

## ***Insurgents vs. Guerrillas vs. Terrorists***

Though distinguishing between guerrillas, insurgents, and terrorists may seem like a purely academic exercise, deeper analysis may reveal some extremely pragmatic understandings to help in combating each.

Doctrinally, we (DoD) define terrorism as “the calculated use of violence or threat of violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological.”

Doctrinally, we (DoD) define insurgency as “an organized resistance movement that uses subversion, sabotage, and armed conflict to achieve its aims. Insurgencies normally seek to overthrow the existing social order and reallocate power within the country. They may also seek to (1) Overthrow an established government without a follow-on social revolution. (2) Establish an autonomous national territory within the borders of a state. (3) Cause the withdrawal of an occupying power. (4) Extract political concessions that are unattainable through less violent means” [numerals added].

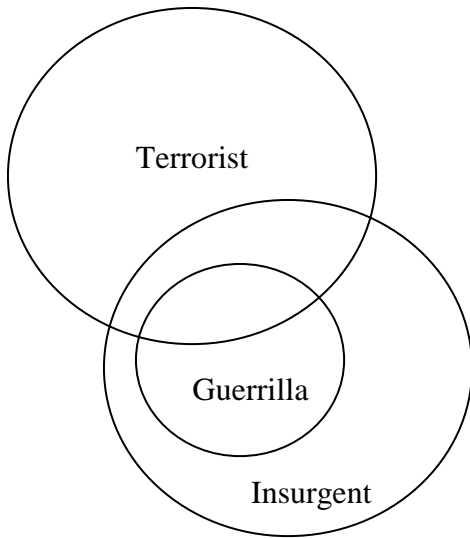
Doctrinally, guerrillas are the “overt military aspect of the insurgency.” They exist alongside their counterparts, the auxiliary and the underground.

We find critical distinctions in these definitions. First, doctrine correctly identifies guerrillas as a subcomponent of insurgencies that work overtly toward the latter’s counter-regime goals, typically organized not too unlike general purpose forces. Second, each of the five goals of an insurgency—the violent arm of a given resistance movement—centers on attacking regimes. In comparison, the goals of terrorists are not specific to governments but rather focus on broader ideological intentions. Furthermore, we see that terrorists may not even feel the need to target governments. Instead they may choose to attack societies directly in order to achieve a particular endstate. Hence, by definition terrorists are not concerned with regime change, reallocation of power, or challenging existing social orders.

Another way to look at it is this: insurgents use ideology to target governments, but terrorists target governments (or societies) to advance ideology.

Notwithstanding the differences between these irregular warriors, it is conceivable that a terrorist may also simultaneously be an insurgent and a guerrilla. Depending upon the ideology that the terrorist wants to advance, regime change may be a critical component of that effort. Marxist terrorists operating in capitalist or monarchical societies are good examples of ideologically-motivated terrorists who envision regime change as an integral component to their strategy.

This discussion leads us to a nice Venn Diagram:



From this diagram, we can see that there is some overlap between these irregular warrior types. So what? Well, let's look at today's fight. Where does al Qaeda fit in?

In his book, *Inside Al Qaeda*, Rohan Gunaratna describes what his research reveals is al Qaeda's strategy. UBL has declared that al Qaeda's ultimate strategic endstate is to reestablish the Caliphate as the pan-Islamic ruling authority in the Muslim world. Later, he outlined al Qaeda's principal goals that support this vision. First, they support any faction in opposition to Muslim regimes that Al Qaeda believes undermine Islamic values and interests; second, they support any faction in opposition to governments who oppress Muslim populations; and third, they support any faction fighting to create its own regime or government whose rule is founded in Islam. Later, UBL added the destruction of Israel and the liberation of holy sites in Palestine as a goal, and he also supports any effort to attack the U.S. or other "western" regimes that he considers a threat to Islam in the world. (p. 21-22). I think it is reasonable to conclude that an empirical measurement of al Qaeda's attacks would reveal that UBL's strategy is more than rhetoric; al Qaeda's operations have generally been consistent with this strategy.

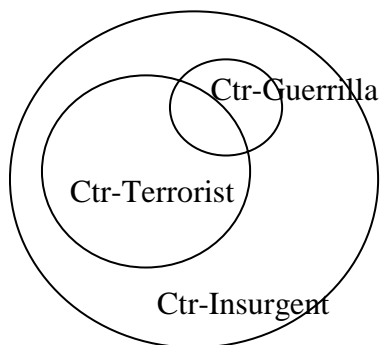
Each of these goals clearly centers on regimes. Using violence to remove enemy regimes in order to replace them with an alternative regime—the Caliphate—is classic insurgency. Destroying the Israeli state in favor of a Palestinian substitute is also definitively "insurgency." Attacking regimes in order to "liberate" oppressed Muslims from their rule can hardly be considered anything but "insurgent" in nature. Even attacks against the national power of the United States are designed to weaken its regime such that it can no longer support its "apostate"-Muslim allies abroad. Conclusively, al Qaeda's strategy marks it as a global insurgency.

But what about terrorism, and the global war against it? We have all witnessed al Qaeda's terrorist methodologies, so how can it not be a global terrorist organization? One thing that clouds this analysis is that many Islamists do not believe in the separation of church and state, but rather in the synthesis of the two. Thus, regime changes might facilitate advancement per se of a particular ideology. However, al Qaeda's strategic

goals are specifically limited to regimes. If it were purely a terrorist organization, its desire to advance its ideology would go much further, perhaps declaring the intention to convert the entire world to Islam and subjugate all of it beneath the Caliphate. Instead, its goals are noticeably short of that ideological endstate, and we can even see that their operations are particular to regimes as well.

Perhaps more helpful is to see that al Qaeda's terrorist operations are limited to tactical applications. In other words, al Qaeda uses terrorism tactically and operationally to advance its global insurgent strategy. Fear, coercion, and intimidation are intended to accomplish tactical goals like the assassination of individual members of the Saudi regime. Zarqawi's beheadings brew fear and intimidation with the intent to fragment the coalition against him and expel enemies who are more easily bullied. As a result, one might characterize al Qaeda as global or strategic insurgency that tactically and operationally accomplishes its goals using terrorism.

Arriving at this conclusion, then we can then derive our own Venn Diagram to represent an appropriate strategy against al Qaeda.



In other words, we need a global counter-insurgent strategy. At the operational and tactical levels, we should mix CT, COIN, and counter-guerrilla efforts. While each of these approaches has some commonalities, they, as before, also have some important differences. Once we understand how they are different, we can begin to properly allocate resources and efforts to the appropriate levels of war as part of a more efficient and coordinated approach...which is a discussion we will reserve for a future irregular warfare message of the week.