politically but at the same time showing hostility to Western cultural values. As a result, there is an inherent perception among Muslim populations that Western society is decadent, corrupt, and self-serving. The political Islamist movement exploits these perceptions and radicals promote the idea that Islam can solve the deep-seated problems of the region that have ultimately forced their populations to leave. This message resonates among Muslims.

In addition, the majority of Muslim states have failed their own populations in terms of education. Learning by rote is preferred over questioning and problem-solving skills, which makes populations more receptive to black-and-white, simplistic interpretations of Islam. Islamic texts are a core part of the curriculum even in the secularly oriented states such as Libya, Algeria, and Syria. In 2005 Tunisian commentator Afif Lakhdar complained that religious schools in most Islamic countries teach children that it is acceptable to stone adulterous women, cut the throats of apostates, and undertake jihad against the *kufir* [heathen]. Until recently these ideas were routinely taught in state schools.<sup>10</sup> Algeria only cancelled the teaching of jihad and of stoning

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<sup>10</sup> Al Afif Lakhdar, "Al-Hadatha al-Tunisia fi Eidiha al-Hamzene [The 50th Anniversary of Tunisian Modernity]," Ahewar.org, March 21, 2006. As of March 21, 2006: <http://www.rezgar.com/debat/show.art.asp?aid=60141>

women in its schools in 2005, when Libya also stopped teaching jihad and the so-called sword verses of the Qu'ran.<sup>11</sup>

Immigrants therefore often arrive with a mindset that is wary of Western society; this creates an environment in which radical ideas can flourish. The idea that Muslims might somehow be contaminated by living in the West has been promoted within Muslim minority communities for many years. During the 1980s and 1990s, Saudi propaganda repeatedly stressed the idea that Muslim minority populations should protect and separate themselves from the host population.<sup>12</sup> They also emphasized the importance of setting up segregated educational establishments for Muslim children and lobbied for the right of Muslim communities in the West to legislate for themselves under sharia law. Through these efforts they tapped into the natural fears of communities who were afraid of losing their cultural identity and their children to an unfamiliar society.

These ideas and grievances clearly do not in themselves create radical militancy, but they shape a mindset that may be vulnerable to more-extreme ideologies that advocate an anti-Western agenda. They may also provide an emotionally supportive environment for militant ideas.

### **Host State Foreign Policies**

The foreign policy of the host state, particularly the West's policy toward the Muslim world, causes grievance among Muslim minority communities. The Palestine-Israel conflict is a longstanding hurt that has been used by regimes of the Middle East as much as by Islamists. Despite its resonance among Muslim populations, however, jihadists have tended to choose to fight in other locations.<sup>13</sup> The war in Iraq also fosters the wider perception of Western aggression toward Muslims and has encouraged the idea of "fighting back." The Madrid and London

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<sup>11</sup> Traditionally used by jihadists to justify fighting against heathens.

<sup>12</sup> In publications such as the *Muslim World League Journal*, for example.

<sup>13</sup> Even Sheikh Abdullah Azzam, the father of the Afghan Arabs and himself a Palestinian, chose to take up arms against the Soviets, believing that the aspiration to achieve an Islamic state was higher than that of achieving a Palestinian state.

bombers cited Iraq as a key issue, and Osama Bin Ladin and other Al-Qa'ida members are aware of the potential to exploit the conflict. The GWAT also fuels resentment and anger among Muslim minority populations. There is a widespread belief among Muslims that there is no proof that Bin Ladin was behind the 9/11 attacks and that those arrested under antiterrorism legislation in Western states are innocent. This is partly related to feelings of being a community under siege, but it also reflects a culture of political conspiracy theory endemic to the Arab and Islamic world.

Whether foreign policy directly contributes to the process of radicalisation has yet to be proven. Despite the widespread assumption that the Iraq War created scores of new radicals, it seems likely that even if the war had not taken place, the global jihadist movement would have continued to gather momentum. The increasing number of attacks and willing recruits appear to be related as much to a renewed confidence in the jihadist movement inspired by the success of 9/11 after so many years of failures following the initial triumph in Afghanistan at the end of the 1980s. Moreover, many members of the new generation of radicals appear to have no coherent strategy or objectives, but rather are using violence as a means of expressing their frustrations and anger at the status quo.<sup>14</sup> As such, a Coalition withdrawal from Iraq is unlikely to bring an end to terrorist attacks being carried out in the West. Nevertheless, many previous U.S.-led coalitions have made for useful anti-Western propaganda. The Bosnian crisis launched a torrent of propaganda videos, cassettes, and pictures of atrocities being committed against Muslims, and these items were used directly as a recruiting tool to encourage people to join the jihad. Although this material alone cannot push someone into taking on a radical ideology, it can have a powerful effect on those already vulnerable to radicalisation.

Western policy toward a radical's country of origin is also cited as a source of grievance. Although radicals acknowledge that they have found refuge in the West, they are frustrated that Western governments are supporting authoritarian regimes that display scant regard

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<sup>14</sup> Author interviews with Islamists, including radical elements from various countries, 2002 to 2006.

for issues such as human rights.<sup>15</sup> Many Islamists, both radical and moderate, believe that regimes in the Islamic world are puppets of the West and only capable of surviving because of Western support. They believe that the only thing preventing their own societies from applying sharia law is the fact that the West is assisting their governments out of its own fear of Islam. Although conflict within the *Ummah* affects Islamist radicals, the situation in their country of origin, or the country of their parents' origin, often has the greatest effect on them personally. So for some radicals who are unable to strike their own regimes, hitting the Western backers of these puppet states is the next-best solution.

### **Catalysts, Motivators, and Key Communicators on the Path of Subversion**

Many catalysts and factors push individuals toward radicalism, and each radical's circumstances are unique. In the 1980s and 1990s, the Islamist opposition that fled to Europe consisted of more-educated middle-class people who were expressing their political discontent with the status quo in religious terms. They were driven out by politics and by the lack of space for an opposition movement in their country of origin. Today, the radical component within host states comprises a more complex mix of educated, uneducated, underprivileged, relatively wealthy, seemingly integrated, and marginalized people. For this reason it is impossible to construct a generic path to radicalisation. However, a number of common factors may be significant.

Background appears to play a major role. Future radicals often experience a conservative or religious upbringing and come from devout families. These families often assert that their radicalized relatives were quiet, good boys who always went to the mosque and who cared about their communities. On the other hand, some radicals appear to go through a phase of drinking, womanizing, and petty crime before they settle into a more devout existence, often after getting married and having a family. Religion is central to the culture of these communi-

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<sup>15</sup> Author interviews with Islamists, including radical elements from various countries, 2002 to 2006.



ties and remains a dominant societal force through every phase of the process.

