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DEEP OPERATIONS AND THE COMPLEX COUNTERINSURGENCY

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ABSTRACT

This paper considers the issue of deep operations at the operational level of war as applied against a complex insurgency. A description of a complex counterinsurgency is provided and is largely based on the work of Dr John Mackinlay, who proposed the idea in his RUSI Whitehall Paper (no 64), *Defeating Complex Counterinsurgency: Beyond Iraq and Afghanistan*. Mackinlay's definition highlights four key dimensions in which the counterinsurgency operates: the strategic, the operational, the tactical and the virtual. The utility of deep operations are considered against this theoretical framework using quantitative and qualitative data from ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The paper concludes that deep operations have utility in the complex counterinsurgency when the enemy presents himself in a conventional manner. However, the insurgent's horizontal leadership structure and his ability to manipulate the virtual dimension are inherently difficult to attack. When kinetic means are used to attack them, there is the potential that the negative effects of such an attack will outweigh the positive effects, strengthening the insurgency.

*O, it is excellent to have a giant's strength,
But, it is tyrannous to use it like a giant.*

William Shakespeare

INTRODUCTION

In October of 2001, US-led forces began operations against Afghanistan in response to the attacks of 11 September 2001, with the aim of ousting the Taliban from power and denying Al Qaeda safe haven in that country. In 2003, the US then undertook operations to remove the national government of Iraq from power, based on an assessment of the threat Saddam Hussein posed to Middle Eastern and global security. The speed with which both the Taliban and Ba'athist governments fell was in large part due to the overwhelming superiority in force-of-arms possessed by West, primarily the United States. It was a clear case of American strength pitted against its enemies' weaknesses—an asymmetric war in which the West, using its great advantage, prevailed.

What has followed those initial victories is a second asymmetric conflict in both Afghanistan and Iraq. An ongoing insurgency—supplied with enough men, funds and materiel to resist pacification in large sectors of both of those nations—has prevented the ultimate achievement of the end state sought by the West: the establishment of democratic governments and denial of terrorist aid and assistance. It is an insurgency driven by unifying themes not only in these two countries but throughout the world in places such as London, Madrid and Bali where its adherents have acted. These themes include a resentment of the West's domination of political and economic issues of the Muslim world, the fate of the Palestinians, and the perceived persecution of Islam. What has set this asymmetric insurgency apart from those of the 20th century is the global scale on which it is being waged and the means by which it is spreading.

In 2005, John Mackinlay published a thesis describing what he called a complex global insurgency that he believes exists today¹, primarily driven by al Qaeda. He proposes that the operational level of war is no longer part of the strategic-operational-tactical trinity but one of four *dimensions*, the strategic-operational-tactical-virtual, with the latter being introduced and expertly manipulated by the insurgents. He claims that until the counterinsurgents, that is the Western-led coalition, understand how this new dimension is used to link the operational to the strategic, victory will be elusive. Mackinlay also highlights the seeming intractability of the operational environment and the difficult position in which military commanders find themselves in this “inherently unmanageable”² space, raising an important question for the West: *Are its present methods of warfare likely to succeed?*

This essay conducts a theoretical examination of the operational and strategic implications of Mackinlay’s thesis, with its primary focus on deep operations and their ability to influence the campaign’s outcome. Deep operations are a critical element of the manoeuvrist philosophy, designed to neutralize an enemy’s fundamental strengths through a series of attacks on his leadership, government institutions, national symbols, armed forces and civilian populations across the physical, temporal and cognitive realms. These attacks are made using a range of options from bombing and blockade to special operations and psychological warfare. When the object of these attacks is within reach, Western militaries are able to apply their present war fighting doctrine; however, Mackinlay describes an enemy whose very construct does not present these ‘targets’ and has actually adapted in many ways that protect itself from attack. When it is attacked, it is unclear what effect the attack has had, with some evidence even suggesting that the negative effects outweigh the positive. This raises the central question of this essay, *Are deep operations still relevant in the complex counterinsurgency?*

This paper argues that while deep operations have a role in the complex counterinsurgency, their application may produce less of an effect than in conventional

¹ John Mackinlay, *Defeating Complex Insurgency: Beyond Iraq and Afghanistan* (London: The Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, 2005)

² *Ibid.*, xi.

warfare. To prove this assertion, the following will be demonstrated. First, using existing doctrine and contemporary thought on deep operations, it will be shown that deep operations remain relevant in the 'single AirLand battle' context. Second, it will be shown that against leadership targets, deep operations may be less successful than in conventional conflicts because the insurgency has protected itself through the adoption of its horizontal structure and its use of the virtual dimension. The proof will be completed by showing that deep operations, especially kinetic operations, may actually cause a strengthening of the insurgency. The paper begins by introducing Mackinlay's thesis followed by a discussion of deep operations theory in the manoeuvrist warfare philosophy. The thesis is then presented and demonstrated.

The evidence used to demonstrate the thesis is taken from open sources. Because Mackinlay's thesis is based on the insurgency in Afghanistan and Iraq, the attempt has been made to use data from these theatres. However, due to the lack of analytical work in the public domain and the nature of the ongoing conflict, the author recognizes that the arguments presented here cannot be fully tested until such information is available.

“DEFEATING COMPLEX INSURGENCY: BEYOND IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN”

In his paper, *Defeating Complex Insurgency: Beyond Iraq and Afghanistan*, John Mackinlay reasons that the present insurgency is unlike any other; so different than the revolutionary insurgencies of 20th century that it calls for an entirely new approach to defeat it. He describes four key characteristics that make it unique:

- It is a globally dispersed campaign against the entire culture and political ideas of the nations seen as challenging the insurgents' way of life.
- It exploits capabilities of the 'virtual dimension' where the connections between people are more important than the individuals themselves.

