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"Global War on Terrorism": Rediscovering the Insurgency and Counterinsurgency Theory

The "Global war on terrorism" has become a widely used expression in the lexicon of Western policymakers, analysts and academics. It causes many controversies and interpretations which are not always helpful in comprehending the essence and logic of this ongoing conflict. First of all, it is necessary to admit that it is indeed a war, where protagonists use violence for political purposes. Having in mind that one of the belligerents is a non-state actor, the most productive way to understand this struggle is to apply a well-established and developed theory of insurgency and counterinsurgency, which until now was mainly used to explain an intra-state armed conflict. The strategic logic of a "global war on terrorism" follows closely the principles of this theory. However, they have to be seen in the context unusual for the insurgency and counterinsurgency theory. Its application at the level of the international system is fraught with challenges and difficulties stemming from the conflict's global and trans-national dimensions.

Introduction

In the spring of 1999, the author of this article attended the Wilton Park conference in the United Kingdom. As was usual at that time, the main theme of the event was transatlantic relations and their prospects. All participants – security policy experts, academics, diplomats, and military officers – almost unanimously agreed that after the end of the Cold War and with the overwhelming common threat gone, the transatlantic Alliance got into a certain strategic vacuum. Neither the Balkan wars, nor expansion of democratic space eastwards, managed to fill it in. However, a thought by one history professor drew the attention of at least some of the audience. As all historians are, apt to see the broader chronological perspective, he postulated a far-sighted, even prescient, idea. According to him, accepting that history is cyclical in its nature, we had to think of our times not as a post-war period but rather as of another inter-war period. It should be viewed as a period between the Cold War and some other war of a global scale, the causes, reasons, parties, and characteristics of which we still do not anticipate.

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Two years later, this thought came true. On September 11th, 2001, the strategic landscape of the world was altered instantly. The radical Islamic group, Al-Qaeda, challenged the global hegemon, the United States of America, by striking targets in New York City and Washington D.C., symbolizing the hegemon's economic and military power. The shock and impact of that day on the U.S. foreign policy and strategy are often compared to those caused by the Pearl Harbour attacks of 1941. The difference is that the terrorist attacks struck at the heartland of the United States, and was broadcasted live across the entire world through the television and internet channels. It also caused the deaths of almost three thousand people, mostly civilians and billions of dollars of damage. However, the most unprecedented aspect of the challenge was that it stemmed not from another state, but from a non-state actor.

The scale and ambition of the U.S. response are equally formidable. President George W. Bush declared a war which came to be known as the "global war on terrorism": the enemy was identified, the allies were mobilised, hesitant parties were warned, ideological parameters were established, police, and surveillance functions of the state were strengthened, the defence budget was substantially increased and military action was launched. In the context of this conflict, the last decade of the 20th Century indeed looks like an inter-war period. True, peace during that period was as elusive in most of the regions of the world as at any other time, even to Western powers which practiced the so-called "humanitarian intervention" doctrine and were sending their troops to various hotspots. However, at least it was hoped that the conflict of a global scale, such as the two world wars and the Cold War, became remote and with less theoretical possibility. Even if forecasts and speculations were made, they focused on China as a rising power. But Osama bin Laden, Al-Qaeda's leader, proved that it is sufficient to mix a dose of religious extremism and zeal, good planning, imagination, a few hundred thousand dollars with the right political, social and strategic context in order to provoke a new global conflict.

Almost everyone is in agreement that, this new conflict is different from the previous ones, just as the Cold War was different from the two world wars. Discussions regarding its nature still continue. Some experts reckon it is not a war at all and therefore military power has no role to play in it. Others reject its level of ambition, that it is a so called war on "terrorism," claiming that it is the same kind of rhetoric as the "war on drugs." Still others study all available sources on combating terrorism in their pursuit to provide a basis for an effective strategy, but more or less ignoring political and ideological dimensions of the conflict. However, there is an interesting strand of literature which examines the "global war on terrorism" through the lenses of the insurgency and counterinsurgency theory. Until recently, this theory has been employed to analyse armed conflict within states. In the case of a "global war on terrorism," its application is raised to a higher level of analysis, that of the international system. In a way, it is a logical extension of the thesis which became popular during the 1990s, that the influence of non-state actors is growing in international relations and that the probability of a major inter-state war is low. At some stage, with those non-state actors acquiring access to a wider range of

sources of power, the conflict with the main agents of the current world order, states, became inevitable. The challenge came in the shape of the Al Qaeda organisation and was directed against the hegemon, whose political, economic, military, and cultural power maintains that world order. It is only natural that a theory explaining armed conflict between the upholder of political system, the government, and non-governmental groups, becomes attractive at the level of the international system.

The purpose of this article is to employ the main elements of the insurgency and counterinsurgency theory in order to highlight the logic and, as Clausewitz would put it, the "grammar" of the "global war on terrorism." The main question is how this theory can help with the interpretation of contemporary conflicts in the international system and anticipation of their probable outcomes. The article does not aspire to go into any depth to characterize the international system or examine actions of various actors and events. Its attention will be focused entirely on adequacy of the insurgency and counterinsurgency theory in the context of the "global war on terrorism." A more strategic level narrative is chosen without going into details of operational and tactical levels. The article draws broad parallels between intra-state insurgency and counterinsurgency and the "global war on terrorism." Its first chapter provides a rather comprehensive overview of the literature on insurgency and counterinsurgency and the main tenets of the theory. The second part is devoted to analysing the "global war on terrorism" as global insurgency and counterinsurgency.