Family ties can also determine involvement in a radical group. Often, more than one member of a family is involved in radical Islamist politics. Entire families have belonged to groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood or the Jama'a al-Islamiya in Egypt. Those engaged in terrorist activity often have siblings or relations who are also involved.<sup>16</sup> This pattern also holds true for converts. Radical French converts David and Jerome Courtailler both adopted Islam as a means of trying to overcome the many problems in their lives.<sup>17</sup> Shoe bomber Richard Reid's father, a convert to Islam, recommended conversion to his son as a way of getting out of trouble. Radicals also tend to marry members of each other's families, thereby creating their own tight-knit communities.

Social ties are a key part in the radicalization process. According to Marc Sageman, social networks are highly important in the path to radicalization, and the shift to more-extreme interpretations of Islam is often triggered through friends and acquaintances.<sup>18</sup> Immigrants are particularly vulnerable to this phenomenon in the absence of other social networks. Many, finding themselves alone in unfamiliar territory, gravitate toward the mosque or to existing communities where they discover support and comfort. In some cases, radical elements exploit this vulnerability. As a result, militant cells in Europe may be composed of immigrants who come from the same communities in their country of origin. For example, a number of the Madrid bombers are believed to have come from the same small community in Tangiers.

The oral culture that predominates in the Muslim world means that figures such as sheikhs, imams, and self-styled religious scholars

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<sup>16</sup> Ayman Zawahiri's brother Mohamed was also involved in the Al-Jihad organisation. Khalid Islambouli, who assassinated President Muhammad Anwar El Sadat, also had a brother who was part of the Egyptian militant scene.

<sup>17</sup> Craig S. Smith, "Europe Fears Converts May Aid Extremism" (*New York Times* [online], July 19, 2004). As of March 5, 2008: <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C06E0DD133AF93AA25754C0A9629C8B63>.

<sup>18</sup> Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

can wield significant influence and be instrumental in the radicalization of the young and vulnerable. In Arab society Islamists cluster around a particular charismatic figure or sheikh; the same pattern occurs within immigrant communities. These figures appear to be eloquent and knowledgeable, qualities that are particularly persuasive (especially on a theological level) to immigrants with a poor education.<sup>19</sup> They reinforce their position of importance by dispensing charity within their community, or at least to the people that show interest in them. In the eyes of an immigrant community, they appear to have a good command of Arabic, the language of the Quʿran, which confers on them a special authority. This is particularly important because many Arab societies are semiliterate, speaking only a limited dialect of Arabic and having a poor command of standard Arabic. For the most part, these radicals adopt a simplistic discourse that plays on the grievances already shared and expressed by many parts of the Muslim community, including religious and nonpracticing people.

Radical sheikhs primarily provide religious guidance and may not play a direct role in any kind of terrorist action. They prefer to stand back from operations, which allows them a degree of absolution. However, they have been willing to advocate and encourage radical ideas and teachings.<sup>20</sup> The Internet and the increased popularity of religious programs on satellite and terrestrial television (for example, Fatwa al-Hawa [Fatwa on the Air]) offer interactive ways of getting religious advice. Islamists can now receive religious teachings from many different sources, but they do not always have the awareness or educational background required to put these teachings in context. This may create circumstances that aid radicalization.

A trip abroad to one of the key Muslim countries (i.e., Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Pakistan, Sudan, or Afghanistan) may play a major part in the radicalisation process. The London bombers are known to

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<sup>19</sup> In this way, firebrand preachers Abu Qatada and Abu Hamza in the United Kingdom and Haydar Zammar in Germany were able to draw strong loyal followings from immigrant populations.

<sup>20</sup> In the 1990s, for example, a group of Muslims in Denmark contacted Abu Qatada in London to ask whether it was religiously acceptable to steal from Christians there. In response, Abu Qatada issued a *fatwa* authorising such behaviour.

have travelled to Pakistan. Sheikh Abdullah Faisal, the Jamaican convert who was convicted in the United Kingdom in 2003 on charges of soliciting murder and inciting racial hatred, spent ten years studying in Saudi Arabia.<sup>21</sup>

In some cases, prison also appears to act as a catalyst to radicalization. Taking on a strict form of Islam (either as a convert or as a previously nonpracticing Muslim) has the appeal of leaving one's past life behind and wiping one's sins clean.<sup>22</sup> At a more venal level, some radicals assert that stealing from and abusing the host society because it is *kufri* can be seen in Islam as a way to justify past behaviour. The prison environment also lends itself to the spread of Islam, as it does to other faiths. The situation can become oppressive when radical elements within the Muslim prison population achieve influence. This is especially true if they speak Arabic because they often have more sway than the prison imam (who is generally considered part of the establishment).

## Conclusions

The Muslim dimension is so overwhelming that it raises an important question: Is global insurgency a generic milestone in the evolution of insurgency, or a uniquely Muslim phenomenon that no other archipelago of populations could emerge to reproduce? A COIN against global jihad will involve an array of actors and nations in a strategy that must involve multiple disciplines. Many of the actors and contingents will be Muslim. In this multinational environment, Western actors at every level must first overcome a long-standing antipathy directed by the Muslims toward them, their foreign policy, values, and culture that may be hidden or manifestly evident. This antipathy arises from the following factors:

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<sup>21</sup> Audrey Gillan, "Muslim Cleric Accused Inciting Murder" (*The Guardian* [online], February 22, 2002). As of March 5, 2008: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2002/feb/22/religion.september11>

<sup>22</sup> Author interviews with Muslim prisoners, London, 2005.

- The concept of an *Ummah* tends to make any coalition (however justified or legitimate) acting against Muslim states or insurgents an aggressor in the eyes of the Muslim community at large.
- Radical Islamists generally view non-Muslims as *kufri*, and Muslim communities more broadly often feel uncomfortable about Western societal and cultural values. This inherently accepted attitude undermines non-Muslim-led interventions or initiatives involving Muslim populations or participants.
- Muslim immigrants may be the casualties of efforts to achieve a change of regime in their countries of origin. They resent Western support for the dictators and autocracies who expelled them.
- Politicized Islamists among the Muslim immigrant communities resent what they perceive to be Western efforts to prevent the application of sharia, which they see as the cleansing formula that could solve their problems.

For these reasons it is unlikely that a Western-led effort to alter long-held Muslim beliefs and attitudes about the West and the legitimacy of global jihad would succeed. Moreover, it would be hard to introduce an effective counterstrategy into the tight-knit, family-oriented process of transformation toward extremism. The individual's transition to extremism begins from a developed basis of inherent antipathy for the Western culture and its apparent approach toward Islam. This can be exploited by key communicators. An individual's jihadist activists can be influenced by close relatives, siblings, and small groups of former associates from the home country. Individual activists readily accept the teachings of anti-Western religious leaders or sheiks who live abroad or in the West and are able to communicate via the Internet.

