Counterinsurgency Theory and the Stabilization of Iraq's Anbar Province

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DRAFT: 7 October 2009

Whither the Anbar Miracle?

The Sunni insurgency in Iraq began in Anbar Province after the American invasion in 2003. There former Baathist regime members, Sunni tribesmen, and foreign Islamic extremists found a common enemy in the US occupation, leading to some of the war's fiercest fighting in places like Fallujah and Ramadi. By late 2006, Marine Corps assessments of prospects for the province were outright pessimistic.[1] Despite scoring some important military successes like the killing of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in June 2006, the US appeared to be losing in Anbar.

Yet only a year later Anbar was touted as a model of counterinsurgency (COIN) success. Violence plummeted from a high of nearly 2000 incidents in September 2006, more than in any other province in Iraq, to just 155 in January 2008, the lowest rate since the beginning of the insurgency (Figure 1). US forces worked with former Sunni insurgents to decimate AQI throughout its strongholds along the Euphrates River (forcing it to shift northward to Mosul, where, as of this writing, AQI remnants continue to fight). Irregular militias and self-defense groups (loosely referred to as "Sons of Iraq") were inspired by activity in Anbar and took the fight to insurgents in other parts of the country. Within Anbar insurgency gave way to intense political competition, and the province transitioned peacefully to Iraqi control in August 2008. While this did not resolve the deep rift between the Sunni province and the Shia-dominated

[1] Dafna Linzer and Thomas E. Ricks, "Marines' Outlook in Iraq: Anbar Picture Grows Clearer, and Bleaker," Washington Post (28 November 2006), A1.

central government, and while potential for backsliding remains, the sudden emergence of stability and its endurance for over two years is nonetheless remarkable.

What happened in Anbar and how can we explain it? What are the implications for a more general COIN theory of victory? One of many ironic aspects of the war in Iraq is that the tribal engagement strategy which worked in al Anbar—turning former Sunni insurgents against AQI and resuscitating hopes for coalition success at large—is nowhere to be found in the COIN doctrine specifically written for Iraq. US Army Field Manual 3-24 addresses large-scale conventional forces protecting the population from, and training host-nation security forces to combat, a revolutionary nationalist insurgency.[2] It advocates large force ratios and proactive state-building efforts on behalf of the host nation, prompting Stathis Kalyvas to describe the manual as a guide to "benevolent occupation."[3]

It does not emphasize leveraging tribes, community organizations, or other traditional networks to actively counter insurgent violence, other than by soliciting intelligence, nor does it explore in depth the ways in which host nation security forces themselves may exacerbate the violence. Moreover, it characterizes irregular units as threats because the use of violence outside of government authority is seen as a boon to the insurgents' cause: "If militias are outside the

[2] U.S. Army, *Field Manual No. 3-24: Counterinsurgency* (Washington DC: Department of the Army, 2006), jointly published as *Marine Corps Warfighting Publication No. 3-33.5* (Washington DC: Department of the Navy, 2006). *FM 3-24.2: Counterinsurgency Tactics* (2009) goes into detail for units at the battalion level and below, whereas FM 3-24 is written for operational commanders and their staffs. See also *FM 3-07: Stability Operations* (2008) on the more general problem of establishing essential government services. In these doctrinal concepts, COIN involves combating an insurgency while simultaneously conducting stability operations, but stability operations need not involve COIN (for example, in response to natural disasters). Of course, there are historical examples of rebellions crushed without stability operations, especially by states other than the U.S. On the relationship between contemporary COIN doctrine and the "classic" literature of the 1960s (including its very selective implementation) see Austin Long, "Doctrine of Eternal Recurrence: The U.S. Military and Counterinsurgency Doctrine, 1960-1970 and 2003-2006," *RAND Occasional Paper* (2008)

[3] Stathis N. Kalyvas, "Review of the New U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual," *Perspectives on Politics* vol. 6, no. 2 (2008): 351-353, 351.

[host nation] government's control, they can often be obstacles to ending an insurgency."[4] In Anbar, however, alliances between US forces and sub-national groups and the activities of irregular tribal militias were key to the turnaround. As one prominent Anbari put it, "If we had a modern state, we wouldn't have to rely on the rule of tribes, [but until then] a little bit of evil is better than more."[5]

Anbar's improvement also cannot be explained by the "surge" strategy of 2007. Violence in Anbar was already in steep decline by the time additional US forces were introduced to Iraq (Figure 1), and the bulk of these went to the Baghdad area anyway. The causes of stabilization in Anbar significantly predate the introduction of more troops, but even more importantly, they are rooted in Iraqi calculations of political interest rather than a straightforward result of American agency.[6] The population is composed of active elements which, like the enemy, "get a vote."

[4] FM 3-24, para 3-112
[5] Anthony Shadid, "Iraq Election Highlights Ascendancy of Tribes," *Washington Post*, January 25, 2009, A1.
[6] See Jon Lindsay, "Does the 'Surge' Explain Iraq's Improved Security?" Massachusetts Institute of Technology Center for International Studies, *Audit of the Conventional Wisdom* (September 2008); John A. McCary, "The Anbar Awakening: An Alliance of Incentives," *The Washington Quarterly* vol. 32, no. 1 (2009): 43-59.

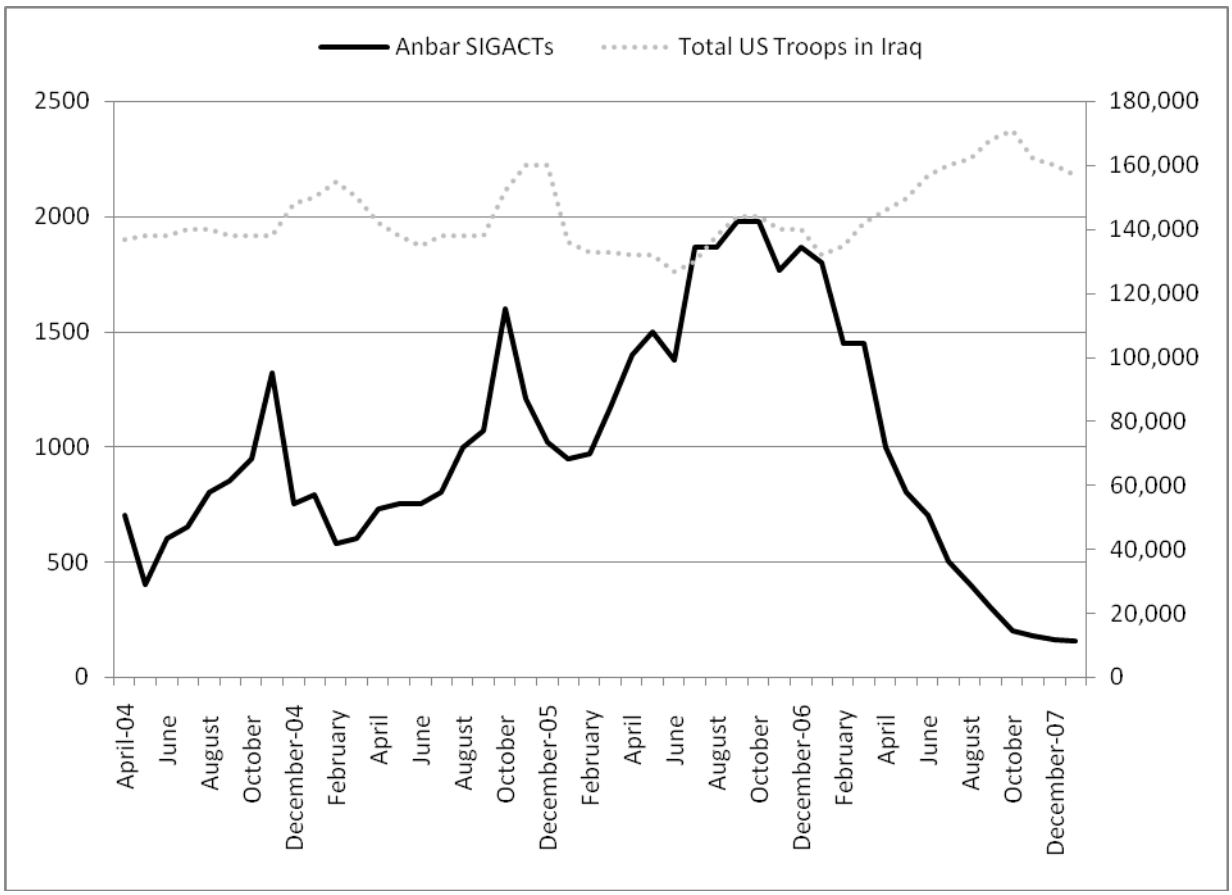

Figure 1: Monthly violent events in Anbar (left) and overall US troop levels in Iraq (right)[7]

This paper provides an account of the conflict in Anbar within a theoretical framework for COIN grounded in contemporary scholarship on civil war.[8] It draws specifically on Roger Petersen's

[7] Anbar violent Significant Activities (SIGACTs): US Multinational Force West (MNF-W) figures, in Anthony H. Cordesman, "Violence in Iraq: Reaching an 'Irreducible Minimum'," Center for Strategic and International Studies (25 February 2008), http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/080227_violence.in.iraq.pdf. Troop strength: Michael E. O'Hanlon and Jason H. Campbell, "Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction & Security in Post-Saddam Iraq," Brookings Institution (28 May 2009), http://www.brookings.edu/iraqindex. At the highpoint of violence in Anbar in October 2006 (corresponding to the Battle of Ramadi), about 1,980 SIGACTS, there were 144,000 US troops in Iraq. The first month in which troop totals exceeded this was April 2007, a minor increase to 146,000, and yet Anbar SIGACTS had already fallen by half to 1,000. By July SIGACTs were halved yet again, while US troops increased only to 160,000. Monthly troop totals for Anbar alone are not publically available, but they would show far less of an increase (from a rough average of 35,000), given that over half of the additional surge troops were deployed in Baghdad. It is also notable that the surge is a gradual, steady increase from 132,000 troops in January 2007 to a height of 171,000 in October, rather than the sharp step function in popular accounts. Anbar SIGACTs by contrast drop precipitously in the same period. Note that the two previous upticks and reductions of Anbar violence (corresponding to the 2004 Battle of Fallujah and the 2005 Battle of al Qaim respectively) also precede the introduction of additional US troops, further evidence against any simple causal relationship between troop levels and SIGACTs.

model of community-based insurgent mobilization.[9] To accommodate the Anbar case within this model, we elaborate on the importance of formal insurgent organization and then derive COIN responses to Petersen's mechanisms for triggering and sustaining insurgency.

