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THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN: THE ROLE OF MILITIA IN COUNTERINSRUGENCY

by

ANDREW T. NIDIFFER

Under the Direction of John Duffield

ABSTRACT

Can the success of the Sunni Awakening in Iraq be applied to other counter-insurgency conflicts, or is it an exemplary case? Using case studies including Iraq and Afghanistan, it will be examined whether or not militias can be can be used to fight counterinsurgency campaigns in Afghanistan and generally to other conflicts. It may not work in Afghanistan, and certainly presents a Catch-22 situation, but it may be applicable in certain situations in other conflicts under certain conditions.

INDEX WORDS: Iraq, Afghanistan, Counterinsurgency, Militias, Internal conflict

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ANDREW T. NIDIFFER

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1. Introduction

Following the attacks by al-Qaeda on September 11, 2001, the United States quickly struck back, launching an operation in Afghanistan to hunt down al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, eliminate al-Qaeda bases and safe havens in Afghanistan, and remove the Taliban from power. After two years of fighting in Afghanistan, the United States shifted focus to Iraq, charging that Saddam Hussein both harbored terrorists and possessed weapons of mass destruction. The invasion of Iraq was launched in 2003. After the United States and its coalition partners removed Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq, they found themselves embroiled in a protracted counterinsurgency campaign, facing everything from Iraqi Sunni and Shi'ite militias to foreign fighters from the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Asia.

However, in 2006, the conflict took a rather interesting turn. Starting in Anbar, Sunni militias that had previously fought against coalition forces began cooperating with them. This movement-under varying names such as the Awakening or Sons of Iraq, among others-quickly spread across the country. These militia groups received training and funding from coalition forces and began operating locally to clear out al-Qaeda in Iraq and secure their neighborhoods. While there was some concern and criticism, these groups played an important role in securing the country and reducing violence.

Now, with all US combat troops withdrawn from Iraq, attention has been shifted back to where it all started: Afghanistan. In the years since the invasion of Iraq, Taliban forces managed to mount a counterattack and regained some territory lost in previous years. This forced Afghani and coalition forces to renew their efforts; many readers should remember the Marjah

offensive, in which US Marines, alongside coalition and Afghan forces, made an effort to completely clear and hold the city against Taliban forces. At the same time, during the Taliban counteroffensive, reports began to surface that several villages and communities had successfully defended their territory against Taliban incursions using their own protective forces, with no help from the Afghanistan government or coalition forces. This has given rise to the idea that local militias, with the support of the central government, may prove to be a successful barrier against Taliban forces in other regions of the country, much like the Awakening groups in Iraq against al-Qaeda insurgents. However, this begs the question: can this tactic, which arguably was successful in Iraq(this case will be argued later), be adopted for use in Afghanistan?

As is often the case in war, tactics that work in one area may not work as well in others. This applies not only to local, tactical situations but also to strategic ones as well. Many factors would contribute to the success of this particular tactic. They include the current tactical and political situation locally (that is, within both the state where the conflict is taking place and in the local community), the culture of the state, the geogprahy of the state, natural resource wealth, and, most importantly, the level of local autonomy and fragmentation (ethnic, religious, tribal, etc) in the state. I believe that it is these last two that is the greatest predictor of the success or failure of this tactic. To understand the current situation in a state experiencing internal conflict, one must necessarily go back long before the onset of the current conflict to understand how the different entities have interacted, as well as why they did so. Specifically, I will look at the ethnic, communal, and sectarian conflict or tension in a state as well as the strength of local authorities compared to the central government as an indicator of how

successful militias can be in helping to conduct a counterinsurgency campaign. By analyzing the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, I show that both of these factors can in fact have a bearing on the ability to use militias to help fight a counterinsurgency campaign. The higher the conflict or tensions within state (which I later term fragmentation) the harder it is for militias to be used successfully. The autonomy of local groups, on the other hand, makes defeating insurgents easier, but it comes with the added risk of disarming or reintegrating armed groups back into civilian life or the security forces.

Beyond examining the theoretical basis behind these militias-how they act as well as how and why they are formed-it is important to examine in detail both the benefits and drawbacks of the militias as compared to using strictly foreign or uniformed counterinsurgency forces. After this, both the Iraq and Afghanistan cases must be examined in detail. As previously mentioned, this includes the history-which includes a general overview on the history with a heavier focus on recent history, the social structure, community structure, and ethnic history-as well as the contemporary state of the conflict. Militias were certainly helpful in defeating the insurgents in Iraq; they could be helpful in Afghanistan as well, however it does not come without risks. Hopefully this analysis will provide information that is useful in not only explaining how militias influenced the counterinsurgency efforts in the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts, but can also be applied to future conflicts as well.

2. Theory

The best question to start with would simply be “how can militias be used successfully within a broader counterinsurgency campaign?” Generally, success would be simply that these

militia groups provide the result for which they are designed; namely, stopping insurgent incursions or preventing them from gaining a foothold in their community and surrounding area. However, given the type of conflict in which this tactic has been and could be used, there is one more dimension of success. Once their task is completed and their community successfully defended, these groups must then be disbanded or assimilated into either the state police or military apparatus or back into civilian life without continuing violence or dissension, or turning against the government. Any political wings of the militias, or even politically motivated militias themselves, should be integrated into the government and be able to operate legitimately, or be disbanded. This integration would allow these groups to remain in the position of protecting their community-and the authority that comes with it-while under the auspices of the government.

In addressing the first question of how militias can contribute in a COIN campaign, it can be further broken down into two more questions: "how do you defeat an insurgency" and "how can militias assist in a counterinsurgency". Unfortunately there is no one single answer to the first question. There are about as many different answers as there have been insurgencies. However, there are a few general principles and guidelines that should be applicable to counterinsurgencies. Bottliglieri, in a study of Peruvian and Malayan counterinsurgencies, notes that each government followed three principles and were ultimately successful: "unity of effort, intelligence, and small unit operations."[1] Unity of effort involved simply getting all operations on the same page and focused on defeating the insurgents. Intelligence focused on understanding the leadership, organization, and support base of the insurgents, and small unit

[1] Bottliglieri, 70

operations gave the government more local influence and increased local contacts. Along these lines, Beckett notes that Thompson-a British military leader in Malaya-authored "five principles" of counterinsurgency and "implicit within [them] was Thompson's belief in the primacy of the police over the military and…the need for small-unit operations to meet and defeat the insurgents in their own element."[2] Assuming these principles are generalizeable to other insurgencies-and they should be-then the use of militias by the state should easily assist with intelligence and small unit operations.

This then leaves unity of effort. The importance of this principle is evidenced by the fact that the Counterinsurgency Field Manual devotes an entire chapter to the subject. It focuses primarily on the integration of military and civilian operations, but also deals with the integration of the military and the host nation government. One successful characteristic mentioned is the inclusion of other participants in planning at every level. This would indicate that unity of effort can be maintained by treating these militias not as simple foot soldiers or roving bands on guard duty, but by including them in the creation and implementation of defensive strategies and day to day operations. Including them into a more formal structure may have the effects of making them more disciplined, allow the government to exert more control over them or supervise them easier, and possibly even allow for easier integration into the state's military or security forces following the cessation of conflict.

One problem that has come up time and again when fighting insurgencies is that the military tries to fight an insurgency using modern military equipment, following modern military tactics. This is about as effective as a football team playing a rugby team, but using

[2] Beckett, 107

rugby rules; it's not going to get very far. Using the mindset of conventional warfare while fighting an insurgency tends to prompt overreactions to attacks (something insurgents are counting on to build support) and is usually counterproductive. In fact, Lyall and Wilson find that the more highly mechanized a military is, the more likely a state is to lose to an insurgency.[3] They also note that the counterinsurgency's appearance as an occupier also correlates with a loss by the state. It could therefore be hypothesized that using local militia in significant numbers might reduce this view of being an occupier and, more importantly, using lightly armed militia to fight lightly armed insurgents will bring down the correlation of forces, reducing the likelihood of excessive retaliation and response on the part of the counterinsurgents.