1. Insurgency and Counterinsurgency Theory

The insurgency and counterinsurgency theory is not a theory in a strict meaning of this term. It can be better described as one of the fields of war studies, exploring a specific type of armed conflict, that which is between a government and armed rebels. Precursors to the systematic discussion on insurgency and counterinsurgency in Western strategic thought can be found not only in a treatise of Carl von Clausewitz, but also in a book by another representative of classic strategic though, Antoine Henri de Jomini, entitled "The Art of War, " where he commented upon the Spanish resistance to the Napoleonic occupation. More dedicated studies appeared at the start of the 20th Century. The best know author from this period is Thomas Edward Lawrence, or Lawrence of Arabia, a British officer who described his observations from the Arab rebellion against the colonists in 1916-1918 in his book the "Seven Pillars of Wisdom" and in its abbreviated version "Revolt in the Desert." Another contributor to the creation of insurgency and counterinsurgency theory was yet another British officer, C. E. Calwell, who drew upon his rich experience of colonial wars and suppression of insurrections in South Africa and India from which to write a classical book, "Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice."

In the course of the 20th Century, the amount of literature on insurgencies and counterinsurgencies grew, along with the increasing "popularity" of this

type of conflict, starting with the rebellions against the colonial powers and ending with violent ideological conflicts between communist and anti-communist movements. Mao and Che Guevara are perhaps best known theorists and practitioners from this period, although there were host of other authors, from Irishman Michael Collins and Vietnamese Vo Nguyen Giap to Brazilian Carlos Marighella. Contemporary modifications of insurgency and counterinsurgency theory are reflected in the concepts of 4th Generation Warfare (4GW) and netwar by such authors as Thomas X. Hammes and John Arquilla respectively.[1]

1.1. Terminology Problem: Is Insurgency a War?

While reading the literature of the above authors, one's eye captures a great variety of terms used in this field. But all of them essentially refer to the same phenomenon of insurgency and counterinsurgency, just at different levels or placing an emphasis on its different dimensions and characteristics: *guerrilla warfare* where emphasis lies on tactics; armed resistance (focus is on the violent element); asymmetric warfare (asymmetries in power and methods of the opposing sides are highlighted); "small wars"; and revolutionary wars (etc.). There is a universal agreement about one thing: insurgency and counterinsurgency is war. It may seem an obvious observation. However, states and societies often refuse treating this conflict as a war until it is too late. The same problem arises in the "global war with terrorism" discourse, where many analysts question the use of the term "war." For instance, James Carroll asserts that, "The war on terrorism is not a war because though we have an enemy, the muscle-bound Pentagon offers no authentic means of assault."[2] By the same token, it is claimed that the response to the Al Qaeda's challenge is more a function of police and intelligence services rather than the armed forces[3]. As we shall see later in the discussion this conclusion is entirely correct, but not because insurgency and counterinsurgency are not war.

The classical definition of war, even a test of some sort, is the concept of war proposed by Clausewitz. According to him, "war is… an act of force to compel the enemy to do our will".[4] At the same time war is "a continuation of political intercourse, with the addition of other means."[5] The essence of insurgency and counterinsurgency also is the use of force and violence for political purposes and seeking to compel the opponents to do ones will. As

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[1] See Lind W. S., ""The Changing Face of War: into the Fourth Generation", *Marine Coprs Gazette,* 1989, October, pp. 22-26, and Arquilla J. et al, "Networks, Netwar, and Information-Age Terrorism", in Howard R. D. & Sawyer R. S. (eds.), *Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Understanding the New Security Environment,* Guilford: McGraw-Hill/Dushkin, 2002, pp. 86-108.
[2] Carroll J., "Is America actually at war?", *International Herald Tribune,* 30 January 2006.
[3] See Record J., *Bounding the Global War on Terrorism*, Carlyle: US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2003, p. 2-6.
[4] Clausewitz C., *On War*, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976, p. 75.
[5] Ibid, p. 605.

Steven Metz and Raymond Millen wrote, "Insurgency is a strategy adopted by groups which cannot attain their political objectives through conventional means or by a quick seizure of power. It is used by those too weak to do otherwise. Insurgency is characterized by protracted, asymmetric violence, ambiguity, the use of complex terrain (jungles, mountains, and urban areas), psychological warfare, and political mobilization all designed to protect the insurgents and eventually alter the balance of power in their favour."[6] It is obvious that insurgents are motivated by a political agenda, therefore the "Crime and Punishment" discourse which is often employed in the context of terrorism (or, in essence, insurgency and counterinsurgency) is problematic, often inadequate and leads nowhere in strategic sense.

