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## All Available Tools: Parallel Governance and Modern Insurgencies

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*Political power is the central issue in insurgencies and counterinsurgencies; each side aims to get the people to accept its governance or authority as legitimate. Insurgents use all available tools—political (including diplomatic), informational (including appeals to religious, ethnic, or ideological beliefs), military, and economic—to overthrow the existing authority.*

-FM 3-24 "Counterinsurgency"

The ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq have energized a vibrant discussion of counterinsurgency (COIN) that will influence American military doctrine and strategy for years to come. A substantial portion of this dialogue has focused on the conduct of stability operations encompassing the provision of security to local populations, the facilitation of political development, resource allocation, and the training of indigenous forces. Given its self-inflicted absence from America's post-Vietnam strategic discussion, the revitalization of this particular strain of COIN theory is long-overdue.<sup>1</sup> However, recent efforts designed to refine COIN practices within the American military have not been complimented by a commensurate initiative that seeks to better describe our "competition" – namely, the methods, strategies, and structures the enemy utilizes to attract or transform local populations in the furtherance of their political and military goals. This is a critical oversight. Absent a comprehensive and precise understanding of insurgent efforts to garner influence within the population, American counterinsurgency strategy will remain incomplete, regardless of the talent and experience of its authors.

This article will not attempt to thoroughly describe parallel governance systems, frequently referred to as "shadow governments" operating today. Instead, it is simply intended to galvanize interest in the study of the population control measures of our current enemies, primarily Islamic extremists operating in Iraq and Afghanistan. Although some suggest these groups have failed to realize the importance of building the shadow government structures that attracted extensive American attention during the Cold War, this article casts some doubt on that proposition. Unfortunately, given the often covert nature of these activities and the surprising lack of institutional interest in them, my data points will raise more questions than answers. Rather than dissuading study, however, the "hard-target" nature of research into parallel governance should serve as a challenge to irregular warfare analysts. Additionally, the key role that shadow governments have historically played, as well as the critical roles they

assume in our current battles with irregular actors, should further motivate research. We cannot claim lack of precedent as an excuse: throughout the Cold War, American military analysts as well as academics were directly engaged in the study of insurgent population control, giving rise to a fascinating body of research that aided the era's COIN practitioners.

### **Worth Remembering**

*The briefings in official [Philippine] circles left me unsatisfied. They failed to answer some pertinent questions. What caused a Huk youngster to kill his brother Filipino in the government ranks? What would make him stop doing this?...Even more germane, why were so many citizens supporting the Huk effort to destroy a government founded under a constitution which stated that it was to be fully representative of these selfsame citizens? Coercion of these citizens by terror couldn't be the sole answer. There had to be something else.*

-Major General Edward Lansdale, "In the Midst of Wars."<sup>ii</sup>

Much of Edward Lansdale's storied efforts against communist guerrillas in the Philippines were devoted to determining what that "something else" was and then formulating tactics to counter it. Lansdale's attempts to understand the Huk's methods of population control were only one part of a broader Cold War-era initiative. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, as the American national security establishment sought to better understand communist insurgencies and their intentions towards the local population, a diverse range of researchers – military and civilian -- took up the study of parallel or "underground" government systems, of which there were a readily available supply of examples. Communist insurgencies of the era, educated by doctrine and accounts of successful "people's wars," sought to construct complex parallel government systems that used a variety of tactics to compel or attract support from the populace on behalf of the armed campaign. It was into this field of research that Dr. Andrew Molnar, a social scientist working on behalf of the Special Operations Research Office (SORO) based at American University in Washington DC, along with a team of academic researchers delved.<sup>iii</sup> Two resultant volumes, 1963's *Undergrounds in Insurgent, Revolutionary, and Resistance Warfare* and 1965's *Human Factors Considerations of Undergrounds in Insurgencies* presented concise descriptions of insurgent frameworks utilized to enact and secure political change within local populations. The thrust of the work is encapsulated brilliantly in the *Human Factors'* first page:

