

## Insurgencies are Organizations Too: Organizational Structure and the Effectiveness of Insurgent Strategy

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### Abstract

This paper makes two key points about the relationships between insurgent organizational structure, decision-making processes and organizational effectiveness. First, organizational structure and decision-making evolve organically, influenced by how insurgencies resolve five key dilemmas and deal with a range of contextual factors. Second, I argue that in a modern, post-9/11 context, the most effective organizational structure for an insurgency is internationally networked and decentralized. Conclusions will focus on the implications of the key points for both understanding and responding to insurgencies.

In April of 1965, Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara, hero of the Cuban revolution, travelled with a group of Cuban fighters to eastern Congo to support the rebellion against the American- and Belgian-backed government. He intended to share his experiences from the success of the Cuban revolution with Congolese fighters by deploying experienced Cuban fighters alongside inexperienced Congolese recruits. He hoped the Congolese would learn by example, through a process he called ‘Cubanization’, and take on the Cuban fighters’ technical skills and revolutionary mentality. The Preface to his account of his time there, however, begins, ‘This is the history of a failure.’ Guevara very quickly realized that the context of the Congolese revolution was dramatically different from the one he had known in Cuba. The lessons he had learned in the mountains of the Sierra Madre were not always relevant to the Congolese context, and instead of the ‘Cubanization’ of the Congolese soldiers he had hoped for, he observed a ‘Congolization’ of the Cubans, as they adapted to the new environment and began to emulate their Congolese colleagues (Guevara, 2001).

In this paper, I argue two key points similar to the ones that Guevara observed, both oriented towards understanding the relationship between organizational structure and other aspects of insurgency. First, I argue that insurgent organizational structure and subsequent strategic decision-making evolve organically, as a natural result of the organization’s short- and long-term goals, economic and social resources, observations and responses to the enemy’s behaviour, and other contextual factors. Second, I argue that the relationship between structure and organizational effectiveness is a product of context, and that in a post-9/11 global context of weak borders, wide-reaching media, centralized counter-terror networks and easy transportation and communication, a decentralized, international network is the most effective structure for an insurgent organization.

This paper is divided into two sections. In the first section, I identify, explain and analyze five key dilemmas of insurgent organizing: (1) action versus secrecy; (2) growth versus control; (3) recruitment versus retention; (4) success versus longevity; and (5) resources versus constituencies. Dilemmas are a widely used tool in organizational economics and psychology to understand the complexities of decisions that organizations face. They emphasize that choices are not binary and highlight the organization’s agency in negotiating the various challenges they face.

In the second section, I discuss two different insurgencies and analyze their actions quantitatively to determine their ultimate organizational effectiveness. Insurgent organizations exist along a spectrum, from hierarchical to network structures. I introduce a second spectrum along which networked insurgencies can be classified, from local to international structures.

### *Definitions*

It is impossible to discuss in significant depth the topic of insurgency without a thorough understanding of the terms involved, particularly the distinction between ‘insurgency’ and ‘terrorism’. Since 11 September 2001, and the subsequent Global War on Terror (GWOT), the terms have taken on new meanings in popular usage. In the academic literature, and therefore in this paper, ‘terrorism’ is considered a strategy of insurgency rather than a separate organizational type, defined by its strategic choices: the targets it attacks, and the weapons and tactics it utilizes. Goodwin, McCarthy and Yukich, in an unpublished paper on terrorism in the Irish Republican Army, state it perfectly when they say,

‘...the label ‘terrorist’ does not usefully describe a type of political organization per se, nor a type of state or individual. Rather, it points to a distinctive political strategy that political groups, states, or individuals may or may not choose to employ.’ (Goodwin et al, 2008)

Their opinion is shared by many scholars in a wide range of literature on the topic of terrorism, including Tilly in ‘Terror, Terrorism and Terrorists’ (2004), Richardson in ‘What Terrorists Want’ (2006) and Merari in ‘Terrorism as a Strategy of Insurgency’ (1993). Even Guevara sees terrorism in a similar light, calling it a ‘valuable tactic’ for assassinations, but warning against harming innocent civilians (Guevara, 1985). State terror, while similar in its short-term effect on civilians, is a fundamentally different phenomenon and will not be considered in this paper.

The term ‘insurgency’ encompasses a very broad span of ideas, and depending on the context in which it is used, can have a range of meanings. For the most part, the use of the term insurgency implies an organized, armed resistance movement, and so for the purposes of this paper will be defined as:

*A non-governmental organization working to affect social and/or political change through violent means against existing power structures and in a way that deliberately challenges the state’s monopoly on the legitimate use of violence.*

It is also important to differentiate insurgencies from organized criminal groups, whose orientation is primarily towards profit-making. Insurgencies are often heavily involved in illicit profit-making ventures to raise funds for their endeavors, and the distinction between organized crime group and insurgency lies in the group’s ultimate goals. Financial gain can be a goal in itself, or a means to achieve a larger political agenda. For the purposes of this paper, only organizations with the stated primary goal of political change are considered.

### **Section One: Five Key Dilemmas of Insurgent Organizing**

The literature on insurgent and terrorist organization contains within it a number of existential questions about the founding of organizations, their maintenance, and their ultimate victory or demise. Those questions have been framed here as five key dilemmas of insurgent organizing, to convey the range of the choices the insurgent organization has as it faces each dilemma. Each dilemma represents a challenge that a nascent insurgent organization must resolve if it is to survive and achieve some measure of success, and portrays the spectrum of available options. How it resolves these dilemmas, however, is effected most by the context in which the insurgency operates. The five key dilemmas are: (1) action versus secrecy; (2) growth versus control; (3) recruitment versus retention; (4) success versus longevity; and (5) resources

versus constituencies.

### *Dilemma One: Action versus Secrecy*

Simply put, any insurgency has two complementary operational goals: to carry out attacks, and to avoid getting caught. The inherent paradox of implementing those goals, however, is that the more attacks an organization carries out, the less secret the organization will be and thus the higher the likelihood they will be defeated. Heightened secrecy can also have a detrimental impact on an organization's ability to carry out attacks, as higher levels of secrecy can weaken internal communication and make it harder to coordinate operations. McCormick, Horton and Harrison, writing about how civil wars end, point out the inverse of that relationship: as organizations emphasize easier internal communication, they become less secure and open themselves up to infiltration and leaks (McCormick et al, 2007). Organizations must decide whether to be more active and therefore less secretive, as with a separatist insurgency that attempts to take and hold land, or more secretive and less active, as with an urban terrorist sleeper cell like those preparing for the 9/11 or 7/7 attacks, who were only able to carry out a single attack.

In discussing terrorist organizations, or other insurgencies for which publicity is a major operational goal, we must make a distinction between internal and external secrecy. While a group may be seeking publicity through its actions and consciously disregarding external secrecy, it must still be very resistant to infiltration and protective of its internal secrecy. An Al Qaeda training manual for undercover operatives advises caution when using technology:

‘It is well known that in undercover operations, communication is the mainstay of the movement for rapid accomplishment. However, it is a double-edged sword: It can be to our advantage if we use it well and it can be a knife dug into our back if we do not consider and take the necessary security measures.’ (Al Qaeda, date unknown).

Ultimately though, communication within an organization is key, and is facilitated by technology. Zakaria Zubaydi, former commander of the Palestinian Al Aqsa Martyr's Brigade in Jenin, explained that although its members were not financially remunerated for their participation, the organization did supply them with mobile phone credit because they spent so much time on their phones (Zubaydi, 2011). Johnston, similarly, states that technology has been one of the key determinants of modern insurgent organizational structure. He argues that the advent of more sophisticated and less expensive communication technology has accelerated a shift towards more network-oriented, decentralized organizations; with cell phones and the internet, the semi-autonomous sub-groups of a multidivisional organization can reduce the information asymmetry that Johnston says is one of the primary weaknesses of that organization type and become even more effective (Johnston, 2008).

