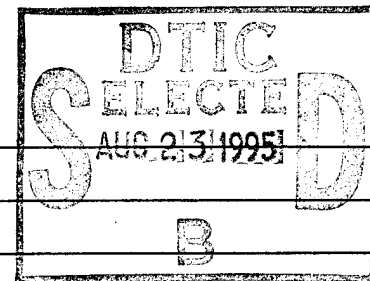DTIC
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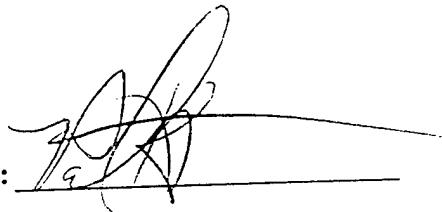
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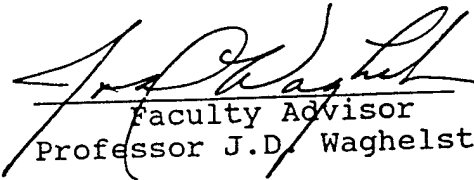COMMANDER

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Abstract of

ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM: CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE OPERATIONAL

COMMANDER

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Additionally, he must be prepared to conduct Noncombatant
Evacuation Operations (NEO) on short notice, and institute
effective anti-terrorism measures.

I. Introduction.

With the removal of Cold War restraints, the world appears to be entering a new round of insurgency and civil war. Many of these conflicts may take place in areas in which the United States has a substantial interest. Operational Commanders must, therefore, be prepared to support counterinsurgency efforts in their geographic areas.

Current U.S. doctrine for counterinsurgency operations is codified in Joint Pub 3-07, <u>Doctrine for Joint Operations in Low Intensity Conflict</u>. This doctrine grew primarily out of lessons learned in Viet Nam, where the communist opposition generally followed a Maoist pattern of revolution. Key characteristics of a Maoist insurgency are its three phase approach, rural base, marxist ideology, and rigid centralized control[1].

With the demise of the Soviet Union, Leftist insurgencies are on the decline. The new insurgency is more likely to appear either ethnically or religiously inspired. A large number of these may be "Fundamentalist Islamic" insurgencies. Indeed, there are a number of scholars that believe that the next great threat to the dominance of western civilization may be from a resurgent Islam. This paper will examine two Islamic insurgencies, and in so doing attempt to answer the following questions:

1. Do radical Islamic movements constitute a threat to U.S. security?

2. How do Islamic insurgencies differ from the classic Maoist model?

3. What are the operational implications of these differences for a regional CINC?

II. Case Studies.

A. Iran.

1. Summary. Prior to the beginning of the revolution in 1977, Iran appeared to be among the most stable of third world countries. It had a strong authoritarian government. It enjoyed the unqualified support of the United States. The military was well trained, well equipped, and loyal. Oil wealth had generated a significant economic expansion, and society was moving from traditional to modern customs. Some dissent was present, but it was well-behaved, and well controlled by the internal security force, SAVAK. Indeed, in 1978, President Carter declared that Iran was "an island of stability and tranquility."[2]

In fact, within this "island" were the seeds of a revolution that would shock the world with its speed and intensity. Despite the oil revenues, much of the Iranian population was dissatisfied with the regime's handling of the economy.[3] Politically, there were two significant sources of discontent within Iranian society. First, the oil boom and the Shah's rapid modernization program led to the westernization of society. Second, the regime ruthlessly suppressed its opposition. In 1977, secular political opposition was weak and fragmented[4]. The ulama (clergy) had no significant political organization, but controlled a vast network of mosques and other religious buildings and organizations. Only a few of these, led by Ayatollah Khomeini, supported the overthrow of the monarchy. Most were willing to work within the system for political and

social reform.[5]

The revolution began when the Shah instituted a political liberalization program, in 1977, to counter growing international criticism of his human rights policies[6]. The result was a tidal-wave of opposition to the regime. In January 1978, the publication of an article, approved by the regime, extremely uncomplimentary to Khomeini triggered the beginning of violent opposition. The ulama, after their appeal for a retraction was ignored, organized a peaceful protest rally in Qom. Upon the arrival of the police, the rally became violent. The police, not equipped with riot control equipment[7], fired on the protesters, killing several. Rioting soon spread to other cities. Bazaars were closed in support of the protest, marking the beginning of an alliance between shopkeepers and the ulama.[8] The leadership provided by the ulama in this period propelled them to dominance in the opposition movement.

