



Summer Intern Model Arab League July 9, 2016

BACKGROUND GUIDE Council on Counter-Terrorism and Counter- Insurgency

ncusar.org/modelarableague



Created by contributions from the staff and volunteers at the
National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations

Topic I: Examining methods by which counterinsurgency (COIN) strategies and tactics can be employed to combat the influence of insurgent groups like Daesh and Al Qaeda

I. Introduction

A. General Background

Insurgencies are “the organized use of subversion and violence to seize, nullify, or challenge political control of a region.”¹ They are often characterized by an organized, non-state paramilitary force attempting to subvert the legitimate government of a region, and implementing its own informal regime in its place. It is important to note that insurgencies, while outwardly militaristic, are often rooted in an ideal or ideology: this may be a political system, independence movement, religious motivation, or any other unifying cause. They also frequently exhibit the characteristics of a “proto-state,” with aspects of a military, bureaucracy, and civil society; thus, the defeat of an insurgency cannot be achieved solely through military might. Counterinsurgency, then, broadly defined, is “comprehensive civilian and military efforts designed to simultaneously defeat and contain insurgency and address its root causes.”²

As such, culture, legitimacy, and intelligence – the bases for which are all heavily rooted in the allegiance of a region’s population – are critical aspects that complement military operations. Without cultural understanding and empathy, a population will not support counterinsurgency forces; without that support from locals, the government will not be seen as legitimate, nor will it receive valuable intelligence from them. The population will seek other means to fulfill their needs, a mantle which insurgents are often altogether happy to pick up, gaining the trust and loyalty of locals as they do so. It is this tug-of-war between insurgents and counterinsurgents to win the support of a local population – and with it, legitimacy and intelligence – that defines the outcome of an insurgency.

Many times, these insurgencies are the result of “a grievance between segments of a state’s population with its constituted government.”³ This makes threat and root cause identification paramount, as the remedy thereof is essential to deescalating tensions and reinstalling legitimate state power. Promises by insurgents to provide a cure to the perceived ills make the movement appealing to those who have been aggrieved. Counterinsurgency operations must make simultaneous efforts to not only contain the violence that is associated with insurgencies, but also to begin alleviating the problems that drove citizens to support the rebels in the first place. This so-called “hearts and minds” approach, while often overlooked in contemporary operations, cannot be discounted as an effective means of quelling intrastate conflict.

B. History in the Arab World

As is often the case in post-colonial regions, many countries in the Arab world gained their political independence through insurgency, or experienced varying degrees of regime change

¹ Department of the Army. (2014). *Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies* (FM 3-24). Washington, D.C. <http://fas.org/irp/doddir/army/fm3-24.pdf>

² *Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies* (FM 3-24).

³ *Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies* (FM 3-24), 4-2.

through coups d'état or uprisings. Egypt, Iraq, Yemen, Syria, Libya, and Algeria are some of the more notable instances, though nearly every Arab state has had to endure a popular uprising at one time or another. The results of some of these insurgencies persist today: Sultan Qaboos of Oman is one such example.

More recently, the Arab world has been forced to face growing interstate – rather than intrastate – threats, particularly in the form of extremist groups like Daesh and al-Qaeda. Though their aims are not analogous to those of the 1960s and 1970s (often the seizure of a state's government and infrastructure), the means they employ are similar. These groups present themselves as the true advocate and arbiter of the oppressed, and demonstrate their utility to populations by providing services that the state government can or will not. Depending on the relative capacity of the government to combat it, an insurgent group might even take informal bureaucratic control of remote regions, and implement their own infrastructure and system of government.

When this occurs, all too often the response is to send military battalions to assault these towns, wreaking havoc on a population that had already been enduring hardship. Moreover, these liberation attempts can be seen as attempts to deprive the locals of the services that the insurgent government had begun to provide, serving to alienate the official state government even further. Compounding the issue is the Western affiliation of these so-called liberating forces, which often lack the aforementioned cultural empathy and understanding that is so critical to winning the allegiance of the local population. This only serves to underline the insurgents' message that they are the only group truly looking out for the interests of the people. In fact, the destruction that results from military campaigns designed to suppress insurgencies often have the effect of *strengthening* support for extremists. This is a detail not lost on the insurgents themselves: in 2014, Daesh declared, "If you fight us, we become stronger and tougher. If you leave us alone, we grow and expand."⁴ This principle has been demonstrated in Iraq, Yemen, and Syria, where insurgent groups have garnered significant support in their fight against legitimate state governments from decimated populations.

