



# Double-I, Double-N

## A Framework for Counter-Insurgency

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### Introduction

It is hard not to sympathise with Goliath, defeated by a weapon so much lighter than his own. His problems would later resurface – literally, in the context of maritime warfare. Repeatedly condemned as sneaky and immoral, German submarines seriously threatened the British in both First and Second World Wars. Apart from the *Dreadnought's* ramming of a U-boat, their battleships were helpless; and, although there were only fifty-seven U-boats in 1939, the damage they inflicted was out of all proportion to their numbers and their cost.

These analogies are imperfect where insurgents using terrorism are concerned, but they show that it is not enough for a conventional power to denounce its opponents as unprincipled, underhanded and cowardly. Insurgents use techniques which need to be assessed on the basis of efficiency, not morality. This paper will examine them (i) from the viewpoint of the enemy; (ii) drawing attention to their strengths; and (iii) laying down criteria for potential counter-measures.

### A Question of Definition

As extremists at home and insurgents abroad share similar views and values, it is helpful to regard them as belonging, intentionally or not, to an integrated ideological movement. In their heart burns the certainty that nothing must obstruct the One True Doctrine – its opponents can, and must, be pitilessly destroyed. This uncompromising stance has much in common with extreme interpretations of religion in centuries gone by, and with the secular ruthlessness of Communism and Nazism more recently. Indeed, the present-day

threat unhappily combines the worst elements of all three: the theocratic intolerance of the Inquisition, the fifth-column potential of revolutionary Communism, the implacable racialism of the Nazis, and the readiness of each to deny justice, human rights and life itself to any perceived adversary.

Today's enemies of Western civilisation are probably delighted to be designated as 'Islamists' or 'Muslim fundamentalists'. Such descriptions define them by the faith they claim to serve and position them prominently in its vanguard. Their credentials are enhanced, whilst the non-militant majority – failing to appreciate supposed distinctions between 'Islam' and 'Islamism' – invariably feels accused, resentful and alienated.

Conversely, the characterisation least welcome to militants, and least offensive to mainstream moderates, is one which describes the extremists and their behaviour as entirely 'un-Islamic'. This leaves no doubt about the *background* of the enemy referred to, but confers no religious legitimacy or status when the label is applied. What we are currently dealing with is a particular brand of totalitarian who justifies the use of any technique, however illegal, in the name of a militant interpretation of religion to which few of the faithful actually subscribe. Our enemies are, therefore, best defined as 'un-Islamic extremists' – a description from which they cannot draw legitimacy, status or satisfaction. It is a better label than 'terrorists', since that merely indicates willingness to employ unlimited criminal methods, whilst revealing nothing about the background of the militants or the nature of their cause. The shorthand



Young Afghan boy photographed during RAF Regiment aid distribution operations outside Kandahar in September 2007. Photo by Susan Schulman.

'UEs' will therefore be used to refer to current enemies of the West, both at home and overseas.

Just as it is counter-productive to define our adversaries in 'Islamic' terms, it is also unhelpful to describe our response to their attacks as a 'War on Terror'. *Terrorism is a technique – not a doctrine or a cause.* Yet, the doctrine which confronts us is very specific indeed, aiming as it does to impose extreme theocratic rule upon the existing Muslim world, and eventually far beyond its borders. The views and values of extreme theocracies are implacably opposed to those of a West currently engaged – whether realising it or not – in fighting to preserve its own civilisation.

### The UE Perspective – Principles of Campaigning

Terrorism, then, is the method employed by UEs, both domestically and abroad. Though allowing no degree of moral, legal or humanitarian restraint, it is simply a means of undermining the power of others and gaining it for oneself. Whilst often inflicting direct economic damage, it is principally used

to weaken the morale of the targeted group, and to sap its determination to carry on resisting. For this reason, an inextricable link exists between the technique of terrorism and the propaganda opportunities which arise from its use.

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Since politics is the pursuit of power, warfare the use of military force for political ends, and terrorism the use of warfare outside its recognised rules and restraints, it is hardly surprising that key principles of political campaigning apply to the military and terrorist environments. Here are the most relevant, especially between unequal opponents:

- always fight on ground where you are strongest and your opponent weakest;
- always seek maximum impact for minimum effort;
- try to manoeuvre your opponent into a situation where he is damned if he does, but damned if he doesn't;
- use your opponent's own weight to drag him down ('military *jiu-jitsu*');
- apply these methods simultaneously and repeatedly.

From the UE point of view, all this was brilliantly achieved in and after September 2001.

