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<b>14. ABSTRACT</b> Without a continuous Center of Gravity analysis, not only prior to commencing operations, but throughout the course of a given conflict, the ultimate success and achievement of national strategic objectives will be in serious jeopardy. The determination of the enemy's Center of Gravity has typically been utilized in a conventional war setting against one enemy or coalition. Insurgencies present a very different set of problems however, both to the war fighter and policy maker, and by nature, do not follow the same set of rules. The current situation in Iraq is unique in that it is wrought with multiple insurgency groups (global, regional, tribal, religious, nationalist and foreign) that have varying agendas and loyalties. In such an environment, a Center of Gravity approach may be viewed with skepticism. True, the search for a Center of Gravity becomes complicated in this situation causing some to dismiss it altogether however, the fact that there are several insurgent groups with various characteristics means that there are differences that can be exploited. Using the insurgency in Iraq, potentially the most complex insurgency the United States has had to face, this paper will demonstrate that a Center of Gravity study is not only valid but crucial, and can be used to identify a set of focused operational objectives and lines of operation. This is an essential task and function not only for the <i>military</i> operational commander but also for the <i>civilian</i> policy maker who sets the national strategic objectives. This paper will divide the insurgencies in Iraq into two groups based on similar ideologies and show how the results of a Center of Gravity analysis can form an operational framework in which all elements of national power can be concentrated. Results of this preliminary study indicate that through a national focus toward unity of effort, an increase in cultural knowledge, improved security and reconstruction methods, and a massive information campaign the counterinsurgency in Iraq still has a chance at success.			
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Newport, RI

***Iraq's Insurgency Collage - Does COG apply?***

By

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**A paper submitted to the faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.**

**The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.**

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**13 February 2006**

## Abstract

Without a continuous Center of Gravity analysis, not only prior to commencing operations, but throughout the course of a given conflict, the ultimate success and achievement of national strategic objectives are in serious jeopardy. The determination of the enemy's Center of Gravity has typically been utilized in a conventional war setting against one enemy or coalition. Insurgencies present a very different set of problems to both war fighters and policy makers, and by nature, do not follow the same set of rules. The current situation in Iraq is unique in that it is wrought with multiple insurgency groups (global, regional, tribal, religious, nationalist and foreign) that have varying agendas and loyalties. In addition, there are aspects which forecast both an ethnic and ideological civil war. In such an environment, a Center of Gravity approach may be viewed with skepticism. True, the search for a Center of Gravity becomes complicated in this situation causing some to dismiss it altogether, however, the fact that there are several insurgent groups with various characteristics means there are differences that can be exploited. Using the insurgency in Iraq, potentially the most complex insurgency the United States has had to face, this paper will demonstrate that a Center of Gravity study is not only valid but crucial, and can be used to identify a set of focused operational objectives and lines of operation. This is an essential task and function not only for the *military* operational commander but also for the *civilian* policy maker who sets the national strategic objectives. This paper will divide the insurgencies in Iraq into two groups based on similar ideologies and show how the results of a Center of Gravity analysis can form an operational framework in which all elements of national power can be concentrated. Results of this preliminary study indicate that through a national focus toward unity of effort, an increase in cultural knowledge, improved security and reconstruction methods, and a massive information campaign the counterinsurgency in Iraq still has a chance at success.

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*“...at the outset of a war its character and scope should be determined on the basis of political probabilities. The closer war [becomes] ... the more imperative the need not to take the first step without considering the last.”<sup>1</sup>*

**Thesis & Introduction.** Without a continuous Center of Gravity analysis, not only prior to commencing operations, but throughout the course of a given conflict, the ultimate success and achievement of national strategic objectives are in serious jeopardy. The determination of the enemy’s Center of Gravity has typically been utilized in a conventional war setting against one enemy or coalition. Insurgencies<sup>2</sup> present a very different set of problems to both war fighters and policy makers, and by nature, do not follow the same set of rules. The current situation in Iraq is unique in that it is wrought with multiple insurgency groups (global, regional, tribal, religious, nationalist and foreign) that have varying agendas and loyalties. In addition, there are aspects which forecast both an ethnic and ideological civil war. In such an environment, a Center of Gravity approach may be viewed with skepticism. True, the search for a Center of Gravity becomes complicated in this situation causing some to dismiss it altogether, however, the fact that there are several insurgent groups with various characteristics means there are differences that can be exploited. Using the insurgency in Iraq, potentially the most complex insurgency the United States has had to face, this paper will demonstrate that a Center of Gravity study is not only valid but crucial, and can be used to identify a set of focused operational objectives and lines of operation. This is an essential task and function not only for the *military* operational commander but also for the *civilian* policy maker who sets the national strategic objectives. This paper will divide the insurgencies in Iraq into two groups based on similar ideologies and show how the results of a Center of Gravity analysis can form an operational framework in which all elements of national power can be concentrated. Results of this preliminary study indicate that through a national focus toward unity of effort, an increase in cultural knowledge, improved security and reconstruction methods, and a massive information campaign the counterinsurgency in Iraq still has a chance at success.

*“First Principle. The government must have a clear political aim: to establish...a free...country which is politically and economically stable...”<sup>3</sup> - Thompson*

**U.S. Ends and Means.** The first step in any worthwhile reassessment of ongoing operations is a reexamination of national strategic and operational objectives to include whether means used are effective. The Bush administration’s political goals in Iraq in brief, were to administer consequences for continued violations of United Nations Security Resolutions, eliminate the threat of WMD, and force a regime change to produce a democratic and free Iraq resulting in a more stable Middle East. The means used to accomplish these goals were predominantly conventional military force followed by humanitarian aid, with seemingly not enough thought toward a possible insurgency. To some extent the U.S. has been successful: the Baath party regime was toppled, Saddam Hussein was captured, an Iraqi interim government was put in place, Iraqi security forces and police are being trained, a constitution has been drafted and two major elections have been held. To an equal or greater extent, however, the U.S. is extremely far from its strategic goals. Insurgent, extremist and sectarian violence continue unabated, corruption and anti-western sentiment are rampant, and the U.S. is under substantial domestic and international pressure to withdraw. Initially, the conventional military power of the U.S. was directed at, what was then, Iraq’s Center of Gravity: the Baath Party and its central government in Baghdad. The inclination of the weaker enemy, however, was to revert to the advantageous strategy of insurgency (warfare mode of choice when facing a superior foe). It has been established that the U.S. poorly planned for this shift in the nature of war and enemy center of gravity. Additionally, the U.S. dismantled the Iraqi government (mostly Sunni), disbanded the Iraqi armed forces, and instituted a de-Baathification process that removed Baath government officials as well as Baath doctors, teachers, lawyers, and businessman putting “400,000 breadwinners in the unemployment line”.<sup>4</sup> These means among others at the beginning of “Phase IV”<sup>5</sup> operations did not help to bring about the strategic objectives for a stable and secure

Iraq. Instead they added “fence-sitters” to the previously organized insurgency. It was initially believed the U.S. didn’t need Sunnis to form the new government and that the population made up of Kurds and Shiites would be enough. Many Sunnis claim this marginalization as a decision point for joining the insurgency. Thus began the shift in the nature of the war and break up of the enemy Center of Gravity into multiple Centers of Gravity. Only five of twenty-one major counterinsurgency operations have been successful over the past 250 years.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, a Center of Gravity analysis is crucial to make Iraq the sixth.