C. Finding a Solution to the problem: Past, Present, Future

As has been noted, Arab states have coped with the issue of insurgency on numerous occasions. Some were borne of the phenomenon; others have been brought to their knees by it. The League has taken some steps towards the traditional methods of countering violent extremist groups, particularly through the 1998 Arab Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism, as well as the creation of the Counterterrorism Committee of the League of Arab States. That said, it has yet to formulate a substantive approach to battling the root causes of insurgency, which is often the base from which terrorism grows, as well as the link to civilians that lend legitimacy to those violent acts.

As has been repeated *ad nauseum*, "as insurgency is a political phenomenon... military force alone... often only polarizes the society the insurgency is embedded in even further."⁵ If the

⁴ Canadian Security Intelligence Service. (2016). *Al-Qaeda, ISIL and Their Offspring*. Canada. https://www.csis-scrs.gc.ca/pblctns/wrldwtch/2016/2016-05-02/ISLAMIC%20STATE_REPORT_ENGLISH.pdf

⁵ Florence Gaub. 22 June 2015. "Why Arab states are bad at counterinsurgency." *The Brookings Institution*. <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/markaz/posts/2015/06/22-why-arab-states-are-bad-at-counterinsurgency>

Arab world hopes to bring a close to many of the extremist groups and resistance movements these governments face, they will have to use the military as a means of supporting and facilitating political solutions. Doing so runs counter to popular notions of combatting these groups – as those results are tangible and measurable, if not effective – and will require compromise and negotiation. However, results of prior counterinsurgency efforts have yielded far greater results than military operations when properly employed: Turkey from 1984-1999 and Algeria from 1992-2004 provide regional examples. By building off those successes, and learning from the lessons of the myriad failures, the League of Arab States may be able to create a framework by which states can permanently and equitably resolve the underlying roots of insurgencies.

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- Has my state encountered its own insurgency in the past? If so, was my state successful in countering it? Why or why not?
- What are the roots of political conflict in my state – and perhaps in others – that could potentially develop into a basis for insurgency?
- What organizations, departments, and groups does my state employ to prevent and cope with political unrest? Could they be used as examples or models for a League-wide framework?

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- How can the League develop a comprehensive counterinsurgency doctrine that will aid and instruct members in how to combat insurgencies, the prerequisites for doing so, and how they might prevent them from occurring at all?
- What steps can the League take to dismantle the networks that insurgencies rely on for funding, intelligence, and other resources?
- How can members utilize the ever-expanding advent of technology – an advent often employed more deftly by insurgents – to counter the messaging and informal infrastructure of insurgencies?

IV. Additional Resources

- United States Government Interagency Counterinsurgency Initiative: [*U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide*](#)

Compiled by the Departments of State, Defense, Justice, Homeland Security, and others, this guide provides a comprehensive – if at times U.S.-centric – overview of the theory, components, conditions, strategies, and actors involved in insurgencies and counters. It includes the political, economic, and military aspects necessary to defeating these movements, and instructs readers on how to utilize them in a coherent strategy designed to restore order.

- Christopher Paul, Colin P. Clarke, and Beth Grill: [*Victory Has a Thousand Fathers: Sources of Success in Counterinsurgency*](#)

This compilation of case studies assesses the operational success of 30 counterinsurgency missions from across the globe. Additionally, it compiles the elements of success for a general framework of counterinsurgency operations.

- [Arab Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism](#)

The text of the 1998 agreement passed by the League of Arab States, designed to create a League-wide response to rising instances of violent non-state actors. Includes a League definition of ‘terrorism’ and ‘terrorist offense;’ makes provision that League members will not provide safe haven, funding, or other material support to terrorist groups; and establishes League protocol for sharing information regarding suspect activity, actively combatting threats, and vigorously prosecuting offenders of the agreement.

- *Council on Foreign Relations:* [“Invisible Armies Insurgency Tracker”](#)

Compiled by CFR, this database compiles nearly every country in the world’s history of insurgencies, the outcome, and the duration of each. An extremely useful resource for gaining a perspective of the state, regional, and global impacts of past and ongoing insurgency movements.