### *Dilemma Two: Growth versus Control*

As an organization grows in membership, geographical area and diversity and number of activities, the leadership must decide when and how to relinquish the high degree of control they exercised when the organization was smaller. Insurgent organizations, like business corporations, need more people if they want to engage in more activities.

As organizations grow, their structures also become formalized and fixed. Sanin and Giustozzi describe a spectrum of insurgent organizational structure. At one pole of the spectrum, they place an ‘army’ structure: hierarchical and separate from civilians. At the other end, they place a ‘network’ structure: integrated with civilians and based on existing social hierarchies. They present the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) as a classic ‘army’ and the Afghan Taliban as a classic ‘network’ (Sanin & Giustozzi, 2010)

Along similar lines, Brafman and Beckstrom make a similar claim. They outline two opposite

organizational structures: the spider, with a central 'head' and many subordinate 'legs', and the starfish, without a 'head' and with the ability of the 'legs' to operate independently and even reproduce themselves when severed. They emphasize that when centralized or decentralized organizations are attacked, each organizational form tends to become more extreme. In a centralized organization, further centralization can make it more vulnerable as the decision-making capacity become concentrated in fewer individuals. In decentralized organizations, a greater degree of decentralization allows the organization to spread to avoid irreparable organizational damage, continue to operate as smaller sub-groups, and to regroup after the attack has ended (Brafman & Beckstrom, 2006).

Johnston argues that the key determinants of insurgent organizational structure are technology and geography. He describes a causal chain in which their interaction influences the type of organization that develops, which has an impact on the organization's effectiveness. Johnston illustrates two ideal types of organizational structure, grounded in new institutional economic theory: the unitary form, and the multidivisional form. He argues that the unitary form, similar to Sanin and Giustozzi's 'army', is created explicitly, while the multidivisional form, similar to the 'network', is created organically. He defines military effectiveness as the group's ability to translate resources into power. As insurgencies grow, recruit more members and occupy more territory, unitary organizations become less effective, and the successful ones shift organically to become multidivisional organizations. Explicit, unitary organizations are intrinsically less flexible than multidivisional organizations, and in the modern context, that makes them less effective (Johnston, 2008).

The role of charismatic leadership is also important in understanding how insurgent organizations grow and change. Jordan, writing about leadership by analysing the assassination of insurgent leaders, finds that although charismatic leadership is key to the creation of a strong insurgent group, it does not determine the group's ultimate survival and can actually be a hindrance as the group develops over time (Jordan, 2009).

Langdon, Sarapu and Wells, also writing about the effectiveness of targeting insurgent leaders, focus specifically on the role of charismatic leadership in the formation and development of insurgencies. They argue two points relevant to the debate on insurgent organizational structure. First, they find that groups with charismatic leaders may resist bureaucratization and growth, and may even resist, at least implicitly, achieving organizational goals. If the leader feels that victory will force the organization to grow beyond his/her control or will remove the organization's *raison d'être*, s/he may actually work to ensure that victory is not achieved. Second, they draw a distinction between groups that resemble armies and those that with semi-autonomous squads. They say that in the army-style groups, a loss of leadership always results in the group either being strengthened or collapsing, the group never stays the same or weakens (Langdon et al, 2004). Their findings speak to the relationship between flexibility and effectiveness, as more flexible, network-style organizations are more resilient to the loss of their leadership.

Oots draws the comparison between terrorist organizations and non-violent political groups, adding to the school of thought that terrorism is a rational political decision. He argues that groups are founded when charismatic leaders have a set of goals, and when the benefits of membership outweigh the costs for potential recruits. He also agrees that a major function of a terrorist organization is maintaining its own existence, and illustrates that an organization's leadership needs to sustain the organization overall in order to sustain its privileged position.

### *Dilemma Three: Recruitment versus Retention*

The recruitment-retention dilemma is a particularly pressing one for insurgent organizations, but which receives mostly perfunctory treatment in the literature. Recruitment is described as an extremely difficult endeavour, and retention is treated mostly as a form of what organizational economics calls 'contract enforcement,' focused on convincing members to fulfil their commitments. Actually, the challenge of recruitment is often more related to a lack of quality rather than quantity of recruits, and the real challenge of retention lies not in preventing people from quitting, but preventing them from being killed. Gates,

writing about the structure of rebel organizations, identifies three factors – geography, ethnicity and ideology, which he calls the ‘microfoundations’ of rebellion. He argues that they are key determinants of overall military success, and links them particularly to the recruitment and retention of group members. He posits that the central challenges for a rebel organization are the recruitment of new members and motivating them to kill and die for the group’s cause (Gates, 2002).

Although there are clear overlaps between recruitment and retention, namely, how to recruit people into an organization that may not believe in retaining them alive, the challenges to each are distinct, and so I will analyse them separately here.

### *Recruitment*

Recruitment can be approached both from the perspective of the organization seeking new members, and the individual deciding to join an insurgency. There are three main, overlapping reasons that an individual chooses to join an insurgency: (a) because family members, friends, or other members of the recruit’s social network are involved; (b) because of personal trauma, including violence against the individual and/or his or her family members; and (c) because of deep religious and/or political conviction that inspires a willingness to fight and for a cause (Frisch, 2010).

Chai, writing in 1993, was one of the first academics to question the hegemony of the rational choice explanation for why people engage in political violence. Pre-dating the greed or grievance debate, he theorizes that the decision to rebel might involve more than a purely economic cost-benefit analysis, and argues that violence creates incentives to create more violence and that the people who choose to participate may have an intrinsic interest in perpetuating it. Ultimately, he argues that there are many, complex reasons that organizations and individuals choose to participate in political violence, and to assume that the decision is purely economic is overly simplistic and prevents a thorough understanding of it (Chai, 1993).

Attempting to understand the perspective of the individual, Weinstein and Humphreys, in a wide-ranging survey of former fighters in Sierra Leone, investigate why people joined violent factions in Sierra Leone’s civil war. They find that a complex blend of grievance, incentives, coercion and social pressures all interacted to motivate participation. Responding to the ‘greed versus grievance’ dichotomy in explaining insurgent participation, they argue that the debate should not be between the supremacy of one theory over another. Rather, they find that there are many simultaneous factors, the combination of which may be different for different groups and individuals, and those differences may help account for a group’s behaviour. (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2008).

Kuznar, in a wide-ranging psychological and sociological analysis of the reasons people engage in terrorist activities, highlights the significance of a sense of material inequality and lack of fairness as important motivators. He links those sentiments to deeper psychological feelings of resentment and humiliation, which both fuel the motivation to act violently, and create important social bonds with others who share those feelings. He also proposes that, because of their awareness of economic inequalities, those in the middle-upper echelons of their social rank are particularly prone to risk-taking (Kuznar, 2007).

Kuznar also emphasizes the importance of social networks as an important factor in an individual’s decision to participate in terrorism. He highlights the social isolation from mainstream society often felt by migrants, specifically Muslim migrants in Europe, and theorizes that participation in terrorist activities may stem from a psychological impetus to be a part of a supportive group after migrating to an unfamiliar and alienating environment. His conclusions about the role of social networks in recruitment to commit violence is widely supported across the literature, and provide some insight into the non-economic reasons that people choose to participate in terrorist activities (Kuznar 2007).

### *Retention*

Much of the literature on member retention focuses on avoiding desertion and splintering within insurgent organizations. This, however, does not seem to be as much of a challenge as the literature implies; people choose to stay in organizations for many of the same reasons they choose to join them in the first place. The factors that contribute to recruitment, like strong social networks, grievance, and incentives also contribute to retention, and do not diminish with membership. Within insurgent organizations, the more pressing problem is not how to keep members from leaving, but how to keep them from dying. On one hand, very limited resources must be expended on recruiting new members, while on the other hand, their survival (and thus, their retention) is very difficult to ensure, as they participate in violence on behalf of the organization.

