

## Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency

by Jason Rineheart

### *Abstract*

*This article focuses on current counterterrorism and counterinsurgency doctrines. It argues that the more traditional frameworks for analyzing counterterrorism campaigns, which structure debates around a military (or war) model or a criminal justice model, need to be updated in the light of the current state of terrorism. As a potential new framework, the author restructures the debate around hard and soft power tactics. He also describes how the existing counterinsurgency literature primarily focuses on two frameworks: classical and modern (or global) counterinsurgency. Using the war in Afghanistan as an example, he compares and contrasts the strengths, weaknesses, and potential offsetting effects of modern counterterrorism and counterinsurgency strategies, arguing that in order for the United States to be successful in its battle against Al-Qaeda's brand of international terrorism, it must take its struggle from the open battlefields of counterinsurgency into the shadowy world of counterterrorism.*

### *Introduction*

Nine years after 9/11, the struggle against international terrorism is at a crossroads. Policy debates on whether to adopt a counterterrorism or counterinsurgency strategy in Afghanistan continue to drive contemporary security discourse in the United States and NATO.[1] However, these debates provide little strategic clarity on how to counter international terrorism. While Al-Qaeda's strategy is adaptive, the war in Afghanistan has become much more complicated than one would surmise from America's stated goal to "disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al-Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their return to either country in the future." [2] Counterterrorism and counterinsurgency debates on Afghanistan are somewhat shortsighted – focusing too much on the strengths and weaknesses of short and long-term commitments while avoiding critical discussions about what a sustainable counterterrorism strategy should consist of at the international level. The line between counterterrorism and counterinsurgency strategy has become increasingly blurred, yet they are two rather distinct doctrines.

The American-led invasion of Iraq not only diverted attention away from the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks, it also gave rise to a new wave of research and analysis on insurgency and counterinsurgency warfare. While the Al-Qaeda terrorism threat was not entirely ignored, research on terrorism tended to aggregate America's terrorism and insurgency threats and frame counterterrorism within the context of counterinsurgency warfare, leading to the misleading conclusion that both strategies were mutually reinforcing. There were at least three perceptions of the problem at hand. The first focused on how Al-Qaeda was exploiting the largely nationalist insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan in order to play the role of strategic spoiler. The second focused on the resilient and adaptive nature of Al-Qaeda as a global organization and its ability to project its ideology worldwide in order to gain more recruits and encourage new attacks. The

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third focused on the need to change the facts on the ground and address the root causes of terrorism.

This gave rise to several theoretical approaches to counter the threat posed to the U.S. forces on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan: including enhanced policing, better intelligence and information operations, increased international cooperation, counter-radicalization programs, and the need for good governance and economic development – all in an attempt to address the ill-understood underlying causes of terrorism. Such prescriptions tended to misunderstand the nature of the terrorism and overplay causal linkages.

In the following I shall try to address five questions: What is counterterrorism? How has counterterrorism evolved over the past four decades? What is the nature of counterinsurgency? How are counterterrorism and counterinsurgency doctrines similar and how are they different? And, finally, to what extent has the increased focus on counterinsurgency warfare after 9/11 affected how we view the current nature of counterterrorism?

#### *What is Counterterrorism?*

Counterterrorism is a difficult concept to define, especially for western democracies. Paul Wilkinson writes that: “There is no universally applicable counter-terrorism policy for democracies. Every conflict involving terrorism has its own unique characteristics.”[3] Both Paul Wilkinson and Louise Richardson argue, and they are not alone, that Western democracies must make respect for civil liberties and the rule of law a staple in their counterterrorism strategies.[4] While this advice to liberal democracies is admirable and complies with championed democratic principles, it does not amount to a counterterrorism strategy – these are simply highly valued principles meant to guide counterterrorism.

Counterterrorism is defined in the U.S. Army Field Manual as “Operations that include the offensive measures taken to prevent, deter, preempt, and respond to terrorism.”[5]. This definition is more concrete but has its strengths and weaknesses. First, it correctly states that counterterrorism is an all-inclusive doctrine including prevention, deterrence, preemption, and responses, which would require bringing to bare all aspects of a nation’s power both domestically and internationally. Second, this definition includes everything but essentially differentiates nothing, which is a problem. If an effective counterterrorism doctrine means ‘whatever we need, whenever we need it,’ then this could create problems with developing effective counter strategies, allocating resources, and determining accountability – it might make the concept of counterterrorism rather worthless. There are, however, advantages to an all-encompassing approach to counterterrorism. It allows a government such as the United States to recognize the complexities of responding to terrorism; it also provides a rhetorical tool that reinforces the notion that there is no simple fix to America’s terrorism problem – but that does little to help our understanding of counterterrorism.