The following empirical section describes the microdynamics of conflict and stablization in Anbar from 2003 to 2009. It is based on information in the public domain as well as the field experience of both authors, who worked in different capacities for the U.S. Government in Anbar province in 2007 and 2008.[10] As the United States winds down in Iraq and builds up in Afghanistan, it is critical to understand the lessons and limitations of recent history. The paper concludes with a theoretical assessment of the case and the general utility of the COIN framework.

A Theoretical Framework for COIN

COIN is often described as a "contest for hearts and minds," each side vying for the support of the population. The theoretical assumption behind this conventional wisdom is that civil war is a problem of popular grievance, be it ethnic, class-based, or ideological. Prescriptions which follow include information operations to persuade the population to support

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[8] The first scholarly effort to examine the conflict in Vietnam at the level of the province and below, published in 1973 as the U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia was waning, was Jeffrey Race, *War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province* (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1973). Since then, other histories at this level of detail have appeared and political scientists studying insurgency/civil war have also embraced analysis of the microdynamics of conflict. In the field of Vietnam historiography, see Eric M. Bergerud, *The Dynamics of Defeat: The Vietnam War in Hau Nghia Province* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991) and David W.P. Elliott, *The Vietnamese War: Revolution and Social Change in the Mekong Delta, 1930-1975,* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2003). In political science, see, *inter alia*, Roger D. Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion: Lessons from Eastern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Elisabeth Jean Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Jeremy M. Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); and Stathis N. Kalyvas, T*he Logic of Violence in Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[9] Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion*, 32-79.

[10] This paper is the perspective of the authors alone and does not represent that of any government organization. Note that the COIN model described herein is not only an academic contribution, but was pragmatically valuable for understanding an active operational environment.

the government and reject the insurgents, civil affairs programs to address grievances rooted in developmental inequality, and a focus on governmental legitimacy as the critical factor for breaking the insurgency.

Yet linkages between attitudes, preferences and behavior, as well as between national cleavages and individual motives, are notoriously loose. Civil war violence often expands and persists in local areas for private reasons that have nothing to do with the declared political goals of any of the rival combatants, giving rise to a complex mosaic of overlapping conflicts and the settling of private grudges.[11] Frank Kitson, a veteran of several British COIN campaigns, observed that most insurgents fight for their close friends and family, money, or adventure, with only a very small portion at all ideologically motivated.[12] This begs the question, if the causes of war are ostensibly represented as macro-level cleavages in society, why is it the non-ideological, sub-ethnic, sub-national micro-level factors that matter operationally?

By contrast with its macro grievance account of conflict, COIN literature in its pragmatic advice embraces a local perspective, recommending that operations should be driven by detailed local intelligence generated bottom-up through continuous patrolling, meetings with local elite, and low level source operations. Intelligence should provide high fidelity on local demographics, community structure, and traditional networks; indeed, the lengthy chapters on intelligence in COIN doctrine read like Anthropology 101 textbooks, identifying every possible social cleavage or identity. These catalogs stop short, however, from identifying what types of mechanisms matter and why in the generation and structuring of violence, leaving local

[11] Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*

[12] Stephen T. Hosmer and Sibylle O. Crane, *Counterinsurgency: A Symposium, April 16-20, 1962* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1962). Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 93-95, provides a list of over twenty different non-ideological private motivations for insurgent participation or collaboration. See also Lucian W. Pye, *Guerrilla Communism in Malaya, Its Social and Political Meaning* (Princeton University Press, 1956).

practitioners to figure things out on an ad hoc basis. When COIN doctrine offers applicable pragmatic advice, given its vague theoretical underpinnings, it does so in spite of itself!

Recent scholarship on civil war has explained insurgent mobilization and support in terms of incentives to individuals and small groups. One strand of research focuses on economic incentives.[13] This is clearly important for Iraq, where conflicts over control of smuggling routes opened up a wedge between Sunni tribes and foreign jihadis, and where insurgent improvised explosive device (IED) operations were coordinated through black markets for bomb makers, transporters, and emplacers. Economic incentives are not sufficient, however, to explain why some insurgents run risks which far outweigh financial rewards (or total lack thereof), why some persist (or defect) when they might actually make more money doing the opposite, or why different communities behave differently when the economic incentives are similar. On the other side, COIN has to be more than a development program, which by itself can be easily co-opted by insurgents; just as indiscriminate violence is counterproductive in COIN because it drives neutral civilians to the insurgency, likewise indiscriminate do-gooding is counterproductive because it strengthens insurgents along with everyone else.[14] At some point someone has to be able to identify and sanction insurgents, which requires a more nuanced understanding of how violent actors arise and persist within local society.

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[13] Jeremy M. Weinstein, "Resources and the Information Problem in Rebel Recruitment," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* vol. 49, no. 4 (2005): 598-624; Fotini Christia, "Following the Money: Muslim Versus Muslim in Bosnia's Civil War," *Comparative Politics* vol. 40, no. 4 (2008); Michael L. Ross, "What Do We Know about Natural Resources and Civil War?" *Journal of Peace Research* vol. 41, no. 3 (2004): 337-356; Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "Greed and Grievance in Civil War," *EconWPA, Development and Comp Systems*, no. 0409007 (2004)

[14] Sarah Kenyon Lischer, "Collateral Damage: Humanitarian Assistance as a Cause of Conflict," *International Security* vol. 28, no. 1 (2003): 79–109. This is a long-standing criticism of pure "hearts and minds" approaches to COIN, contrasted with "costs and benefits" applied more selectively. See Charles Wolf, Jr., *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency: New Myths and Old Realities* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1965) and Austin Long, *On "Other War": Lessons from Five Decades of RAND Counterinsurgency Research* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2006).

Another strand focuses on the structure of community networks and individual calculations about safety and honor.[15] Kalyvas's *Logic of Violence in Civil War* provides a rich exposition of this approach, the major thrust of which is that there is a serious moral hazard problem in COIN: "While political actors 'use' civilians to collect information and win the war, it is also the case that civilians 'use' political actors to settle their own private conflicts," (p. 14) and hence the war's dynamics quickly tak e on an endogenous character that has little to do with macro-level cleavages. Kalyvas answers a basic Clausewitzian question about COIN, namely, what kind of war is this?[16] Civil war is a process of state-building and alliance consolidation at the local level where everyone is potentially a strategic actor trading information, resources, violence, and protection. The conventional wisdom that COIN is about politics is often misunderstood in terms of national or ethnic political competition, distorting perception of the local, endogenous, and more-or-less feudal dynamics which really matter. COIN is a war for popular support not because people need to be persuaded of the legitimacy of one cause or another, but because people are active participants in providing information and material aid during an ongoing process of local power consolidation. This is the reason for the truism that "the population is the center of gravity" in COIN.

Kalyvas provides further insight into the conditions under which individuals will or will not collaborate with counterinsurgents, emphasizing specifically the distribution of control (predicting more violence in zones of contested control). Nevertheless, an operational theory of

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[15] Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*; Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion*; Roger D. Petersen, *Understanding Ethnic Violence: Fear, Hatred, and Resentment in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2002); Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action*; Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy M. Weinstein, "Who Fights? the Determinants of Participation in Civil War," *American Journal of Political Science* vol. 52, no. 2 (2008): 436-455

[16] "The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish…the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature," Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. and ed., Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 88-89.

COIN requires still more fidelity on how and why individuals change their level of support for one actor or another in order to manipulate these conditions. Petersen's *Resistance and Rebellion* provides a useful framework for just this. His explanations of Lithuanian village resistance in the face of austere German and Russian counter-rebellion efforts turn out, with some modification, to travel well.

Petersen's begins with the familiar observation that participation in a civil war falls along a broad spectrum from membership in government security forces to mobile guerrilla operations, with many degrees of passive and active support in between; furthermore, people can change their level of support over time. **Error! Reference source not found.** describes a partition of the population, where the valence represents collaboration with the government (positive) or the insurgency (negative), and the magnitude represents the level of support.[17] This partition describes types of behavior rather than loyalty to specific groups; there may be (and usually are) multiple insurgent and COIN groups in any particular conflict.

Figure 2: The spectrum of participation in insurgency and COIN within a society

The first level is unorganized support, where people are willing to participate in demonstrations, sing resistance (or patriotic) songs, put up posters or wear symbols, vote, etc. The second level involves active, organized, but very localized participation in the insurgency

[17] The valences are reversed in Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion*, 9, *i.e.,* insurgent participation is +1, +2, *etc.*, because he is trying to explain levels of increasing insurgent mobilization. In a COIN context, however, it is useful to reverse the notation, where people can be either for ("+") or against ("-") the COIN effort, usually the "good guys" from the perspective of this literature.

(or counter-insurgent self defense militia), to include providing intelligence, supplies, and safehouses, as well as engaging in armed activity in one's own village or neighborhood. The third level is membership in a formal (guerrilla or government) combat organization distinguished by more bureaucratic procedures and structured command relationships.

