

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE*Form Approved*
OMB No. 0704-0188

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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 18-06-2011		2. REPORT TYPE Master's Thesis		3. DATES COVERED (From - To) 26-07-11 to 18-06-2011	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE The Fallacy of Leadership Removal Strategies in 21st Century Counterinsurgency				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Hauenstein, Brett R.				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Joint Force Staff College Joint Advanced Warfighting School 7800 Hampton Blvd Norfolk, VA 23511-1702				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER	
12. DISTRIBUTION AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release, distribution is limited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT This thesis proves that military planners and policy makers have a predisposition to leadership removal strategies and that these strategies are not effective ways to defeat an insurgency. In the 21st century military planners and policy makers have become enamored with leadership removal as a strategy for defeating enemy organizations. The influence of conventional theorists like Warden and Strange drive planners to overemphasize leadership within an insurgency. Nearly all government documents concerning insurgencies falsely conclude that leadership is a key element in insurgent operations. The evolution of insurgency in the 21st century has brought about unique organizational structures which show a lesser reliance on leadership for survival. A careful review of three different insurgencies shows that leadership removal does not necessarily produce the effects that planners intend and rarely results in the defeat of the insurgent organization. Planners need to be aware of the inclination to overemphasize leadership and instead focus on proven concepts which involve a political, as well as a military solution.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Counterinsurgency, Insurgency, Leadership, Organizational Structure, Campaign Planning, Warden, Strange, Global Insurgency, Tamil Tigers, Huk Rebellion, Shining Path, Strategy					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Unclassified Unlimited	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 79	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT Unclassified	b. ABSTRACT Unclassified	c. THIS PAGE Unclassified			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include area code) 757-443-6301

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THE FALLACY OF LEADERSHIP REMOVAL STRATEGIES
IN 21ST CENTURY COUNTERINSURGENCY

by

Brett R. Hauenstein

Lt Col, USAF

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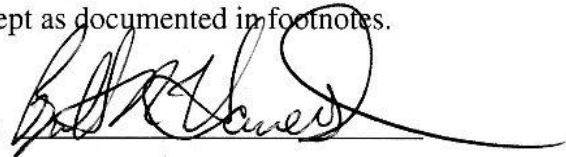
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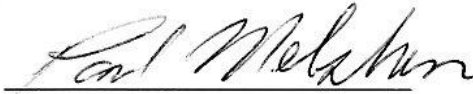
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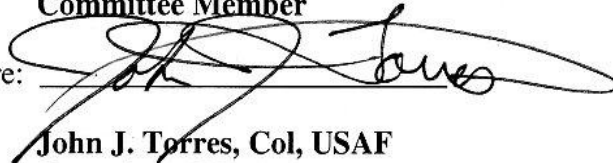
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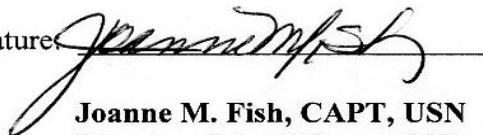
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ABSTRACT

This thesis proves that military planners and policy makers have a predisposition to leadership removal strategies and that these strategies are not effective ways to defeat an insurgency. In the 21st century military planners and policy makers have become enamored with leadership removal as a strategy for defeating enemy organizations. The influence of conventional theorists like Warden and Strange drive planners to overemphasize leadership within an insurgency and virtually all government documents concerning insurgencies falsely conclude that leadership is a key element in insurgent operations.

The evolution of insurgency in the 21st century has brought about unique organizational structures which show a lesser reliance on leadership for survival. In addition, recent research downplays the importance of leadership removal as a reliable and effective strategy for defeating insurgencies. A careful review of three different insurgencies shows that leadership removal does not necessarily produce the effects that planners intend and rarely results in the defeat of the insurgent organization. Planners need to be aware of the inclination to overemphasize leadership and instead focus on proven concepts which involve a political, as well as a military solution.

TABEL OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS INSURGENCY?	5
CHAPTER 2: A SHORT OVERVIEW OF COUNTERINSURGENCY THEORY	19
The Classicists	19
Sir Robert Thompson	19
Sir Frank Kitson	20
David Galula.....	21
Neo-Classicism.....	22
David Kilcullen	22
What Counterinsurgency Theory Tells Us	23
The Leadership Element.....	24
CHAPTER 3: ORGANIZATIONAL MODELS AND THE ROOTS OF LEADERSHIP REMOVAL STRATEGIES IN COUNTERINSURGENCY	25
Organizational Models and Leadership Defined.....	25
Hierarchical	27
Networked	27
Organizational Conclusions.....	28
The New COIN: A Predisposition to Leadership Focus	29
The Hidden Paradigm.....	33
The Facts about Leadership Removal	34
Leadership Summarized	37
CHAPTER 4: THREE INSURGENCIES - EXAMINATION AND ANALYSIS	39
The Huk (<i>Hukbalahap</i>) Rebellion.....	39
The History	39
Leadership and other Variables	41
The Shining Path (<i>Sendero Luminoso</i>).....	45
The History	45
Leadership and other Variables	48
The Tamil Tigers (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam)	51

The History	51
Leadership and other Variables	53
Case Study Lessons	57
CONCLUSION.....	61
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	66

INTRODUCTION

Although initially undertaken as conventional wars to eliminate terrorist threats, the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have devolved into parts of a complex global insurgency. The United States Military entered into these conflicts not anticipating the need to conduct counterinsurgency (COIN) warfare, but eventually the U.S. adapted, by rebuilding doctrine and tactics from the historical records of decades past. An examination of the most recent U.S. counterinsurgency literature and doctrine illuminates a noticeable predisposition to oversimplify the complexities of insurgency, leading planners to approach these conflicts from a conventional planning perspective. Unfortunately, the prevalent influence of well-established conventional doctrine has influenced counterinsurgency doctrine, leading policy makers and military planners to overemphasize leadership removal as critical to success in counterinsurgency.

This thesis argues through both historical analysis and contemporary research that leadership removal as the focus of a counterinsurgency operation is of questionable value. It will demonstrate that policy makers and military planners need to recognize that leadership removal will rarely result in the defeat of an insurgency; moreover, the changing nature of 21st century insurgency movements, characterized by complex organizational structures has made leadership removal strategies even less effective.

The U.S. *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, FM 3-24, the current counterinsurgency doctrine, is rife with unproven references to the criticality of leadership and the inherent value of removing insurgent leadership as a means to success. It reflects the thinking of conventional military theorists who have put great credence on the idea that leadership is critical in warfare. The doctrine also carries forward the

corollary that removing enemy leaders will significantly affect the enemy. Air Force theorist John Warden called enemy leaders the “strategic center.”¹ Warden’s concepts have been integrated with Dr. Joseph Strange’s center of gravity analysis framework and incorporated into joint doctrine, creating a significant influence for military planners.² As a result, the assumption that leadership is critical in all forms of warfare has permeated the thinking of conventional planners, the same planners who are now charged with developing counterinsurgency campaigns. By taking an objective look at U.S counterinsurgency literature and doctrine, this thesis will explore the significance of insurgent leadership. This will be accomplished through a review of classic and neo-classic counterinsurgency theory, analysis of current organizational structure concepts, and historical case studies, all of which will be framed within the context of 21st century insurgency.

This review of classical counterinsurgency theory reveals that the preoccupation for targeting insurgent leadership is a recent phenomenon. The classicists focused on other key elements of an insurgency, treating leadership as just one of many things to be considered within a conflict, but not essential to success. Examining 21st century insurgency emphasizes their findings and underscores why they downplayed leadership as a critical vulnerability. Moreover, as the nature of globalized insurgency is being revealed, the role of leadership and organizational structure must be better understood and appreciated. An examination of organizational types will illustrate the complex nature of insurgent organizations, uncovering distinct lessons about the efficacy of

¹ John A. Warden III, “The enemy as a system,” *Airpower Journal* 9, no. 1 (spring, 1995): 40.

² Joe Strange and Richard Iron, *Understanding Centers of Gravity and Critical Vulnerabilities*, (Stockholm: Department of War Studies, Swedish National Defence College, 2005), 1.

leadership. Organizational typology can often be the most influential consideration when weighing the importance of the role of an insurgent leader. The historical analysis within this thesis will show that the elimination of key leaders influenced all three insurgencies examined, but that in none of the cases did the removal of a single leader directly cause the insurgency to collapse, as current COIN doctrine implies.

What military planners need to understand is that modern insurgencies are complex and require intellectual rigor in order to weigh evenly all the critical elements. It is only this type of examination and evaluation that will lead to the development of an effective counterinsurgency campaign. This thesis validates the ideas of the classic COIN theorists that while leadership may be important in an insurgency, other elements of counterinsurgency theory are as equally important, if not more so.

The research review and an examination of three case studies will make it clear that the most critical aspect of counterinsurgency warfare relies on the ability of counterinsurgency practitioners to address the underlying root cause or grievance within the insurgency and respond with not only a military option but also a political one. As counterinsurgency expert Dr. Paul Melshen has noted, for a counterinsurgency effort to be successful, “every attempt must be made to undermine, alleviate, eliminate, or fulfill the insurgents’ political goals.”³ So, while leadership may be important, it will never be more important than the grievance itself. A properly developed counterinsurgency strategy will be the result of a thorough examination of all the causes and attributes of any given insurgency, without placing undue emphasis on leadership removal. A

³ Paul Melshen, "Mapping Out a Counterinsurgency Campaign Plan: Critical Considerations in Counterinsurgency Campaigning," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 18, no. 4 (December 2007): 688.

misplaced focus may not only be detrimental to achieving victory, but can often produce unintended results.

This thesis is not designed to be a study in leadership styles or to rate the effectiveness of leaders, but instead it is designed to look at the general effect that removing leadership has on an insurgency, by examining in detail the effects within three case studies. In each of the case studies, leaders were considered a key to success. Each was either an influential, ideological, or organizational leader within the insurgency. Although this analysis will present conclusions about the strategy of leadership removal in each case study, the overall conclusion is that undue emphasis on leadership targeting is not warranted at the expense of ignoring other key elements of the insurgency.

This thesis will present the case that current policy makers and military planners have a preoccupation with a leadership removal strategy that can serve as a distraction in combating an insurgency. Not only does the historical analysis derived from the case studies support this conclusion, but other research now shows that leadership removal alone will not be effective in defeating an insurgent organization.

CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS INSURGENCY?

In order to explore the dynamic of leadership within an insurgency, it is critical to understand what an insurgency is. In the past decade numerous definitions of insurgency have been presented. They are very similar, and when reviewed in context, reflect an appreciation that insurgency continues to evolve.

In the 20th century, insurgency warfare was conducted in a very similar manner across the world. Most insurgencies were anti-colonial and inspired by the communist model. These conflicts were normally fought within state borders by populations or groups that felt disenfranchised or marginalized within the state. A common belief was that insurgencies “stemmed from two major causes: (1) the rise of nationalism in colonial territories, and (2) Communist pressure.”¹ The historical evidence largely supports this contention. The uprising in Kenya in the 1950s, for example, was largely fought over land rights.² The insurgency in Malaya was firmly rooted in a communist bid for state power and, one of the most successful insurgencies of the 20th century was executed in China by Mao Tse Tung.³ Throughout the mid-20th century it was the norm for insurgencies to be founded on a Communist, Leninist, or Maoist ideology. These ideologies all supported the development of the cause, while creating the political subtext for violent action. Mao, Marx, and Lenin gave credibility to the idea of the struggling masses and a popular uprising: Lenin in the urban areas and Mao in the rural areas. The

¹ David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare Theory and Practice*, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964), 99.

² Frank Kitson, *Bunch of Five*, (London: Faber, 1977), 3-4.

³ *Ibid.*, 69-70.

single characteristic common to these movements was that they all were undertaken by a group to overthrow or subvert a government within an established, functioning state.

Sir Frank Kitson's counterinsurgency experiences in Malaya, Kenya, and Northern Ireland from the 1950s through the 1970s, led to his definition that "insurgency is a rising in active revolt against the constitutional authority of a country."⁴ He later clarified this definition, stating that "the ultimate aim of an insurgent organization is to overthrow a government or make it do something it does not want to do." In essence, he believed that insurgencies are "concerned with the struggle for men's minds."⁵ The concept that insurgency involves the conquest of the popular mind was shared by another British counterinsurgency practitioner, Sir Henry Gurney. As the British High Commissioner in Malaya from 1949-51, he described counterinsurgency in the terms of winning the "hearts and minds of the people."⁶ Kitson and Gurney dealt with counterinsurgency in the decades after World War II, when the British and French colonial structures were under siege. Thus, insurgency defined within this context, was a revolt against a legitimate (constitutional) authority, with the goal of making that authority bow to the popular will directed and influenced by the insurgents. The psychological aspect of insurgency was paramount in this period. The British approach to winning the hearts and minds, while defending the legitimacy of the government served as the model for counterinsurgency until the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in

⁴ Kitson, *Bunch of Five*, xii.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 282.