Violence intensified when government forces attempted to prevent a traditional 40-day death commemoration for the victims of the Qom riots at a Mosque in Tabriz. Protestors took to the streets, and burned several buildings symbolic of the westernization of Iran[9]. At this point, factions within the ulama differed sharply in strategy. The constitutionalists, led by Ayatollah Shariatmadari, still advocated peaceful protest leading to reform from within, while the fundamentalists, led by Khomeini, praised the martyrs of Tabriz and encouraged further violence. The commemorations became a cyclical pattern of violence, as each riot's martyrs were commemorated, leading to more martyrs. The mosques became pulpits for ringing

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denunciations of the regime, and for mobilizing the people, particularly the poor, newly urbanized, masses who had come to the cities to support expanded industry. Bombings of western symbols occurred with increasing frequency, but with little apparent coordination.[10] In August 1978, the Rex Cinema in Tehran was burned, killing 400 people. Accusations that the regime had committed the crime to discredit the opposition led to the first large-scale anti-Shah rallies in Tehran.[11] Martial law was declared. On September 8, 1978, the army fired on protestors who were defying curfew restrictions. Hundreds were killed. Subsequently, workers joined the opposition movement en masse, initiating paralyzing teacher, telecommunications, electric and oil industry strikes.

Meanwhile, Khomeini, exiled in France[12], skillfully exploited both the western media and the exile community to diminish the regime's external support. In November, rioting intensified in Tehran, leading the Shah to install a military government. Under pressure from the West, the government did not use deadly force to suppress the rioting. Some concessions were made to the opposition, including the arrest of several former officials and restriction of capital flow out of the country. These had little impact except to further erode elite support for the regime. In December, the opposition continued to use religious tradition as a vehicle for confrontation, organizing religious processions in violation of martial law. Millions participated in two days of peaceful rallies, during which the secular and religious opposition groups published a joint declaration calling for an end to the Shah's rule, establishment

of a republic based on Islamic principles, and recognition of Khomeini's leadership.[13] The Shah, recognizing the inability of the military to rule, installed a caretaker civilian government and left for an "extended vacation." He never returned.

The final hurdle for the revolution was to preclude or destroy a coup by the armed forces. In this, they were assisted by the United States, who discouraged a coup. Khomeini triumphantly returned from Paris on February 1, 1979, declared the government illegal, and established a provisional government. After some Air Force technicians pledged allegiance to Khomeini, they were attacked by the Shah's Imperial Guard. The attack was foiled with the help of fundamentalist supporters. The army then declared its neutrality, leaving the provisional government in control.

2. Assessment. The Iranian Revolution was a mass revolt that was successfully harnessed by the radical clergy. The revolution succeeded when the Shah lost, and Khomeini gained, legitimacy with the majority of the Iranian population. The following observations are pertinent.

a. The 1978 riots were a spontaneous uprising that grew out of peaceful demonstrations against a newspaper attack on Khomeini. After security forces fired on the demonstrators, the riots began. The ulama, though they had not called for riots, quickly gained legitimacy as its leaders. They were credible because they had organized the initial protest rally, and because of their control of the religious network.

b. The alliance of the religious and secular opposition to the Shah was the operational center of gravity of the

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revolution. There was significant, potentially exploitable fragmentation within the opposition. The _ulama_ were separated into fundamentalist and constitutionalist groups. The secular groups varied from conservative, pro-religious, to radical Marxist. The failure of the Shah to exploit these divisions was key to his downfall.

      c. The Shah eroded his own legitimacy in several ways. He alienated his traditional powerbase through economic reforms that failed to satisfy the lower classes while placing a significant burden on the upper and middle classes. His 1977 political reforms, implemented as a concession to world opinion, further alienated the middle class by liberalizing the expression of political dissent without a corresponding intent to share power. His poor health and failure to strongly put down rebellious elements were perceived as weak leadership by many, especially the military.

      d. Unity of effort with respect to the insurgency was absent within both the Iranian and the United States government. Segments of each either practiced or recommended repression at the same time other segments were practicing or recommending liberalization.

      e. Internal security forces, lacking non-lethal training and equipment, failed to show adequate restraint in dealing with relatively peaceful demonstrators.

      f. Khomeini's perseverance in maintaining active opposition to the regime after the failed 1963 uprising put him in position to capture legitimacy as an opposition leader.