Counterterrorism operations are subject to change according to the nature of the terrorism threat. Indeed, international terrorism, particularly Al-Qaeda terrorism, is and remains persistent and adaptive. While terrorism is a tactic that cannot be entirely eradicated, steps can be taken to

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disrupt, dismantle, and ultimately defeat organizations that use terrorism. As such, policy prescriptions for addressing threats emanating from ‘corrigible’ groups like Hamas and Hezbollah will look entirely different according to the political context, the current threat environment, and, of course, the government conducting the counterterrorism operations. For instance, America would probably shy away from conducting Predator and Reaper drone strikes in southern Lebanon; this might not be a productive strategy in the long-term if the objective is to encourage Hezbollah to renounce terrorism, disarm, and fully blend its political and military forces into the existing Lebanese system. By the same token, while Israel may continue to carry out targeted assassination strikes against Hamas leaders, it would not be in the interest of American foreign policy or its counterterrorism policy to conduct U.S. strikes in Gaza and the West Bank. Al-Qaeda, on the other hand, is considered an ‘incorrigible’ terrorist organization with ambitious socio-political objectives which no government could realistically accommodate when trying to negotiate a political settlement and bring about an end to Al-Qaeda’s terrorism. Therefore, America has chosen a clearly enemy-centric approach to combating Al-Qaeda in order to achieve its objectives, which, as President Obama has recently stated, is to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al-Qaeda.

In order to effectively frame current American counterterrorism efforts, it is important to appreciate the difference between counterterrorism policy and counterterrorism operations, and to fully understand the competing objectives and mandates within the American government. The U.S. Department of State has had a long-term no concessions counterterrorism policy, which continues today.[6] This position was defined early on during its struggle against international terrorism. In 1973, Palestinian terrorists seized six diplomats (including the American ambassador to Sudan) in Khartoum and demanded the release of over 60 terrorists jailed in Israel, Jordan, West Germany, and the United States. Richard Nixon’s response was direct: “As far as the United States as a government giving in to blackmail demands, we cannot do so and will not do so.”[7] However, after 9/11, while America’s no concessions policy remains intact, counterterrorism operations carried out by the Department of Defense and CIA highlight that counterterrorism had evolved into a more lethal form of asymmetric warfare, which further blurred the line between policy and operations and reinforced the notion that counterterrorism has become an all-encompassing approach.

American counterterrorism policy and operations worldwide have, at times, appeared to present contradictions. But this is largely a problem of understanding the American bureaucracy and the competing efforts of the U.S. State Department, Department of Defense, and its intelligence agencies, rather than proving or disproving any contradictions in American counterterrorism policy. For example, Mark Perry has recently argued that America must talk to terrorists or risk losing the so-called war on terrorism. Perry argues that America violated its ‘no concessions’ counterterrorism policy in Iraq when it chose to negotiate a settlement with the loose network of Iraqi tribal militias in the al-Anbar province. By this logic, he argues, the U.S. must engage with other terrorist organizations like Hamas and Hezbollah because they are completely rational organizations with realistic political and social goals.[8] But within the fog of war in Iraq, it is

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important to understand how the negotiations unfolded. The American military engaged in talks with an insurgent enemy in order to quell violence within the broader context of an ongoing war. On the other hand, future negotiations with Hamas or Hezbollah, if they were to ever take place, would be handled by the Department of State within a non-war context.

Daniel Byman argues that despite America's attempts to isolate and weaken Hamas, the group has emerged stronger than ever and that direct engagement is the only option for resolving the conflict.[9] The same can be said for Hezbollah in Lebanon. However, practically no responsible analyst has argued that direct engagement with Al-Qaeda is an option for ending Al-Qaeda's terrorism. This highlights the fact that different counterterrorism strategies are needed for different terrorist organizations and that different departments within the same government have different approaches. In short, America's ability to successfully isolate and weaken terrorist organizations is subject to debates.

We also have to look how counterterrorism has evolved over the past four decades in order to fully appreciate the current state of affairs and the widening gap between policies and operations.

#### *The Evolution of Counterterrorism*

Counterterrorism has changed over the past four decades; unsurprisingly, this evolution has mirrored changes in the nature of terrorism. The current wave of international terrorism began arguably on July 22, 1968, when three members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) hijacked a commercial passenger flight from Rome to Tel Aviv.[10] This represented at least three novelties. First, it was one of the first hijackings where the objective was primarily political, and the target was specifically chosen for its symbolism. Instead of hijacking any airplane, three Palestinian terrorists took control of an El Al plane from Israel's national airline. Second, the hijacking was intended to influence a wider audience, rather than for personal criminal gain or for escape by simply redirecting a flight for transport. Rather, the terrorists were intending to trade hostages for imprisoned Palestinian terrorists in Israel. In addition, it was the first time a terrorist organization began operating regularly at the international level, leaving its home turf to attack citizens of a foreign country who, in many cases, had nothing to do with their struggle in order to promote their political cause before an international audience.[11] This encouraged other non-Palestinian groups – such as the ethno-nationalist/separatist ASALA (the Armenian Army for the Secret Liberation of Armenia), the JCAG (Justice Commandos of the Armenian Genocide), militant elements within the Free South Moluccan Youth organization, and left-wing groups such as the German Red Army Faction (a.k.a the Baader-Meinhof Group) – to “internationalize” their political struggles. These groups, Bruce Hoffman observed, learned from the PFLP that they could promote their cause worldwide by simply taking a plane, its crew, and its passengers hostage. “When we hijack a plane it has more effect than if we killed a hundred Israelis in battle,” said George Habbash, the founding leader of the PFLP in a 1970 interview. “For decades world opinion has been neither for nor against the Palestinians. It simply ignored us,” he said. “At least the world is talking about us now.”[12]

