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14. ABSTRACT Recent events in Iraq and Afghanistan have demonstrated that military interventions to affect regime change can be extremely costly and fraught with risk. When weighing future foreign policy options, it is possible that the US will turn to less overt means of changing regimes and spreading democracy, namely the sponsorship of insurgency. After analyzing historical examples of US support to insurgent movements, this paper outlines operational planning considerations and limitations. The US government currently possesses the necessary capabilities to support an insurgency, but is lacking in an effective command and control structure to ensure unity of effort. In order to properly harness these capabilities, a unique coordinating structure needs to be created that can take advantage of the disparate skill sets resident in State, CIA, and DoD.					
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**NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, R.I.**

**Regime Change the Old-Fashioned Way:
US Support to Insurgencies**

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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23 April 2008

Abstract

Regime Change the Good Old Fashioned Way: US Support to Insurgencies

Recent events in Iraq and Afghanistan have demonstrated that military interventions to affect regime change can be extremely costly and fraught with risk. When weighing future foreign policy options, it is possible that the US will turn to less overt means of changing regimes and spreading democracy, namely the sponsorship of insurgency. After analyzing historical examples of US support to insurgent movements, this paper outlines operational planning considerations and limitations. The US government currently possesses the necessary capabilities to support an insurgency, but is lacking in an effective command and control structure to ensure unity of effort. In order to properly harness these capabilities, a unique coordinating structure needs to be created that can take advantage of the disparate skill sets resident in State, CIA, and DoD.

Introduction

Recent events in Iraq and Afghanistan have demonstrated that military interventions to affect regime change can be extremely costly and fraught with risk. As a result, it is unlikely that the US government will employ direct military intervention as a policy tool to change unfriendly regimes in the near future.

When weighing future foreign policy options, it is possible that the US will turn to less overt means of changing regimes and spreading democracy, namely the sponsorship of insurgency. The rationale is clear: after several years of fighting an insurgency in Iraq, US policy makers have a new-found appreciation for their effectiveness. Therefore, US leadership might consider sponsoring or fostering insurgencies in regimes that pose threats to our national interests.

This paper will not attempt to argue the merits of whether or not it would be politically prudent for the US to use insurgency as a foreign policy tool, nor will it address the strategic implications of supporting such a movement. Instead, this paper will concentrate on how the US supported insurgencies in the past and draw some operational lessons learned from historical examples. Taking these examples into context, this paper will then discuss operational planning considerations and limitations associated with supporting an insurgency, and recommend a new command and control structure to coordinate operations across the US government.

What Capabilities are Needed to Support an Insurgency?

Each insurgency is unique and possesses its own strengths and vulnerabilities; an outside government's ability to influence events must be carefully matched to the needs of

each specific movement.¹ It is virtually impossible to develop a model that applies across a wide range of different insurgencies; instead, it is more useful to consider a capabilities-based approach, one that is inherently flexible in its ability to change the nature and level of support. The first step to defining a government's ability to support an insurgency is to articulate these capabilities in terms of their relative importance.

A recent RAND study on state support to insurgency noted that key capabilities offered by outside actors include “arms, money, and materiel; safe havens to organize and train; and diplomatic assistance, including representation for the insurgents' cause in international forums.”² The study went on to classify these factors by their relative importance, sorting them into “critical, valuable, and minor.”³ Critical support includes safe haven and transit; financial resources; political support and propaganda; and direct military support. Valuable forms of support include training and weapons/materiel. Minor forms of support for insurgent movements include fighters; intelligence; organizational aid; and inspiration.⁴

For the purposes of this study, this paper will focus on the support that the US government is willing or able to provide across the spectrum of involvement. Specifically, the capabilities that the US is most likely to provide include financial resources, propaganda and political support, and military training and materiel. Because this paper is being written in the current political context of relative aversion towards direct military intervention (i.e. Iraq), this option will not be considered.

It is important to note that each insurgent movement has different centers of gravity and different needs; therefore, there is no proscriptive doctrine of how to employ state support to enhance an insurgency. However, recent Cold War history provides several useful

examples of US support to insurgent movements that employed the three critical capabilities, and will enable us to develop some useful operational considerations.