Petersen identifies specific triggering mechanisms which move individuals from one level to the next and sustaining mechanisms which keep them from backsliding. These mechanisms are rooted in individual rational choice based on the behavior of other people in society at large and in local community networks. Individual incentives thus change over time as more or fewer people are engaging in various behaviors. Furthermore, different segments of the population respond to different kinds of incentives; therefore, the triggers that move a person from zero to one are different than those that move him from one to two or two to three. Society-wide considerations determine movement from zero to one: these include feelings of resentment created through status inversions or occupation, the prestige of being a brave first mover, individual safety calculations based on the number of other people getting away with level-one behavior, and focal points to coordinate resistance rooted in culturally-specific symbols and narratives. By contrast, the structure of local social networks determines movement from one to two. Primary considerations are local safety calculations (based on the number of people in personal networks already engaging in level-two behavior) and normative reciprocity (which may be unconditional as in helping out family, strong as in maintaining one's honor before his tribesmen, or somewhat weaker as in pressures for conformity). Since both safety and normative calculations are based on the behavior of others, entire groups can go rapidly over tipping points, or fail to organize at all. The mechanisms which sustain participation at level two include

violent coercion and threats and less-than-rational psychology, such as wishful thinking, sunk costs, and faith in repeated small victories.

Petersen gives most attention to level two mechanisms, arguing that local organized participation is really the key to understanding rebellion.[18] Without strong local networks (based in tribes, youth groups, professional or religious organizations, etc.), there will be no rebellion, no matter how angry individuals may feel. With strong networks, rebellion can be sustained even in the face of a more powerful government force. These local insurgent organizations provide the critical support that level three mobile combatants depend upon and which make the problem of discriminating between "innocent" civilians and insurgents so vexing for the counterinsurgent.

Petersen gives less attention to level three, mobile guerrilla organization, other than suggesting that ideological commitment and small unit cohesion is important. To be more general, the theory must include formal guerrilla organizations like AQI and political party machines. Whereas local social networks (level two) correspond to the Weberian traditional/charismatic ideal type of organization, formal organizations (level three) are rational/bureaucratic entities with clear hierarchies, lines of authority to direct people and resources, and official rules and codes of conduct.[19] This is an ideal distinction, as local organizations can and do employ bureaucratic techniques, and mobile combat units often recruit locally. The point is that formal organization provides an alternative locus for coherence rather than local traditional social networks, and can thus direct operations over multiple locales.

[18] Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 126, also points out that most rebels are natives of the areas in which they operate, and rebel organizations are often populated with family members.
[19] Max Weber, *Politics as a Vocation* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1965; originally published 1919).

Bureaucracy is a prominent feature of guerrilla organizations, both modern and traditional.[20] Quite contrary to some contemporary portrayals of insurgents as swarming, decentralized, flat, self-organized networks, such organizations have sophisticated administrative, financing, command, communication, and disciplinary/judicial structures. These features enable insurgent groups to survive and operate against a determined counterinsurgent, even though their clandestine nature often conceals the degree of organization. Cell-phones and computers did not substitute for formal AQI organization; they merely enhanced it, as the radio enhanced Viet Cong organization in Vietnam. The noted autonomy of insurgent lieutenants (AQI regional emirs) is similar to the tactical flexibility afforded western military units via "mission type" orders, rather than a lack of organization.

The functioning of the "organizational weapon" itself provides powerful triggering and sustaining mechanisms at level three. Explicit recruiting and training pipelines and propaganda programs can enhance the prestige and ideological attraction of resistance. The same mechanisms that sustain level two participation (coercive sanction of defectors and irrational psychology) will tend to be strengthened by the heightened monitoring and enforcement capabilities and cohesive loyalties associated with formal organization. Like any organization,

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[20] Philip Selznick, *The Organizational Weapon: A Study of Bolshevik Strategy and Tactics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1952); Andrew R. Molnar, Jerry M. Tinker and John D. Lenoir, *Human Factors Considerations of Undergrounds in Insurgencies* (Washington DC: Special Operations Research Office, The American University, 1972); Mary Anderson, Michael Arnsten, and Harvey Averch, *Insurgent Organization and Operations: A Case Study of the Viet Cong in the Delta, 1964-1966*, RAND Document RM-5239-1-ISA/ARPA, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1967); Melvin Gurtov, *Viet Cong Cadres and the Cadre System: A Study of the Main and Local Forces*, RAND Document RM-5414-1-ISA/ARPA, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1967); David Elliot and William Stewart, *Pacification and the Viet Cong System in Dinh Tuong: 1966-1967*, RAND Document RM-5788-ISA/ARPA, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND 1969); Joe Felter, ed., *Harmony and Disharmony: Exploiting Al-Qa'ida's Organizational Vulnerabilities* (West Point, NY: Center for Combating Terrorism, 2006); Jacob Shapiro, "Bureaucratic Terrorists: Al Qaida in Iraq's Management and Finances," in Brian Fishman, ed. *Bombers, Bank Accounts, and Bleedout: Al Qaida's Road In and Out of Iraq*, (West Point, NY: Center for Combating Terrorism, 2008); Anonymous, "Smuggling, Syria, and Spending," in Brian Fishman, ed. *Bombers, Bank Accounts, and Bleedout: Al Qaida's Road In and Out of Iraq*, (West Point, NY: Center for Combating Terrorism, 2008); Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008)

insurgent groups are "value infused," in Selznick's phrase,[21] conflating ardor to defeat the government/occupation with preserving the organization itself, nurturing the oft noted irreconcilable "hard core" of an insurgency.

Another feature of insurgency missing from Petersen's model altogether is economic motivation (apparently not a significant factor in the Lithuanian case). Social networks (level two) regulate patronage relationships, and many have an important economic component (as in tribal smuggling networks). Finance is an obvious component of formal organization (level three) for facilitating logistics, recruiting, and rewarding. While we would expect economic incentives alone to be somewhat weaker than mechanisms rooted in strong social networks, we recognize the role of greed as an additional triggering or sustaining mechanism.

Petersen's model (as amended) readily lends itself to deriving COIN responses in two steps. First, it is necessary to prevent people from shifting toward the negative end of the spectrum by inhibiting the mechanisms that trigger and sustain shifts toward insurgency. For example, to counter resentment formation, the counterinsurgent can include members of the newly disenfranchised group in local governance (such as regular tribal council meetings) and work to control targeting errors (false positives and indiscriminate violence). To alter safety calculations, population control (barriers to entry and movement, ID cards, biometric surveys) is critical, as is a robust intelligence program to improve targeting precision against level two and three insurgents. To counter normative mechanisms, local elites can be encouraged (perhaps through bribing them with contracts for civil affairs projects) to publically shame insurgents and lead their tribes to stand down insurgent activity. To counter sustaining mechanisms, amnesty

[21] Phillip Selznick, *Leadership in Administration: A Sociological Interpretation* (Evanston, IL: Row, Peterson and Company, 1957)

and protection programs for defectors and informants are crucial, as are truth-based information campaigns to publicize insurgent defeats and atrocities. To counter level-three insurgent organization, its bureaucratic processes and participants must be disrupted, subverted, or destroyed (This is a broader task than merely targeting leadership, discussed below, as a military bureaucracy is designed to expect and to replace fallen leaders.)

Second, it is necessary to encourage people to shift toward the positive end of the spectrum by enabling mechanisms that trigger and sustain shifts in that direction. Information campaigns should encourage resentment against insurgents for usurping power and resources and for committing indiscriminate atrocities, and should emphasize the prestige and heroism of people that stand up against the insurgents.[22] Such psychological operations (PSYOP) must be conducted with a high level of cultural fluency (and ideally conducted by indigenous groups themselves) to avoid negative cultural focal points and to exploit the positive ones.[23] Local self-defense groups can be formed by improving safety thresholds for participating, emphasizing the prestige of self-defense, and forming groups with some prior tribal or community association. Sustaining mechanisms to maintain government security force integrity include counter-intelligence activities, professionalization and disciplinary measures, as well as emphases on esprit-de-corps, patriotism, and combat successes.

A major theoretical assumption behind these pro-COIN mechanisms is that there is symmetry in the reasons people move from one magnitude to another, and only the relative level of organization and scale of the COIN actor differs. At first blush this may seem counter-

[22] Following the assassination by al-Qaeda of Sheikh Sattar al-Rishawi, founder of the Anbar Awakening movement, posters and buttons celebrating the martyrdom of "The Lion of Anbar" and exhorting Anbaris to continue the fight appeared all over Ramadi.

[23] Iraqis can put up some effective if obscene propaganda that would never be approved through American PSYOP channels. Sometimes the best PSYOP program might simply be providing computers and printers for indigenous partners.

intuitive, as a common observation is that the COIN problem is very different from the insurgent problem in that the former has to build capacity as well as fight an adversary, all while remaining out in the open and easily identifiable in uniform, whereas the guerilla simply blends into the population and "wins by not losing." However, these are simply differences in the information about and relative power of the adversaries to harness the triggering mechanisms, not differences in the social mechanisms themselves.

Error! Reference source not found. lists triggering and sustaining mechanisms for insurgency along with the COIN inhibiting and countering mechanisms. The columns show the valence of shifts, while the rows show the degree of participation, thus preserving the symmetry between insurgent and COIN participation. We also include the organizational and economic incentives that Petersen leaves out. For simplicity, we collapse the level two and three sustaining mechanisms.