1.2. Definition and Types of Insurgency

At this point, it is necessary to characterise insurgency and counterinsurgency in greater detail by discussing the essence of this type of conflict, its nature, and certain features of its evolution, but also bearing in mind that generalisations are risky in war studies. In the most general terms, insurgency can be defined as a legitimacy crisis, whereby one or several aspects of a state are challenged - ranging from legitimacy of a state itself, to the legitimacy of its political and social order, a particular government or its certain policies.[7] Depending on the nature of crisis and aims of the insurgency, non-governmental groups which emerge and resort to violence are classified by Bard O'Neill into several types:
   • Anarchistic, which reject any governance and government;
   • Egalitarian, which use radical methods to overthrow the existing social order within some particular political community;
   • Traditionalist, seeking to restore political order of the past, based on traditional values. Herein fall reactionary-traditionalist groups pursuing restoration of ancient political system, idealised as "golden age";
   • Apocalyptic-utopian, mostly religious cults;
   • Pluralist, which aspire to a political system based on democratic values;
   • Reformist, which seek to change governmental policies;
   • Preservationist, which are determined to prevent political and social change;
   • Commercial, which simply pursue self-enrichment through usurpation of political power.[8]

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[6] Metz S., Millen R., *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in the 21st Century: Reconceptualizing Threat and Response*, Carlyle: US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2004, p.2.
[7] See O'Neill B., *Insurgency and Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse*, Washington: Potomac Books, 2005, p. 15.
[8] Ibid, pp. 19-29.

1.3. Strategic Objectives and Logic of Insurgency: The Importance of Audiences

Whatever the roots of insurgency, its strategic objective is to shape the public's perception of the legitimacy aspect which comes under challenge. Violence is employed as a means of persuasion which helps to discredit the state, political order, government or its policy, attract and mobilizing supporters, intimidate opponents of insurgency and isolate them from the government. Metz and Millen call this "armed propaganda" which also assists political mobilisation.[9] It facilitates the establishment of "brand awareness" and promotes the political agenda of the insurgent group within the general public. Speaking in strategic terms, such an approach is similar to a concept explaining how the armed forces are used in international relations. Called "armed suasion," this concept was elaborated by Thomas Schelling in his book of 1967, *Arms and Influence*. Its essence is that the demonstration of military power, its use or the threat of use, are employed to shape the perception of opponents as well as allies about the situation and influence their ensuing decisions about further courses of action.

This is a strategic logic and mechanism underpinning insurgencies too. David Galula, a French author and former officer who fought Algerian insurgents, argues that the watching audience is key to each insurgency as its opinion and support determines the final outcome.[10] According to him, each audience can be divided into a minority of active supporters of insurgents, which the insurgents need to expand since it serves as a vital source of intelligence, logistics, and sanctuary (etc.). This minority of active supporters of the government needs to be intimidated or destroyed and it needs to be a passive majority.[11] It is this passive majority from which the perceptions and opinion of which constitute the main battleground of insurgents and counterinsurgents. Already a commonplace phrase, the "battle for the hearts and minds," which became very popular after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, is related exactly to this characteristic of insurgency and counterinsurgency. As Manwaring comments, "its chief aspect is the use of words, images, and ideas."[12]

1.4. Challenges to the Counterinsurgent

The success of insurgency is contingent upon many factors such as geographical conditions, organisation, experience, resources, and the will of the active minority of supporters, external assistance, and availability of safe sanctuaries (etc.). Listing and analysing all of them would require a separate article. Therefore it is necessary limiting the discussion to two crucial aspects. The first is the appeal of insurgent aims to the broader public, this being if they

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[9] See Metz S., Millen R. *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in the 21st Century: Reconceptualising Threat and Response*, Carlyle: US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2004, p. 4.

[10] See Galula D., *Counter-Insurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, London: Pall Mall Press, 1964, p. 8.

[11] Ibid, pp. 75-76.

[12] Manwaring M. G., *Shadows of Things Past and Images of the Future: Lessons for the Insurgencies in Our Midst*, Carlyle: US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2004, p. 2.

are articulated in a way which strongly resonates with the existing problems and popular grievances in relation to state, political order or government, then the insurgency stands much greater chances of eventually succeeding. According to Galula, "The best cause for the insurgent's purpose is one that, by definition, can attract the largest number of supporters and repel the minimum of opponents."[13] Exactly for this reason the main target of counterinsurgents usually is the insurgents' cause which either needs to be discredited or simply "stolen" by demonstrating that the problems and grievances feeding insurgency are being seriously addressed and effectively dealt with by the government. The second aspect is the competence and experience of the counterinsurgent itself in suppressing insurgencies this being: the political will and determination of its leadership and the external moral, political, financial and military support and assistance.[14] Every war, following Clausewitz's words, is a duel.[15] Actions of one side evoke the responses and reactions of the other side. The actions and image of the counterinsurgent, in the eyes of a general public, often determine the outcome of the conflict. Therefore insurgents, by employing violence, seek to demonstrate the counterinsurgent's weakness, incompetence and isolation, and most importantly provoke the government's inadequate and disproportionate response. Such a response leads to negative public opinion and increases the number of members of society supporting the insurgency.[16]

The counterinsurgent's situation often is unenviable. First of all, signs of the insurgency become evident only when the political dimension has already been shaped in favour of the insurgents. Governments are slow to recognize preconditions of insurgency and its early evolution, when the underground organisation of the insurgent movement takes place. Therefore they are forced to react to violence which already cannot be defeated or neutralised with coercive measures available to the government, unless parts of society are effectively repressed. This is a phenomenon of a gradual transition to war, whereby governing authorities do not realise in time when the situation warrants extraordinary emergency measures inherent to wartime, or, if they do recognize the challenge in time, find it difficult to impose such measures due to a negative public reaction.[17] Furthermore, there is an asymmetry of responsibilities between the insurgents and the counterinsurgent, which aggravates the position of the latter. Authorities are responsible for ensuring law and order in the entire country's territory and protect its economic, financial and administrative infrastructure, citizens, and their property. Insurgents, unburdened by such responsibility, exploit this asymmetry causing overstretch of the authorities which struggle to maintain control of the country's territory. For this characteristic, insurgency and counterinsurgency was dubbed as "war of fleas," where "fleas" (insurgents)