- It is not as critical to seize territory or overthrow governments as it is to alter the beliefs of the population opposing it.
- It conducts its campaign on a global scale, seeking to demoralize or influence the population of the states that oppose them.³

The complex, systemic nature of the hostile forces, the characteristics of the concerned populations, the failure to recognize the virtual dimension, the role of the media and the proliferation of actors in the operational space are reasons why the West is unable to adopt a more manoeuvrist approach to the counterinsurgency, writes Mackinlay⁴. At the strategic level, “in the linear process of disillusionment-isolation-subversion-terrorist act, our emphasis is placed on reacting to the last phase, but the manoeuvrist would interrupt the first one.”⁵ At the operational level, this translates into insurgents who “[arrive] in the operational space, have been found, recruited, trained and moved into the theatre by a convergence of clandestine cells and individuals that lies beyond the operational space.”⁶ Mackinlay suggests the West is presently without the right weapons to interrupt the multi-dimensional insurgency at the strategic level, resulting in a reactionary, fight of attrition at the operational level⁷:

“...the juxtaposition of these factors and their counter-acting effect in the same operational space create an environment that is inherently unmanageable, in which it is almost impossible for the elements of the international intervention to regain the initiative from the forces that oppose them.”⁸

A similar thesis has been proposed by other theorists. For example in his treatise, *The Sling and the Stone: On War in the 21st Century*, Thomas X. Hammes asserts that a fourth generation of warfare exists, “...[using] all available networks—political,

³ *Ibid.*, p vii.

⁴ *Ibid.*, xi.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁷ *Ibid.*, x.

⁸ *Idem.*

economic, social and military—to convince the enemy’s political decision makers that their strategic goals are either unachievable or too costly for perceived benefit. It is an evolved form of insurgency.”⁹ Furthermore, after forty years of observation and study, Dr Bard O’Neill, Director of International Affairs at the US National War College, has concluded that insurgents and terrorists generally fall into one of four categories regarding their strategic focus: conspiratorial, military, urban warfare, or protracted people’s war. However, he observes that this is not the case with al Qaeda. Al Qaeda, “[has] not explicitly adopted one of these four strategies...[which] does not necessarily mean they have no strategy.”¹⁰ He goes on to say that al Qaeda is a transnational organization whose thinking is on a global strategic scale, based on “alliances with like-minded Islamic militants in all corners of the world”¹¹ with “a clearly articulated long-term goal...to establish a global political system (caliphate) based on its version of Islamic law.”¹² O’Neill further recognizes the highly organized information campaign using pamphlets, the Internet, etc., leading him to finally conclude that al Qaeda is the first insurgency to have a military-focus but with a global theatre of operations.¹³

While Hammes, O’Neill and Mackinlay share the common theme that modern insurgencies are more sophisticated, ‘evolved’ and complex than many of those in the 20th century, Mackinlay offers the unique characterization of the environment in which the insurgency operates and the mechanisms it has developed to survive which give it its complexity. He claims that the insurgency spans four *dimensions*: strategic; operational; tactical; and virtual. The key is the virtual dimension that is being expertly manipulated by the insurgency to spread its vital ideas, messages and directions while simultaneously using it to attract new recruits. This has led to a physical environment with a multitude of actors who only complicate the operational space further. In addition, it has allowed the structure of the insurgency—principally its leadership—to adopt a flattened horizontal structure that affords it protection from attack by Western forces.

⁹ Thomas X. Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone: On War in the 21st Century* (St. Paul: Zenith Press, 2004), 2.

¹⁰ Bard O’Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism*, (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2005), 65.

¹¹ *Idem.*

¹² *Idem.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, 66.

The Virtual Dimension

Mackinlay believes that the key to understanding and defeating a complex insurgency is by addressing its virtual dimension, what he calls the link between the strategic and the operational dimensions. The virtual consists of the “populations of the contributing states, the host state and the Muslim minorities who constitute the vital ground.”¹⁴ It also includes the communications systems and media used to make contact with these populations, as well as the powerful images, ideas and “key communicators that can alter beliefs”¹⁵ they transmit. Conflict in this dimension is a struggle by both sides “to alter the minds of specific populations”¹⁶ in a way that gains their support.

The insurgents have thus far been more successful in this dimension than the coalition, especially in using the Internet where “...they exploit [its] characteristics...in a manoeuvrist fashion that relates the strategic to the operational”¹⁷. The result is the ability to imbue previously uncommitted individuals with the intoxicating idea of *jihad*, “[a] power...crucial to the insurgents’ momentum, so persuasive that it uniformly reaches widely separated communities of different ethnicity that it takes men from their wives, families and otherwise normal lives to commit appalling acts against complete strangers.”¹⁸ Media outlets as well become the insurgents’ unwitting accomplice as, “Bin Laden’s greatest hits are delivered for him to the strategic populations by the Western media, using familiar language and news anchor personalities that they have grown to accept as authoritative.”¹⁹ During a 29 August 2006 press conference, US Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld confirmed the importance of virtual dimension and the skill of the insurgents in manipulating it when he said, “some of the US’ most critical battles are being fought in the newsrooms”. He went on to say that, “Our enemies have skilfully adapted to fighting wars in today’s media age, but...our country has not”,

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁵ *Idem.*

¹⁶ *Idem.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁹ *Idem.*

concluding finally that the US was, “losing the media war to al Qaeda.”²⁰ Two days later, when interviewed on NBC Nightly News, President George Bush concurred, saying, “We’re great at TV yet we’re getting crushed in the PR front.”²¹ With respect to insurgent success in this new dimension Mackinlay speculates that, “In his wildest dreams, Mao could not have imagined an insurgent campaign with such globally effective results. In his long-term, labour-intensive strategies, the scale of preparation to achieve a series of blows on this scale against a global ‘War on Terror’ would have been enormous.”²²

While the insurgency appears adept in this dimension, the coalition struggles with carefully planned media response lines and dubious mottos such as ‘The Global War on Terror’ that are unable to overcome the insurgency’s appeal. Until the West acts decisively in this dimension, little success can be realized, warns Mackinlay. He advocates fighting fire with fire by becoming equally skilled at manipulating the media and the Internet in order to displace the enemy’s messages and credibility with that of more moderate Muslims, or failing that, the West.