*“Before prescribing anything for [this] disease you better do the proper analysis!”<sup>7</sup> - Waghelstein*  
**The Center of Gravity Defined.** The Center of Gravity concept is interpreted in many different ways and was originated by Clausewitz in his book “On War”. He describes it as *“the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends... the point against which all our energies should be directed... Only by constantly seeking out the center of his power... will one really defeat the enemy.”<sup>8</sup>* Written in the 1800s, when wars were between nation states, his theory mainly applied to military and conventional warfare as opposed to the many resources of power and aspects of warfare today. Recently several other interpretations have surfaced. U.S. Joint Publication 5-00.1 and Army Field Manual 3-0 describe the Center of Gravity in similar language as *“those characteristics, capabilities, or sources of power from which a military force derives its freedom of action, physical strength, or will to fight”<sup>9</sup>* Milan Vego defines it as *“that source of massed strength – physical, moral, or a source of leverage – whose serious degradation ... would have the most decisive impact...”* He proposes starting with a listing of Critical Strengths and Weaknesses.<sup>10</sup> Dr. Joe Strange attempts to clarify its definition stating, *“They are **not** characteristics, capabilities or locations... They are dynamic and powerful physical or moral agents of action or influence that possess certain characteristics and capabilities, and benefit from a given location or terrain.”*  
*(Emphasis his)* Strange introduces the concept of Critical Capabilities and Requirements to aid



in finding the Center of Gravity and Critical Vulnerabilities.<sup>11</sup> The current global environment requires not only military leaders, but policy makers and agencies to conduct this analysis in order to provide unity of effort and determine actions and resources across all elements of national power (diplomatic, informational, military and economic (DIME)). This paper will utilize the Dr. Strange method of analysis combined with Vego's use of Critical Strengths and Weaknesses. A true Center of Gravity study of each Iraqi insurgent group is beyond the scope of this paper. However, a broad overview of the process will be given using Iraq as a model, for the purpose of proving the validity and necessity of such a task.

*“Know thy enemy and know thyself and in a hundred battles you will not fail.”<sup>12</sup> Sun Tzu*  
**Center of Gravity Analysis Overview.** The Center of Gravity study begins with an analysis of the enemy's desired end state, strategic objective, and operational objectives. The next step is identification of the Operational Factors of Force, Space and Time, which analyzes key enemy planning factors in these areas (See Fig 1-1).<sup>13</sup> The Operational Factors are followed by identification of the Critical Factors (Capabilities, Requirements, Strengths, Weaknesses and Vulnerabilities). Before a Center of Gravity analysis is even begun however, the planner must know the enemy, his culture, and his history. This is especially true when dealing with insurgencies for which control and winning of the population's loyalties are crucial.

*“Maoist military doctrine likens guerrilla fighters to fish swimming in a sea of peasants, who provide logistical support”.*<sup>14</sup>

**The Sea In Which They Swim.** Understanding the population, its culture, history and social characteristics are indispensable for successful counterinsurgency operations, which focus on the population, creating a secure environment and gaining popular support. No modern army using conventional tactics has ever defeated an insurgency.<sup>15</sup> Any Center of Gravity study that does not take into account this “sea in which the insurgent swims” would be delinquent.

## IDENTIFYING CRITICAL FACTORS AND CENTERS OF GRAVITY

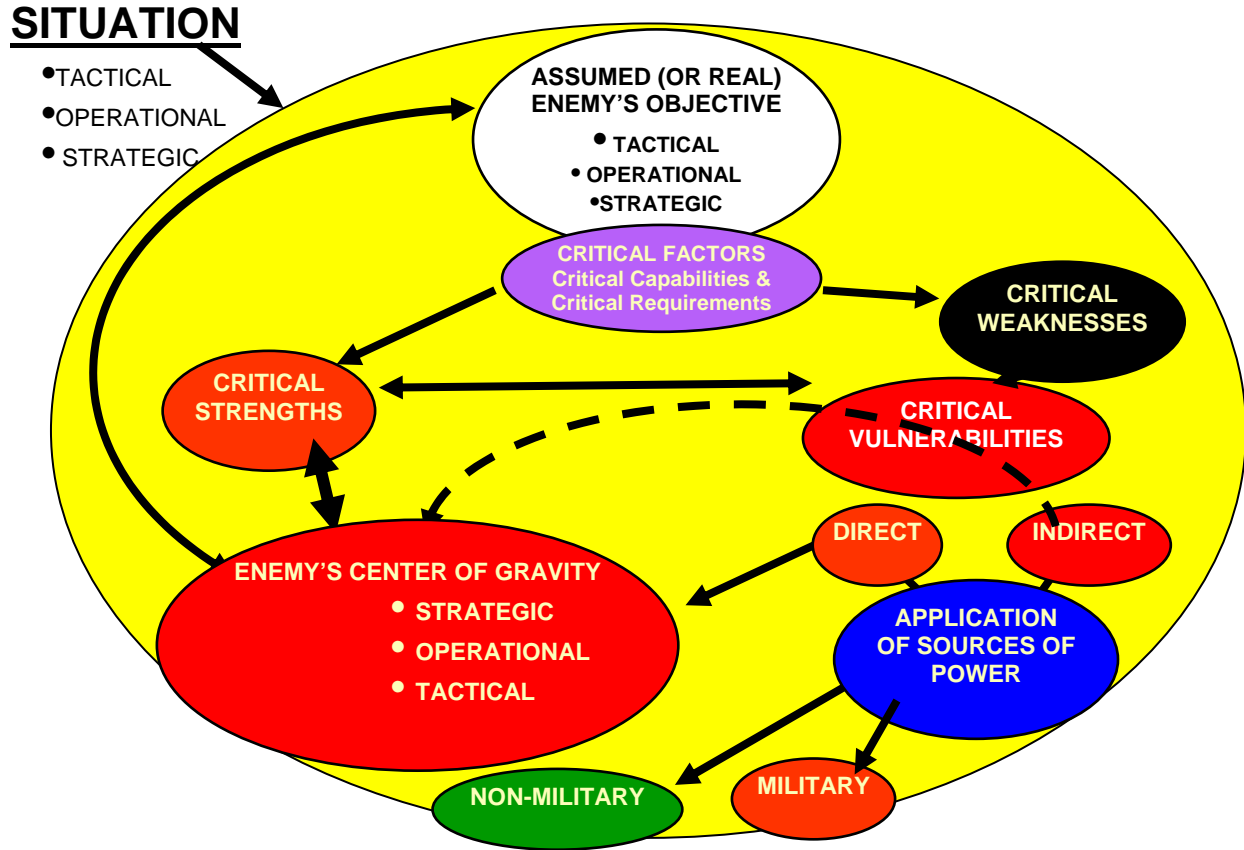


Figure 1-1

**Cultural Factors.** Following are several examples that illustrate cultural and historical factors in Iraq which may not have been anticipated and greatly contribute to the difficulty today in establishing new governance. For thousands of years various groups have formed autonomous, security-providing, self-contained social units or tribes. Even at the beginning of the twentieth century, during both Ottoman Turk rule and British occupation, Iraq's disconnected society claimed no allegiance to a central government. The Iraqi people, from the period of British control (1919-1958) through the Saddam years, have been divorced from the political process; a process marked by sectarian repression and secret police. Finally, increased Western influence is seen by many Muslim countries and individuals as threatening Islam, increasing depravity and distance from the ideal Abbasid Caliphate period (8<sup>th</sup> -13<sup>th</sup> century A.D.).