More importantly, access to recruits is a resource in itself, and one that is finite. If recruits are being slaughtered with no evidence of progress, the flow of recruits will dry up as the calculus for potential members changes to incorporate the higher risks involved with joining the organization. Another particularly difficult aspect of retaining group members is that the highest value recruits are also hardest to retain, both because of opportunities outside the insurgency, and because they often have more dangerous positions within it, including making bombs and attacking higher-value and more dangerous targets.

The onus is also on the organization to build loyalty. Akerlof and Kranton find that non-economic motivations are key to fostering loyalty and group identification, particularly in military contexts. A sense of group identity and inclusion, they argue, is more important than financial incentives as a motivator for group members. Members of military organizations are particularly susceptible because their physical and emotional distance from society, their proximity to each other, and their exposure to crisis and trauma all serve to cement a sense of belonging that monetary incentives alone could never induce (Akerlof & Kranton, 2005).

Attempting to understand how the use of suicide bombing fits into the literature on member retention, Pedahzur and Perliger, write about networks of Palestinian terrorists and find that suicide bombers are usually not central figures in the networks. More often than not they are peripheral members, whose sacrifice will not be a major blow to the organization (Pedahzur & Perliger, 2006). Zubaydi, speaking from his personal experience agreed, saying that the suicide bombers he approved were rarely regular members of the Al Aqsa's fighting force (Zubaydi, 2011).

#### *Dilemma Four: Success versus Longevity*

Another widely agreed-upon idea in the literature is the critical importance of organizational survival in decision-making. The predominant understanding, as discussed by Oots and others, is that insurgent organizations are primarily rational actors, and that the use of violence, including against civilians, is an effective political tool. Abrahms disagrees with this conventional wisdom and criticizes the assumptions that underpin it, particularly that terrorist organizations engage in violence with the primarily political goals. He points out seven ways that terrorist organizations contradict the widely held assumption of strategic rationality. He argues that organizational survival and social connections, rather than the achievement of political goals, are the most important factors in the decision-making of terrorist organizations. (Abrahms, 2008).

Langdon, Sarapu and Wells also support the widely held claim that the first and foremost goal of any insurgent group is its own survival. The survival of the group and its leadership may be inextricably linked, as is the case with small insurgencies based on a cult-of-personality style of leadership, or it may be a completely separate issue, as in larger, more structured organizations (Langdon et al, 2004).

Harmon argues that terrorist organizations are not mindless, and that they carefully choose targets and tactics to advance a complex agenda of short and long-term goals that allow for greater organizational longevity (Harmon, 2001). Ultimately, insurgent organizations respond to this challenge by setting both easily attainable short-term goals, like spreading fear among a civilian population through terrorist attacks,

and virtually impossible long-term goals, like the establishment of a global Islamic Caliphate, in the case of Al Qaeda, or the eradication of the state of Israel, in the case of Al Aqsa.

### *Resources versus Constituencies*

Olson, writing about bandits in ancient China, presented one of the key choices facing all armed actors with an interest in resource extraction. He presents the 'roving bandit' as an armed group that attacks a village, steals as much as they can, and then leaves to do the same to the next village, and the 'stationary bandit', a group that establishes itself in a specific area and extracts a smaller, regular tithe from its residents. The stationary bandit will make less money in the short term, but ensures a steady flow of income over the long-term (Olson, 2000).

Modern insurgent organizations often face a very similar dilemma. Weinstein outlines the link between resources, recruitment and organizational structure and behaviour. He argues that insurgencies are dependent on both social and economic endowments, the nature of which influence the organization's recruitment, structure, goals, and leadership. The crux of his argument rests on the idea that an organization's methods of resource extraction influence the individuals who choose to join and the way the organization behaves. An organization that depends on the local population for support will employ a 'stationary bandit' approach, and attract high-commitment recruits who believe in the organization's ideology and will employ violence selectively. An organization with access to natural resources or external funding will attract low-commitment recruits who are primarily interested in profit and who have little regard for the lives or livelihoods of civilians, or in establishing a stable system of long-term tax collection. He also argues that the relationship between endowments and an organization's leadership is mutually reinforcing: endowments shape the leadership's behaviour, but the leadership can shape endowments as well (Weinstein, 2006).

The risk of constituent alienation, particularly among organizations that use indiscriminate violence, must be considered. Byman cites Al Qaeda's steep learning curve after popular opinion in Saudi Arabia turned against them when early attacks killed Saudi Muslims as well as Westerners (Byman, 2011). Kydd and Walter describe terrorism as a form of costly signalling, and argue that terrorist groups use violence to signal their strength in the hope that it will produce not only concessions from enemies but obedience from their supporters as well (Kydd & Walter, 2006). Organizations, especially those using terrorism, must be very careful in their application of violence to ensure that the message they send pressures both their enemies and their supporters to act in certain, albeit different, ways.

From a slightly different perspective, Findley and Young write about the challenges of counterinsurgency. They claim, as do many others, that an insurgent organization depends on civilians for supplies, protection and recruits. When a counterinsurgency succeeds at its goal of winning the support of those same civilians, the insurgency will ultimately collapse because of a lack of new recruits and other forms of civilian support. Aslan agrees, theorizing that Al Qaeda's violent tactics have prevented their acceptance among young Muslims. 'It was not the invasion of Iraq, or nation-building in Afghanistan, or Bush's 'freedom agenda,'" she writes, 'that deafened young Muslims to al-Qa'ida's call. It was al-Qa'ida's bloodlust in Iraq and Afghanistan.' (Aslan, 2011).

### *Context and the Resolution of Dilemmas*

It is clear from the dilemmas discussed above that insurgencies need to be dynamic and malleable organizations. They are influenced by a host of contextual factors, which determine the way they negotiate the five dilemmas discussed here. Ultimately, flexibility and responsiveness to changes in context will determine how they resolve the challenges of the five dilemmas, and ultimately their survival as an organization. Zubaydi states that the single most important aspect of leading Al Aqsa was the ability to shift strategy and structure regularly to pre-empt and respond to the actions of the Israeli military (Zubaydi, 2011). Crenshaw concludes that although organizations usually form when goals are identified and an

organization is created to achieve them, the organization will continue to grow and change as internal dynamic impact its strategies and tactics (Crenshaw, 1987). That flexibility, which is key to survival, is most often found in organizations with structures that evolve organically, and are responsive to changes in how they deal with the dilemmas they face. Sanin and Giustozzi also conclude that the organizational differences in different contexts are evidence that organizations evolve organically rather than explicitly (Sanin & Giustozzi, 2010). Johnston argues that while hierarchies are structured explicitly, networks are organic. Organizations that expand will naturally become more networked and make fewer explicit decisions about structure (Johnston, 2008) and thus remain flexible even as they grow.

The distinction between organic and explicit organizational structure and decision-making is important for two reasons. From a policy and particularly counter-insurgency perspective, the conclusion that context is key to the evolution of insurgencies would imply that lessons learned in one context should only be very carefully applied to another. The challenges represented by the dilemmas can be used to frame how an insurgency deals with its context. It also implies, therefore, that if the context in which an insurgency is forming can be changed, so too can the formation of the insurgency. It may be possible to track, or even predict, how those changes will take place if we know how the organization has resolved these dilemmas over time. As such, they can be a useful framework to guide counter-insurgency strategy towards an understanding of the importance of context and the ways it can influence organizational behaviour.

## ***Section 2: A New Spectrum of Insurgent Network Organization***

In this chapter, I discuss a new dimension of the hierarchy-network spectrum described above. I then define the parameters for a discussion of network effectiveness, and through two brief case studies, illustrate the different ways that local and international networks are effective. Through the lens of the five dilemmas discussed above, I highlight similarities and differences between the organizations, and discuss how those differences are related to the ways they negotiate the dilemmas.