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International terrorism became a serious problem in 1968 for two reasons. First the loss of the 1967 Six-Day War, and subsequent Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights, West Bank, and the Sinai Peninsula, was a devastating defeat for the Palestinians and the Arab countries bordering Israel. This inspired groups like the PFLP to begin operating internationally to promote their cause because there was no chance that it could defeat Israel on the battlefield. Second, Latin American guerrilla fighters, frustrated with their battlefield failures in the countryside, began an urban terrorism campaign, which involved at first mainly the kidnapping of foreign diplomats. The primary tactics used by all of these groups were hijackings, kidnappings, and embassy raids, and the intention was, in addition to obtaining publicity, gaining ransoms and having imprisoned comrades exchanged for hostages and/or a safe passage away from the crime scene.[13] Such terrorist blackmail forced governments to respond accordingly. While acts of terrorism at this time killed relatively few people, such publicity stunts put tremendous pressure on governments to respond responsibly since a wrong decision during a hostage crisis could have disastrous consequences and the blame was likely to land in the court of the government. An example of this was the German response to the attack on Israeli athletes at the Olympic Games in Munich on September 5, 1972: eleven Israeli athletes (and eight members of the Palestinian Black September) were killed after a hostage standoff that ended in a shootout. While the West German government was not the primary target of the attack, the scene of crime was on German soil and the government was forced to act and bungled in its rescue attempt. This was an eye-opener as not only Germany but many other governments realized how insufficient their response capabilities were. As a consequence, several countries developed elite rapid-reaction hostage rescue teams. In short, during this period, governments' counterterrorism efforts consisted mainly in improving responses to groups hijacking international flights, taking hostages, and raiding embassies. At that time, the terrorists' primary intention was not to kill, but rather to raise attention for their cause by playing to the media and blackmailing governments into acceding to their political demands before worldwide television audiences.

Over time the nature of international terrorism changed and so too did counterterrorism.[14] It appeared that terrorists were no longer taking people hostage or hijacking airplanes as the primary tactic to achieve their goals. These tactics offered diminishing returns and no success in achieving the terrorists' primary political objectives. Palestinian militants quickly realized that hostage takings and hijackings were little more than a nuisance to governments.

Yasser Arafat eventually renounced terrorism and engaged in peace talks with the Israeli government in the mid-1990s.

New groups, such as Hamas, introduced more lethal tactics like suicide bombings with the intention of achieving at least the same level of limited strategic success that Hezbollah and the Tamil Tigers had reached by using suicide strategies.[15] Al-Qaeda also started attacking the United States, aiming at mass-casualty terrorism from the 1990s onward, which culminated with the theatrically orchestrated 9/11 attacks. In 1995, the Japanese religious cult Aum-Shinrikyo carried out a Sarin gas attack on a Tokyo subway system, apparently with the intention of causing mass casualties. Terrorism had evolved into a more lethal and indiscriminate form of

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warfare that appeared to be more religiously motivated. This once again put governments in a predicament to respond forcefully to an enemy that it did not entirely understand.

The evolution of counterterrorism over the past forty years was a slow process that involved adapting to the nature of international terrorism, as well as taking advantage of new advancements in military technology. The Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) played a significant role in this evolution. The RMA is associated with new advancements in military technologies. It began in the 1970s during the nuclear stalemate between America and the Soviet Union when it was becoming clear that possession of nuclear weapons offered little strategic or political advantage over the other since using them would have drastic consequences. The answer, for America, was to develop more conventional weapons capabilities that the USSR did not have or could not afford to develop. This, it was assumed, would ultimately give them the upper hand in the event of a conventional war.[16] Yet the new weapons had to be politically and morally acceptable, i.e. they had to be precise, minimize collateral damage, and reduce the risk of death by the military personnel delivering them.[17] They had to make war “bloodless, risk-free and precise as possible.”[18] These military capabilities, combined with modern advancements in computer technology, were the kicker in the RMA, because if linked into precision-guided weaponry, military commanders could, in theory, orchestrate the battlefield in real-time from a safe distance. These advancements in military technologies are what Michael Ignatieff dubbed “virtual war,” meaning “a war without death – to our side – is a war that ceases to be fully real to us.”[19]

After 9/11 the evolution of counterterrorism became more apparent. Michael Boyle argues “the development of counterterrorism as a model of warfare is new to the post-September 11 era.”[20] Peter Bergen dubs counterterrorism in the post-9/11 world as “The Drone War”; some have even characterized the Obama administration’s over-reliance on drones as the “Obama Doctrine.” Indeed, the use of unmanned aerial Predator and Reaper drones by the US military and CIA has revolutionized how America combats terrorism; it can be seen as a new tactic in counterterrorism warfare. But using unmanned drones is not the first attempt by America to use the benefits of the RMA to respond to international terrorism. Before 9/11, President Bill Clinton ordered a one-off, precision-guided cruise missile attack aimed at Al-Qaeda bases in Afghanistan in response to the 1998 bombings of the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. The use of unmanned drones has had interesting implications on the development of counterterrorism strategies not only in the unpopular Bush administration, but as highlighted above, the Obama administration has considered drone warfare to be “the only game in town”.