However, it is unlikely that militias can be forced or conscripted into an alliance with the government. There must be some form of motivation on the part of the militia, or incentives from the government, to get them to agree to an alliance. The motivation can vary; the militia could be ideologically aligned with the government, it could be a choice for the lesser of two evils (as in the case of the Anbar Awakening in Iraq), or even a pragmatic shift to the side that is perceived as winning. On the part of the government, they can offer such incentives as amnesty, a path to participation in legitimate politics, and possibly even as far as autonomy to one degree or another. What inducements will work will depend on the motivations and goals of the individual militias. If they cannot be persuaded to stop fighting, then they need to be persuaded to fight alongside the government as opposed to against the government.

[3] Lyall and Wilson, 89

In Mao Zedong's Theory of Protracted War, three phases of an insurgency are outlined: strategic defensive, strategic stalemate, and strategic counteroffensive. In the first phase, the insurgency is on the defensive, trying to survive and build up a support network. Phase II involves a roughly equal force correlation. In Phase III, the insurgents have the greatest strength and move from guerrilla to conventional military tactics. It is in the second phase where militias have the greatest impact. This phase sees the beginning of guerrilla combat, and possibly the rise of a counterstate. The US Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual mentions two examples when discussing Phase II; Moqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army and Hezbollah in Lebanon. The example of al-Sadr is most useful: the Mahdi army provided security and some services in the areas it controlled. The manual notes that it first undermined the security and services of the government, then stepped in to fill the gaps it had created.[4] It is situations like this that promote the rise of militias; either as part of the insurgent network or as a response to the reduction of security and increasing violence. Militia allied with the government can potentially step in and fill the void left by the removal or withdrawal of government presence until it can regroup. They may also have the ability to prevent the insurgency from advancing from Phase I to Phase II or from Phase II to Phase III by making it difficult to undertake guerilla attacks or keeping the insurgency from building up a local support network.

The Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual says that "[i]nsurgents succeed by sowing chaos and disorder anywhere; the government fails unless it maintains a

[4] Counterinsurgency Field Manual, 11-12

degree of order everywhere."[5] In this way militias can be a double-edged sword. They can be a source of disorder if they are working with or inside an insurgency or if they perceive the government as intruding or illegitimate. On the other hand, if they can be co-opted by the government, they can provide stability and order by acting as agents of the government when it would otherwise be unable to have a presence.

The troops most likely to be in daily, continuous contact with the local populace(junior officers and enlisted men) are going to be unlikely to have the knowledge for successful interaction. While they may have been given short cultural briefings or learned some of the language, it is very unlikely that they would fully grasp all of the figures of speech, nuance, and cultural cues that can take years of dedicated study to learn. While locals can be hired as translators, things can often be lost in translation. This applies not only to speech, but to body language and gestures as well. Innocuous gestures in one culture can be insults in another. The simplest of gaffes can invalidate weeks worth of goodwill. Here we find one of the primary benefits of using militias. Because they are from the area, they know the language, the culture. Militias are intimately familiar with the patterns of their neighborhoods or communities as well, which can prevent insiders from posing as members of the community, hiding in plain sight.

During the Malayan Emergency, one of the tactics used was to relocate rural populations to strategic hamlets-secured and fortified towns and villages, and undertake "clear and hold" missions. The purpose was to take an area, clear it of the insurgents, and then hold it from potential insurgent attacks. These strategic hamlets were protected by hamlet militia. This served a dual purpose of making the local populace invested in their own security and

[5] Ibid, 4

freed up military or police forces for more important operations. This first purpose is very important in that, in a counter insurgency, the support of the local populace is paramount. As Robert Thompson, the Permanent Minister of Defense for the British government in Malaya says, "give the people a stake in stability and hope for the future, which in turn encourages them to take the necessary positive action to prevent insurgent reinfiltration and to provide the intelligence necessary to eradicate any insurgent cells which remain."[6] The fact that the strategic hamlet tactic worked shows that militias can indeed provide local protection against insurgent inroads, particularly when they have assistance from security forces.

The second criterion of success comes in disarming or reintegrating militias back into civilian life or into the security forces. Unfortunately, those most attracted to service in a militia are going to be young, uneducated, out of work, and possibly those without family members. To successfully reintegrate these former combatants would require successful educational, job, and counseling programs. Disarmament is also a key component. If these combatants cannot find gainful employment or education and still have easy access to weapons, they may fall back on what they know, bringing back crime and violence. What about if some of these groups can be integrated into the government? If some of the militias can be integrated into the police or military, the question then becomes which ones and how many. This is more of a political question, and has often been answered by integrating the backers of whichever side or group is given control of the defense or interior ministries during shared power agreements or through elections. For militias to be used successfully in countering an insurgency, they must be either disarmed or integrated into the security forces of the state. If

[6] Ibid, p.113

they retain both their arms and their autonomy, the simplest spark could be enough to reignite the conflict, or start a new one. There are many factors that can go into disarming an reintegrating both militias and the insurgents they were fighting.

Many a war has been believed to be ended, only to have violence and hostilities quickly flare back up. Sometimes this is due to grievances or issues that are left unresolved after the termination of conflict, other times it can be as simple as combatants unwilling to lay down arms. In internal conflicts, it can be hard to get all sides, all participants to willingly stop fighting, especially if it has been a long-running conflict. Fighting can give people power, status, or even just employment. Participants may be unwilling to give this up and go back to menial jobs or even unemployment. They may also be ideologically unable to stop fighting and live besides those they recently opposed. So, how do you make the participants willing to stop fighting, to make peace last?

One problem is that you simply cannot please everyone. Many groups that fight are not completely unified; they may fight for the same cause, but have a different motivation or some may be more committed to the cause than others for various reasons. Other groups may simply be an umbrella group full of smaller factions. In regards to these factions, some may be "prepared to negotiate and accept a compromise settlement that requires them to sacrifice some of their goals in the interests of peace. But, other factions may reject the compromise, insist on their original goals, accuse the compromisers of 'selling out' the interests of their people, and threaten to renew the fighting."[7]

[7] Esman, 307

It must be remembered that, when an irregular conflict ends, it is not just the insurgents that must be disarmed and reintegrated; any government irregulars or militias must be reintegrated as well. They have to be persuaded to lay down their arms and go back to a peaceful life. Unfortunately, those most likely to be willing to fight on behalf of the government without being in the military-young men, possibly ideologically aligned with the government-may be some of the hardest ones to reintegrate. Humphreys and Weinstein find that fighters that are younger, male, and ideological were the most likely to retain strong ties to their factions after a conflict ends. Specifically looking at Sierra Leone, they found that, when comparing the RUF to the CDF (a militia group aligned with the Sierra Leone government) while the CDF was more likely to be employed and accepted, when it comes to confidence in the democratic system and being delinked from their former factions, the numbers are much more similar.[8] This shows that, while reintegration may be easier among government supporters, the underlying levels of trust and satisfaction may not be that dissimilar from the former insurgents.