## The Virtual Dimension

In the context of this document and the environment of insurgency and COIN, the virtual dimension refers to activities that take place in the minds of the concerned population and actors. It refers in par-

ticular to activities that alter, weaken, or reinforce their core beliefs. Whereas kinetic operations are physical, virtual activities typically produce effects that are not immediately palpable in terms of ships sunk or troops killed. Kinetic actions generally occur in places and spaces that exist in a physical sense, but the virtual war zone is the human mind. The virtual dimension also refers to the communications systems and media used to reach the mind, together with the ideas, images, and key communicators that can alter human beliefs. The consequences of virtual action are measured by opinion polls, election results, and altered markets, and sometimes by riots on the street. Other measures include levels of popular assistance and support for a peace process or an insurgent organization.

The virtual dimension grows in significance with the proliferation of communications. The reverberations of the 2005 bombing in London were greatly amplified by the virtual dimension. Within a few hours, the incident was projected across the world into the minds of millions of listeners and viewers. The consequences for Britain's multiracial society and UK foreign policy in Iraq were significant. The broadcasting power of the actors and systems concerned in the act of amplification fall into two groups.<sup>23</sup> The commercial news services are regarded as the regulated element of the virtual dimension. Their versions of the event become the visual, acoustic, and print icons of the atrocity. The unregulated actors create less authoritative versions of the same event. Their imagery, captured initially on mobile phones, is connected to individual Web sites that are linked back to the regulated commercial news services by reporters across the world who trawl the Internet. The political and emotional impact of the event is therefore achieved by the instruments of the virtual dimension, not by the physical circumstances of the attack itself.

Interestingly, no single party has so far controlled the virtual dimension. Therefore, it is not a special weapon exclusively in the

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<sup>23</sup> The system for news distribution has been described as directly comparable to the Internet. An excellent description of a parallel network in its simplest form is in Ned Snell, *Teach Yourself the Internet in 24 Hours*, 3rd ed. (Indianapolis, Ind.: SAMS, 1999), "Hour One, What Is the Internet?"

hands of any particular user. Just as opposing forces act against each other in the strategic and operational spaces, rival ideologies and factions compete in the virtual dimension. It is therefore a theatre of war with vital ground, key objectives, and tactically significant areas that can be seized by either side.<sup>24</sup>

The significance of the virtual dimension in the context of this document is that it is the instrument that sustains and multiplies the energy of both the insurgent and the counterinsurgent. As previously explained, the vital ground for both sides comprises an array of concerned populations in the operational space.<sup>25</sup> These populations are the strategic centres of gravity for both the insurgents and the opposing forces. If their support, sympathy, and “do-something” activism is terminated, the energy that sustains a campaign is also extinguished. However, the concerned populations are dispersed. Whereas the supporting constituency for the PLO understood Arabic and English and lived mostly in the same region, the geographic spread of concerned populations today is global. The populations are divided by space, languages, cultures, and religions; they wake and sleep in different time zones. Without the Internet, video cameras, mobile phones, Web logs, Web sites, and satellite television stations, a concerned population that is globally dispersed could not be engaged, and its energy could not be mobilised. In methodological terms, the Internet and satellite television are arguably what propelled insurgency across the evolutionary threshold from the PLO propaganda campaign of three decades ago to global insurgency today.

The insurgents associated with the global jihad learned to exploit the virtual dimension before COIN forces did. This was not a deliberate or planned strategy by a formal organization, but an intuitive development that arose from a much bigger social change that is the consequence of daily interaction with the Internet. For centuries, the physical dispersal of the Muslim community has diminished its collective energy and kept populations focussed on national or regional issues. These national and regional perspectives remain, but the Inter-

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<sup>24</sup> Definition of “virtual theatre” from Mackinlay, *Defeating Complex Insurgency*.

<sup>25</sup> For more detail, see Mackinlay, *Defeating Complex Insurgency*, Chapters One and Two.

net has created a new dimension of Islam that is global. Muslim awareness and Muslim protest have taken on what Faisal Devji describes as an absolutely new global context in the form of a hypermodern community that spans the Philippines to Niger, and whose connections occur through the mass media alone.<sup>26</sup> However, Devji's point needs to be qualified. The United Nations Development Program's Arab Human Development Reports indicate that Internet usage in the Arab world remains limited due to issues related to cost, illiteracy, and the monitoring of communications by regional security services. Therefore, Devji's comments apply only to a small minority of the world's Muslim populations. Of far greater importance to Muslim populations in the Arab world are the satellite television channels such as Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya, which offered the first (more or less) independent Arab alternatives to state broadcasting in the region and thus drew a massive following. A significant number of religious scholars, sheikhs, and local imams, whose *fatwas* and rulings can have a much greater degree of influence among Muslim populations on the ground, now communicate to their followers by Internet. This phenomenon grew from the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan, where Muslims from Devji's virtual community were mobilised to fight for a global vision of Islam. In this context, the Internet helped speed up and facilitate the communications process.<sup>27</sup>

The concept of a global Muslim community became possible because the community

is anchored neither in an institutionalized religious authority like a church, nor in an institutionalized political authority like a state. Indeed it is the continuing fragmentation and thus democ-

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<sup>26</sup> Faisal Devji, "Back to the Future: The Cartoons, Liberalism, and Global Islam" ([www.opendemocracy.net](http://www.opendemocracy.net), April, 12, 2006). As of March 5, 2008: [http://www.opendemocracy.net/conflict-terrorism/liberalism\\_3451.jsp](http://www.opendemocracy.net/conflict-terrorism/liberalism_3451.jsp)

<sup>27</sup> Indeed, in the case of the Danish cartoons, the Internet played a limited role. The case was taken up by a group of moderate Muslims in Denmark several months after the cartoons were published. This group travelled to Saudi Arabia to alert the official Saudi establishment and to formulate a common position.

ratization of authority in the world of Islam that might account for the militancy of its globalization.<sup>28</sup>

Devji's global Islam is therefore a structureless, leaderless archipelago of communities whose energy is aroused by a nervous system based on communications technology. With the Internet, it became an archipelago that could be animated by a cause or perceived grievance that affected its faith or cultural sensitivities:

In the absence of any significant religious or political authority in the Muslim world today, it is precisely unseen figures like Al-Qaeda or the Danish cartoons that have the ability to mobilize Muslims globally, though of course in different and even opposing ways.<sup>29</sup>

Devji's generic Muslim is therefore easily hurt but also easily angered because in this stateless community he or she is in some ways denuded of the protections and prohibitions of the state.

If these descriptions of a "Muslim community" and its relationship to the virtual dimension are at all valid, they have a seismic effect on the conduct of COIN at the strategic level. Insurgency is still a matter of mobilizing populations to redress a disparity of military strength between the insurgents and the forces that oppose them. COIN therefore is still a matter of reversing that process and recapturing the support of the concerned populations. The counterinsurgent campaign requires first a strategic plan that defines a desired outcome.<sup>30</sup> This plan must address the vital populations that energize both the insurgency and the COIN. So far, so good—a familiar Maoist pattern emerges. The problems that arise from the most recent Islamist version of this evolutionary process fall mainly on the opposing or reacting party, the coalition states. They face a relatively tiny nucleus of operatives who are

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<sup>28</sup> Devji, "Back to the Future."