Throughout much of the literature on insurgent organizational structure, there is widespread agreement on the hierarchy-network spectrum of organizational types as discussed by Sanin and Giustozzi, Johnston and others. That spectrum, however, is becoming a less and less accurate way of describing the reality of insurgent organizations in operation today. Classic examples of long-term, largely effective hierarchical insurgencies, like the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka, are being defeated through conventional military means, or are shifting towards a network-oriented structure to survive, like the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). In a modern, post-September 11th context, the strict hierarchical structure has become a liability rather than an asset to an insurgent organization. A number of factors have contributed to this shift, stemming both from the policies and practices related to the Global War on Terror (GWOT) and broader trends of the globalization of travel and trade.

The GWOT policies have contributed to a centralization of counter-insurgent strategy and given greater access by historically weak governments to the training and material resources of conventional military operations. Local conflicts, like those in the Philippines, Indonesia, Russia, Nigeria, Somalia and elsewhere have been incorporated into a broader GWOT narrative and the governments fighting those counter-insurgency campaigns have been able to strengthen their conventional military capacity exponentially as a result, through support from the United States, Great Britain and other governments, as well as from international institutions. As the military capacity of the state has grown, their ability to confront and defeat hierarchical insurgent groups with structures are similar to their own has grown as well.

Simultaneously, insurgent groups now have unprecedented opportunities to decentralize. Chief among them is the ease of communication, both short-distance, through mobile phone technology, and long-distance, through the internet. As discussed above, communication has always been key to an organization's efficiency. With easier methods of communication available, insurgent cells within a network are able to maintain strong communication links without rigid, hierarchical structures. Also important is the opening of borders for travel and trade. This has allowed insurgent groups, particularly

those with international goals like Al Qaeda, to broaden the scope of their actions and attack targets far from their bases. The planning and implementation of the Madrid train bombings and the September 11th attacks, as well as other unsuccessful attempts at violence, including a recently thwarted attack using explosives shipped commercially from Yemen to the United States, are evidence of the ways that open borders are being exploited by insurgents.

Finally, the wide reach of the media, both in sourcing stories and in reporting them, has created clear incentives for a strategy based on perpetrating a small number of high-profile incidents. Older, hierarchical models of insurgent organization tend to emphasize a long-term strategy based on guerrilla tactics and attrition, whereas modern, networked insurgencies can capitalize on the international media echo to project power and presence through fewer, very public attacks.

Consequently, to be able to accurately analyze the organizational structure of modern insurgencies, it is important to introduce another measure in addition to the hierarchy-network spectrum. As discussed above, hierarchies are becoming less viable as insurgent organizational structures, so the new measure will focus on those organizations closer to the network pole of the spectrum.

The new measure is a spectrum as well, with the 'local' network at one pole, and the 'international' network at the other. Networks are by definition loose and flexible, and so the local-international spectrum can be applied not only to the way that organizations are structured internally, but also the ways they work with other like-minded organizations.

A local network is one based on an orientation towards short-term, tactical goals, in which insurgent cells within an organization share an operational orientation foremost, and an ideological agenda second. The Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, active in the West Bank during the second Intifada, is an example of a local network – the organization overall was comprised of individual, autonomous units in different cities, and each unit was made up of smaller, semi-autonomous cells with complementary responsibilities, all with the same goal of fighting the Israeli occupation. The organization also partnered with other groups fighting Israel, including Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Al Aqsa did not share the Islamist ideologies of those organizations, but did share their short-term goal of ejecting Israeli troops and settlers from the West Bank and Gaza, and even the longer-term goal of the eradication of the state of Israel.

In negotiating the five dilemmas discussed in the previous section, local networks tend to prioritize action over secrecy, as they can retreat into hiding among the population in urban centres, or in geographical features like jungles or mountains; control over growth, as they work within a limited area and ideological scope; retention over recruitment, as they may not have access to many new recruits; success over longevity, as they try to achieve specific, locally oriented goals; and constituencies over resources, as their primary sources of funding may be from local populations or sympathizers abroad in their diaspora.

At the other pole of the spectrum is the international network. Within international networks, broad ideologies and some long-term goals are shared, and the tactics used to advance them may even be similar, but they are implemented in different contexts with different operational goals and agendas. Al Qaeda is a prime example of an international network. The organization's leadership and membership is spread between a number of different countries, their attacks have taken place in still other countries, and they work closely with autonomous subsidiary networks in a number of other countries and contexts. Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) are the organizations with the closest links, but they have also partnered with Jemaah Islamiyah in Indonesia, Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines, and other organizations in other countries with shared ideological goals but different immediate, operational goals.

In dealing with the five organizational dilemmas, international networks tend to prioritize action over secrecy, carrying out single missions in which the individual perpetrators are caught or killed; growth over control, as they spread to carry out different short term goals in different contexts, or to work with partners

with wide-ranging ideologies and operational styles; recruitment over retention, as they build more cells in the various contexts in which they operate, and longevity over success, as they aspire to practically unattainable long-term goals while advancing other, shorter-term agendas. It is important to note that in responding to all five dilemmas, most international and local networks behave differently from each other.

### *Methodology*

As we compare the effectiveness of local and international networks by looking at two fairly ideal cases, it's important to establish a definition of effectiveness as it pertains to the strategies and tactics of insurgent organizations. Data for the case studies has been drawn from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), housed at the University of Maryland, which uses a wide variety of sources to include all terrorist incidents globally since 1970. They define terrorism very broadly, and in a way that encompasses the definition of insurgency discussed above, as well as the parameters of both the hierarchy-network spectrum and local-international spectrum. Their definition is unique in that does not mention civilians or attacks on civilians (START, 2011). That omission has enabled it to work for the purposes of this paper, as it aligns very closely with the definition of insurgency described above.

Based on the GTD's parameters, effectiveness will be defined by: (1) the frequency of attacks, (2) the sophistication of weapons used, (3) the number of casualties, including injuries and fatalities, caused by individual attacks, (4) the percentage of successful attacks, which are those where law enforcement officials were unable to prevent the attack as it occurred or immediately prior, (5) the defensive capabilities of the target, as the choice and ability to attack military and police targets implies a higher level of organizational effectiveness than attacking civilian or commercial targets, (6) the average number of attackers per incident, because the ability to coordinate more people implies greater organizational effectiveness (7) achievement of their stated goals, and (8) ultimate survival of the organization today.

### *Case Study: Al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade*

The Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade was a network of West Bank-based militants that was active during the second Intifada, from 2000 to 2010. Affiliated with the Fatah political party, the link was initially denied until a BBC report in 2003 uncovered evidence of monthly payments from Fatah to Al Aqsa cells, at which point Fatah and Al Aqsa admitted their close relationship.

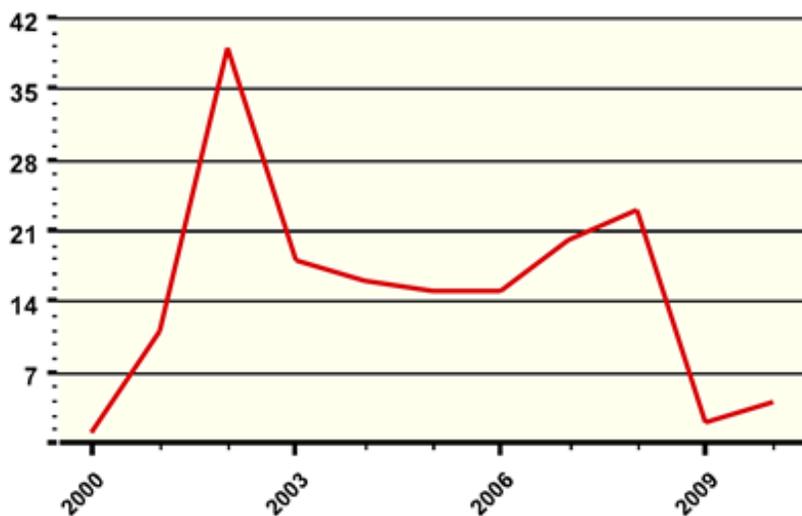
Al Aqsa was comprised of small, autonomous units throughout the West Bank, many of which pre-dated the establishment of the organization, and which were united under its banner. As an organization, they often partnered with Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, although they espoused a secular ideology and did not share those organizations' Islamist goals. Zakaria Zubaydi, the commander of the Jenin cell of Al Aqsa, said that he often served as a media spokesman not only for Al Aqsa, but for Hamas and other West Bank militant groups, indicating high levels of cooperation between different organizations (Zubaydi, 2011).