Physical Complexity

There is a physical complexity found at the operational level where three types of insurgents exist simultaneously: the local, the national, and the international. The local insurgents are “closer to road bandits than genuine revolutionaries”²³ who take up arms in hopes of becoming richer.²⁴ Lawlessness works in their favour as legitimate

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was accustomed to an abusive relationship in which [it] was the habitual abuser.”²⁵ The final type of insurgent is the international insurgent. He is ethnically and culturally distinct from the local population and his “motives for volunteering are largely inspired by faith and passion.”²⁶ His aim is strategic and simple: to strike America, the coalition and the apostate rulers they support, all in accordance with the al-Zawahiri concept of *jihad*.²⁷ Al Qaeda typifies this group, operating in the same operational space as the local and national insurgent, striking the same targets, but with vastly different attitudes and methods.

This physical structure outlined by Mackinlay is not entirely new. For example, in the Spanish Civil War communists, nationalists, many sympathetic foreigners as well as foreign militaries such as the German Luftwaffe were involved. However, it is important to note the distinction today that the local, national and international actors occupying the operational space simultaneously, many are there largely as a result of the insurgency’s global campaign propagated through the virtual dimension.

Structure of the Complex Insurgency

Unlike traditional government and military models that are vertically organized into strategic, operational and tactical levels, the insurgency’s structure is predominantly horizontal. This is especially true of the international insurgency orchestrated by al Qaeda. It has recognized leaders like Osama bin Laden and al-Zawahiri, but no perceivable command structure. ‘Orders’ appear to be issued via grainy videos that appear on *Al Jazeera* or sympathetic websites simply encouraging followers to take up arms. According to Mackinlay, this allows it to spread like a virus to the national and local levels, resulting in activist cells formed by the like-minded who then seek contact with other cells. This is the essence of its global-strategic nature, working in “leaderless, unstructured networks which form and reform into federated groups according to need;

West's military response has been to stick to its "natural preference for the dimension of the campaign that is closest to [its] professional comfort zone and engage their massive technical superiority. This may win for the kinetic part but that does not amount to success in the overall campaign."²⁹ This, according to Mackinlay is why the insurgency, "without a head or heart...seems to survive every form of amputation."³⁰

Implications of Mackinlay at the Strategic and Operational Level of War

If Mackinlay is correct, then military-strategic and operational levels face serious challenges in achieving the desired end state. If the enemy is more adept at influencing the centres of gravity through the virtual dimension and truly has little interest in tactical success, then he has the capability to weaken will of the population supporting the counterinsurgency. It also implies that based on present Western doctrine, the type of warfare between insurgent and counterinsurgent might only be attritional because the insurgency has a seemingly endless supply of recruits worldwide which it can access via the virtual dimension, and on which it can draw. They reside beyond the influence of the counterinsurgents as long as groups like al Qaeda dominate the virtual dimension. In other words, without changing its approach, the West cannot strike deeply enough at the sources of al Qaeda's centre of gravity and prevent it from fielding volunteers who engage in protracted terrorist and/or guerrilla warfare, grinding down Western forces and eventually Western will. The danger for the West is that even though it may win the close battles when they occur, in the long term, a war of attrition favours the insurgency because it can be conducted without threatening the insurgents' own centre of gravity, its own popular support. Such a war actually can actually strengthen the insurgency by providing an endless series of romanticized images of martyrs; 'Davids' slaying 'Goliaths'. Conversely, a long war of attrition seriously threatens the centre of gravity in Western nations, that same popular support.

Mackinlay's thesis remains untested. While successfully exploring a previously unexamined area of military-political thought, it does have limitations. For example, it

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 48.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 51.

restricts its model to a Islamic-based counterinsurgency, a point Mackinlay concedes. In addition, he states that a complex counterinsurgency cannot be countered using the manoeuvrist approach outside of the virtual dimension. It is likely too early to make such a sweeping statement as the very nature of the manoeuvrist philosophy is to be innovative and bold in design and execution—characteristics that would appear necessary in all dimensions of such a conflict. Even so, it would be wise for any military commander to pay careful attention to the virtual dimension as a key battleground. He also offers five recommendations on how to defeat the insurgency. He suggests that the following steps be taken³¹:

- Revitalize and re-forge a more cohesive alliance with a more inspiring political vision, a greater sense of inclusion, a more multicultural personality and a common counter-strategy.
- Secure the ‘strategic populations’ by having a more effective presence in the virtual dimension, more Muslim role models and stronger Muslim institutions.
- Simplify the operational space by appointing a single campaign director to control the actions of people and agencies, military or otherwise, to ensure a common understanding of the end-state and the steps to achieve it are understood and coordinated.
- Develop a civil-military concept of operations for international counterinsurgency operations recognizing the more organic nature of the adversary and the need to move nimbly between the virtual, operational and strategic dimensions.
- Globalize the Coalition’s priorities to give a wider vision of global security that may require states to subordinate elements of their statehood to the imperatives of collective security.

Unfortunately for the operational-level commander, these recommendations are almost entirely at the strategic level, offering little in the way of campaign options. This raises a vital question: If the key actions of the counterinsurgency are at the strategic level, what then is the real role of the operational commander and what should his campaign plan look like? This question is unanswered by Mackinlay but is the foundation of the

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp 53-61.

questions about deep operations considered by this paper. Overall, these criticisms of Mackinlay's work are minor and do not detract from what is a sound and well-defended thesis that allows its use as a framework for examining the effect of deep operations in counterinsurgency.

The remainder of the paper merges Mackinlay's ideas with manoeuvre warfare by specifically examining deep operations. The paper focuses primarily on the point of view of the operational level commander, although it does consider salient strategic, tactical and virtual level issues. It also assumes that a successful counterinsurgency depends on a highly coordinated 'whole of government' approach. In other words, the role of the military is to 'do military things' while other agencies tackle efforts such as regional development, education, policing, and governance.

DEEP OPERATIONS

Deep operations are an essential component of the manoeuvrist philosophy of warfare; what John Kiszley called, "a main expression of the operational art."³² Deep operations, in combination with 'near' and 'rear' operations provide a physical, temporal and conceptual framework of the operational space in which the commander must not only plan and execute his own campaign but also anticipate and defeat the plans of his foe.