⁶ Adrian H. Jones, and Andrew R. Molnar, *Internal Defense against Insurgency: Six Cases*, (Washington: Center for Research in Social Systems, American University, 1966), 19.

1979. This event served to revitalize the study of insurgency and low intensity conflicts as the character of the Mujahedeen resistance became clear.

In 1986, at the height of its involvement in Afghanistan, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) published a pamphlet to guide analysis of an insurgency. In it, insurgency was defined as “a protracted political-military activity directed toward completely or partially controlling the resources of a country through the use of irregular military forces and illegal political organizations.”⁷ This definition, although overly complex and overstated, nevertheless defined insurgency in terms that characterized the conflict in Afghanistan. The United States and the rest of the world viewed the Soviet invasion as illegal, and this definition of insurgency fit a model that aligned with the CIA’s support of the Mujahedeen combating the Soviets. Of note is that within this definition there is no longer an emphasis on the state’s legitimate authority. The CIA defined a conflict fought within the borders of a single country against a local authority in order to achieve a political objective. This definition remained fairly constant for the remainder of the century.

In the early part of the 21st century, the U.S. and its coalition partners went to war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Despite efforts to prosecute these conflicts conventionally, both devolved into complex insurgencies. What eventually emerged in both conflicts was the presence of radical Islamic ideology subverting local grievances to provide the basis for an insurgency. In Afghanistan, the Taliban was closely allied with Al Qaeda and the global movement it was promoting; while in Iraq, elements of Al Qaeda quickly seized

⁷ Central Intelligence Agency, *Guide to Analysis of Insurgency*, (S.I, s.n: 1986), 2.

on the war and local grievances as well as nationalistic ideals to develop an insurgency against the coalition and the new Iraqi government.

Over the course of the previous 20 years, counterinsurgency doctrine had been allowed to atrophy. Despite the lessons of the Soviets in Afghanistan, the U.S. military continued to believe that it would not be involved in counterinsurgency warfare. The devolution of Iraq and Afghanistan into insurgency as part of global movement created significant problems for American planners and policymakers. The American military's significant lack of understanding of insurgency and counterinsurgency led to the United States military developing and publishing a new field manual in 2006 addressing counterinsurgency. This was the first new piece of government literature addressing counterinsurgency since Vietnam, borne out of the need for cohesive doctrine to address the conditions that American and coalition forces were facing in Iraq and Afghanistan. It was clear that more research and analysis into modern day insurgent warfare was essential. Undertaken as a collaborative effort between the Army and Marine Corps, the publication of Field Manual 3-24 was highly acclaimed as practical modern counterinsurgency doctrine to fill the void left by years of inattention. The field manual recognized that the devolution of conventional conflicts often resulted in insurgencies. It utilized the 2001 joint community's definition of insurgency as "an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict."⁸ But at some point the authors differed with the joint definition by further refining the definition of insurgency to, "an organized, protracted politico-military

⁸ United States, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, ([Washington D.C.]: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2001), 215.

struggle designed to weaken the control and legitimacy of an established government, occupying power, or other political authority while increasing insurgent control.”⁹ This definition is largely an amalgamation of the CIA and British theories and not a substantially new view of insurgency as the field manual had implied. What this definition did, however, was combine the protracted political nature from the Soviet experience, while re-applying the legitimacy of the government from the British colonial experience. This approach was still inadequate for the current wartime situation. After publication of FM 3-24, the U.S military updated the joint definition of insurgency in 2010. Breaking from the language of FM 3-24, insurgency was now defined as, “the organized use of subversion and violence by a group or movement that seeks to overthrow or force change of a governing authority”¹⁰

The evolution of the insurgency in Iraq most likely drove this modification, marrying up the definition to fit the situation now faced in Iraq by the occupying authority. Key similarities within all the definitions remain consistent. First, insurgency always involves a political element, whether it be a constituted governing authority as in the British or classical view, or a politico-military struggle as outlined in 2006. In either case, the definitions delineate a battle between those in power versus those without power. Secondly, all the definitions imply some form of insurgent organization, the definition of which is dictated by the context of the times. In classic counterinsurgency theory, organization is considered as a movement within a country; but in the current

⁹ United States, *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual: U.S. Army Field Manual No. 3-24: Marine Corps Warfighting Publication No. 3-33.5*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 1-1.

¹⁰ *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, 229.

definitions, *organization* becomes broader, it involves a group and implies a looser affiliation. In the 2001 joint publication the words “overthrow of a constituted government” were included, but in 2006, FM 3-24 restructured the definition to conform to the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. The definition now shifted to insurgency “weaken[ing] the control and legitimacy of an established government, occupying power, or other political authority.”¹¹ This is an important evolution in a modern definition of insurgency.

Beyond a movement as a basis for insurgency there is a recognition that non-state actors may play a role, and that insurgencies may not always be fought within an established state, but may be waged against multiple political entities. The current *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, JP 1-02, definition of insurgency moves further away from the classical view that insurgency is directed against a state or a state constituted authority, when it only requires a “governing authority.” This definition also differs from the classical form in using the words “force change.” The implication is that insurgencies can also seek to change multiple political structures across state boundaries, or simply seek changes in government policy or practice. This view of insurgency found in the joint definition is now more dominant in American thinking than FM 3-24’s definition.

The *U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide* is the most recent government publication concerning counterinsurgency operations. Published in 2009, it offers an additional definition of insurgency, describing it as “the organized use of subversion and violence to seize, nullify, or challenge political control of a region.” In this definition,

¹¹ *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, 1-1.

the concept of a state has been removed and now insurgency has been applied in a regional political context. Although this could imply a region within a state, it fits in with the currently accepted view that insurgency is not necessarily state-focused and can encompass larger regional political structures. This leaves the military with two *official* definitions of insurgency and one additional U.S. government definition which has been endorsed by the Department of Defense. All of this illustrates the rapid evolution of insurgency theory in the 21st century.

Twentieth century, or classical insurgencies were limited to actions against a recognized state, wherein a group sought the overthrow of the legitimate authority through subversion or violence. In the 21st century, insurgency is a blanket concept intended to imply a struggle for political control or political change that may or may not involve a state, but something less structured as well — a “governing authority.” Counterinsurgency theorist David Kilcullen reflects this thinking, postulating a theory of globalized insurgency integrating globalization with multi-state actors. In this context, he defines insurgency as “a popular movement that seeks to overthrow the status quo through subversion, political activity insurrection, armed conflict and terrorism.”¹² Al-Qaeda’s proclaimed outcome in its global insurgency desires political change in multiple states. In fact, in modern day insurgency, an insurgent group may be “seeking only to destabilize vice create an alternative political order,” or it may simply, in Frank G. Hoffman’s words, “seek to paralyze and fragment the state, rather than gain control of its apparatus and govern.”¹³

¹² David Kilcullen, “Countering global insurgency”, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 28, no. 4 (August 2005): 603.

¹³ Frank G. Hoffman, “Neo-Classical Counterinsurgency,” *Parameters*, (Summer 2007): 81

Breaking down key elements of insurgency helps provide a deeper understanding of what insurgency is today. First, insurgents not only use violence, but they also rely heavily on non-violent methods, including the widespread use of propaganda and subversion. Al Qaeda has demonstrated repeatedly its ability to propagate anti-western or pro-Islamic messages in support of its claims. Next there must be a degree of organization, not necessarily in the defined hierarchical structures of the past, but in an organizational structure built to support the overall vision of the insurgency. Without some degree of organization, it is difficult to develop a vision of what the group wishes to achieve. This discussion purposely omits a state actor, institution or geographic focus, instead, allowing an insurgency to be as narrow or broadly focused as it needs to be. Within this construct, insurgency can support local objectives or sweeping transnational ones. Broadly stated, insurgent groups can either force change or disrupt.

New insurgent groups are increasingly demonstrating that their sole goal is to disrupt power centers. The idea of the political status quo is critical to any insurgency. Insurgents seek change and the only way to affect lasting change is through political means. The political status quo can be governments, but more broadly these are power centers.

Bard O'Neill differentiates this by referring to the “non-ruling group and the ruling authorities.”¹⁴ The idea being that an insurgency will seek to change what those in power have, attempting to shift power to the insurgents. Finally, while an insurgency can utilize terrorism to achieve its ends, terrorism, like subversion or armed violence is only a tool in a wide arsenal that insurgent groups may employ.

Modern day radical Islamic insurgent groups are decentralized and loosely affiliated with broad, inter-related goals. The global insurgency model relies on an organization with a networked structure that diffuses leadership throughout the movement, allowing affiliate organizations to operate independently. “These semi-independent or independent cells plan and act within their own means to promote a common ideological position.”¹⁵

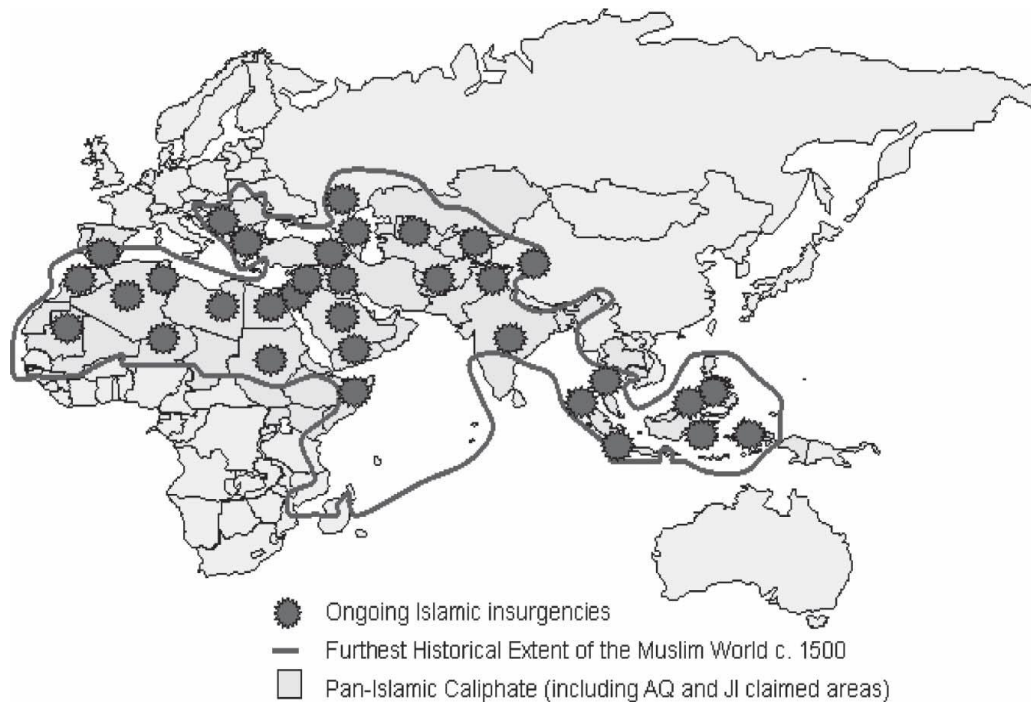
In the current decade religion has emerged as the common ideological position. “A generation ago none of the 11 major terrorist organizations was religiously oriented. By 2004, nearly half of the world’s identifiable and active terrorist groups are classified as religious.”¹⁶ The spread of radical Islam has become a major influence for insurgency in the 21st century and has emerged as a global, transnational issue. (See figure 1).

¹⁴ Bard E. O'Neill, William R. Heaton, and Donald J. Alberts, *Insurgency in the Modern World*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1980), 1.

¹⁵ United States, *A Military Guide to Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century*, DCSINT handbook, no. 1, ([Fort Leavenworth, KS]: U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, TRADOC Intelligence Support Activity (TRISA) – Threats, 2007), 3-9.