**Historical Factors.** Historical contexts also reveal telltale signs of likely Iraqi reactions to foreign invaders. Iraq, under the rule of the Ottoman Turks until 1918, was “liberated” by the British after World War I with the verbage, “*we have come to liberate Iraq and not to occupy*”.<sup>16</sup> Within one year the British were met a united Shia and Sunni insurgency to throw off the bonds of imperialism. Any British attempts to quell the uprising only served to exacerbate the problem. Similar to today, a *fatwa* (religious ruling) was issued, stating that it was against Islamic law to be ruled by non-Muslims, as well as a calling for *jihad* and culminating in the Great Iraqi Revolution of 1920 against the British. This whole ordeal was extremely costly for the British, who replaced their regime with an Arab Sunni government and Iraq’s first monarch (the *British* version of legitimate government (substitute *Democracy* for today)).<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, this was viewed as a Western imposition and, after several coups and counter-coups, was overthrown in 1958 by the military regime that eventually became the Baath party.<sup>18</sup>

**Societal Factors.** There is a *myriad* of groups and organizations in Iraq today, some that overlap, and others that are divided by historic hatreds. The three main divides in Iraq are the Sunni Muslims, Shia Muslims and ethnic Kurds. All three of these groups contain secularists, Islamist conservatives and radical Islamist Extremists.<sup>19</sup> Various ethnic backgrounds coexist as well such as Arabs, Persians, Kurdish, Turkmen, and Assyrians with tension existing between many. The Islamic Extremist element in Iraq has a large contingent of Al Queda and their foreign fighters. Other external influences come into play and include non-state financial sponsors of the insurgency, and support (political, economic, and military) given by states with a stake in the outcome (Iran and Syria for example). Finally, criminal activity has often been mistaken for insurgent activity and is suspected as a means of funding insurgents.

**Shia Muslims.** Many key factors exist regarding several of these groups which are useful to the operational commander. The longest and most deeply engrained division in Iraq is between the Sunnis and the Shiites dating back to the 8<sup>th</sup> century split over finding an Imam or successor to Mohammed. The Shia Muslims today, despite constituting the majority of the population over the years, have been largely unrepresented and repressed in significant areas of society, while the minority Sunni Muslims have been the governing elements for hundreds of years and are integrated into business and other professions. More recently, since the overthrow of the Iranian government by Shiites in 1979, some militant factions of Iraqi Shia have been supported by Iran in opposition to Saddam. The elections of 15 December, 2005, resulted in the United Iraqi Alliance (Shia) winning 120-130 of the 275 seats in parliament with 50 seats for major Kurdish groups and 40 for Sunni Arab blocs.<sup>20</sup> This reverse in power causes severe resentment among many Sunni, who see the new Shia majority as backed by Iran and a puppet of the U.S. Further complicating things is the militant Shiite Badr Brigade infiltrating the Ministry of Interior and conducting death squad patrols of Sunni neighborhoods to take revenge.<sup>21</sup>

**Sunni Muslims.** Sunni rule of Iraq goes all the way back to the Ottoman Turks (1534-1918) who placed Sunnis in high positions to counter the Iranian Salavid Empire, the first to declare Shia Islam their official religion. More recently Sunni and Baath Party rule has only increased the long sectarian hatred with their repression, secret police and centralized control. Saddam eliminated any suspected opposition, usually consisting of Kurds, communists, Shia movements, and members of his own party and military. The Sunnis vehemently view Shiites as simple-minded, incapable of leadership and merely an arm of their mortal enemy, Iran. Even if initially thankful to the U.S. for relief from Saddam, Sunnis took a devastating hit to their honor and pride when they were marginalized in the political process, unemployed and witnessed the Shia

rise in their place. They also fear lost oil revenues that a decentralized government would bring.<sup>22</sup> A proper analysis might have easily predicted such a strong Sunni resistance. The 15 December 2005 elections were an extremely significant milestone in that a large Sunni population turned out to vote after an almost complete boycott the year before.

**Kurds.** The Kurds live in northern Iraq. Their ethnic people overlap into Turkey and Iran. Most Kurds are Sunni and have constantly formed groups in rebellion against the Iraqi government, some communist and some backed by Iran. The primary Kurdish agenda is their desire for an independent state. This may cause widespread regional instability as Turkey and Iran are against losing their Kurd populations and potentially the land on which they reside. Additionally, Iraq's oil revenues come mainly from this area which if lost, would devastate Iraq economically.

In just this quick summary of the Iraqi people, the complexity of the situation that the U.S. faces is easily seen. The next section will study insurgent operational factors of insurgents.

*"You've got overlapping universes of insurgents...different constellations"<sup>23</sup> - Hoffman*  
**The Insurgents.** The Iraqi insurgency, as a reflection of Iraq's society and culture, is a complex collage of supporting and opposing groups based on ethnic, religious, tribal, regional and political factors, all waging war on U.S. forces and U.S. strategy. Some sources state that there are close to forty various insurgent groups in Iraq.<sup>24</sup> In such a complex case, it is best to organize the insurgencies into categories. For this case insurgent groups will be classified based on ideological similarities resulting in two groups: (1) the Islamic Extremists, and (2) to borrow President Bush's term from his 7 December speech, Iraqi "Rejectionists".<sup>25</sup>

*"To discover how much of our resources must be mobilized for war, we must first examine our own political aim and that of the enemy."<sup>26</sup> - Clausewitz*  
**V.a. Insurgent Objectives.** The first step to an accurate determination of an enemy Center of Gravity is a study of the ideology and objectives of each particular group. Islamic Extremists, also known as jihadists, are those who have taken an extreme view and interpretation of the

Kuran to the point of supporting the ideology of global jihad against the non-believer, and belief that the West is responsible for Muslim suffering and powerlessness. Bin Laden exemplified the aims of this group in his 1998 fatwa claiming that America had declared war against God and his messenger, and calling for the murder of any American as “*the individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it.*”<sup>27</sup> The Extremist strategic objective is to establish a pan-Islamic Caliphate throughout the world by working with other Islamic Extremist groups to overthrow all non-believing regimes and eradicate all Westerners and non-Muslims from Muslim countries.<sup>28</sup> Extremists generate support for their agenda by cultivating the perception that Islam is under threat.<sup>29</sup> Their means is extreme violence and terrorism as “*Islamic governments have never been... established through peaceful means*”.<sup>30</sup>

The second group, the “Rejectionists”, are more loosely defined here than in the President’s speech and include his third group, “Saddamists” (those still loyal to Saddam and Baath party). Rejectionists in this paper, represent all those who reject the ongoing political process, Shia political leadership, and U.S. “occupation” force. The objectives of this group are to disrupt the political process making Iraq ungovernable in hopes of regaining power and driving the U.S. out. It is critical for the planner to note the objectives and means that coincide between the groups and those that diverge. This will be addressed later in the Critical Vulnerabilities section.