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[13] Galula D., *Counter-Insurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, London: Pall Mall Press, 1964, p. 19.
[14] Ibid, pp. 75-76.
[15] Clausewitz C., *On War*, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976, p. 75.
[16] See O'Neill B., *Insurgency and Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse*, Washington: Potomac Books, 2005, p. 104-106.
[17] See Galula D., *Counter-Insurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, London: Pall Mall Press, 1964, p. 9.

simply exhaust the "dog" (government) by relentless attacks which cannot be prevented, countered, and or responded to everywhere and at all times.[18] Most of the authors agree that the administrative capacity of the counterinsurgent, its ability to maintain control over the territory and population, without leaving the vacuum of governance where alternative administrative structures of the insurgents could emerge, are very important elements in successful counter-insurgencies. Related to that is the importance of effective coordination of all state authorities and agencies – military, intelligence, police, internal security, financial, migration, diplomatic, judicial, economic, and even educational – in counterinsurgency campaigns. It is argued that only about one fifth of the overall effort in dealing with the conflict is concentrated in military and law enforcement dimensions.[19] Most of it takes place in political, social, ideological, and propaganda dimensions. Every war is a continuation of politics, and insurgency and counterinsurgency is an absolutely political war, dominated by interactions on the political level.[20] Therefore, most of the authors concur that there are no military solutions to insurgency. This observation is well in line with the analysis of the main objectives of the counterinsurgent – "stealing" or discrediting the insurgents' cause and isolating them from the society upon which the insurgents draw for support. This is a war between two political, social, economic, administrative, military, intelligence, and information net-works, competing for popular support. It is exactly this notion of competing networks which lies at the core of 4GW and netwar concepts. In the age of the Information Revolution, forming and running such networks are greatly facilitated by the Internet and mobile communications. According to Arquilla, Ronfeldt, and Zannini, "netwar refers to an emerging mode of conflict…at societal levels, involving measures short of traditional war, in which the pro-tagonists use network forms of organization and related doctrines, strategies, and technologies attuned to the information age."[21]

In any case, insurgency and counterinsurgency usually is a long war, last-ing for years and even decades, where both sides are simply seeking to outlast each other. For this reason, Mao calls his model of insurgency "a protracted people's war". As Metz and Millen wrote, "Often insurgencies drag on so long that entire generations emerge that have known nothing but conflict".[22] More than that, insurgents use time as their weapon because, as Drew put it, "every day of the conflict when insurgent movement continues its existence…dis-credits the government and its ability to govern effectively and control its own

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[18] Robert Taber was the first to apply this popular analogy. See Taber R., *The War of the Flea: A study of guerilla warfare theory and practice*, L. Stuart, 1965.
[19] Ibid, p. 89.
[20] See Manwaring M. G., *Shadows of Things Past and Images of the Future: Lessons for the Insurgencies in Our Midst*, Carlyle: US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2004, p. 2.
[21] Arquilla J et al, "Networks, Netwar, and Information-Age Terrorism", in Howard R.D., Sawyer R. L., eds., *Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Understanding the New Security Environment*, Guilford: McGraw Hill / Dushkin, 2004, p.90.
[22] Metz S., Millen R., *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in the 21st Century: Reconceptualising Threat and Response*, Carlyle: US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2004, p. 5.

destiny".[23] Bearing in mind that all what the insurgents have to achieve is to survive and to demonstrate it, time is often their greatest ally.

This rather detailed overview of the insurgency and counterinsurgency theory provides sufficient ground for looking at how it could be applied on a global level of analysis in order to explain the conflict between the United States and Al Qaeda. In addition, while discussing the U.S. strategy in the framework of this theory, some additional theoretical concepts will need to be employed although they fell outside the scope of the above overview. Nonetheless, it supplied enough of theoretical material to support drawing parallels between the "global war on terrorism" and classical insurgencies / counterinsurgencies. The next chapter of this article is devoted for establishing such parallels.

2. Al Qaeda Challenge and the U.S. Response: The Logic and "Grammar" of Conflict

This chapter attempts answering the main question of the article – can insurgency and counterinsurgency theory explain the conflict which we came to know as "global war on terrorism"? How can we employ this theory to interpret Al Qaeda's and U.S. strategies in the conflict? Does the character of this conflict correspond to the main tenets of the insurgency and counterinsurgency theory? To what extent does its global scope limit the applicability of the theory? Or, perhaps, we should be looking for and articulating an entirely new war theory, which can better characterize the "global war on terrorism"?

