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Whack-a-Mole or Coup de Grace? Institutionalization and Leadership Targeting in Iraq and Afghanistan

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War is fundamentally a clash of organizations. Organizations provide the vital mechanisms that mobilize and convert resources into combat power as well as applying that combat power against the enemy.[1] This is true not only of conventional militaries, but also of insurgent and terrorist groups.[2] Organizational capacity is thus a crucial determinant of success in conflict. Stephen Biddle, for example, attributes heavy causal weight for success in modern conventional military conflict to the relative capacity of military organizations to employ a set of techniques he terms "the modern system."[3] Philip Selznick argues that organization is equally crucial for success in political combat, where subversion of other organizations is as important as brute force.[4]

Yet despite the acknowledged importance of organizations to determining success in war, policymakers and military/security personnel often attribute great importance to the role of specific individuals, particularly in the context of counterterrorism. This gives rise to an operational technique deployed against insurgent and terrorist groups that seeks to destroy or cripple the organization by targeting senior and mid-level leadership.[5] In particular, this technique has been a major component of the U.S.-led campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan.[6] A January 2011 assessment by then commander of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, General David Petraeus, specifically noted the importance to the campaign there of "…the relentless pace of targeted operations by ISAF and Afghan special operations forces. Indeed, while there clearly is a need for additional work in numerous areas, it is

[1] Allan R. Millet, Williamson Murray, and Kenneth Watman, "The Effectiveness of Military Organizations," *International Security* v.11 n.1 (1986) and Martin van Creveld, *Fighting Power: German and U.S. Army Performance, 1939-1945* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982).

[2] Mary Anderson, Michael Arnsten, and Harvey Averch, *Insurgent Organization and Operations: A Case Study of the Viet Cong in the Delta, 1964-1966* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1967); Nathan Leites and Charles Wolf Jr., *Rebellion and Authority: An Analytic Essay on Insurgent Conflicts* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1970); Jeremy M. Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Abdulkader H. Sinno, *Organizations at War in Afghanistan and Beyond* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008); and Paul Staniland, "Explaining Cohesion, Fragmentation, and Control in Insurgent Groups," (Dissertation, MIT Political Science, 2010).

[3] Stephen Biddle, *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

[4] Philip Selznick, *The Organizational Weapon: A Study of Bolshevik Strategy and Tactics* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1952).

[5] Graham Turbiville, *Hunting Leadership Targets in Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorist Operations* (Hurlburt Field, FL: Joint Special Operations University Press, 2007) presents several examples.

[6] Michael T. Flynn et al., "Employing ISR: SOF Best Practices," *Joint Forces Quarterly* 50 (2008); Seth Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires: America's War in Afghanistan* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010); Mark Urban, *Task Force Black: The Explosive True Story of the SAS and the Secret War in Iraq* (London: Little, Brown, 2010).

equally clear that ISAF and Afghan forces inflicted enormous losses on mid-level Taliban and Haqqani Network leaders throughout the country and took away some of their most important safe havens."[7]

This technique, generically termed leadership targeting, has attracted a modest amount of recent scholarship and policy analysis seeking to evaluate its effectiveness.[8] The raid that killed Osama bin Laden in May 2011 further highlights the importance of these operations to current counterterrorism.[9] Subsequent remarks by Secretary of Defense (and former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency) Leon Panetta argue that Al Qaeda has been all but defeated through leadership targeting, while former National Counterterrorism Center Director Michael Leiter dismissed such remarks, indicating that even within the U.S. intelligence community there is substantial debate over the efficacy of leadership targeting.[10] Yet despite its policy importance, leadership targeting remains understudied by scholars.

This lack of detailed study is especially true of leadership targeting in Iraq and Afghanistan, and it is in part due to the high levels of secrecy that surround these efforts as well as the general difficulty in evaluating the effects of such targeting on clandestine organizations operating in war zones.[11] Those unclassified studies that have appeared frequently have methodological issues, which is understandable but problematic. For example, a 2011 National Defense University study focusing on leadership targeting in Iraq argues that "…the interagency teams used to target enemy clandestine networks were a major, even indispensable, catalyst for success."[12] Yet the authors are heavily reliant on sources from these teams, which can be expected to be positive in their assessments. More can and should be done to develop both the theoretical understanding of these efforts and also an empirical assessment of what has and is happening in Iraq and Afghanistan.

This article proceeds in three main parts. It begins with a brief review of some of the recent literature on the effectiveness of leadership targeting. It then proposes that the key variable in determining

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[7] COMISAF Assessment, January 25, 2011, p. 2.

[8] Stephen T. Hosmer, *Operations Against Enemy Leaders* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2001); Daniel Byman, "Do Targeted Killings Work?" *Foreign Affairs* v. 85, n. 2 (March/April 2006); William Rosenau and Austin Long, "The Phoenix Program and Contemporary Counterinsurgency," (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2009); Jenna Jordan, "When Heads Roll: Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Decapitation," *Security Studies* v.18 n.4 (October-December 2009); Michael Freedman, "The Headless Horseman: A Theoretical and Strategic Assessment of Leadership Targeting," paper presented at the 2010 International Studies Association Convention; and Matt Frankel, "The ABCs of HVT: Key Lessons from High Value Targeting Campaigns Against Insurgents and Terrorists," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* v.34 n.1 (January 2011).

[9] Peter Baker, Helene Cooper, and Mark Mazetti, "Bin Laden Dead, Obama Says," *New York Times*, May 1, 2011.

[10] Eric Schmitt, "Ex-Counterterrorism Aide Warns Against Complacency on Al Qaeda," *New York Times*, July 28, 2011.

[11] Alex Wilner, "Targeted Killings in Afghanistan: Measuring Coercion and Deterrence in Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* v.33 n.4 (April 2010) is an important exception.