    B. Algeria.

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1. Summary. Prior to the riots of 1988, Algeria strongly resembled pre-revolutionary Iran. On the surface, it appeared to be among the most stable of 3rd world nations. Its economy was growing under the impetus of petro-dollars. The ruling <u>Front du Liberation Nationale</u> (FLN) was moving the country towards a western, secular society that emphasized women's rights and provided a social safety net. Despite its own revolutionary origins, the regime enjoyed strong support from western democracies. But, like Iran, there was substantial discontent beneath the surface.

Economically, expansion suddenly stalled when world oil prices dropped (1986), leaving the country with a substantial debt burden. The government enacted an austerity program, which led to significant hardship and discontent in the poorer segments of society. Unemployment rose to 30%, particularly affecting young urban males. At the same time, the upper class grew richer.[14]

Politically, Algeria was a one-party, socialist state. Opposition political parties were banned. The <u>ulama</u> were not overtly political, and had no overall organization. They did, however, control a substantial infrastructure. In addition to the mosques, informal Islamic organizations provided a wide variety of social services for the urban poor. Some Islamic guerrilla activity was conducted by Moustapha Bouyali, who was crushed in 1987.[15] Of note, many future members of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) became acquainted with Bouyali supporters in prison.

Algeria's second revolution began with the October 1988

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riots in Algiers. Triggered by inequity in housing distribution
and a water system failure[16], the riots lasted 5 days. The
rioters were primarily newly urbanized, unemployed youths. The
riots led directly to two critical occurrences.

First, it politicized the Islamic movement. Some of the
clergy encouraged the rioters, and presented lists of demands to
the government. Although the riots were not overtly religious,
the government, looking for anyone who could speak for the
rioters, settled upon three Islamic leaders who could, perhaps,
control the rioters through the network of Mosques. President
Chadli met with three Islamic leaders[17] shortly after the riots
to discuss the situation. This clearly gave the Islamic movement
popular legitimacy.[18]

Second, it led the government to open up the political
process. Opposition parties were legalized. Among the over 60
new parties that were recognized, was the newly founded Islamic
Salvation Front (FIS), a loose amalgamation of several Islamic
grass-roots organization that proclaimed a return to use of the
Sharia (religious law)[19] as the solution to Algeria's social and
economic ills.[20]

The FIS consisted of two major wings. There was a moderate
wing, led by Abassi Madani, and a radical wing, led by Ali
Belhadj. The moderates were in control of the political
platform, which sanctioned gradual introduction of Sharia-based
laws within the existing constitutional structure. In general,
they represented older, more educated muslims. The radicals, on
the other hand, were composed of the same elements that had
participated in the riots--young, urban poor. They called for

strict and immediate application of the <u>Sharia</u>. This would require a radical reorganization of society in all spheres—political, social, and economic. The existing constitution would be eliminated. Women's rights would be restricted, and interest payments forbidden. In the opinion of many scholars, the entire middle class would flee.[21] It is important to note that not all of the clergy supported the FIS. In fact, most of the country's clergy are paid by the state.

In the 1990 municipal elections, the FIS achieved a stunning success. They received 54% of the vote in a multi-party field, while the FLN received only 28%. They did particularly well in urban areas, winning control of major municipal governments, including Algiers.[22] In response, the FLN-controlled National Assembly approved a redistricting plan that would have massively increased the number of districts in FLN dominated rural areas. Recognizing the tactic, FIS leaders called for a general strike in May 1991. This strike was not completely successful, so the FIS added street demonstrations. The police and military were called out to clear the demonstrations, and violence broke out. Martial law was declared and national elections, scheduled for June 1991, were postponed. Both Madani and Belhadj spoke vehemently against the FLN, leading to their arrests in August.

The national elections were finally held on December 26, 1991. In the first phase of the elections, the FIS won 188 of 430 assembly seats. Over 200 seats remained undecided in which no candidate had received a majority of the votes. In the run-off phase, scheduled for January 1992, the FIS was projected to win enough seats to control the assembly, perhaps with the two-

thirds majority necessary to modify the constitution.[23]

To avoid an FIS led government, the army forced the President to resign, and for all practical purposes, took over the government. The Prime Minister and an interim President then declared the December 1991 elections void. In March 1992, the FIS was officially banned. Roundups of active Islamists were conducted and thousands were jailed.

