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Six Reasons Insurgencies Lose: A Contrarian View

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The American conventional wisdom is of the all-powerful, all-knowing, invincible insurgent. Insurgencies always win; it is pointless to resist them. The archetype is the black pajama-clad Vietcong guerrilla triumphing over supposed American imperialism in Vietnam. The truth, in the case of Vietnam, as with insurgencies in general, is much different.

Insurgencies generally lose, not win. The Dupuy Institute, using a database for an ongoing research project that includes 63 post-World War II insurgencies, found that the insurgents only win 41% of the time.¹

Insurgencies do win, and most of the writing and talking about insurgencies (which is often very good) focuses on what insurgencies do to win, or how to conduct an effective counterinsurgency. More often, insurgencies lose, and sometimes their defeats are a result of the inherent weaknesses of insurgencies, or of their own actions. There are six critical reasons why insurgencies lose, curses brought down upon their own houses, and not induced by counterinsurgent forces. But first, we need to lay the groundwork for our discussion.

Defining the Terms

‘Insurgency’ is generally defined as a struggle between a government and a group or groups not possessing controlling political power that use violent and non-violent methods in pursuit of a particular political objective such as overthrowing the government or breaking away and establishing an independent state. On rare occasions, they fight to keep things from changing. Certain past violent Protestant groups in Northern Ireland are sometimes held up as examples of this.

What we generally term ‘guerrilla warfare’ and ‘terrorism’ are the primary violence tools insurgent groups use to get what they want. ‘Terrorism’ is generally defined as violence or the threat of violence intended for the coercion of civilians (we will ignore the obvious contentious nature of the definition for the sake of argument). ‘Guerrilla warfare’ is generally acts of armed violence against an opponent usually mounted in a manner classified as ‘irregular’ in comparison

¹ http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2007-05-08-insurgency-report_N.htm, accessed 15 May 2009.

to conventional warfare, and often performed by a non-state or extra-state actor. ‘Guerrilla’ is commonly used interchangeably with ‘insurgent.’²

Why then do insurgencies lose?

1. Insurgencies are weak in comparison to their opponents.

Insurgencies are especially vulnerable when they begin they use terrorism and guerrilla warfare because they are too weak to go toe-to-toe with their opponents. Walter Laqueur writes: ‘failing the element of surprise and sufficient arms and ammunition, an insurrection cannot succeed.’ They have not built their support or bases and are still learning to fight.³ States usually have more money, more people, better technology, and more stuff. If they utilize these things properly, they have a good chance of winning. Insurgencies generally start with fewer forces than their opponents and have far less military equipment; what they do have is often poor. In the later quarter of the nineteenth century, one of the things that enabled Europeans to suppress uprisings in their colonies was their possession of the Gatling gun, and later, modern machineguns. Today, body armor, satellites, laser guided weaponry, communications technology, etc., give conventional forces an edge. But this does not mean the insurgents lose. Technology is great, but it does not guarantee victory.

The Filipino insurgency against the United States (1899-1902) possessed very poor equipment in comparison the Americans, and the U.S. Navy’s blockade made it virtually impossible for them to import weapons. Moreover, the insurgents had very little training, whereas many of their foes had combat experience against Native Americans or in Cuba that was directly applicable to the conduct of counterinsurgency warfare.⁴

In the Second Boer War (1899-1902), the Boers proved unable to fight the British conventionally and so resorted to guerrilla warfare, which greatly wearied the British. But Britain had great strength, and one of the big reasons that the Boers lost was that they simply did not have enough men. British military action reduced their numbers even further.⁵

In 1936, an Arab revolt against Jewish immigration and British rule erupted in Palestine. The British had few troops in the area, and the insurgents quickly won control of the more rugged and inaccessible hill regions: Samaria, Galilee, and some of Judea. The insurgents were a poorly armed lot, very disorganized, and spent much of their time fighting one another. They also killed far more of their fellow Arabs than they did British citizens and Jews, combined. The British fumbled around a lot, and thought little of the organizational potential of their opponents, and were thus slow to take the rebels seriously. Soon, there were about 5,000 guerrillas. By 1937, there were probably 15,000 active insurgents, plus their village supporters.

² These definitions are derived from Robert Taber, *The War of the Flea: The Classic Study of Guerrilla Warfare*, foreword by Bard E. O’Neill (Washington: Brassey’s, 2002), viii-ix.