A brief review of doctrine reveals differing connotations of 'deep'. NATO's joint doctrine makes the following reference:

At both operational and tactical levels, operations may be organised within a framework of 'deep', 'close' and 'rear' operations. The terms...are used to describe how these three operations relate to each other, primarily by function (i.e. **what** they are to achieve) and secondly by geography and time (i.e. **when** and **where** they are to achieve it). These operations must be considered together and conducted as an entity at the operational and tactical levels"³³

³² John Kiszley, *Thinking About the Operational Level*, RUSI Journal Vol. 150, Iss. 6; (London: RUSI Press), 38.

³³ NATO, *Allied Joint Publication AJP-01(B)*, (Brussels: NATO, 2002) 3-6.

Canadian Army doctrine provides this similar, but more abstractly theoretical view of deep operations:

Deep operations are those directed against enemy forces and functions beyond the close battle. Deep operations seek to restrict the freedom of action of the opposing commander through pre-emption, disruption of the coherence and tempo of his actions, dislocation and destruction or neutralization of selected parts of his force. Although they may achieve, in themselves, an operational objective, or establish favourable circumstances for such an achievement, their primary purpose is to create favourable conditions for close operations.³⁴

This definition clearly suggests a linear approach to the battlespace—what is not ‘near’ is ‘deep’—and is focussed on the enemy’s force and its commander. The idea that deep operations have the primary purpose of “creating favourable conditions for close operations” implies the inevitability of land combat consistent with the original AirLand Battle doctrine that brought manoeuvrist warfare into Western military thinking in the mid-1980s and into doctrine in the 1990s. This view is not universally shared outside of the Army. For instance, as a joint concept, the Canadian Forces does not have an accepted definition of the terms deep, close and rear, nor do Canadian Air Force or Navy doctrine discuss it. The same situation exists in the United States. In his analysis, Pratt points out that “the Air Force does not share the same understanding of depth as the Army does...There is no official definition for *depth* in Air Force doctrine. Although the Army definition could be adopted by the Air Force, its implications would be virtually meaningless...In fact the very nature of the Air Force causes it to operate in depth all the time...”³⁵, which Pratt attributes to the fact that, unlike the Army, “Air Force doctrine is based on the strategic level of war.”³⁶

³⁴ B-GL-300-001-FP-000 *Conduct of Land Operations—Operational Level Doctrine for the Canadian Army*, (Ottawa: DND, 1998), 51.

³⁵ Lieutenant-Colonel G.M. Pratt, *The Clash of Service Doctrines: Integration Versus Synchronization in Joint Operations*, Operational Art: Canadian Perspectives Context and Concepts, Ed. By English, Gosselin, Cooms and Hickey, (Winnipeg: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2005), 238

³⁶ *Idem*

For the purposes of this paper, ‘deep’ will be considered in its broadest sense, encompassing the physical, temporal and cognitive, and in the overall context of ‘near’ and ‘rear’ as suggested by this more inclusive extract from Canadian Army doctrine:

There are no strict divisions between deep, close and rear operations and it is incumbent upon the commander to decide which formation or function is best suited and placed to be used in each type of operation. Deep, close and rear areas may overlap in time and space and some formation and units may engage in each at different stages.³⁷

Deep operations can be either kinetic or non-kinetic. Kinetic operations involve the use of military force to physically neutralize or destroy an enemy’s important capabilities while non-kinetic operations imply neutralizing an enemy’s capability without the need to physically damage or destroy it. Intelligence gathering, information operations, psychological operations, deception, command and control warfare, and capture and interrogation of key leadership figures are all forms of non-kinetic operations. Kinetic and non-kinetic deep operations must combine to fracture and dissolve the enemy’s cohesion with the ultimate purpose of defeating his strategic and operational centres of gravity³⁸ otherwise they serve no purpose.

DEEP OPERATIONS AND THE COMPLEX INSURGENCY

This remainder of this paper will demonstrate three assertions regarding deep operations in complex insurgencies. First, using existing doctrine and contemporary thought on deep operations, it will demonstrate that deep operations are still relevant but primarily in the land-centric, linear and ‘single battle’ sense. Second, it will be shown that against a complex insurgency, present Western models for deep attack or strike have less chance of success than in conventional conflicts, due to the fact that the insurgency has protected itself through the adoption of its horizontal structure. Finally, the paper

³⁷ B-GL-300-001-FP-000 *Conduct of Land Operations—Operational Level Doctrine for the Canadian Army*, (Ottawa: DND, 1998), 51.

³⁸ B-GJ-005-500/FP-00 *CF Operational Planning Process* (Ottawa: Canadian Forces, 2002), pg 2-2, defines Centre of Gravity as: *characteristics, capabilities or localities from which a nation, an alliance, a military force or other grouping derives its freedom of action, physical strength or will to fight.*

will demonstrate that deep operations, especially kinetic operations, may actually cause a strengthening of the insurgency due to the enemy's skilful use of the media and internet in the virtual dimension.

The Single or AirLand Battle

While new organizations such as al Qaeda and the Taliban present ever more complicated and difficult problems to deal with at the operational level, there is one basic element of these organizations that is consistent with every other insurgency. Despite the sophistication of their strategies on a global level, at some point, either of their choosing or not, armed conflict against its enemies is likely. The primary combat techniques of the insurgents are terrorism, guerrilla warfare, and conventional warfare.³⁹ Recent NATO operations in Afghanistan, such as Operation MEDUSA, saw the engagement of a significant insurgent force by Alliance forces some five years after the fall of the Taliban. According to open source reporting, the insurgents—believed to be mostly Taliban— assembled a large force in Panjwai district in preparation for an assault on the city of Kandahar. Given that NATO estimates approximately 500 insurgents were killed in the battle, it is reasonable to assume that the insurgent force was even larger, perhaps considerably. Clearly, these are not small cells operating in a leaderless environment. This represented a near battalion-sized force coordinating its tactical actions.