“President Obama has not only continued the drone program,” writes Peter Bergen, “he has ratcheted it up further.” He goes on to say that in 2007 “there were three drone strikes in Pakistan; in 2008, there were 34; and, in the first months of 2009, the Obama administration has already authorized 16.”[21] At the time of writing, in 2010 alone, the Obama administration has authorized over one-hundred drone strikes worldwide. The large majority of them have occurred in the border regions between Afghanistan and Pakistan.[22] Regardless of the controversy surrounding these operations, American drone strikes have been successful to a certain extent.

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Mohammed Atef, AQ's top military strategist, was killed in November 2001 in a drone strike near Kabul, two months after the 9/11 attacks. In 2002, Abu Ali Al Harethi, a suspected mastermind of the 2000 attack on the USS Cole, was killed in Yemen - the first drone operation outside of Afghanistan. Kamal Derwish, an American citizen, was also killed in the attack - the first American citizen to be killed by a CIA-orchestrated drone strike.[23] Drone strikes have also been seen as successful. Since 2008, according to Bergen, "U.S. drones have killed dozens of lower-ranking militants and at least ten mid-and upper-level leaders within Al Qaeda or the Taliban." [24]

However, it is debatable whether the drone strikes will prove strategically successful in the long-term, due to their often-unintended consequences. Killing AQ leaders and rank-and-file members might be considered a 'success' in the short-term, but they can be replaced relatively quickly. Drone strikes can also lead to collateral damage, killing innocent bystanders who are presumably not affiliated with AQ or its leaders, which could alienate the local population or blunt the effectiveness of more population-centric strategies such as state-building and counterinsurgency, which focuses on winning the legitimacy of the local population and promoting good governance. Yet it remains to be seen if drone attacks alone are sustainable. In order to identify, locate, and target AQ and its affiliates from the air in regions like Pakistan, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Yemen, America needs effective and timely human intelligence. Drone strikes are also questionable from an ethical and international law perspective because operations are deadly – capitulation to a drone is not possible. Such strikes may well violate the sovereignty of a state like Pakistan, which allows America to carry out attacks in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), which has historically been an autonomous region outside the authority of the Pakistani government. Yet the Pakistani government has yet to authorize strikes in Baluchistan which is a hotbed for Islamic extremism in Pakistan proper. At the end of the day, an advanced drone program is an operational tool, and a campaign of targeted strikes can provide a counterterrorism strategy with some innovative and timely successes. Yet drone operations are a tactic, not an overarching strategy. Moreover, the changes in the nature of counterterrorism raise a larger question of the nature of power in modern counterterrorism operations. If counterterrorism is indeed an all-encompassing approach requiring all aspects of a nation's power, then it is important to understand both the hard and soft power options of counterterrorism.

#### *Hard and Soft Power in Counterterrorism*

Existing research on counterterrorism tends to structure debates around two approaches: the war (or military) model and the criminal justice model.[25] The war model tends to frame the struggle against terrorism in military terms of an enemy-centric war where the armed forces of a state are primarily in charge of developing counterterrorism strategy. On the other hand, the criminal justice model champions the rule of law and democratic values which prevail in Western democracies. Doing so puts restrictions on the government and thereby risks reducing the effectiveness of counterterrorism measures. However, as Ami Pedahzur and Magnus Ranstorp have argued, both models rarely function according to academic theory during an actual

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counterterrorism campaign. While democracies tend to champion democratic ideals and the preservation of civil liberties, their attempts to combat terrorism forcefully have continually tested the boundaries of the criminal justice model.[26]

There is a need to view counterterrorism from other angles. It is becoming increasingly clear that a new framework is needed in order to develop and measure successful counterterrorism strategies.[27] Considering the evolution of counterterrorism, it could be more useful to view counterterrorism in terms of “hard” and “soft” power. This would require restructuring the debate around a direct and indirect approach to counterterrorism.[28] The direct approach would be an enemy-centric doctrine consisting of primarily offensive, hard power tactics such as Predator and Reaper drone strikes, special forces operations, increased policing and intelligence operations. These are useful tools if the goal is to isolate and destroy groups like Al-Qaeda. The indirect soft power approach would consist of population-centric methods, and would contain features such as capacity building, economic development, and counter-radicalization focusing on the underlying causes that allow terrorism to thrive.