2.1. Al Qaeda and their Goals: Supra-national Agenda

One should start looking for the answers to the above questions by examining the Al Qaeda and their goals. The very fact that the Al Qaeda is not a state actor of international relations should direct our attention to the theoretical frameworks incorporating such players. In war studies, the insurgency and counterinsurgency theory offers perhaps the only appropriate model in this respect. However, the first complication immediately arises as this theory investigates conflict within state. In the meantime, Al Qaeda's goals hardly suggest that boundaries of some particular state act as a constraint. Statements by their leader Osama bin Laden and accompanying actions reveal much more global ambitions. Essentially, the Al Qaeda seek to unite the world's Islamic community (*umma*), stretching from North Africa and Middle East through Central and South-West Asia to South-East Asia, into a single caliphate governing

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[23] Drew D. M., *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency: American Miliary Dilemmas and Doctrinal Proposals*, Air University Press, 1988, p. 6.

by Islamic law, *shariah*.[24] There is no doubt that this is a political goal, although inspired by religion and its historical past. According to Jason Burke, "Many Muslims, including bin Laden, believe it should be given political expression through the eradication of divisions, national or other, among Muslims and the unification of the *umma*, or Muslim community."[25] Any attempts by the opponents of the Al Qaeda to treat armed violence in pursuit of this goal, simply as blind and fanatic destruction in the name of some utopian religious goals, would completely ignore the Al Qaeda's political agenda. Using O'Neill's classification, the Al Qaeda qualifies as a reactionary-traditionalist insurgent group seeking to restore lost reputation and influence of Islam in the world which existed in the early Middle Ages. This political agenda logically leads to the strategic objectives which are, again, very clearly expressed in order to: eliminate Western political, economic, cultural, and military influence in the Islamic world which allegedly corrupts the Muslim community and which is interested only in the division and weakness of Islam; to depose corrupt repressive regimes in the Muslim countries because they just reflect the will of the West; and to prevent the rebirth of the Islamic community and its unification in a single state.[26] No matter how idealistic or ambitious these objectives are war as a means to achieve them can be one of the rational political instruments - but war against whom?

In the insurgency and counterinsurgency theory, the insurgent's opponent is the state's government and its supporters. It can be observed that the political goals and strategic objectives of Al Qaeda lead to a clash with many opposing governments and political systems, the legitimacy of which is questioned by this organisation – be it Saudi Arabia, Jordan, or Pakistan. Even its organisational principles may lead us to believe that we are dealing with just another group seeking to influence processes at the state level, since it represents and supports a network of intra-state Muslim insurgent groups operating within their national boundaries.[27] However, two aspects indicate that the scope of insurgency is much larger and that it affects not only specific governments or political systems. Firstly, it is the chosen main opponent – the United States. And, secondly, it is the nature of grievance lying at the heart of this insurgency and around which Al Qaeda's ideology and strategy revolve – the alleged suppression and humiliation of all the Muslims caused and sustained by the current world order, the main "agent" of which is the United States.[28] In his "declaration of war" circulated in 1998, Bin Laden makes the following statement: "It is no secret to you, my brothers, that the people of Islam have been afflicted with oppression, hostility, and injustice by the Judeo-Christian

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[24] See Fowler M. C., *Amateur Soldiers, Global Wars: Insurgency and Modern Conflict*, London: Praeger Security International, 2005, p. 2.

[25] Burke J., *Al Qaeda: the True Story of Radical Islam*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2004, p. 27.

[26] See Sageman M., *Understanding Terror Networks*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004, p. 18-19.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Fishel K. L., "Challenging the Hegemon: Al Qaeda's Elevation of Asymmetric Insurgent Warfare Onto the Global Arena", *Low Intensity Conflict & Law Enforcement*, vol. 11, No. 2/3, 2002, p. 285-298.

alliance and its supporters…but the blatant imperial arrogance of America, under the cover of the immoral United Nations, has prevented the dispossessed from arming themselves."[29] It is exactly here that the roots of the insurgency or legitimacy crisis, inspired and led by Al Qaeda, lie. But, in such a case, we have to acknowledge that this is the legitimacy crisis affecting not some particular political system or political regimes in the Muslim states but the entire world order maintained by the global hegemon, the United States, and its political, economic, military, and cultural power. The nature of the Al Qaeda's goals has pre-programmed the clash with the United States – the clash which by virtue of the U.S. global reach and influence turned into a global conflict.

However, the international system and state as two distinct analytical levels may not succumb so easily to the application of the same theoretical framework – insurgency and counterinsurgency theory. In addition to that, it is not enough to brand the conflict as insurgency and counterinsurgency solely on the grounds that the "global war on terrorism" is a manifestation of the political legitimacy crisis and that it involves a non-state actor as one of the belligerents. Strategic logic which drives the opposing sides is equally important.

2.2. Strategic Logic: The War of Images and Ideas

The main indicator of the "global war on terrorism" as an insurgency and counterinsurgency lies in the role of and interaction between military power, ideology, and propaganda. As it was pointed out in the first chapter, in insurgency and counterinsurgency violence is used as a means of suasion which amplifies and communicates an ideological message and shapes the image of the belligerents in the eyes of the observing audience.

Al Qaeda's campaign against the U.S. hegemony started well before the September 11th attacks. Bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, as well as the attack on the *USS Cole* at the Aden harbour in Yemen, preceded them. However, it was exactly the attacks of September 11th which, in terms of a dramatic effect, were rather unprecedented in the world's military and political history and which were broadcasted to the entire globe by the news channels that established Al Qaeda as an equal opponent to the hegemon. As Colin Gray, one of the most prominent contemporary strategy theorists put it, the Al Qaeda "…assumed the mantle of an historic victor. Islamic warriors for God had seen off a superpower. This was a heady conviction, one which still plays its role as a potent source of self-confidence and prestige."[30] It can be argued that violence was not employed just for the sake of physical destruction as a strategic goal. The Al Qaeda's strategists obviously pursued two main goals:

• To establish its "brand awareness" in the Islamic world and beyond. An audacious and effective attack undoubtedly helped to attract new follow-

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[29] Quoted in Lawrence B., *Messages to the World: the Statements of Osama bin Laden*, London: Verso, 2005, p. 25.
[30] Gray C. S., *Another Bloody Century: Future Warfare*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005, p. 237-238.

ers.[31] From that moment, the group accelerated its drive to become the main conduit of Muslim grievances which mobilises and directs their energies in the right direction. By and large, the main audience of the attacks was exactly the world's Muslim community which was supplied with ample evidence of how vulnerable "the great evil," the United States, was;

    • To provoke a disproportionate U.S. response which was supposed to even further push those in doubt of the Al Qaeda's goals and aspirations into the ideological embrace of the group.[32] In the framework of the insurgency and counterinsurgency theory, the objective of the struggle is a passive majority winning the support of which is crucial for achieving the aims of an insurgent as well as counterinsurgent.