The likely preparations for this battle represent the use of deep operations in its strictest sense. NATO's deep capabilities were undoubtedly employed, such as: intelligence, reconnaissance and surveillance systems; electronic warfare to disrupt enemy communications; signal intelligence to exploit insurgent lack of communication discipline; air supremacy for deep interdiction of forces and reserves; and possibly capture and interrogation of individual insurgents. The fact that Colonel Steve Williams, Deputy Commander of NATO forces in southern Afghanistan, announced on 31 July 2006, two days before the actual start of the operation, that it would be entering the area

³⁹ Bard E. O'Neill, *Insurgency & Terrorism*, (Washington, DC: Potomac Books Inc, 2005) 33.

of Pashmul to engage the Taliban⁴⁰ indicates such deep operations were being employed by NATO to prepare the near battlespace.

When the Taliban concentrated its forces to fight Canadian units, the insurgents acted in a decidedly non-manoeuvrist manner, playing to NATO's strengths not its weaknesses. The Taliban's actions were far more conventional than non-conventional or asymmetric. This engagement is an example of Mackinlay's national-level insurgency in action. The Taliban, already dislodged from power, sought to solidify control in Kandahar to advance their cause and expand their support base. But, if the insurgency continues to prosecute the warfare component of its campaign in this manner there remains a place for kinetic and non-kinetic deep operations to set the stage for a conventional battle. In such encounters the use of the overwhelming conventional superiority of Western forces can be brought to bear.

New models for expanding beyond the limited view of deep operations suggested by Army doctrine is provided by Grubbs and Forsyth.⁴¹ They abandon what they call the "decidedly linear construction" of the deep battle portrayed in the US Army's Field Manual 3-0, *Operations*, in favour of a new model recognizing the "non-linear battlefield", based on their experiences in Afghanistan.⁴² Their thinking and the model they propose make it clear that they align themselves more with the USAF concept of 'depth' than the US Army's--the disparity highlighted by Pratt. Grubbs and Forsyth are also in full agreement with Mackinlay that presently, "[counterinsurgency] doctrinal writers envisioned a hierarchically structured enemy system with a conventional force."⁴³ They also criticize present doctrine's view that, "depth has a predictable relationship to time...the doctrinally defined deep area of the battlefield constitutes a location and predictable time structure that enable a commander to develop the close fight to his advantage."⁴⁴ They observe that as far as the insurgency in Afghanistan is concerned:

⁴⁰ Graeme Smith, *Afghans Tipped to NATO Sweep*, The Globe and Mail, 1 Sep 06

⁴¹ Lee K. Grubbs and Michael J. Forsyth, *Is There a Deep Fight in Counterinsurgency?*, Military Review Jul/Aug 2005; 85, 4; pp 28-31.

⁴² Grubbs and Forsyth, *Op Cit.*, 28.

⁴³ *Idem.*

⁴⁴ *Idem.*

the enemy...does not have a traditional infrastructure to support his forces, and therefore, no deep areas that fit the traditional understanding of the term. This leads to two questions: Does the contemporary enemy have a deep area? And how do U.S. forces achieve the paralysing effect of operational shock in this environment?⁴⁵

Grubbs and Forsyth come down squarely on the affirmative that the insurgency does have a deep area. They go on to propose two models for identifying how to attack the insurgency throughout its depth. The first is Colonel John Warden's Ring Theory where the enemy's capabilities are modelled in a series of five concentric rings. The most important centre ring is the enemy's leadership. Progressing outward from the centre are: production facilities; infrastructure; population; and fielded forces. These are depicted in Figure 1. Grubbs and Forsyth rearrange the order of some rings while substituting others, as depicted in Figure 2. Their reasoning is consistent with almost all counterinsurgency doctrine from the 20th century, and Mackinlay's thesis—that the vital ground in the contest are the minds of the affected populations; the 'hearts and minds' approach. Grubbs and Forsyth identify the population as a non-kinetic 'information target' for deep operations, focussing on elites, clerics and the man-on-the-street⁴⁶ in order to gain their support.