First, the extremists drew their Western enemies into a form of warfare where conventional military power is relatively inefficient and potentially counter-productive. The forces which mounted textbook invasions were soon at risk of becoming hostages to daily attrition – and attrition is weak ground for democracies. On any afternoon in the Second World War when a cruiser or destroyer went down, the death toll



exceeded the entire British loss of life thus far in Afghanistan and Iraq. Yet, the latter casualties have much more impact because they are announced individually, day-in and day-out. Totalitarians understand this well. As Stalin is said to have observed: 'One death is a tragedy, one million is a statistic'.

Even if un-Islamic extremists could wipe out three hundred soldiers in a day, the effect would be far less than the cavalcade of piecemeal losses inflicted during the past few years. This propaganda effect was highlighted in 1978, when an American television series called 'Holocaust' (a term until then seldom employed) enabled its audience to identify with the fictional members of a doomed family – despite a sanitised plotline – far more effectively than real footage of anonymous victims being bulldozed into pits. From the UE viewpoint, the exploitation of emotion in individual cases is a strategic campaigning technique, in the absence of an ability to inflict frequent mass casualties upon their enemies.

Secondly, the 11 September attacks achieved maximum impact for minimum effort on a scale unlikely to be exceeded unless a chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear assault on the West actually happens. The destruction of the World Trade Center and related attacks killed almost 3,000 people; destroyed an iconic symbol of American prestige; inflicted huge economic damage; and catapulted Al-Qa'ida – the powerhouse of un-Islamic extremism – from obscurity to world prominence. All this resulted from a single outrage, not against a US embassy abroad, nor against a US warship afloat, but against a target in the heartland of the US itself. And all it took were nineteen indoctrinated fanatics, the cost of flying lessons and air tickets, and the logistical support of a handful of organisers.

Similarly, in Spain the 2004 attacks changed both the government and its foreign policy at a stroke – again at minimal cost – and, although British policy overseas did not alter after the London Underground outrages, further domestic legislation only heightened the sense of siege felt by Britons in general and British Muslims in particular.

Thirdly, 11 September met the 'damned-if-you-do, damned-if-you-don't' criterion. For the un-Islamic extremists, Iraq was a bonus – but Afghanistan was expected. Whether or not Mullah Omar and his Taliban knew about the UE operation, Al-Qa'ida clearly anticipated its consequences for Afghanistan. Why else was General Masood, the strongest opponent both of the Soviets and the Taliban, assassinated just forty-eight hours before the terrorist attacks? His killers, given false journalistic credentials by the 'Islamic Observation Centre' in London, removed the outstanding personality able to lead the country after a Western intervention.

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The plotters expected the invasion – and, just as they maximised their impact by striking the US homeland, so they calculated that drawing the West into Afghanistan would, on balance, work to their advantage. They offered their enemy no choice but to retaliate, and no way of retaliating without embarking on a fight in inhospitable territory. The stage was now set for war of a kind unsuited to the rigidities of conventional military power after its predictable early success in ousting the Taliban government. By sheltering amongst the people, un-Islamic extremists minimise their prospects of discovery and maximise the risk to their opponents of alienating civilians affected by Western retaliation. In this situation, security and counter-insurgency forces will be dependent on intelligence but vulnerable to deception, as UEs fabricate accusations against innocent people who then become disaffected if treated unfairly. There is, in

short, a serious prospect of being trapped in a downward spiral, like the Sorcerer's Apprentice whose every effort to chop up the broomstick doubled the problems he faced.

Fourthly, applying *ju-jitsu* to the field of technology has been one of the most versatile aspects of the UE campaign. Whilst traditional insurgent methods – sniping, sabotage, ambushes and roadside mines – have dominated the war of attrition against occupying forces, a single such incident, digitally captured, can now be sent into cyberspace within minutes. There it becomes accessible to millions worldwide, over and over again. Since the purpose of propaganda is to reinforce what people already believe rather than to change their minds, the internet is tailor-made constantly to spur on the disaffected and intensify their militancy. If the allegiance of the community is the ultimate goal, the exploitation of such technology is of critical importance. The expression 'winning hearts and minds' is no less valid for being over-used. It recognises the motivations of *belief*, on the one hand, and *fear and opportunism* on the other. Those who subscribe to the extreme theocratic vision can be fed a daily ration of spiritual reinforcement; those who are terrified by the conflict can have their anxiety intensified; and those still deciding onto which bandwagon to jump, can be bribed and cajoled in the UE direction.