Example 1: US Propaganda and Political Support to an Insurgency – Iran 1953

In April 1953, President Eisenhower tasked the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to provide political and propaganda support to opposition forces in Iran in order to overthrow the existing government led by Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadeq.⁵ Eisenhower assessed that direct military intervention was not an option, largely because of the danger of involving the Soviet Union in a broader war.⁶ Therefore, the President directed the CIA to undertake covert activities to remove Mossadeq while still retaining some measure of deniability for the US government.⁷

The CIA conducted a six-phase plan that involved propaganda, political and diplomatic maneuvering, and organized street demonstrations.⁸ In conjunction with the British Special Intelligence Service (SIS), the CIA partnered with various opposition movements to apply pressure on the government led by Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadeq. The propaganda effort utilized newspapers and radio broadcasts to cast doubt on the legitimacy of the Mossadeq regime, and involved both financial and informational support. At the same time, the CIA and State Department carefully orchestrated moves to garner international and domestic support for the opposition leaders. And finally, CIA and SIS intelligence operatives organized wide-ranging street protests to apply direct pressure on the government.⁹ The coup nearly failed, but close coordination and meticulous planning allowed CIA and State personnel to adapt during the course of the operation and overcome resistance from the Mossadeq faithful and the Iranian army.

After the successful coup, several operational conclusions were drawn by the US government.¹⁰ First of all, the meticulous planning and extensive contacts of the CIA allowed the plan to ultimately succeed despite its early setbacks. Second, the personal intervention and adaptive thinking of the CIA, State, and US military personnel involved was critical to the ultimate success of the coup. Third, key tactical mistakes made by Mossadeq supporters were a major reason for the installation of the Zahedi government.

Operational lessons learned underscored the need for close coordination across US agencies as well as with foreign partners. Furthermore, the CIA demonstrated its ability to successfully coordinate both overt and covert pressure on the regime in concert with its primary objective of removing Mossadeq.

Example 2: Military Training and Materiel Support to an Insurgency – Cuba 1962

When he assumed office in 1961, President Kennedy was dedicated to removing the Castro regime from Cuba, and had inherited a covert action plan from the Eisenhower administration.¹¹ The focus of the plan was a CIA effort to train and equip a force of Cuban ex-patriates to return to Cuba, start an armed resistance movement, and unseat the Castro regime. In the year before the invasion, the CIA trained over 2,000 paramilitaries and procured a wide variety of military equipment that ranged from small arms to B-26 bombers and amphibious landing craft.¹² One of the key operational guidelines was provided by Kennedy himself: that US assistance would not be apparent to Latin American governments.¹³

Unfortunately for the Kennedy administration and the CIA, the invasion failed miserably. A 1961 after-action report from the Inspector General faulted the CIA for failing to recognize when the operation had expanded beyond plausible deniability, and for failing to

realistically appraise the chances of success.¹⁴ The report went on to cite major operational failures, including inadequate air and naval operations, poor command and control, faulty assumptions in planning, and inadequate intelligence assets. Other governmental reports pinned the failure on an underestimation of Cuban aircraft, an inability to break out of the beach-head, and poor coordination with existing insurgent movements.¹⁵

Several key operational lessons learned can be drawn from the Bay of Pigs fiasco. First and foremost, an indigenous resistance movement must already exist; it cannot be created by an outside force. Second, US strategists need to clearly understand the potential that the operation might require overt military support or it would fail, and what the repercussions might be from a failure to intervene. Third, the support to the insurgent movement needs to be diverse, and include both overt and covert components. And most importantly, the failure highlighted the need for closer cooperation between the CIA and both the Departments of State and Defense.

Example #3 - US Financial Support to Insurgency – Afghan Mujahedin

After the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979, the United States developed several policy options to thwart Soviet aims in central Asia. The Reagan administration began providing direct support to Afghan Mujahedin resistance fighters in hopes of bleeding the Soviet effort.¹⁶ This support came in terms of money, and expanded to include intelligence and materiel support in the later years of the conflict.

In 1980, the CIA spent approximately \$30 million to support the insurgency, mostly by purchasing weapons.¹⁷ The funding levels remained fairly consistent until 1984, when the Soviets escalated the conflict by effectively employing SPETSNAZ and helicopter gunships against the Mujahedin rebel forces. Reagan and his policy team remained

committed to the success of the Mujahedin resistance, and in 1985 signed NSDD 166 to authorize a sharp escalation of covert activity against the Soviets.¹⁸ Immediately following NSDD 166, funding massively increased, totaling roughly \$2 billion total throughout the 1980's.¹⁹ NSDD 166 also increased CIA support for the Mujahedin to include access to satellite imagery, intelligence on planned Soviet operations and targets, intercepts of Soviet communications, and materiel to include improved communications equipment, sniper rifles, and explosives.²⁰ CIA and military officers traveled to Pakistan to train operatives, plan operations, and deliver sensitive targeting intelligence.²¹ The diverse measures of support provided under NSDD 166 vastly improved the combat capability of various Mujahedin elements, and were a factor in keeping the insurgency operational.