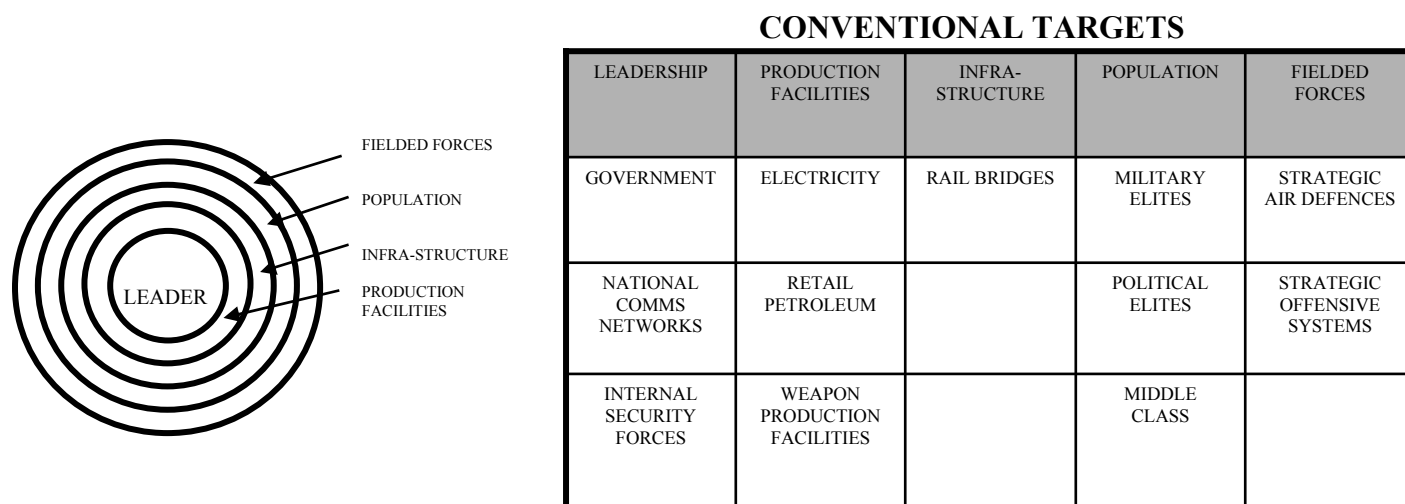


Figure 1 – Warden's Ring Theory in Conventional Warfare

⁴⁵ *Idem.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

INSURGENT TARGETS

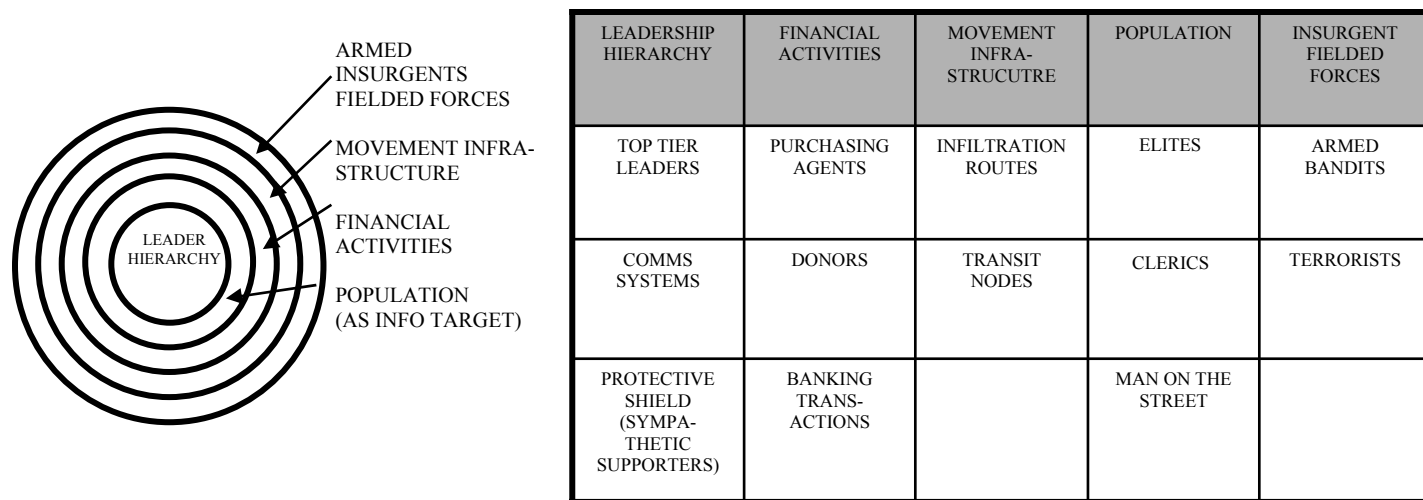


Figure 2 – Warden’s Ring Theory Modified by Grubbs and Forsyth for Insurgent Warfare

The second model they present is the application of Dr Joe Strange’s model of developing an understanding of the enemy’s operational centre of gravity, after which “we can determine tangible targets and create lines of operation through which friendly forces can paralyse the insurgency.”⁴⁷ They assume a hypothetical centre of gravity as insurgent sanctuary within a sympathetic population, then outline how attacking the enemy’s critical vulnerabilities (CV) “simultaneously and in an unrelenting fashion denies the enemy the critical requirements (CR) and critical capabilities (CC) he needs to sustain the fight.”⁴⁸ This example is shown at Figure 3.

⁴⁷ *Idem.*

⁴⁸ *Idem.*

CV: LEADERS	CV: CACHES	CV: COMMS
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COMMS

access to their logistical needs. In addition, their ability to deal with the virtual dimension and horizontal leadership structure is unclear.

It is unknown at time of writing whether the models proposed by Grubbs and Forsyth are actually in use in Afghanistan or Iraq, therefore it cannot be known for certain if they are delivering the theorized result. Grubbs and Forsyth offer useful models when most or all of the critical vulnerabilities are within reach of the operational or strategic level commander, but even they admit that this is not likely to be the case⁵⁰, making the military contribution to the overall strategy significantly more difficult to develop. As Mackinlay says, “there is a lack of tangibility about the problem.”⁵¹ Because the models are sufficiently strong when dealing with nationalist insurgents such as the Taliban in the AirLand battle context, they should be considered as a complementary view to Mackinlay.

History provides reminders that such effort also depends on having the assets to make it work. Writing in 1989, Hosmer records that despite deploying 120,000 troops to Afghanistan and conducting deep operations to cut off infiltration lanes and destroy logistics centres, in the end they had little to show for it:

Soviet and Afghan forces have made a concerted effort to interdict resistance supply operations near the Pakistani border. They have established numerous government posts in the border areas and frequently attacked *mujahedin* supply columns and supply bases from the air. As a result of the fighting, a 50-mile strip along the Afghan frontier has suffered significant devastation and depopulation. Yet despite the intensity of these and other interdiction efforts, the volume of weapons and equipment available to *mujahedin* forces in Afghanistan has continued to increase.⁵²

Attacking the Enemy’s Horizontal Structure

While deep operations have an enduring utility in conventional warfare, Mackinlay’s complex insurgency challenges their general utility when it comes to

⁵⁰ Grubbs and Forsyth, *Op Cit.*, 29.

⁵¹ Mackinlay, *Op Cit.*, 52.

⁵² Stephen T. Hosmer, *Op Cit.*, 73.

attacking the enemy's horizontal leadership and command structure. The construct is inherently robust against attack, sharing many similarities with the Internet for instance. The Internet seeks to link computers as a network so that the network eventually *becomes* the computer. Complex insurgency has a structure that does not rely on the individuals in the system, but like the Internet, is reliant on their ability to connect with others to share ideas, ideologies, beliefs, and plans thus sustaining the movement.