[12] Christopher Lamb and Evan Munsing, "Secret Weapon: High-value Target Teams as an Organizational Innovation," (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University, 2011), p.6.

the overall effectiveness of leadership targeting is the level of institutionalization of the organization targeted. Moreover, this is true not only of insurgent or terrorist groups targeted, but also of groups opposed to such organizations whose leadership is targeted by insurgents or terrorists. Third, this argument is then supported by evidence on leadership targeting from Iraq and Afghanistan. It concludes with recommendations for both future research and for policy-makers.

Off With Their Heads

Most research on leadership targeting has been inconclusive about its effectiveness. In some cases it appears to have had a profound effect on the targeted organization, sometimes even causing it to collapse, while in others the effect has been minimal or at best transitory. This contradictory evidence has made it difficult not only to evaluate in advance how much effort should be put into leadership targeting, but also what the appropriate benchmark for success should be. Is the goal to completely dismantle the targeted organization or merely to degrade its capabilities? The former is a much more ambitious goal but if possible would seem to be worth a significant resource investment. The latter, while useful, would seem to merit much less investment.

Despite this contradictory data, one widely accepted hypothesis is that hierarchical, centralized organizations are more susceptible to leadership targeting. Insurgent/terrorist organizations have, it is argued, therefore become much less hierarchical and centralized to cope with this vulnerability. The image that has emerged, particularly from the early part of the war in Iraq following the 2003 invasion, is of a loose constellation of cells that constitute a robust self-organizing network.[13]

At the same time, other scholars have attempted to move beyond the anecdotal with quantitative methods. Jenna Jordan, for example, uses quantitative methods to demonstrate, among other things, that larger and older organizations are much less susceptible to leadership targeting than smaller, younger organizations. She argues that this is because age and size both correlate with the ability of organizations to develop more complex, resilient structures and stable relationships between organizational members and components.[14]

Yet her description of the mechanism by which age and size make organizations resistant to leadership targeting indicates that these are proxy variables. There is nothing inherent in size or age that

[13] See John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2001); Bruce Hoffman, "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq," (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2004); and Daniel Kimmage and Kathleen Ridolfo, "Iraq's Networked Insurgents," *Foreign Policy*, November/December 2007. Frankel makes a similar argument about decentralization.
[14] Jordan, pp. 734-744.

immunizes organizations. Rather these two variables might make it more likely that an organization will develop complex structures and stable relationships that are difficult to affect with leadership targeting.

It would therefore be ideal to isolate the actual variable of interest, in this case the level of complex structures and stable relationships, rather than probabilistic proxies. Some young, small organizations may nonetheless have complex organizations and stable relationships, while some large, old organizations may not. The ability to identify the vulnerability of organizations to leadership targeting therefore is critically dependent on identifying the level of complex structure and stable relationships rather than merely relying on the proxies of age and size. However, exploring the organizational patterns of clandestine organizations can be difficult.

Yet clandestine organizations are not entirely opaque, particularly when engaged by a powerful state security apparatus. Interrogation of captured or surrendered members and the capture of documents along with human and signals intelligence collection can be coupled with dedicated analysis to produce substantial insight into clandestine organizations. Some of this insight often is made available to the public, either by policy choice or by insider leak. Moreover, interviews and field research along with publically available documents can also provide a view inside the workings of insurgent and terrorist organizations. Combining these sources and methods can produce reasonably detailed pictures of the structure (or lack thereof) of these groups. This method of relying on primary or quasi-primary sources will be exploited to directly examine the variable of interest, the existence of robust organizational structures (hereafter referred to as the institutionalization of an organization).

In addition, this approach allows for examining more than just leadership targeting against the very top of insurgent organizations, a limitation in many studies of the subject. This is important as a substantial portion of leadership targeting against insurgent/terrorist organization has been against mid-level leaders, particularly those with specialized skills. Israeli efforts, for example, have often been directed against skilled bomb-makers who, while important, are not at the top of their organizations.[15] It would be ideal to examine evidence on both senior and mid-level leadership targeting. In addition, it would be useful to examine other sorts of non-state armed organizations, such as militias. These groups are not only important to some counter-terrorism and counterinsurgency efforts but also provide additional data points for hypothesis testing.

The next section presents an argument that the key variable of interest for leadership targeting is the level of institutionalization of the organization. This hypothesis contradicts the existing conventional

[15] Byman, "Do Targeted Killings Work?"

wisdom about hierarchy. Rather than being vulnerable to decapitation, hierarchical groups that are well-institutionalized are extraordinarily resistant to leadership targeting, both at the senior and middle levels.

The Importance of Institutionalization

In combat, whether conventional or not, all organizations lose leadership at various levels. On the Eastern Front in World War II, for example, the German Army suffered massive losses among its officer corps. Omer Bartov estimates that from May 1942 to May 1945 the elite Grossdeutschland Division suffered casualties among its officers equivalent to three or four times its initial complement.[16] In other words, on average each leader in the division had to be replaced three or four times over a three year period.