Today, the FIS itself is extremely fragmented, and operates through an underground council within Algeria, relying on exiles in Germany and the U.S. to communicate with the outside world. Several armed groups have arisen, the largest of which is the Armed Islamic Group(GIA).[24] These groups use violent, terrorist tactics, including suicide bombings, to attack the regime and western symbols in both Algeria and in France. Targets have included feminist leaders, entertainers, schools, and infrastructure. Recently, this has become a virtual civil war, with up to 500 deaths weekly.[25]

2. Assessment. As in Iran, the clergy took control of a mass revolt, and harnessed it to gain electoral success. They were not, however, able to gain the support of the working and lower middle classes when they called for a general strike to protest the FLN redistricting plan. This represented strategic overextension. Subsequently, they were effectively suppressed by the military government. Initiative in the insurgency has passed to armed extremist groups who operate in a cell structure, and fit into the classic Maoist pattern in Phase I. The following observations are pertinent.

a. The operational center of gravity is the legitimacy

of the radical Islamist leadership. This legitimacy was initially conferred on the FIS by the regime itself, when it selected Islamist leaders as spokesmen for the rioters (1988 riots). This legitimacy is based on (1) the competing ideology of Islam vis a vis the failed ideology of socialism, (2) the provision of social services at the local level by Islamist organizations and (3) the availability of the existing mosque infrastructure as a "party" organization. Since its suppression, the FIS has continued to work peacefully through the mosques, while the armed groups have resorted to Maoist-style intimidation and assassination to gain control.

 b. As in Iran, lack of restraint by security forces during demonstrations has led to vengeance driven retaliation.

 c. The insurgency is primarily an urban phenomenon, with most support coming from young, unemployed, newly urbanized males.

 d. Common prison experience may have led to closer cooperation between the FIS and extremists.

III. Analysis.

 A. Do radical Islamic movements constitute a threat to U.S. security?

Contrary to popular belief, there is no monolithic, centrally controlled pan-Islamic movement. Despite Iran's sponsorship of Hizbollah in Lebanon, and lower levels of support to several other Islamic groups around the world, ethnic and religious differences between the national movements preclude a high degree of cooperation. In Algeria, the insurgents are Sunni, and avowedly Algerian nationalist. This is fundamentally

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different than the Shia pan-Islamic leadership in Iran. The situation is similar in Egypt and Israel, where the main Islamic opposition comes from the Muslim Brotherhood, and its offshoot, Hamas, which are Sunni. Clearly, neither Iran nor any other coordinating group exerts COMINTERN-like control over a monolithic Islamic movement.

U.S. security is threatened by these movements in three respects. First, their anti-western bias and diffuse leadership pose significant dangers to U.S. citizens and corporations in the region. Second, governments which result from Islamic insurgencies are likely to pursue security and economic policies that are contrary to U.S. interests, at least in the short term after a revolution. Third, Islamic success in one nation may encourage revolt in others. For example, if the Algerian movement is successful, dissatisfied masses in Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco may be encouraged to rise[26], destabilizing all of North Africa.

B. How do Islamic insurgencies differ from the classic Maoist model?

Differing operational center of gravity. As in most insurgencies, the operational center of gravity is the legitimacy of revolutionary leadership. In the case of Islamic revolutions, this center of gravity is specifically the legitimacy of the Islamic leadership among the lower middle class (workers, low-end professionals) and the military. The Iranian revolution was successful when Khomeini demonstrated his ability to shut down national services/industries and neutralize the Army. The FIS, despite strong support from the urban lower class, was dealt a

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severe setback when it was unable to orchestrate a successful general strike to protest the FLN redistricting plan.

Urban, vice rural based. Most insurgent support comes from young, newly urbanized males, particularly those unemployed.

Driven from the bottom up, vice the top down. In both Algeria and Iran, the radical clergy took control of popular uprisings that were already in progress.

Fragmented vice centralized leadership. In Iran, the clergy was split into three distinct groups (radical, constitutionalist, and royalist), while more moderate Islamists supported the secular parties. In Algeria, the FIS was split into two major wings, with several more extreme splinter groups.