¹⁶ Hoffman, “Neo-Classical Counterinsurgency,” 77-78

Figure 1



Source: David Kilcullen, "Countering Global Insurgency," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 28, no. 4 (August 2005): Figure 1

An organization that transcends national borders is now starting to define insurgency in the 21st century, and it does not necessarily seek to overthrow a single government from within its borders. In contrast with the past, this type of organization presents a networked organizational structure, supported by ideology that has shifted from largely communist models to radical Islam. Evidence now suggests that Al-Qaeda operates as the central strategic guiding force in this globalized insurgency, it is

clearly an insurgency – a popular movement that seeks to change the status quo through violence and subversion. But whereas traditional insurgencies sought to overthrow established governments or social orders in one state or district, this insurgency seeks to transform the entire Islamic world and remake its relationship with the rest of the globe.¹⁷

¹⁷ Kilcullen, "Countering Global Insurgency," 604.

This insurgency is enabled by a global information support network that is critical to the global insurgency.

The strength of this networked, insurgent organizational structure lies in the fact the affiliates have localized goals based on legitimate grievances. This 21st century insurgency represents a multi-faceted threat. It exists at the local level, but also contributes to the transnational radical Islamic cause. Analysis of the demands of other insurgent groups, like the Tamil tigers or the Free Aceh Movement, shows they are remarkably similar to those of Al-Qaeda, whereas “the only significant difference is that Al Qaeda’s claims stretch across multiple Islamic countries instead of being confined to a specific region in a recognized nation-state.”¹⁸ The Al-Qaeda network has shown that although they do not maintain direct control of insurgencies across the globe, the strategies these groups follow are closely aligned with those of Al-Qaeda.¹⁹

While the emergence of radical Islam and the overarching goals of Al-Qaeda have been critical to the development of a globalized insurgency, the growth of the internet and the development of new communications technology have certainly helped enable its rapid evolution. Never before in history have societies become more connected, not only in regards to information sharing, but also with intricate ties to financial and trade markets. The world is becoming firmly stitched together in nearly every aspect. The internet now provides links for insurgent groups to cooperate across state borders; allowing them to share information and provide propaganda support to the fundamental cause or ideology. The internet is about the spread of ideas, and Kitson was very clear

¹⁸ Daniel G. Cox, "The Struggle Against Global Insurgency," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, (1st Quarter 2010): 137.

¹⁹ Kilcullen, "Countering Global Insurgency," 598.

when he noted that the use of violence by insurgents “should be used very largely in support of ideas.”²⁰ The internet allows insurgent actions in one part of the world to be viewed and used to support an insurgency in another part of the world and ultimately be shaped into a message supporting a shared ideology. The speed and quantity of information creates power for the organization who knows how to use it. For example,

in order to demonstrate ruthlessness and gain followers, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi has likewise posted images of beheadings, the training of suicide bombers, live-action attacks in Iraq, a monthly online magazine, and pictures of some 400 “martyrs.” Zarqawi’s slick video, “All Religion Will Be for Allah,” is available for downloading off the Internet and can even be shown on a cell phone.²¹

Other evidence of the immediate effect of internet propaganda was visible in the international outcry over the images of Private Lynndie England standing over Abu Ghraib prisoners, or the turmoil caused by the threat of cartoon images of the prophet Mohammed being published. The internet and telecommunications technology has provided the linkage between global actors and local ones. No longer does a local insurgency need a physical safe haven, there is little need for proximity. Technology advances in finance have made it easy to channel money to virtually anywhere in the world within seconds.

The Internet is utterly intertwined with the insurgency in Iraq, for example. Insurgent attacks are regularly followed with postings of operational details, claims of responsibility, and tips for tactical success. Those who use insurgent chat rooms are often monitored by the hosts and, if they seem amenable to recruitment, contacted via email. Insurgent sites contain everything from practical information for traveling to Iraq to morale boosters for those currently involved in the struggle. Videos of killings by the “Baghdad Sniper” or “Juba,”

²⁰ Kitson, *Bunch of Five*, 282.

²¹ Audrey Kurth Cronin, “Cyber-Mobilization: The New Levée en Masse,” *Parameters: US Army War College* 36, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 83.

who is claimed to have killed 143 American soldiers and injured 54, are posted on the web.²²

The internet and technological advances have been critical to the evolution of insurgency, assisting with recruiting and propaganda, while enabling the development of the transnational aspect of a modern global insurgency.

Understanding the interconnected nature of this network can be difficult and while all insurgencies exist in a distinctive environment, driven by dynamic factors, they still share some common traits. Analyzing the elements of insurgency takes study and rigor, even FM 3-24 admits that every insurgency is complex and unique by stating in the forward that “every insurgency is contextual and presents its own set of challenges”²³ While there are many dynamics in an insurgency, one highlights itself as the fundamental consideration when developing a counterinsurgency strategy. To have a sustainable insurgency, there must be an underlying grievance that is not being satisfied by the appropriate authorities. Thus, there is a political element to every insurgency. Identifying the underlying cause and addressing it remains the hallmark of an effective counterinsurgency effort, despite whether the insurgency is linked to global jihad or stands alone.

The review of what insurgency is, illustrates how complex the environment has become and how critical analytical rigor is to understanding and comprehending its many facets. Whether an insurgency is receiving support as part of the globalized insurgency or it is insular, there are numerous factors that must be considered. All of the dynamics

²² Cronin, "Cyber-Mobilization: The New Levée en Masse," 85.

²³ *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, forward.

within an insurgency must be examined in order to identify the fundamental grievance that has driven a group to undertake violent measures.

The message for counterinsurgency planners is that the organizational model created by networked structures provides a widely dispersed leadership network, one where no single leader is critical to the success or failure of the overall campaign. While individual affiliates can be damaged or crippled by the loss of a leader, without addressing the root cause of the local insurgency, leaders will eventually be replaced and the affiliate will rebuild or adapt, becoming a threat again. In light of these modern realities, this thesis will examine how important leadership is to these organizations as applied to a counterinsurgency strategy. This approach will consider the evolution of insurgency by examining counterinsurgency theory as the basis for the current American counterinsurgency doctrine, then reviewing several historical case studies, examining the effects of removing insurgent leaders.

CHAPTER 2: A SHORT OVERVIEW OF COUNTERINSURGENCY THEORY

The development of what came to be known as classical counterinsurgency concepts was a hallmark of the 20th century. The concepts and writings presented by two British officers, Sir Frank Kitson and Sir Robert Thompson, and one French officer, David Galula, created the foundation for counterinsurgency thinking. These three have remained influential because they recognized critical elements within counterinsurgency campaigns; elements that have proved to be timeless. In contrast, it is important to note that none of the theorists recognize leadership as a critical element of counterinsurgency. The following is a summary of the notable contributions of these counterinsurgency practitioners, highlighting the concepts they considered critical to the success of a counterinsurgency campaign.

The Classicists

Sir Robert Thompson

Sir Robert Thompson was one of the earliest counterinsurgency theorists, learning his trade first in Burma in World War II and then in Malaya and Vietnam in the post war period. In his book, *Defeating Communist Insurgency: The Lessons of Malaya and Vietnam*, one of the most critical elements of counterinsurgency operations can be found. He believed that a holistic approach to counterinsurgency was essential to success, requiring counterinsurgency practitioners to identify and address the underlying causes of conflict. He recognized that any plan “must include all political, social, economic,

administrative, police and other measures which have a bearing on the insurgency.”¹

Thompson outlines what today would be termed as a whole of government approach. He was also very clear about another fundamental element of counterinsurgency; adhering to the rule of law. He believed that “If the government does not adhere to the law, then it loses respect and fails.”²

Sir Frank Kitson

Sir Frank Kitson carried British counterinsurgency theory forward in practice in Kenya, Malaya, Cyprus, Oman and Northern Ireland from the 1950s till late into the 1970s. Kitson embraced Thompson’s whole of government approach, stating “there can be no such thing as a purely military solution because insurgency is not primarily a military activity.”³ He also endorsed Thompson’s belief that following the rule of law was critical to success. Kitson could think of no reason that a counterinsurgent force could allow the “law [to be] flouted by its own government, even in an insurgency situation.”⁴ His most important contribution to counterinsurgency theory is the idea of keeping the population safe while conducting the armed campaign.⁵ He points out that a secure population, protected from insurgent reprisals will provide valuable intelligence.

¹ Robert Grainger Ker Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency, The Lessons of Malaya and Vietnam*, (St. Petersburg: Hailer Publishing, 2005), 55.

² *Ibid.*, 52.

³ Kitson, *Bunch of Five*, 283.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 289.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 287-288.

Thus for Kitson, a focus on the population is essential to success; for in his view insurgencies are “primarily concerned with the struggle for men’s minds.”⁶

David Galula

David Galula’s writings concentrate on the military aspect of counterinsurgency, but he clearly intends for political action to take place simultaneously during the campaign. Galula is the proponent of what FM 3-24 describes as the “clear-hold-build” strategy.⁷ This concept is founded on the idea of securing the population by clearing the insurgents, then holding the area, and building upon the success before moving to the next area. He emphasizes Kitson’s idea of protecting and securing the population, although Galula’s focus is more on controlling a population, rather than protecting them. Galula also promotes Thompson’s whole of government approach, summed up in his much quoted axiom that, an insurgency “is 20 percent military action and 80 percent political.”⁸ His writings demonstrate how critical it is to understand the underlying cause of an insurgency before taking action. More importantly, he recognizes that military action can only go so far and a political solution must be attained to have sustainable success.⁹

⁶ Kitson, *Bunch of Five*, 282.

⁷ Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare, Theory and Practice*, 78-96. Galula has been very influential to U.S. doctrine, the current version of FM 3-24 includes a written acknowledgement to his book on counterinsurgency warfare

⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 13-19.

Neo-Classicism

David Kilcullen

David Kilcullen has become one of the most noted contemporary counterinsurgency theorists in recent years, shaping current definitions of insurgency. Kilcullen takes classic theory and further develops it in an attempt to define the current conflict against Islamic extremists. His concept of globalized insurgency, supported by mass media and real time information sharing has created new insights into thinking about the form insurgency has taken in the 21st century. Kilcullen's writings support the classic counterinsurgency elements of protecting the population, eliminating outside support, and fighting for the minds of men, but Kilcullen puts them into a contextual framework within 21st century. In his construct, the importance of a popular support base is paramount, but in his construct, he redefines the population to be influenced to include a global diaspora.¹⁰ Kilcullen deemphasizes the classicist's focus on military operations further, recognizing that military actions can often be more detrimental in a global information environment dominated by mass media and electronic social networks. Kilcullen is adamant that insurgent groups are not only using "the guns and bombs," but also, "the Minicam and videotape."¹¹ He believes mass media has greater power to shape the relative success or failure of an insurgency than the gun and challenges Galula's view that 80 percent of a counterinsurgency is political. Instead he

¹⁰ David Kilcullen, "Counter-insurgency Redux," *Survival* 48, no. 4 (2006-2007): 121.

¹¹ Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 198

argues that “given pervasive media presence and near instantaneous propaganda exploitation of all combat action, counter-insurgency may now be 100% political.”¹²

What Counterinsurgency Theory Tells Us

A review of counterinsurgency theory, past and present, reveals several consistent factors. Five key factors have remained timeless and are summarized as follows: counterinsurgency operations must seek to identify and address the underlying grievances of the belligerents; they must have an understanding of the underlying grievances that fuel the insurgency, because if “ideas and grievances are the seeds of insurgency,” as Frank Hoffman asserts, attacking a problem at its roots must begin there.¹³ COIN practitioners must recognize that insurgency is a battle of ideas, not of territory; popular support is essential to accomplish a political goal. Therefore, if a counterinsurgency effort is to be successful it must garner popular support, neutralizing support for the insurgents. Protecting the population is critical, if the population is no longer threatened by insurgents, the people become allies in eliminating the insurgency. The rule of law must be followed by all counterinsurgent forces; it is only through the rule of law that the counterinsurgent force gains respect and legitimacy, failure to respect the rule of law can undermine the entire COIN effort. Lastly, counterinsurgency operations must be undertaken in the political as well as the military arena. The political dimension of insurgency makes a wholly military solution impracticable.

¹² Kilcullen, “Counter-insurgency Redux,” 123.

¹³ Hoffman, “Neo-Classical Counterinsurgency,” 79

The Leadership Element

It is significant to note that a review of counterinsurgency theorists of the 20th and 21st century reveals nothing concerning insurgent leadership and its criticality as a means to defeat an insurgency. This does not imply that leadership is without value to an insurgency. Galula discusses the importance of insurgent leadership in the formative stages of a movement, but discards leadership as a viable target once the insurgency has evolved.¹⁴ The other classicists do not even discuss the efficacy of targeting leaders as an element within a counterinsurgency campaign. It is apparent that the dominant theorists did not consider insurgent leadership worthy of special emphasis.