Yet even this understates the scale and speed of leadership casualties among the division's front-line combat units. The division's Sixth Grenadier Company had 10 different leaders from July 26 to September 5, 1943. During the course of fighting on March 8-9, 1944, the company had three different commanders.[17] In November 1942, the 2nd Battalion of the division's 2nd Infantry Regiment "lost its commander, adjutant, as well as all company and platoon commanders in the course of one single Russian artillery barrage which lasted only twenty minutes."[18] Despite these ferocious casualties, the Grossdeutschland Division was able to continually replace leaders and remained a coherent and effective combat unit, serving as a mobile reserve for the Eastern Front until almost the end of the war.[19]

This phenomenon is not limited to elite German units. In the June 6, 1944 Normandy landings, some U.S. forces suffered rapid and massive leadership casualties. For example, an official U.S. Army history describes the experience at Omaha Beach of Company A of the 116th Infantry Regiment: "…every officer of the company, including Capt. Taylor N. Fellers, was a casualty, and most of the sergeants were killed or wounded… Fifteen minutes after landing, Company A was out of action for the day."[20] Yet less than a month later, Company A of the 116th was back in front-line combat around St. Lo. In the fighting there, it once again lost all of its officers yet remained combat effective under the command of the company first sergeant.[21]

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[16] Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front, 1941-45: German Troops and the Barbarisation of Warfare* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 16.
[17] Ibid., p. 17.
[18] Ibid., p. 17.
[19] For an overview of the division's operations, see James Lucas, *Germany's Elite Panzer Force: Grossdeutschland* (London: Macdonald and Jane's, 1978).
[20] *Omaha Beachhead (6 June-13 June 1944)* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1989), pp. 45-47.
[21] *St-Lo (7 July - 19 July 1944*), (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1994), p. 108.

What explains the ability of these units to remain combat effective despite repeated and severe loss of leadership? The answer is institutionalization of the organization according to Weberian rational-bureaucratic authority.[22] In this mode of organization it is the organization that gives authority to leaders, rather than some characteristic intrinsic to the leader (such as descent from a traditional lineage or personal charisma). This institutionalization ensured that no specific leader was critical to the functioning of the organization, so the loss of any given leader, while disruptive, did not permanently impair the unit. Further, these units could efficiently and effectively replace its lost leaders, minimizing (though not eliminating) even the disruptive effects of these casualties.[23]

Institutionalization based on rational-bureaucratic authority in this context requires three elements. The first is the existence of hierarchy in the organization. Hierarchy ensures that there are clear lines of succession following the death (or incapacitation) of a leader. For example, a military officer would be replaced by his deputy or executive officer. Hierarchy also allows any lack of clarity about succession (for example if all officers in a unit have been killed) to be readily adjudicated from above, either by sending replacements from another part of the organization or by field promotion of a unit member. Authority and position in the organization must derive from this hierarchy and not from some other attribute of a given leader (while acknowledging that specific leadership characteristics may nonetheless influence how effective any given leader is).[24] A common military aphorism expressing this attribute of institutionalization is "salute the uniform, not the man."

The second attribute is functional specialization. Specialization, in addition to making the overall organization function more efficiently, helps leadership replacement in two ways. First, when a leader with a particular set of skills (e.g. knowledge of explosives) is killed, there is a readily identifiable pool of replacements. Second, and more importantly, is the existence of a specialized personnel management component. This component, if well-institutionalized, maintains records on all leadership personnel, enabling them to be tracked and if necessary moved from one part of the organization to another in order to make up for leadership losses.[25]

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[22] Max Weber, *The Theory of Economic and Social Organization* (New York: Free Press, 1964).
[23] On the institution for replacing lost German Army officers, see William S. Dunn, *Heroes or Traitors: The German Replacement Army, the July Plot, and Adolf Hitler* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), pp. 1-14. On U.S. Army officer replacement in World War II, see William Keast, "The Procurement and Branch Distribution of Officers," (Washington, D.C.: Army Ground Forces, 1945).
[24] See Weber, *The Theory of Economic and Social Organization* and Peter Blau, "The Hierarchy of Authority in Organizations," *The American Journal of Sociology*, v.73 n.4 (January 1968)
[25] See, for example, discussion in Sinno, pp. 40-42.

The third attribute is the existence of bureaucratic processes and standard operating procedures in the organization. These processes provide a clear and consistent process for conducting the organization's activities, including personnel management. All parts of the organization will therefore conduct operations, including the replacement of leadership, in an at least broadly similar manner.[26]

These three attributes allow the organization to routinely and smoothly replace lost leaders. This process is so normal and routine in conventional military organizations, as in the examples noted earlier, that it is simply taken for granted. Yet it is also applicable to other organizations such as insurgent groups or anti-insurgent militias.

For example, the Viet Cong insurgency in South Vietnam possessed all three attributes to a very high degree. The Viet Cong had multiple levels of hierarchy from the senior leadership of what the U.S. military referred to as the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN) down to individual unit commanders. It had functional specialization, including cadres for logistics, intelligence, recruitment, and the like. Finally, the Viet Cong were consummate bureaucrats, as evidenced by the number of documents captured from them. They produced lessons learned reports, doctrinal manuals, and personnel records. This ensured that despite extensive leadership casualties, including those resulting from the leadership targeting campaign embodied in the Phoenix Program, the insurgency was able to replace leaders and avoided collapse for an extended period.[27]

In contrast, poorly institutionalized organizations have serious trouble when leadership at any level is removed. These organizations struggle when leaders are removed as they have no clear successors. Leadership struggles should be expected as rival claimants jockey for position. Sometimes these struggles will turn violent, leading to factional warfare and the potential for organizational disintegration. Other times the struggles will remain non-violent, but nonetheless reduce organizational efficiency, effectiveness, and cohesion as lower ranking members try to determine who to follow. This can then lead to defection and organizational decay and splintering. If a sufficient number of leaders are killed in a poorly institutionalized, it can simply collapse.

An example of this is the experience of the Tamil Elam Liberation Organization (TELO). This group was one of several Tamil insurgent organizations in the 1970s, but one marked by "weak organizational

[26] See, for examples, discussion in James Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It* (New York: Basic Books, 1991) pp. 221-223.