Tactically, Al Aqsa was involved in primarily three types of operations: suicide bombings on targets within Israel, suicide attacks using guns on Israeli military targets within the West Bank, and hit-and-run attacks on Israeli military units in urban areas of the West Bank, particularly refugee camps. Zubaydi argued that defence of the refugee camps was always Al Aqsa's primary goal, and attacks on Israeli military and civilian targets were always ultimately defensive. The organization's stated preference in suicide attacks was to use guns rather than explosives, both because of the ability of the attacker to choose targets more carefully, and because it was seen as a more honourable and courageous way to die. Suicide attacks were carried out at the initiative of the attackers themselves, with organizational approval and weapons, although without organizational involvement in planning the operation or choosing a target. Zubaydi insisted that the organization did not recruit people for suicide attacks, and would only endorse an operation after someone had volunteered and been turned down repeatedly over the course of at least six months to a year (Zubaydi, 2011). He described the organization as being divided into small cells, each

with a specific role. Most cells were made up of soldiers, but others were dedicated to making and placing bombs, using computers and the internet for research and communication, transporting money and guns, or keeping watch for Israeli incursions into Al Aqsa-held areas (Zubaydi, 2011). The main challenge the organization faced was not a lack of volunteers, but a lack of weapons. Zubaydi stated that there was only one gun for every five insurgents. To acquire guns Al Aqsa militants would climb on top of Israeli armoured vehicles with tools and detach mounted heavy machine guns while the Israeli soldiers inside were powerless to stop them, or pull smaller personal weapons from the hand of Israeli soldiers as they aimed them out through slits in armoured personnel carriers (Zubaydi, 2011). The Intifada ended in 2004, but Al Aqsa continued to be active through 2010, although it was effectively crippled in 2008, when Zubaydi and many other high-level members accepted amnesty offers from Israel in exchange for their resignations. Zubaydi expressed frustration with Israel's approach to counter-insurgency operations, and blamed their use of overwhelming force on the ultimate defeat of his organization. The Al Aqsa fighters did what they could with limited resources, he said, but when Israel retaliated with bulldozers, tanks and helicopters, and displayed a willingness to utilize excessive force, they were unable to put up a significant resistance (Zubaydi, 2011).

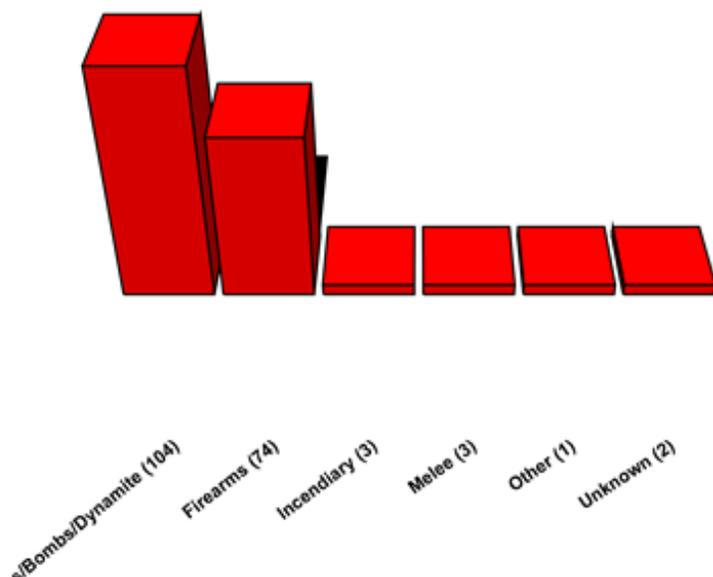
Over the course of the 10-year period between 2000 and 2010, Al Aqsa was involved in carrying out 164 incidents, alone or in collaboration with other Palestinian insurgent groups. Figure 1.1 illustrates the frequency of Al Aqsa attacks from its creation in 2000 through its dissolution in 2010.

**Figure 1.1: Al Aqsa Frequency of Attacks, 2000-2010**



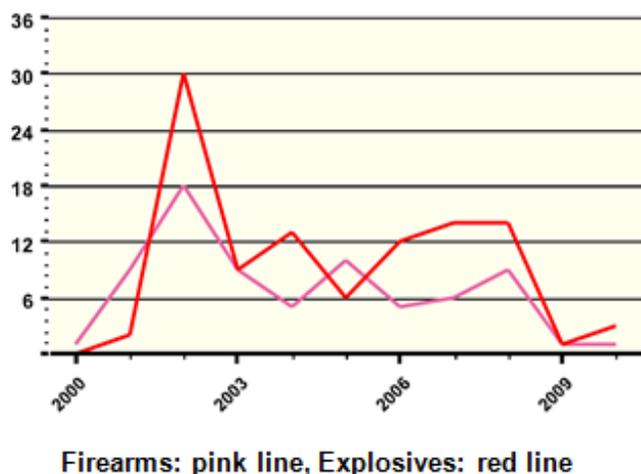
At its height in 2002, attacks were very frequent, especially in the early part of the year – there were 14 attacks in March alone. In response, the Israeli military attacked the Jenin refugee camp, widely suspected to be a source of many of the attacks. The camp proved harder to conquer than they expected, and fierce fighting raged for 11 days. The Israeli military, unable to defeat the insurgents in house-to-house fighting, flattened large areas of the densely populated camp and arrested hundreds of suspected militants. The Israeli response dealt a severe blow to the organization's capacity, reflected here in the sharp drop between the frequency of attacks in 2002 and 2003. In 2008, the Israeli government signed an agreement offering amnesty in exchange for a ceasefire with many members of Al Aqsa's leadership. That agreement is reflected here in the severe drop in frequency between 2008 and 2009.

**Figure 1.2: Weapons used in Al Aqsa attacks, 2000-2010**



As is clear from Figure 1.2, Al Aqsa’s weapons of choice were bombs and firearms. Bombs were homemade, using agricultural fertilizers and other locally available chemicals. Guns were mostly AK 47 and M 16 assault rifles, which were largely either purchased illegally in Israel and smuggled into the West Bank, stolen from Israeli soldiers, or purchased under the auspices of Fatah and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). The use of explosives speaks to a certain level of expertise within the organization, as they require skill and practice to assemble and detonate. After the Battle of Jenin, there was a sharp drop in the frequency of explosive use, after which point there seems to have been a reverse correlation between firearm and explosive use; when the frequency of explosive use increases, the frequency of firearm use decreases (see Figure 1.3). This implies that the organization was operating at full capacity in terms of human and material resources, and had to prioritize the use of one type of weapon over the other, based largely on availability.

**Figure 1.3: Al Aqsa weapons use, 2000-2010**



In Figure 1.4, we can see that most of Al Aqsa’s attacks had fewer than ten casualties, and very few had more than 50. This speaks to the tactics used in many of the incidents: hit-and-run attacks with firearms on Israeli soldiers and settlers, roadside bombs in areas Israeli soldiers would pass through, and suicide bombings against civilian targets within Israel. The attacks with the most casualties were all suicide attacks, most carried out with explosives but some with firearms. The generally low number of casualties also implies fairly primitive bomb-making capabilities. Explosives made with agricultural fertilizers are very

unstable, and were probably manufactured in small quantities for specific attacks.