Islamic vice leftist pattern of operations. Four distinct operational patterns are noteworthy.

* Religious symbolism is used as cover for revolutionary activities. In Iran, the ulama used the 40 day commemorations and other religious events to conduct demonstrations. This placed the regime in the untenable position of either restraining a religious event or allowing large scale, often violent demonstrations.

* High risk operations are conducted. Religious reverence for martyrdom makes activists more willing to participate in risky, even suicidal operations.

* Uncoordinated attacks on security forces and western symbols are conducted. These are motivated by a sense of required personal vengeance[27] and a scripturally based requirement to defend Islamic territory against non-adherents[28].

* External terrorism may be used. Because one of the

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focal points of an Islamic movement is the elimination of western cultural influence, attacks on the west may serve to increase the legitimacy of an insurgency in the eyes of the local population.

Rapid vice extended phase progression. While Maoist insurgencies may take years to consolidate a support base (Phase I), Islamic insurgencies begin at the end of Phase I, since the religious infrastructure is already in place. Moreover, the mass revolt precludes the need to use large conventional forces to defeat government armies (Phase III) in the field. Thus, Islamic insurgencies can arise and succeed very quickly.

Regressive vice progressive social policy. Women's rights and personal freedoms become extremely restricted, by western standards.

C. What are the operational implications for a regional CINC?

Ensure that intelligence assets are used to keep a close watch on incipient Islamic insurgencies. Given the speed with which an Islamic insurgency can take hold, assets must be in place now, and reports of insurgent activity taken seriously. Key indicators include increased use of Islamic dress, increased amount of local social services provided by informal Islamic organizations, and the content of the Friday sermons.

When an insurgency is detected, attack the center of gravity!

* Use Psyops to exploit the difference in post-revolution visions of society between more moderate and radical elements. Women's rights, freedom of the press, and the inability of the Sharia (cite current Iranian example) to cure economic ills

should be emphasized.

* Discourage the Host Nation from doing anything to legitimize the Islamic opposition—do not single them out for criticism, do not use them as intermediaries between spontaneous rioters and the government.

* Discourage the Host Nation from interference with religious events.

* Discourage the Host Nation from over-reacting to isolated violent attacks and peaceful demonstrations. The isolated attacks may not be coordinated, and harsh repression will lead to a cycle of violence. A key part of security assistance should be training of HN forces in non-lethal riot control techniques.

Interdict money and supplies from sympathetic countries. While there is no need to prepare a comprehensive plan to defeat a global Islamic movement that does not exist, a limited amount of support may come from Iran or other Islamic movements.

Be prepared to execute NEO on very short notice. Islamic insurgencies can develop very quickly, and their anti-western character makes them very dangerous to U.S. citizens.

Institute anti-terrorism measures. Ensure that the possibility of suicide attack is taken into account.

Minimize western antagonism. If troops are in country, ensure that they scrupulously respect local customs with respect to alcohol, dress, and entertainment. Do not send female troops.

IV. Conclusion.

Islamic insurgencies represent a significant threat to U.S. security and are substantially different in nature from the

Maoist model. The key to a successful Islamic revolution is the ability of the radical clergy to harness a mass revolt of the urban lower class, and then gain the support of the secular opposition. This may occur quickly, as the existing religious infrastructure becomes the revolutionary organization. Patterns of operation may include the use of religious symbolism as cover for insurgent activities and the use of suicide/high risk attacks on regime and western targets. Regional CINC's must attack the alliance between religious and secular insurgent forces, while minimizing cultural antagonism. Additionally, they must institute effective anti-terrorism measures, and be prepared to evacuate non-combatants on short notice.

Endnotes

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3. Ibid., p. 174.

4. There were five opposition groups--two small leftist guerrilla organizations, the outlawed communist (Tudeh) party, and two legal secular parties, the National Front and the Freedom Movement.

5. Ibid.

6. Particularly those of the newly inaugurated Carter Administration.

7. Ibid., p. 191.

8. Ibid.

9. Women's rights centers, bars, and cinemas were frequent targets.

10. Ibid., p. 195.

11. Ibid., p. 198.

12. Khomeini was in France after his ejection from Iraq at the Shah's request.

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14. Stephen C. Pelletiere, <u>Mass Action and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Revolt of the Brooms</u>, Carlisle PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College 1992, p. 3.

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