Internal conflicts always carry with them one problem that other types of conflicts to not necessarily encounter: once the fighting is over, the opposing sides will have to coexist. If the conflict was one of secession, then there may be two neighboring states, but even in this case interaction cannot be avoided. For each side to coexist in relative peace, a number of steps would have to be made by each side. Kelman notes that there are four essential components to a positive peace between former belligerents: mutual acceptance and reconciliation, a sense of security and dignity for each party, a pattern of cooperative

[8] Humphreys and Weinstein, 541

interaction between the parties, and institutionalization of a dynamic problem solving process.[9] All four of these can be rather difficult. Reconciliation is difficult because each side always calls for the redress of grievances, and express a desire that the other side be punished for perceived crimes and injustices. Each side would have to realize that, for a peace to exist, these grievances cannot be fully addressed to the liking of each side; a middle ground would have to be made. The recognition of mutual security needs can also bring about problems during peace, as the Afghanistan case will demonstrate later on. The security dilemma, usually applied to the interactions of states, can apply to disarming militias as well. If one party does not comply with disarming policies, this would provide a disincentive for other parties to comply as well. One problem is that insurgencies generally use small arms, with the largest weapons usually some heavy machine guns, maybe some light heavy weapons (while not necessarily an insurgency, the rebels in Libya have been seen mounting heavier weapons such as rocket launchers, anti-aircraft guns, and even armored personnel carrier turrets onto the backs of trucks). The problem with small arms is that they can be used both defensively and offensively. As Posen notes, because these weapons are so rudimentary, what must be examined is the opposition's cohesion and past record[10]. A village militia armed with rifles, while nominally for defense, can easily be viewed as an offensive threat, particularly if that village has a history of offensive action. Therefore, it can be assumed that, as long as one side or group refuses to completely disarm, so too will the other side, thus complicating the reintegration process.

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[9] Kelman, 197
[10] Posen, 30

There are numerous methods to account for the security dilemma, but most of these tactics are tailored towards counteracting the dilemma in states. In internal conflicts the dilemma may be much harder to allay, as threats are much more amorphous and indistinct, with alleviation methods taking much longer to come to fruition.[11] All of this is important in that militias, especially in larger cities, may have had some interaction or conflict with other militias from another neighborhood, community, or ethnicity. The security dilemma should therefore be compounded by the level of fragmentation within the state. The dilemma is more salient when your potential adversary is a block away as opposed to 100 miles away with a mountain range separating you. Following the termination of conflict there may be grievances stemming from the conflict, or preexisting grievances. These must be redressed in such a way that both groups can lay down their arms and act legitimately. For militias to be successful, they have to be able to stop fighting once the insurgency is over.

I believe that, at this point, my definitions for the two criterion of success (dependent variables)-and the justifications and reasoning for them-have been sufficiently presented. Therefore, I now present my primary independent variables. As is often the case in war, tactics that work in one area may not work as well in others. This applies not only to local, tactical situations but also to strategic ones as well. Many factors would contribute to the success of this particular tactic. They include the current tactical and political situation locally(that is, within both the state where the conflict is taking place and in the local community), the culture of the state, and finally the history of the state, particularly regarding previous conflicts, especially at the communal or tribal level. In fact, I believe that it is this history that is the

[11] Rothstein, 233

greatest predictor of the success or failure of this tactic. If a state has had a long history of communal conflict-I will refer to this as fragmentation-then the recruitment and utilization of ethnic or communal militias by the government could simply fuel preexisting flames, causing the use of these militias to be problematic. Therefore, I hypothesize that states with a history of fragmentation will have difficulty achieving both criteria of success. Likewise, if a state has had a long history of local autonomy-this one simply enough referred to as autonomy-it could run into problems when trying to reintegrate these militias as the government attempts to exert control over an area. In this case, I hypothesize that states with a higher degree of local autonomy will have a greater difficulty achieving the second criteria of success.

According to the Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual "COIN[counterinsurgency] is a struggle for the population's support. The protection, welfare, and support of the people are vital to success…Designing operations that achieve the desired end state require counterinsurgents to understand the culture and the problems they face."[12] Put another way, to win the hearts and minds of the local populace(to use the famous line from Vietnam)requires that COIN forces understand the culture, the history, the society of the location they are operating in and the populace they are trying to defend. Depending on the dynamics of a state, this can be difficult enough if the COIN forces are part of that states army but come from different regions. If the COIN force is composed of foreign troops, this difficulty is compounded even more.

A large part of the fragmentation variable is that of ethnicity. In the Malayan case, the insurgency mainly drew its support from ethnic Chinese, while the ethnic Malays supported the

[12] Counterinsurgency Field Manual, 51-52

government. While trying to build up their forces, the British government enacted policies such as conscription that were aimed at increasing the number of ethnic Chinese in the security forces. This was done because they realized that, without support of ethnic Chinese on the side of the government, the war could easily enflame ethnic tensions. The idea was to make it a war between Communism and an independent Malaya instead of a war between Chinese and Malays. The important thing here is that the relationship between the Malays and the Chinese was not even very hostile. While the Chinese tended to be more rural, peasant farmers there was no history of conflict or oppression. This effectively what could have been (and usually is used as) a very effective rhetoric and recruiting tool on the part of the Communist insurgents.

The characteristics of a militia should also impact the effect it has in a counter-insurgency scenario. Are they former military personnel, foreign fighters, sectarian radicals, or local defensive groups? The decision by a government to ally itself with militias when fighting an insurgency is not one that should be made lightly, as it can have wide-ranging consequences from perceived legitimacy to prospects for a negotiated settlement to the practicability of external support. If the conflict is a sectarian one, then the government may lose legitimacy domestically if they ally themselves solely with militia from one sectarian group against another. If they ally themselves with groups that are perceived to be criminal or terroristic, it may make external assistance politically difficult, if not outright impossible. However, this of course is subject to *realpolitik*; if it is necessary, these ties can be overlooked or at least downplayed and shoved under the table. So, the militia itself must also be considered when using this tactic. Specifically its formation, its stated goals or motivations, and its source of legitimacy. By knowing these, it can be evaluated as to how useful these militias could be to

the government and the ease of which they can be reintegrated after the conflict ends. Because of this, it is important to understand militias, both why they form and some of the costs and benefits associated with them.

The Malaya case also shows why autonomy can play a pivotal role. Many insurgencies, especially rural insurgencies such as in Malaya, use as their base areas that are both distant from the capital and hard to access (in the case of Malaya this was the jungles near the Laos border). As part of their clear and hold campaigns, the British relocated much of the rural population to fortified, protected villages. This tactic had a number of benefits: it brought the population closer to the government both physically, making access easier, and ideologically, by giving them land and protection. Of course, it also allowed for easier monitoring of the population to prevent any subversion. Areas physically further or in some way isolated from the government (due to mountains, desert, jungle, etc) are harder to control, and are therefore easily taken by insurgents or fall under their sway. And, if the central government in weak in an area, then it is logical to assume that the local government is very strong. If a strong local government is given more power, it becomes even more difficult for the central government to later exert control over the area.

One of the factors that goes into autonomy is that of the distance and accessibility of the central government to outlying regions. Fearon and Laitin examine civil wars and, by extension, insurgencies-since insurgencies can easily give rise to full on civil wars. They assert that, among other things, one factor that will advantage or favor an insurgency is that of a territorial base separated by the center of the territory by water or distance. They measure this through looking at the percentage of both mountainous and noncontiguous territory. They

found that mountainous territory is "significantly related" to higher rates of civil war.[13] And, since this can be easily extrapolated to be applicable to insurgencies as well, this should lend support to using distance and accessibility as part of the measurement for autonomy. Lyall and Wilson also found distance to be a factor in the success of a government against insurgents.[14]

Oil can also have an effect on local autonomy. Several researchers have already noted that oil can affect civil wars (especially secessionist wars) in various ways.[15] One effect that has been noted is that oil revenues tend to make the government stronger. With these revenues, the central government is more able to exert control over areas that are further away from the government center. One of the ways in which this is accomplished is that the military is often a big recipient of oil revenues. This allows the central government to essentially project their power further than they would otherwise.