³ Angela Rabasa, et al, *Money in the Bank: Lessons Learned from Past Counterinsurgency (COIN) Operations* (Santa Monica: Rand, 2007), 75.

⁴ Rabasa, et al, *Money in the Bank*, 11-12.

⁵ Walter Laqueur, *Guerrilla Warfare: A Historical and Critical Study* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1998), 92.

By 1938, the rebels controlled most of Palestine, despite the fact they had very poor military equipment. The Arab population generally supported them, or stayed out of the way, which is usually good enough for an insurgency to succeed.

At this point, the British finally woke up and began taking the revolt seriously. They expanded the police and put in more troops, upping their forces to 23,000, and brought in a new commander, General Bernard Montgomery. Sound familiar? They then broke the rebellion in three months. This war, by the way, is a Who's Who of future British military leaders in World War II: Montgomery, Arthur 'Bomber' Harris, Orde Wingate, and others.⁶

Insurgencies generally lack the resources to provide infrastructure improvements that better the lives of the people, the support of whom is the main battleground in insurgency warfare. For example, in 1970, during the Dhofar rebellion (1962-1976), the Sultan of Oman realized that he could not coerce the disaffected tribes into supporting him, but, by building schools, hospitals, wells, etc., he could provide something the insurgents could not, thus convincing them to support the regime.⁷

Because the El Salvadoran insurgency of 1979-1992 depended upon arms and support from Communist allies, the collapse of the Soviet Union meant that the insurgents lost their support from Moscow, as well as Cuba and Nicaragua. This was indispensable to their survival.⁸ The insurgents also never got ground-to-air missiles, which meant they could not counter El Salvadoran airpower.⁹

Similarly, in Colombia, the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) have not generally used their drug wealth to acquire sophisticated weapons, especially surface-to-air missiles that would allow them to neutralize government air craft.¹⁰ In contrast, the Colombians are very well armed because Colombia had been one of the biggest recipients of U.S. military aide, and the largest in Latin America. The EU also supports them heavily. In 2006, the FARC probably had 12-15,000 combatants, and there were also probably 3,000 ELN (National Liberation Army) guerrillas. The Colombian military and police numbered 207,000 and 129,000 respectively.¹¹

2. *Insurgencies are fractious.*

From the outside, insurgencies sometimes look all-powerful and competent, with everyone on the same page. But this is not always the case. Insurgencies are usually ideologically or religiously driven. Where you have ideas, you have disagreement, and in insurgencies these are arguments among people who are willing to kill to get their way. This can be a problem. Often,

⁶ Laqueur, *Guerrilla War*, 186-90; Charles Townsend, 'The Defence of Palestine: Insurrection and Public Security, 1936-1939,' *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 103, No. 409 (Oct. 1988), 917, 933, 947.

⁷ John Pimlott, 'The British Army: the Dhofar Campaign, 1970-1975,' in *Armed Forces & Modern Counter-Insurgency*, Ian F.W. Beckett and John Pimlott (eds), (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 33-4.

⁸ Rabasa, et al, *Money in the Bank*, 44.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 65-6.

there is also more than one insurgent group in an area; these sometimes fight one another. In general, this dissension undermines the ability of insurgencies to win.

In 1892, the Filipino organization Katipunan started an insurgency against the Spanish. Its leaders though, spent most of their time fighting amongst themselves. Their internal rivalries culminated with Emilio Aguinaldo's 1897 assassination of the leader of Katipunan, Andrés Bonifacio. The Spanish bought-off Aguinaldo with 400,000 pesos and promises of reforms that were quickly forgotten, and packed him off to Hong Kong. When the Americans went to war with Spain in 1899, they brought Aguinaldo back to help them fight the Spanish. Aguinaldo hoped the Philippines would get their independence out of this. When this didn't happen, he went back to revolutionary work.¹²

Aguinaldo and his forces tried conventional warfare at first, but the U.S. troops were too good for the insurgents to fight conventionally. The Filipinos turned to guerrilla war, their revolt being focused on the largest island, Luzon. But the infighting continued. There were various factions within the guerrilla movement, each with goals of their own.¹³ Aguinaldo even had one of his generals, Antonio Luna, assassinated.¹⁴ The leaders of the Filipino Huk rebellion (1946-1954) were disputatious from the first day of their revolt.¹⁵