<sup>29</sup> Devji, "Back to the Future."

<sup>30</sup> The *2006 Afghan National Development Strategy*, for example, provides a roadmap for the future governance, security, and development of the state, and involves an array of international forces, donors, humanitarian actors, and development agencies.



physically sustained by a much larger network of activists who are in turn emotionally supported by an entire archipelago of Islamic communities. In Devji's explanation, the generic Muslim and his or her global community, brought to life by satellite television stations and the Internet, represent a successor to the state. In a shapeless, amoebic fashion, the community adopts an international personality, expresses opinions, and takes action. And of more direct concern to this document, it also energizes and empowers a form of insurgency that seeks to strike Western interests and culture. The problem for the coalition is that its strategic plan must reverse the disaffection of the Muslim archipelago, hold together the coalition of states which comprise its centre of gravity, and successfully canvas the active support of third-party Muslim states in the operational space. For reasons previously discussed, these aspirations are counteracting. At a higher level, the entire concept of a global Muslim community held together in the virtual dimension rides outside the prevailing paradigm of international structures and state-to-state interaction.

A global Muslim community that asserts its personality in the world arena and challenges the U.S. strategic concept of a war against terror (which narrowly seeks military outcomes in Iraq and Afghanistan and eschews the larger Muslim dimension) represents a potentially hostile community that is established in every concerned state and region.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, the global Muslim community is an intuitive actor that cannot be addressed or threatened, cannot negotiate, and can only be reached from within through the same informal systems that animate it and hold it together. It would be impossible for non-Muslim actors to enter the community's consciousness along its internal nervous systems. Change has to come from within, and will be led by Muslims. The West needs the support of the Muslim community. The strategic challenge is to change core Muslim attitudes toward

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<sup>31</sup> Tatham describes how the "Arab street," spurred by Arab satellite television reportage, has gradually become increasingly hostile to the U.S.-led Coalition efforts in Iraq and, to a lesser extent, Afghanistan. His thesis is statistically reinforced by the enormous following for and spread of these television channels. See Tatham, *Losing Arab Hearts and Minds*.

the West in harmony with other Western interests and objectives. The next chapter describes the elements of such a strategy.

## Rethinking Strategy and Operations

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Previous COIN campaigns confirmed the need for an effective strategic plan and an operational response that demonstrated both legitimacy and multisectoral competence. This chapter explains the problems that arise from the continued need for strategic planning and operational capabilities that genuinely address the characteristics of the opposition.

This document has argued that coalition forces have been doctrinally surprised by complex insurgency in its most recent form. This surprise has been systemic, extending to political leaders, makers of foreign policy, and military planners. In previous experience, the British also began their campaigns badly, usually because their initial effort focused on the eradication of the terrorist. Their mindset in Northern Ireland and Malaya took several years to shift from attrition to a more manoeuvrist approach in which they addressed the environment of subversion rather than the terrorists themselves. In its intense experience of insurgency, the Vietnam War, the United States never managed to make this doctrinal shift. John Nagl argues that at the institutional level, Vietnam can be seen as the history of individuals attempting to implement change but failing to overcome a stronger institutional culture that was predisposed to attrition.<sup>1</sup> Writing in 2005 about U.S. forces in Iraq, British Brigadier Nigel Aylwin-Foster comes to much the same conclusions as Nagl. Aylwin-Foster's firsthand research found U.S. forces inclined "to consider offensive operations as the key" with-

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<sup>1</sup> Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*, p. 116.

out understanding the penalties of that approach.<sup>2</sup> Despite the fact that “winning popular support” was a U.S. force objective, Aylwin-Foster found that U.S. troops remained intuitively in the warfighting mode,<sup>3</sup> failing to understand that every soldier in COIN has to adapt to the grey areas of the civil-military interface.<sup>4</sup> Many considered that the solution was to capture or kill the terrorists. The one-day brigade raid, with its focus on killing insurgents rather than protecting the population, was the preferred tactic. In Aylwin-Foster’s opinion, the U.S. Army was not culturally attuned to its role, preferring attrition through high technology. Emotion and a “strong sense of moral authority exacerbated the situation.”<sup>5</sup>

Writing from an academic perspective about the same phenomenon, Colin Gray feels that the U.S. “way of war” is the problem. The United States suffers from a “strategy deficit,” and U.S. force commanders must stop thinking that strategy is above their pay grade.<sup>6</sup> Gray warns against the predilection for patent strategic medicines that contain a single “big idea” that appears to offer an irresistible solution, but whose underlying analysis depends on a simplified version of the situation. In COIN campaigns, U.S. planning has in the past become “a strategy of tactics” that relies more on the serial introduction of big ideas—new organizations, new technology, and the activities of special forces—rather than on an effective, long-term aspiration. Gray undermines his argument by presenting insurgency as a static concept that can be addressed by “a single working theory,”<sup>7</sup> in contrast to this document’s evidence that insurgency is an evolving concept that needs

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<sup>2</sup> Nigel R. F. Aylwin-Foster, “Changing the Army for Counterinsurgency Operations” (*Military Review*, Vol. LXXXV, No. 6, November–December 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Aylwin-Foster, “Changing the Army for Counterinsurgency Operations,” p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Otherwise known as civil-military cooperation. This refers to the need for each soldier to work sensitively at the front lines between the civilian population, the military forces, and civilian agencies.

<sup>5</sup> Aylwin-Foster, “Changing the Army for Counterinsurgency Operations,” p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Colin S. Gray, *Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy: Can the American Way of War Adapt?* (Carlisle, Pa.: Strategic Studies Institute, March 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Gray, *Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy*, p. 20.

to be addressed by an evolving form of COIN. Operational capability is as important as the strategic plan. In the past, horse armies were convincingly defeated by gunpowder armies in spite of strategy; in COIN, the operational thinking of Malaya and Northern Ireland was initially defeated by the complex insurgent.

## The Strategic Dilemma

Politicians are fond of saying “each insurgency is unique” without then drawing the logical conclusion that their own attempts at strategy might be based on flawed readings of an unfamiliar situation. It takes time for the institutional supertanker to assimilate a new environment and adjust the course adopted during previous experiences. It is therefore significant that, just as British COIN campaigns usually began with attrition, so too has the GWAT been based on attrition both in concept and execution. The dilemma is that, from the perspective of a leader’s domestic political survival, attrition is the safer option.