FM 3-24 says that leadership is “critical,” and while there can be no doubt that leadership can be critical to an insurgency, the question remains as to whether focusing on leadership removal in a counterinsurgency campaign will result in the defeat of the insurgency?¹⁵ If, as the classicists portray, removing insurgent leadership is not critical to success in a counterinsurgency campaign, then why has leadership become a central element in American thinking. To understand this phenomenon this thesis will next examine conventional planning constructs. If these planning paradigms lead to an undue emphasis on insurgent leadership the next step will be to determine how insurgent leadership in a modern insurgency can best be understood as part of the counterinsurgency campaign.

¹⁴ Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare, Theory and Practice*, 48-49.

¹⁵ *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, 1-13

CHAPTER 3: ORGANIZATIONAL MODELS AND THE ROOTS OF LEADERSHIP REMOVAL STRATEGIES IN COUNTERINSURGENCY

All insurgencies are unique; however, all insurgencies share two common traits: the goals are ultimately political in nature; to achieve the goal, the population must, to some degree, support the insurgents. In addition, to achieve their political goal, insurgencies also require some type of organizational structure. Within this context the relationship between organizational structure and the criticality of leadership arises. The type of organizational structure within an insurgency can significantly influence the movement's leadership requirements as well as providing insight as to whether a leadership removal strategy will be worth undertaking. The leadership requirements will widely differ depending on the organizational structure. The first section in this chapter will examine different organizational structures, outlining the leadership requirements in each one. The second section will explore the predisposition current military planners and policy makers have with targeting leadership as an effective approach to counterinsurgency. The final section will outline how understanding basic organizational structures can help planners evaluate insurgencies and assess whether or not leadership targeting is viable as a method of dealing with an insurgency.

Organizational Models and Leadership Defined

To begin examining organizational structures as they relate to insurgencies, Henry Mintzberg's definition of the strategic apex of an organization is essential.¹ Mintzberg

¹ Henry Mintzberg, *Structure in Fives*, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall Inc., 1993), 13.

defines the strategic apex as the “person or persons charged with overall responsibility for the organization (whether called president, superintendent, or pope), and any other top-level managers whose concerns are global.”² This can be further refined, in terms of organizational power and influence, understanding that the strategic apex does not have to be a *designated* leader, but only needs to be the one who has, or controls, the power within the organization. The strategic apex of an organization is an entity that has the authority to determine the direction and motivation of an organization.³ The source of power found at the strategic apex varies depending on the type of organizational structure. It can be inferred from Mintzberg that every organization has a strategic apex of some sort and that being able to recognize where the strategic apex resides is critical in evaluating the structure of insurgencies. It is certainly critical to determining whether targeting leadership is likely to have the effect the counterinsurgency practitioner had planned for. Organizational structures are continually evolving but generally fall into two categories as defined by the Army’s Training and Doctrine Command: hierarchical (centralized) and networked (decentralized or diffused); both of these structures will be examined in further detail.⁴

² Mintzberg, *Structure in Fives*, 13.

³ Bradley S. Taylor, “Counter-leadership and conflict termination,” (Master’s Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 1999), 4.

⁴ *A Military Guide to Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century*, 3-6.

Hierarchical

In a hierarchical organizational structure, the strategic apex is at the top of a vertical hierarchy, normally visible and identifiable.⁵ Decision making tends to take place at the highest level of power within the organization. Information flows up and down through subordinate levels of leadership. Personnel receive direction from the level above. At the lowest level, personnel may not have any exposure to the senior level leadership at the strategic apex. This organizational structure is widely believed to be the most vulnerable to the removal of a leader with immediate and dramatic effects.⁶ Whether the loss of the leader causes the organization to completely fail or just falter is often dependant on other variables. In a hierarchical structure, a well defined plan of succession can often be a critical variable in determining the efficacy of removing leaders, but recent studies have now suggested that ideology or the age of the organization can be better determinants.⁷

Networked

In the networked organizational structure, there is no single strategic apex; multiple apexes exist across a spectrum of tiers within an organization.⁸ Mintzberg describes the far end of the spectrum as “power to everyone,” where the strategic apex

⁵ Jenna Jordan, “When Heads Roll: Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Decapitation,” *Security Studies* 18, no. 4 (October 2009): 729.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 728.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 719.

⁸ *A Military Guide to Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century*, 3-8 – 3-9. The Army’s Training Command identifies four different types of networked organizational structures: The Chain, Hub and Star, All Channel and the Loosely Affiliated network.

may not even be definable.⁹ In a networked structure, sub-groups or cells are allowed the freedom to execute tasks supporting the organizations overall mission. This type of organization can “be like the many-headed Hydra,” where “no single person has an impact on the organization overall.”¹⁰ While this type of structure may be able to sustain the loss of a single leader better than the hierarchical structure, it will also have greater difficulty making critical decisions and require a more robust communications capability.

Organizational Conclusions

Clearly these structural models have application within insurgencies. Some insurgent groups like the Viet Cong were highly regimented in a hierarchical structure. Others, like the Algerian insurgents in 1954-60, were organized as a hierarchy but had multiple strategic apexes similar to a networked structure. Information technology in the 21st century has allowed insurgent organizations to be far more networked. Shamil Basayev’s Chechen insurgency, and Al Qaeda and its affiliates represent examples of multiple strategic apex organizations. The global trend has been for insurgent groups to continue to evolve their organizational structures

into loosely affiliated networks, linked by a key individual, common ideology, or common enemies. They may elect to follow a more cellular structure, exercising greater autonomy and less connectivity than the old formal networks. Lastly, such organizations may employ hybrid structures, where specific capabilities or financial support are provided to local cells.¹¹

Recognizing the reality that modern insurgent organizations are developing complex organizational structures with multiple strategic apexes, requires military

⁹ Mintzberg, *Structure in Fives*, 110.

¹⁰ Taylor, “Counter-leadership and conflict termination,” 40.

¹¹ Hoffman, “Neo-Classical Counterinsurgency,” 75

planners and policy makers to reassess their preoccupation with strategies that rely on eliminating leaders as a means to defeat an insurgency.

The New COIN: A Predisposition to Leadership Focus

Conventional military doctrine emphasizes an analytical process to determine centers of gravity (COG), examine critical capabilities (CC), critical requirements (CR) and critical vulnerabilities (CV) in order to determine strategic, operational and tactical objectives. The COG-CC-CR-CV process, developed by Dr. Joseph Strange, tends to focus military planners on leadership as a critical target to achieve success.¹² Describing his model, Strange says that “at the strategic level, they [centers of gravity] are usually leaders.”¹³ Strange then uses Saddam Hussein as the example of the strategic center of gravity for Iraq, because Saddam was the center of power, the strategic as well as the moral center that all military efforts should be directed at.

As the outcome of Operation Iraqi Freedom has shown, Strange’s analysis can be flawed. The operational plan for the invasion of Iraq was written focusing on Saddam Hussein as the center of gravity, and according to Strange’s concept of COG, once Hussein was eliminated, the Iraqi government and defense structure would collapse, allowing the coalition to declare victory. However, Saddam went into hiding, eventually being captured, but his removal did nothing to end the conflict that had consumed Iraq in late 2003.¹⁴ The same high level focus on leadership also led to soldiers being issued a deck of playing cards imprinted with Iraqi leadership photos during the last phase of

¹² United States, *Joint Operation Planning*, ([Washington, D.C.]: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2006), IV-9-IV15.

¹³ Joe Strange and Richard Iron, *Understanding Centers of Gravity and Critical Vulnerabilities*, 7.

¹⁴ Tommy Franks, *An American Soldier*, (New York: Regan Books, 2004): 339

Operation Iraqi Freedom. Because of the belief in the criticality of leaders, the U.S military has dedicated entire task forces to hunt enemy leaders.

Along with Strange, one of the most influential American military theorists to affect doctrine and planning has been Air Force Colonel, John A. Warden. Warden originated the concepts used in the air campaign in the first Gulf War. The undeniable success of air power in that short-term conflict lent credibility to his targeting theory and his methodology for determining enemy vulnerabilities.

Warden defined the conventional enemy as a system of systems. Within this system of systems he derived five rings, arranged from most important to least important: command, organic essentials, infrastructure, population, and fielded forces.

For Warden, who compared the enemy system to a living entity, the command ring was synonymous with the brain. As Warden described it, the brain

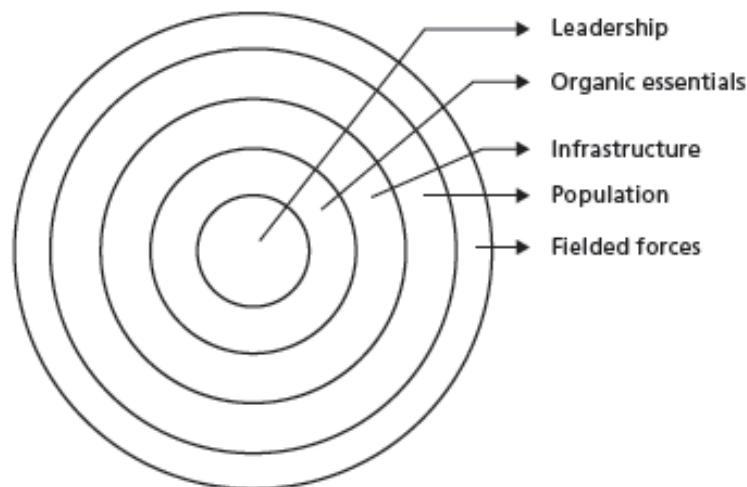
provides the leadership and direction to the body as a whole and to all its parts. It, and it alone, is absolutely essential in the sense that there can be no substitute for it and without it the body, even though technically alive, is no longer operating at a strategic level...without the integrating, directing function of the brain, these organs [the organic essential ring] are without meaning.¹⁵

Warden's concept was tested in the largely conventional, first Gulf War where leadership was targeted numerous times. His concept was again used in the air war in Kosovo, targeting Slobodan Milosevic to force him into concessions. However, the elimination of key military and political leaders in Iraq did not, as Warden insisted, disable the enemy organization, nor has it been proven that targeting Milosevic was responsible for ending that conflict. In the case of Iraq, the loss of leadership instead caused the enemy to mutate its organization, opting for insurgent strategies and tactics.

¹⁵ Warden, "The Enemy as a System," 40.

Although Warden admits that leadership can be difficult to eliminate, his overall thrust is clear – enemy leadership is critical to success and therefore must be the focus of effort. He goes as far as saying “the first ring or center of gravity is the commander himself. He is the target of operations either directly or indirectly because he is the one who will decide to concede something to the enemy.” Even his graphical depiction of the five rings delivers the not so subtle representation of a target with a bull’s-eye, with the bull’s-eye being leadership. (See Figure 2).

Figure 2



Leadership: Most critical ring comprising decisionmaking entities, command-and-control nodes, etc.
Organic essentials: Second most critical ring comprising those facilities or processes a state requires to survive (power-generation facilities, etc.)
Infrastructure: Third most critical ring comprising the enemy’s transportation system (rail lines, bridges, airfields, ports, etc.)
Population: Fourth most critical ring; very difficult to target (morally, internationally) directly; best approached indirectly as North Vietnam did to the United States
Fielded forces: Least critical and most hardened by design; campaigns focusing on this ring tend to be the longest and most bloody

NOTE: Figure adapted from Warden (1989).

Source: Paul K. Davis and James P. Kahan, *Theory and Methods for Supporting High Level Military Decisionmaking*, (Santa Monica: RAND Project Air Force, 2007), Figure A.2.

Warden’s model eventually influenced the development of the ill-fated Effects Based Operations (EBO) concept of the late 1990s. The concept advocated a new

approach to war, focusing on key nodes (including leadership) as the way to destabilize an enemy's conventional force. "The seminal works of Col. John Warden (USAF, ret.) helped shape the Air Force's embrace of effects-based targeting and later EBO."¹⁶ Warden's five ring system continues to influence conventional military planners.