**Operational Factors.** The next step, analysis of the Operational Factors of Force, Space, and Time is important to the planner for understanding the enemy and his environment, and for setting the stage to determine his Critical Capabilities, Requirements, Strengths and Weaknesses. The purpose of this section is not to provide an exhaustive list of Operational Factors, however, key aspects of both groups that build toward the Critical Factors will be highlighted. Factor of Force (or Factor Force) for the Islamic Extremist consists of: Al Queda operatives, Iraqi jihadists

(of all backgrounds), and foreign fighters (both jihadists and mercenaries). The Rejectionists on the other hand are made up of Sunni militants to include, Saddam loyalists and Baathists, Iraqi nationalists, and, for purposes of this study, any militant Shiites or Kurds whose aim it is to rid Iraq of its foreign occupiers. Functional Factors of Force for both insurgent groups have similar elements: a small corps of leaders, the fighters, martyrs (more so with Extremists), a base of support in the populace, alliances (global in the case of Extremists), clerics and tribal leaders who act as mid-level leaders and recruiters, fund-raisers and financial sponsors, technological experts (bomb-makers), the pool of recruits (young, undereducated, unemployed), and the media.

Factors Space interacts with Factor Force in that Islamic Extremists, Al Qaeda and affiliate groups are increasingly globally networked and located worldwide. Iraq for them has become a very large front in their jihad against the U.S. Additionally, both groups are suspected to receive support from Muslim countries and organizations. Both utilize technology as well as Fourth Generation Warfare (4GW) in their tactics and communications as seen in the innovative improvised explosive devices (IED) and planning through cyberspace. For Factor Space, both groups have the advantage of melting into the populace and the urban jungle. The fact that the countryside is very much divided into sectarian areas makes it very easy for both groups to incite sectarian violence and frustrate U.S. efforts for harmonious government and law enforcement. Lastly, the hundreds of miles of porous borders allow thousands of foreign fighters in to Iraq.

Concerning Factors Time, a possible difference exists between the two groups. The Extremists by virtue of their unlimited and global objectives can be relatively patient compared to Rejectionists who have the U.S.-Iraqi political milestones to compete against. Additionally, the deeper engrained ideology of Extremism is more apt to weather time than more emotional

and urgent causes of the Rejectionists.<sup>31</sup> Tactically, the factor of time favors both groups as they can choose the time, place and nature of their attacks.

**Critical Factors: Critical Capabilities and Requirements.** Critical Capabilities (CC) are the enemy's primary abilities which enable him to accomplish his objectives, while Critical Requirements are those conditions, resources, and means that enable a given Critical Capability to be realized.<sup>32</sup> As found with the study of Operational Factors, insurgencies by nature, although individually unique, will have many similarities. For example, both groups share several Critical Capabilities to include: their ability to conduct attacks, mobilize popular support in Iraq as well as globally, obtain new recruits, command and control, maintain operational security, and finance operations. Some of the corresponding Critical Requirements for each Capability are: (for CC – to conduct attacks) an urban environment and populace in which to hide, a widespread, decentralized and horizontal network, technological training (e.g. communications and bomb making), tactical training (e.g. small arms and ground fighting), finances for fighters, supplies and logistics, a supportive or fearful populace; (for CC – to mobilize support) alliances, support and influence of sheiks and tribal leaders, a cause or grievance among the populace (e.g. lack of security, infrastructure, and employment), an ideology (e.g. Muslim anti-western), a media mechanism from which to broadcast, legitimacy of the group, coercion at times, and, more so for Extremists, the worldwide scattering of mosques doubling as recruitment centers; (for CC – to command and control and CC - maintain OpSec) secure communications, technology, a well connected network of cells, very clear guidance on objectives (e.g. fatwas and use of media), decentralized control; and (for the CC – finance of operations) large financial sponsorship and hi-tech banking and money transfers.



**Critical Strengths and Weaknesses.** The Critical Factors are further broken down into Critical Strengths and Critical Weaknesses, and begin to reveal clues to the planner as to possible Centers of Gravity and potential Critical Vulnerabilities to effect or attack. Some Critical Capabilities can serve as both a Critical Strength and a Critical Weakness depending on different aspects of its use or effect. For example the Extremists' ideology is a Critical Strength in that its rhetoric capitalizes on much of the Muslim world's grievances. However, other moderate Muslims see this cause as misguided and not true Islam. Also, as a Critical Strength, their radical violence and indiscriminate attacks serve to keep fearful Iraqis from participating in the political process, cut deep into U.S. domestic support, and decrease the faith and trust of the populace in the Iraqi government to protect them. It also, however, serves to hinder more widespread support and often ignites family and tribal loyalties of Iraqi victims. Critical Strengths that both groups share include: methods and capabilities of attack, dynamic leadership with a loyal following, a general base of support among the populace, freedom of action and movement, recruiting capability, available funding, technology (globalization of commerce, internet, banking), operational security, decentralized structure, difficult to find, the lack of any rules of engagement, the availability of weapons, and the relatively low cost of operations.

Determining the correct Critical Weaknesses can be more difficult with insurgencies but crucial to the development of counterinsurgency lines of operation and operational objectives. There are two main weaknesses on the Extremist side, their ideology and their alliances. Their ideology, although listed as a Critical Strength, can also serve as a Critical Weakness when in alliance with groups that have more tangible grievances and causes. Comparing the Desired End States of both groups further illustrates this Critical Weakness. The operational objectives line up in that both groups want to expel the occupiers and disrupt their political strategy. However,

the Desired End States differ in where and what they want to be when they grow up. The Rejectionists, largely Sunni nationalists and secular Baathists, generally desire a free Iraq under Sunni leadership and do not fondly anticipate reverting to an 8<sup>th</sup> century Caliphate. Iraqi jihadists were not part of the country's leadership and are, in fact, ideological enemies of Baathism.<sup>33</sup> Also, the indiscriminate attacks of the Extremists often extend to the Iraqi populace as their beliefs justify the killing of other Muslims who are perceived as cooperating with occupation forces or even the Iraqi government. A common tactic of Extremists is to deliberately provoke opposing sectarian groups to undermine security efforts and incite further violence.<sup>34</sup> Many Rejectionist leaders regret allowing the jihadists, often foreign, into their areas of control.<sup>35</sup>

The Critical Weaknesses on the Rejectionist side is also their cause and ideology but for a different reason. Because there are so many different tribal, regional and ethnic elements that fall into this category, there is disagreement on objectives and agenda within the group itself. Specifically, insurgents agree on the negative goals of ousting the U.S. and disrupting strategies of government and economy, but have not unified on a positive goal for a future Iraq. Another Critical Weakness on the part of Rejectionists is time. Tactically and operationally, time is typically on the side of the insurgents. However, in this case, because of the significant milestones made in the political processes and the desire of many insurgents in this group to regain power, time may seem to be running out. These two Critical Weaknesses combined were brought to light by the recent elections. Many Sunni and former regime leaders who were part of the insurgency regretted their boycott of elections in January 2005 and desired a political voice as the Iraqi government and constitution were being established. Despite widespread threats from Al Qaeda and Islamic Extremists, Sunni sheiks and insurgency leaders encouraged their

people to vote and promised the local civilian population in their regions protection from attacks. In one instance, Sunni voter turnout in Ramada went from 2% in January to 55% in December.<sup>36</sup>

**Insurgency Center of Gravity.** At this point in the analysis, a Center of Gravity is determined by looking at the enemy's objectives and his Operational and Critical Factors. Traditional Centers of Gravity such as leadership, armed forces, command and control often do not always apply when dealing with an insurgency. Documents seized from Saddam reveal that he and top deputies helped organize and facilitate their side of the insurgency.<sup>37</sup> However, the capture of Saddam has not lessened its intensity. Likewise, the capture of Bin Laden or his deputies will not likely dismantle the motivation or spread of Islamic extremism. Command and control is too diffuse and decentralized to be a Center of Gravity or pinpoint a hub of either group. Neither groups' financial support nor weapons supplies are Centers of Gravity due to the inexpensive techniques and easy access to arms. Unless the strategic Centers of Gravity for each group are targeted, all the weapon caches found and all the individual bombers caught will not significantly impact the insurgency in Iraq. On the Extremist side, the one thing that unites these people and gives them their motivation and purpose, their Center of Gravity, is the legitimacy and appeal of Islamic Extremist ideology. The Iraqi Rejectionists have a strong cause, but it is less unified than the Extremist ideology. The bulk of the Rejectionists consists of the Sunni Arab population who see the de-Baathification process as actually the firing of thousands of Baathists in benign but important positions in society. The Rejectionist strategic Center of Gravity therefore, is the cooperation and support of the Sunni Arab population.