[27] See Rosenau and Long; Anderson, Arnsten, and Averch; Douglas Pike, *Viet Cong: The Organization and Techniques of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1966); and David Elliott, *Revolution and Social Change in the Mekong Delta 1930-1975* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2003). For an example and analysis of Viet Cong records that show leadership replacement, see David Elliott, *Documents of an Elite Viet Cong Delta Unit: The Demolition Platoon of the 514th Battalion* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1969).

structure" and a "lack of institutionalization." Indeed, the organization left so few known records that it is unclear even when the group was founded. Given this lack of institutionalization it is unsurprising that the arrest of its two key leaders in 1981 effectively crippled the organization.[28]

However, TELO would get a second chance when India decided to begin supporting Tamil militancy in 1983. A vast influx of arms, training, and money empowered the nearly moribund organization, giving it substantial lethal capability. However, it remained poorly institutionalized and, following internal clashes that killed an important leader, the organization was essentially wiped out almost overnight in a *coup de main* by a rival insurgent group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE, also known as the Tamil Tigers). TELO's leadership was "killed… driven into exile, or forced out of militancy." TELO never recovered as a combat organization, fading into relative obscurity as a political front for the victorious LTTE.[29]

If the proposed hypothesis is correct, some form of succession struggle after leaders are killed should always be observed in poorly institutionalized groups. However, sometimes even the poorly institutionalized can survive the loss of key leaders. Factional fighting resulting from succession crises can be won by one of the factions in a speedy manner before the organization falls apart, or the factions can reconcile. The loss of leadership will likely weaken a poorly institutionalized organization but, absent exploitation such as the Tamil Tigers' assault on TELO, may not collapse it.

An example of this factional fighting without collapse is the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), also known as the Pakistani Taliban. A poorly institutionalized collection of tribal fighters and Islamic militants formed in 2007 in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) it was led until August 2009 by the charismatic Baitullah Mehsud. His death in an American drone strike provoked a succession crisis between his brother Hakimullah and another TTP commander Wali-ur-Rehman. This crisis allegedly escalated to armed conflict at a meeting to choose Baitullah's successor. Days later another commander, Faqir Muhammad, also claimed leadership of TTP. The organization seemed set to unravel in factional fighting but in some fashion that remains opaque Hakimullah Mehsud and the other two challengers reconciled and Hakimullah was named leader of the TTP.[30] Yet fault lines remain within the poorly-

[28] Staniland, pp. 423-424.
[29] I*bid*., pp. 438-441, 453-454; quotation from p. 454.
[30] C. Christine Fair, "The Militant Challenge in Pakistan," (Seattle, WA: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2011); Ismail Khan and Lydia Polgreen, "New Leader of Pakistan's Taliban Is Named, Though Officials Believe He Is Dead," *New York Times*, August 22, 2009; Salman Masood, "Taliban in Pakistan Confirm That Their Leader Is Dead," *New York Times*, August 26, 2009; and author interviews in Islamabad, August 2009. Faqir Mohammed is a leader in Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM), a Pakistani militant group allied with TTP.

institutionalized organization, as evinced by the June 2011 defection of Fazal Saeed, a key leader in the Kurram Agency.[31]

If the hypothesis above is correct, it raises the question of the sources of institutionalization in insurgent organizations. Is institutionalization endogenous to some other variable such as resource wealth, political popularity, or mobilizing ideology? The examples noted above suggest not, as these variables are present in cases of both well-institutionalized and poorly institutionalized groups. Resources and training from an external sponsor did not institutionalize TELO. Nor did Islamic ideology institutionalize TTP. Yet resources supplied to the Viet Cong by North Vietnam did not inhibit institutionalization. These possible endogenous explanations will be examined in subsequent sections on groups in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Insurgent and anti-insurgent organizations are not equally institutionalized, and therefore variation in the effects of the loss of leadership should be expected. This leads to a simple testable hypothesis. Organizations that are well-institutionalized should be expected to suffer only temporary disruption from losing leadership, while groups that are poorly institutionalized should very frequently be crippled or even collapse when subjected to a leadership targeting campaign.

Evaluating institutionalization can be difficult, particularly for clandestine organizations. To simplify, coding will be binary, with each of the three attributes coded as present or absent. This is clearly an abstraction, as these attributes are actually continuous rather than binary. However, this abstraction should be valid for at least a plausibility probe of the hypothesis.

Hierarchy is coded based on the presence of clear chains of command and reporting derived from position in the organization rather than personal charisma and/or traditional authority. Functional specialization is coded based on the presence or absence of specialized sub-units (such as those focused on recruitment or finance) and/or a division organization of labor among leaders along functional lines (e.g. the modern military staff system with officers focused on personnel, intelligence, operations, logistics, etc.).[32] Bureaucratic process is coded based on the presence or absence of record-keeping, standard operating procedure, along with the creation and distribution of codes of conduct or lessons learned.

An organization where all three attributes are present is coded as well-institutionalized; all others are coded as poorly institutionalized. Again this is an abstraction as a group could have some measure of

[31] Daud Khattak, "The Significance of Fazal Saeed's Defection from the Pakistani Taliban," *CTC Sentinel*, v.4 n.7 (July 2011).

[32] For an overview of the staff system see James Hittle, *Military Staff: Its History and Development* (Harrisburg, PA: The Military Service Publishing Company, 1949) and Martin Van Creveld, *Command in War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).

one or two of the characteristics and would thus be somewhere between well-institutionalized and poorly institutionalized. Yet this abstraction should be adequate to begin exploring the available evidence.