**Figure 1.4: Casualties per (number of incidents) in Al Aqsa attacks 2000-2010**

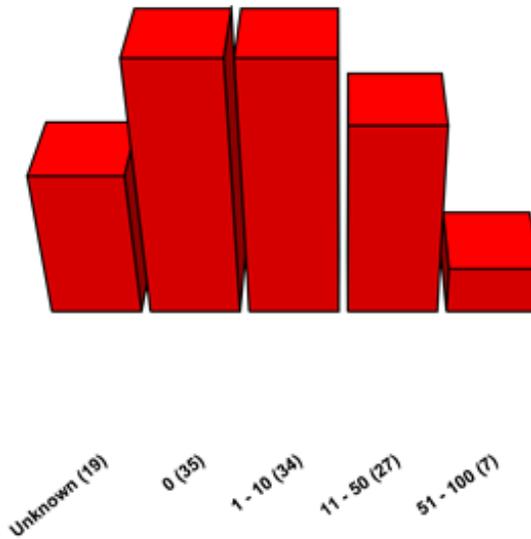
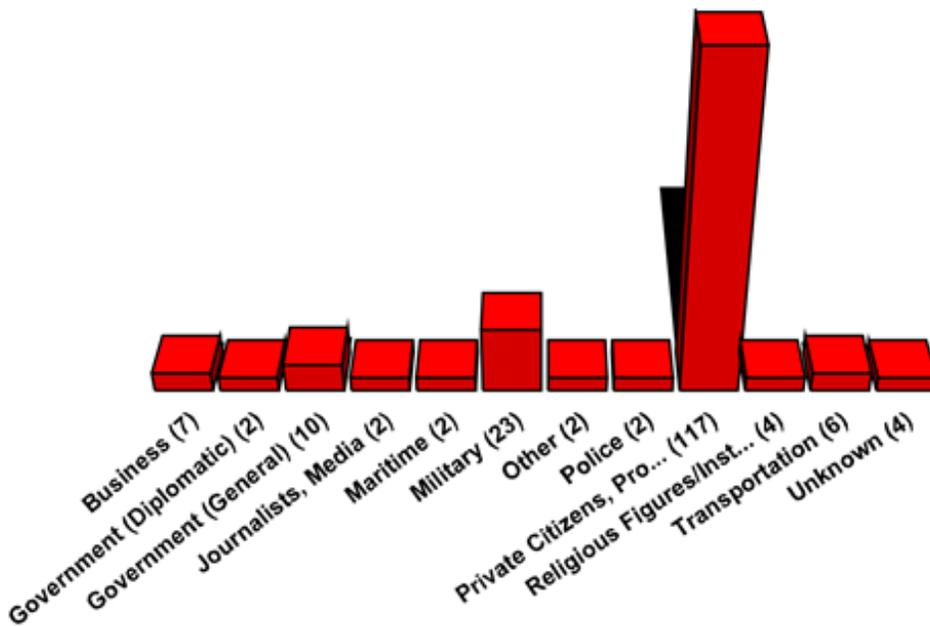


Figure 1.5 depicts the frequency with which Al Aqsa attacked different categories of targets. As is clear from the graph, the overwhelming number of attacks targeted private citizens and property, particularly settlers in the West Bank. Zubaydi, when asked about his choice of targets, claimed that neither he nor the organization was aware of the intended targets for suicide attacks beforehand. The organization supplied the bomber with explosives, and left the decision about where to detonate them in his or her hands. As such, we can deduce that since the bombers received no training or guidance, they chose the least well defended targets, namely civilians. Zubaydi also expressed the view that because all Israelis are required to serve in the military, Al Aqsa fighters saw all Israelis as soldiers, regardless of whether they were in uniform, and as such had no qualms about striking targets that were ostensibly civilian.

**Figure 1.5: Targets of Al Aqsa attacks (number of attacks), 2000-2010**



Al Aqsa's attack teams were small, with an average of 1.89 insurgents per attack. Their largest attack involved 17 insurgents, who attacked and held a European Union office in Gaza for approximately 30 minutes to protest the publishing of cartoons in Danish newspaper that they believed were offensive to

Islam. The high number of suicide attacks, 25% overall, which were perpetrated by single individuals also brings this figure down, as suicide attackers are able to do more damage and cause more casualties than a single non-suicide attacker. Al Qsa's attacks were mostly operationally successful: 92.7% of attacks were not prevented as they were being carried out. The 12 attacks that were prevented were unremarkable, and were due either to a technical failure on the part of the bomber, random checks on people and vehicles by Israeli police officers, or the fast action of Israeli civilians, including a bus driver who pushed a bomber off the bus before he could detonate his explosives. Al Qsa was ultimately unable to fulfil their goals of the establishment of a Palestinian state and the eradication of the Israeli state. The organization had limited manpower, as evidenced by the negative correlation between firearms and explosives uses in Figure 1.3, limited access to firearms, as the interview with Zubaydi made clear, and to explosives, as most of the bombs made were small (between 8 and 12 kilograms) and rudimentary, sometimes even failing to detonate. They attacked weakly defended civilian targets out of necessity. Most of their members received little or no training; only those who had previously served in Fatah's police force, a small percentage, received any formal training at all. The Israeli military had better weapons and equipment, including armoured vehicles, helicopters and other military aircraft, state of the art communication technology, and more and better-trained soldiers. It is, however, a testament to Al Qsa's flexible, locally-oriented network structure that they survived as long as they did, and only admitted defeat when the Israeli government displayed an unwillingness to keep fighting. The Israeli military was surprised at how well organized the Al Qsa-organized resistance it encountered was, and the battle lasted much longer than they had expected. In fact, Israeli estimates before the battle predicted it would last no more than 72 hours, far short of the 11 days that it ultimately took to subdue the camp (Rees, 2002).

#### *Case Study: Al Qaeda*

There is some debate about whether Al Qaeda actually exists as a cohesive organization in itself, or whether it is merely a name shared between otherwise unrelated organizations. It seems that the confusion comes from Al Qaeda's non-traditional structure and geography, as it is not attached to a specific territory like most other insurgencies. Despite that, it is in fact an organization that both works with other local insurgencies and retains its own structure, leadership, and operational capacity.

Al Qaeda was founded in the late 1980s by Osama bin Laden to provide logistical support to Muslim fighters against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In the early 1990s, he established extensive training camps in Sudan for newly recruited *Jihadi* fighters, who then went to fight for Islam in their home countries or elsewhere. In the mid-1990s, because of international political pressure on the Sudanese government, the organization moved back to Afghanistan. Until 1996 or 1997, bin Laden is thought to have focused solely on supporting fighters in internal *jihad* conflicts in Muslim countries. In 1997, however, he is believed to have decided that internal *jihad* had failed, and decided to reorient the organization to undertake external *jihad* as well (Gunaratna & Oreg, 2010). Al Qaeda's first act of external *jihad* were the bombings of the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in August, 1998, followed about two years later by the U.S.S. *Cole* bombing in October, 2000, and a year after that by the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York and Washington DC.

It was not until 2003, though, following the American invasion of Iraq, that Al Qaeda formalized its strategy of sponsoring local affiliate organizations. Associated groups are thought to communicate with organizational leadership for tactical as well as for ideological guidance and for approval of their operations. The global leadership balances the organizations own internationally-oriented operations with hands-on support for local operations with affiliate groups (Gunaratna & Oreg, 2010).