The Greek Civil War and insurgency (1944-1949) was rooted in resistance to Nazi occupation. Four primary factions arose in Greece, the Communists (ELAS) being the most powerful. During the war, these groups were generally more concerned with fighting one another than the occupiers. The Communists, in particular, realized that the real struggle for control of the country would occur after the war. They fought the Germans more than their supposed brothers in arms, but also spent a lot of time trying to destroy the rival resistance organizations, taking prisoner the head of 'National Band', and killing the leader of EKKA (National and Social Liberation).¹⁶

Latin American guerrilla movements after the 1960s competed with one another and suffered internal splits. In Colombia, the ELN habitually terrorized its own people; leaders being murdered by their men and bloody purges were occupational hazards.¹⁷

The insurgents in El Salvador (1979-1992) were a coalition of four Communist groups that did not agree doctrinally. The leaders didn't trust one another and their arguments sometimes became violent, such as with the murder of the second in command of one faction because of a disagreement over strategy.¹⁸

The fractiousness in post-World War II African insurgent movements became almost universal. One reason was that very often these insurgent movements were tribally based. Moreover, these tribal rivalries were fueled by the Cold War contest between the Soviets and the Chinese, who

¹² Ibid., 7-8.

¹³ Ibid., x.

¹⁴ Ibid., 7-8.

¹⁵ Laqueur, *Guerrilla Warfare*, 293.

¹⁶ Ibid., 226-7.

¹⁷ Ibid., 316.

¹⁸ Rabasa, et al, *Money in the Bank*, xi, 40-4.

competed for influence among the various left-wing insurgent groups. The insurgencies invariably split into pro-Soviet and pro-Chinese wings.¹⁹

The Iraqi insurgency that erupted in 2003 has been enormously fragmented, perhaps more so than any other in history. It is more accurate to refer to it as a number of insurgencies. A Congressional Research Service report, now obsolete, lists eight different groups under just one Sunni umbrella organization. GlobalSecurity.org identified at least 30 groups at one point in 2005. Ahmed S. Hashim, in his 2006 book *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq*, identified 19 different groups and discussed their constant shifting, merging, and splitting apart.²⁰

The various groups that have fought against the U.S. or the new Iraqi government fall into five main categories: 1) Former regime elements – Baathists that want a return to power of the Baathist Party; 2) Nationalist groups that simply want the U.S. to leave, some are Sunni, some Shia; 3) Religious elements that want the U.S. out, again, some are Sunni, some Shia; 4) Al Qaeda in Iraq; and 5) Foreign fighters: most of these, but not all, are Al Qaeda (Saddam Hussein brought in a lot of such men before the beginning of the war). There is a sixth group of troublemakers as well, criminal gangs. These factions were never of one mind. Such fractiousness dissipates the strength of insurgent groups and lessens their chances of achieving their political objectives.

3. Insurgencies are leader dependent (sometimes).

Sometimes, insurgent movements fall apart if their leader or leaders are killed or captured. This is particularly true of groups dominated by one or a few key personalities. Removing the leaders seems to be most effective against groups that are driven more by the personality of the leader than by ideology. Al-Qaeda in Iraq appears to be more ideologically driven. For example, the June 2006 death in Iraq of Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi severely damaged the Al Qaeda network and supplied a lot of intelligence, and Al Qaeda Iraq had a lot of trouble putting itself back together afterwards, but this did not prove the death of the movement there.

In 1901, in the Philippines, after capturing some enemy communications, the U.S. sent in a column disguised as guerrilla reinforcements and captured Aguinaldo, the head of the Filipino insurgents. He then took an oath of loyalty to the U.S. His capture decapitated the guerrilla movement and it never got its act together afterward.

The Peruvian insurgent group Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) (1980-1992), suffered a heavy blow in 1992 with the capture of its leader, Abimael Guzmán. His successor was also captured shortly thereafter, and much of the other leadership. The group went into steady decline.

In May 2009, Sri Lankan government forces killed most the leadership of the Tamil Tigers rebels, including the group's head, Velupillai Prabhakaran. This insurgency has lasted more than 30 years and cost over 70,000 lives. The Sri Lankan government believes that this, combined

¹⁹ Laqueur, *Guerrilla War*, 310-14.