Table 1: Insurgency triggering/sustaining mechanisms and COIN inhibiting measures

Level of Participation	I. Trigger shift toward insurgency (→ -)	II. Inhibit shift toward insurgency (→0)	III. Trigger shift toward government (→ +)
A. Unorganized support (→1)	• Resentment (status inversions; indiscriminate COIN violence)	• Create political enfranchisement and honorable opportunities; Control targeting errors & protect population	• Encourage resentment against insurgents, publicize & exploit atrocities
	• Safety calculation (society-wide)	• Censure anti-government displays (can increase resentment!)	• Protect/encourage displays of support for COIN
	• Status (heroic first mover)	• Publicize insurgent atrocities, ridicule radicalism	• Emphasize COIN heroism, prestige of defying insurgents
	• Focal points (culturally-specific)	• Avoid negative focal points which resonate for insurgents	• Leverage positive focal points
B. Local Organized Support (→2)	• Safety calculations (community)	• Lower safety levels for insurgents: Improve intelligence coverage, targeting precision, population control (ID cards, biometrics, barriers, etc.)	• Protect/enable self-defense groups
	• Reciprocity/honor (local norms)	• Respect legal/human rights; Engage & respect local elites, encourage elites to shame insurgents	• Encourage local elites to reinforce prestige of self-defense
	• Material incentives	• Alternative employment, bribes	• Fund self-defense groups, offer rewards for info & bounties
C. Mobile Combatant Organization (→3)	• Ideological Commitment	• Reduce ideological appeal; isolate/attrite true believers	• Enhance patriotism, esprit de corps, professionalism
	• Bureaucratic organization	• Disrupt/destroy/subvert insurgent logistics, administration, and command	• Strengthen administrative capacity & reliability; fight corruption
	• Material incentives	• Disrupt insurgent finance; alternative employment	• Pay security forces fairly & reliably
D. Organized Action (Sustain 2/3)	• Coercion	• Amnesty programs, protect informants & defectors	• Strengthen counterintelligence and security force discipline
	• Irrationality (small victories; sunk costs; wishful thinking)	• Attrite insurgents; publicize COIN successes; discredit insurgent propaganda	• Demonstrate progress, emphasize inevitable victory

None of the COIN measures listed in **Error! Reference source not found.** are in and of themselves original. They have all been described in detail in military doctrine, COIN histories,

and practitioner memoirs. Yet this is usually done in an ad hoc fashion with generic comment on the complexity and political nature of COIN. What is thus unique here is gathering these measures together into a coherent framework which shows how they work within the mechanisms which create or abate insurgency: column I lists a typology of the mechanisms which generate rebellion, and columns II and III provide a typology of correlated mechanisms for its suppression. This framework cannot by itself provide any prescription for how to balance these measures and allocate resources among them, since that would depend on the particular distribution of popular participation in each particular conflict. The goal in this paper is a more preliminary theoretical justification for various types of COIN operations, and to provide insight into the common exhortation to synergize and coordinate a wide range of operations in COIN.

COIN tasks roughly cluster in three ways in **Error! Reference source not found.**. While PSYOP and civil affairs appear widely throughout the table (every operation has some psychological effect whether intended or not, and civilians and the expenditure of money are involved across the board), these "non-kinetic" activities are especially emphasized in row A, addressing that segment of the population responding to society-wide factors. The "kinetic" missions are respectively emphasized to deal with level two and three insurgency (col. II, rows B-D) because they represent the application of selective violence to coerce or deter insurgents (kinetic targeting is listed in row A only in a negative sense of controlling false positives and collateral damage). The third cluster of missions (col. III, rows B-D) emphasizes security assistance and combat advising with irregular or government security forces.

These clusters can be described as three basic types of COIN operation correlated with Petersen's spectrum of participation. On the negative end of the spectrum, *targeting* operations are military missions to selectively identify and kill/capture insurgents, emphasizing level three

but also level two participants. On the positive end, *training* operations are designed to ensure that COIN has an indigenous face, emphasizing government forces (level three) when possible and irregular groups (level two) when necessary. Both of these are more recognizable military missions, either hunting or engaging an enemy or training and advising indigenous security forces to do the same. Between them, is a third category of *engagement* operations working with the rest of the population of potential strategic actors. Neither enemy "red," friendly "blue," nor strictly neutral "white," these are sometimes called "green networks" to include community, tribal, and municipal populations.

COIN targeting is often described in cyclic terms, where detainees and intelligence gathered from each target are exploited for leads to new targets.[24] While this cycle is complicated to master and iterate quickly, owing to the intelligence burden associated with furtive human targets and many operational moving parts, it can be an effective way to chew through a level three insurgent organization. The danger, however, is that this can become a "do loop" subject to endless optimization on the assumption that if it only runs faster and more accurately enough insurgents will be attrited to defeat the network; COIN then generates into a Sisyphusian exercise in "whack a mole" or "mowing the grass."[25] Level three combat organizations are not built around single individuals, but are rather designed to compensate for leadership attrition. Rather than decapitation, a more promising approach is to disrupt the

[24] US Special Operations Forces call this cycle "F3EA" for find, fix, finish, exploit, analyze: Michael T. Flynn, Rich Juergens and Thomas L. Cantrell, "Employing ISR: SOF Best Practices," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, no. 50 (2008): 56-61. Conventional forces conduct similar targeting operations: Raymond T. Odierno, Nichoel E. Brooks and Francesco P. Mastracchio, "ISR Evolution in the Iraqi Theater," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, no. 50 (2008): 51-55. The F3EA is related to the Air Force's notion of the "kill chain" for tactical time sensitive strike.

[25] Colin F. Jackson, "Defeat in Victory: Organizational Learning Dysfunction in Counterinsurgency," Ph.D. dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (2008)

political and economic infrastructure that sustains the organizational weapon.[26] By contrast, leadership targeting against level two participants can be more disruptive, as organizations are built around particular traditional/charismatic individuals. The challenge of distinguishing level two and three organizations and shedding light on clandestine bureaucracy complicates the intelligence task supporting targeting. Intelligence ambiguity increases the risk of counterproductive targeting errors, which inadvertently supports insurgent triggering mechanisms. False positives and collateral damage kill the wrong people, generating resentment and, in some cultures, blood debts. False negatives fail to protect the population, exposing indigenous allies to coercive retribution. Given these targeting problems, a more well-rounded approach incorporating training and engagement is important both to improve COIN intelligence posture and to more directly influence level one and two constituencies.[27]

Engagement is where military forces often have the most trouble in COIN because persuasion, communication, negotiation, and alliance building are the core activities, and these are not part of regular military training regimens. Targeting and training have more demonstrable success metrics (how many insurgents killed, how many battle drills run, etc.), whereas engagement is an ongoing and ambiguous activity. Engagement operations are critical, however, because they facilitate training and targeting, often shading into them. They are the elusive link between measures of performance (what a military is doing) and measures of effectiveness (what is actually happening as a result), because engagement deals directly with the

[26] The Phoenix program and associated special units in South Vietnam, while controversial, provide at least a starting point for planning future anti-infrastructure operations. These operations targeted village, district, and provincial level administrators, not the national leadership of the Viet Cong. See Mark Moyar, *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey: Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorism in Vietnam* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1997); Thomas L. Ahern, Jr., *CIA and Rural Pacification in South Vietnam* (Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Intelligence, 2001- declassified 2006) and William Rosenau and Austin Long, "The Phoenix Program and Contemporary Counterinsurgency," (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2009).

[27] For similar conclusions on the limited utility of these operations based on non-U.S. cases, see Graham Turbiville, Jr., *Hunting Leadership Targets in Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorist Operations: Selected Perspectives and Experience* (Hurlburt Field, FL: Joints Special Operations University, 2007).

political and informational challenges at the heart of COIN. Engagement again highlights the critical importance of level two participation, on both the insurgent and militia side, because this is where the other types of COIN operations overlap. Targeting and training are mutually supportive in a relatively straightforward way because their target segments are on the far ends of the participation spectrum. The relationships with engagement, however, are far more complicated because they are situated in the problematic transition zone between level one and level two behaviors. It is risky to talk to or pay potential enemies, but when trying to stem insurgent generation and penetrate their organizations, it is dangerous not to. It is controversial to pay or train irregular forces, but when government forces are weak and unable to solve the discrimination problem, it is dangerous not to.

As every operation has a potential PSYOP effect, so every operation has intelligence potential. There is a consensus that intelligence is *the* hard problem for COIN, because identification of insurgents (or better said, civilians who are occasionally incentivized to support the insurgency) is so hard. With high costs for targeting errors (easily marginalized with a myopic focus on running the targeting cycle faster), it makes sense to seek intelligence advantage wherever possible. Civil affairs can be useful here by providing forces a reason to interact with the population, providing opportunities for intelligence access to and placement within community networks. The British employed one such scheme in Northern Ireland involving a laundry service which tested for explosive residue, allowing for the identification of individuals in contact with someone in the bombing business.[28] There is no end of creative intelligence collection possibilities associated with civil affairs projects, meetings, and surveys, a great deal of which can be realized completely overtly, such as through chatting up the chief of

[28] Martin Dillon, *The Dirty War: Covert Strategies and Tactics Used in Political Conflicts* (London: Hutchinson, 1990), 27-61.

tribal security during a dinner with the tribal sheikh. While there are legitimate fears among some civil affairs personnel about being associated with intelligence, fearing for their own credibility and safety, this is simply a matter of intelligence tradecraft no more ethically or operationally fraught than other collection operations (which *always* have similar dilemmas about cover and should only be attempted by trained personnel with careful planning).

Further sources of local intelligence often neglected are the very forces being trained. Both regular and irregular personnel may be from or have family in locations that the counterinsurgent would like to gain access and placement. It is easy for COIN trainers to focus only on teaching tactical skills to their students, forgetting that each individual is a rich source of local knowledge, at least of general atmospherics if nothing more actionable. For engagement and training, moreover, the information needed to understand local politics and events is noisy and relatively available for overt collection if personnel are out amongst the people; this contrasts greatly with the expensive, perishable, and often technical intelligence needed to support targeting missions. A further reason to overlap training, engagement, and intelligence operations is that every foreign contact, very much including students being trained for combat, is also a counterintelligence liability.

Engagement activities further support training efforts. Standing up self-defense groups is a tricky business, and it is necessary to work with local elite to provide reliable men and enforce norms of operation, less the militant treatment become worse than the insurgent disease. It is also important to integrate security forces and the population they protect, or at least try to diminish the level of dysfunction between them. The police in Baathist Iraq, for example, were more or less abusive thugs greatly feared by the people; there was no concept of a "thin blue line" or "to serve and protect." A way to start changing this is through involving partner security

forces in humanitarian assistance, literacy programs, and development activities in order to build bonds of trust between security forces and the people, with the positive benefit of a greater willingness of the latter to inform on insurgents. Like combat operations, civil affairs projects should be conducted "by, with, and through" locals.