Autonomy can also be derived through the local political economy of an area. Through examination of several cases, Reno has noted a trend that "informal institutions, including local community 'clandestine' markets that are responses to increased marginality, may play a role in reducing risks of local social fragmentation that come with weakened state capacities..[and if] new frameworks favor old patronage networks and clandestine economy channels over the interests of elites based in the capital, they limit the impact of interventions of violent entrepreneurs and reduce risks of predatory armed conflict."[16] What this means is that, if there are informal, possibly illicit forms of economic activity in the region, allowing these activities to continue allow local authorities to maintain their authority, allowing them to resist the

[13] Fearon and Laitin, 24
[14] Lyall and Wilson, 89
[15] Ross, 342
[16] Reno, 16

pressures of armed outsiders. He also notes that armed groups without broad legitimacy rely on the power of outsiders to stay in power rather than on local communities; this plays a major role in the risk of the use of small weapons on these communities.[17] This reinforces the theme that communities are best able to fend off the predations of outsiders when they have strong local authority, and that outside groups seeking power will prey on these communities where they do not enjoy authority or legitimacy.

Both of these variables-fragmentation and autonomy-are in turn affected by several smaller factors. For fragmentation, this would include the number of ethnic or religious groups living within a state and, more importantly, the density with which these groups can be found. The intensity of the relationship also contributes to the fragmentation of a state. For example, a state with 10 different ethnic groups that can be found living in close proximity to each other would be considered more fragmented than a state with 3 ethnic groups that tend to be separated regionally within the state. Autonomy can be affected by a number of factors as well. This includes the distance between the governmental seat and outlying regions as well as how accessible the two are. It also includes how long outlying regions have been under the control of the central government as well as how strong that hold is. Admittedly these factors are kind of subjective judgments, which is why I feel case studies are the best way explore this question, at least for now.

There are some caveats to using militias, however. Often times they are not created, they are recruited. As in the case of Iraq, militias had to be recruited from the side of the insurgents to the side of the government. In cases such as this, you run into a very interesting

[17] Ibid, 23

relationship: men who only a week or two ago were trying to kill each other may not be working together on an almost daily basis, possibly even undertaking joint patrols together. This can lead to tension, and runs the risk of intentional friendly fire if emotions and memories of recent combat cannot be kept in check.

The COIN manual warns of the dangers of militias as well. It notes several examples of cases in which militias have formed to fill a perceived security gap: loyalist militias in Northern Ireland, right-wing paramilitaries in Colombia designed to combat FARC, and of course the militias during Operation Iraqi Freedom. It notes that militias can bring with them several problems. If they are outside the control of the government, they can be obstacles to ending insurgencies. They run the very real risk of becoming more powerful than the government, particularly locally. Militias can also fuel an insurgency and help bring the conflict to full-fledged civil war. The manual also warns that, while militias may not be an immediate security threat, they can pose a long term threat to law and order, and prescribes that they be treated and tracked just like insurgent groups. COIN forces should also be aware of the role militias play in insurgencies and politics, and how they can be disarmed.[18] Thompson also warns that using militia in populated areas where other groups also exist can cause problems, as these militias could owe allegiance more to a local warlord than to the government, and could lead to perpetual civil war.

For case selection I have chosen Iraq from 2003-2011 and Afghanistan from 2001-present. I have chosen these cases because in many respects they are similar. Both cases happened at the same time, began under similar circumstances, are located in the same region,

[18] Ibid, 113

and are both predominately Muslim. Both cases experienced outside assistance on the behalf of both the government and the insurgents. However, there are a few differences in these cases that must be brought up, including the point regarding outside assistance. While both sides in each case received foreign men, monetary, and materiel support, it is important to note that, in the case of Afghanistan, the relationship between the Taliban and Pakistan (allegedly the Pakistani government, or parts thereof, and almost certainly tribal elements along the border) has allowed the Taliban to take refuge in relatively safe areas that allowed them to rearm and recuperate, much as they did during the war against the Soviets. The insurgents in Iraq had no such refuge to exploit; any door into the country securely closed itself afterwards. They also differ in terms of natural resources: Iraq has fairly abundant oil reserves, while Afghanistan has no exploitable resources. This difference is in all likelihood the most important; the presence of oil in Iraq may be another cause for contention that Afghanistan would not have, but at the same time offers the Iraqi government opportunities not available to the government in Kabul.

Remember, the purpose of a COIN campaign is to defeat the insurgents. Therefore the militias must help in this regard. Along with this, if the goal of these militias is a reduction in violence, then a continuation of violence by these groups once the primary threat is gone should be considered a clear sign of failure. To restate my argument, I hypothesize that:

> H_1: States with high fragmentation will find it harder to use militias to successfully defeat insurgencies.
>
> H_2: States with higher fragmentation will find it harder to disarm and reintegrate militias after the end of the conflict.
>
> H_3: States with higher autonomy can more successfully use militias to defeat insurgents.

H_4: States with higher autonomy will find it harder to disarm and reintegrate militias after the end of the conflict.

3. Case Studies

3.1 Iraq

The US and its coalition partners invaded Iraq in 2003. Coalition troops quickly captured Baghdad, and the regime was effectively toppled, with Saddam Hussein going into hiding. The military was disbanded, and a new government was set up. Coalition forces quickly realized that the transition would not be smooth, as insurgent groups started sprouting up quickly. Sunni groups, Shi'ite groups, unemployed military, foreign fighters; all of them took up arms against coalition troops, and each other.

When the invasion first began, the US and coalition forces were seen as the biggest threat; a threat to individual autonomy, a threat to the culture, a threat to the religion. It was feared by many to be simply a modern day Crusade: an army of Christians coming to rid the Holy Land of its Muslim occupiers. As McCrary notes, the Sunni militias allied themselves with Sunni al Qaeda in a "marriage of convenience…Iraqis in al Anbar provided local knowledge, logistics, and up to 95 percent of the personnel, while experienced foreign al Qaeda fighters provided training, expertise, and financing."[19] This marriage actually serves as evidence of how militias such as these can be utilized by COIN forces as well, particularly by providing local knowledge. However, as marriages of convenience so often do, this one began to fall apart. Local leaders, who initially feared losing power to the central government, saw that that was

[19] McCary, 43

exactly what was happening; only they were losing it to the foreign al Qaeda operatives in the area. This became especially true as more and more talk became public about US withdrawals. Everyone knew the US would leave eventually; the question then became when-or even if-al Qaeda would leave. Coalition forces also began funneling reconstruction money directly through the local sheikhs instead of through the government or contractors. This returned local power and authority back to the tribal leaders, giving further motivation to ally with the Coalition against the insurgents.