The direct approach to counterterrorism is straightforward but it raises serious questions regarding the ethical and legal use of force – on top of the issue of collection of intelligence and the protection of civil liberties within a democratic society. On the other hand, it remains to be seen if soft power alternatives such as democracy promotion, economic development, and counter-radicalization effectively address the ill-defined “root causes” of terrorism. Robert Jervis argues that even if political oppression, weak states, poverty, and economic inequality were the real root causes, “there is little reason to think that we could deal with them effectively”. He concludes that “we cannot point to solid evidence that doing so would make much difference.”[29] This is not to say that American involvement internationally would not include some form of economic and development assistance in weak and failing nations. But it is difficult to give aid to weak states like Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Yemen and expect to be able to determine effectiveness in terms of countering Al-Qaeda’s terrorism. Moreover, providing development aid to increase capacity building is questionable from a counterterrorism perspective since a causal link between weak states and terrorism cannot be proven. Aid may well increase the standard of living, level of education and general quality of life in some countries. Yet it is difficult to argue that locals would turn to terrorism or political violence without it. Furthermore, such root cause theories would have to address the fact that homegrown terrorists do indeed radicalize and carry out attacks in democratic countries as well as weak and failing nations – and that while poverty and economic inequality are prevalent throughout the world, terrorism is not.[30] It may be more useful from a counterterrorism perspective to view terrorists as rational actors who adopt the tactic of terrorism as a strategic choice to pursue political objectives, not as passive observers who are susceptible to what the supposed underlying causes forces them to do.[31]

Then there is the issue of counter-radicalization and de-radicalization in counterterrorism. Some argue that terrorist radicalization and de-radicalization should be viewed as a complex process consisting of a variety of interdependent push- and pull-factors and triggering events that drive

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people into and out of terrorism.[32] Others contend that social networks and group dynamics better explain how individuals are violently radicalized.[33] So far theories of radicalization have had difficulties in explaining why individuals take up or leave terrorism behind. This is mainly due to the fact that terrorists come from a wide variety of backgrounds and there exists no single individual terrorist profile.[34] Despite the absence of a single terrorist phenotype, some view counter-radicalization programs as a critical part of counterterrorism. Lorenzo Vidino argues that attempts to dismantle terrorist networks is similar to playing a game of “whack-a-mole” and that governments should take steps to prevent radicalization in order to stop people from becoming terrorists. He goes on to argue that anti-radicalization programs would vary from “convening interfaith meetings to creating government-funded Muslim magazines and TV channels, from promoting lectures of Muslim clerics exposing the theological flaws of al Qaeda’s ideology to mentoring projects and professional development seminars.”[35] Theories of counter-radicalization also have trouble measuring success from a counterterrorism perspective, because such programs essentially amount to increased community engagement that requires community leaders to target and mentor individuals who are presumably susceptible to terrorism recruitment. Yet it is difficult to prove that they would have turned to terrorism in the first place, and, more importantly, that they will not engage in terrorism afterwards.

Some go a step further and look at ways soft power can facilitate an exit for individuals from terrorist groups, arguing that government counterterrorism programs should offer terrorists a pathway out of terrorism by facilitating disengagement and rehabilitation.[36] While research on disengagement, de-radicalization, and rehabilitation is in the early stages, it is realistic that (local) government can play a crucial role in facilitate pathways out of terrorism for groups and individuals who want to leave terrorism behind.[37] In Lebanon, soft approaches such as political engagement and increased capacity building might have some influence on bringing about Hezbollah’s disarmament and its full integration into the Lebanese political system. Yet the fact remains that Hezbollah already chose to join the political process in Lebanon many years ago and has yet to decommission its militia.[38] Similarly, attempts to weaken and isolate Hamas have proved questionable from a hard power perspective. Hamas showed in 2006 that it could use democracy to its benefit without having to moderate its political aims or renounce violence. The FMLN in Central America, on the other hand, decommissioned its militia and joined a democratic system in the early 1990; it is now one of the largest political parties in El Salvador. So the record is mixed on whether democracy can offer groups a pathway out of terrorism. Yet it is reasonable to assume that some soft power measures could indeed offer certain individuals and groups some sort of pathway out of terrorism.

While both hard and soft power measures in counterterrorism do not necessarily provide a magical way to defeat terrorism, such a framework can be a useful way to characterize and analyze counterterrorism initiatives. In the context of countering Al-Qaeda terrorism, however, it seems America prefers hard power to soft power. One of Al-Qaeda’s primary goals is to reverse American foreign policy and its influence in the Middle East while overthrowing corrupt Arab regimes it supports.[39] But it is clear, and rightfully so, that American government has little

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appetite for addressing the root causes of Al-Qaeda's terrorism since it has just approved \$60 billion in military sales to Saudi Arabia - the largest military sales package ever for an Arab state [40]. According to Bob Woodward's new book *Obama's Wars*, the CIA has Presidential and Congressional approval to carry out covert, lethal counterterrorism operations in over sixty countries. It also manages a 3,000-man team of Afghans known as Counterterrorism Pursuit Teams (CTPT). Its purpose is to take the fight to Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In short, it appears that for the time being aerial drone strikes and other hard power tools will drive American counterterrorism strategy.[41]

Nevertheless, America should be mindful that counterterrorism operations that cause high civilian casualties rates allow terrorists to exploit its actions and to strengthen their own position from a propaganda perspective. There is a fine line between effectively responding to terrorism and strategic overreach. John Brennan, President Obama's top counterterrorism advisor, recently commented on the need to resist using the "hammer" in counterterrorism. He went on to argue that America must use the "scalpel" and prepare for a long struggle against Al-Qaeda, a struggle that would take the fight from the battlegrounds of counterinsurgency into the shadows of more covert counter terrorist operations.[42] However, this does not mean that more precise is necessarily less lethal. While post-modern terrorists may want a lot of people watching and a lot of people dead, covert counterterrorism forces now want few people watching and a lot of terrorists dead.