Figure 3 summarizes the three types of COIN operations. Starting from Petersen's model of the social mechanisms which trigger and sustain insurgency, amended to include formal organizations and economic incentives, the basic thrust of COIN is to inhibit these mechanisms and promote counter-triggering mechanisms in the other direction. Doing this involves conducting three different but mutually supporting types of operation—targeting, engagement, and training—focusing on different segments of the population, with attention especially to the overlap around the level two segments. The basic objective is to shift popular behavior away from the insurgency in order to separate out (identify, target, partition) irreconcilable elements, and this is done by conducting targeting, engagement, and training operations by, with, and through indigenous groups in order to maintain local ownership of the conflict.

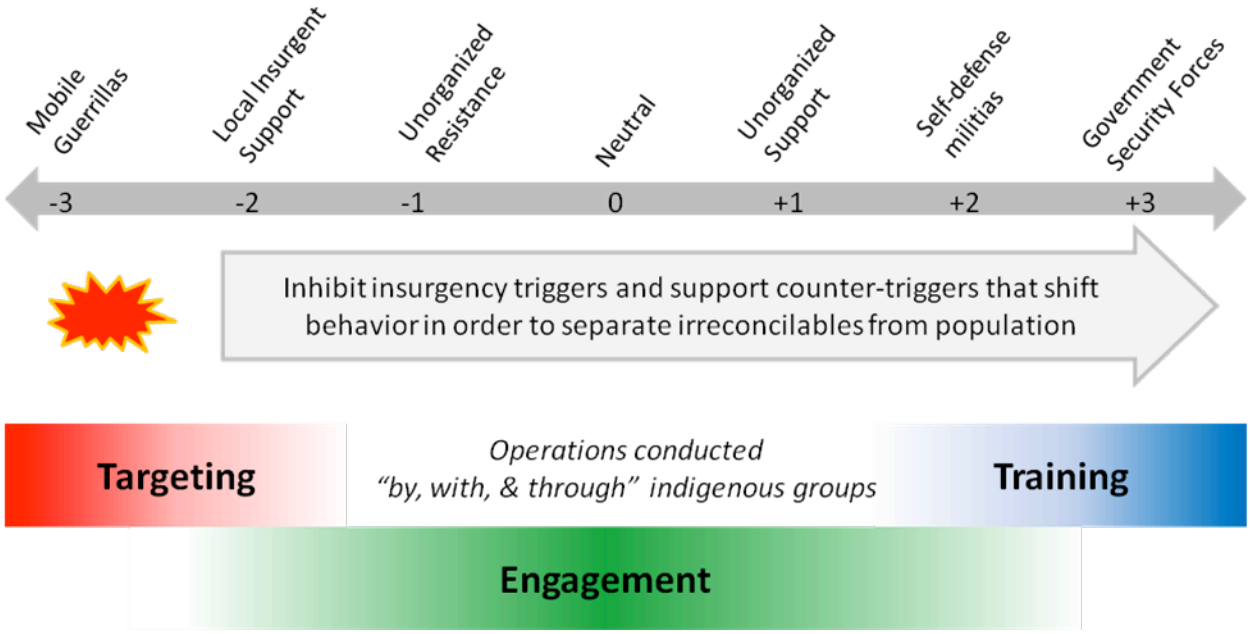

Figure 3: Different types of COIN operations for different segments of society

Depending on the local conflict structure the balance between the three types of operation can vary radically. Implementation is an operational and circumstantially contingent art, dependent on an understanding of the endogenous interaction between insurgents, militias, community networks, and COIN forces. Furthermore, there are many reinforcing and balancing feedback relationships among the different mechanisms, to say nothing of the concurrent set of operations that the insurgency is likely running to inhibit, counter, and subvert COIN efforts.

This framework (Table 1 and Figure 3) lays out in ideal terms the different types of operations and their contribution to gradual COIN success. We thereby ground familiar pragmatic advice found in COIN doctrine and practitioner memoirs in civil war scholarship on the microfoundations of conflict, rather than within suspect assumptions about popular grievance.

The War in Anbar

The remainder of this paper is an extended historical application of the COIN framework. While Petersen's model was originally developed to explain a Lithuanian case, with the minor adjustments above it is well suited to explain the case of Anbar province. To organize this case, following a brief introduction to the province, we qualitatively describe the distribution of political actors across the Petersen spectrum through the course of the insurgency and its suppression, 2003-2009 (quantification of this distribution is not possible as demographic data on each group either does not exist or remains classified). We highlight the triggering, sustaining, and inhibiting mechanisms that move people through different levels of participation.

Anbar is the largest province in Iraq, about the same size as the US state of Arkansas or the country of Greece, spanning the deserts west of Baghdad to the Syrian, Jordanian, and Saudi borders. Almost all of Anbar's 1.2 million inhabitants live in towns along the Western Euphrates River Valley (WERV), the dominant geographical feature (**Error! Reference source not found.**). The WERV is a longstanding historical corridor for licit and illicit trade between the Levant and Baghdad, and would become a channel for AQI foreign fighters and weapons after 2003. There is one major hydroelectric dam on the Euphrates at Hadithah which backs up Lake Qaddisiyah, supporting small fishing communities. Two other large lakes, Thar Thar and Habbaniyah, are disconnected from the river and support slight economic activity; while they provided some refuge for insurgents, they were too remote and unpopulated to serve as a substantial base.

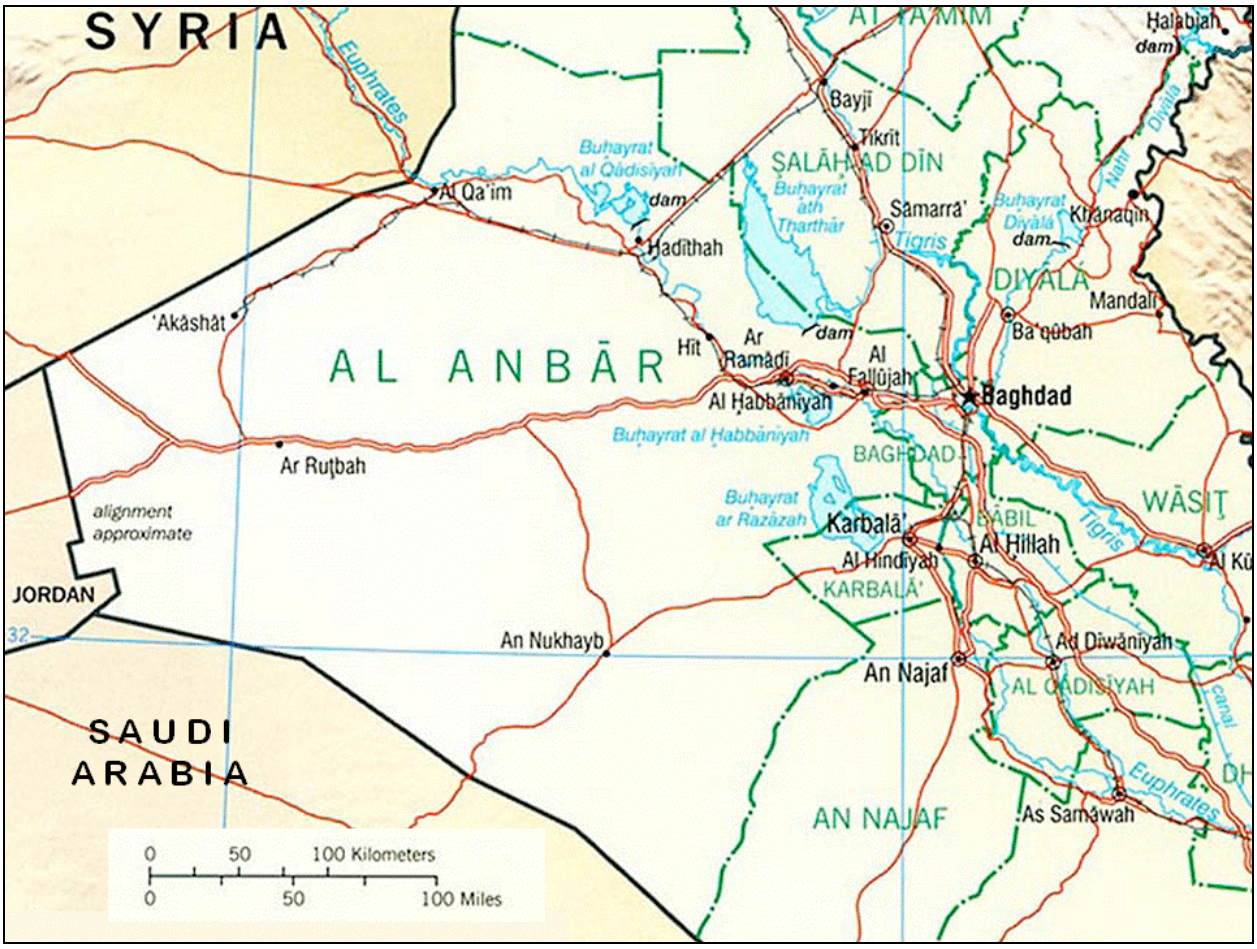

Figure 4: Anbar Province[29]

The province is formally divided into several municipalities, but these can be more conveniently grouped into three regions along the WERV, each with its own character (also corresponding to US brigade/regimental areas of operation throughout much of this time period). The first is the suburban gateway to Baghdad, running from the province boundary just west of Abu Ghraib through Fallujah, the second largest city in Anbar, and on to Habbaniya (the location of al-Taqaddum, a major Iraqi Air Force base and American logistics hub). Fallujah, known as "the City of Mosques," is a conservative Sunni area and the political stronghold in Anbar of the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP), an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood which was banned during Baathist rule. A number of tribes in this area were of particular importance to the Baath regime:

[29] Derived from CIA Iraq Shaded Relief Map (2004), University of Texas Perry-Castañeda Map Collection

many Republican Guard officers came from a powerful tribe to the west of Fallujah, the Fahad; many Iraqi Intelligence Service officers were Jumayli from the northeast of Fallujah; and many Saddam Feddayeen were Zobai from the southeast. Tribal and political control is most fragmented in the arc of communities between Fallujah and Baghdad (Karmah, Nasser wa Salam, and Zaidon), providing opportunities for insurgent staging against Fallujah and Baghdad.