²⁰ Ahmed S. Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 170-6.

with their crushing the Tamil forces, marked their victory in the war. Time will tell if they prove correct.²¹

An argument often raised against this is that killing a leader creates a martyr. The problem with this flawed line of reasoning is that the purveyors of this canard cannot demonstrate a case in which martyrdom resulted in the achievement of the political objective the martyr sought. Historically, killing your enemies has been a pretty effective means of making sure they no longer bother you.

4. The tactics insurgents use alienate the very people they are trying to win over.

The object for which the insurgents and counterinsurgents are fighting is the people. Whoever wins over the people usually wins the war. Insurgents try to do this in various ways. Usually, it is with an idea. The Chinese communist leader Mao Zedong, the developer of modern insurgency theory, recognized the importance of giving China's peasants an intangible to fight for (communism), not just a thing. The Chinese Communists also promised a tangible, land. (The Communists would take this away later, but conveniently neglected to tell the peasants this upfront.)

But if these things don't do the job, there are other ways to get the people to move away from supporting the government. One is terror. Insurgents use terror because it works. People can be terrorized into opposing a government or into not supporting it, which, for the insurgents, can end up being good enough. But their use of terror is a balancing act. They can go too far and alienate the very people they are hoping to win over.

Filipino insurgents in their 1899-1902 revolt alienated the population by levying taxes upon them and by attacking those who helped the Americans.²²

In 1952, what became known as the Mau Mau rebellion (1951-1954), began in Kenya. The British suppressed it and then later gave Kenya its independence. It proved a bloody affair, for the rebels, and for the innocent civilians of Kenya against whom the Mau Mau committed massacres which did not win them much support.²³

The FARC and ELN are terribly unpopular in Colombia. Their random terror tactics include kidnapping, bombings, and attacks on civilians such as a May 2002 church bombing that killed 119 people. Such atrocities kill, literally, their popular support. The Colombian insurgents have also made themselves stink in the people's nostrils by abandoning politics for the lure of drug profits. Drug trafficking has also undermined (though not eliminated) their opportunities for foreign help. Opinion polls have never given the FARC more than three percent support in Colombia.²⁴

²¹ Ravi Nessman, 'Sri Lanka says war over, rebel leader killed,' http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20090518/ap_on_re_as/as_sri_lanka_civil_war, accessed 5/19/09.

²² Rabasa, et al, *Money in the Bank*, x, 11.

²³ Laqueur, *Guerrilla Warfare*, 311.

²⁴ Rabasa, et al, *Money in the Bank*, xii, 63.

Al Qaeda in Iraq, once it gained control over an area, instituted a ruthless form of Sharia law and became increasingly unpopular. Terror became the order of the day and the entire civil structure collapsed as schools and businesses closed. Al Qaeda's influence also undermined the authority of the Sunni tribal sheiks in Anbar province, who began turning against Al Qaeda in late 2006.²⁵

5. The ideas and/or the rule of the insurgents are simply disliked.

Insurgents are not always welcome guests. They live off the people and from the people, which means they *take* from the people. Moreover, insurgencies are generally run by elites that have different ideas and agendas from the soldiers filling their ranks and the non-combatants that support them. The result is that sometimes the leaders and the people fighting under them or supporting them have different goals. Plus, occasionally, insurgents push ideas that are simply not attractive to many of the people they are trying to win over, alienating segments of the population.²⁶

In the Philippines (1899-1902) the insurgency had an inadequate base of support, partially because the goals of the insurgents conflicted with the desires of the people. Some sought autonomy for the various provinces, while the rebels' goals included establishing a strong, central government.²⁷

Greek communist insurgents (1944-1949) supported an independent Macedonia. This angered many Greeks and left the insurgents open to charges of treason.²⁸ Moreover, the communists simply misjudged their appeal. Most of the Greeks did not support communism and the party had never won more than 10% of the vote in pre-war elections. The Greek insurgents were trying to sell an idea that very few wanted.