    Just as in any other insurgency, violence is used to persuade the third parties to withdraw from the conflict and cease providing support to the opponents. In such cases, the audience of violence is comprised of the societies of those countries. This logic was behind the terror attacks in Madrid in 2003, executed in a run-up to the Spanish general elections. It turned the public opinion in favour of the political party which was advocating withdrawal of Spain's military contingent from Iraq.[33] It may be just a coincidence, but terror attacks on July 2005 against London's public transit system were perpetrated the next day after the city was chosen to host the summer Olympics of 2012: intentionally, or not, the message to the British public and to the world was that the country would not be safe as long as it plays such a prominent role in the U.S.-led coalition in the "global war on terror."

    The United States, having declared a global campaign against terrorism in the aftermath of September 11th, managed, at least for some time, to avoid the trap of disproportionate response. The campaign in Afghanistan was launched as a rather limited mission, without major excesses of the use of force. But already at that time the actions of the United States and their allies started supplying propaganda ammunition for the ideological and political machine of Al Qaeda. Everything, starting with the speech of President G. W. Bush which contained an unfortunate branding of "the global war on terror" as a crusade, then the incarceration of the suspected Taliban fighters at the Guantanamo base, the occupation of Iraq, treatment of prisoners at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq by the U.S. military personnel, rendition of the suspected terrorists to the third countries practicing torture as an interrogation technique, and similar episodes served well the Al Qaeda's cause. They were used as evidence to underscore the point that, allegedly, the United States and their allies sought to perpetuate humiliation and oppression of the Muslims. For instance, one of Bin Laden's statements, commenting on the invasion of Iraq pronounces: "while these wars are being waged by the Americans for religious and economic

[31] See Fowler M. C., *Amateur Soldiers, Global Wars: Insurgency and Modern Conflict*, London: Praeger Security International, 2005, p. 6.
[32] Ibid.
[33] This rationale is best revealed by Bin Laden's statement "To the Peoples of Europe". See Lawrence B., *Messages to the World: the Statements of Osama bin Laden*, London: Verso, 2005, p. 233-236.

purposes, they also serve the interests of the petty Jewish state and its murder of Muslims there. There is no better proof of this than their eagerness to destroy Iraq… and their efforts to fragment all the states in the region… into paper mini-states whose weakness and disunity will guarantee Israel's survival and the continuation of the brutal Crusader occupation of the Peninsula."[34] Even the reluctance of the United States to rein in Israel during its short campaign in Lebanon in the summer of 2006 was employed as a testimony to Western plot against the Muslims.

All this effort to use violence and propaganda directed against the United States, the West in general, and against repressive regimes in the Muslim countries is greatly aided by the global means of communication and media, especially the Internet and satellite TV. They were given special attention in the treatise of Ayman al-Zawahiri, the Egyptian who is one of the main Al Qaeda's ideologists and strategists, entitled "Knights under the Banner of the Prophet."[35] These instruments that are used by the Al Qaeda very actively and adroitly, although the atrocities of the organisation such as the bombing of a wedding party in the hotel of Amman in Jordan or recorded beheadings of hostages in Iraq, also may have had a negative impact on the Muslim public opinion.

Under the pressure of the U.S.-led campaign, the Al Qaeda has morphed into a diffuse movement the followers of which inspired by its leaders initiate and perpetrate the terrorist attacks without much organisation from some centre. The Al Qaeda only provides a broad direction, sometimes funding and training, perhaps indicates the suitable timing, but its main role now is the legitimisation of "resistance" to Western oppression. According to Burke, the Al Qaeda's name should be translated not as "a base" anymore, but as "a maxim."[36] From Muslim teenagers in the United Kingdom to wealthy entrepreneurs of the Gulf states, from Egyptian students to Pakistani traders and Indonesian peasants, the Al Qaeda's ideological movement has become as global a phenomenon as its global projection of military power. Terrorist acts, wherever they take place – in London, Bali, Istanbul, Amman or Riyadh – are just the symptoms of a continuing and growing insurgency. This is clearly appreciated by most Western strategists who urge others to address the roots of it and not the symptoms. Thus, by its strategic logic, the "global war on terrorism" is indeed an insurgency and counterinsurgency war – a war where images, ideas, and perceptions constitute perhaps the most important dimension of the struggle.

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[34] Quoted in Lawrence B., *Messages to the World: the Statements of Osama bin Laden*, London: Verso, 2005, p. 60.
[35] See Sageman M., *Understanding Terror Networks*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004, p. 20.
[36] See Burke J., *Al Qaeda: the True Story of Radical Islam*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2004, p. 290.