The second is centered on the provincial capital Ramadi and its sprawling suburban/semi-rural outlying communities such as the Jazeera district north of the Euphrates. Although Fallujah is closer to Baghdad, Ramadi politics are more attuned to the national capital. It is a less religious and more cosmopolitan area. By early 2007, Ramadi had become the political center of the tribally-based "Awakening" parties, the principal rivals to the incumbent IIP, and the site of intense political competition for provincial control.

Unlike the urbanized areas around Fallujah and Ramadi, the large rural western region falls far more under the sway of tribal authority. As Anbar as a whole looks suspiciously toward Baghdad, so do the western communities look suspiciously toward Ramadi. The principal towns in this area include Hit, the "Haditha Triad" (the towns of Haditha, Barwana, and Haqlaniyyah) abutting the dam, the small gateway towns of Rawah and Anah forming something of a riverside retirement community for Baathists, and the border town of al Qaim, home of the Mahal tribe which traditionally controlled cross-border smuggling. Outside of the WERV, Anbar is mostly empty desert crisscrossed with wadis (dry streambeds) and low ridges. Near the Jordanian border lie the small Wild West communities of Rutbah and Akashat, and in the south is Nukhayb, a gateway town on the Hajj route to Saudi Arabia, notable for being one of the few areas of Anbar with a significant Shia population.

Tribe, Party, and State in Anbar, 2003

When the United States entered Anbar in 2003, it was confronted with the legacy of Saddam Hussein's policies. Chief among these were strong tribal networks, empowered by the combination of Saddam's Persian Gulf Wars, economic sanctions, and deliberate mingling of tribes with the state security apparatus. The IIP, no longer banned, lacked the extensive integration into Anbari society of the tribes but its years of clandestine operation gave it a much stronger formal organization.[30]

In contrast to the tribes and the IIP, in 2003 the Iraqi government and Ba'ath Party were shells animated largely by Saddam's cult of personality and skillful if desperate use of terror and patronage. These shells, along with most of the military, collapsed rapidly as U.S. air and ground forces attacked. Only a subset of regime loyalists stood and fought, often with more valor than skill. Anbar was relatively untouched in the initial invasion, which came principally from the south, though some Coalition special operation forces did operate in the western part of the province.[31]

The collapse of already decimated institutions was exacerbated by decisions made by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) charged with administering Iraq. These included a sweeping de-Ba'athification law that excluded many who were only nominal or low-ranking Ba'athists and a decision to formally disband the old Iraqi military. This latter decision also

[30] For an overview of the Ba'ath's effects on Iraqi society and its tribal policies, see Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Ba'athists, and Free Officers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978); Faleh Jabar, "Sheikhs and Ideologues: Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Tribes Under Patrimonial Totalitarianism in Iraq, 1968–1998,"and Hosham Dawood, "The 'Stateization of the Tribe and the Tribalization of the State: the Case of Iraq'," both in Faleh Jabar and Hosham Dawood (eds), *Tribes and Power: Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Middle East* (London: Saqi Books, 2003); Amatzia Baram, 'Neo-tribalism in Iraq: Saddam Hussein's Tribal Policies, 1991–1996', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, v.29 n.1 (February 1997). On the IIP, see, see Ahmed Hashim, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 2006), p. 21.

[31] See Bernard Trainor and Michael Gordon, *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq* (New York: Vintage Book, 2005) and Linda Robinson, *Masters of Chaos: The Secret History of the Special Forces* (New York: PublicAffairs Publishing, 2004).

meant that many individuals with significant military and security service experience would not be receiving pensions, which was particularly important to Anbar given the number of officers drawn from its tribes.[32]

Anbar in Flames, 2003-2005

In the summer of 2003, an insurgency against Coalition forces began as former members of Saddam's regime (referred to as "FREs"- former regime elements), Islamic extremists both domestic and foreign, Anbari tribesmen, and Iraqi nationalists briefly made common cause. With limited forces and operating in a totally unfamiliar environment, the responses of Coalition forces would frequently achieve tactical success at the cost of inflaming anti-Coalition sentiment. In April 2003, for example, U.S. soldiers, feeling threatened, shot and killed protesters in Fallujah.[33] This interaction led to a shift of substantial numbers of Anbaris to the minus one (-1) level of mobilization.

The situation in Anbar began to worsen in late 2003 and early 2004 as the insurgency against the Coalition grew in strength and more importantly became better organized. The insurgency was divided into two broad categories of insurgent: the religious extremist and the nationalist, though an individual could be both and belong to more than one group. A variety of criminal entrepreneurs were also operating in Anbar and were willing to aid the insurgents in exchange for money, protection, or other *quid pro quo* benefits.

The extremists were both domestic and foreign. Domestically, many of the extremists were deeply conservative Sunni imams who had been empowered during Saddam's Islamization campaign. Perhaps the premiere example of the domestic religious extremist in Anbar in this

[32] See discussion in Tom Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin, 2006) and James Dobbins, Seth G. Jones, Benjamin Runkle, Siddharth Mohandas, *Occupying Iraq: A History of the Coalition Provisional Authority* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2009)
[33] Dan Murphy, "At Vortex of Violence-Fallujah," *Christian Science Monitor*, April 2, 2004.

period was Sheikh Abdullah al-Janabi, imam of the Saad bin Abi Wakkas Mosque in Fallujah (though he had a public falling out with the Ba'ath regime in 1998). In this period he came to head an umbrella organization of various smaller extremist groups/cells known as the Fallujah Shura Council (FSC). Fallujah, as noted a very religious city, was a natural home for extremists.[34] The population had substantial numbers of passive supporters (-1), many of whom could be readily persuaded by social ties and economic rewards to shift to minus two (-2) or even minus three (-3).

The exemplar for the foreign extremists was Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the *nom de guerre* of a Jordanian who had gone to Afghanistan to become a mujahedin in 1989. Between 1989 and 2001 he had drifted between various extremist groups around the Middle East and was imprisoned and released by the Jordanians. In 2002 he allegedly had become affiliated with Ansar al-Islam, a mostly Kurdish Sunni extremist group in northeastern Iraq. He also is alleged to have had ties to al Qaeda, the exact nature of which remain unclear.[35] Following the invasion of Iraq, Zarqawi used his connections to form an organization called the Group for Monotheism and Holy War (generally known by its Arabic acronym JTJ) containing both foreign and domestic extremists. Zarqawi migrated to Anbar in this period, operating in the area of Fallujah and Ramadi.[36] Most of Zarqawi's recruits were Iraqi, bolstered by a small but significant number of foreign fighters. He and leaders like Abdullah Janabi were thus to some extent competing for the same recruits.

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[34] "Two Locals Headed Fallujah Insurgency," *Associated Press*, November 24, 2004 and Carter Malkasian, "Signaling Resolve, Democratization, and the First Battle of Fallujah," *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, v.29 n.3 (June 2006). The FSC is sometimes referred to as the Mujahedin Shura Council, but this is also the name of a later Anbar-wide umbrella organization so FSC is used for clarity.
[35] Scott Petersen, "The Rise and Fall of Ansar al-Islam," *Christian Science Monitor*, October 16, 2003.
[36] Monte Morin, "Who's Your Enemy?" *Stars and Stripes*, June 3, 2007.

The nationalist insurgents were often FRE officers mixed with more moderate (i.e. non-Salafi) Islamists. An example of the FRE officer type of nationalist was Staff Major General Kadhim Muhammad Faris al-Fahadawi, a former Iraqi Army Special Forces and Republican Guard commander.[37] An example of the moderate Islamist/nationalist category was Muhammad Mahmud Latif al-Fahadawi (widely referred to as MML), an Islamic scholar who served as a political organizer and spiritual guide for nationalist groups such as the 1920 Revolutionary Brigade (1920RB).[38] Both men generally operated in Ramadi and Habbaniyah, the homeland of their tribe the Albu Fahd, and also an area of substantial numbers of disenfranchised FRE officers. This gave them a ready pool of passive supporters (-1) who were readily mobilized further to the -2 or -3 level. Note that these supporters overlapped to some degree with potential recruits for the jihadi insurgents.

Criminal entrepreneurs both added to the general insecurity of Anbar in this period and aided the insurgents. Many of these criminal activities had become a major component of the economy of Anbar under Saddam and the collapse of the government merely amplified the scale. Of course, with no effective government much of this activity was really in a grey area. For example, consumer goods poured into Iraq while oil (from a variety of sources including simply pooled in unused pipelines) poured out; technically much of this activity was smuggling but it was widely accepted. Theft, extortion, and kidnapping for ransom were more clearly illegal and these activities also boomed. Tribal ties provided links both within the insurgent categories (e.g.

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[37] Dexter Filkins, "A U.S. General Speeds the Shift in an Iraqi City," *New York Times*, November 18, 2003 and author conversations in Iraq, June and August 2008.

[38] On MML, see Gianni Marizza, *Iraq dalla A alla Z* (*Iraq from A to Z*), March 2006, pp. 76 and 260; "State of the Insurgency in al-Anbar," I MEF G2 intelligence report, August 17, 2006 (online at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/02/AR2007020201197.html); and "AQI Situation Report," declassified, translated internal AQI document (online at http://ctc.usma.edu/aq/pdf/IZ-060316-01-Trans.pdf).

nationalists Faris and MML were both from the Albu Fahd) and between them.[39] The resources provided by these activities could readily be used to provide economic incentives to mobilize elements of the population.