Evidence exists suggesting Mackinlay may be correct, based on the efforts of Western forces to eliminate the leadership of Al Qaeda, the Taliban and the various groups operating in Iraq since 2001. Since 2001, many influential leaders have been captured or killed, such as: Abu Zubaydah, captured in January 2002; alleged 'mastermind' of the September 11th attacks and supposed number three man in Al Qaeda, Kahlid Sheik Mohammed, captured in February 2002; and Abu Marsab al-Zarkawi, killed in June 2006, plus a host of other lesser 'officials'. These accomplishments would certainly have been the result of a host of deep operations such as reconnaissance and intelligence collection, signals intelligence, human intelligence known as HUMINT, the interrogation of other prisoners, the tracing of financial transactions, etc. When the leadership or command system was not neutralized directly, it was placed under continual stress by the coalition military. Direct evidence for this was revealed in June 2006 when al Qaeda's leader in Iraq, Abu Al-Zarkawi was killed by American bombers. When US forces arrived on scene Zarkawi was still alive. In his pocket was a letter from Al Qaeda's leadership, presumed by CENTCOM to be in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region. Written by a previously unknown individual named 'Atiyah, the letter admonishes al-Zarkawi for some of his previous actions. As a courtesy, 'Atiyah apologizes to al-Zarkawi if he has "misunderstood" al-Zarkawi's actions to this point, saying such a misunderstanding is "not unlikely, especially with the disruption that exists and the loss of communications"⁵³. 'Atiyah also states that there are other 'brothers'—a reference to Al Qaeda's leadership—who wish to consult with al-Zarkawi, but are unable

⁵³ Letter translated by the United States Military Academy's Combating Terrorism Center and posted on the CENTCOM website, <http://www.centcom.mil/sites/uscentcom1/What%20Extremists%20Say/Letter%20Exposes%20New%20Leader%20in%20Al-Qa%60ida%20High%20Command.aspx?PageView=Shared>, dated 25 September 2006, accessed 9 October 2006.

because they are “too occupied with vicious enemies here...they [the Taliban ‘brothers’] are also weak and we ask God that He strengthen them and mend their fractures.”⁵⁴ He goes on to say that, “The path is long and difficult, and the enemy isn’t easy, for he is great and numerous and he can take quite a bit of punishment as well.”⁵⁵ At one point, ‘Atiyah explains how Zarkawi can use a *jihadi* website’s discussion forum to communicate with Al Qaeda leadership in Waziristan, Pakistan and avoid detection by Western intelligence organizations. This gives the clear impression of a leadership structure under siege and the detrimental effect the counterinsurgency was having on it. In other words, deep operations seemed to be having the desired effect.

In a more traditional conflict, the elimination or suppression of key leaders, especially in a movement so dependent on passion, faith and its leader’s charisma, would have a significant effect on the strength of the movement. One can only speculate how the loss of a leader such as Lenin, Hitler or Mao might have caused their efforts to stall or collapse. However in this case, despite the apparent success, there is evidence that casts some doubt on the efficacy of these deep operations. In Afghanistan, NATO itself has described the period between May and October 2006 as the most violent since the overthrow of the Taliban⁵⁶. On 4 October 2006, US military spokesman in Iraq, Major-General Caldwell stated that “the number of car bombs in Baghdad hit the highest level of the year last week and that bombs reported in general were also at an all-time high”⁵⁷. A similar pattern has been observed in Afghanistan where the number of suicide bombings has increased dramatically. In 2003, there were two, in 2004 there were six and in 2005 there 21. At time of writing, there have been 78 in 2006⁵⁸. If the insurgency’s leadership and ability is indeed under constant pressure in an attempt to

⁵⁴ *Idem.*

⁵⁵ *Idem.*

⁵⁶ International Herald Tribune, *NATO Says Violence in Southern Afghanistan Subsiding*, 11 October 2006, http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2006/10/11/asia/AS_GEN_Afghan_NATO.php, accessed 11 October 2006.

⁵⁷ The Washington Times, *Baghdad Bombings Hit ‘All-Time High’*, 5 October 2006, www.washingtontimes.com/functions/print.php?StoryID=20061005-120650-5381r, accessed 5 Oct 06.

⁵⁸ Fisnik Abrashi, *Only 6 Months Left to Win In Afghanistan, NATO General Estimates*, The Globe and Mail, 8 October 2006, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20061008.wafghann1008/BNStory/Front>, accessed 8 October 2006.

shatter its decision-making processes, evidence of this cannot definitively be found in the enemy's accelerating pace of operations.

It is too early to tell if Mackinlay is right about the ability of the leadership to survive all attempts to 'amputate' it from the insurgency. He does not dispute that the insurgency needs leadership, nor does his thesis suggest that its pursuit is pointless. His claim is that the function of leadership—to inspire, influence and guide—is being successfully accomplished in the virtual dimension, regardless of how many bombs are dropped on the actual leaders themselves.

Unintended Consequences

By their very nature, deep operations span the operational and strategic levels, exposing them to heightened scrutiny by media and local populations. Their use needs to be carefully managed to avoid sparking unintended negative consequences within the very populations they are intended to influence. The risk of this occurring rises when kinetic operations are involved. The final section of this paper demonstrates the potential for negative effects deep operations can have on an operational campaign.

The global or transnational scale of the insurgency poses unique problems for a commander. For example, as previously observed by the Soviets in the 1980s, insurgents are being recruited and trained outside the operational theatre, and therefore, out of reach of conventional forces. The Soviets tallied at least 120 training camps in Pakistan and Iran alone.⁵⁹ Today, it is commonly reported that Taliban and al Qaeda have their headquarters in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region with its tangle of tribes and historic ties to various groups. Striking these targets moves beyond the operational level commander to the strategic level and is consistent with any campaign plan that seeks to shock and paralyse the enemy. However, if there is not a complete understanding of the populations one wishes to influence, such operations have the potential for disaster.

⁵⁹ Spasibo, Nikolay. *Lessons of Operations in Afghanistan*, (London: MOD, 1997), 3.

On 3 December 2005, Abu Hamza Rabia, an al Qaeda ‘official’ was killed in an explosion near the Pakistani village of Miram Shah. At first Pakistani officials claimed he was killed while making a bomb, however, photos in newspapers around the world the next day showed villagers holding shrapnel from a bomb casing that had US government markings. This supported villagers’ accounts claiming a missile struck Rabia’s compound⁶⁰ calling into question the Pakistani Government’s credibility and highlighting the dangerous tight rope it walks regarding national support for its participation in the counterinsurgency. Less than two months later, on 13 January 2006, a second strike occurred in the Pakistani village of Damadola in an attempt to kill Al Qaeda’s second-in-command, Dr Ayman al-Zawahiri. This attack was not successful in killing Zawahiri, but did allegedly kill 18 civilians. It resulted in significant protest from sympathetic Pakistanis and caused the Pakistani Government to launch a formal protest with the US Government.⁶¹ This echoed previous complaints from Afghan President Karzai that US forces were using too much force and were killing too many innocent Afghans in the course of operations, many of which were conducted in the border region, specifically the killing of 48 civilians and the wounding of 117 more by US aircraft in Deh Rawud in the province of Uruzgan.⁶² Rather than enhance operational tempo, such outcomes tend to slow operations to give time to deal with the negative fallout.