The combination of Strange's center of gravity analysis process and Warden's five ring model has driven military planners to focus on leadership as the enemy's "source of moral or physical strength, power, and resistance."¹⁷ Many times this focus has not produced tangible results. It is clear that the effort to kill leaders such as Iraq Al Qaeda leader Musab al-Zarqawi "requires prodigious resources that may produce only modest benefits."¹⁸ Conventional warfare paradigms have deeply influenced counterinsurgency planners who have adopted these conventional constructs and applied them to insurgency.

The *U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide* contends that "to be successful, insurgencies require charismatic leadership,"¹⁹ while FM 3-24 the military's counterinsurgency bible, proclaims "leadership is critical to any insurgency."²⁰ The *Military Guide to Terrorism in the 21st Century*, an Army handbook intended to guide intelligence collection support to counterinsurgency lists leadership as a "vulnerable

¹⁶ Paul K. Davis and James P. Kahan, *Theory and Methods for Supporting High Level Military Decisionmaking*, (Santa Monica: RAND Project Air Force, 2007), 62.

¹⁷ *Joint Operation Planning*, IV-8.

¹⁸ Christopher M. Ford, "Of Shoes and Sites: Globalization and Insurgency," *Military Review* 87, no. 3 (May 2007): 90.

¹⁹ Interagency Counterinsurgency Initiative, (U.S.). *U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide*, ([Washington, D.C.], 2009), 2.

²⁰ *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* 1-13.

target” in its discussion of insurgent organizations.²¹ Nearly all of the U.S. government’s insurgency literature regards leadership as a critical target; a clear reflection of conventional analysis applied to counterinsurgency. This formulistic approach derives that leadership is critical to the direction and survival of an insurgency, while ignoring key tenets of counterinsurgency theory and diverting planners away from examining and understanding the sources of discontent that fuel insurgency.

The Hidden Paradigm

Policy makers, relying on military advice, fall into the same trap, focusing on suspected or actual insurgent leaders as a rapid and effective means of collapsing an organization.

The Clinton administration’s cruise missile attack on a suspected bin Laden training camp and the Bush administration’s hellfire missile attack on a caravan of suspected al Qaeda leaders in Yemen demonstrated the widespread belief that incapacitating a leader of a movement helps to prevent future attacks. Indeed, President Bush has made the capture or assassination of Usama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein one of the central elements of his anti-terrorism and anti-insurgency efforts.²²

Numerous government agencies have personnel dedicated to locating and attacking insurgent leaders and the hunt for Osama Bin Laden has been ongoing since the 9-11 attacks. Even when leaders have been located, a strategy relying on leadership removal has not provided encouraging results.

²¹ *A Military Guide to Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century*, 9.

²² Lisa Langdon, Alexander J. Sarapu, and Matthew Wells, "Targeting the Leadership of Terrorist and Insurgent Movements: Historical Lessons for Contemporary Policy Makers," *Journal of Public and International Affairs* 15 (Spring 2004): 60.

The Facts about Leadership Removal

Prior to the last ten years of war in Iraq and Afghanistan, there were few studies that attempted to determine the efficacy of removing insurgent or terrorist group leadership. New research has now been aimed at determining whether removing leadership has had the effect that planners desired. Most of the new studies deal with larger data sets that include the heads of organizations conducting violent activities such as terrorists, radical cells, as well as insurgencies. In these, some leaders were eliminated by natural causes, some by assassination, others captured, and some were killed outright in combat. Although the researchers had difficulty correlating the circumstances of a leader's removal and categorizing it for useful analysis, there is one pertinent conclusion that can be drawn from their research: leadership removal is an unpredictable strategy that has rarely resulted in the collapse of an organization.

One of these studies, a statistical research project, analyzed the effects of leadership removal within terrorist organizations. The variables considered included the type of organization, (ideological, religious or separatist), the size of the organization, and the age of the organization.²³ In terms of typology, the research showed that religious groups were far less affected by leadership removal than were ideologically based organizations. (See Figure 3).

²³ Jordan, "When Heads Roll: Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Decapitation," 722. It is important to note that although her study states its data set is terrorist organizations, she does not draw a distinction of what a terrorist organization is vice an insurgent organization. In fact, most of the organizations included in the study would be considered insurgent groups based on any of the definitions already discussed in this thesis.

Figure 3

Probability of Organizational Collapse After Decapitation				
	Young	Old	Small	Large
Religious	5%	.8%	5%	2%
Ideological	39%	8%	39%	18%
Separatist	24%	4%	25%	9%

Source: Jenna Jordan, "When Heads Roll: Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Decapitation," *Security Studies* 18, no. 4 (October 2009), 742.

The next key variable was the age of an organization, and in the study, this element was particularly significant. The longer an organization had been viable, the lower the probability it would be affected by a loss of leadership. The tipping point occurred at the ten year mark. After ten years, leadership removal proved to have very little impact on the organizations survival. (See figure 4). The *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, also known as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) movement in Columbia and The Shining Path in Peru; both well established insurgencies, highlight this conclusion as they both continue to be viable after the leader of each was eliminated.

Figure 4

Impact of Age on Organizational Fate					
	0-10 Years	11-20 Years	21-30 Years	31-40 Years	41+ Years
Remain Collapsed	93 70.99%	79 92.94%	29 90.62%	28 84.85%	17 100.00%
Collapsed	38 29.01%	6 7.06%	3 9.38%	5 15.15%	0 0.00%

Pearson $\chi^2 = 23.6827$ Pr = 0.000.

Source: Jenna Jordan, "When Heads Roll: Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Decapitation," *Security Studies* 18, no. 4 (October 2009), 742.

This research also concluded that leadership removal often had the inverse effect on an organization's ability to survive. In almost all cases, organizations which had leadership removed collapsed at a slower rate than organizations that collapsed at a naturally occurring rate. The only exception to this was in small organizations, those with less than 500 members.²⁴

Another study examined whether the loss of a leader would cause an organization to fail, allow it to conduct business as usual, or cause it to become more or less radical.²⁵ In this, researchers also found that religious-based organizations had a better chance of withstanding a leadership loss than ideologically based organizations. Quite notably, the study also concluded that there can be no level of confidence that removing a leader will have any predictable effect over an organization.

The leadership of a group can generally change or be seriously challenged without threatening the group's survival. After a crisis in leadership, twenty-three of the thirty-one groups we examined remained together, while only eight disbanded. This suggests that the loss of a leader may not necessarily cause the group to disband. Put another way, other characteristics of a group may be more important in keeping a group together than the individual characteristics of a leader.²⁶

The results of both of these studies indicate that leadership removal has historically had little effect on an organization's survival. When it has had an effect, the organization was relatively small and in existence for less than ten years.

Thus, FM 3-24 and the *U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide* are misleading in emphasizing leadership as the focus of a counterinsurgency effort. This focus on leadership as the key to defeating an insurgency often overtakes a careful

²⁴ Jordan, "When Heads Roll: Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Decapitation," 741-42.

²⁵ Lisa Langdon, Alexander J. Sarapu, and Matthew Wells, "Targeting the Leadership of Terrorist and Insurgent Movements: Historical Lessons for Contemporary Policy Makers," 60-62.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 75

analysis of the organization as a way of assessing the importance of leadership. Furthermore, recognizing Mintzberg's concept of the strategic apex, such an analysis focused on the organizational structure can reveal that certain types of organizations are more likely to be affected by removing a leader than others. Likewise, organizational structure can be instrumental in a group's ability to withstand the removal of its leadership. It is a commonly held belief that a hierarchical organization has a harder time dealing with a loss of leadership, but recent studies now suggest that if there is a well defined plan for succession, even this type of organization can be resilient to losing its strategic apex. In contrast, a networked or diffused organizational structure represents the most difficult model for removing leadership. Since the power is shared, it is difficult to identify a single strategic apex, "their groups have become hydra-headed entities with little or no hierarchical organization and a correspondingly diminished vulnerability [to leadership removal]."²⁷

These studies diminish the importance of leadership targeting strategies by acknowledging that, in most cases, insurgencies continued with business as usual despite the leadership loss. Although the organization was affected in some way, it was not as pronounced as would have been expected.²⁸

Leadership Summarized

The U.S. has a notable predisposition to targeting leaders in its military planning process for conventional war. Unfortunately, in insurgency warfare this predisposition

²⁷ Christopher M. Ford, "Of Shoes and Sites: Globalization and Insurgency," 89.

²⁸ Lisa Langdon, Alexander J. Sarapu, and Matthew Wells, "Targeting the Leadership of Terrorist and Insurgent Movements: Historical Lessons for Contemporary Policy Makers," 66

for leadership removal can interfere with the proper analysis necessary to understand the nature of the insurgency.

A systematic approach was used in analyzing leadership in insurgencies. Leadership functions were defined using Mintzberg's strategic apex, with an analysis of organizational structures to determine how leadership operates within complex organizational structures. Finally, several pertinent studies were reviewed to understand what the historical data reveals about the efficacy of leadership removal strategies. With this information, the framework has been created to examine three historical case studies, analyzing how the removal of key leaders influenced different insurgencies with different organizational structures, different ages, and different ideologies.

CHAPTER 4: THREE INSURGENCIES - EXAMINATION AND ANALYSIS

This chapter will address three insurgencies as case studies examining the significance of leadership removal. Each case study outlines a general timeline, a discussion of the organizational structure, a sketch of the environment, and a depiction of the leadership, followed by a more in-depth analysis examining the significant factors and elements that existed within each conflict. The analysis focuses on the factors that make each insurgency unique and draws conclusions about the effect the loss of leadership had on the long term viability of the insurgency. These three insurgencies have been used by other authors as cases supporting counter-leadership strategies, but by highlighting key issues and relating them to Mintzberg's organizational theory, as well as findings from current research, new conclusions become apparent.

The Huk (*Hukbalahap*) Rebellion

The Huk rebellion has been studied in depth over the years. The counterinsurgency campaign in this insurgency is often cited as a model for successful campaigns. It clearly highlights three critical counterinsurgency elements as presented by the classical theorists: the adherence to the rule of law; winning the people to the side of the government while protecting the population; and the government's ability to address the underlying causes of the insurgency.

The History

The Huk rebellion in the Philippines developed as a classic communist-inspired insurgency of the post-World War II era and was fought from 1946 until 1956. Within it

elements of socialist and communist movements came together to fight the government for increased land ownership. The insurgency took place largely on the island of Luzon, which is characterized by both difficult mountainous terrain and fertile farmlands and is the location of the capital city of Manila.

During World War II the Huks--short for *Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon*, or “People’s Anti-Japanese Army,” fought a guerrilla campaign against the Japanese in the countryside while many landowners fled to urban areas under the Japanese control. When the war ended, the landowners returned and demanded back rent from the Huk fighters who had stayed.¹ The Huk guerillas, made up mainly of peasants, had both popular support and prestige giving them significant leverage against the landlords.² The Huks also had the advantage of a charismatic leader in Luis Taruc. Taruc was regarded as the “colorful, idolized military commander of the ‘Huks’ . . . the ‘conscience of the Philippines.’”³ Taruc entered politics shortly after Philippine independence, but even though he and others representing his party were elected to congress, they were not allowed to take their seats. The ruling party claimed election irregularities and shut them out of the government. Without political power and without the means to address grievances, the Huks returned to the mountains and prepared for armed resistance.⁴ In his memoirs, Taruc states that his group represented “true nationalism” and his goal was

¹ Ronald E. Dolan, "Philippines: A Country Study," Country Studies Web Site, GPO for the Library of Congress, 1991, <http://countrystudies.us/philippines/25.htm> (accessed December 29, 2010).

² Mathew H. Phares, “Combating Insurgency: Can Lessons from the Huk Rebellion Apply to Iraq?” (Master’s Thesis, Quantico: Marine Corps Combat Development Command, 2008), 5.

³ Douglas Hyde, "Foreward," In *He Who Rides the Tiger*, by Luis Taruc, vii-xxiii, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), vii.

⁴ Luis Taruc, *He Who Rides the Tiger*, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), 26.

“socialism” because he perceived communism as a “vague and distant theoretical idea.”⁵ Taruc led a peasant based insurgency, modeled on Mao Tse Tung’s concepts. In fact, it was Edgar Snow’s book *Red Star over China* that served as a guiding text for the Huks.⁶ In the same manner as the Chinese communists, the Huks organized areas under their control as regions or *Recos*, each with a military and political cadre.⁷ After eight years of leading the insurgency, Taruc, tired of internal communist party politics, and desiring peace, surrendered to the Philippine forces in 1954 after negotiating a deal for amnesty with the government. The amnesty deal was never honored and Taruc spent 12 years in prison. After Taruc surrendered, the insurgency continued for another year, while some sources have claimed the Huks fought until as late as 1959.