The movement known as "The Awakening"-and by various other names such as the Sons of Iraq-began in 2005 in Anbar province. At this point, the number of daily insurgent attacks doubled from over 10 to over 20. By late 2006 the number of attacks had grown to over 40. After this they began a sharp decline, down to just over 10 by the middle of 2007 and under 5 attacks a day by the end of the year. Anbar went from having the second most number of attacks daily (beaten only by Baghdad) to being one of the safest provinces in Iraq by 2008. At the time in which Baghdad was experiencing almost 60 attacks a day, Anbar was averaging slightly over 10. When this statistic is taken in relation to population, it is even more telling: Baghdad (a city) has a population of over 5 million; Anbar (Iraq's largest province geographically) has a population of around 1.2 million. At several points, Anbar actually experienced a higher average number of daily attacks than did Baghdad. In February 2007, Anbar accounted for 45% of combat deaths among US forces in Iraq. Two months later, they accounted for only 12%.[20] While this reduction in combat deaths is admittedly over only a short time span and could easily be random, or due to variances in troop deployment or

[20] USA Today, http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2007-04-19-combat-deaths_N.htm

increased operations elsewhere in Iraq, it is indicative of a general trend. The Awakening in Anbar quickly spread across Iraq, and was not limited to Sunni groups; Shi'ite groups changed allegiances as well. Violence in Iraq has dropped substantially. Yearly US military fatalities reached a height of just over 900 in 2007. In 2008 the number of fatalities was over 300, and less than 150 in 2009. Civilian casualties reached a height of 34,500 in 2006, with about 10,000 fewer deaths in 2007. In 2008, there were only about 6400 fatalities. By mid 2007, enemy-initiated attacks against Coalition members reached a height of 1800 per week. In late 2008, the number of attacks was lower than in much of 2004[21]. All combat US troops have been withdrawn from Iraq, and all remaining US troops are scheduled to be withdrawn by the end of the year. While the withdrawal was mandated as part of an agreement in force as early as 2007, the fact that it was even possible at all and there was no resurgence in attacks afterwards shows that the insurgents are nowhere near as powerful as they once were.

Now that combat in Iraq is winding down and the security situation is much improved, the question becomes how to deal with the large numbers of armed, experienced fighters. Remember, a large number of armed, trained, unemployed men is what helped cause the insurgency in the first place. With most of the fighting done, the government and the Coalition run the risk of having armed, trained, and experienced urban fighters unemployed; not a good combination. In 2007, the government passed the Unified Retirement Law, which granted pensions to former Iraqi soldiers and the Accountability and Justice Law, which provided employment and pensions for low-ranking former Baath officials.[22] Because the Iraqi army was

[21] Brookings Iraq Index
[22] Ibid, 107

disbanded soon after the invasion, many of the soldiers suddenly found themselves out of work, with no money, and the training to fight. This led many of them to join the militias. By granting them their pensions, the government was able to remove the necessity of fighting to make a living.

Originally, the Iraqi government had planned to only integrate a small percentage of militia groups into the security apparatus; the rest were expected to find civilian occupations. Ucko argues that the bottom-up reintegration policies in which militias are registered, documented, and hired by the US to patrol their local areas has been the most successful attempt at reintegration. Unfortunately, he also notes that these policies have been undertaken with little central government buy-in.[23] The latest figures are fairly heartening. In September of 2009, there were over 83,000 members of the Sons of Iraq. At that point, only about 4500 had been transitioned into the Iraqi Security Forces, and a little over 7000 had moved to non-security employment. By the end of the next year, there were less than 55,000 members remaining, with almost 9,000 employed with the Iraqi Security Forces and over 30,000 in non-security employment. This gives a transition figure of 42%.[24] This indicates that my second criteria of success is being fulfilled; now that the fighting is over militia members are either being disarmed or integrated into the security apparatus.

Now that I have shown the Iraq case to have met both criteria of success, it is time to evaluate the levels of fragmentation and autonomy in Iraq. I have to assess the level of fragmentation in Iraq to be high. If there are any common themes in Iraqi history, one would

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[23] Ibid, 110
[24] Brookings Iraq Index (Note: Figures do not include the 25,000 Awakening members in Anbar province)

have to be tension between Sunni and Shi'ite Iraqis. Iraq itself was the locate of the schism between Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims, and while having a Shi'ite majority in regards to the population, it has mostly been run by or favored towards Sunni Iraqis, especially during the centuries-long Ottoman rule. Shi'ite Iraqis were for the most part excluded from the administration and from education, leaving them with very little political power.

The creation of the modern state of Iraq itself did not in any way help the fragmented nature of Iraq. Following the defeat of the Ottomans in World War I, the British and French carved up the Empire not according to preexisting tribal or cultural lines, but according to their own geopolitical objectives. One of the most famous members of the British administration in Iraq, Gertrude Bell, was warned by an American missionary that they were "flying in the face of four millenniums of history if [they] try to draw a line around Iraq and call it a political entity! Assyria always looked to the west and east and north, and Babylonia to the south. They have never been an independent unit.[25]"

One of the greatest concerns to the British at the time was the diversity of the Iraqi population. The Shi'ite population in Iraq at the time numbered around 2 million[26], but there were also significant populations of Sunni Muslims, Christians, Jews, and Kurds. The addition of Mosul and the northern Kurdish areas to Iraqi territory was intentional, in that Mosul was strategically important to the British and it was hoped that the area contained oilfields as well.[27] Even then the Kurdish population was a concern to some in the British administration,

[25] Fromkin, 451
[26] Ibid, 450
[27] Ibid, 450

who were worried that the large Kurdish population would not accept an Arab ruler.[28] This concern may have turned out to be rather prescient, when one considers the fact that the Kurds in Iraq are at present at least semi-autonomous.

The ascension of the Baath and Saddam Hussein to power in the 1960s further exacerbated the fragmentation in Iraq. The Baath party ruled very strictly, imposing one party rule and became increasingly dominated by back-home politics, where those from the same family, tribe, or village were put in places of authority. They quickly removed opposition using a variety of tactics, including show trials and assassinations. The Baath were of course part of the Sunni minority-and therefore also benefitted the Sunnis at the expense of the Shi'ites-and their rule further widened the divide between Sunni and Shi'ites, and also affected tribal and ethnic relationships.

While the Baath party did manage to bring economic growth to Iraq, the Iran-Iraq war brought social and economic problems back to the forefront. Cleavages between rural and urban communities that had already begun to develop were accelerated by the war.[29] Much of the southern areas in Iraq were severely damaged, which caused a migration to the cities. Iraqi Kurds, with the backing of Tehran, pushed back against the government, which led to the infamous gassing of Halabja and the Anfal campaign, which also targeted the Kurdish population in Iraq. The Gulf War following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait brought about the swift defeat of the Iraqi military, with many units surrendering without a fight. However, following calls from the US, both Kurds and Shi'ite rose up against the government. These uprising were

[28] Ibid, 450
[29] Metz, 166

ruthlessly put down using helicopters and air attacks, prompting the US to put a no-fly zone in place as a protective measure, as well as sanctions.

At the time of the fall of the Ottoman Empire, much of Iraq was tribal, up to seventy-five percent according to some figures.[30] In 1920, the tribes actually revolted, but they revolt was put down. Under the constitutional monarchy of this period urban versus tribal tension increased as well. Power and influence increasingly shifted from the tribal areas into the cities and, while tribal sheiks had been enriched economically by British policies, they found themselves increasingly irrelevant and weak when compared to urban elites.[31] There were several tribal revolts against the government, but these were put down relatively easily. Several years after Iraq gained its independence the Middle East experienced its first coup attempt when the military overthrew the government. This coup helped to ensure that the military would have a heavy involvement in politics[32].

The fact that Iraq was the location of the original rift between Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims, as well as the long history of minority Sunni rule gives strong testament to the fragmentation of Iraq. Iraq has been a land of numerous tribes, with very complicated relationships between them. And the conflict has not just been tribal; ethnic and religious differences have also been continual catalysts for discontent. The fragmentation is even more evident when viewing a map showing the tribal landscape in Iraq. It is worth pointing out that many of the larger cities in Iraq lie not only upon borders between multiple tribes, but also along borders of ethnic or

[30] Fromkin, 450
[31] Metz, 150
[32] Ibid, 151

religious communities as well. This can lead to a very volatile mix[33]. In some respects, these areas could present more of a problem than the more homogenous areas, in that insurgent groups or tribal militias may be engaged in combat both with the government and with each other.