The killing and mutilation of four security contractors in Fallujah on March 31, 2004 highlighted the growing lawlessness and violence in Anbar. At this point Fallujah had become a bastion for the insurgency and was essentially not under control by either the provincial government or the Coalition. The U.S. Marines, who had just taken over the Anbar area of operations (AO) from the U.S. Army, attempted to restore order in Fallujah in April with Operation Vigilant Resolve. However, tough insurgent resistance in the urban environment meant that the city was being destroyed and civilians killed. After a few days, the operation was halted and by the end of the month the Marines withdrew entirely from Fallujah proper. An attempt was made to use an Iraqi unit cobbled together from various tribes to secure Fallujah. This attempt was doomed from the start and Fallujah remained an insurgent stronghold through the summer of 2004.[40]

Insurgent capacity grew throughout this period. Al Qaim became a major transit point for foreign fighters flowing in from Syria. These fighters would then flow down so-called "ratlines" (infiltration routes) along the WERV. Rutbah, initially secured by U.S. Special Forces, also became an insurgent way station, although not to the same degree as Al Qaim.[41] In

[39] See Toby Dodge, *Iraq's Future: The Aftermath of Regime Change*, Adelphi Paper n. 372 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2005) and Phil Williams, *Criminals, Militias, and Insurgents: Organized Crime in Iraq* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army Strategic Studies Institute, 2009).
[40] See Malkasian, "Signaling Resolve."
[41] James Gavrilis, "The Mayor of Ar Rutbah," *Foreign Policy* (November/December 2005).

October, Zarqawi declared his allegiance to Al Qaeda and renamed JTJ "Al Qaeda in Iraq" (AQI).[42]

In November 2004, the Marines along with U.S. and Iraqi Army units, launched a second offensive, Operation Phantom Fury (also referred to by the Arabic al Fajr- "the Dawn"), to retake Fallujah. They were opposed by the FSC led by Abdullah Janabi, AQI led by Zarqawi associate Omar Hadid, and a variety of smaller groups, all of whom were heavily entrenched.[43] After more than a month of intense urban combat that devastated the city, the insurgents were forced out after taking massive casualties. Abdullah Janabi fled, apparently to Syria. AQI operations shifted west along the WERV, which it increasingly dominated.[44] The net result was likely a strengthening of AQI, as potential rivals like Janabi had been eliminated.

In January 2005, elections for both the Provincial Council and for representatives to the National Assembly drafting the constitution were held in Anbar. Due to insurgent intimidation and resentment towards the Coalition and central government, few in Anbar participated with voter turnout of perhaps 5%. The IIP, the only effectively organized party, won an overwhelming majority in the Provincial Council (The IIP's cynical strategy involved discouraging Sunnis to vote in order to appeal to nationalist sentiment as well as undermine rivals, then changing tack at the last minute to support its candidates).[45]

AQI continued to improve in organizational capability in 2005, combining ruthlessness, bureaucratic skill, and foreign support. It absorbed many domestic extremists as it filled the void

[42] This is also referred to as AQIZ or by its Arabic acronym QJBR. The JTJ name was also still used by some.
[43] See Malkasian, "Signaling Resolve," and Hannah Allam, "Fallujah's Real Boss: Omar the Electrician," *Knight Ridder Newspapers*, November 22, 2004.
[44] See Malkasian, "Signaling Resolve," and Bing West, *No True Glory: A Frontline Account of the Battle for Fallujah* (New York: Bantam, 2005).
[45] Kimberly Johnson, "Governor Not Backing Off In Violent Anbar," *USA Today*, June 27, 2006.

left by Abdullah Janabi's departure. At the same time, its growing power made AQI less willing to compromise; rather than partnering with nationalists, tribal smugglers and other criminals, it sought to dictate terms to them.[46]

The nationalists and tribesmen were having second thoughts about AQI as well. Many of the nationalists in this period were beginning to consider participation in the political process, as the alternative seemed to be more battles like Fallujah to no gain. Tribesmen were increasingly angry as AQI took over their lucrative grey and black market activities.[47]

Anbar Awakens, 2005-2008

The first open break between AQI and Anbaris came around Al Qaim in early 2005. Backed by the Albu Nimr from the town of Hit, the Albu Mahal from the area formed a paramilitary unit known as the Hamza Brigade (alternately known as the Desert Protectors). A combination of resentment against AQI's increasingly domineering attitude and economic disputes with AQI over smuggling revenue provided mobilization incentives. Former governor Faisal al-Gaoud sought to establish a partnership between the Hamza Brigade and the Coalition but was initially unsuccessful. A May 2005 Coalition offensive, Operation Matador, damaged the city and killed members of the Hamza Brigade, ending attempts at cooperation for several months. In August, the Coalition began to support the Hamza Brigade with airpower, but this was insufficient. By September 2005, the Hamza Brigade had been driven out of Al Qaim.[48]

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[46] See "State of Insurgency in al-Anbar," as well as Jacob Shapiro, "Bureaucratic Terrorists: Al Qaida in Iraq's Management and Finances," and Anonymous, "Smuggling, Syria, and Spending," in Brian Fishman, ed. *Bombers, Bank Accounts, and Bleedout: Al Qaida's Road In and Out of Iraq*, (West Point, NY: Center for Combating Terrorism, 2008).

[47] See Austin Long, "The Anbar Awakening," *Survival* v.50 n.2 (March/April 2008) and John A. McCary, "The Anbar Awakening: An Alliance of Incentives," *The Washington Quarterly* v.32 n.1 (January 2009).

[48] Ellen Nickmeyer and Jonathan Finer, "Insurgents Assert Control Over Town Near Syrian Border," *Washington Post*, September 6, 2005; Carter Malkasian, "A Thin Blue Line in the Sand," *Democracy,* n.5, (Summer 2007); and Carter Malkasian, "Did the Coalition Need More Forces in Iraq?" *Joint Forces Quarterly*, n.46 (Summer 2007).

Around Ramadi, others began attempting to fight AQI. Sheikh Abdul Sattar Bezia al-Rishawi, a smuggler, gathered some tribal fighters but they were crushed by the superior organization of AQI led in Ramadi by the ferocious Bassim Muhammad Hazim al-Fahadawi, commonly known by the kunya Abu Khattab. MML and other nationalists also decided to turn against AQI at some point during mid- to late 2005. These nationalists, operating under a new umbrella organization called the Anbar People's Council (APC), fought against AQI and also sought to help the Coalition protect the elections for the new national government in December 2005.[49] The APC thus represents a jump directly from a -3/-2 level of mobilization to a +3/+2. Nationalist insurgents began to cooperate with the Coalition for a mix of motives including fear of a major Coalition assault on Ramadi like the one against Fallujah, as well as AQI's growing dominance of the province.

AQI's response to the APC was ruthless and devastating. Under the direction of Abu Khattab, they assassinated key personnel, including the well-respected Sheikh Nassir al-Fahadawi, the leader of the powerful Albu Fahd tribe, in February 2006. Others were intimidated and cowed by these actions. MML himself was a target and apparently fled. Other anti-AQI nationalists, possibly including remnants of the APC, formed the Anbar Revolutionaries (often known by its Arabic acronym TAA) at about the same time. TAA used a combination of targeted killings and propaganda such as grafitti and leaflets in a campaign intended to weaken and discredit AQI. While this clandestine organization had some success

[49] See "State of Insurgency in al-Anbar;" "AQI Situation Report;" Toby Harnden, "US Army Admits Iraqis Outnumber Foreign Fighters as its Main Enemy," Daily Telegraph, December 3, 2005; and Multinatinal Force-Iraq Press Briefing, "Tearing Down al-Qaida in Iraq," December 2006.

with assassinations of AQI targets, including Abu Khattab, it was simply not sufficient to reverse AQI's growing ascendancy.[50]

Many sheikhs fled to Jordan or Syria. The combination of assassinations (often carried out by members of the same tribe), intimidation, and sheikh flight began to undermine the power of the tribe. Further, it also began to shuffle status within and between tribes, as discussed more in the following section. Everything was not going AQI's way, however. In November 2005, Faisal al Gaoud's attempts to form a partnership between the Hamza Brigade and the Coalition finally bore fruit. This partnership led to the launch of a major offensive around Al Qaim called Operation Steel Curtain, which eventually drove AQI out and secured the town. Steel Curtain was the first large-scale partnership between U.S. military units (level 3) and local paramilitary units (level 2) that took place in an area where there was substantial popular support (level 1). Note that the level 1 support was not universal around Al Qaim, as the Mahal were not the only tribe.[51]

The success around Al Qaim remained an isolated success until Sheikh Sattar, Faisal al-Gaoud, Hamid Farhan al-Heiss (from the Albu Thiyab tribe), Sheikh Ali Hatim al-Assafi, and other tribal leaders around Ramadi once again sought to oppose AQI. Hamid Heiss and Ali Hatim formed the Anbar Salvation Council (ASC), which may have overlapped in membership with TAA. Sheikh Sattar formed the Anbar (later Iraqi) Awakening (know by its Arabic acronym SAA, later SAI) and it also may have overlapped with TAA. The two organizations

[50] See "State of Insurgency in al-Anbar;" "AQI Situation Report;" "Tearing Down al-Qaida in Iraq," "Iraqi Rebels Turn on Qaeda in Western City," *Reuters*, January 23, 2006; and Jonathan Finer and Ellen Nickmeyer, "Sunni Leaders Attacked in Iraq," *Washington Post*, August 19 2005.