Topic II: Assessing the capacity of member states to conduct counter-terrorism measures and combat irregular threats, while formulating strategies to improve capabilities

I. Introduction to the Topic

A. General Background

Since the Cold War – and beginning with its proxy wars – global military operations have increasingly shifted away from interstate, symmetric conflicts towards intrastate, asymmetric conflicts. Asymmetric conflict is defined as “warfare that is between opposing forces which differ greatly in military power and that typically involves the use of unconventional weapons and tactics (such as those associated with guerrilla warfare and terrorist attacks).”⁶ This type of warfare is often characterized by irregular combatants, a blanket term for fighters not associated with an official state military force.

The strength and capacity of irregular forces vary widely; however, in most cases these paramilitary groups cannot stand toe-to-toe with regular militaries. This necessitates unconventional tactics and strategies when combatting larger and better-equipped forces, designed specifically to negate the advantages professional militaries have in training and ordnance. Without adjustments, these professional militaries find their equipment and training to

⁶ “Asymmetric warfare.” (2016). *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/asymmetric%20warfare>.

be ineffective in combatting the guerrilla tactics employed in asymmetric warfare; moreover, defeating an irregular army can be problematic because of the often undefined or decentralized chain of command. Finally, the rules of engagement and treaties governing warfare – such as the Geneva Conventions – often do not apply to, or at the very least are not followed, by these types of forces.

B. History in the Arab World

There have been many examples of asymmetric warfare in the Arab world: the Mujahideen in Afghanistan during the 1980s, the Taliban during the 2000s, and groups like Daesh and Houthi rebels in Yemen at present being some of the more modern examples. Though these groups have typically been defined by their religious motivations, the tactics they employ are not unlike those of the Chechens in the North Caucasus, the Irish Republican Army in Northern Ireland, or the Viet Cong in Vietnam. These include the use of high-profile attacks on civilians, hit-and-run guerrilla tactics in urban areas, and a decentralized command structure that avoids the collapse of operations due to the death or capture of high-ranking officers.

Because of the political motivations that irregular warfare frequently stems from – after all, it takes quite a grievance to inspire a civilian to take up arms against some of the most well-equipped militaries on the planet – the comparatively large casualties that irregular combatants incur often are not deterrents. That said, while counterinsurgency tactics are critical to eventually ending the conflict, the interim demands that military forces be equipped to effectively combat guerrillas. Though Saudi Arabia and some of the other Arab military powers have made significant investments in counterterrorism, the results on the ground have largely failed to materialize.

C. Finding a Solution to the Problem: Past, Present, Future

While the Arab world has experience with combatting irregular forces, the fact remains that, like most other modern militaries, members of the League are often ill-equipped to defeat them. Though studies demonstrate that the most critical component of combatting irregulars is strong infantry numbers, modern militaries continue to invest heavily in expensive, long-term procurement projects – many times at the expense of bolstering troop numbers. While threats from belligerent states like Iran necessitate Arab investment in capabilities required for symmetric wars, the present and pressing threat of irregular forces like Daesh must be considered in defense budgets and appropriations processes.

Moreover, adequate training is paramount. Professional soldiers are traditionally trained to combat similarly-trained and -equipped enemies. Thus, combat troops must be adequately informed as to the strategies and tactics that are necessary to successfully resist and eliminate irregular threats. Unlike Europe, most Arab states spend a significant percentage of their GDP on defense; that said, it is critical that those funds are directed towards the most tactically relevant and efficient means of countering *all* threats. This includes strength of infantry, cybersecurity and intelligence, and appropriate equipment (which, as relates to asymmetric conflict, is generally not comprised of warheads, destroyers, and harrier jets).

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- How much does my state spend on defense? What types of equipment does it possess? Where are the military's perceived strengths and deficiencies?
- Has my state engaged with irregular forces recently? If so, how successful was the campaign? What lessons can be learned?
- How would my state rank the threats to its own security? To the League's security? Are those threats regular, irregular, or somewhere in between?

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- What past methods of asymmetric warfare have been effective in quelling irregular threats, and could be incorporated into a League-wide framework?
- How can the League wage asymmetric warfare without increasing disaffection within the population, or otherwise strengthening the cause of insurgents?
- How can joint training, interoperability, and shared capacity building improve the effectiveness of Arab counterterrorism?

IV. Additional Resources

- United Nations: "[Global survey of the implementation by Member States of Security Council resolution 1373 \(2001\)](#)."