It is important to remember that the Awakening happened in a province that was majority Sunni, many of whom felt very threatened by the imposition of a new national government, as they feared losing power. As many sources have indicated, the drive of the insurgency there was predominately sectarian: a Sunni insurgency fighting against a Shi'ite and Kurd dominated government. Historically, Iraqi politics has been dominated by the Sunnis. After the invasion and removal of Saddam's regime, the Kurds and Shi'ites in Iraq finally saw a chance to participate in politics like they never had before, by running the new government. The Sunnis in Iraq naturally feared a reduction in their own historical power, and quite possibly retribution at the hands of a Shi'ite-led government. In fact, when the first elections were held, many Sunni groups boycotted, in effect helping to bring about what they most feared: a Shi'ite dominated government. Many Sunnis found themselves purged out of government ministries and other positions, as well as finding barriers in place when trying to obtain government jobs. Some of those put into power in the newly elected government were militia leaders-such as al-Sadr-and began to integrate their own militias into the national security forces. This caused the government to effectively support sectarian issues and even helped to push the Sunni militias into their alliances with al-Qaeda in Iraq.[34] It had a second effect of forcing those Sunni groups

[33] For example, Baghdad has 7 tribes in close proximity, and lies between two areas, one that is predominately Sunni Arab and one that is a mix of Sunni and Shia Arabs.
[34] Ucko, 100

that did participate in the political process to focus on a sectarian platform as well. If the government was going to look out for the interests of Shi'ites and Kurds at the expense of the Sunnis, then the Sunni parties would have to focus solely on protecting the Sunni population.

Despite this, at the most recent count, the Iraqi government has seen the participation over 20 major parties, along with numerous other smaller parties.[35] What is most heartening is that these parties are Sunni, Shi'ite, Kurd, and Arab. Some of these parties are even associated with militias. While this has concerned some, especially within the Shi'ite led government(Sunni parties affiliated with Sunni militias certainly bring to mind the fear of a return to Sunni dominance in Iraqi politics), the fact that they exist demonstrates a willingness and desire to operate legitimately within the political process. The road to reintegration of these militias into the political process has not been easy, however.

In regards to autonomy, Iraq has to be classified as low. With the exception of a few cases, Iraq has been governed fairly strongly, by both internal and external governments. For example, there were a few times during Ottoman rule when most of Iraq was controlled by the local tribal leaders and sheikhs. Throughout Ottoman rule the old tensions and conflicts-tribal versus urban, tribal versus tribal-remained present, although Ottoman reforms did begin to transform the political and social landscape. Economic reforms led to a growing urban population, as well as leading to social status based not on lineage, military prowess, or religious knowledge, but based upon wealth and property ownership.

[35] CIA World Factbook

Certainly at present the Iraqi Kurds have a fairly high level of autonomy; they may not be a separate state, but they have their own government, school systems, official languages, and military. This is only a fairly recent development, however. The rest of the state has clearly had a much lower level of local autonomy. Ba'athist rule was firm, so clearly there was no real local autonomy there. The Ottomans ruled Iraq strongly with the exception of two centuries. With Baghdad the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate, local autonomy was fairly low during this period as well. Geographically, most of the population is clustered along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, without many geographical barriers. However, it is important to note that there are significant oil reserves in Iraq. As of 2009, Iraq was the 11th largest exporter of oil in the world, as well as 5th in terms of oil reserves[36]. In fact, Mosul, which lies on the border between predominately Kurdish and predominately Arab areas and has seen most of the recent fighting since combat has wound down, is so contested because of the oil reserves in the area. Whichever group-the central government or the Kurdish government-controls the area, controls the income from the oil.

However, when it comes to oil, Iraq has faced a number of problems over the course of its history. The oil for food program during the late 90s to prior to the invasion in 2003 was fraught with corruption, with Iraq illegally exporting oil, realizing profits of up to almost $14 billion. After the invasion the provisional authority took control of oil production and centralized the proceeds in order to curb corruption. The revenues were intended to go to the Iraqi government and for reconstruction, however the funds mostly went to foreign firms.[37]

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[36] CIA World Factbook
[37] Le Billon, 696

Later on in the conflict, reconstruction money allocated to large-scale projects has generally been positively correlated with increased violence. However, a study by Berman et al has shown that Commander's Emergency Response Program(CERP) spending as well as similar smaller reconstruction programs have been correlated with reduced violence, and that the effect tends to be larger the smaller the project is.[38] This indicates that oil revenues in Iraq, when they are appropriated to smaller projects, strengthens the ability to combat the insurgents and has made local areas less autonomous by strengthening ties to the central government.

Therefore, even taking into account the semi-autonomous Kurdish area in the north, it is safe to say that autonomy in Iraq is low. While several independent, militia-backed governments did spring up during the height of the insurgency (such as the Mahdi Army in Sadr City) and provided their own version of security and services, these have all disappeared. The fact that no other groups or provinces have attempted to break away or challenge the central government (except of course for the Kurds) shows that Iraq's low level of autonomy may not have inhibited its ability to fight the insurgency, it certainly has made it much easier for Iraq to reintegrate and disarm the numerous militias that rose up during the insurgency.

By all accounts, this strategy seems to have worked in Iraq. As noted earlier, fragmentation is measured as moderate because, while there are only a few ethnic and religious groups, there is a significant number of tribes and many cities or provinces have some degree of ethnic, religious, and/or tribal intermingling. Much of the insurgency was sectarian in nature, but the Anbar Awakening and Sons of Iraq movement saw militias of all types working

[38] Berman et al, 770

alongside the government against the insurgency. This fact, along with the fact that many militia members were themselves former insurgents (which certainly exaggerated the effect to some degree) means that hypothesis H_1 and H_2 can only be somewhat supported. In regards to H_3, in this case it appears that autonomy has not had much of an impact in either direction. However, the unique case of a strong, fairly autonomous Kurdish region in comparison to the rest of the state has a remarkable bearing on H_4; while most of the country-low autonomy-has become fairly peaceful, much of the remaining violence is located in or near the highly autonomous Kurdish region, which lends support to this hypothesis. This fortunate "case within a case" has made the insurgency in Iraq a very useful case to examine.

3.2 Afghanistan

The counterinsurgency in Iraq has for the most part been successful, and the use of militia by the government helped contribute to this success. Now that we know it can be useful, the question turns into whether this tactic can be useful in other counterinsurgency campaigns. Fortunately, there is another insurgency that we can examine and apply this tactic to currently ongoing: Afghanistan. While the situation in Iraq has been improving over the past few years, the situation in Afghanistan has been stagnating. As recently as last year, almost half of the provinces in Afghanistan were either sympathetic to or actively supporting the insurgents. In fact, as of September 2010, only 6 "key districts" were considered to be secure, with 43 more considered unsecured or dangerous environments, and an additional 68

experiencing frequent to occasional threats.[39] These key districts (numbering 121 as of September 2010) represented roughly one third of the number of total districts in Afghanistan.

Up to this point, there has not been much of an effort on the part of the government in Kabul or the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to utilize militias. There have been limited instances of local villages or towns defending against Taliban incursions on their own, but this has not become a general trend pushed by the government. The focus has, for the most part, seemed to be mainly on getting the Afghan National Army trained into an effective force. This has led to a reliance on the part of the ISAF on FOBs (Forward Operating Bases). As of the beginning of 2010, the US had over 180 FOBs in operation. These FOBs are isolated, by necessity located in or near insurgent operating areas or unsecured provinces, and, as can be seen with OP Restrepo in the Korengal Valley, vulnerable to attack. Outposts such as these become magnets for attacks and are difficult to supply and reinforce due to the nature of the terrain: air lifts using helicopters and MV-22 Ospreys are commonplace in Afghanistan, and ground convoys are frequent targets of attacks and IEDs.