**Prime Minister Tony Blair’s joined-up strategy.** In Chicago in 1999, then–UK Prime Minister Blair set out a concept of “joined-up” foreign policy. In this concept he aspired to make a connection between the problems of global change, the environment, the economy, and security strategy. In March 2006 he referred again to this concept and emphasized a unity of policy with the United Kingdom’s subsequent interventions in Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, and Iraq.<sup>8</sup> Refuting criticism of his decisions to support the U.S. interventions, he stressed that civilized society does not have the option of “benign inactivity.”<sup>9</sup> According to Blair’s joined-up policy, a victory for democracy in Iraq and Afghanistan is a vital element of defeating global terrorism. Blair believed that Islamic activists were unrepresentative extremists, and that Mohammed Sadiq Khan’s videoed statement needed to be con-

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<sup>8</sup> Tony Blair, “Clash About Civilisations,” speech, London, March 21, 2006. As of March 5, 2008: <http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page9224.asp>

<sup>9</sup> Blair, “Clash About Civilisations.”

fronted.<sup>10</sup> According to Blair, Khan and jihadists at large advocated not an attack on the West but an attack on all civil society, a global civil society made up of Muslims, Jews, and Hindus as well as the Christian cultures associated with the West. In his opinion, the jihadist aspirations for governance, education, the status of women, and the eradication of other faiths were absurd, and had to be challenged by all members of civil society and above all by the Muslims who were central to a successful refutation of these ambitions.

Like the GWAT, Blair's counterstrategy is simple, almost affordable, and politically appealing to a majority. Blair's attack characterizes the jihadists as extremists, isolated mad dogs without following or genuine grievance. His reactive logic appears to reason that because the insurgents have no popular support, there is no need to address the swamp: The priority must be the mosquitoes. This thinking is close to the U.S. concept of attrition, and it conveniently opens the door to a "do-something" response that is visible and essentially military and counterterrorist in approach. The counterterrorist objectives of the British campaign were reaffirmed by UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown in an address to the Royal United Services Institute, London, in which he ticked the following homeland-security boxes: police, security forces, fire, ambulance, frontier controls, identification cards, attacking terror finances, etc.<sup>11</sup>

This plan probably satisfies some elements of his domestic constituency, but it neither understands nor engages what is attacking the West. As genuine strategy, it fails. Since 2002 a growing torrent of analysis has pointed out both the danger of dismissing the jihadist phenomenon merely as "terrorism" and the limitations of believing that the problem can therefore be solved by "counterterrorism."<sup>12</sup> From a

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<sup>10</sup> Mohammed Sadiq Khan, a British man, was one of the July 6, 2005, bombers whose videotaped statement about his hatred for British society was subsequently found and widely screened.

<sup>11</sup> Gordon Brown, "Securing Our Future" (*Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies Journal*, Vol. 151, No. 2, April 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Starting with Sir Michael Howard, "New Policies for a New World," Closing Address to RUSI/Guardian Conference, October 2001; and more recently and explicitly in David Kilcullen, "Countering Global Insurgency" (*The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 4,

Western perspective, a jihadist bomber seems like a mad dog and it is therefore reasonable to destroy him and dismiss his motives. But in traditional Muslim communities in Britain and Europe, the actions of a violent extremist, however disturbing, reflect the very real grievances of those communities. Blair's assumptions do not recognize that the thrall of the *Ummah* is stronger for many Muslims than Blair's version of civil society. In traditional Muslim communities that are also represented in the British and European minorities, a Muslim mad dog is preferable to the infidel, particularly the British or American infidel. Blair's concept of Muslim interlocutors, whom he hopes will bravely refute Khan's attack on British society, presupposes a plentiful supply of British Muslims who will routinely volunteer for the role of government spokesperson. It also assumes that these spokespeople, should any credible ones be found, would not immediately lose their credibility as Muslims in the very communities they seek to win over.<sup>13</sup> Adopting a counterterrorist strategy assumes a degree of knowledge the West does not have about the communication paths by which extremist ideology reaches its targets, about the size of the of European minorities, and, more importantly, about the percentages of these minorities that are vaguely or strongly sympathetic to jihadist views. Without this knowledge it seems risky to embark on a "do-something" campaign that is largely kinetic and does not seem to address the linkage between Muslim sympathy and the impetus of the jihadist minority.

## The Counterinsurgent Campaign

In the last decade the list of terrorist acts associated with global jihad indicates that, in addition to the United States, a number of states have an interest in moving toward a form of security based on a more inclu-

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August 2006); Jennifer Morrison Taw and Bruce Hoffman *The Urbanization of Insurgency: The Potential Challenge to US Army Operations* (Santa Monica, Calif.: MR-398-A, 1994); and Alwyn-Foster, "Changing the Army for Counterinsurgency Operations."

<sup>13</sup> To counter Islamic radical subversion in prisons (see Chapter Three), the UK Home Office has appointed official prison imams. However, their effectiveness is compromised by their official status as infidel appointees.

sive relationship between Muslim populations and the West. Their collective purpose in the long term therefore cannot be to conduct a counterterrorist campaign that seeks to destroy an endless supply of disaffected young jihadists. Their aim must be to dispel the sense of exclusion and animosity and help lead the Muslim population to success. European states need to place the divisions in their own populations at the top of their national list of priorities. All states should adopt an indirect tactical approach, increasingly replacing the police cordon-and-raid at dawn with the message that jihad is uncool. In parallel with the domestic campaign there is a need to help weak states that are in imminent danger of becoming places where an armed jihadist camp can find sanctuary. This span of interests, national and international, has to be brought together into a coherent campaign that represents the aspirations of a powerful community. Its interpretation on the ground has to be presented as a mosaic of different operations in different places that nevertheless have the same long-term strategic intent. Moreover, between the individual parts of the mosaic there needs to be a high degree of operational harmony so that the actions of the U.S. military commander in Jalalabad do not upset the local government initiative in Bradford, or vice-versa.

This document does not aspire to set out the detailed geography of this strategy by nation, county, and community. Its aim is to show that the current concept, or lack thereof, is counteracting and counterproductive. The local military value of a one-day brigade raid in the suburbs of Baghdad is erased at the coalition level when it is presented to a Muslim audience. The local military commander in the suburbs of Baghdad is unaware and probably unconcerned that his highly visible but minor success has increased tension in the streets of British, Italian, French, Belgian, and Dutch cities where racial animosity between communities already exists. COIN thinking needs to face up to the realities of environment. Successor campaigns must be

- politically led
- internationally comprised
- multisectoral
- multifunctional in their span of capabilities and actors



- genuinely joined up.

The purpose of this section is therefore to describe a campaign that is more than a matter of military attrition against terrorists.

**Maintaining political primacy.** The campaign must be politically led. Its political objectives should be understood down to the soldier level. Throughout the campaign structure there should be no “purely military” arena of activity, no point at which the military regains its primacy. Likewise, there should be no level of action below which there is no longer a need for the front-line soldier to understand or follow the political objectives of the campaign. His or her actions in the street should demonstrate these imperatives. For example, he or she must be aware of the need to strike a balance between winning the support of the population and displaying the negative body language typical of an aggressive military force following the routines of self-protection.<sup>14</sup> This is the era of the “strategic traffic accident”<sup>15</sup> in which every soldier, in or out of uniform, represents the political aims of a greater coalition and is also visible and accountable to several different echelons of world, national, and local media.