With the increase in support under NSDD 166, an operational debate over the use of advanced US surface-to-air missiles assumed strategic implications.²² CIA and Pakistani intelligence officials argued that the Mujahedin needed Stinger missiles to fight the increased Soviet helicopter threat.²³ Stinger missiles proved to be a controversial weapon because the potential loss of deniability could have directly implicated the US and provoked a Soviet response. The core of this dispute was the ultimate aim of the campaign: either to pin down and harass the Soviets, or to openly defeat them in Afghanistan.²⁴ Ultimately, this debate underscored the need for operational decisions to be in concert with overall strategic guidance.

The primary operational lessons from Afghanistan focus on the diversity of support and successful coordination of US efforts. Financial support alone was not enough to sustain an insurgency against a determined enemy, and the expanded support authorized under NSDD 166 was critical to the success of the insurgency. The US government was relatively

successful in coordinating its efforts between agencies, ensuring that the Reagan Administration's political outcomes were finally achieved.

How Has the US Organized and Controlled Support to Insurgencies?

The preceding examples of supporting insurgencies emphasize the importance of coordination between the various elements of the US executive branch. In order to develop a deeper understanding of the element of coordination, it is relevant to explore how recent Presidential Administrations structured their support to insurgent movements.

The United States has a long historical tradition of supporting insurgencies; in recent history a Presidentially-sanctioned effort to plan such operations began in 1942, with the creation of the Coordinator of Information under William Donovan.²⁵ In the beginning phases of the Cold War in 1948, President Truman signed National Security Council directive 10/2, charging the CIA to conduct "covert actions" to include activities such as "subversion against hostile states, including assistance to underground resistance movements, guerrillas and refugee liberations [*sic*] groups."²⁶ In 1954, President Eisenhower revised the governance of covert operations, and NSC 5412 created an Operations Coordinating Board to review support to insurgencies.²⁷ Following its role in the Korean War, the CIA took steps to improve its ability to support insurgencies by consolidating its clandestine services.²⁸

The Bay of Pigs failure in 1961 was a watershed event, and senior members of President Kennedy's administration were afterwards deeply involved in the management of support to insurgencies.²⁹ It can be argued that President Kennedy attributed the failure to poor direction and coordination, and created a special structure to oversee Operation MONGOOSE, a second covert program against the Castro regime in Cuba. To ensure unity of effort, Kennedy designated Brigadier General Edward Lansdale in writing as the

MONGOOSE Chief of Operations, and granted him authority to coordinate efforts across both CIA and DoD.³⁰

Control and authority over US support to insurgencies remained largely unchanged until the Hughes-Ryan Amendment to the 1974 Foreign Assistance Act, which required a Presidential finding explicitly authorizing each covert action.³¹ In 1991 the National Security Act further expanded the formal procedures to approve covert actions, to include notification of Congress and a written Presidential finding.³²

Past Presidential administrations have struggled to balance operational factors with strategic considerations when it came to the management of support to insurgencies. Unity of effort and coordination have proven to be key to US successes, but have been difficult to achieve due to confusing authorities as well as the need for deniability. The historical examples underscore the need for operational coordination as perhaps the most important determinant of success or failure.

Do These Capabilities Currently Reside in the USG?

Drawing upon the analysis of historical examples and structures, the next step is to assess the USG's current capabilities to support insurgent movements. The ability to provide financial support, political and propaganda support, and military training and materiel currently reside in several agencies and departments to varying degrees.