The next two sections present evidence testing this simple hypothesis. This will take the form of comparative examination of different organizations that experienced (or are experiencing) leadership targeting in Iraq and Afghanistan. This method of focused, structured comparison allows for an exploration of the effects of leadership targeting on different types of organizations, with variation based on both level of institutionalization (well-institutionalized v. poorly institutionalized) and on the type of organization (insurgent/terrorist v. counterinsurgent/counterterrorist).[33]

In order to control (to the extent possible) for variation both within the two countries and across them, the majority of data will be drawn from two provinces that have broadly similar characteristics: Iraq's Anbar province and Afghanistan's Kandahar province. In both Anbar and Kandahar, insurgencies emerged within a few months of the defeat of Ba'ath and Taliban regular forces respectively. Both were (or are) strongholds of insurgent activity and shared a border with a neighbor that provided at least some degree of sanctuary to insurgents. (Syria and Pakistan respectively) Both have major rivers flowing through them (Euphrates and Arghandab respectively), with the majority of the population living near these two rivers, and a substantial urban population. Society in both is almost entirely Sunni Muslim and is tribal.[34]

Targeting Leaders in Iraq

In Anbar, an insurgency began in a sporadic and disorganized way in the summer of 2003 but gathered strength in late 2003 and early 2004.[35] The insurgency was divided into two broad categories of insurgent: the religious extremist and the nationalist, though an individual could be both and belong to more

[33] See discussion in Alexander George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), pp. 67-72.

[34] On Islamic tribal society generally, see Albert Hourani, "Conclusion: Tribes and States in Islamic History," in Philip Khoury and Joseph Kostiner eds., *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East* (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1990). On the tribes in Iraq post-1958, see Hosham Dawood, "The 'Stateization' of the Tribe and the Tribalization of the State: the Case of Iraq" and Faleh Jabar, "Sheikhs and Ideologues: Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Tribes Under Patrimonial Totalitarianism in Iraq, 1968–1998," both in Faleh Jabar and Hosham Dawood, eds., *Tribes and Power: Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Middle East* (London: Saqi Books, 2003) and Amatzia Baram, "Neo-tribalism in Iraq: Saddam Hussein's Tribal Policies, 1991–1996," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, v.29 n.1 (February 1997). On Afghanistan see David Edwards, *Before Taliban: Genealogies of the Afghan Jihad* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002) and Gilles Dorronsoro, "The Taliban's Winning Strategy in Afghanistan," (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2009), pp. 25-27. Kandahar does have scattered pockets of Shiite Hazara, as around the shrine to Shah Agha Maqsoud in the village of Darvishan. Similarly there is a pocket of Shia Arabs in the southern Anbar village of Nukhayb.

[35] This section is, in addition to specific footnotes, based on field research in Iraq, August 2007-August 2008 and December 2009.

than one group. A variety of criminal entrepreneurs were also operating in Anbar and were willing to aid the insurgents in exchange for money, protection, or other quid pro quo benefits.[36]

The extremists were both domestic and foreign. Domestically, many of the extremists were deeply conservative Sunni imams who had been empowered during the Ba'ath regime's Islamization campaign in the 1990s. Perhaps the premiere example of the domestic religious extremist in Anbar in this period was Sheikh Abdullah al-Janabi, imam of the Saad bin Abi Wakkas Mosque in Fallujah. In this period he came to head an umbrella organization of various smaller extremist groups/cells known as the Fallujah Shura Council (FSC). Fallujah, a very religious city, was a natural home for extremists and also provided ready access to both the national capital of Baghdad and the provincial capital of Ramadi.[37]

The exemplar for the foreign extremists was Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the *nom de guerre* of a Jordanian who had gone to Afghanistan to join the mujahedin in 1989. Between 1989 and 2001 he had drifted between various extremist groups around the Middle East and was imprisoned and released by the Jordanians. In 2002 he allegedly had become affiliated with Ansar al-Islam, a mostly Kurdish Sunni extremist group in northeastern Iraq. He also is alleged to have had ties to Al Qaeda, the exact nature of which remain unclear.[38] Following the invasion of Iraq, Zarqawi used his connections to form an organization called the Group for Monotheism and Holy War (generally known by its Arabic acronym JTJ) containing both foreign and domestic extremists. Zarqawi migrated to Anbar in this period, operating in the area of Fallujah and Ramadi.[39]

The nationalist insurgents were often former military and intelligence officers of the Ba'ath regime mixed with more moderate (i.e. non-Salafi) Islamists. An example of the former officer type of nationalist was Staff Major General Kadhim Muhammad Faris al-Fahadawi, a former Iraqi Army Special Forces and Republican Guard commander. Faris had also been one of the chief organizers of the Saddam Fedayeen, a Ba'ath paramilitary organization, so he had a huge set of connections and knowledge that enabled him to lead operations against U.S. forces.[40] An example of the moderate Islamist/nationalist category was

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[36] See Toby Dodge, *Iraq's Future: The Aftermath of Regime Change*, Adelphi Paper n. 372 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2005) and Phil Williams, *Criminals, Militias, and Insurgents: Organized Crime in Iraq* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2009).

[37] "Two Locals Headed Fallujah Insurgency," *Associated Press*, November 24, 2004 and Carter Malkasian, "Signaling Resolve, Democratization, and the First Battle of Fallujah," *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, v.29 n.3 (June 2006). The FSC is sometimes referred to as the Mujahedin Shura Council, but this is also the name of a later Anbar-wide umbrella organization so FSC is used for clarity.

[38] Scott Petersen, "The Rise and Fall of Ansar al-Islam," *Christian Science Monitor*, October 16, 2003.

[39] Monte Morin, "Who's Your Enemy?" *Stars and Stripes*, June 3, 2007.

[40] Dexter Filkins, "A U.S. General Speeds the Shift in an Iraqi City," *New York Times*, November 18, 2003 and author conversations in Iraq, June and August 2008.

Muhammad Mahmud Latif al-Fahadawi (widely referred to as MML), an Islamic scholar who served as a political organizer and spiritual guide for nationalist groups such as the 1920 Revolution Brigade (1920RB).[41] Both men generally operated in Ramadi and its environs.

In this initial period 2003-2004, none of the groups noted above was well-institutionalized. The FSC in Fallujah, for example, relied heavily on the charismatic leadership of Abdullah al-Janabi. The same was true of many of the nationalists, such as those led by Kadhim Faris, and the various criminal gangs of Anbar. Even Zarqawi's JTJ was nascent in terms of institutionalization in this period. In terms of the three attributes, at best the groups appear to have had hierarchy and some degree of specialization, with no bureaucratization or standard operating procedure.