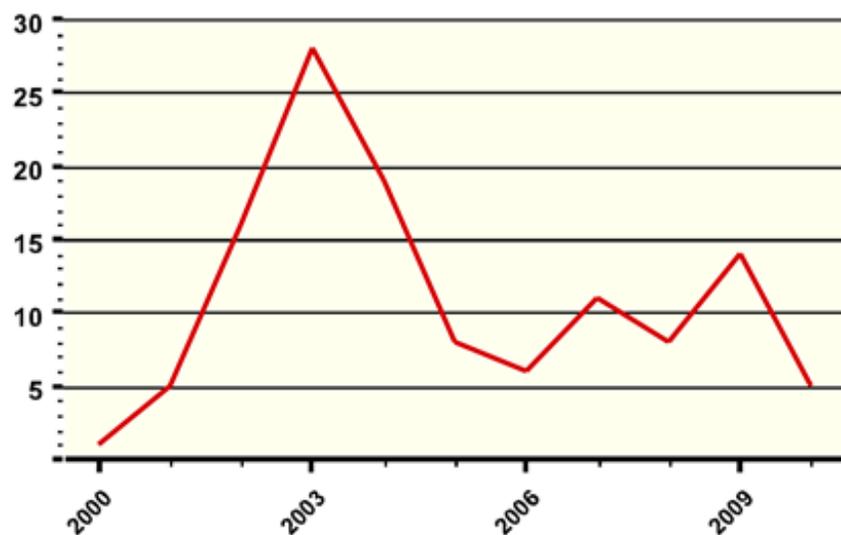
Al Qaeda's leadership is centred in a Command Council with subsidiary Committees: Political, Religious, Military, Administrative and Financial, Security, and Media. The Amir, a position until recently held by Osama bin Laden, and his Deputy, convene the Council and make high level decisions, but the day-to-day running of the organization is done largely by the Council and its Committees. As this paper is focusing on Al Qaeda's insurgent activities, the emphasis here will be on the Military Committee, which is divided into

four Units: the General Section, which focuses on training and fighting within Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Special Operations Unit, which focuses on planning and executing external operations, the Weapons of Mass Destruction Sub-Unit, which oversees research into non-conventional warfare, and the Library and Research Section, the exact work of which is unknown (Gunaratna & Oreg, 2010).

Osama bin Laden, the organization's founder and leader, was assassinated by U.S. Special Forces in May 2011. His former deputy, Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, has ostensibly replaced him although at the time of this writing it is too soon to tell what impact the assassination has had on the organization.

We will measure the organization's effectiveness over the course of the decade between 2000 and 2010, the same time frame in which Al Qaeda was observed. Over the course of that time period, Al Qaeda was involved in carrying out 102 attacks. This is also the time frame in which Al Qaeda embraced its role as an international insurgent network and executed some of its most significant operations.

**Figure 2.1: Al Qaeda frequency of attacks, 2000-2010**



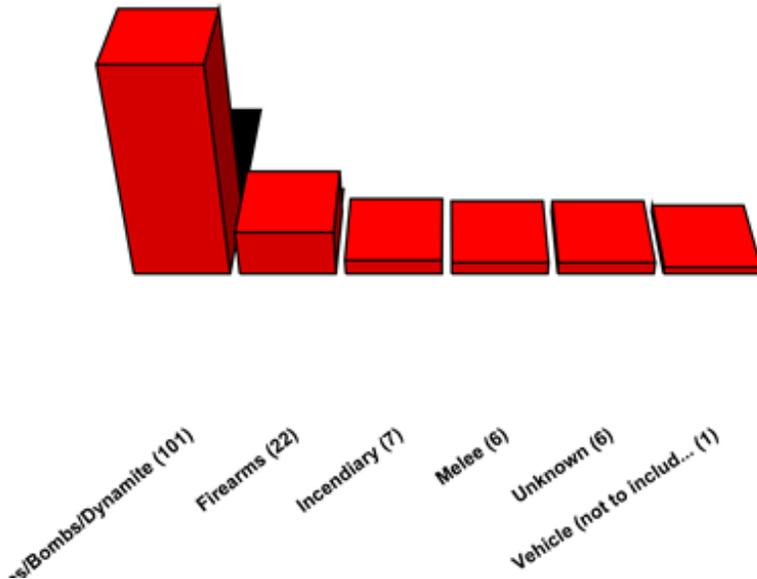
Particularly interesting about Al Qaeda's frequency of attacks is the dramatic spike and fall from 2001 to 2005. Even after their base in Afghanistan was significantly destabilized with the invasion in November 2001, the organization not only survived but appears to have thrived. Most of the attacks that took place from 2001 to 2003 took place in countries with significant Muslim populations and compromised security situations, including Afghanistan, Tunisia, Kenya, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Iraq, showing not only Al Qaeda's resilience in Afghanistan but also their broad international presence even at that fairly early stage.

Harder to account for, however, is the sharp drop in frequency of attacks from 2003 to 2005, and the resurgence in 2008. The American invasion of Iraq in early 2004 attracted much of Al Qaeda's attention; of the 15 attacks in 2004, nine were in Iraq and the others, except for the final attack of the year on the 29th of December in Saudi Arabia, were in Pakistan near the Afghan border. In 2005, the focus broadened once again, and each of the four attacks that year took place in a different country. The 2008-2009 spike marked a shift in tactics that began in late 2007, and involved a number of incidents focused on attacking local civilians in Algeria and Iraq, and destroying or stealing their property and livestock. It is unclear if these incidents were related to resource extraction, intimidation, both, or a third dynamic that is not apparent from the data on the attacks.

Al Qaeda's choice of weapons represents a clear strategic focus on the use of explosives, both remote-detonated and suicide bombs. Given its explicit goal of creating fear among its enemies, it is not surprising that the organization has chosen such a high-profile and indiscriminate weapon. The wide range of sizes and types of explosives being used are also indicative of the diverse range of people involved in the organization's operations. Some of the explosives used were quite large and sophisticated, a testament to

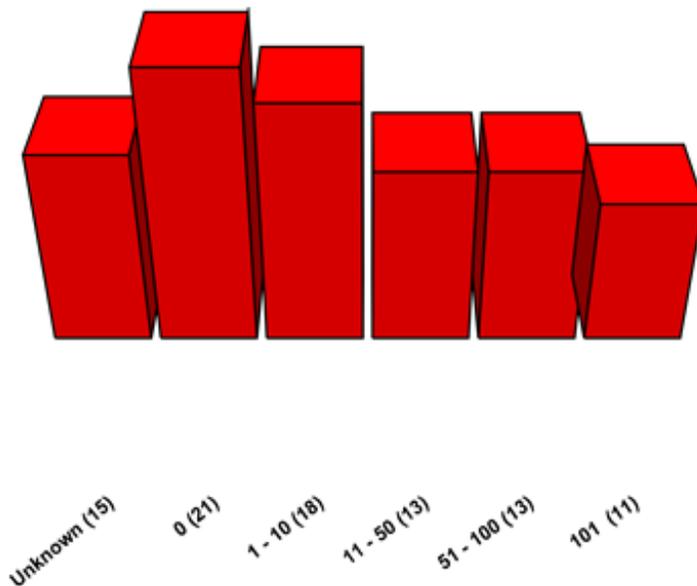
the skills of its members. By the same token, many of the bombs were small and fairly crude, evidence of the organization's growth and decentralised nature, as it recruited new members with a wide range of skill levels but is unable or unwilling to provide sufficient training and materials to all of them.

**Figure 2.3: Weapons used in Al Qaeda attacks 2000-2010**



It is interesting to note in Figure 2.4 is that there is an approximately equal number of incidents in every casualty bracket. Al Qaeda does not seem to have particular strengths or weaknesses related to the magnitude of their attacks, despite the fact that larger attacks with more casualties are more difficult to execute.