The Malayan insurgency (1948-1960) was almost exclusively among the ethnic Chinese, but they did not possess universal support even among the Chinese population.²⁹

In the 1960s, in Latin America, the insurgencies were often led by middle and upper class elites who sometimes did not even speak the same language as the peasants they were trying to revolutionize. These leaders also generally had contempt for the laboring masses, which did little to endear them to the people whose support they were trying to win. This was particularly true in Bolivia and Peru. Similar problems emerged in African insurgencies, such as in Angola (1961-1975), where MPLA (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola) leaders did not know the tribal languages of their troops.³⁰

An insurgency raged in the Dhofar province of Oman from 1962-1976. Oman was virtually a feudal state ruled by a Sultan who was particularly harsh on the people of Dhofar. After 1968, the Dhofari insurgents adopted a communist line. This angered rank and file rebels because communism attacked the two basic fundamentals of their lives: Islam, and the tribal system. By

²⁵ Kimberly Kagan, 'How They Did It,' *Weekly Standard*, Vol. 13, No. 10, (11/19/2007), web version, 6.

²⁶ Thomas A. Marks, *Maoist Insurgency Since Vietnam* (London and Portland: Frank Cass, 1996), 286-7.

²⁷ Rabasa, et al, *Money in the Bank*, ix-x.

²⁸ Laqueur, *Guerrilla Warfare*, 285.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 291.

³⁰ Laqueur, *Guerrilla Warfare*, 316-17.

1970, the fissures broke-out into violence within the group as the communist elements tried to suppress those who refused to drink from the ideological well. Twenty-four of the insurgency's most experienced leaders defected to the Sultan, providing massive intelligence windfalls to the Omani government and its British advisors. This move to communism also undermined insurgent support among the people, who valued their tribal structures and religion far more than the new insurgent ideas. Interestingly, some of the most effective forces the Sultan and the British had at their disposal were contractors, British officers, and Baluchi infantrymen from Pakistan.³¹

In El Salvador (1979-1992), the communist insurgency was inspired by what had happened in Nicaragua in 1979 when the Sandinistas came to power. But the El Salvadoran communists misread the situation; there was no broad base of support for their movement among their nation's citizens.³²

In Iraq, the insurgent groups have or have had various goals, ones that separate them from large blocks of the population. The Sunni Baathists wanted the reestablishment of a Baath Party dominated government, something which lacked wide appeal. Shia elements under Moqtada Al-Sadr wanted a Shia dominated theocracy, which also was attractive to only a minority. Al Qaeda pushed an extreme fundamentalist version of Sunni Islam. They wanted Iraq as a base for expansion and as their first step toward the reestablishment of the ancient Islamic caliphate. Most Iraqis had no interest in this.

6. Insurgents sometimes pursue bad strategy.

One of the myths often bandied about is of the always brilliant insurgent. The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong are often held up as supermen. But what is often forgotten in this is that in 1965 and 1968 the 'insurgents' chose to fight toe-to-toe with U.S. forces and suffered grievously. The North Vietnamese Tet Offensive in 1968, and its follow-on operations, virtually destroyed the Viet Cong and forced the North to use regular North Vietnamese Army units to fight as insurgents in the South.

In the Philippines (1899-1902), part of how Aguinaldo hoped to win was by betting that the unpopularity of the war in the U.S. would mean the election of a Democrat to replace President William McKinley's Republican administration. He hoped a new President would change American policy toward the occupation of the Philippines.³³ Another error was failing to get the help of the *ladrones*, which were basically bandit groups operating in the countryside. They were potential allies, but they were also seen as a threat by the *principales*, the large landowners. The Filipino insurgents concentrated on winning over the *principales*, promising them great things after the war. The result was that Aguinaldo's men fought the *ladrones*, as well as the Americans. Moreover, this decision prevented the insurgents from building a sufficiently firm base of support in the countryside. Aguinaldo basically ignored the bulk of the population, which the U.S. then won over by demonstrating that they were there to help.³⁴

³¹ Pimlott, 'The British Army: the Dhofar Campaign,' 34.

³² Rabasa, et al, *Money in the Bank*, 42-3.

³³ *Ibid.*, 10, 14.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

Another good example of insurgents making poor strategic decisions is the Rif revolt in Spanish Morocco (1921-1926). The insurgents came very close to winning, but their own mistakes doomed them. Mahamed Abd-el-Krim led the insurgents. He was a bright, well-educated man, a former civil servant, a leading journalist, and a former professor of Berber.

The insurgents began their attacks against the Spanish army in July 1921 and soon wiped out most of the opposing Spanish forces. They were helped by the fact that the Spanish horribly mismanaged their war. The Spanish lost 10,000 killed in 1921 alone (some say it was closer to twice this).