*The structure of an insurgent or revolutionary movement is much like an iceberg. It has a relatively small visible element (the guerrilla force) which is organized to perform overt armed operations, and a much larger clandestine, covert force (the underground). The underground carries on the vital activities of infiltration and political subversion: it establishes and operates shadow governments; and it acts as a support organization for the guerrillas.<sup>iv</sup>*

Molnar's research into insurgent undergrounds provided a foundation for future analysis that was able to leverage additional intelligence data on insurgent undergrounds operating in Vietnam and Central America. One of the more fascinating works in this genre was *Viet Cong Repression and Its Implications for the Future* written in 1970 by Dr. Stephen Hosmer, a social scientist

employed by the RAND Corporation. The work referenced thousands of captured Viet Cong documents in thoroughly describing the underground that Dr. Molnar and SORO researchers had presaged years earlier (full text is available via RAND's website [here](#)). The reams of primary source material, warehoused in RAND's Washington D.C. office, granted researchers an arsenal of new examples that attested to the validity of Dr. Molnar's descriptions of insurgent intelligence, administration, and population control mechanisms. To translate these often esoteric discussions on population control for executive audiences, no less celebrated scholar than Samuel Huntington was deputized by the Johnson administration to better gauge the success of failure of the VC's influence mechanisms. His central finding, featured in a classified 100 page report and a follow-on 1968 article in *Foreign Affairs*, communicated Dr. Huntington's fundamental rejection of the oft-pondered question who did the population support? in favor of a different paradigm, one that, in Huntington's words, focused on "the absence of an effective structure of authority" in order to better assess the loyalties of the population. Even the Viet Cong's political and security cadres, which Huntington described as "quite hierarchical," enjoyed little success in its attempts to subvert areas in which government institutions were suitably mature.<sup>v</sup>

## Old News?

Although fascinating, the aforementioned works are undeniably dated. As has previously been noted, the large scale withdrawal of American combat forces and the collapse of the Saigon government also collapsed the American military's interest in counterinsurgency and, with it, detailed work on parallel government structures. Some have argued that the past is exactly where such studies belong. Today's insurgents, some suggest, eschew population control – or at least its classical application – in favor of simple coercion. Noted strategic studies expert Dr. Steven Metz, in his thought-provoking 2007 monograph "Rethinking Insurgency," argues that military officers are overly reliant on historical studies to understand contemporary insurgencies, a reliance he deems a "serious flaw." Instead of studying insurgencies for which securing public support was the central goal, American strategists should realize that insurgency has changed drastically. In Dr. Metz's estimation, modern insurgencies require less of a "mass base" leading them to ignore "carrots" – such as services or alternate institutions -- in favor of brute force to secure the acquiescence of the population.<sup>vi</sup> Other notable researchers such as Dr. John Arquilla have argued for radical new interpretations of modern insurgent and terrorist groups, usually focusing on the "networked" offensive activities rather than their efforts to control populations.<sup>vii</sup>

Are modern insurgencies -- particularly Al Qa'ida (AQ) and its affiliated organizations -- disinterested in securing population centers through parallel governance? Many of AQ's formative theological tracts seem to suggest as much. As author Lawrence Wright posits in his 2007 book *The Looming Tower*, Osama Bin Laden's initial statements concerning his designs on a "liberated" Arabian peninsula were so spacious as to render them irrelevant, leading Wright to state "the radical Islamic movement has never had a clear idea of governing, or even much interest in it..."<sup>viii</sup> Leading strategists linked to AQ, such as Abu Musab al-Suri, have historically argued for the formation of cellular networks that could conduct terrorist attacks independent of each other -- purely offensive strategies that betray little interest in the formation of shadow governments.<sup>ix</sup>