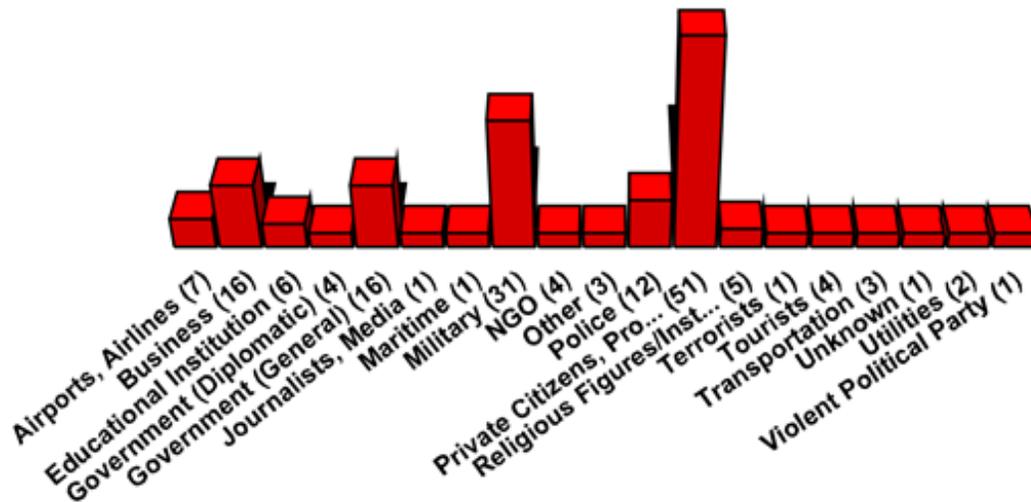
**Figure 2.4: Casualties per (number of incidents) in Al Qaeda attacks, 2000-2010**



Al Qaeda's attacks were largely successful. 90.2% were not prevented during or immediately prior to the attack. The attacks coded as unsuccessful all came very close to succeeding but ultimately failed because of the quick actions of other people or the mistakes of the attackers. Six were assassination and kidnapping attempts in which the primary target very narrowly escaped, two others were bombings that missed their targets, and the final two were the hijacking of the 9/11 plane that crashed in a Pennsylvania field, and the December 2001 attempted shoe bombing of a transatlantic flight. All were logistically sound on the part of

the organization planning them, and so barely count as failures as there was little the attackers could have done differently.

Figure 2.5: Targets of Al Qaeda attacks (number in brackets) 2000-2010



Al Qaeda attacked a fairly diverse cross-section of targets, with private citizens and property being the primary target, and military targets a not-too-distant second. Also interesting in Figure 2.5 is the fairly constant level of incidents targeting symbols of local and international economic and political power: airports and airlines, government, aid organizations, tourists, transportation, and religious institutions. The attacks listed here encompass a wide range of contexts as well, mostly in the Middle East but in Western Europe, Southeast Asia and West Africa, as well as others. The average number of attackers was 4.08 people per incident, the mode was one attacker per incident, and the highest number of attackers in a single incident was 60. In this case, though, the data is unreliable as over half of the incidents are not coded for a specific number of attackers. A significant number of attacks (approximately 40%) were suicide attacks, which suggests that there was only a single attacker although there are a few cases of simultaneous double suicide attacks. In terms of achieving its operational goals, Al Qaeda has largely failed. There is, if anything, a larger Western presence in Muslim countries than when the organization was founded, and there are fewer Islamist states. On the other hand, bin Laden's stated goal of driving the United States into bankruptcy is fast coming true, although the extent to which Al Qaeda can take credit for it is questionable. Finally, Al Qaeda does seem to have survived, despite the conquering and occupation of its base country and the assassination of its leader. Warnings of a potential attack in New York City or Washington DC on the 10th anniversary of the September 11th, while ultimately misleading, dominated the American media in the days leading up to the event. Regardless of Al Qaeda's actual operational capacity, the American government, press and public still regard them as a serious threat.

*Measuring Effectiveness* Ultimately, the juxtaposition of Al Aqsa, a local, mostly homogenous, chronically under-resourced and ultimately failed network with Al Qaeda, an international, diverse, wealthy and at least at the time of this writing, fairly successful network makes some interesting points about the nature of networked insurgencies. Both were young organizations, less than a decade old in their current form. Both used religious and cultural identities, foreign occupation-related grievance, and charismatic leadership to recruit new members and find non-monetary incentives for participation. Neither has explicitly achieved its goals, but Al Aqsa has admitted defeat and Al Qaeda has not. For that reason, as well as more adept use of weaponry, the ability to coordinate larger teams to attack more difficult targets in a more spectacular way and to cause more casualties, it would seem that Al Qaeda is the more effective of the two organizations.

Many of Al Qaeda's local affiliates are very similar to Al Aqsa, and are benefiting from their associate with a diverse and sophisticated international network. Not every organization has to be an Al Qaeda to survive, but connecting to international networks to traffic in resources, ideologies, personnel and experience make modern insurgent organizations exponentially stronger and more effective. One of the cornerstones to Al

Qaeda's success has been avoidance of a traditional geographical base, and it is Al Qaeda's international reach that has allowed it to carry out complex attacks, escape capture and dominate Western media outlets, and which has encouraged local organizations to align themselves with its rhetoric and resources.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, through a discussion of the five dilemmas of insurgent organizing, I have demonstrated the ways that contextual factors drive insurgent organizational structure and strategic decision-making. As it faces a decision to overcome each dilemma, the insurgent organization is influenced by a myriad of factors: its own short- and long-term goals and ideologies, the economic and social resources at its disposal, its enemy's behaviour, and its geography, among others. The parallels drawn between the successes of Al Qaeda and the failures of Al Aqsa further highlight the importance of context, but they also emphasize the diversity of options that organizations face. None of the dilemmas is binary, and each represents a range of choices an organization can make. However, in a modern context of weak borders and easy international transportation, wide-reaching and hyperactive international media outlets, centralized counter-insurgency operations, and inexpensive, reliable means of communication, it would appear that the most effective insurgencies will resolve the dilemmas by evolving an internationally-networked and decentralized organization built of semi-autonomous units with shared goals, ideologies and tactics.

It is impossible to research insurgent organizational structure and growth without arriving at conclusions for counter-insurgency policy. Ultimately, especially given the political climate in the Middle East at the time of this writing, one cannot help but draw parallels between the violent politics of insurgency and the non-violent protests that have, in a matter of months, affected widespread change in ways that insurgencies were never able. All of the ingredients of insurgent participation have been present, in the strong social networks through which people join, the charismatic, young leaders rallying their peers, the deep-seated grievance, and not least of all the allure of economic, political and social opportunities under a new form of government.

My recommendations to counter-insurgency strategists in government in the United States and Europe are these: harness the energy of insurgency into non-violent political activism, and support and protect the people who choose that route. Development projects aimed at addressing grievances, and at creating economic and social opportunities for potential recruits, could fundamentally change the nature of an insurgent organization before it grows large enough to pose a threat.

In the framework of the five dilemmas, that would entail: encouraging non-violent action over violent secrecy; supporting the growth of movements working to bring about productive social change; recruiting new members and retaining veterans by strengthening social networks and encouraging the use of new means of communication; prioritizing constituencies over resources. In a non-violent and inclusive organization, success and longevity are not mutually exclusive – one success can be the foundation for the next, to construct an organization that is strong enough to resist defeat and flexible enough to recognize and exploit weaknesses in its enemy. The protests in Syria, in particular, have turned the accepted wisdom about peaceful protest on its head. There, government violence has, up to this point, not been met with violence from the protestors. The protesters in Syria and elsewhere in the Arab world have realized that just as the perpetration of violence does not define a revolutionary organization, neither does a dedication to peace make them weak.

What remains to be seen, however, is their flexibility to resist continued repression. Based on the findings in this paper, the key to their success will be their flexibility, and their connection to international networks. The internet has been lauded for its role in coordinating the revolutions thus far, and should be used now for sharing experiences across borders and revolutions. Recent reports from Syria have painted the protestors as wildly decentralized, but also very adept at using cell phones and the internet to communicate with each other and with sympathizers internationally (Shadid, 2011). Given the findings of this paper, complete decentralization and skilful use of communication may be the best strategies for the ongoing

protest movement.

Just as Al Qaeda is a non-traditional insurgency, the product of a unique modern context, the collective movements of the Arab Spring are a non-traditional counter-insurgency, led and populated by people who are defeating the potential for insurgency by rejecting its use of violence, by choosing protest over violent resistance.

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