This 2016 United Nations report analyzes the success with which UN member states have implemented the requirements of Security Resolution 1373, which provided stipulations for updating laws and regulations regarding terrorism and matters relating to it. This includes global terrorism trends, strategies presented by the UN to counter them, and regional reports on how well states are doing in combatting terrorism.

- Ivan Arreguin-Toft: [How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict](#).

In his exhaustive assessment of asymmetric conflict, Arreguin-Toft explains the various factors that sometimes allow the smaller, weaker force to defeat the larger, more powerful one. A largely strategic piece, *How the Weak Win Wars* provides recommendations for powerful actors to utilize their advantage, rather than having it become an impediment against nontraditional forces.

- Linda Robinson, Paul D. Miller, John Gordon IV, Jeffrey Decker, Michael Schuille, Raphael S. Cohen: [Improving Strategic Competence: Lessons from 13 Years of War](#)

Focusing on the 13 years following the September 11th attacks, *Improving Strategic Competence* presents findings, lessons, and recommendations for the American army – and military forces in general – to improve their capacity for combatting irregular threats. Focusing heavily on tactics and infrastructure, it provides a roadmap for properly adapting personnel, equipment, and cooperative exercises to emerging threats.

Topic III: Formulating a multifaceted civilian approach to contesting recruitment by insurgents and extremist groups through means including but not limited to campaigns, education courses, and rehabilitation

I. Introduction to the Topic

A. General Background

While combatting extremists on the ground is the more publicized and tangible element of counterterrorism, an equally important aspect is the prevention of recruitment and radicalization of young people to these causes. Particularly with the advent of technology and the internet, extremist groups can remotely and anonymously make contact with potential recruits, making the induction process more difficult to disrupt. Attacks in the Middle East, Europe, and the United States have been carried out by Daesh loyalists who have never set foot in an extremist camp or, in some cases, spoken with a member of the group's leadership.

Moreover, those who *have* actively engaged with extremist groups or traveled to the Middle East to participate in combat often go back to their homes. While some return disillusioned by the fighting and realities of war, others are intent on carrying out acts of violence beyond the borders of the conflict zones. The difficulty of actively tracking the movements of these foreign fighters creates a significant challenge when it comes to monitoring potential threats.

Both the personal and remote interactions with extremist groups are of great concern to governments seeking to deter and prevent terrorism within their borders. While there have been discussions surrounding the responsibility of technology firms – including social media websites, cell phone companies, and internet service providers – to report and monitor potentially threatening correspondence or activity, these have yet to yield substantive or universal results. Additionally, rapid developments in the technology sector make it difficult to keep pace with groups that are constantly finding new ways to employ applications and services to propagate violence.

B. History in the Arab World

The proximity of League members to hotbeds in Iraq, Syria, and the Horn of Africa makes this issue particularly pertinent to the Arab world. Since January 2015, Daesh has carried out roughly 25 terrorist attacks in League member states outside of Iraq and Syria.⁷ While Libya, Egypt, and Yemen – all of which have experienced varying degrees of governmental collapse – have borne the brunt of this violence, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Tunisia, and Kuwait have also confirmed Daesh-directed attacks within their borders.

Of the estimated 27,000 foreign fighters that have joined Daesh, approximately 6,500 have come from Tunisia; 2,500 from Saudi Arabia; 2,200 from Jordan; 1,300 from Morocco; 900 from

⁷ Karen Yourish, Derek Watkins, and Tom Giratikanon. 22 March 2016. "Where ISIS Has Directed and Inspired Attacks Around the World." *The New York Times*.
http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/06/17/world/middleeast/map-isis-attacks-around-the-world.html?_r=0

Lebanon; and 800 from Egypt.⁸ While Arab states have tried to curtail recruitment efforts by restricting and monitoring social media, rooting out extreme elements of the Islamic community, and promoting moderate Islamic leaders, homegrown terror threats continue to arise. That said, while so-called lone wolf attacks persist, there have been signs of reduction in the flow of foreign fighters in recent months.⁹ While it's unclear how much this can be attributed to anti-recruitment campaigns, Daesh does appear to be losing some ground.