### *Counterinsurgency Theory*

How does counterinsurgency differ from counterterrorism? Counterinsurgency has been defined as "those military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological and civic actions taken by a government to defeat an insurgency." [43] Based on this definition, counterinsurgency is an all-encompassing approach to countering irregular insurgent warfare – an approach which recognizes that a military solution to a conflict is not feasible; only a combined military, political, and civilian solution is possible. Seth Jones of the RAND Corporation has argued that, based on his analysis of 90 insurgencies, defeating an insurgency is a long process that lasts on average 14 years.[44] T. E. Lawrence has been quoted as saying "to make war upon rebellion is messy and slow, like eating soup with a knife." [45]

There are several studies that highlight the best practices of waging counterinsurgency warfare. David Galula, a former Lieutenant Colonel in the French army, is considered the intellectual God Father of counterinsurgency studies. In his famous book *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (1964), Galula argued that, in order to counter an insurgency, it was essential for the counterinsurgent to win the support and legitimacy of the local population, promote good governance, and keep a sufficient amount of troops in an area to provide security after the governments forces have taken it over. He also argues that is important to "destroy or expel the main body of armed insurgents" or, if that is not possible, to "win over or suppress the last insurgent remnants." [46] These principles provided the intellectual framework for countries like America and Britain to further develop and implement their respective counterinsurgency

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doctrines at both the theoretical and practical level. They are also the foundation of General Petraeus's "clear, hold, and build" strategy.

John Nagl, building on Galula's work, argues that there are two approaches to counterinsurgency: the direct and indirect approach. The direct approach focuses primarily on defeating the enemy with military force. The indirect approach, on the other hand, involving a "battle for the hearts and minds," focuses on a more population-centric strategy. It involves denying the insurgency the support of the local population while at the same time attacking the insurgency with military force.[47] The primary goal of both the insurgent and the counterinsurgent is promoting good governance and winning legitimacy in the eyes of the local population. This framework for victory has been the primary focus of American counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. As a consequence, General Petraeus's declaratory strategy has revolved around denying the insurgency its sanctuary within the population and training the local security services to hold the territory so the insurgents do not return, while building infrastructure, promoting good governance, and eliminating political corruption – thereby winning the population's "hearts and minds."

Counterinsurgency theory can be seen within a classical and modern framework. Classical counterinsurgency theory is similar to both the Nagl and Petraeus approaches. Since a classical insurgency is generally associated with a struggle within one state, with a possible safe haven in a bordering state, a classical counterinsurgency is confined within the borders of a single state. Seth Jones, in his analysis of 90 insurgencies, identified three key variables that are, in theory, critical to a successful classical counterinsurgency: 1) training the local police and security forces to combat the insurgency; 2) improving the quality of local governance; and, 3) denying the insurgency any external support and outside sanctuary.[48] Jones goes on to argue that America is not likely to commit itself to a 14-year long counterinsurgency in Iraq, Afghanistan, or Pakistan. Thus, in his view, training and supporting the host government's security forces to defeat the insurgency is critical. Locals have more legitimacy and are more familiar with the local geography, language, culture, political landscape, and history. They are simply more capable of gathering intelligence from the local population and thus should take the lead in any long-term counterinsurgency effort.

Modern counterinsurgency theory, on the other hand, takes a more international approach. After 9/11, Al-Qaeda's network across national borders was characterized by many as a global insurgency.[49] This new insurgency threat was not only local, it was international, which as some argue, requires a re-thinking of how such irregular warfare should be combated.[50] Many counterinsurgency experts acknowledge that as the nature of an insurgency evolves so too does the counterinsurgency strategy[51] Indeed, Kilcullen's observation that "a globalized insurgency demands a rethink of traditional counterinsurgency" appears to make sense if one subscribes to the argument that Al-Qaeda is a global Islamist insurgency.[52] Bruce Hoffman recently framed the global Al-Qaeda threat in a similar way, and argued that while AQ does not enjoy the operational safe-haven it did before 9/11, it has "nevertheless been able to reconstitute its global terrorist reach."[53] As such, Hoffman argues that a new Global Counterinsurgency (GCOIN)

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strategy is needed to combat this international terrorist threat. This approach would include: vital information operations to counter the radical narratives; separating the enemy from its support base to deny it sanctuaries and freedom of movement; continuing to detect and defuse the enemy domestically and internationally; and a commitment to build legitimate civil governance which could counter the underlying causes of terrorism and insurgency.[54] This modern approach is basically a classical counterinsurgency theory of winning the “hearts and minds,” which denies the enemy sanctuary, seeking to promote good governance and engaging in information operations - but on a global scale. It is a much more ambitious undertaking than conducting classical counterinsurgency within a single state. However, it also remains to be seen whether AQ merits this type of attention and whether it really amounts to a global Islamist insurgency.