The US government has several existing mechanisms to provide financial support to insurgent movements. As noted in the historical examples, the CIA is legally authorized and chartered to finance opposition movements whose goals are in concert with US strategic objectives.³³ And in order to maintain deniability and some "stand-off" from US involvements, CIA funding is largely channeled through covert means.³⁴ On the other hand,

the Department of State can provide overt funding for opposition movements, and for example is currently offering millions of dollars to groups that “support democratic reform and governance in Iran.”³⁵ With the changes in authorities since 9/11, DoD is also increasing its funding flexibility to be able to provide both overt and covert funding for operations.³⁶ Specifically, United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) is authorized to use discretionary funds to train and equip groups in conjunction with combating terrorism, to include paramilitary activity.³⁷

In the case of political and propaganda support, the Department of State (DoS) assumes a dominant role when providing overt support to an insurgent movement. Under its charter of promoting democracy, DoS could openly advocate the aims of the insurgent group, and lend legitimacy and recognition to the movement if such a move might improve their strategic communications goals.³⁸ For example, the Department of State is currently funding television broadcasting into Iran as a means of spreading democracy, and Congress allocated over \$36 million in 2006 for this project.³⁹ At the same time, State Department officials can quietly build alliances and diplomatic support for insurgent movements, and broaden their international base of support. As noted in the Iranian historical example, the CIA can simultaneously provide covert political and propaganda support to strengthen insurgent political movements.⁴⁰ When employed together, overt diplomatic and covert propaganda support could greatly enhance the chances of success.

Perhaps the most problematic yet most promising capability that resides in the US government is its ability to provide military training and materiel to insurgent movements. USSOCOM is chartered to be able to conduct unconventional warfare (UW), and US Army Special Forces are the principal actors in such an effort.⁴¹ This includes a recent doctrinal

shift to conduct UW in conflicts short of war, often for limited political objectives.⁴²

Military training and support can be conducted by US military personnel on both an overt and covert basis; however, the covert means carry the additional risk of compromise and its resulting loss of deniability.

The US does possess an alternative covert means of providing training and materiel, largely residing within the CIA.⁴³ The Agency has a cadre of paramilitary officers capable of providing training and expertise to indigenous insurgent movements, and is able to procure and deliver large amounts of sophisticated weaponry.⁴⁴ This capability can give US policy makers a more deniable means of providing weapons and materiel while still limiting overt US exposure.⁴⁵

However, the intersection of overt and covert military support has proven to be a problematic facet of US support to an insurgent movement. Overt military support for an insurgent movement carries an international stigma of violating a country's sovereignty, and potentially causing increased regional instability. However, covert military support by itself is limited in both scale and scope, and may not be enough to be a decisive element in insurgent support. For instance, overt military support would have ensured a successful Bay of Pigs invasion, but would have sacrificed the US "moral high ground" that Kennedy was trying to maintain by making the movement appear indigenous to the Cuban exile community.

The US does currently possess sufficient capability and capacity to provide a broad range of support across the three critical capability areas. However, historical analysis has demonstrated that the most difficult aspect of providing support to an insurgent movement has been the orchestration of support inside the US government itself.

Key Operational Planning Considerations and Limitations

Analysis of these historical examples and structures yields several overarching operational principles that must be accounted for in the planning process. These planning considerations and limitations focus on several problematic aspects that have plagued past US efforts to support insurgencies.

First of all, planners must clearly delineate between overt and covert activities, and establish both coordination as well as boundaries. Overt activities need to maintain a degree of separation from covert operations both for reasons of legality and legitimacy. However, close coordination between the two aspects, as occurred in Iran in 1953, can sustain and enhance an insurgency without compromising US political goals.

It is also critical for planners to recognize the seams that will appear between the participants from different agencies. Any US support to an insurgent movement will comprise a wide variety of actors with differing legal authorities, methods of operation, and organizational culture. For instance, detailed planning support from the US military might have significantly improved the CIA's planning of the Bay of Pigs operation. However, coordination between CIA and DoD was problematic, and the tactical planning shortfalls that resulted were a key reason for the operation's failure. Future support to insurgent movements must ensure that the seams between overt and covert, military and civilian are closely scrutinized to minimize operational errors.

A political concern stemming from supporting to an insurgency is the potential of tainting US government interests in the region. Both the State Department and Geographic Combatant Commander have to publicly represent the US position of democracy and freedom in the region long after the end of the insurgent movement; therefore, any support

they might provide must be carefully measured against its wider strategic consequence. However, neither USSOCOM nor CIA are as concerned with this aspect, as both regularly participate in these activities and do not have the same overt diplomatic role as an Ambassador or Geographic Combatant Commander.