**Critical Vulnerabilities.** Determining the Centers of Gravity is not an end to itself. The most important and final step is for planners to accurately determine the enemy's Critical Vulnerabilities. This will shape the concept of operations at every level (strategic, operational,

and tactical) and provide an operational framework in which to concentrate and focus all efforts of national power (DIME). These efforts will then be focused along mutually supporting lines of operation, converging through decision points and operational objectives toward a common national strategic objective. Figure 1-2 shows Milan Vego's concept in the case of one enemy

**METHODS OF DEFEATING THE ENEMY CENTER OF GRAVITY**

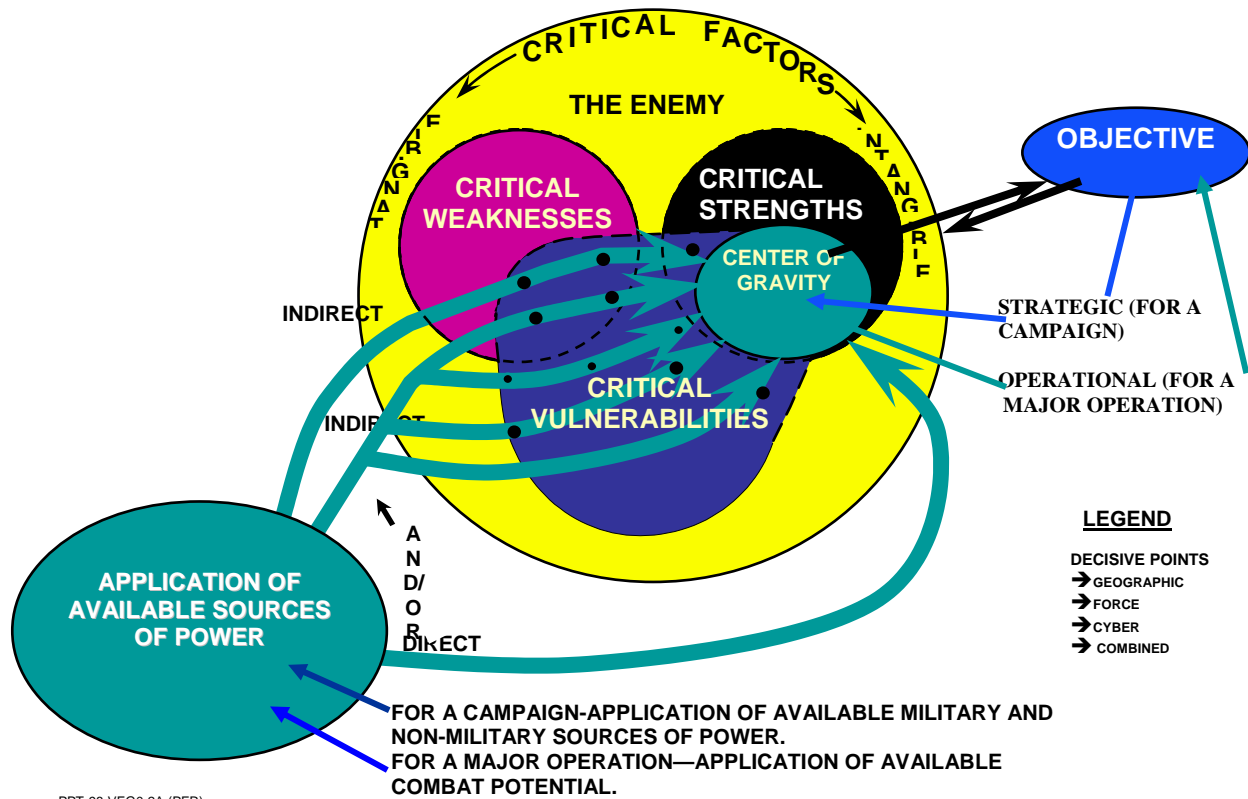
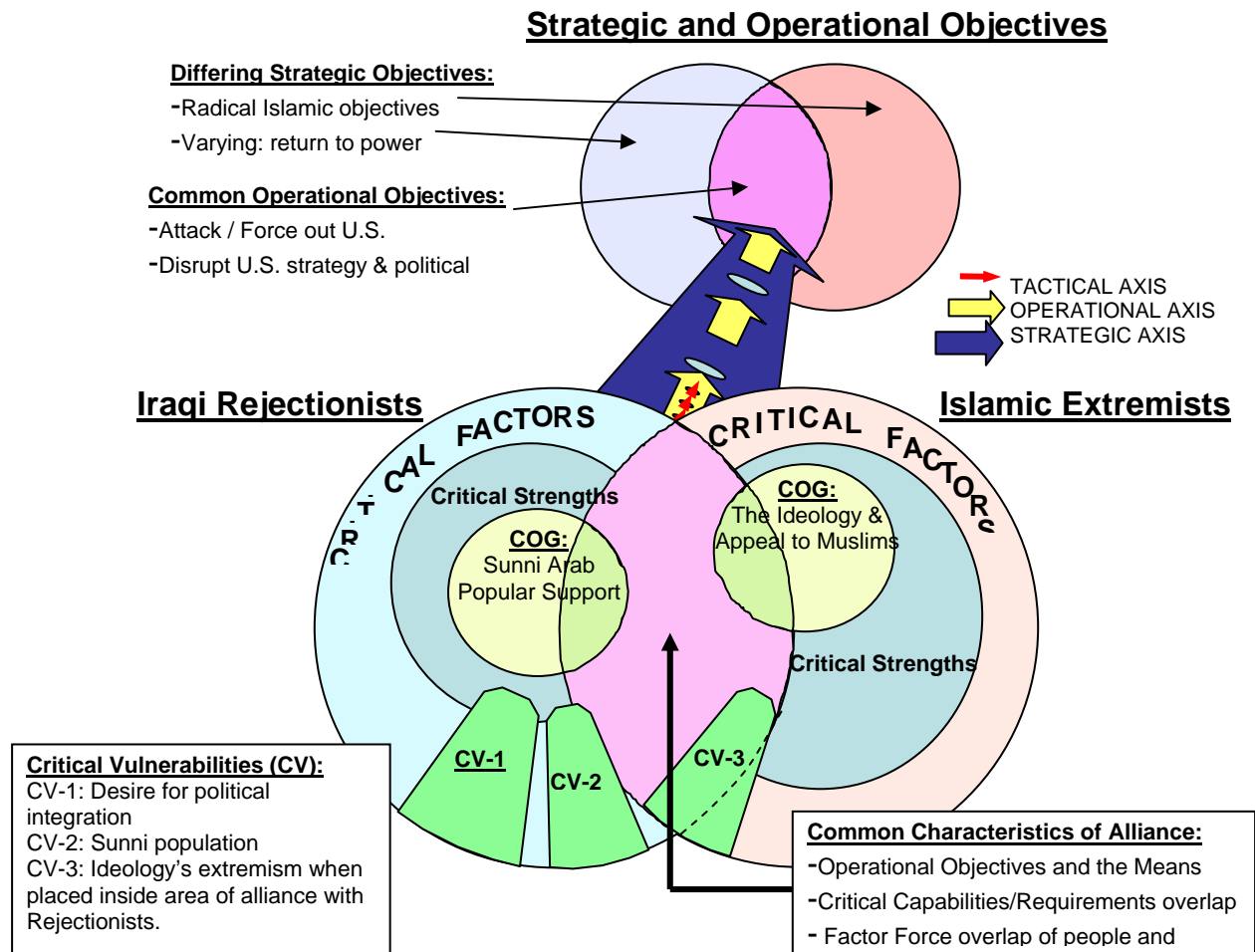