This ignorance may only be temporary, betraying a lack of experience rather than a lack of interest. From both the Afghanistan and Iraq theaters, there is a growing body of evidence to suggest that our dismissal of the population control capabilities of modern insurgencies was premature. In the theoretical realm, other writers affiliated with AQ have begun to broach the subject of how the organization and its allies could properly manage areas Western observers would describe as "failed states," such as the tribal areas of Pakistan or Somalia. Most notable is *The Management of Savagery*, a surprisingly accessible treatise written by Abu Bakr Naji in 2004 (translation available [here](#)). In the book, Naji expounds on the importance of shaping local societies in order to realize the ultimate goal of creating an Islamic state. Too often, Naji opines, jihadists rely on violence to enact such changes. In his estimation, the movement would be better served were it to create parallel governance and education system that would aid in the control of the population. The treatise goes on to describe in some detail the structure needed to better control local communities, including judicial, security, and religious mechanisms. Such measures are necessary to avoid the population's rejection of AQ activity are a key precursor to victory in Naji's view.

The bloody reign of Al Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI) in many areas of the country appears to serve as the realization of Naji's worst fears. A large body of analysis and reporting indicates that the tribal awakenings and factional fighting between AQI and other insurgent groups came about largely in reaction to the organization's relentless campaign against its perceived enemies in the population. Indeed, as Coalition Forces moved into areas formerly held by AQI, they discovered extensive networks of jails, torture chambers, and mass graves. AQI propaganda, often containing images of executions and torture, has done much to portray a recklessly violent organization. Echoing the words of most coalition and Iraqi press releases, reporter Tom Ricks refers to the group in his latest book, *The Gamble*, as "nihilists."<sup>x</sup>

While there is no doubt that AQI's efforts to secure some measure of cooperation from the population were heavily coercive, the question should be raised: did AQI's brutality indicate a complete lack of strategy concerning population control, or does it simply indicate careless execution? AQI, or at least its senior leaders, were not ignorant of the important role played by the population in determining the success of the group's operations. This understanding is made clear in the 2005 letter between AQ second in command Dr. Ayman Zawahiri and then AQI leader Abu Musab Zarqawi. After identifying the failure of the Taliban to attract broader support for its rule as the prime factor for its downfall, Zawahiri writes:

*Therefore, I stress again to you and to all your brothers the need to direct the political action equally with the military action, by the alliance, cooperation and gathering of all leaders of opinion and influence in the Iraqi arena. I can't define for you a specific means of action. You are more knowledgeable about the field conditions. But you and your brothers must strive to have around you circles of support, assistance, and cooperation, and through them, to advance until you become a consensus, entity, organization, or association that represents all the honorable people and the loyal folks in Iraq. I repeat the warning against separating from the masses, whatever the danger.<sup>xi</sup>*

Of course, such a statement only signals intent, not implementation. To determine AQI's success or failure in heeding Zawahiri's caution, we should first turn to AQI's own records, often the best source for insights into the group's activities. One collection from Anbar Province and reviewed by CNN correspondent Michael Ware includes court verdicts, enemy lists, and the names of prisoners being held – all classic methods of insurgent population control.<sup>xii</sup> In other efforts, such as the management of its foreign fighter cadre, AQI displayed a capacity to organize and track hundreds of people, as well as tens of thousands of dollars; such a capability could have presumably been tasked to managing AQI activity with regard to the general population.<sup>xiii</sup> This degree of structure recently led two RAND researchers to remark that the picture of AQI as decentralized and cellular was in fact incorrect, stating that AQI saw itself as "as a formal organization, with a chain of command, that develops and seeks to implement strategic goals," to include, presumably, control over population centers.<sup>xiv</sup> Another indication of organized parallel governance activity is provided by Captain James Few. Referenced in Mr. Rick's new book – ironically, on the same page in which the term "nihilist" is invoked – Captain Few described AQI's phased plan to take over an Iraqi town, an operation that utilized "clandestine organization, psychological preparation of the people, expansion of control, consolidation of power."<sup>xv</sup>