It is in situations such as this where militias can be useful. If they can be persuaded to side with the government, they can be used to defend areas such as these until such time as insurgent activity decreases, or enough forces can be mobilized to undertake a clear and hold mission, much like what the British did in Malaya. Then, once the area has been cleared, these militia can be used to help in holding the area, relieving combat troops from having to do routine patrols and garrison duty, freeing them for such missions as protecting Provincial Reconstruction Teams or undertaking raids into adjacent areas. To determine whether or not

[39] Brookings Afghanistan Index

militias can be used in Afghanistan the way they were in Iraq, it is important to first determine the levels of fragmentation and autonomy.

Fragmentation in Afghanistan has to be considered high. Historically, Afghanistan is a nation of tribes, with family and tribal relationships forming the basis of political and social life. It is through this tribal structure that the Afghanistan monarchy arose. Just as Sunnis have dominated much of the political history of Iraq, the Pashtuns have dominated much of the political history of Afghanistan: Afghanistan was first united as a state by a Pashtun army under a Pashtun leader.

The Pashtun rulers had to maintain internal control over a diverse population. A variety of tactics were used to assert and maintain control, including holding hostages, forced internal migrations coupled with generous land grants, and a subordination of religious rulers to the crown. After World War I, the government undertook several Western-style reforms, including modern education, a European styled constitution, ministerial cabinets, and a quasi-legislative parliament.[40] However, many of the reforms severely undercut the power and authority of the tribal sheikhs, which lead to a revolt and an abdication of the throne. The new government cut back on the reforms, reverting back to many conservative Islamic policies and other policies to regain support of the rebelling tribes.

A new, Soviet-backed government rose to power in the 1960s. However, this Marxist government was not very popular with the Afghan tribes. The tribes rebelled, to the point that

[40] Ibid, 37

"all but three or four of the twenty-eight provinces"[41] were revolting. Continued Soviet support allowed the government to hold off the rebels, but a disconnect was growing between the Soviets and the Afghan government. The Soviets invaded and placed its own government in power. The invasion was quick, with massive numbers of troops, armor, and aircraft dedicated to the invasion.

Before the Soviet invasion there were already large numbers of resistance groups fighting the Afghan government. When the Soviets invaded, they became targets as well. These resistance groups, or mujahideen(literally "strugglers" but generally translated as holy warriors) were predominately Muslim, and the strongest and most powerful of the groups were based in Pakistan. The war against the Soviets in Afghanistan truly became an international affair. Thousands of Muslims from across the Middle East flocked to Pakistan to join up with the mujahideen; many more contributed money or supplies. Even foreign governments saw an opportunity in the war, particularly the United States. They saw the war as an opportunity to bleed the Soviet Union much as the Soviet Union had done to the United States in Vietnam, by supplying money, weapons, and training. The fighting was heavy and brutal, with the Soviets having a decided advantage through its use of air power until American-supplied MANPADS(man portable air defense systems) arrived and negated this advantage. During this time, the Mujahideen based in Pakistan draw a lot of assistance and support from the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence, or ISI. This relationship, forged during the resistance against the Soviets, would come in use in the later war after the US invasion.

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[41] Ibid, 85

Following the Soviet withdrawal, a power vacancy existed in Kabul. A coalition of mujahideen groups took control, but again infighting turned the country into chaos. A small armed, heavily religious group composed originally of students and calling itself the Taliban("Taliban" of course meaning "students") arose. They called for a new Islamic government and swept across the country. After several incursions and shellings of Kabul, Taliban forces overran the city and forced out the government. The Taliban gained recognition from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, but was denied a seat at the UN.[42] It quickly became a haven for radical Islamist groups, who set up training camps and headquarters in the mountains. One of these groups was a small group led by a Saudi named Osama bin Laden.

From its base in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, al-Qaeda attracted members, planned, and carried out numerous attacks against US targets such as the embassy bombings, the attack on USS Cole, and of course the two World Trade Center attacks. The attacks on September 11, 2001 prompted a swift NATO response on Afghanistan, focusing on removing the Taliban and tracking down al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. Special forces units quickly descended on the country, in an attempt to track down the terrorists and to cut off potential escape routes into Pakistan. Conventional troops soon followed, to secure the Bagram airbase, Kabul, Kandahar, and other major cities. Taliban forces were slowly driven out of the cities into the mountains, but have since made a resurgence, causing the ISAF to renew their efforts.

The difficulty in this strategy is getting the local villages to work with the government and provide the militia support. Afghanistan is very diverse, and this diversity is making cooperation difficult. While Iraq had relatively few tribes and only a handful of different ethnic

[42] O'Balance, 243

and political groups, Afghanistan has a much higher level of fragmentation. In regards to ethnicities, there are 7 that have a significant percentage of the population-the largest by far is Pashtun at 42%-with many other smaller ethnic groups.[43] And, as the map displaying ethnolinguistic groups in Afghanistan[44] shows, these groups are not all located in their own separates areas of the country as in Iraq; in Afghanistan the ethnic groups are much more intermingled. Many of these ethnic groups have their own languages as well; this causes communication problems and can mean difficulties when military units are redeployed around the country. Tribally Afghanistan is even more complex; there are, for example, roughly 60 Pashtun tribes and around 400 sub-tribes.[45] The tribes have a tendency to treat outsiders with suspicion, if not outright hostility. This means that ISAF forces will face difficulties in cooperation, and the locals may also be unwilling to cooperate with the government.

It seems that autonomy is very high in Afghanistan as well. Many villages are located in valleys surrounded by steep mountain ranges with high elevation; which makes them hard to access from Kabul or the rest of the country except by air. Tribal relationships and hierarchies are very strong and firm, with a heavy emphasis on tradition. While these tribal traditions have made it difficult for the government to make inroads, they have also had the benefit in some cases of keeping Taliban influence out of a village or province. During the Soviet occupation many areas either had their own militia or had residents join mujahideen groups. Many men in the villages are armed, and the history of tribal warfare means that they have to have some form of militia either active or ready to be called up, usually led by a tribal elder or other

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[43] CIA World Factbook
[44] See Appendix
[45] The Economist, *In the Dark*

notable figure. So, the infrastructure for forming militia allied to the government is there. The only problem is persuading them to fight for the government.

The tactics of the combatants in Afghanistan also give testament to the power that the geography of Afghanistan has. For example, the large number of FOBs in Afghanistan show the need for an armed presence in much of the country; in Iraq Coalition troops generally were stationed in bases in key cities from which the undertook mounted or foot patrols, while in Afghanistan troops must be broken up into smaller, more distributed bases throughout the countryside. The heavy reliance on overland supply convoys-which have themselves become favorite targets of the Taliban-show that it is much harder to project power across Afghanistan than in Iraq.

A good measure of the local autonomy in Afghanistan is the levels of opium and poppy cultivation. Under Taliban rule, annual poppy cultivation in Afghanistan generally hovered around 20-30% of total global levels (with an outlier of 50% in 1999). In the period from 2005-2009, that level was greater than 65%, reaching a height of 90% in 2007. However, in 2010 it had dropped back down to 40%. For opium the trend is roughly the same as poppies except for lower overall numbers (a height of around 35% in 1999 under the Taliban, 70% in 2007). With poppy and opium cultivation considered illegal under both the Taliban and new government, the fact that the levels are so much higher post-Taliban suggests that local autonomy has actually increased since the Taliban were removed from power.