[51] See Malkasian, "Did the U.S.," and John Ward Anderson, "U.S. Widens Offensive in Far Western Iraq," *Washington Post*, November 15, 2005.

joined together in fighting AQI and at this point (mid-2006) were under the overall guidance of Sattar, who had a flair for the dramatic and a charismatic personality.[52]

Under Sattar, the two organizations began cooperating with Coalition forces against AQI, which at this time dominated much of Ramadi. The situation was so dire in all of Anbar that an August 2006 Marine Corps intelligence assessment deemed that social order had all but collapsed and AQI held sway over most of what was left.[53] However, as with the Desert Protectors in Al Qaim, the combination of Coalition firepower and money (level 3) with the tribal leaders' local knowledge and forces (level 2) rapidly began to reverse the situation. SAI affiliates and copy-cats began to appear in other parts of the province. Around the Haditha Triad, Coalition forces partnered principally with members of Albu Jughayfi; in Karmah it was with local tribesmen led by the Albu Jumayli.[54]

The year 2007 saw almost all of AQI's gains in Anbar reversed. Though successful in assassinating both Sheikh Sattar and Faisal al-Gaoud along with many other Anbaris, AQI's intimidation failed this time, as the Coalition continued to support resistance.[55] Sattar's brother, Ahmad, replaced him as leader of SAI.[56] In Fallujah proper, there was no equivalent to the Awakening, but a strong police chief, Colonel Faisal Ismail al-Zobai, also worked with the Coalition to secure the city. He was himself a former nationalist insurgent who also had ties to the IIP.[57] His brother Karim Ismail al-Zobai, commonly know by the kunya Abu Maruf, became

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[52] McCary, "Anbar Awakening;" Malkasian, "Thin Blue Line;" Greg Jaffe, "Tribal Connections: How Courting Sheiks Slowed Violence in Iraq," *Wall Street Journal,* August 8, 2007; and Mark Kukis, "Turning Iraq's Tribes Against Al-Qaeda," *Time*, December 26, 2006.
[53] "State of the Insurgency in al-Anbar."
[54] Matthew C. Armstrong, "A Friend in the Desert," *Winchester Star*, April 8, 2008 and U.S. Marine Corps Regimental Combat Team 6 blog entries for Karmah: http://fightin6thmarines.vox.com/library/posts/tags/karmah/.
[55] "Baghdad Hotel Bombing Kills Anti-Qaeda Sunni Sheikhs," *International Herald Tribune*, June 24, 2007 and Alissa Rubin, "Sheik's Allies Vow Revenge for His Killing," *New York Times*, September 15, 2007.
[56] Tina Sussman, "Slain Sheik a Stark Contrast to His Brother," *Los Angeles Times*, October 13 2007.
[57] Sudarsan Raghavan, "In Fallujah, Peace Through Brute Strength," Washington Post, March 24, 2008.

a prominent leader of anti-AQI forces around Zaidon.[58] Together the brothers had a substantial group of level 2 and level 1 supporters. South of Fallujah, the influential leader of the prominent Albu Issa (many tribesmen of which initially flocked to the insurgency, including AQI), Sheikh Khamis Hasnawi al-Issawi, began to side with the anti-AQI tribes, though he did not formally join SAI. This brought more level 2 fighters over to the U.S. side. Access to and within both Fallujah and Ramadi were controlled via large berms around city perimeters, concrete blast walls partitioning neighborhoods, and Joint Security Stations within the cities manned by both Iraqi Police and U.S. Marines.

By the end of 2007, Anbar was, if not secure, nonetheless radically safer, though AQI attempted a major offensive in Ramadi during August. This offensive was preempted when the insurgents were engaged at their assembly area on the outskirts of the city in what became known as the Battle of Donkey Island.[59] In 2008, security in Anbar continued to improve as the number of police topped 20,000 in the province. Driven from major population centers in Anbar, insurgents either fled the province or went into the hinterlands in order to find new bases of operation, particularly in remote areas of the Lake Thar Thar region.[60]

The year 2008 was not entirely peaceful, as AQI was still able to launch suicide bombing and IED attacks. One of the most dramatic took place in June when a major meeting of sheikhs, political figures, and Coalition forces in Karmah was struck by a suicide bomber. The blast killed several prominent Iraqis and Americans, including the respected mayor of Karmah and a

[58] See Multinational Force Iraq press release, "Sunni, Shia Sheikhs Present United Front Against al-Qaeda," November 10, 2007.
[59] Ann Scott Tyson, "A Deadly Clash at Donkey Island," *Washington Post*, August 19, 2007.
[60] Multi-National Force Iraq press release, "Coalition Force Destroy Weapons Caches in Lake Thar Thar Region," August 6, 2008.

U.S. Marine battalion commander.[61] However, in September the security situation was deemed stable and the Coalition officially passed control of the province's security back to Iraqi forces. This was followed by relatively peaceful provincial elections in January 2009.[62]

Assessment

The Anbar case exhibits all the characteristics of the modified Petersen COIN model. The U.S. invasion in 2003 toppled Sunnis from power, a startling status reversal that, along with negative cultural focal points regarding European occupiers and Shia "schismatics," pushed most of the Anbari population solidly into a -1 level against American forces and the Shia-dominated Baghdad government (both +3). Anbar's strong tribal structures provided the raw material to support local resistance (-2), while the concentration of former Baathist Republican Guard and intelligence personnel provided the organized nucleus for nationalist insurgencies (-3). These were supplemented by the influx of foreign religious extremist organizations (-3). Level 2 mobilization and support are only the first steps for either the insurgent or counterinsurgent. Effective bureaucratic organizations are needed to convert the mobilized resources (men, material, intelligence) into durable and capable forces

In the first few years of the war, tribal leaders ignored Coalition engagement overtures while the latter emphasized targeting operations. Lacking high-fidelity local intelligence, both false positive and false negative errors tended to reinforce triggering mechanisms to -1 and -2, and applied selection pressure to -3 organizations to develop clandestine bureaucratic infrastructure to survive and thrive against Coalition forces. Iraqi Security Forces (+3)—initially composed of Shia members or locals recruited with weak monetary incentives and subject to

[61] Hannah Allam and Jamal Naji, "3 Marines Among Dead in Attack on Iraqi Tribal Leaders," *McClatchy Newspapers*, June 26, 2008.
[62] See John Valceanu, "Iraqis Take Control of Anbar Security," *American Forces Press Service*, September 1, 2008 and Steven Lee Myers and Sam Dagher, "After Iraqi Elections, Next Big Test is Acceptance," *New York Times*, February 10, 2009.

infiltration by insurgents—were ineffective and tended to reinforce insurgency triggers. The ability of -2 and -3 insurgencies to inflict continued damage against Americans and erode public support reinforced sustaining mechanisms (evidence of small victories, wishful thinking, and sunk costs). Insurgents—especially extremist organizations like JTJ/AQI—also made wide use of coercive sustaining mechanisms, assassinating and beheading accused collaborators, a powerful check on the emergence of +2 rivals.

The key to the turnaround was the emergence of +2 militias, coupled with +3 Coalition power. +1 sentiment and +2 local action began to arise through frictions between tribal Anbaris and foreign jihadists, which became acute as the two began to compete for smuggling rents. AQI responded with heightened levels of murder and intimidation (a capacity of its well-organized internal security functions); this violence was a consequence and not a cause of the initial schism, contrary to popular conceptions, but it certainly widened the fissures once underway. As the initial experience of tribal militias in al Qaim and Ramadi demonstrated, however, +2 militias were no match for hardened -3 insurgents. The predations of -3 jihadists on local Anbaris and their perceived successes against +3 forces made these groups loom as more dangerous long-term threats to the local tribes than the inevitably temporary Americans. Only when tribal engagement efforts began to channel Coalition resources and combat support to tribal militias were they able to hold their own. +2 organizations benefitted from local intelligence and mobilization, with the combat responsiveness of Coalition +3 capabilities.

Ongoing tribal engagement led to a virtuous spiral inhibiting insurgency triggers and reinforcing COIN counter-triggers. With the support of +2 self-defense militias, Coalition forces were able to improve recruitment and training of more effective, more legitimate +3 indigenous security forces, and to leverage civil affairs programs to generate better low-level intelligence to

target the residual bureaucratic infrastructure of -3 adversaries. Coalition training, targeting, and engagement efforts worked well in synergy because tribal elements had made interest-based calculations to form +2 local structures and cooperate. The efficacy of this synergy further reinforced commitment of +2 organizations, leading to the astonishing plunge in violence in 2007 as the majority of the Anbari population rejected -2 and -3 organizations. This tipping point dynamic was something of the inverse of the dynamic during the first years of the war.

Conclusion

We have provided a rough COIN framework that joins pragmatic practitioner and doctrinal precepts—always emphasizing the local nature of politics and intelligence—to contemporary civil war scholarship. In particular, we have adapted Petersen's theory of community-based insurgent mobilization to a more general account which includes the organizational and economic dimensions of both insurgency and counterinsurgency. The general COIN theory, as well as our account of the war in Anbar, emphasizes the importance of organized combat power (counterinsurgent as well as guerrilla) joined to traditional community-based networks, the intensely localized and endogenous character of civil war as actors influence one another's movement along the scale of participation, the importance of tailoring COIN targeting, training, and engagement operations to the local distribution of participation, and perhaps most importantly from a policy perspective, the limitations of American agency, as successful COIN critically depends on interest-based calculations of local actors. This framework allows us to better explain the surprising turnaround in Anbar province, once the virulent core of the Iraqi insurgency, more effectively than explanations based on popular grievance or U.S. troop strength.

The theory presented here is necessarily only a preliminary sketch. The framework is somewhat indeterminate as it depends critically on an analysis of any local political constellation to apply it. Much more work could be done to expand/refine and conditionalize the COIN measures described in Table 1: which operations work in which situations? The Petersen spectrum of participation is explicitly dyadic in terms of insurgent vs. counterinsurgent behavioral support, but civil war usually involves more than two parties (especially when there is a third party intervention, like the U.S. in Iraq or Afganistan). Clearly there is also much room for further empirical testing, comparing the framework across different provinces in the same war, or to different wars entirely.

This assessment also has immediate implications for U.S. policy in Afghanistan. In Anbar, the decision of the local population to turn against AQI was made for very local reasons and essentially without regard to overall U.S. force levels or even strategy (apart from the decision to ally with tribes and nationalist insurgents). This is likely true in Afghanistan as well. Put simply, U.S. agency is limited to enabling the local population after it turns against insurgents rather than causing this turn.