The Rifs took over most of Spanish Morocco within just a few weeks. But they failed to finish the job when they had the chance (their first strategic mistake), missing an opportunity to seize the capital of Melilla. Abd-el-Krim's men were too busy looting while he was too busy trying to set up a Berber government. The Rifs made a second particularly bad error by expanding the war to French Morocco, and unnecessarily adding France to their list of enemies. Thirdly, Abd-el-Krim's rebels undermined their position by establishing a tyrannical theocracy that alienated the common people. In 1925-1926, the Spanish and French committed over 300,000 troops (some say 450,000) and broke Abd-el-Krim's rebellion.³⁵

The Greek Communists (1944-1949) made great headway against the weak Greek government and some argue that they were well on the way to winning. But in 1948, they changed from fighting as guerrillas in small bands to fighting like a conventional army in defense of the areas they controlled. Moreover, the shift came at a time when they lost the support of the neighboring Yugoslavian regime that had been so crucial for arms and logistics. The Greek communist leaders made the switch to conventional warfare partially because they believed time was running out for them and that they had no choice. It was a fatal mistake. Fighting a regular army on its own terms pits guerrilla weakness against the regime's strengths. The result of this is usually the annihilation of the guerrillas.³⁶

In El Salvador (1979-1990), Communist guerrilla attacks against the infrastructure weakened their support among the population.³⁷

In the late summer of 2005, some of the Iraqi Sunni groups in Tal Afar province began growing disillusioned with their foreign allies, meaning Al Qaeda. They believed these people were trying to start a civil war, and they were right. Al Qaeda in Iraq was a big part of the reason for Iraq's descent into sectional strife, and this was because of Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi. He fled to Iraq from Afghanistan after the 2001 U.S. invasion and ran a loosely affiliated branch of Al Qaeda. In January 2004, he (probably) wrote a letter to Bin Laden announcing his plan to spark civil war in Iraq by killing Shiites. Zarqawi perhaps did more than anyone else to feed the religious violence and ethnic cleansing that became a part of the Iraq War. Ayman al-Zawahiri, one of Al Qaeda's primary strategic thinkers, criticized Zarqawi's particularly brutal approach in July 2005. He also disapproved of the videotaped beheadings of civilian hostages done by Zarqawi's gang.

³⁵ Laqueur, *Guerrilla Warfare*, 184-5.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 282-5.

³⁷ Rabasa, et al, *Money in the Bank*, 43.

In February 2006, Al Qaeda blew up the Golden Mosque in Samara, one of Shia Islam's holiest shrines, as part of their ongoing effort to provoke a civil war between the Sunni and Shia. The Shia struck back with death squads that murdered Sunnis by the thousands. The almost random Shia violence killed lots of Al Qaeda cadre and supporters. It also frightened the Sunni, who now needed protection from the Shia. This was something Al Qaeda could not provide. The U.S. could, partially thanks to the 'Surge.'

By the autumn of 2006, the Sunni Sheiks began rebelling against Al Qaeda and fighting them openly. Al Qaeda heavy-handedness produced an insurgency against *them* in areas they controlled. Al Qaeda responded by murdering some of Anbar's most important sheiks. The sheiks then united to fight Al Qaeda and agreed to have their young men join the Iraqi Security Forces. What has become known as the 'Anbar Awakening' was born. The rapid expansion of Sunni militia units that were then brought under American tutelage followed. A big part of making this happen was U.S. Marine Corps Brigadier General John Allen figuring out was going on in Anbar and taking advantage of it.³⁸

Al Qaeda in Iraq made one of the same mistakes as the communist rebels in Oman: they attacked and tried to breakdown the tribal system. The Sunni valued this far more than even expelling the Americans. The result: an insurgency against the insurgents.

Conclusion

Insurgencies sometimes lose. In fact, they lose more than they win. Generally, if the power trying to put down the insurgency will fight while they build, give the people a better alternative than what the insurgents offer, remain patient and realize that it takes a long time to defeat an insurgency, and not lose their nerve, they will usually win.

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³⁸ Mario Loyola, 'The Return of the Sheik,' *National Review* (8 Oct. 2007), 32; David Kilcullen, 'The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One,' Lecture, Center for A New American Security, 20 May 2009, <http://www.cnponline.org/ht/a/GetDocumentAction/i/13527>.

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