The technological superiority of the West supplies un-Islamic extremists with many of the weapons they need: the internet to propagate their creed, instructions and achievements; aircraft to use as missiles; vulnerable installations to target; and potentially weapons of mass destruction to destroy much stronger opponents. Conversely, precisely because they have developed and procured complicated equipment at very great expense, there is an institutional reluctance by Western forces not to use it, even when simpler methods of campaigning are better-suited to the conflict. What modern intelligence agency would prefer to ferret in squalid bazaars for scraps of information when a multi-million-dollar satellite is beaming down gigabytes of

data for laboratory analysis? Rather than riskily sending a snatch squad to seize an agitator in a crowd, is it not tempting to 'take him out' with an unmanned aerial vehicle – even at the cost of killing and maiming a dozen-or-so spectators? The unpalatable truth is that *UE tactics of provocation are designed to prompt Western leaders and military commanders into counter-productive responses*. The technological superiority of the West thus provides facilities to un-Islamic extremists and works against the flexibility needed to combat them.

### **The Communist Precedent**

The UE threat is routinely contrasted with that of the Cold War era, but there are similarities between our current enemies and international Communism. That functioned via a combination of subversion and aggression, exploiting the gullible with a bogus, quasi-religious idealism. Its real aim was dictatorship in the name – and on the backs – of a favoured class of people. Once the Soviet Union was established as a central power-base, foreign devotees were activated as Fifth Columnists in target countries, weakening them from within to assist the pressure from outside. Communism inspired and brainwashed young idealists to sacrifice themselves for a noble vision: the emancipation of the workers of the world. Yet, whenever successful in taking over a state, it imposed the dictatorial rule of a privileged few. Over time, this became an inescapable cause of disillusionment, as did its manifest failure to create the promised Workers' Paradise.

Whether or not the leading cadre of Al-Qa'ida shares the cynicism of the old Communist dictators, manipulation of the gullible clearly plays a role. Which Al-Qa'ida *Agitprop* workshop came up with the inspired supernatural bribe of seventy-two virgins per martyr? The lure of heavenly fornication is vastly more effective as an incentive to self-sacrifice than any promise of earthly rewards, since only those cheated of the latter are able to come back and complain.

Un-Islamic extremists do not aspire to overthrow Western societies at this stage, but instead to use Western

intervention in the Muslim world, once provoked, as a means of undermining moderate Islamic regimes. By uniting such societies against Western intervention, the very people who have provoked it aim to profit politically. In order for an empire to be founded, a power base is necessary. That in Afghanistan may have been sacrificed for the present, but radicalisation and destabilisation in Pakistan next door is a potentially more valuable prize. A variety of Arab countries are also candidates for polarisation, subversion and takeover. Once power bases exist at state level – if the West permits this to happen – it will be much easier to exert external and internal pressure on neighbouring countries, as the Soviet Union so often attempted to do.

### **Double-I, Double-N: Criteria for Counter-insurgency**

One would hesitate to outline the basic framework for counter-insurgency planning, but for the fact it is so often ignored. The four main criteria can be summarised as 'Double-I, Double-N': Identify, Isolate, Neutralise and Negotiate. Though presented in this order, they should not be seen as rigidly consecutive. Nor do they determine precise courses of action. They are purely a yardstick against which to measure the wisdom or folly of proposed counter-measures.

#### *Identify*

This is part of the role of intelligence in any military campaign, but is especially important in countering insurgents. Not only must we find out where they are and what plans they are hatching, but we will not even know the identities of more than a handful of their leaders. No uniforms are worn, no conventions observed and no formed units deployed. The strength of the UE, at home and abroad, lies in his, or her, invisibility. Technical measures, especially domestically, may help to identify new suspects as well as the whereabouts and plans of known UEs, but there can be no substitute for the gathering of personal information at grass-roots level. This will depend partly upon organised networks of agents and informants, but primarily –

in a successful counter-insurgency campaign – on information from the community in which the extremists attempt to hide. If the informants or the police cannot be trusted, however, the potential for deception by the enemy is considerable. The gravest error under this heading, therefore, is to precipitate military action based on unreliable intelligence. One laser-guided bomb on an Afghan wedding party fingered by a bogus informant harms the counter-insurgency cause far more than a dozen successful strikes can assist it.

#### *Isolate*

Terrorists at home and insurgents abroad depend upon supportive elements within local communities and cross-border foreign support. Methods are needed to isolate them politically, psychologically and, where possible, physically. Rural insurgencies were traditionally vulnerable to the cutting of supply-lines between bandits and supportive villages. In Malaya, such villages were physically sealed or even moved wholesale to areas inaccessible to the insurgents. Whether such radical solutions could now be used, in the era of 24-hour news coverage and the internet, is gravely open to doubt. This adds to the importance of isolating the insurgent by propaganda and political warfare.