If we consider Al-Qaeda a serious global insurgency threat that has the resources and support to overthrow multiples governments worldwide, then it is certainly reasonable to adopt both Kilcullen and Hoffman’s approaches. However, if we do so it blurs even further the line between counterterrorism and counterinsurgency because it not only inhibits our understanding of both doctrines, it requires us to develop a new form of hybrid warfare. Just because an organization such as Al-Qaeda may use terrorism on an international scale and dabble in domestic insurgencies does not make it subject to the same respective counter strategies. Furthermore, to a certain extent, labeling Al-Qaeda as a globalized insurgency threat legitimizes Al-Qaeda’s cause and gives this organization or network too much credit. “The Al-Qaeda organization is neither an insurgency against a US hegemonic order nor the vanguard of a global Islamic resistance to globalization and westernization,” Michael Boyle has argued. “It is a resilient and highly lethal terrorist organization with a fanciful political programme and relatively little popular support in the Muslim world.”[55]

#### *Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency*

Counterterrorism and counterinsurgency are two fundamentally different doctrines and it is important to understand the strengths and weaknesses of each in order to fully appreciate the offsetting effects they might have. Michael Boyle has recently asked the question whether counterterrorism and counterinsurgency go together, and concluded that there is no reason to think that both strategies are fully compatible or mutually reinforcing, and despite the recent conflation of the two doctrines, that a counterinsurgency strategy should not be seen as a counterterrorism strategy and vice-versa.[56] Counterinsurgency can provide a clear framework for success if the situation is ripe for this type of warfare. The main tenet of counterinsurgency recognizes that a sole military solution is not feasible, making it essential for a dual military-political solution that adopts a population-centric approach. Additionally, counterinsurgency doctrine rests on a few key pillars of protecting the local population, promoting good governance, eliminating enemy safe-havens, and training the locals to take the fight to the insurgency. Classical counterinsurgency seeks to combat an insurgency confined within the borders a nation-state, while modern counterinsurgency theory takes these classical principles and applies them at the international level, or what Bruce Hoffman calls Global

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Counterinsurgency (GCOIN), which ultimately seeks to combat international terrorism while addressing the underlying socio-economic conditions that supposedly allow terrorism to thrive. Counterterrorism, on the other hand, provides a less clear framework for success but is equally complex. Counterterrorism has evolved over the past four decades into a more lethal form of unconventional warfare. Not surprisingly, this evolution has mirrored the trends in international terrorism. Since international terrorists from the late 1960s to roughly the end of the Cold War were primarily hijacking airplanes, raiding embassies, and taking hostages to promote their causes, counterterrorism forces adjusted to meet these threats. Yet over the past few decades terrorism has become bloodier and more indiscriminate, which forced governments to adjust their counter tactics. With the RMA developing unmanned, precision-guided weaponry that drastically decreases the risk of one's own soldiers dying in conflict on the ground, counterterrorism was able to evolve into a form of irregular warfare that is, as Michael Ignatieff described the RMA, as "bloodless, risk-free and precise as possible."<sup>[57]</sup> Instead of hostage negotiators being called to deal with a terrorist's demands, now a soldier operates unmanned aerial Predator and Reaper drones with Hellfire missiles to seek and destroy Al-Qaeda terrorists. Counterterrorism today is indeed a complex, multifaceted phenomenon. In the context of combating Al-Qaeda, counterterrorism is a sharp, quick, and lethal form of warfare focused on isolating, boxing in, and destroying the organization and its members. However, counterterrorism is something entirely different when thinking in terms of dealing with the complexities of Hamas and Hezbollah, as well as the hard and soft power alternatives that an all-encompassing strategy can bring to bear.

Recently the debate between counterterrorism and counterinsurgency advocates has gained traction within the Obama administration. Some argue that a long-term counterinsurgency is the only way to achieve America's goals in Afghanistan, while others argue that it does little to address the global threat posed by Al-Qaeda. For this a number of reasons can be cited. First, Afghanistan has been a "nightmare, a graveyard of empires," ranging from the Brits to the Soviets and now, potentially also to the Americans.<sup>[58]</sup> No one has ever effectively ruled Afghanistan. The country is so diverse in terms of its tribal structures that no unified state has ever been formed. Second, based on the counterinsurgency principles, success in Afghanistan requires certain underlying conditions that America currently does not have and cannot create. For example, having a legitimate host government is the bedrock of any successful counterinsurgency strategy. However, the current Karzai regime has been criticized for being extremely corrupt and for having made little progress in development.<sup>[59]</sup>

A recent poll of 6,500 Afghans conducted in 34 of the 36 provinces put the police and judiciary as the most corrupt departments in the Afghan government. These are the very entities responsible for implementing the rule of law.<sup>[60]</sup> Different U.S. governmental agencies in Afghanistan also appear to be working at cross-purposes. For example, the CIA has been funding Hamid Karzai's corrupt brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai, who is essentially the governor of Kandahar City, to provide security, collect intelligence, and combat the Taliban using his local militias. But the military, at the same time, is working to promote legitimate governance and win