What is significant about these incidents is the effect they had on the centre of gravity for both the insurgency and the counterinsurgency, the support of the people. Karzai expressed his frustration by saying, “the civilians being killed are my own people and my strongest allies and in the forefront of the war against the Taliban.”⁶³ In Pakistan, the population in the provinces bordering Afghanistan where the strikes took place remain a breeding ground for the insurgency. This is partially so because the citizens in the border region are ethnic Afghans. Afghanistan does not recognize the

⁶⁰ CNN, *Al Qaeda No. 3 Dead, But How?* 4 December 2005, <http://www.cnn.com/2005/WORLD/asiapcf/12/03/pakistan.rabia/index.html/>, accessed 9 October 2006.

⁶¹ CNN, *Pakistan Protests Airstrike*, 14 January 2006, <http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/meast/01/14/alqaeda.strike/>, accessed 9 October 2006.

⁶² Ahmed Rashid, *Assasination, Bombing Incident in Afghanistan Pose Severe Political Challenge for Karzai’s Leadership*, 7 August 2004, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav070802a.shtml>, accessed 13 October 2006.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

border between and Pakistan drawn by the British because it divides the Afghan Baloch and Pashtun peoples on either side of it. Those living in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas, the North West Frontier Province and Balochistan consider themselves to be Afghans⁶⁴. Adding to the complication is the remainder of Pakistan's divided loyalties among its population. The very name Pakistan itself was coined from the names of the ethnic Muslim homelands that make it up, (P for Punjab, A for Afghanistan, K for Kashmir, I for Iran, S for Sindh and TAN for Balochistan). In this volatile part of the world, winning the 'hearts and minds' of such a population is no doubt difficult. The strikes on the suspected Al Qaeda targets only served to inflame the population of a supposed 'ally' nation key to the counterinsurgency while allowing the insurgency to point out how the US violated the sovereign territory of a Muslim nation, killing 18 innocent people—again, expertly played in the media.

There is no doubt that these were legitimate targets suited for deep operations, but their kinetic nature made them less successful overall. The non-kinetic option may have proven more suited. This is not a level of sophistication beyond the capabilities of the West. In fact, recent developments in counterinsurgency doctrine scheduled for release by the US Army and US Marine Corps in Fall 2006 recognize this fact. The new doctrine remains focussed on the 'hearts and minds' centre of gravity, but places emphasis on non-kinetic operations. It states a series of paradoxes to highlight the complex nature of insurgency, such as: the more you protect your force, the less secure you are; the more force is used, the less it is successful; and, tactical success guarantees nothing.⁶⁵ As highlighted by the Pakistani bombings noted above, it recognizes the need to carefully weigh how and when "the virtues of using firepower and battlefield manoeuvres [sic] in swift, decisive operations"⁶⁶ do and do not apply.

CONCLUSION

⁶⁴ The Senlis Council, *Helmand at War*, (London: Senlis, 2006), 26.

⁶⁵ Michael R. Gordon, *Military Hones a New Strategy on Insurgency*, New York Times 5 October 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/learning/students/pop/articles/05doctrine.html>, accessed 5 October 2006.

⁶⁶ *Idem*.

Deep operations continue to be cornerstone of the operational art because their very essence is to shatter the will, morale and cohesion of the enemy. War is a human activity and those participating in it are subject to human emotions and reactions. Against the correct targets and with the correct weapons deep operations still have the potential to achieve this shattering effect. When the enemy presents himself in a more conventional manner, the full and asymmetric weight of western militaries' planning, mobility, firepower, intelligence collection systems, and manoeuvre can be used against him successfully. However, it would appear rare or unlikely that a reasonable enemy would make such a presentation very often when the odds are so heavily stacked against him. Even so, this type of action is only one layer of a highly complex but loosely organized foe that does not resemble a conventional military-political structure against which deep operations may easily be conducted. This is especially true of its leadership structures.

In the Mackinlay model, the insurgency has a leadership and command structure that does not rely on the individuals in the system, but like the Internet, is reliant on their ability to connect with others to share ideas, ideologies, beliefs, plans and suggestions. As a result, when the system is healthy and spreading, it is able to survive as a whole when one part of it comes under attack. The US-led forces in Afghanistan and Iraq have spent significant effort to eliminate Taliban and Al Qaeda leadership using a sophisticated series of deep operations but the results thus far are unclear as to the impact on the overall organization. It must be concluded then that in this context, deep operations run the risk of becoming purely attritional than manoeuvrist. There is a distinct possibility that such operations may actually prove counter-productive because they can alienate important populations and citizens who are considered the centre of gravity. This arises more from a case of not fully understanding the complex operational space rather than a lack of skill at executing long-range operations. As Mackinlay—and it seems the US military is imminently ready to declare—there is a case for “more being less” when it comes to deep operations and counterinsurgency.

The complex insurgency poses a serious challenge when it comes to effectively delivering it the knock-out blow. It continues to adapt as it comes to understand the methods of the counterinsurgency attacking it. Mackinlay suggests that the counterinsurgency must also radically adapt because it is fighting on a different plane of thinking than the insurgents which risks making its efforts meaningless. If the insurgency continues to operate like a virus on a global scale, then it is clear that the only way to defeat it is to conduct a counterinsurgency also on a global scale; a global anti-virus. Such an approach would require a massive undertaking and application of military resources. If this is the case, then deep operations would be conducted on a truly world-wide scale, increasingly the complexity even further when one considers the affected populations, the important centre of gravity.

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