**Identifying the adversary’s strategic centre of gravity.** Against a global opponent, it is important to know from the jihadist perspective, as opposed to the coalition perspective, which conflict areas are critical and which are peripheral. Blair and U.S. President George W. Bush see protecting the success of democracy in Iraq and Afghanistan as central to GWAT. But for reasons explained in Chapter Three, the impetus of global jihad is likely to carry on beyond success or failure in Iraq and Afghanistan. The energy of the movement does not arise from its influence over territory, and its impetus will not therefore be arrested

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<sup>14</sup> In 2006, the authors observed in Kabul that some Multinational Force contingents patrolled the streets in closed-down armoured vehicles, pushing civilian traffic off the road and throwing dust over the stalls and into the open shop fronts. The contingents claimed that this was necessary to maintain their security. The fact that these actions seemed to negate one of the main reasons for the patrols was not understood at the unit level.

<sup>15</sup> For example, the May 29, 2006, Kabul traffic accident involving a U.S. convoy. The accident sparked a riot, brought the city into a state of curfew, and exposed U.S. forces to some unfavourable worldwide publicity.

at what are seen in the West as the front lines of the insurgency. A logical counterstrategy would investigate and focus on the opponent's real source of energy rather than on proxy battlefields. This investigation might compel planners to take a lateral view of what constitutes the adversary's centre of gravity and, rather than a hostile territory, they may find it comprises an energizing conjunction of circumstances. So, intervening in a territory that is providing a real-life refuge may become secondary to the "disaggregation"<sup>16</sup> of a sense of grievance from a virtual environment in which the adversary moves, grows, and operates.

**Engaging in the virtual dimension.** In the paradigm of complex insurgency, the propaganda of the deed is more powerful than the deed itself. The deed is therefore planned more for its visibility and drama than for its orthodox military value in terms of ships sunk and territory gained. In such a campaign, the opposition needs only to remain at large and to keep "scoring goals" to continue animating a community of unknown followers. The propagation of the deed is carried out for them by the neutral energy of the media and the Internet. The moderate Muslim majority, whose numbers in EU states are uncounted, only have to do nothing for the insurgency to survive in their midst. Disarming the propaganda arising from the jihadist attacks would remove a source of energy that lies at the heart of the insurgency's strategic centre of gravity. To achieve this would require a joined-up information offensive that sets aims to alter the expectations of vulnerable individuals and potentially disaffected communities. To be credible, this offensive would have to be visibly led by Muslims, and its contents would have to be designed by Muslims. Recruiting sufficient numbers of role models and key communicators would first require countries with multiethnic populations to implement policy changes that address the grievances outlined in Chapter Three. The information policy message should be inclusion: that Muslim populations can be and already have been part of globally enjoyed wealth and success that are not exclusively West-

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<sup>16</sup> For a full explanation of the concept of "disaggregation," see Kilcullen, "Countering Global Insurgency."

ern.<sup>17</sup> Defeating a propaganda-of-the-deed campaign may also require the coalition, particularly its military forces, to move into the virtual battlefield. This would require rethinking the value set on the kinetic effect of military action; virtual effects and televisual imagery would take much greater precedence than before. There is some evidence that the U.S. Marine Corps put this concept into effect in 2004 in Fallujah. The next requirement would be to alter the cultural emphasis of a coalition campaign to include the entire span of vital-ground populations as opposed to exclusively domestic ones.

**Isolating the activist.** General Sir Rupert Smith points out that the days of separating insurgent activists from their sympathetic population by direct means are long since over. In Malaya, Sir Robert Thompson and a compliant colonial service used a practical method (the “direct” method) to separate the Chinese rural population from the insurgency by physically moving the Chinese into protected villages. After the policy of attrition failed in Northern Ireland, the British separated the IRA from its sympathetic constituency through an indirect method. In recognized IRA operational areas, the population was “middle classed” out of the equation by resolute and concentrated government spending, education, and commercial incentives. Through the measure, the middle-class populations of every political provenance were no longer part of the trouble-causing, lumpen proletariat.<sup>18</sup> They now earned good money, owned houses, and were actively repelled by the prospect of the reassertion of a violent form of lawless authority. It is not yet apparent that any strategy of separation will emerge in the UK and U.S. versions of the GWAT.

**Accepting the policy dilemma.** The logic of addressing a propaganda-of-the-deed campaign forces campaign directors (i.e., the *SF* + *GOV*) to make concessions amounting to something of a revolution in their own core principles and beliefs. A successful counterin-

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<sup>17</sup> This argument is explained in Gilles Kepel, *The War for Muslim Minds: Islam and the West*, trans. Pascale Ghazaleh (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2004), especially Chapter Seven, “The Battle for Europe.”

<sup>18</sup> See this description in Martin Oppenheimer, *The Urban Guerrilla* (London: Penguin, 1969): “[The community] catapults to revolutionism the moment life is no longer seen as liveable . . . [I]t has nothing to lose, only the world to gain, so why not?”

urgent campaign embodies a generic planning dilemma. A persistent insurgency that arouses popular sympathy, measured in millions of people, must have a basis of genuine grievance. To succeed, the counterstrategy has to address the grievance. Disengaging the sympathetic support of a large population is hard to achieve even under the ideal conditions enjoyed by the British. Under circumstances that involve dispersed Muslim populations, as outlined Chapter Three, it becomes vastly more complicated. In Malaya the insurgents' political campaign was disarmed when the colonial regime granted independence and transferred power to a democratically elected national government at an early stage of the campaign. British expatriate rubber planters and junior colonial officers gnashed their teeth at the prospect, but as strategy it was manoeuvrist and successful. Abandoning previously stated principles to this extent is the option of a supremely confident government that is barely accountable to its electorate, which was the case in Malaya and (to a significantly lesser extent) in Ulster. It is not clear that Bush and Brown have the necessary experience of the global version of COIN or the necessary political support to make manoeuvrist concessions in their GWAT campaign priorities or in foreign policies.

The rethinking process for a joined-up coalition strategy needs to engage the virtual and the Muslim dimensions as well as measure their influence on the coalition's objectives. "Middle classing" the entire Muslim population is not an option. In developed countries, this alternative might be possible, but for communities on the edge of survival, restoring human security may have the same effect. The methodology for restoring human security province by province in Afghanistan is an indicator of the way ahead. In this case, "human security" refers to the assurance of a livelihood in addition to the enjoyment of personal freedoms associated with a liberal society. Therefore, a reappraisal of the components of the COIN campaign—political, virtual, social, and security—may reveal that the military dimension becomes a subordinate element of a much larger and more complex mosaic of interacting operations. There is no single cure: Defeating a complex insurgency requires a multiagency approach.

## Operational Capability

In the hands of newspeople and film directors, the icons of post-9/11 intervention will probably forever be the noise and drama of the one-day raid: bodies, gunfire, and streets littered with rubble and spent casings. Fortunately for the coalition's military forces, the reality is that they are more likely to move into a post-Iraq phase of operations in which a different tempo and different roles have emerged. In the present climate of reactive analysis, "post-Iraq" seems far away. Nevertheless, several developments, which have been identified above as long-term conditions, provide a useful basis from which to see where the West has recently come from, and (more importantly) where it might go.