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the “hearts and minds” of the locals. Major General Michael Flynn was quoted as saying: “If we are going to conduct a population-centric strategy in Afghanistan and we are perceived as backing thugs, then we are just undermining ourselves.”[61] Furthermore, CIA drone operations used for counterterrorism purposes are not only highly lethal but also have a tendency to cause unintended civilian casualties. Therefore, while targeted drone strikes that have relatively high levels of collateral damage may be seen as a necessary evil for a successful counterterrorism strategy, it essentially blunts the effectiveness of the nearby counterinsurgency operation since it has the potential to further alienate the local population.[62]

Third, the costs of a long-term commitment to counterinsurgency in Afghanistan are astronomic. As Kalev Sepp has argued, “If – as in Iraq – counterinsurgency means a campaign that will cost \$2 trillion, engage 150,000 troops, see the deaths of some 5,000 of those soldiers, and last for at least six years with an indeterminate end, then only the United States can do it, and probably only once in a generation.”[63] According to Bob Woodward’s new book on the Obama administration, President Obama has been quoted as saying, in relation to the war in Afghanistan: “I’m not doing long-term nation-building. I am not spending a trillion dollars.”[64] Due to the costs of counterinsurgency warfare, as the argument goes, the United States is not likely to sustain an international coalition or the international legitimacy required that some argue is critical to succeeding in Afghanistan. Fourth, counterinsurgency is “clearly not working” writes Richard Haass, President of the Council on Foreign Relations.[65] Haass goes on to argue that America must stop thinking that the Taliban and Al-Qaeda represent the same security threat to Afghanistan and to its national security interests in the region, and that the Taliban is not likely to harbor Al-Qaeda again because of the enormous consequences.

Above all, counterterrorism and counterinsurgency strategies must keep in mind the current threat that Al-Qaeda poses. CIA Director Leon Panetta estimated that Al-Qaeda has only “60 to 100, maybe less” members in Afghanistan.[66] And a recent estimate put its size in both Afghanistan and Pakistan at fewer than 500.[67] So if the mission in Afghanistan is to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al-Qaeda, as President Obama has stated, then a strategy focusing on this threat seems to be more feasible and have a higher likelihood of success. However, some have argued that the size of Al-Qaeda’s membership in Afghanistan and Pakistan is not necessary a productive method to measure its strength. Al-Qaeda has never had more than a few hundred core members and it continues to use affiliate organizations to project its terrorist brand internationally.[68] Whatever its size, as America’s battle against Al-Qaeda continues worldwide, it seems counterinsurgency warfare will be marginalized for a more enemy-centric counterterrorism strategy which will utilize a variety of hard and soft power tactics to disrupt, dismantle, and destroy Al-Qaeda.

### *Conclusion*

The line between counterterrorism and counterinsurgency strategy has become increasingly blurred, yet as we have seen, both concepts represent two different strategic doctrines. However, the increased focus on counterinsurgency warfare after 9/11 has affected how we view current

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counterterrorism efforts. At the heart of any counterinsurgency strategy is a “hearts and minds” approach of promoting good governance and gaining legitimacy in the eyes of the local population. This way of thinking appears to have had a certain impact on the development of more soft power counterterrorism measures, which now seek to promote legitimate governance and capacity building to address the somewhat unclear underlying causes of terrorism. Indeed, Daniel Benjamin, the U.S. State Department’s Coordinator of Counterterrorism, writes that America must address the complex factors of radicalization and “confront the political, social, and economic conditions that our enemies exploit to win over recruits and funders” by increasing “foreign assistance to nations and communities where violent extremism has made inroads, such as Pakistan and Yemen.”[69] This view reinforces the notion that America can effectively address its terrorism problems by changing the facts on the ground. Yet, in reality, this only highlights the State Department’s strategy for countering Al-Qaeda terrorism, which at the end of the day assumes a dubious causal linkage between socio-economic and political conditions and terrorism, and appears to be at odds with the more hard power approaches used by the CIA and American military.

However, critical questions remain regarding American counterterrorism strategy. Will the hard power counterterrorism tactics such as Predator drone strikes used by the CIA blunt the effectiveness of the State Department’s soft approach to counterterrorism? In contrast to counterinsurgency doctrine, does America really need the support and legitimacy of a local population in order to be successful in counterterrorism?[70] If so, can America and its allies develop a realistic framework to counter extremism and violent radicalization? If not, to what extent can hard power tactics prove strategically successful? Can both hard and soft power in counterterrorism be fully compatible and mutually reinforcing, or will both always operate at cross-purposes? And, more importantly, just because local populations in regions like Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia may have extremist views or despise American foreign policy, does that necessarily mean they will join Al-Qaeda and resort to international terrorism? In short, the larger task for America and its allies will be to find adequate answers to such questions and determine what the long, perhaps multigenerational struggle against international terrorism will look like after the war in Afghanistan, and, in this way, move beyond the current debate surrounding counterterrorism and counterinsurgency.

***About the Author:*** Jason Rineheart is a freelance writer specializing in counterterrorism and Middle East security and a Research Assistant at the Terrorism Research Initiative. He holds a B.A. from the University of Oklahoma and an MLitt from the University of St Andrews.

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