C. Finding a Solution to the problem: Past, Present, Future

In response to the proximate threat of violent extremism, many member states have implemented prevention and rehabilitation initiatives. The most prominent example is the Mohammed Bin Naif Counseling and Care Center in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The Center is designed to counsel at-risk members of the community – particularly young men and women – to prevent them from falling victim to extremist recruitment, as well as reintegrate returning fighters through moderate Islamic clerics, psychologists, and social workers.¹⁰ Though this has been the most well-publicized example, Oman and others have begun working on their own terrorist rehabilitation programs.

Additionally, technology companies have begun making concrete efforts to combat extremist propaganda and recruitment material. In April 2015, Twitter announced it had suspended 10,000 accounts associated with Daesh, and also claimed it had been periodically suspending as many as 2,000 additional accounts per week.¹¹ YouTube has made its own contributions, by streamlining the process for governments to flag extremist propaganda, expediting its removal and reducing viewership.¹²

All that said, questions have been raised regarding the efficacy of these programs and initiatives. Daesh and other extremist groups continue to innovate and find workarounds for the distribution of their media. Particularly problematic is the development of Daesh-created messaging and communications apps, which make monitoring and intercepting extremist traffic difficult.¹³ Moreover, the suspended accounts are often simply replaced by new ones, creating only minor interruptions in the spread of messaging materials.

⁸ Ashley Kirk. 24 March 2016. "Iraq and Syria: How many foreign fighters are fighting for Isil?" *The Telegraph*. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/03/29/iraq-and-syria-how-many-foreign-fighters-are-fighting-for-isil/>

⁹ Michael Kaplan. 26 April 2016. "ISIS Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq Drop as Islamic State Group Loses Revenue, Ground." *International Business Times*. <http://www.ibtimes.com/isis-foreign-fighters-syria-iraq-drop-islamic-state-group-loses-revenue-ground-2359953>

¹⁰ "Mohammed Bin Naif Counseling and Care Center."

<http://www.mncc.org.sa/wps/wcm/connect/main/Counseling+center/Main/Programs/Consulting/?presentationtemplate=Design/MNCC/MNCC+DP+EN>

¹¹ Rick Gladstone. 9 April 2015. "Twitter Says It Suspended 10,000 ISIS-Linked Accounts in One Day." *The New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/10/world/middleeast/twitter-says-it-suspended-10000-isis-linked-accounts-in-one-day.html>

¹² Shiv Malik, Sandra Laville, Elena Cresci, and Aisha Gani. 24 September 2014. "Isis in duel with Twitter and YouTube to spread extremist propaganda." *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/24/isis-twitter-youtube-message-social-media-jihadi>

¹³ Clay Dillow. 13 January 2016. "ISIS Has Its Own Secure Messaging App." *Fortune*. <http://fortune.com/2016/01/13/isis-has-its-own-secure-messaging-app/>

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- How many fighters has my state seen recruited to extremist groups? How has my state been affected by Daesh-coordinated terror attacks?
- Does my state conduct a government-sponsored anti-terror-recruitment campaign? If so, has it yielded results?
- What issues in my state's society might an extremist recruiter target? Religion? Finances? Politics?

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- What have been the most effective means of combatting recruitment via social media, messaging applications, promotional videos, etc.?
- How can civil society, e.g., schools, mosques, non-governmental organizations, contribute their expertise to combatting recruitment by extremist groups?
- How successful and cost-effective are terrorist rehabilitation programs? Should they be expanded or curtailed?

IV. Additional Resources

- *Journalist's Resource*: "[Social and news media, violent extremism, ISIS and online speech: Research review](#)"

This collection of articles from the Harvard Kennedy School assesses the means by which extremist groups employ social media to recruit, promote and radicalize, and also evaluates efforts made to combat these methods.

- [United Nations Counter Terrorism Center](#)

The United Nations Counter Terrorism Center (UNCCT), founded on a \$100m grant from Saudi Arabia, is the arm of the United Nations dedicated to capacity-building that will combat the ability of terrorist organizations to recruit, garner support, and carry out violence. The projects are organized in global, regional, and national initiatives, which range from border security, youth engagement, and tracking extremist groups' movements and activities.

- Alberto M. Fernandez: "[Here to stay and growing: Combating ISIS propaganda networks](#)"

In this paper for the Brookings Institution, Fernandez examines the efforts of Saudi Arabia, the United States, the United Kingdom, and al-Qaeda to combat ISIS propaganda. Finding them wanting for various reasons, Fernandez also makes a number of recommendations to improve the capabilities of governments as it relates to winning the media war.