Extrapolating from these environmental conditions and the prevailing international structures, it is possible to say that in a future strategy against global jihad, U.S.-led coalitions will continue to intervene and garrison overseas. However, in the post-Iraq era there may be greater awareness in all sectors of the need for the effort to be multifaceted and for the military component to be just one subordinate part of a multidimensional counterstrategy. The mosaic's many sectors will use an increasingly indirect approach to shift popular support in particular states away from assisting global insurgency. A coalition force therefore may be deployed in a soft security role to help a weakened state assert aspects of authority, none of which may be primarily military. However, in a serious breakdown of order the soldier has to be able to transform from being a security provider, border observer, trainer, secondee staff officer, and intelligence collector into a combat soldier. In this scenario, the continued reliance on short-term cures, strategic medicines, futuristic technologies, and special-force expeditions represents a failure to understand the past or the direction of the future. In the filmmakers' version of Iraq, these expedients are imaginable, but in a future mission the operational space will be less dominated by the soldier. The purpose of this final section is to focus on the generic military role in future COIN operations, to understand where the military fits into this mosaic, to anticipate the military's greater subordination to a

politically led campaign, and to record what the West already knows about successfully led coalitions.

## Doctrine Deficit

The consequence of being surprised by the complexity of global jihad is that it has taken some time for UK and U.S. government departments to respond jointly (i.e., between the departments of their own administrations as well as with other states). Moreover, in planning terms it is still not clear by what genuine strategy the West will respond. In Whitehall there is recognition that mounting overseas interventions of any kind involves foreign affairs, defence, and overseas development departments from the start. In January 2006 the UK MoD published a discussion note whose “comprehensive approach” between departments suggests a methodology for information sharing and defining a lead framework between departments for a particular contingency.<sup>19</sup> A similar initiative is in place in Washington, D.C.<sup>20</sup> The UK MoD discussion note tentatively recognizes the command problems of mounting a multisector campaign that is certain to have political, security, law and order, development, economic, and humanitarian functions, but it fails to establish a generic structure in Whitehall to address this problem. The interdepartmental struggle continues on a contingency-by-contingency basis, and at the highest level there is an absence of leadership with no apparent effort to establish a directorate that could, with one voice, deploy and direct a counterstrategy whose reach matches its adversary’s.

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<sup>19</sup> UK Ministry of Defence, Joint Doctrine and Concepts Centre, Joint Discussion Note 4/05, *The Comprehensive Approach* (Shrivenham, UK: January 2006). As of March 5, 2008: <http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/MicroSite/DCDC/OurPublications/JDNP/JointDiscussionNotejdn405TheComprehensiveApproach.htm>

<sup>20</sup> Various agencies are buying into the idea of multidisciplinary, multiagency, and short-and long-term integration of resources. The British idea is reflected in the U.S. *National Security Strategy*, the U.S. *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, and the U.S. Department of State’s Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (equivalent to the United Kingdom’s Post Conflict Reconstruction Unit).

The ramification for the military is that an array of loosely connected national governments and their various departments are conducting what is, in blunt English, a COIN campaign. The campaign embodies the same holistic concept as Thompson's approach in Malaya, but in this case each sector is now represented by one or more government departments at the national level, and this escalation of complexity and scale is further amplified by an international dimension. The military is a key part of this, but the problem is that none of the other departments or countries involved recognize a common version of COIN.

The absence of doctrine was foreseeable. In the 1990s the priority in the United States and United Kingdom was for a peace support operations doctrine to be developed. However, resulting politically correct manuals failed to address the possibility that interventions, however well intentioned, could be effectively opposed by local military forces. By the late 1990s, as the intervention culture became more and more militarily capable, the missing element in Western common knowledge was a doctrine for COIN that

- was internationally recognised, especially by coalition forces and host states
- included only internationally acceptable techniques, whether implied or explicitly advocated
- included a generic description of the full range of adversaries (see below)
- included principles and institutional knowledge related to maintaining the coherence and operating as part of a coalition
- included principles and techniques governing the virtual dimension of the strategy
- introduced a common methodology for measuring success.

## **A Generic Version of the Adversary**

The failure to develop a generic version of the adversary results in several problems. In the Cold War, elaborate efforts were made to develop

a fairly detailed generic enemy. These efforts were published as training manuals that explained the adversary's strategic concept, tactics, weapons, and organization based on Russian and Chinese models.<sup>21</sup> The benefit of reducing the characteristics of the opposition to a generic form (that was universally understood down to the individual soldier level in NATO's professional forces) was that it compelled a more sophisticated approach toward the enemy. This degree of sophistication is now missing, particularly at the soldier level. Moreover, the United States' version of the opponent differs from the United Kingdom's, which in turn differs from that of various other governments and departments involved. Each component of the mosaic has a different version of the adversary.

Adopting a generic version of the adversary should not be interpreted as a dumbing-down process. On the contrary, its purpose is to encourage a uniformly more intensive and sophisticated understanding at the soldier level. The Cold War enemy was black and white in concept; the "new" enemy has to be shaded. Indeed, there are many shades of adversary that soldiers, government officials, and civil agency executives must understand and deal with. It is also possible that after treaties, negotiations, and concessions, the most hunted element of the adversary will become the future regime of the new state. The more shades and facets there are to understand, the more it seems important that the officials and soldiers involved should encounter a sophisticated version at an early stage of their preparatory training. A generic adversary, similar to the Cold War concept, has to reduce and explain the problems of shading in the context of a politically led campaign. A well produced generic adversary would help to create a common narrative between departments of the same state and between states in the same coalition.

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<sup>21</sup> In Cold War NATO exercises, the Russians were the "Fantasians" and the Chinese were the "Vandals." Today, the "Orange" model is still based on a Russo/Eastern European-equipped and organized adversary. This is greeted with a degree of hilarity by forces and staff courses that now include a sizeable Eastern European component.



## The Response Mosaic

The concept of the “strategic corporal” is sufficiently part of British language to be reflected in British doctrine.<sup>22</sup> The consequence of the visible parts of a military force having a strategic effect when caught in the floodlights of the virtual dimension is that the element of a coalition thus exposed must understand its position in the hierarchy of actors.

The international response in Afghanistan is a prototype version of the mosaic approach to COIN in which several different coalitions attend to different sectors of a security and nation-building program in the same operational space. Relevant departments in Washington, D.C., and London, including the defence departments, each tend to see the operation from the narrow perspective of its own departmental function. But the “strategic corporal” and his commander on the ground have to have a very acute sense of the other moving parts that comprise the international response around them. Without this awareness, elements of the response act against each other’s interests, as they constantly do in the Afghanistan prototype. On the ground, the force commander has to think beyond his operational space and understand where his particular area of responsibility lies in relation to the global dimension of jihad and in the mosaic of operations that address it. Are the security problems in his area the consequence of local events that he can influence, or rather are they the consequence of global events beyond his control? As Smith remarked, one must know whether one’s asset is the pawn or the king on the international chess board, preferably before the game begins.