Figure 1-2

and Center of Gravity. Critical Vulnerabilities are those Critical Factors or components which the planner has the capability to influence and will directly or indirectly negatively impact the enemy's Center of Gravity causing it to fail. For the Extremists, their radical strategic goals could lead to potential weakness in their alliances with the local Iraqi insurgent groups. It is difficult to target or get rid of an ideology, however, by focusing efforts on eroding the Extremists' alliances and support base, its ideology's acceptability and legitimacy in Iraq will be

significantly reduced. The Critical Vulnerabilities of the Iraqi Rejectionists include their inter-group cohesion, the elements and leaders that desire to have a voice in the political process, the factor of time as the political process continues, and the acquiescence of the Sunni Arab populace. Although previously listed as a Critical Strength and Center of Gravity, the Sunni



**Fig 1-3: Centers of Gravity for Two Insurgencies**

Arab populace is also a Critical Vulnerability in the sense that the U.S. may have the capability to affect them and meet several of their needs thereby undermining their support to the Iraqi Rejectionists. Figure 1-3 depicts one way to look at two Centers of Gravity for two enemies on a common operational axis. By targeting the political desires of some Rejectionist elements to get a seat at the political table, you indirectly begin to affect the Center of Gravity of the Sunni Arab

populace who have been marginalized and removed from the system. This will have a destabilizing effect on the overlapping objectives and motives between the two groups as certain elements of Sunni insurgents begin to participate in the political process. As they do, Extremists, because of their ideology, will have no choice but to attack those that attempt to participate in the U.S. tainted government creating a rift between the two. As this continues and the alliance begins to break apart, the Extremists' Center of Gravity will be indirectly affected by losing legitimacy among the Iraqi populace. Both groups may still hate the U.S. but the differences in their political desires can be capitalized on to break apart the insurgency. Carried out exponentially, this could result in regional Iraqi militants driving foreign fighters and Extremists from their areas. This has already been reported in some parts since the elections.<sup>38</sup> There have been several incidents of Extremist attacks killing Sunnis, the largest being the bombing of 26 Sunni police recruits in Samarra this January. The Sunnis had been encouraged by sheiks to begin participating in the security of their neighborhoods. Many known Al Queda members have been hunted down and killed in retaliation.<sup>39</sup> Interestingly, and to confirm this trend, Jordanian born al-Zarqawi, head of Al-Queda in Iraq, has supposedly been replaced by an Iraqi in order to compensate for possible division.<sup>40</sup> Sunni resentment against foreign fighters and Extremists with no stake in Iraq's future except for destruction is growing.

*“...while fifty different small objectives are pursued,... inertia, friction, outside interests always emerge, especially in allied armys...”<sup>41</sup> - Clausewitz*

**Resulting Focus of Effort.** What has emerged thus far is a main focus of effort and two supporting efforts. The primary Critical Vulnerability and thus, the main focus of effort should be the reintegration of the Rejectionists' Sunni Arab population into the political process and many of their previous civilian roles. The supporting efforts are directed at the other Critical Vulnerabilities: winning over the insurgents' base of support in the populace, and attacking and countering the radical ideology of the Extremists in Iraq. There are several ways that these

conclusions can be transformed into sequenced and synchronized tasks, some of which may be intuitive. However, history reveals that the intuitive does not always translate to reality.

**Focus of Effort in Action.** The most important application of this study, under which all other applications must align, is Unity of Effort/Unit of Command. This is one of U.S. Joint Doctrine's Principles of War<sup>42</sup>. Despite this guidance, in Iraq, the Provincial Reconstruction Teams fall under a different chains of command than those units assigned to security in the same region. Civilian agencies and other government agencies (OGA) are also a separate entity. Coordination and unity of effort is often dependent on the personalities and relationships of those in charge at the operational and tactical level, and are often derailed by the rapid turnover of personnel every three to six months. In addition, the reintegration of Sunni Arabs into the political process is clearly not a just military task. The Shiites and Kurds, may require significant diplomatic pressure to allow Sunnis more say in the government. General Ponce, the El Salvador Defense Minister during the 1980s, was often known to say, "90 percent" of countering insurgency "is political, social, economic, and ideological and only 10 percent military."<sup>43</sup> It is vital that policy be established which indoctrinates and incorporates the principle of Unity of Effort and Command across all national resources.

The second most crucial adjustment needed to accomplish the stated focus of effort and supporting efforts from this study is an increase in U.S. civilian and military cultural sensitivity and awareness. One ally commented that while U.S. forces were "*unfailingly courteous...at times their cultural insensitivity [inadvertently] amounted to institutional racism*".<sup>44</sup> All three of the targeted critical vulnerabilities can only be affected through a deep knowledge of the Iraqi people and culture. The rotation frequency of personnel is too high to learn this on the job. Improvements in this area are currently underway in the military. The Army and Marine Corps have recently

applied this lesson to their training programs and produced the most realistic model of urban, desert and cultural training the military has seen, namely, Mojave Viper in Twenty-Nine Palms.<sup>45</sup>

The third application derived from the focus and supporting efforts is to influence the Sunni Arab population. Regional populations under insurgent control are largely made up of two groups: those that directly support the insurgents or are recruited because of similar grievances and beliefs, and those who are supportive due to fear of insurgent reprisals. In either case, confidence in the government and security has been lost. To counter this, the U.S. must provide adequate and permanent security in neighborhoods, revitalize and rebuild the people's economy and infrastructure, and give the people a stake in their future. The emphasis must be on most effective means. One of the tactics used by U.S. forces has been to conduct large kinetic sweeps or "cordon and search" for insurgents. This does not instill loyalty in a people that are afraid of reprisals when troops return to base or move on to other areas. The most effective counter-insurgency security strategy was the Combined Action Platoon concept in Vietnam.<sup>46</sup> A "clear and hold" strategy, the U.S. Marines lived and worked in the villages, rebuilding infrastructure and patrolling with indigenous security teams. This technique is currently being tested in Mosul and Al Anfar with great success.<sup>47</sup> Combined with the "oil spot strategy"<sup>48</sup>, this would be extremely effective in undermining the insurgents' population base of support.