Considering that the definition of nihilism is "total and absolute destructiveness," Ricks' dismissive description -- echoing the vast majority of news reporting and opinion on AQI -- seems to diverge from Captain Few's first-hand account of a methodical and organized strategy to control the population. With indicators increasingly describing AQI's campaign as hierarchical, organized, and bureaucratic -- is it too much of a leap to suggest that its effort to influence and control Iraq's Sunnis were similarly well organized? Given the examples of Molnar, in which the actual physical application of violence by insurgents was only one aspect of the macro-strategy aimed at developing parallel governance, one can easily relate to General Lansdale's suspicion that he was missing "something else." Finally, it is worth noting that in 2006 AQI sought to transform the territory it held into the "Islamic State of Iraq." While widely (and probably accurately) derided as a propaganda tactic, it is nonetheless notable that AQI leaders were wedded to the idea of creating a state construct with recognized and populated "ministries." The effort may signal the end to AQ's disinterest in parallel governance strategies.

The nature and extent of the population control methods are somewhat clearer with regard to the Taliban, owing to the group's past as a government and, perhaps, its greater appreciation for community support. Recent news reports have provided evidence for the growth, in both scope and sophistication, of the Taliban's parallel governance system. An *Associated Press* article written in December 2008 assesses the Taliban shadow government in substantial detail, describing a range of mechanisms that the Taliban utilizes, including taxation, courts, and military drafts. Gilles Dorronsoro, a visiting scholar at the Carnegie Endowment, wrote recently that the Taliban shadow government – including a parallel judicial system -- was operating effectively within Logar Province, which borders Kabul.<sup>xvi</sup> Taliban networks in Pakistan are pursuing similar strategies of population control: a January 2009 report featured in *The New York Times* describes the group's use of radio transmissions to charge residents of Swat Province with various crimes and identify targets of Taliban soldiers, among other tactics designed to cow and manipulate the populace.<sup>xvii</sup> It is undoubtedly this level of control over the inhabitants of the area that led Islamabad to tacitly admit defeat and agree to allow the Taliban's shadow

governmental structure to consolidate its presence. While it may be tempting to denigrate some of these tactics as purely coercive and reflexive, such a characterization does not take into account the level of sophistication and bureaucracy required to manifest taxation, judiciaries, and other pseudo-government entities. As Molnar suggested, courts and tax collectors are only the most overt manifestation of a deeper, sophisticated infrastructure that operates largely in secret.

News reports may have granted American analysts better insights into the Taliban's population control measures, but clarity does not necessarily lead to greater awareness. The aforementioned AP article carries with it a statement from NATO commander in Afghanistan General David McKiernan, who admits to the existence of shadow governments but also states "they [the Taliban] certainly do not bring with them any incentives to a community, any socio-economic programs, any perks, if you will..."<sup>xviii</sup> This, unfortunately, is beside the point: as Huntington pointed out, public acceptance is a poor measure for the strength of parallel government systems -- public *adherence* is the key metric. Take, for instance, the Taliban's recent destruction of music shops in Pakistan and its targeting of a local comedian. Although presumably unpopular in Western parlance, the lack of any effective governing structure renders public perception irrelevant as long as the shadow government is allowed to operate in an unfettered manner.<sup>xix</sup>

## Conclusion

Although publicly available evidence testifying to the existence of parallel government in both Iraq and Afghanistan is increasingly accessible, it remains difficult for Western observers to truly understand it. Our images of the Taliban, AQ, and AQI remain heavily influenced by the beheadings and executions conducted before mass audiences, actions that convey an accessible image of aimless savagery. Their graphic nature may also encourage us to belittle the seriousness of their intent and their role within the larger insurgent strategy. The ultimate failure of AQI's ultra-aggressive tactics in Iraq bolsters this misperception. Finally, our inability to properly grasp and study insurgent governance systems may also be limited by its perceived unimportance, at least when compared to more conventional information requirements. In the words of one soldier quoted in Rick's *The Gamble*, the rampant murders, torture, and execution of hundreds of Iraqi civilians -- many conducted by AQI -- were historically regarded as "background noise" and of secondary importance.