The best evidence for this lack of institutionalization is the paucity or absence of records on any of these groups in this period. It is possible that some records exist and have not been captured/discovered or that have been captured but not made publicly available. However, given the effort detailed below to target insurgent leaders it seems implausible that extensive insurgent records existed without Coalition forces finding at least some of them. It is also unlikely that given the interest in Iraq's insurgency that at least the existence of these records would not be publicly known.[42]

By early 2004 no group was hegemonic within the burgeoning insurgency and there was considerable, if loose, cooperation between groups. This began to change in April 2004 when the public mutilation of security contractors energized the U.S. military to take action in Fallujah.[43] However, tough insurgent resistance in the urban environment meant that the city was being destroyed and civilians killed so this assault was called off. In October 2004, Zarqawi declared his allegiance to Al Qaeda and renamed JTJ "Al Qaeda in Iraq" (AQI).[44] Three of the major insurgent groups of Anbar as of October 2004 are summarized in the table below. Note that all three had been in existence eighteen months or less.

Group	**Leader Origin**	**Ideology**	**Institutionalization**	**Predicted Effect Of Leadership Targeting**

[41] On MML, see Gianni Marizza, *Iraq dalla A alla Z* (*Iraq from A to Z*), March 2006, pp. 76 and 260; "State of the Insurgency in al-Anbar," I MEF G2 intelligence report, August 17, 2006 (online at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/02/AR2007020201197.html); and "AQI Situation Report," declassified, translated internal AQI document (online at http://www.ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/IZ-060316-01-Trans.pdf).

[42] Extensive conversations with U.S. military and intelligence community personnel familiar with Iraq from 2006-2010 have not produced contrary opinion, though again the issue may be classification rather than lack of evidence.

[43] See Malkasian, "Signaling Resolve."

[44] This is also referred to as AQIZ or by its Arabic acronym QJBR. The JTJ name was also still used by some.

Fallujah Shura Council	Domestic	Salafi Islam	Poor	Infighting or collapse
Al Qaeda in Iraq	Foreign	Salafi Islam	Good	Minimal disruption
1920 Revolution Brigade	Domestic	Iraqi Sunni nationalism	Poor	Infighting or collapse

Table 1: Major Insurgent Anbar Insurgent Groups, October 2004

In November 2004 the U.S. military launched another assault on Fallujah. They were opposed by the FSC led by Abdullah al-Janabi, AQI led by Zarqawi associate Omar Hadid, and a variety of smaller groups who were all heavily entrenched.[45] The leadership of the 1920 Revolution Brigade appears to have been in Ramadi, though it had some members in and around Fallujah. Thus it would not be substantially affected by the battles in Fallujah. After intense urban combat that devastated the city, the insurgents were forced out after taking massive casualties. Abdullah al-Janabi fled, apparently to Syria. AQI operations shifted west along the Euphrates, increasingly dominating the towns and villages along the river.[46]

This provides the first data point on the effects of leadership targeting in Anbar. With Abdullah al-Janabi out of the country and casualties in its mid-level leadership, the FSC and many of its smaller components essentially ceased to exist. Given that it was a young organization, highly dependent on a single charismatic leader, and was poorly institutionalized, this is as predicted by existing hypotheses.

In contrast, by November 2004 AQI had at least begun to institutionalize. While the exact level of AQI institutionalization in November 2004 is unclear, available evidence indicates that it was well-institutionalized by the beginning of 2005. This enabled it to not only survive the loss of leaders like Omar Hadid but to actually grow stronger by absorbing the remnants of poorly institutionalized organizations such as the FSC.

Note that this data point also indicates that Islamist ideology did not automatically produce group cohesion or institutionalization. Both the FSC and AQI were variants of the fundamentalist Salafi brand of Islam, yet the former was poorly institutionalized and collapsed with the loss of leaders while the latter only

[45] See Malkasian, "Signaling Resolve," and Hannah Allam, "Fallujah's Real Boss: Omar the Electrician," *Knight Ridder Newspapers*, November 22, 2004. Hadid officially led the Black Banner Brigade, an AQI affiliate.
[46] See Malkasian, "Signaling Resolve," and Bing West, *No True Glory: A Frontline Account of the Battle for Fallujah* (New York: Bantam, 2005).

grew stronger after the battle of Fallujah. Institutionalization does not appear to be endogenous to Islamic ideology.

Nor does institutionalization appear to be endogenous to having deep roots in local social networks. Abdullah Janabi was from Fallujah where he had ties to both tribal networks (Janabi being a tribe of Anbar) and religious networks from his prominent mosque. If any organization had deep local ties it was the FSC, yet it was not well institutionalized and collapsed when it lost leaders. In contrast, Zarqawi was a foreigner, with neither tribal ties nor religious ties in Fallujah. AQI's main commander in Fallujah, Omar Hadid, was from Fallujah but is reported to have been absent from Fallujah since the mid-1990s.[47]

The best available evidence on AQI's institutionalization comes from captured records.[48] The mere existence of records that could be captured is strong prima facie evidence for judging a group to have, at a minimum, bureaucracy and standard operating procedures. However, AQI records provide strong evidence that the organization had a high degree of hierarchy, functional specialization, and bureaucracy.