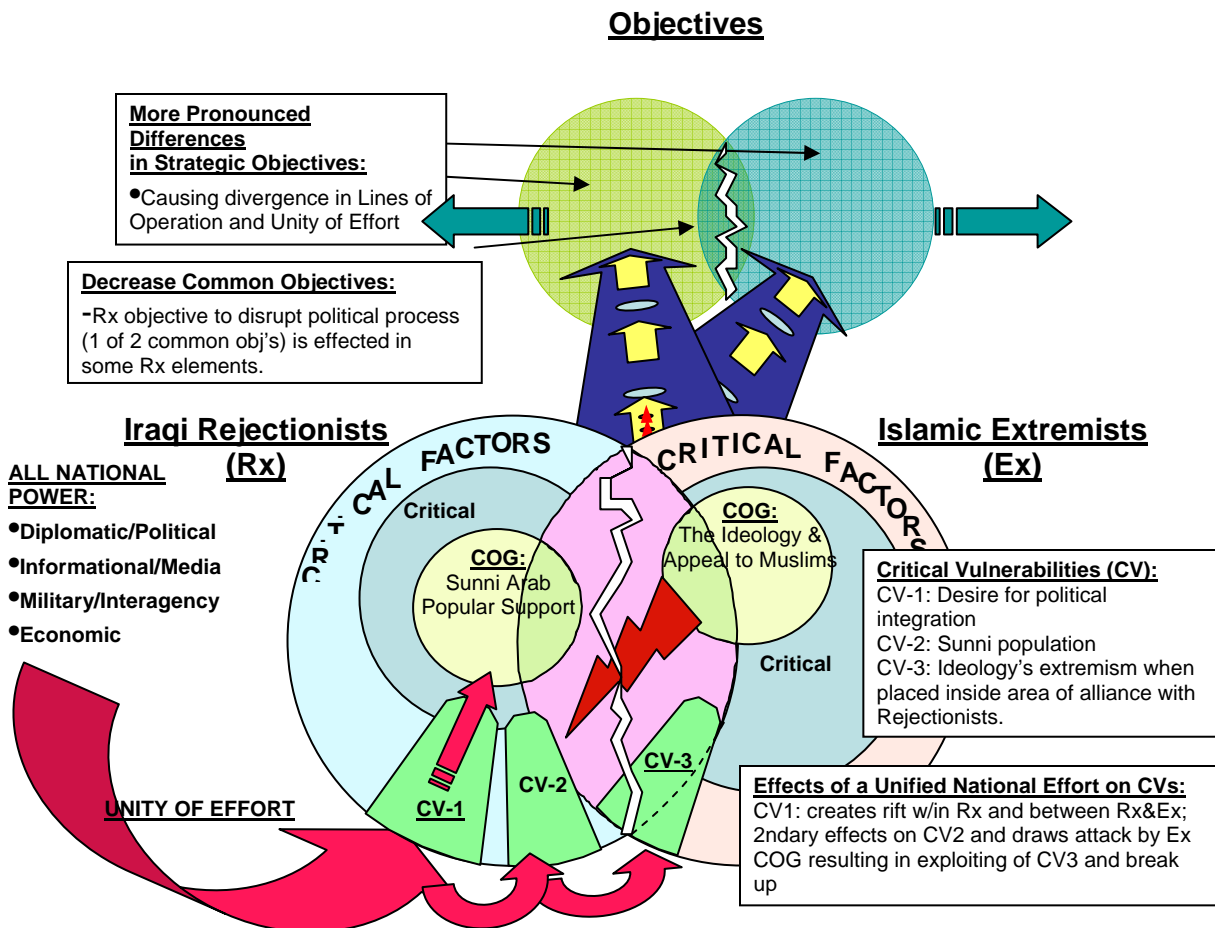
The last recommendation based on this study must address the final supporting effort identified, the ideology of the Extremists. In short, the U.S. must focus all its resources at waging an information war at home and abroad. Sir Robert Thompson stated, "...it is vital that the government should gain the propaganda initiative..."<sup>49</sup> This is larger than just attacking the Islamic Extremist ideology. It also serves to protect a U.S. Center of Gravity: domestic and international support. In Iraq, every effort must be made to get a message out that undermines



the Extremist ideology. “Securing positive coverage for our troops in Iraq can be as important to their safety as...state-of-the-art body armor.”<sup>50</sup> A senior U.S. General from the Central Command area of operations, after publicly acclaiming a long list of positive steps and gains being made in Iraq, was asked why the American people had no knowledge of even one of these items. He was quoted to have said to his military audience that this job of getting the word out was up to each of the individuals in his audience to volunteer to speak in the neighborhoods.<sup>51</sup> While that may be true and a good idea, it is not comprehensive national strategy to conduct information operations and strategic communications attacking Extremist ideology and protecting U.S. Centers of Gravity. This effort is too important to let slide and must be appropriately tasked. The only effective way to do this is implement a Unity of Effort strategy that focuses national energies. Figure 1-4 is a visual interpretation of what this might look like.

*“The insurgency in Iraq is a movement without a Center of Gravity.”<sup>52</sup> - Hoffman*  
**Counter-Argument and Refute.** There are some, Bruce Hoffman to name one, who argue that the Iraq situation and number of political/insurgent groups is too diffuse to conduct a Center of Gravity analysis and, at this stage, has gained too much momentum for any reassessment to have much effect. To combat one insurgent group may also serve to fuel another. The dreaded word “quagmire” appears in the media and many politicians now echo the refrain to bring all U.S. forces home. “Get out now!” they cry. “The U.S. being there is the cause of the insurgency!”

In response to this argument, many Iraqis now realize that despite their hatred for the west, they do not want the Americans to leave quite yet. Despite the cry of Iraqis for the U.S. to depart, civil war and sectarian violence would be sure to result. Plus these security forces still consist of various elements which are more loyal to their respective tribal or religious leaders than to a central government of Iraq. In regards to the complexity of the Center of Gravity analysis, understanding your enemy and conducting this analysis is invaluable to any amount of



**Fig 1-4: Focus of Effort Applied to Two Insurgency Centers of Gravity**

success in counterinsurgency operations. What must be done however, as was done here, is to categorize insurgent groups based on similar causes and then examine commonalities and differences for areas to undermine or exploit.

**Conclusion.** The current picture in Iraq and its implications for the U.S. are challenging to say the least. However, there is a vast improvement in the way the war is being conducted now compared to the summer of 2003, and it is not too late for continuous reassessments to be made using a Center of Gravity analysis. The fact that there is an allegiance of several insurgent groups with various ideologies also means that there are fissures that can be exploited to

undermine their Critical Requirements and Critical Capabilities. If the insurgencies in Iraq, divided into Extremists and Rejectionists, are analyzed based on a Center of Gravity approach, an operational framework will be established in which all elements of national power can be concentrated. Through a mandated national Unity of Effort, increased cultural knowledge, increased security and reconstruction, and a massive information campaign this war can be won, and may also serve as a line of operation on the greater strategic axis focused on the global insurgency of Islamic jihad (Global War on Terrorism).

## END NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*. (Edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), 584.