One major obstacle that has already risen in Afghanistan is that of disarmament. Before the Taliban made its resurgence, numerous efforts were under way to disarm and reintegrate

armed groups into legitimate positions, either in civilian life or the national security apparatus. Unfortunately, it ran into several problems. The first problem involved was the way in which the groups responsible for reintegration suggested civilian occupations. This was generally done arbitrarily, with no consideration of the local economy or the background and skill of the applicant. Distribution of land, water and livestock was not taken into account, which may have exacerbated communal conflict. As for distribution of skills and labor, in certain cases it was found that as many as 15 new tailors were being created per village.[46] Obviously a small village cannot support that many tailors, so many of them quickly found themselves again out of work.

As part of the reintegration process, militias were required to turn in all weapons. It has been estimated that the number of active participants in armed groups in Afghanistan is around 180,000.[47] While initially high, the numbers of turned in weapons quickly dropped to almost nothing. The numbers are very telling: in Takhar province as of October 2006, out of 2,682 weapons only 343-or 13%- had been turned in. The same region reported a total of 14,150 weapons as of 2003.[48] On top of this, it has been reported that, increasingly, those weapons that were being turned in were either in inoperable condition, antiquated, or of poor manufacture.[49] So, the disarmament plan amounted to little more than a spring cleaning for the militias. It allowed them to receive benefits from the central government while letting them get rid of unserviceable weapons, meaning no real reduction in capability.

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[46] Giustozzi, 71
[47] Ibid, 72
[48] Ibid, 76
[49] Ibid, 70

If Reno is correct that informal sources of communal authority such as illicit trade can affect a community's ability to defend itself from outsiders, then this should give an insight into how this tactic might play out in Afghanistan. Historically, the opium trade has been a major source of income in Afghanistan. While states spend millions of dollars each year in an effort to curtail the illicit international drug trade, it may be necessary to allow the continued production of opium in Afghanistan-at least in the short term- to allow these communities to defend themselves from Taliban incursions. However, this must be carefully monitored or controlled; the proceeds could be going towards the purchase of weapons, or being used to fund the insurgents. One possible solution to this could be that the government could trade for these poppies; the farmers could trade their crops in exchange for goods and services such as construction projects, infrastructure improvements, or other goods that are tangible but not easily transferable. If these communities are allowed to do this in the short term, then eventually they would have to be weaned off of a reliance on the opium trade and be forced to shift to more legal means. Some may find this transition not to their liking, and may react harshly.

There is also the problem of where power is going to be located. Because a necessary part of allowing these communities to provide their own defense from the Taliban involves the reaffirmation of local authority, the central government in Kabul will be faced with two choices: remove this authority once combat is over, or cede local control to these communal authorities. A central government would be unwilling to do this second option, but the first option could lead to a resurgence of violence, or at least tension. The first option would require reintegration and disarmament policies and procedures much more effective than previous

attempts. Many of these communities are very remote from Kabul and the central government, so the government's hold would already be tenuous. Also, as Afghanistan is much more divided than Iraq-as is evident by the large number of both political parties and autonomous communities in Afghanistan than Iraq-it will be much harder to integrate these local authorities into the government.

So, while these communal militias could easily achieve the first part of success-that of defending their homes from Taliban attacks- it may be much harder to achieve the second part of success: renouncing violence and engaging in legitimate political practices. In this case, it would seem that H_1 still does not hold up, in that, while Afghanistan is highly fragmented, the level of sectarian violence is not as high as in Iraq. However H_2, H_3, and H_4 both seem as if they would hold true in this case, given the reluctance to disarm and the reports that some villages have already successfully held off Taliban incursions. The only question is whether the government in Kabul wants to trade short term security for possible long-term conflict.

4. Conclusion

Iraq has seen a very drastic improvement in its security situation since the beginning of the war in 2003. During the worst years of the fighting, as insurgent groups tired of the classic "enemy of my enemy" rationalization, groups that had been fighting the government switched allegiances and began participating in legitimate politics and fighting for the government. Iraq may have been highly fragmented, but it also had low autonomy. The high fragmentation seems to have made defeating the insurgency difficult, especially at the beginning of the war; however the low autonomy has made it easy for many of the militia members to be

reintegrated either into the security forces or back into civilian life. The current US administration has adhered to the original Bush timetable (although at the insistence of the Iraqi government and against the wishes of US military high command) and all US troops will be out of Iraq by the end of the year. Whether or not insurgent groups have been eliminated or have simply remained dormant still remains to be seen. But Iraq is certainly in a much better position than it was even 2 years ago.

Unfortunately the conflict in Afghanistan has not seen the improvement that has been seen in Iraq. While the total number of insurgents in Afghanistan is far less than what it was in Iraq, the number has only increased since the beginning of the war. The number of insurgent attacks is on the rise, as has casualties, both military and civilian. The Iraq war may be nearing completion, but even with the recent killing of bin Laden and major successes against insurgent groups such as the Haqqani network, it does not seem that this war will end in the near future. Fragmentation is even higher in Afghanistan than it is in Iraq, and autonomy very high as well. Because of this, should militia be used in Afghanistan, it may be possible to use militia to defeat the insurgency, but the government will find it much harder to bring the militia back into legitimate occupations.

The only hypothesis that was fully supported was H_4. The other hypothesis only had marginal support, if at all. It would seem that fragmentation does have some negative effects on the ability of a government to use militia to help fight in a counterinsurgency; however Iraq was able to use militia successfully, and was even able to get Sunni and Shi'ite militias to work on the same side. It also has a limited, although negative effect on the ability to reintegrate

after the insurgency; but this can be avoided with such institutions as a proportional legislature or other democratic institutions that can provide inclusion. And again, Iraq was able to successfully reintegrate a large number of the militias. On the other hand, autonomy has a slight positive effect on the ability to defeat insurgencies locally; however again Iraq, with lower autonomy, was more successful than Afghanistan in defeating the insurgents. It is however important to note that this could have been effected by the Iraq was coming during the Afghanistan war, essentially putting the conflict in Afghanistan on the back burner for the international community. In regards to integration, however, there is a strong negative effect. Using local militia runs the risk of turning local leaders into warlords, and these militias may be unwilling to disarm and reintegrate due to several factors ranging from a simple fear of losing autonomy to a security dilemma presented by a neighboring militia refusing to disarm.

As I have shown, there are many factors that can go into fragmentation and autonomy, and that these factors can differ on a case to case basis. It may be possible that the different factors going into these variables could have an influence on the effects these variables have, which may explain why many of the hypotheses did not pan out. For example, the oil revenues in Iraq (which contributed to a lower autonomy score) allow Iraq to pay off and pay for the militias recruited into services, as well as repayment of foreign aid. This not only makes success more likely, but also makes it much easier to reintegrate the militias. The lack of natural resources in Afghanistan means that the government is much more reliant on foreign aid that will be difficult to pay back, and also means that the government has much fewer funds to devote to reintegration. It also makes it much harder to eradicate the illicit poppy production

in Afghanistan, as many communities rely on this income and there is no way to replace it, and the government cannot afford to simply buy up the crops itself without even more foreign aid.

I am afraid that the use of militia to help defeat and insurgency comes down to something of a catch-22 situation of choosing between the short run and the long run. It may allow the government to win the insurgency in the short term, but may create additional problems in the long run once the fighting is over. However, there is no need for the government to worry about an “after the war” if it cannot first win the war. Therefore, I believe the benefits of using militia in a counterinsurgency outweighs the risks of doing so, especially as the risks are strongest when there is both high fragmentation and high autonomy.

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