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<sup>22</sup> UK Ministry of Defence, Joint Doctrine and Concepts Centre, Joint Warfare Publication 3-50, *The Military Contribution to Peace Support Operations*, 2nd ed. (Shrivenham, UK: June 2004), paragraph 233. As of March 5, 2008: <http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/MicroSite/DCDC/OurPublications/JDWP/JointWarfarePublicationjwp346LegalSupport-ToJointOperations.htm>

## Using Force

This document argues that the appropriate counterstrategy against the emergence of federated insurgency complexes (FICs) in Iraq and Afghanistan is not for the Coalition to deploy more and more assets for attrition at what it believes are the frontlines of the problem. The FIC is the focal point of several different strands of violent energy, some of which are local in origin, others of which sustain the violence from abroad with imported cash, weapons, manpower, and experience. The FIC is the product of different local, national, and international communities and subversive organizations. It cannot therefore be defeated by a military counterstrategy that is focused narrowly on its point of impact. The counterstrategy must be as internationally spread as the thing it seeks to destroy. Although this implies a campaign that is politically driven, it does not rule out the use of force for the purposes of restoring a monopoly of violence in the operational space. However, in British thinking using force is not a panacea on its own; it does not mean that the successful restoration of order is simply a matter of large body counts and extrajudicial killing by special forces. Three decades of operations in Northern Ireland have imposed a high degree of accountability on the British approach. In this experience, the principle of minimum force has grown more sophisticated and commanders have achieved a certain nuance in both applying graduated levels of force and in communicating the threat of force to a lawless population. However, in a campaign in which the actors of an intervening coalition become globally accountable under the scrutiny of the media, the behaviour of all soldiers in the street becomes critical when they are compelled to use their weapons. When that happens, the use of military force must be seen as accountable, disciplined, and justifiable. This requirement seems to dictate a manpower-intensive presence that is policing rather than attrition based, a presence that in the long term is not much reduced or assisted by the use of more-powerful, indiscriminate, or unmanned weapon systems.

## Coalitions

There are several kinds of military coalition. Formal coalitions based on treaties with institutional structures indicate a purposeful, long-term political convergence of interests. At the other end of the spectrum are what Smith calls “lash-ups”—operationally expedient arrangements between a number of actors already in the operational space. These arrangements are short term, mission specific, and legally underwritten by nothing more than a short memorandum between parties. In a multiparty conflict, elements of the coalition must avoid getting into lash-ups with local forces, especially if these local forces are likely to behave badly, change sides, or continue to call in coalition support long after the utility of the lash-up is over.

Thirty percent of a commander’s time is spent on coalition maintenance. Typically, the theatre commander, if there is one, directs his energy toward the national and international levels. On the ground, the force commander focuses on the operational coherence of the contingents deployed. The theatre commander serves as a representative and figurehead, dealing with national visitors, protocols, international committees, concerned states and populations, and alliance executive structures. On the ground, a force commander has a different perspective of coherence. His interest is to maintain a (frequently precarious) authority over his contingents. He commands through consensus and only gives orders when he can be sure that his subordinates will obey. He must be wary not to lose control of territory within his force area by granting long-term autonomy to a particular national command. Ceding territory on this basis creates fiefdoms within a force and acts against the harmony of a successful mosaic. Coherence is better achieved by allocating functional areas to nations. In any coalition there will be a disparity of contingents. Some national forces are inherently manoeuvrist and some are not. Therefore, it is important to find out which is which before negotiating their roles in the coalition. The problems of directing an international response in these circum-

stances should not be underestimated. However, for reasons of space and editorial focus, they are not treated in this document.<sup>23</sup>

## Operations

A military force that has moved beyond the attrition phase of operational behaviour has to “operate to learn” at all times. In the allocation of troops to tasks there is a constant tension between the need to secure the authority of the state (by protecting its government, military installations, police infrastructure, and law enforcement capabilities) and to collect information (through patrols, surveillance, and interaction with the local population). Although securing authority is essential, it is the second role that informs the operations that ultimately alter the tactical situation in favour of the coalition. Each contingent must incorporate the latest lessons and thinking from the force experience into their own training and contingent replacement cycle.<sup>24</sup>

Coalition forces are governed by the art of the possible. Understanding the scale at which a force is capable of operating is important. If a coalition force is structured in contingents of battalion strength and thinks and acts at battalion level, the commander should not enter situations that will invite a brigade-level response.

In operations against global jihadists, a coalition’s legitimacy, even when underwritten by the highest global authority of a UN mandate, is only secular in nature. However, the sense of grievance that the coalition seeks to disarm is fanatically nonsecular. Troops acting among the population should be aware of this discrepancy. A force’s international legitimacy is derived from its multilateral origins, but its day-to-day legitimacy on the ground is conferred locally by the community, not by some distant authority.

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<sup>23</sup> See Mackinlay, *Defeating Complex Insurgency*, p. 57.

<sup>24</sup> In the UK Army system this is achieved by a centralized Operations Training Assistance Group that trains teams to collate lessons themselves from the operational area and pass them on directly to incoming battalions in the form of training packages.

A coalition commander is the most potent reconnaissance platform available to the force. In a day's work, his cross-sector access to the host nation, the higher political echelons of the adversary, other actors in the operational space, and his own troops is greater and more intrusive than that of any information system. Each force must develop a means of debriefing and harnessing this asset on a regular basis.

## Measuring Success and Failure

It is important for all involved in a counterinsurgent campaign to have a reliable method of measuring the campaign's success. Furthermore, the measurements have to be made by an organization that is impartial, authoritative, and recognized by the largest consensus of concerned populations and actors. Degrees of success and failure can be measured by displacement and rehabilitation of populations, violent incidents, economic growth, individual freedoms upheld, improvement of infrastructure, the successful functioning of schools and hospitals, and the restoration of urban facilities. From the perspective of the COIN campaign director, this system of measurements will surely tell both good and bad news.

In national COIN campaigns, government and security forces had (still have) the luxury of editing and obfuscating the statistics of success and failure to present the best gloss on their operations. In a multinational campaign, the leader of the alliance is denied this option for many reasons; above all, the proliferation of independent observers connected to a proliferation of independent means of communication makes the concealment of bad news almost impossible. Concerned populations respect transparency. Coalition leaders who strive to establish transparency as part of the program must also live by transparency. In future campaigns it is therefore important for the coalition and concerned states to identify a single, universally recognized authority to measure the success of an intervention on a regular basis. This requirement imposes a change of approach at the outset regarding the transparent handling of all negative information vis-à-vis the virtual dimension and the use of spin by the coalition leadership. It also requires

a more educated home constituency and media. Success or failure in COIN is seldom a knock-down victory. Leaders will have to alter the short-term expectations of their political constituencies because COIN continues to be a long journey of discovery in which there are very few shortcuts to what ultimately may become a negotiated settlement.

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