<sup>2</sup> Insurgency definition (doctrinal and broad): (1) An insurgency is an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict. (JP 1-02, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, 7 October 2004, p 262.); and (2) An insurgency is a struggle between a nonruling group and the ruling authority in which the nonruling group consciously uses political resources (e.g., organizational expertise, propaganda, and demonstrations) and violence to destroy, reformulate, or sustain the basis of legitimacy of one or more aspects of politics. (O'Neill, Bard E. *Insurgency and Terrorism*. Dulles, VA: Brassey's, Inc. 1990, p 13.)

<sup>3</sup> Sir Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency: The Lessons of Malaya and Vietnam*, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1966, 50-1.

<sup>4</sup> James Traub, "Making Sense of the Mission," *The New York Times Magazine* (April 11, 2004): 8.

<sup>5</sup> "Phase IV" operations is generally used by the U.S. military when referring to stability and support operations, reconstruction and security operations, and establishing the new government.

<sup>6</sup> John Kamiya, "Insurgency/Counterinsurgency – Historical Perspectives. Leader Preparation Monograph". U.S. Army Security Task Force (USASETAF)/Operational Enduring Freedom (OEF)," (01 December 2004): 17.

<sup>7</sup> John D. Waghelstein, Lecture: "Counter-insurgency," U.S. Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island, 01 February 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, 595-596.

<sup>9</sup> Joint Publication 5-00.1, *Joint Doctrine for Campaign Planning*, 25 January 2002; and Field Manual 3-0, *Operations*, 14 June 2001, 5-27 – 5-29. The definition in FM 3-0 differs from that of JP 5-00.1 in that it reads "localities" in place of the word "power".

<sup>10</sup> Milan Vego *Operational Warfare*. (U.S. Naval War College Press, Newport, Rhode Island, 2000).

<sup>11</sup> Dr. Joe Strange and COL Richard Iron, "Understanding Centers of Gravity and Critical Vulnerabilities," U.S. Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island, Part I, p 15, Part II p 1.

<sup>12</sup> Samuel B. Griffith, *Sun Tzu – Art of War* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 84.

<sup>13</sup> All Operational Art terminology will be capitalized to differentiate the daily use of the word from the Dr. Strange and Milan Vego concepts and definitions. Examples include Factor of Force (or Factor Force, Time or Space), Critical Factors such as Capabilities, Requirements and Vulnerabilities.

<sup>14</sup> Wikipedia Encyclopedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/maoism>. "Maoist Theory." Internet; accessed on 13 February 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Terence Daly, "How to Win in Iraq," *United States Naval Institute Proceedings* 131, Iss 12, Annapolis: (Dec 2005): 14.

<sup>16</sup> Library of Congress Country Studies, Iraq, 1988; available from <[http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+iq0010\)>](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+iq0010)>); Internet; accessed 17 January 2006.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> An "Islamist" is "One who seeks to make Islam a more prominent part of the political and social order, usually by implementing some version of Islamic law, or Sharia. Often used as a more accurate replacement for the term "fundamentalist". (Definition obtained from PBS.org at

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/globalconnections/mideast/glossary/term/islamist.html>)

<sup>20</sup> Rick Jervis, "'Balance' Key to Sunnis In Joining Government," *USA Today*, 19 January 2006, p 8.

<sup>21</sup> Elen Knickmeyer, "Iraq's Sunnis Urged to Defend Themselves," *Washington Post*, 25 January 2006, p 16; and Solomon Moore, "British Arrests of Police Strain Relations in Basrah," *Los Angeles Times*, 26 January 2006.

<sup>22</sup> Fareed Zakaria, "Finally, a Smart Iraq Strategy". *Newsweek* 146, Iss. 17 (24 October 2005).

<sup>23</sup> Quoted by Mark Kukis, "Counterinsurgency 101," *National Journal* (20 November 2004): 3524.

<sup>24</sup> Melinda Liu and Scott Johnson, "The Enemy Spies," *Newsweek* 145, Iss 26 (27 June 2005): 24.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted by Roger Cohen, "Why Iraq's Resistance Differs From Insurgency," *International Herald Tribune*, 14 January 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, 585-6.

<sup>27</sup> Osama Bin Laden, "Text of World Islamic Front's Statement Urging Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders," *Al Quds al Arabi*, 23 February, 1998 (trans. Foreign Broadcast Information Service).

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- <sup>28</sup> C. Christine Fair and Hussain Haqqani, "Think Again: Islamist Terrorism," *Foreign Policy* (Jan 2006).
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>30</sup> Gunaratna, Rohan, *Inside Al Qaeda – Global Network of Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 5.
- <sup>31</sup> Fred Burton, "Another Angle on Al-Zawahiri's Call to Action," Strategic Forecasting Terrorism Intelligence Report, 21 December 2005.
- <sup>32</sup> Dr. Joe Strange and COL Richard Iron, "Understanding Centers of Gravity and Critical Vulnerabilities," U.S. Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island.
- <sup>33</sup> George Friedman, "Iraq, The Constitution and the Fate of a President," Stratfor Geopolitical Intelligence Report, 13 October 2005.
- <sup>34</sup> Kevin Toolis, "Iraq will be Blair's Northern Ireland," *Newstatesman*, 20 October 2003.
- <sup>35</sup> Michael Phillips, "At Perilous Outpost, U.S. Iraqi Troops Work Toward Trust," *Wall Street Journal*, 24 January 2006, p 1.
- <sup>36</sup> Roger Cohen, "Why Iraq's Resistance Differs From Insurgency," *International Herald Tribune*, 14 January 2006.
- <sup>37</sup> Edward T. Pound, "Seeds of Chaos; The Baghdad Files," *U.S. News & World Report* (20 December 2004).
- <sup>38</sup> Sabrina Tavernise and Dexter Filkins, "Local Insurgents Tell of Clashes With Al Qaeda's Forces in Iraq," *New York Times*, 12 January 2006.
- <sup>39</sup> Anonymous. "On Balance" *Washington Times*, 26 January 2006, p 18.
- <sup>40</sup> Liz Sly, "Rifts Deepen Within Iraq's Insurgency," *Chicago Tribune*, 24 January, 2006.
- <sup>41</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*. 636.
- <sup>42</sup> Joint Publication 3-0: *Doctrine for Joint Operations. Principles of War, Appendix A-1*, 10 September 2001.
- <sup>43</sup> Quoted in Hoffman. *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency In Iraq*. p 5.
- <sup>44</sup> Nigel Aylwin-Foster, "Advice From An Ally: Get Past the Warrior Ethos," *Washington Post*, 15 January 2006, p B3.
- <sup>45</sup> Rick Rogers, "Wartime Lessons," *San Diego Union Tribune*, 25 January 2006, p 1.
- <sup>46</sup> Lewy, Guenter, *America in Vietnam*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).
- <sup>47</sup> Wadhams, Nick. "U.S. Troops in Iraq Adopt Oil Strategy," *Associated Press*, 01 February 2006.
- <sup>48</sup> Krepinevich, Andrew. "How to Win in Iraq." *Foreign Affairs* 84 no. 5 (September/October 2005): 87.
- <sup>49</sup> Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency: The Lessons of Malaya and Vietnam*, 97.
- <sup>50</sup> Michael Schrage, "Every Article in the Arsenal," *Washington Post*, 15 January 2006, p B3.
- <sup>51</sup> Email: From: General Schoomaker. Subj: "Iraq"; Internet, 10 December 2005.

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