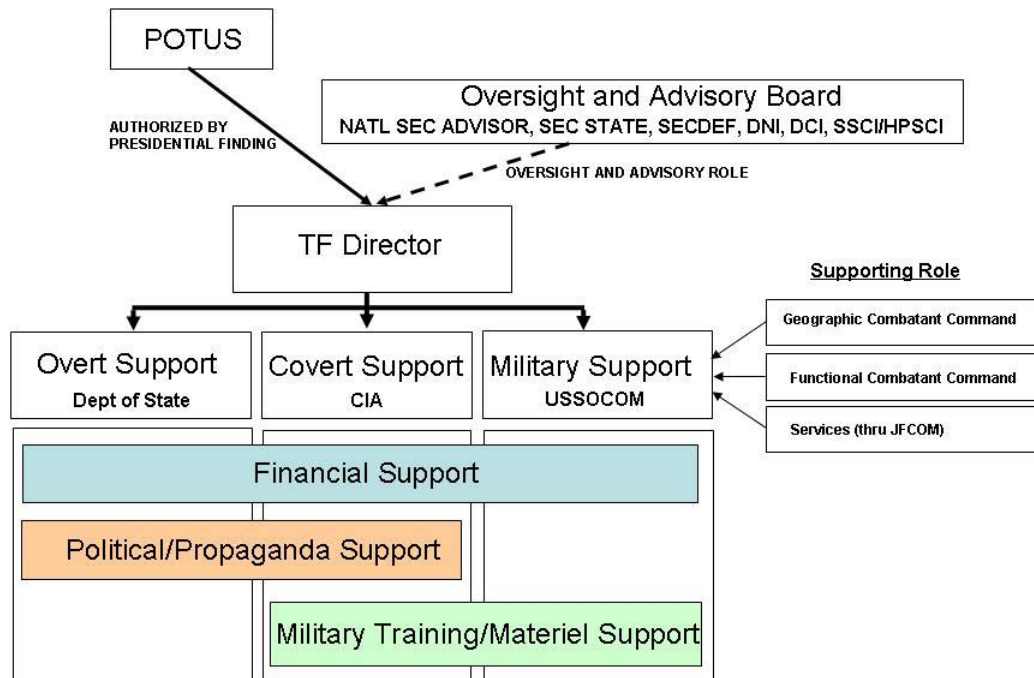
The overarching planning consideration that permeates all these historical examples is the key role of what can best be termed “unity of effort.” Relatively successful examples such as Iran and the Afghan Mujahedin were marked by a command structure that was able to integrate efforts across agencies and Departments of the US government. Therefore, the need is not necessarily for a development of new capabilities, but the overall orchestration of US support to an insurgent movement, for this may be its single greatest determinant of success.

Conclusions

Based upon the historical analysis, the ability to coordinate and control US government support to an insurgent movement might well be our friendly operational center of gravity. Therefore, the organizational structure needs to reflect an ability to achieve unity of effort without compromising the unique capabilities the CIA, DoS, and DoD can contribute.

The diagram below develops this concept in further detail. One of the key features is a Task Force Director, appointed in writing by the President, who acts as the main focal point for coordination of the supporting efforts. Because of the extreme political sensitivities of dealing with an insurgency, this person would likely be directly appointed by the White House. The Director would be charged with two key responsibilities: keeping the US

strategic leadership informed about the operation, and directing the subordinate elements across the Task Force.



One key role of the Task Force Director would be to maintain effective communications with senior members of the legislative and executive branch. An enduring lesson learned from previous US experiences is that any support for insurgent movements must be carefully measured for its political impact, both domestically and internationally. In order to ensure that the President, Executive Branch, and Congress get accurate and timely information, the Task Force Director needs to serve as the single conduit for information. This will allow the relevant policy-making branches of the government to consider US efforts to support the insurgency, and closely match its operational outcomes to strategic political goals.

The Task Force Director will also be responsible for coordinating the efforts of his three Deputy Directors. This is a key legal aspect; the Director cannot have “command

authority” over his subordinates without risking the violation of legal separations of authority. Therefore, his primary role will be to orchestrate and coordinate, and keep the various elements moving in concert. In essence, the Director needs to ensure the “unity of effort” that is essential in supporting an insurgent movement without having the authority to command activities directly.

The key operational feature of this Task Force construct is the three separate Deputy Directors, each from a critical participant. The Deputy Director for Overt Support would be sourced by the State Department; the Deputy Director for Covert Support from the CIA; and the Deputy Director for Military Support from DoD, most likely from USSOCOM. Each Deputy Director would need sufficient rank and authority to request assets and personnel from their respective agencies in keeping with the Task Force’s demands at different phases of the support operations. For instance, the Deputy Director for Military Support might have OPCON over a Special Forces unit training insurgents as well as TACON over ISR and lift assets. Simultaneously, the Deputy Director for Covert activities may be setting up propaganda cells in the target country, and channeling small arms to the insurgent groups. Each Deputy Director will obtain key assets for specific aspects of the operation, and legally employ them in a direction consistent with the overall plan as articulated by the Task Force Director.