2.3. Counterinsurgent's Response: Challenges
of a Global Campaign

Those accepting the *Pax Americana* thesis will find the Al Qaeda's challenge neither new nor original. Western empires such as the Romans and British crumbled under the pressure of insurgents, thereby eroding their legitimacy. But application of the insurgency and counterinsurgency theory to the conflict between the Al Qaeda and the the United States implies equating the power of the United States in the international system with the power of a government inside a state. It is hardly possible to put a sign of equation between them, which has important consequences in the context of this article: in dealing with the insurgents, government as a counterinsurgent can afford applying quite different means and strategies compared to what is possible and available to a state acting in an anarchic international system comprised of sovereign states.

In the "global war on terrorism," the United States cannot use military force with the same ease as a government inside a state. State sovereignty, although weakened by the processes of globalisation and regionalisation, still constitutes the basis of the international system. Any exercise of the U.S. power faces constraints and imperatives stemming from this fact, such as the need to rally political support of other states to military action or conclude military transit agreements. Meanwhile, in classical counterinsurgency, the government is not constrained by the sovereignty of other countries in their actions, unless insurgents find a safe haven and establish their base abroad.

The netwar concept, briefly introduced in the first chapter, offers a partial solution to this conundrum. One of its main ideas is that the organisational networks must be confronted with other networks. If inside a state, the counterinsurgent network takes shape between governmental agencies and political supporters of the regime, then in the international dimension the United States would have to rely on a global network of friendly states which at least partially reduces the barriers of national sovereignty in the global counterinsurgency campaign. Such a network enables the exchange of information, facilitates consent with and support to intelligence and military activities, and provides a platform for a common action against, for instance terrorist financial flows, (etc.).[37] However, in order to make global counterinsurgent action even more seamless in a system of sovereign states, the United States must integrate into this network not only states, but also non-governmental and international organisations, media, the private sector, internet communities, religious Muslim groups, and even warlords. Otherwise the network of the Al Qaeda, operating without regard to national borders and sovereign authority and composed on non-state elements, will not encounter opposition where it is most necessary – in a diffuse and amorphous space which can be called the "global street," particularly in its Muslim part. It is not too difficult to realise that creating and

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[37] A multinational counter-terrorism network as an opponent to Al Qaeda's network is envisaged by John Sullivan and Robert Bunker. See Sullivan J. P., Bunker R. J., "Multilateral Counter-Insurgency Networks", *Low Intensity Conflict & Law Enforcement,* vol. 11, No. 2/3, 2002, p. 353-368.

sustaining such a network is a daunting undertaking. Furthermore, its effectiveness on a global level and without sources and instruments of power available to any country's government within national borders is far from warranted.

In addition to a network-against-network approach, there are more and also closer parallels between what strategic issues a government conducting counterinsurgency within state border encounters and what the United States face in the international system. Take the problem of failed states, which is rather salient on the agenda of the "global war on terrorism." In the framework of the insurgency and counterinsurgency theory, they can be compared to state provinces which fall outside control of central authorities and are used by insurgents to expand their campaign. Restoring governance in such provinces is one of the primary objectives of a state government. In a similar vein, reconstruction of failed states which potentially can and often do become havens for terrorist groups, has become one of the main concerns of the United States and their allies, as the continuing effort in Afghanistan demonstrates. Secondly, just as insurgents inside a state, the Al Qaeda is not encumbered by obligations and constrains which limit freedom of action for governments. The United States, no matter how hard its government lawyers try to find some elegant and "innovative" justifications for various aberrations, must adhere to the norms of international law. Such asymmetry of commitments and restraints is inherent to the dynamics of insurgency and counterinsurgency. The Al Qaeda is one of very few actors in the international system capable of projecting its power globally (sufficient to look at the geography of its terrorist acts) and it does so without any moral qualms or systemic constraints.[38] Furthermore, its global campaign is being conducted with minimal financial resources, compared to the U.S. military, homeland security, and intelligence budgets. Such asymmetry of resources required to support opposing strategies is also in line with the tenet of insurgency and counterinsurgency theory that insurgency is "war on a cheap" for the insurgents.

Again, following the principles of classical insurgency and counterinsurgency theory, counterinsurgents like the United States and their allies, are seeking ideological and political measures to neutralise the goals of the Al Qaeda, marginalise this movement, and isolate it from the majority of the Muslims. The central element of this strategic thrust, at least until a predicament in Iraq and a victory of a radical Islamist group Hammas in the elections in the Palestinian territories, was a Middle East democratisation initiative. The United States attempted to present a viable alternative to the Al Qaeda's radical vision of the Muslim world by arguing that it is individual liberty and democracy, not violence and theocratic dictatorship (often called as being tantamount to fascism), which represent a way and mechanism for the Muslims to regain their standing. The U.S. administration even tried to pressure some of the friendly authoritarian regimes in the Islamic world (e.g. in Egypt and Saudi Arabia) to reform and liberalise political and social life. According to

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[38] See Fowler M. C., *Amateur Soldiers, Global Wars: Insurgency and Modern Conflict*, London: Praeger Security International, 2005, p. 6.