Leadership and other Variables

The defeat of the Huks has been lauded as a victory for counterinsurgent forces and some claim that this is the proof that the removal of insurgent leadership will cause the collapse of an insurgency, but this conclusion lacks an appreciation of all the evidence. While certainly the surrender of Luis Taruc had an impact on the insurgent movement, it is more difficult to say that the loss of Taruc ended the Huk resistance since the insurgency continued for a minimum of one-and-a-half years, and possibly up to four-and-a-half years after he surrendered. One study notes that the rebellion continued with “business as usual” after the surrender of Taruc.⁸

⁵ Taruc, *He Who Rides the Tiger*, 27.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁸ Lisa Langdon, Alexander J. Sarapu, and Matthew Wells, "Targeting the Leadership of Terrorist and Insurgent Movements: Historical Lessons for Contemporary Policy Makers," 67

In the early stages of the Huk's resistance, the Philippine government did as much to aid the insurgency as the insurgents themselves did. From 1946-1950 the government adopted what it termed the "mailed fist" policy. During this time the government was extremely brutal, intending to intimidate the population. As Taruc relates, the government's actions only led to greater popular support for the Huks.⁹

For every barrio woman raped by undisciplined and demoralized soldiers or civilian guards, more peasants, including women, would be driven by hatred and indignation to join the rebels. For every barrio looted and burned to the ground by troops carrying out their superiors' scorched earth policy, a new Huk unit was founded. Every prisoner "shot while trying to escape" led to more strong men and girls from the nearby barrios to join the dissidents.¹⁰

After 1950, the newly elected Philippine president, Ramon Magsaysay made major reforms within the Philippine military forces. Before Magsaysay, the government had failed to acknowledge and address unjust land policies as the root cause of the insurgency; instead they had chosen repression over reform. After Magsaysay took office, the government embraced a new approach to the insurgency. It began by addressing land ownership issues and respecting the rule of law. Then it restructured the military, increasing its professionalism and discipline. Units were created and structured to conduct counterinsurgency operations.¹¹ Taruc, in his memoirs, reported the result and the effect on the insurgency, "Once more, the government began to respect the civil liberties of the people . . . the army's public relations improved; the people cooperated more willingly with government troops."¹² Magsaysay's political approach coupled with

⁹ Taruc, *He Who Rides the Tiger*, 36-38.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹¹ Paul Melshen, "The Huk Insurgency: 1946-1955," (Lecture, Joint Forces Staff College, Norfolk, VA, October 20, 2010).

¹² Taruc, *He Who Rides the Tiger*, 97.

military reforms gave the government the edge in the battle for the hearts and minds. As the government began to address the root causes of the insurgency, the insurgency was unable to sustain itself. Concentrating on the root cause proved the assertion that “most farmers had little interest in or knowledge of socialism,” and were more interested in land reform than the ideology of the insurgents.¹³

Because the rebellion had adopted the communist model, it stressed ideology over practical solutions to land reform. This approach created divides within the organization, “As class hatred spread through their ranks and as the bolshevism of their leaders became more apparent,” Taruc recalled, “cruelty and ruthlessness grew.”¹⁴ In addition, communist atheism was unpopular among the Philippine people, most of whom were devout Catholics. Taruc illustrated how difficult it was to overlay communist ideology on top of the Catholic faith and traditions. He was often called upon to conduct marriage ceremonies and baptisms. “Some of the baptisms were more obviously Christian inspired. I made the sign of the Cross over the baby and invoked the ‘God of all mankind,’ the liberation movement, and the toiling masses.”¹⁵ Taruc also conducted secular marriage ceremonies, noting that “some of those who were ‘married’ by me went to a church later, when quieter times came to have their marriage ‘put right.’”¹⁶

This combination of internal division over the direction of the movement and the emphasis of ideology and indoctrination over practical reform issues lay at the heart of the people’s discontent. These key factors allowed the government to seize the initiative

¹³ Dolan, "Philippines: A Country Study,".

¹⁴ Taruc, *He Who Rides the Tiger*, 52.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

after 1950. As a result, Luis Taruc, the charismatic leader of the Huks, found himself marginalized as the movement fractured in the 1950s, leading to his decision to surrender to authorities in 1954.

It would be simple to analyze this insurgency and credit its collapse to the capture of Luis Taruc, but doing so would minimize the critical failings within the insurgency and likewise, the successes of the counterinsurgency campaign. In the end a combination of land reforms, improved government and military capabilities, and the ability of the counterinsurgency forces to protect the population within the rule of law allowed the government to win back a population that had been swayed to violence and revolt. Magsaysay's approach was instrumental in defeating the Huk rebellion, because it attempted to achieve what should be the ultimate aim of any counterinsurgency campaign, to address the underlying grievance.

Between 1946 and 1950, Taruc was the strategic apex in the Huk rebellion. After 1950, as Taruc was marginalized, a number of new strategic apexes emerged. In this case, multiple leaders did not make the insurgency stronger or more resilient, instead they weakened the organization creating rifts. As one of the leadership studies shows, it is much more likely that eliminating Taruc in the critical early years of the insurgency could have seriously disrupted the Huk rebellion. However, the insurgency would have likely continued through the 1950s as long as the government pursued its "mailed fist" approach, ignoring the root cause of the insurgency and driving popular support to the insurgents.

The efforts of Magsaysay had more to do with the eventual collapse of the rebellion than Taruc's surrender. This case study does not provide evidence supporting a

strategy of leadership removal, but instead points to understanding both the root cause of an insurgency and how the insurgency functions as an organization. The Huk rebellion died of natural causes, not because of the loss of the charismatic leader at the strategic apex. By the time Taruc surrendered, the organization was fractured and its leadership began to encompass multiple weak strategic apexes. The Huks were defeated because Magsaysay employed a political and military solution that overcame the internal weaknesses of the Huk organization and met the needs of the people, both key aspects of classic counterinsurgency theory.

The Shining Path (*Sendero Luminoso*)

The Shining Path insurgency in Peru also had a charismatic leader. Similar to the Huk insurgency, is the claim that leadership removal ended the insurgency. The efforts of the Peruvian government highlight three key aspects of classic counterinsurgency theory: first, adherence to the rule of law, second, winning the people to the side of the government, and third, protecting the population. However, in this case, the Peruvian government, for the most part, did not address the underlying causes and conditions that fueled the insurgency. Nor did the counterinsurgency strategy reflect an appreciation for the organizational dynamic within the Shining Path, which has allowed the movement to still function, even though its leader and founder remains in prison.

The History

Sendero Luminoso, also known as the Shining Path, has conducted one of the most brutal insurgencies in the last two decades resulting in the estimated deaths of over

69,000 people.¹⁷ The Shining Path was formed in 1969 and armed resistance started in 1980. Two factions of the movement are still active today. The insurgency is ostensibly attempting to force the government to balance the country's wealth. On one side are the urban elite and landowners, and on the other side are the indigenous *Indio* people of the rural interior areas.¹⁸ The Shining Path draws its strength from the rural *Indio* people and targets land owners, who are labeled as exploiters. The U.S. Department of State placed the Shining Path on the Terrorism Watch List in October 1997.¹⁹

Between 1980 and 1992 the Shining Path had its greatest influence under its leader and founder, Abimael Guzmán. Guzmán was captured in 1992 and the Peruvian government proclaimed that the Shining Path was defeated. This case study will evaluate the effects of Guzmán's loss on the insurgency.

Using an ideology heavily influenced by the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist model, the leadership of the Shining Path under Guzmán was extremely hierarchical.²⁰ (See figure 5).

¹⁷ "Shining Path," *MilitaryPeriscope.Com*, <http://apps.militaryperiscope.com.ezproxy6.ndu.edu/Terrorism/ShowGroup.aspx?group=201>, (accessed November 18, 2010).

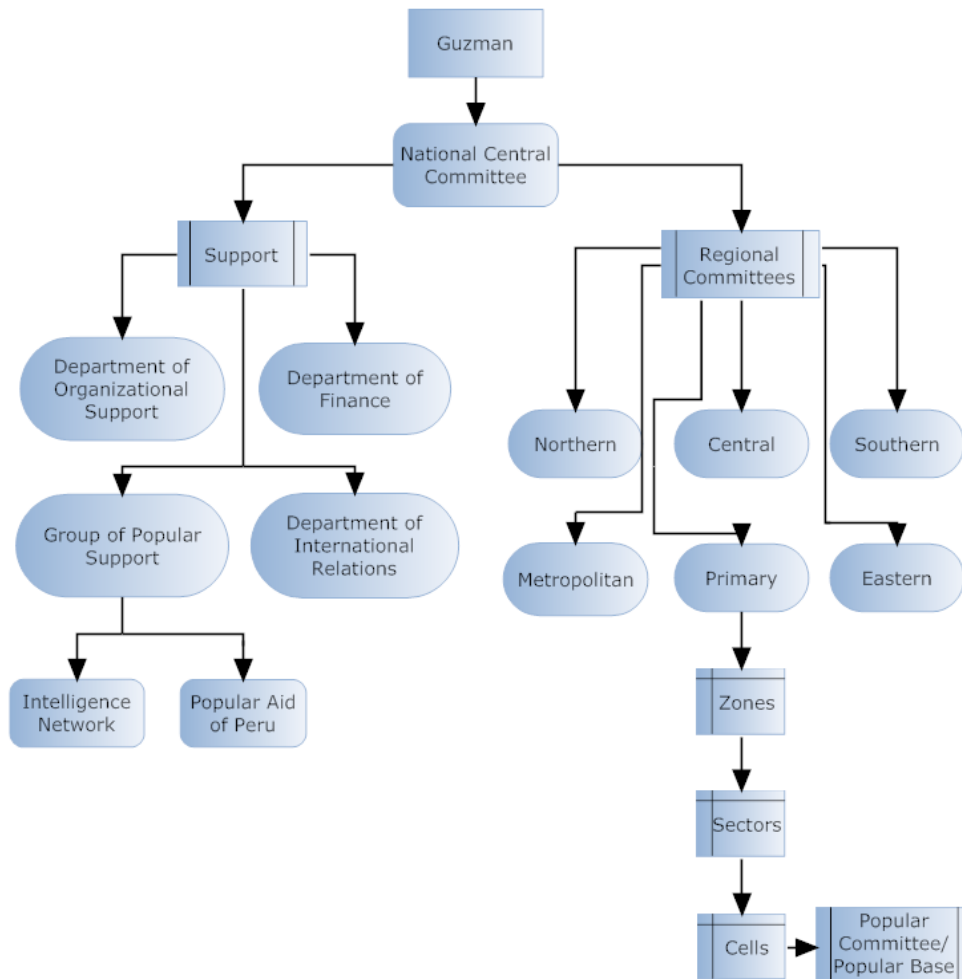
¹⁸ W. Alejandro Sanchez, "The Rebirth of Insurgency of Peru," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 14, no. 3 (Autumn 2003): 186.

¹⁹ "Sendero Luminoso," *IHS Jane's: Defence & Security Intelligence & Analysis*, IHS (Global) Limited, November 10, 2010, http://jtic.janes.com.ezproxy6.ndu.edu/JDIC/JTIC/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/binder/jwit/jwit0269.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=&backPath=http://jtic.janes.com.ezproxy6.ndu.edu/JDIC/JTIC/search&Prod_Name=&activeNav=/JDIC/JTIC (accessed November 18, 2010).

²⁰ *Ibid.*

Figure 5

Organization Chart of Sendero Luminoso



Source: Craig Marcus. "Understanding Sendero Luminoso: An Analysis of the Shining Path Insurgency Between 1988 and 1992," *Small Wars Journal*, 8. <http://smallwarsjournal.com/documents/swjmagfuture/14.doc> (accessed February 7 2011).

Guzmán was the supreme leader, highly revered to near cult status; below him was a complex structure that quickly dispersed into regional and functional areas with a further dispersed and networked structure of disconnected cells. Nearly all Shining Path activities were approved through Guzmán and, to a lesser degree, the central committee

he presided over.²¹ Despite the strength of the Guzmán as the strategic apex, the structure became so diffused at the lower levels that multiple strategic apexes were created. Although strategic direction came from Guzmán, the tactical organization of the rebellion relied on cells in local villages as well as regional leaders. Once Guzmán was captured, it fell to these well established, but less powerful leaders to assume control.