At the unclassified level there are three main sets of captured AQI records that provide detailed insight into its level of institutionalization. The first is the so-called "Travelstar" documents, seized in eastern Anbar from the hard drive of Ala Daham Hanush in 2007. These records detail AQI provincial administration in Anbar 2005-2006, particularly its financial management. The second is a set of captured records from Tuzliyah in western Anbar. Found in January 2007, these records describe AQI administration for the western district of Anbar (i.e. the administrative level just below that of the province) from September to December 2006.[49] The final set is the Sinjar documents, seized in Sinjar (in Ninewa province, north of Anbar) in 2007. These records, while not specific to Anbar, do provide additional insight into AQI institutionalization, particularly in terms of managing activity along and across the Syria-Iraq border.[50]

[47] Allam, "Fallujah's Real Boss."
[48] Note that as with all organizational documents captured records must be evaluated in overall context. Activities and organizational patterns described in some documents may be more aspirational than actual.
[49] The Travelstar and Tuzliyah documents are extensively analyzed in Benjamin Bahney, et. al. *An Economic Analysis of the Financial Records of al-Qa'ida in Iraq* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2010). See pp. 29-30 and Appendix A for discussion of where and how the records were found.
[50] The Sinjar documents are extensively analyzed in Brian Fishman, ed. *Bombers, Bank Accounts, and Bleedout: Al Qaida's Road In and Out of Iraq*, (West Point, NY: Center for Combating Terrorism, 2008). See p. 13 for discussion of where and how the records were found. On AQI organization, see particularly the chapters by Jacob Shapiro, "Bureaucratic Terrorists: Al Qaida in Iraq's Management and Finances," and Anonymous, "Smuggling, Syria, and Spending."

In terms of hierarchy, the documents depict AQI as consisting of multiple layers of hierarchy, descending from the national leadership to the province to districts or sectors to sub-sectors. A RAND Corporation analysis of the first two sets of documents succinctly notes:

> AQI's financial documents depict a hierarchical organization with a centrally controlled bureaucracy that directly funded and influenced the operations of the group's subsidiary "sectors" of Anbar…. In these documents, a provincial general emir and an administrative emir served as key decisionmakers for the allocation of finances between the sectors, directing funds to and collecting revenues from each. AQI divided Anbar into six geographic sectors, each of which had a sector administrator who divided his area into distinct subunits or subsectors. Each subsector then subsumed even smaller operational units, such as "battalions," "brigades," or "groups," according to the Travelstar documents.[51]

In terms of functional specialization, the documents are equally clear that AQI had a variety of specialized subunits. The RAND analysis of the first two sets of documents describes this specialization:

> AQI structured its bureaucracy similarly at the provincial and sector levels. Both the provincial and western Anbar units had administrative emirs who represented and accounted for each sector's administrative system, and they both had bureaucratic sections (with a specific division of labor), namely: "movement and maintenance," "legal," "military," "security," "medical," "spoils," and "media…" The Administrative Council of AQI in Anbar oversaw all functional departments, which include security, legal, medical, mail, media, prisoners, support battalion, and military—each of which was associated with a named individual in the documents. Similarly, each sector had its own set of functional departments, each associated with a specific individual emir.[52]

In terms of bureaucracy and standard operating procedure, the documents show AQI was heavily bureaucratized. RAND analysis of the first two sets of documents notes that "[o]ver time, both the individual appointed to be administrative emir of AQI's provincial administration and the administrative emir of the western sector changed in response to events, but this change in personnel produced only slight changes in accounting procedures in either case. This may indicate strictly defined and enforced accounting rules in the organization."[53] Further, the records they kept were highly detailed, showing both the source of funds (car sales, stolen goods, etc.) and the destination (security, media, etc.).[54]

Analysis of the Sinjar records, though not Anbar specific, produces similar findings. Jacob Shapiro notes that "…the Sinjar Organization continued to use standardized forms, keeping lists of operatives and equipment, demanding regular reports from lower-level units, and sending intra-organizational memoranda on everything from recommendations for a movie memorializing Abu Musab al-Zarqawi to what seems to

[51] Bahney, et. al., p. 31.
[52] Bahney, et. al., pp. 32-33.
[53] Ibid., p. 33.
[54] Ibid., pp. 34-43.

be a meeting agenda with a proposed organizational chart to be discussed."[55] Another assessment of the Sinjar documents describes the cross-border operations of AQI as "well-organized and proficient. It possesses the ability to maintain a regular schedule of border transits and can absorb considerable variations in the numbers of travelers being moved."[56]

In addition to the documentary evidence, this depiction of AQI as well institutionalized is supported by interviews with Iraqis, including Iraqi security forces. For example in an interview with U.S. military historians Anbar native and police chief Major General Tariq Yusif al-Thiyabi described AQI organization in this period:

> Each emir was given control over a certain area. For example, al-Jazeera [an area outside Ramadi] had an emir. Ramadi, there was an emir in charge of that area. Every emir had a group of people working under his control… Inside, the groups were subdivided into subgroups. There were people called security. They were the strongest people within the group. They were responsible for gathering information and executing people. There were groups within the cells that were administration, or management. They prepared the place and took care of the location. And there were people within the group that they called "the eyes." Their function was just to bring information.[57]

A former nationalist insurgent leader who subsequently began working with the U.S. and Iraqi military in Anbar supports Major General Tariq's depiction of AQI organization.[58]

Thus substantial evidence demonstrates that by 2005 AQI was, in contrast to most of its insurgent peers, a well-institutionalized organization. If the proposed hypothesis is correct, AQI should therefore prove extraordinarily resistant to leadership targeting. This was despite its relative youth (two years), demonstrating that organizational age is not always a determinant of institutionalization. Moreover, while AQI was becoming a large organization in this period this was not the source of its resilience. Instead it was AQI's institutionalization and resistance to leadership targeting that enabled its growth as it absorbed the remnants of groups that collapsed when they lost leadership in Fallujah and elsewhere.