### ***Where is the Western response to the extensive output of the UE message via the Arab media and the Internet?***

The West has barely begun to deploy counter-propaganda in an organised way. The term 'propaganda' is often used pejoratively but simply means the process of persuading one's friends and de-motivating one's foes. In the Second World War, positive propaganda buttressed morale and reminded society of what was at stake. Simultaneously, negative propaganda demoralised the enemy, with broadcasts by the thousand and leaflets by the million. Propaganda was deemed a vital adjunct even to all-



out conventional war. With the absence of open conflict during the Cold War, the battle of ideas became still more important. Military deadlock between East and West encouraged a strategy of containment within which the concepts of freedom and democracy could be deployed against Communist dogma, as its failure became apparent with every passing year.

Systematic use against one's opponents of their own words, promises and predictions has always been a most effective propaganda tool. For the un-Islamic extremists to be discredited, all who doubt the need to resist them must be made aware of what they believe, declare and intend to do. This requires the re-creation of professional government agencies, similar to the Political Warfare Executive in the Second World War and the Information Research Department in the Cold War. Where is the Western response to the extensive output of the UE message via the Arab media and the Internet? As long as that question has to be asked, the isolation of the insurgent abroad and the terrorist at home cannot be accomplished.

#### *Neutralise*

In its broadest sense, the concept of neutralisation is identical to the entire process of counter-insurgency; but that is not what is meant here. Neutralisation refers to the security measures undertaken by the military, the police and reconstruction agencies, in tandem with the on-going intelligence and propaganda efforts already discussed. As was discovered in Northern Ireland and in numerous past counter-insurgencies, success against the enemy requires much more than the exercise of military force alone. If by applying it one undermines another key component of the counter-insurgency package, this only assists the enemy's core policy of provoking overreaction.

Every military initiative must be assessed for its likely effects upon identification, isolation and eventual

negotiation. When Hitler unleashed Operation Barbarossa in 1941, British military opinion unanimously predicted feeble Russian resistance – and so it proved at first. What turned the tide was the unspeakable brutality of the invaders, which fuelled all-out resistance to the advancing Nazis. In counter-insurgency, the same phenomenon applies whenever civilians suffer as a result of military strikes against known or presumed extremists. Totalitarians will accept heavy losses of personnel, if this helps them to bond with a swathe of the population. Indiscriminate military action creates a downward spiral, reversing the process of insurgent isolation and drying up the flow of community intelligence on which UE identification depends.

#### *Negotiate*

Unlike identification, isolation and neutralisation – with their respective emphases on intelligence, political warfare and security operations – the role of negotiation in counter-insurgency is periodic, not continuous. In the early phases of conflict, each side is bent on the other's defeat and moves towards a deal merely signify weakness. Insurgencies are brutal, messy and often indecisive. Yet, it eventually becomes clear if one side is winning or a stalemate is emerging. When insurgents seem victorious, negotiation will not work; but when they are losing, or a stalemate exists, it will be obvious that the extremists have failed in their aim of ousting the government. At this stage, some will fight on, but others will choose the best deal they can get. Such deals range from simple amnesties, when the insurgents are losing, to genuine concessions when a deadlock needs breaking.

The proposing of deals must always be made from a position of strength. There will often be potential fissures between those motivated mainly by nationalism and those driven by uncompromising ideology. Such tensions

may cause serious splits in the ranks of insurgents as their uprisings move towards a close; but although negotiation can bring about an end-game, its role should not be overstated. Credit is rightly given to Prime Ministers Major and Blair for the deals eventually struck with the IRA/Sinn Fein. Yet, such outcomes could never have been agreed fifteen or twenty years earlier, even if identical terms had been on offer. It took three decades for the militants to realise and accept that they would never succeed in driving out the British. During that very long period, the outlook of their leadership could evolve to the point where a previously unacceptable compromise eventually became attractive.

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Of course, some will never agree to a deal, but it is part of the skill of a counter-insurgency strategist to choose the right time to offer terms, isolate the *refuseniks*, and put an end to the conflict. When an agreement is reached, each side will naturally claim that little has been given away. The government will point to the cessation of violence and to the prospect of its opponents' absorption into the political process. Former insurgents will likewise maintain that the concessions achieved have vindicated their struggle and offer good opportunities for future progress. However, the best reason to believe that the settlement will be permanent is the fact that it has emerged only at the end of a long and lethal struggle. ■