Leadership and other Variables

The capture of Guzmán was in large part due to the counterinsurgency efforts of newly elected President Alberto Fujimori. In 1992 his government suspended Peru's constitution and implemented a ruthless counterinsurgency campaign. The campaign resulted in the capture and detention of over 20,000 people "on not more than a rumor, a grudge, or a declaration given by a torture victim in the hopes the pain would stop."²² The actions undertaken by Fujimori have been lauded by some for ending the insurgency, but they failed to address the economic disparity within rural Peru which was the underlying cause of the insurgency. The government actions failed to gain the support of the population; instead they instilled fear, destroying what little popular support there was for the government in the rural areas. The social issues which sparked armed resistance from 1980 to 1992 remain prevalent in Peru.

While the loss of Guzmán in 1992 was a near crippling blow for the insurgency, the movement did not collapse. Initially after his capture, the organization appeared to be

²¹ Craig Marcus. "Understanding Sendero Luminoso-An Analysis of the Shining Path Insurgency Between 1988 and 1992," *Small Wars Journal*, 8. <http://smallwarsjournal.com/documents/swjmagfuture/14.doc> (accessed February 7, 2011).

²² Kimberly S. Theidon, "Histories of Innocence: Post-War Stories in Peru," *Working Paper 2008-0127*, (Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, January 2008): 4.

in ruins, violent attacks fell from a high of 1,900 in 1991-1992 to only 90 in 1999. But there is mounting evidence that the Shining Path is having a resurgence. Beginning in 2005 a marked increase of violent activities began to take place.²³

The organization structure of the Shining Path presents a complicated model. In one sense, the strategic apex was clear. Guzmán was at the top and held nearly all the power. But noteworthy is the networked structure of the organization once below the Guzmán's level. In the regional sub-areas, power was held within multiple local strategic apexes within a networked structural model. The existence of lower level strategic apexes as well as the research findings, explains how the resurgence of the movement has occurred.

Because there was not a clear plan of succession, when Guzmán was captured, a leadership void was created and forcing each region to accept a greater leadership role. This fundamentally reshaped the organization, requiring a period of time for the regional leaders to assume their new roles. There was no agreement on the future direction of the organization. One faction continued to recognize Guzmán as the movement's leader despite the fact that he was now in prison, while the other faction refused to recognize Guzmán as their leader anymore and began to reshape the movement without him. The eventual result was that the original organization split in two, and both factions have continued to grow in the last decade.²⁴ Although the factions have periodically attempted to reconcile and merge, they remain at odds with each other.

²³ "Sendero Luminoso," *IHS Jane's: Defence & Security Intelligence & Analysis*.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Despite the hierarchical nature of the Shining Path movement, two factors provide insight as to why this organization survived the removal of its strategic apex. First and foremost, the underlying cause of the insurgency has never been addressed from the political side, creating the impetus for a revival. Second, the research shows that the age of this organization makes it less likely to be affected by the removal of a leader at the strategic apex.

The most troubling development within the Shining Path movement is not that the movement has been reborn, supposedly still under Maoist ideology, but the fact that after the split, both factions adopted new roles in narco-trafficking.²⁵ These criminal activities have brought the Shining Path and the neighboring FARC organization together and created opportunities for the Shining Path to grow and become even more violent with a new infusion of weapons and money.²⁶ The Department of State considers this new organization more dangerous now as it “makes Sendero Luminoso a multi-edged weapon aimed at not only at Peruvian national security, but that of Latin America and the United States as well.”²⁷

The Shining Path is often held as an example of how removing insurgent leadership can collapse a movement. In this case, although the organization suffered a near crippling loss of its leader, its sophisticated organizational structure, coupled with the inability of the Peruvian government to address the economic issues within the country, have allowed the insurgency to remain active. Both factions of the Shining Path

²⁵ W. Alejandro Sanchez, "The Rebirth of Insurgency of Peru," 190.

²⁶ Ibid., 193.

²⁷ Kathryn Gregory, "Shining Path, Tupac Amaru (Peru, leftists)," *Council on Foreign Relations*, August 27, 2009, <http://www.cfr.org/terrorism/shining-path-tupac-amaru-peru-leftists/p9276> (accessed November 28, 2010)

are still present and in 2008 alone they executed 64 attacks, killing police, military and civilians.

The Tamil Tigers (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam)

The Tamil Tigers or Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have been conducting an insurgency in Sri Lanka since 1948. This insurgency presents an interesting case study because nearly all the leadership within the Tamil movement was recently eliminated. The government's approach highlights three key elements of classic counterinsurgency theory: adherence to the rule of law, securing the population and garnering their support, and understanding and addressing the underlying causes of the insurgency. The actions the Sri Lankan government takes to address these elements will likely determine the final outcome of this insurgency.

The History

Sri Lanka is a small island off the southern coast of India. Tensions in Sri Lanka date back to when Sri Lanka became independent in 1948.²⁸ The Tamil people are a religious and ethnic minority in Sri Lanka and they were originally brought to the country by the British as laborers. After independence, the native Sinhalese majority resented the Tamil people for what they considered preferential treatment while under British rule.²⁹ In 1970 the seeds of insurgency sprang forth when the Sinhalese government limited minority access to universities. In 1976 the LTTE was formed and then in 1983, as a

²⁸ "Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam," *MilitaryPeriscope.Com*, <http://apps.militaryperiscope.com.ezproxy6.ndu.edu/Terrorism/ShowGroup.aspx?group=169> (accessed November 18, 2010).

²⁹ *Ibid.*

result of years of continued marginalization and disenfranchisement, violence broke out and the insurgency became fully developed.³⁰

The Tamil Tigers were founded by Velupillai Prabhakaran. He led the insurgents until May of 2009, when he was killed in a government offensive along with nearly all of the senior military leadership of the LTTE. At the height of its membership in 2009, the organization was estimated to have between 7,000 and 15,000 armed combatants.³¹ The Tamil Tiger organization was hierarchical, with Prabhakaran at the strategic apex.

Besides an extremely hierarchical military wing, the LTTE had a political wing responsible for local governance. Included in the political wing was an international secretariat responsible for “ensuring the smooth running of the LTTE global network.”³²

The military wing was extremely robust, broken not only into guerilla forces, but also containing wings for research and development, naval operations, air operations and arms procurement.³³ The organization was also unique in that it evolved into a nearly autonomous state within Sri Lanka. The Tamil people saw themselves in one of “two co-habiting States, one de jure and the other de facto, which should enjoy equal status in the

³⁰ "Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)," *IHS Jane's: Defence & Security Intelligence & Analysis*, IHS (Global) Limited, August 31, 2010, http://jtic.janes.com.ezproxy6.ndu.edu/JDIC/JTIC/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/binder/jwit/jwit0278.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=&backPath=http://jtic.janes.com.ezproxy6.ndu.edu/JDIC/JTIC/search&Prod_Name=&activeNav=/JDIC/JTIC (accessed October 11, 2010).

³¹ Preeti Bhattacharji, "Liberation tigers of Tamil Eelam (aka Tamil Tigers) (Sir Lanka, seperatists)," *Council on Foreign Relations*, May 20, 2009, http://www.cfr.org/publication/9242/liberation_tigers_of_tamil_eelam_aka_tamil_tigers_sri_lanka_separatists.html (accessed November 18, 2010).

³² Peter Chalk, "Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam's (LTTE) International Organization and Operations - A Preliminary Analysis," *Federation of American Scientists*, March 17, 2000, <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/com77e.htm> (accessed December 3, 2010).

³³ "Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)," *IHS Jane's: Defence & Security Intelligence & Analysis*.

eyes of the international community.”³⁴ The LTTE is also one of the few insurgent forces ever able to accomplish assassinations of government leaders. Prabhakaran himself “personally vetted” every new member of the suicide arm of the LTTE; the Black Tigers.³⁵ The president of Sri Lanka and the Prime Minister of India, among others were assassinated by members of the LTTE.

In 1987, India brokered the Indo-Sri Lankan peace accord, but failed to include the Tamil Tigers in the negotiations. The accord resulted in the deployment of nearly 100,000 Indian peace keeping troops to Sri Lanka. The LTTE initially adhered to a cease-fire, but after three months the insurgents declared war on the peacekeeping force. The Indians soon withdrew from Sri Lanka after suffering heavy casualties.

In November of 2005, Mahinda Rajapakse was elected president vowing to “crush the LTTE.”³⁶ The new administration embarked on a renewed brutal campaign to eradicate the Tamil insurgency. In May of 2009 the government was successful in military operations against the Tamil Tigers, destroying the last resistance, killing its top tier of leadership, and securing the surrender of the remaining Tamils.

Leadership and other Variables

The defeat of the Tamil Tigers is of growing interest because it is the most modern example of a government *defeating* an insurgency, therefore the insurgency is now being studied and scrutinized to understand if the actions of the Sri Lankan

³⁴ Raman, B., "Taming the Tamil Tiger," *Southeast Asia Analysis Group*, December 6, 2003. <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers8%5Cpaper714.html> (accessed February 12, 2011).

³⁵ "A History of the Tamil Tigers," *Al Jazeera*, April 28, 2009, <http://english.aljazeera.net/focus/2008/11/2008112019115851343.html> (accessed November 21, 2010).

³⁶ Neil A. Smith, "Understanding Sri Lanka's Defeat of the Tamil Tigers," *Joint Force Quarterly*, no.59, (4th quarter, 2010): 42.

government should be used as a model for modern counterinsurgency.³⁷ In contrast to the other case studies, the Tamil Tigers slowly moved away from the guerilla tactics common to insurgents. As the Tamil Tigers gained greater control of their territory they became more of an organized conventional force. Eventually, the LTTE became so powerful militarily, that it could govern and function as a sovereign state, raising and maintaining land, naval and air forces of higher quality than the Sri Lankan government.

The Sri Lankan government chose to address the insurgency solely with a military approach, despite clear overtures by the LTTE for legitimate political integration and resolution.³⁸ Government forces conducted a merciless campaign that showed little or no regard for the rule of law. The military “attracted widespread criticism for its alleged human rights abuses” being accused of “engaging in extrajudicial killings, abductions, extortion, conscription, and the use of child soldiers.”³⁹ The aftermath of this approach left an estimated 300,000 people in military run internment camps.

To date, the government has been indifferent in its efforts to return these displaced citizens to their homes.⁴⁰

The organizational model of the LTTE was borrowed from the communist insurgencies of the 20th century. It was hierarchical and the strategic apex was located with Prabhakaran and the Central Governing Committee. Not only was he in charge of the political organization, he was also the Commanding General of the military wing.

³⁷ Smith, “Understanding Sri Lanka’s Defeat of the Tamil Tigers,” 40-44.

³⁸ Ibid., 41.

³⁹ Bhattacharji, "Liberation tigers of Tamil Eelam (aka Tamil Tigers) (Sri Lanka, separatists),".

⁴⁰ "Sri Lanka: A Bitter Peace," *Crisisgroup.org*, January 11, 2010, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-asia/sri-lanka/B099-sri-lanka-a-bitter-peace.aspx> (accessed December 3, 2010).

The elimination of not only Prabhakaran, but also nearly all of the central committee was a crushing defeat and a crippling loss at the strategic apex. This void has yet to be filled.

In this case, the removal of the strategic apex has appeared to have been successful in defeating the Tamil movement, but once again, two factors suggest that the insurgency could re-emerge. The Tamil insurgency is well established and has been viable for years and research has shown that an insurgency of this age is not likely to be destroyed by leadership removal alone. The most telling factor is the government's refusal to address the grievances of the Tamils. After the strategic defeat of LTTE forces, the government promised reforms but has failed to deliver on them. "Tamils remain angry at the lack of accounting or justice for the thousands of civilians killed in the final months of the war. Most of the million-strong minority is still committed to a separate state and many would be willing to support renewed violence."⁴¹ The government has been criticized for its indifferent efforts to resettle displaced civilians, adding to the frustrations of an already marginalized population. Compounding the situation is the slow manner that the justice system is dealing with those detained during the conflict, only putting a limited number on trial and holding the others indefinitely.⁴²

The government's military success immediately prompted declarations of victory, but the LTTE organization has already begun to rebound from the loss.⁴³ Even after its

⁴¹ "Sri Lanka: A Bitter Peace,"

⁴² Karon Snowdon, "Sri Lanka to free most Tamil Tigers," *ABC News*, December 9, 2009, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/12/09/2766990.htm> (accessed December 3, 2010).