As the overall COIN effort expands in Afghanistan, we should not be so arrogant as to believe that we are the only entity learning from success and failure in Iraq. AQ and Taliban leaders, already cognizant of the importance of parallel government and popular support, will undoubtedly view efforts such as "the Awakening" and "Sons of Iraq" as a key indicator of future US strategy. As US leaders theorize on methods designed to replicate successful initiatives that energized popular anti-AQI resistance, we must consider the capacity of the enemy to undermine such efforts. The reinforcement of both the doctrinal and practical underpinnings of shadow government is an expected response.

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<sup>i</sup> Colin Kahn, "COIN of the Realm: Is There a Future for Counterinsurgency?" *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2007

<sup>ii</sup> Edward Lansdale, *In the Midst of Wars* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1991), 24.

<sup>iii</sup> SORO altered its name to the Center for Research in Social Systems (CRESS) in the wake of a scandal concerning their anthropological work on Chilean society. For more information, reference: Montgomery McFate, "Anthropology and Counterinsurgency: The Strange Story of their Curious Relationship", *Military Review*, [http://www.army.mil/professionalwriting/volumes/volume3/august\\_2005/7\\_05\\_2.html](http://www.army.mil/professionalwriting/volumes/volume3/august_2005/7_05_2.html).

<sup>iv</sup> Molnar, Andrew; Jerry Tinker, John Lenoir; *Human Factors Considerations of Undergrounds in Insurgencies*. Washington DC: Special Operations Research Office, American University, 1965.

<sup>v</sup> Robert Kaplan "Looking the World in the Eye," *The Atlantic*, December 2001.

<sup>vi</sup> Steven Metz, *Rethinking Insurgency* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2007), 14.

<sup>vii</sup> See John Arquilla, *Networks and Netwars: the future of terror, crime, and militancy* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2001).

<sup>viii</sup> Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower* (Knopf: New York, 2007), 246.

<sup>ix</sup> Shane Drennan, "Fourth Generation Warfare and the International Jihad," *Jane's International Security*, September 26, 2006.

<sup>x</sup> Thomas Ricks, *The Gamble* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009), 48.

<sup>xi</sup> ODNI News release, Number 2-05, 11 October 2005, available at [http://www.fas.org/irp/news/2005/10/letter\\_in\\_english.pdf](http://www.fas.org/irp/news/2005/10/letter_in_english.pdf).

<sup>xii</sup> Michael Ware, "Papers Give Peak Inside Al Qaeda in Iraq," *CNN.com*, June 11, 2008

<sup>xiii</sup> Bergen, Peter; Felter, Joseph; Brown, Vahid; Shapiro, Jacob, "Bombers, Bank Accounts, and Bleedout," (2007), Combating Terrorism Center at West Point. Available at [http://ctc.usma.edu/harmony/pdf/Sinjar\\_2\\_July\\_23.pdf](http://ctc.usma.edu/harmony/pdf/Sinjar_2_July_23.pdf)

<sup>xiv</sup> Benjamin Bahney and Renny McPherson, "Know your Islamic extremist enemy," *The Washington Times*, November 8, 2008

<sup>xv</sup> James Few, "The Break Point: AQIZ Establishes the ISI in Zaganayah," *Small Wars Journal*, April 17, 2008.

<sup>xvi</sup> Gilles Dorransoro, "Wise Up to Taliban's Smart Politics," *Realclearworld.com*, March 21, 2009.

<sup>xvii</sup> Richard Opiel, "In Pakistan, Radio Amplifies Terror of Taliban," *The New York Times*, January 29, 2009

<sup>xviii</sup> *Associated Press*, "Taliban's power growing on Kabul's doorstep," 27 December 2008

<sup>xix</sup> Zeeshan Heider, "Militants killing laughter and music in Pakistan region," *Reuters*, February 8, 2009.