The Deputy Directors will also play a key liaison role laterally across the US government, and with coalition and NGO partners. For instance, the Deputy Director for Overt Support might cultivate relationships with key NGOs monitoring human rights abuses in the target country, and simultaneously coordinate public democracy funds for the insurgent movement. At the same time, the Deputy Director for Military Support would

coordinate with the affected Geographic Combatant Commander as well as various Functional Combatant Commands for support as needed. Each Deputy Director would be responsible for coordinating laterally and dealing directly with potential partner agencies or governments.

The three separate Deputy Directors are necessary to maintain existing legal separation between the different players. In order to preserve the unique authorities granted to actors such as CIA and USSOCOM, these efforts need to remain under the control of their specified commanders or directors. For instance, any covert activity conducted would be under the direction of the Deputy Director for Covert Support, and conducted in concert with existing CIA guidelines, authorities, and restrictions, and under the direction of a senior CIA operations officer. Similarly, any military support would be conducted under the command of the Deputy Director for Military Support, who would essentially become a “supported” commander for specific aspects of support.

This unique structure of coordination while maintaining separate control mechanisms will provide the key unity of effort required to successfully support an insurgency. Historical analysis has underscored the critical role that coordination and the application of both overt and covert pressure play in sponsoring insurgent movements. The Task Force and Deputy Director concepts enable the US to harness its existing capabilities legally to ensure a coordinated effort and still retain a measure of deniability if necessary.

Erecting Unnecessary Barriers?

At first glance, this proposed structure appears to be erecting barriers that might inhibit the success of any operation. The apparent separation of overt, covert, and military activities can be interpreted as violating the fundamental tenet of unity of command, and

potentially putting the Director in the impossible position of coordinating across too large a span of control. An even more subtle counter-argument can be made that this structure is too reliant on cooperation, and inherently too reliant on personalities, to be a viable and repeatable bureaucratic instrument.

However, it is the delicate political and legal nature of support to an insurgency that requires such a unique operational design. The inherent strengths of the Department of State, CIA, and Department of Defense are best utilized when coordinated, but still managed and applied separately. Any subjugation of CIA or State efforts under DoD or vice versa would be both inefficient and ineffective, and potentially illegal. The unique skills and organizational culture of each can be most effective if applied separately but in concert with an overarching plan as articulated by the Task Force Director.

Recommendations

The US government currently possesses the necessary capabilities to support an insurgency, but is lacking in an effective command and control structure to ensure unity of effort. In order to properly harness these capabilities, a unique coordinating structure needs to be created that can take advantage of the disparate skills sets resident in State, CIA, and DoD. The proposed model of a Presidentially-appointed Task Force Director and three Deputy Directors is a first step in addressing the key issue of achieving unity of effort without violating legal or operational boundaries.

It is beyond both the scope and authority of this paper to make recommendations to the National Security Council and White House on how to organize cross-agency support to insurgent movements. However, as national policy goals unfold, this precise topic will likely become a matter of discussion for the Principals Committee.

The primary recommendation of this paper is for the Department of Defense to examine its potential future roles in supporting an insurgency as a supporting component. Specifically, the roles and authorities of a potential Deputy Director for Military Support need to be developed in further detail. For instance, it would make doctrinal sense to designate the Deputy Director for Military Support as the Commander of a Joint Task Force established for the purpose of support. OSD and the Joint Staff would have to determine if the JTF would be established under the authority of a Geographic Component Command, or under the new Title 10 authorities granted to USSOCOM. Similarly, funding and logistical support would need to be coordinated well in advance.

Whether or not this proposed structure is adopted, the US military will soon be tasked with providing financial and operational assistance to an insurgent movement in concert with larger US foreign policy goals. It is critical for the Department of Defense to explore its potential means of support, and develop a coherent strategy for employing and commanding those capabilities. It is also incumbent upon the Department of Defense to establish lateral discussions with both State and CIA in hopes of developing relationships and understanding capabilities. As this paper has noted, history has demonstrated that a well-coordinated and diverse effort can effectively support an insurgency, and help the US attain its long-term foreign policy goals.

Notes

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- ³⁰ Ibid., pg XLVI
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