⁴³ "Sri Lanka declares victory as LTTE Chief is Killed," *IHS Jane's: Defence & Security Intelligence & Analysis*, IHS (Global) Limited, May 18, 2009, http://jtic.janes.com.ezproxy6.ndu.edu/JDIC/JTIC/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/mags/iwr/history/iwr2009/iv16n095f.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=Sri%20Lanka%20declares%20victory%20as%20LTTE%20Chief%20is%20Killed&backPath=http://jtic.janes.com.ezproxy6.ndu.edu/JDIC/JTIC/search&Prod_Name=&activeNav=/JDIC/JTIC (accessed October 11, 2010)

military defeat, it has been assessed that the Tamil's "international apparatus is still functioning."⁴⁴ As one of the most globalized of active insurgencies, with financial support located throughout the world, the Tamil's support structure remains in place.⁴⁵ Recently the Tamil organization posted on its web page that "they have formed a 'transnational government' to strengthen their Tamil diaspora and 'to achieve the goal of independence and sovereignty . . . in the home country and to meet the international challenges internationally.'"⁴⁶ Unless the Sri Lankan government addresses the underlying causes of the insurgency, new leaders will rise up and assert themselves, capitalizing on an unstable situation and reviving the insurgency.

The loss of key LTTE leaders certainly had a dramatic effect on the movement's ability to recover and respond to the government's military offensive effectively. However, the manner in which the government achieved the victory will likely ensure that the movement will continue once it has had time to regroup and rebuild. In this case, removing the leadership has had positive, but perhaps only short term effects. Without understanding, acknowledging, and then addressing the grievances of the Tamil population, the insurgency will likely rebuild itself.

⁴⁴ "Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)," *IHS Jane's: Defence & Security Intelligence & Analysis*.

⁴⁵ "Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam,"

⁴⁶ "Tamil issue a big problem for Sri Lanka," *UPI Emerging Threats, International Security and Counter Terrorism Reference Center*, June 23, 2009, [Http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy6.ndu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=tsh&AN=4U7Y3992366766&site=isc-live](http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy6.ndu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=tsh&AN=4U7Y3992366766&site=isc-live) (accessed November 18, 2010).

Case Study Lessons

Leadership in an insurgency is a difficult element to assess, although it can have a dramatic effect, rarely does leadership removal result in the complete collapse of the organization in the long term. In the first case study, the organizational structure of the Huks was not only hierarchical, but networked into regions. It would have been difficult for any one leader to be the strategic apex for the entire organization, and despite Taruc's prominence in the overall organization, the movement continued to function without him. It is more likely that two other factors contributed more to the defeat of the Huk insurgency than the removal of Taruc. The first being the internal fragmentation of the movement as it struggled to apply an atheist communist ideology on a population that was largely resistant. The second was the two-pronged approach the government took to attacking the insurgency. Magsaysay not only went after the insurgents with a professionalized military that was reformed to fight the type of war it faced, but he also attacked the grievances with land reform policies. Overall his decision to adopt this approach may have been the key to the success of the counterinsurgency effort. Eventually the population favored the government and the insurgents lost support. In this case the leader was removed, and the insurgency failed, but the failure was not likely a result of his removal.

In the second case study, the organization was once again a highly hierarchical one, but the mid-level leadership was more diffused. The strategic apex resided with Abimael Guzmán. In this type of organizational structure, contemporary counterinsurgency doctrine would suggest that the organization should collapse if Guzmán was removed. However, after Guzmán's capture, the organization was crippled,

and it eventually split into two competing organizations. The leadership void caused by the loss of Guzmán was filled by mid-level leaders, causing the movement to fracture, but ultimately allowing it to survive.

The Peruvian military forces conducting operations in the *Indio* countryside failed to respect the rule of law and the government also failed to acknowledge or address the underlying grievances of the population, allowing the insurgency remain active. In Peru, the insurgency continues as two factions, not as ideologically focused and now more involved in narco-criminal activities, but with effective, diffused organizational structures and new leaders. In this case study, the organizational structure was not as critical as the actions of the government, while the strength and resiliency of the organization appears to lie in the age and purpose of the movement.

In the last case study, the final disposition is yet to be determined. The case of the LTTE appears to support the idea that a hierarchical organizational structure is the most vulnerable to leadership removal, but this conclusion should be approached with caution. The circumstances here are unique. Rarely will an insurgency lose so much of the upper level of its leadership at one time. The fact that the Tamils evolved to a largely conventional force took them from a clandestine insurgent organization to a shadow government. The conflict in Sri Lanka ultimately became a war between two conventional forces. When the strategic apex was completely eliminated, along with all senior and mid-level leaders only low-level leaders were left to fill the void.

Despite the advantage gained by eliminating so much of the Tamil organization, the government's approach fell short as it failed to consider the support of the population for the insurgency. The one-sided approach, utilizing only military force to combat the

insurgency showed the government's disregard for the underlying grievances of the Tamil minority. Even in the aftermath of an assured victory, the government has done a poor job in reintegrating the population. Instead, its actions appear to be further alienating the segment of the population that supported the insurgency. Because the LTTE was only recently *defeated*, it is yet to be seen if the organization is actually defeated or will it rebuild and renew the fight. Analysis of the organizational structure and the underlying causes of the insurgency indicate a likely resurgence under new leaders.

In this case study, analysis of the organizational structure suggested that it would be vulnerable to leadership removal, but the age of the organization also predicts a contradicting result. The research findings suggest that the LTTE will re-emerge. In addition, based on the existence of strong international structures and support coupled with recent LTTE rhetoric, it appears that leadership removal in this case will only result in a short term defeat of the organization. For the Sri Lankan government to succeed in the long term it will be forced to address the grievances of the marginalized population.

As seen in the three case studies, a lack of appreciation for the underlying causes of an insurgency can be devastating to any success gained by leadership removal. This conclusion is borne out by Graham Turbiville in his monograph, *Hunting Leadership Targets in Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorist Operations: Selected Perspectives and Experience*. He noted that the effect of leadership removal "often has not translated into more than transitory accomplishment unless integrated into an overall and effective

counterinsurgency and counterterrorist strategy and the political and popular will to support it.”⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Graham Hall Turbiville, *Hunting Leadership Targets in Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorist Operations: Selected Perspectives and Experience*, JSOU report 07-6, (Hurlburt Field: FL: JSOU Press, 2007), 76.

CONCLUSION

Strategist Steven Metz wrote that: “an insurgency is born when a governing power fails to address social or regional polarization, sectarianism, endemic corruption, crime, various forms of radicalism, or rising expectations.”¹ This basic understanding of insurgency is paramount when developing effective counterinsurgency strategies. In the past decades, U.S. military doctrine and insurgency literature has misapplied current conventional planning constructs to insurgency. This has led planners and policy makers to focus on removing insurgent leadership, making it the centerpiece when combating an insurgency. This thesis proves that leadership removal rarely achieves the intended results and that a strategy focusing on leadership removal alone while ignoring the classical counterinsurgency precepts is wasteful and ineffective.

Insurgency has evolved significantly in the last 10 years, focusing less on insular conflicts within a single country’s borders to encompassing the global community. The rise of the information age has had two broad effects on the execution of insurgencies. The first is that it is now easier to sustain an insurgency by no longer requiring safe havens for the insurgents. Global information sharing allows insurgents to communicate, share ideas, transfer funds, and provide mutual support to each other without being in close proximity. Secondly, it has lessened the requirements for leadership. Insurgencies in the 21st century are no longer dependant on local charismatic leaders when they can be technologically networked in the information age. The ease of information flow allows a diffused organizational structure which does not rely on a single entity or leader to

¹ Metz, Steven, "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq," *The Washington Quarterly*, (Winter 2003-2004): 25-36.

provide strategic direction. In this type of organization it is difficult to identify exactly who controls the direction of the organization, allowing the strategic apex to be indistinct and less vulnerable.

While insurgency has evolved, counterinsurgency theory has been forced to evolve, but it appears to be doing so at a slower rate. When the U.S. found itself in dire need of counterinsurgency doctrine in the early 21st century, it rediscovered the concepts of classic theorists like Kitson, Thompson, and Galula. Current doctrine is largely the reapplication of these concepts such as gaining the support of the population, keeping the population safe, upholding the rule of law, and understanding that counterinsurgency needs to address not only the military aspects, but the political as well. Unfortunately, included within these enduring concepts was an idea that these theorists never advocated; the idea that leadership is critical to an insurgency and that removing leadership should be a key element in a counterinsurgency campaign.

The idea of leadership removal or the criticality of leadership in an insurgency can be traced to the influences of Strange and Warden, who offered processes for analyzing and prioritizing resources within a conventional campaign, focusing on key weaknesses of the enemy. These processes led planners and doctrine writers to elevate leadership's role in an insurgency. While the theories Warden and Strange may be applicable to conventional conflicts, they do not translate well into insurgency warfare.

The evolution of insurgencies over the last decade presents a complex and dynamic new challenge for planners. Insurgencies have evolved and the diffused networks they often employ to function do not lend themselves to conventional force based leadership removal strategies. Even those insurgencies that do employ a

hierarchical structure have typically been active for a long period of time. The research shows that these organizations actually become less affected by the loss of a leader the longer they are active. Examinations of insurgencies as illustrated within the thesis demonstrate that leadership removal is rarely effective when used as a counterinsurgency strategy. Moreover, the research clearly shows that removing insurgent leadership will likely not achieve any significant long-term result.

The key to understanding insurgency is the organizational structure, the age and the ideology, all of which can provide critical insights into the approach necessary to destroy the insurgency. Mintzberg's definition of the strategic apex assists planners to understand insurgent leadership and frame questions about whether to pursue a strategy involving leadership removal. The case studies in this thesis have shown that while eliminating a strategic apex can be successful to some degree, leadership removal as a focus of effort to eliminate an insurgency is of questionable utility.

The insurgencies illustrated in the three case studies are quite varied in their individual attributes. The Huks had a charismatic leader in Luis Taruc. At one time Taruc was the strategic apex of the organization but as the insurgency continued, power in the organization became diffused and divided. At the same time, the government adopted a counterinsurgency approach using political and military options with a full understanding of the will of the people, the safety of the population and the need to respect the rule of law. In this case, when Taruc surrendered, the organization continued without him, but was eventually defeated, not because of his loss, but because of the comprehensive efforts of the government.

Abimael Guzmán was the charismatic founder and leader of the Shining Path. His organization existed with a highly hierarchical structure, but shared power among local leaders. While it can be argued that the capture of Guzmán defeated the Shining Path, clearly the evidence shows otherwise. In this instance, the government captured the strategic apex of the Shining Path, but mid-level leaders stepped up to fill the void, splintering the organization in two. Despite the fact that the original organization was defeated, the remnants still had grievances that had not been addressed and two factions quickly picked up the cause. In this case the governments disregard for the classic tenets of counterinsurgency theory allowed the movement to remerge.

Velupillai Prabhakaran of the LTTE led a very hierarchical organizational structure. The removal of Prabhakaran at the strategic apex occurred along with most of his leaders in the hierarchy. What makes this case unique is that the Tamil Tigers had evolved into a nearly autonomous state and because of its hierarchical structure, it would be expected that this organization would quickly collapse. But two factors clearly suggest otherwise. First the age of the organization suggests that it is less likely to remain defeated, and it has a well-established global network. Secondly, based on the belief that the insurgent's grievances are more important in sustaining an insurgency than the leadership, it is likely that this insurgency is not defeated, but will likely resurface. Indications are that the merciless counterinsurgency campaign of the Sri Lankan government fell short in ending the insurgency in the long run. The government's failure to understand the grievances of the Tamil people, its disregard for the rule of law and its indifference to the post war conditions that serve to increase the suffering of the people, indicates that the insurgency can return.

On the surface, it is easy to expect that eliminating a leader would end a rebellion, but that thought process is too simplistic and formulistic and can be dangerous to counterinsurgency planning efforts. As counterinsurgency campaigns become the norm in the 21st century, it is critical that military planners understand that the same processes or models they use for conventional warfare may not be as useful in analyzing insurgencies. A predisposition to leadership removal strategies must be actively countered and planners must take the time and energy to fully analyze insurgency organizations in order to settle on a strategy with the best likelihood of success. In all cases a strategy must take into account the classical counterinsurgency precepts and above all address the underlying cause or grievance of the insurgents to achieve success.

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