O'Neill, it is exactly initiating fundamental reforms, which is most effective at isolating and suppressing insurgency.[39] However, it seems that the United States lacks the leverage to instil change in sovereign states as well as little political will to employ even those which are in their possession. This is aggravated by perceived short-term strategic gains which can be derived from propping up friendly undemocratic regimes and by the possibility of seeing radical groups exploit democratic procedures to seize power, as it happened in the Palestinian territories. The latter scenario repeated in, for instance Pakistan with its nuclear arsenal, would be a nightmare to the Western security community. It is therefore not surprising that the United States, despite all the rhetoric, seems to be losing penchant for the democratisation strategy, while there is no other alternative allowing them to seize the initiative from the Al Qaeda's ideological offensive, which has been found.

Perhaps the most prominent indicator of the convergence between the classical insurgency and counterinsurgency theory and "global war on terrorism" is the admission by the United States that it is this theory which constitutes a conceptual basis for the U.S. strategy. The Quadrennial Defence Review of 2006 cites the classics of insurgency and counterinsurgency and emphasises the limits of military power in the "global war on terrorism" as well as the necessity to coordinate military action with political, diplomatic, economic, social, informational, intelligence, and law enforcement dimensions. Fully in line with the theory, U.S. strategists admitted that it would be a long war – even the title of the document itself is "Long War." Military power is perceived only as an instrument to achieve a degree of security and contain the threat while the conflict is resolved in the dimension of "hearts and minds," just as insurgency and counterinsurgency theory calls for.[40] Unfortunately, although the U.S. is rediscovering its military competence in counterinsurgency, there is little done in the main, political and ideological, dimension. At the same time, all military errors and political mistakes are exploited by the Al Qaeda to further erode the reputation of the United States in the Muslim world. There is a tremendous lack of U.S. attention to the part of the counterinsurgent network which consists of non-state actors and which can provide much better access to Muslim "hearts and minds" than friendly but highly unpopular regimes.

The United States, just as many countries in the past which were challenged by insurgencies, missed the latent phase of global Al Qaeda's insurgency against its hegemony – the phase where political and military mobilisation of the group took place. In the phase of active confrontation, there is some progress in containing the threat, absence of any major attack against the U.S. homeland since September 11th being one of the most frequently cited indicators. But there have been many strategic mistakes made too. By acknowledging that the "global war on terrorism" is nothing else but global insurgency and

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[39] See O'Neill B., *Insurgency and Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse*, Washington: Potomac Books, 2005, chapter 8.
[40] See *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 2006. www. defenselink.mil/qdr/report/Report20060203.pdf (Accessed: 18 August 2006).

counterinsurgency, then perhaps some mistakes can be avoided in the future. But we also have to recognize that the end of this long war will be as elusive and unnoticeable as its beginning.

Conclusions

The term "global war on terrorism" has become quite ubiquitous and terrorism experts lavish their advice regarding appropriate strategies and their execution, but with rare attempts to link them to a broader and well-tested theoretical framework. Starting with an outright refusal to recognize the ongoing conflict as war and up to a failure to appreciate its global scale, strategists on the front lines of this conflict had lost much time until they discovered the value of a classical insurgency and counterinsurgency theory as well as of its contemporary variations. What we are accustomed to treating as a "technical" struggle to prevent further terrorist attacks has to be seen as a "political war" unfolding in the dimension of images and ideas, where the most important player is the audience of the Muslim world and where violence is employed by the Al Qaeda to shape, influence, and mobilise it. The fact that the target of this war is the hegemon of the international system and the guardian of the current world order, the United States, as well as the supporting states and societies, turns it into a global war. It is further globalised by the agenda, mobilisation capacity, and operations of the Al Qaeda which transcend national borders. Due to the conflict's global scale and the nature of the belligerents there can be certain difficulties in transferring the classical insurgency and counterinsurgency theory to the level of the international system, but the conflict's strategic logic follows the theory's tenets flawlessly.

In this war, military force plays a much lesser role compared to a conventional armed conflict between states. In the opposing networks – the Al Qaeda's and U.S.'s – information, propaganda, political, social, and cultural connections matter much more than raw military power. It definitely may change the world order, just as all world wars – First, Second, and Cold – have, and just as insurgencies are able to change domestic political order. Perhaps a global Al Qaeda's insurgency, pressed on by a resolute counterinsurgent who is prepared for a long haul and learns from own mistakes will eventually dissipate as it happens to most intra-state insurgencies. But there is an equal possibility that the Al Qaeda's insurgency will become a catalyst leading to the implosion of *Pax Americana.* Such a scenario would need more ingredients to fully materialise such as a further rise of China, growing opposition of Russia, a deep economic and financial crisis in the United States, their loss of the technological lead and dominance, and similar factors. However, it is worth remembering that it is a similar combination of weaknesses, imperfections, mistakes, and misfortunes of political regimes which allowed insurgents to prevail in intra-state conflicts.

The United States, although slow to comprehend this strategic picture,

is already utilizing explanations and principles of the insurgency and counterinsurgency theory in their strategy. There was even an attempt to articulate ideological alternatives to the Al Qaeda's radical vision and thus discredit or neutralise its cause. But there is still little understanding that, in foreign policies and security policies, the United States can ill-afford actions and initiatives which are uncoordinated across their global network, fragmented, poorly conceived, inconsistent, or narrowly targeted only towards some states or regions. In such a war, which is waged by the United States and their allies, lack of coordination between various strands of strategy or lack of their subordination to a global counterinsurgency framework and logic will have grave consequences. Whatever these consequences are, we will not see them for a long time to come. Insurgency and counterinsurgency is indeed a long war, and time is usually on the side of the insurgent. One thing is clear – when this war ends, the world will be quite a different place compared to what it is now.