AQI's resilience was put to the test by U.S. special operations forces beginning in early 2005. These units, principally drawn from the U.S. Joint Special Operations Command and operating as clandestine task forces, had previously been targeting AQI alongside other groups but in 2005 AQI became their primary target. In addition, 2005 saw a shift by these special operations forces from a heavy focus on

[55] Shapiro, "Bureaucratic Terrorists," in Fishman, ed., p. 77.
[56] Anonymous, "Smuggling, Syria, and Spending," in Fishman, ed., p. 97.
[57] Interview with Major General Tariq Yusif al-Thiyabi in Gary Montgomery and Timothy McWilliams, eds., *Al-Anbar Awakening, Volume II: Iraqi Perspectives* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University, 2009), p. 182.
[58] Author conversations in Iraq, June and August 2008.

targeting AQI's senior leadership to one that included mid-level leaders as well, such as the provincial and sector emirs noted in the Travelstar and Tuzliyah documents.[59]

While special operations efforts against AQI leadership spanned the entire country, Anbar was, in 2005, the organization's stronghold so much of the effort was directed there. Following the battles in Fallujah, AQI had moved west, spreading out along the Euphrates, eventually concentrating in the town of Al Qaim on the Syrian border. Throughout the spring and summer of 2005, U.S. special operations forces "mounted dozens of takedowns against suspected local players or middle managers in the guerilla organization."[60] Many of these "takedowns" (raids intended to kill or capture leaders) were conducted against determined and well-armed resistance, with special operations forces taking a number of casualties.[61] This resistance shows both AQI's potent military capability and that at least a large portion of the takedowns were not "false positives," that is individuals wrongly targeted as AQI leadership. In addition, the timing of the records indicates AQI's institutionalization clearly preceded the campaign against its leadership. This should ameliorate concerns about selection on the dependent variable as AQI's institutionalization preceded the special operations campaign focusing on the group.

The effect of the leadership targeting effort was minimal in both Anbar and nationally as AQI continued to increase in capability. Its growing power made AQI less willing to compromise; rather than partnering with nationalists, tribal smugglers and other criminals, it sought to dictate terms to them. The nationalists and tribesmen were having second thoughts about AQI as well. Many of the nationalists in this period were beginning to consider participation in the political process, as the alternative seemed to be more battles like Fallujah to no gain. Tribesmen were increasingly angry as AQI took over their lucrative grey and black market activities.[62] This would have consequences in the future, as discussed below, but by and large AQI grew increasingly powerful in Anbar even as it lost mid-level and senior leaders.

The special operations campaign against AQI leadership expanded again in early 2006. First, British special operations forces, previously limited in their involvement in the campaign, became a major component. Second, additional U.S. assets were provided to the task forces. Third, additional efforts were made to expand the targeting of mid-level leaders through closer cooperation with conventional military

[59] Urban, pp. 71-80. See also Sean Naylor, "SpecOps Unit Nearly Nabs Zarqawi," *Army Times*, April 28, 2006. On the targeting methodology used by special operations forces, see Flynn, et. al., "Employing ISR;" Lamb and Munsing; and Jon Lindsay, "Information Friction: Information Technology and Military Performance," chapters 6 and 7 (Dissertation, MIT Political Science, 2011).

[60] Urban, p. 81.

[61] Urban, pp. 81 and 85-86. Author conversations with special operations personnel deployed in western Anbar in late 2004 and early 2005 confirm Urban's account.

[62] Austin Long, "The Anbar Awakening," *Survival* v.50 n.2 (March/April 2008) and John A. McCary, "The Anbar Awakening: An Alliance of Incentives," *The Washington Quarterly* v.32 n.1 (January 2009).

units (termed "battlespace owners").[63] Between January 2005 and May 2006, according to a briefing by a U.S. spokesman, 161 AQI leaders were killed or detained (many though not all in Anbar).[64]

In June 2006, the special operations campaign netted its biggest success. Intelligence from both human and technical sources allowed for the targeting of Zarqawi, who was killed by an airstrike. The result was, as predicted by the hypothesis, minimal. Zarqawi was replaced by Abu Ayyub al-Masri and Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, with AQI operations experiencing minimal disruption.[65]

The effect in Anbar of the campaign also continued to be minimal, as AQI grew in strength over the summer of 2006. A Marine intelligence assessment in August 2006 starkly depicted the situation: "AQI is the dominant organization of influence in al-Anbar, surpassing nationalist insurgents, the Iraqi Government, and MNF in its ability to control the day-to-day life of the average Sunni. Transitioning to a primarily Iraqi organization in late 2004, AQI has become an integral part of the social fabric of western Iraq."[66]

Part of what had allowed AQI to become "the dominant organization" in Anbar was its own deliberate leadership targeting campaign. Directed against poorly institutionalized nationalist insurgents and tribal groups, this campaign had dramatic effects, in contrast to U.S. and British efforts against AQI. The first open break between AQI and Anbaris came around Al Qaim on the Syrian border in early 2005. Backed by the Albu Nimr, the Albu Mahal tribe from the area formed a paramilitary unit known as the Hamza Brigade. Former governor Faisal al-Gaoud sought to establish a partnership between the Hamza Brigade and the U.S. military but was initially unsuccessful. A May 2005 U.S. offensive damaged the city and killed members of the Hamza Brigade, ending attempts at cooperation for several months. By September 2005, the Hamza Brigade, facing ferocious AQI attacks on its members, including its leaders, had been driven out of Al Qaim. It appears that only retreating to the remote town of Akashat prevented the group's collapse.[67]

Around Ramadi, others began attempting to fight AQI. Sheikh Abdul Sattar Bezia al-Rishawi, a smuggler, gathered some tribal fighters but they were crushed by the superior organization of AQI led in Ramadi by the ferocious Bassim Muhammad al-Fahadawi, commonly known by the *kunya* Abu Khattab. Mohammed Mahmoud Latif (MML) and his 1920 Revolution along with other nationalists also decided to

[63] Urban, pp. 116-120.
[64] Major General Rick Lynch, Weekly Multi-National Force Iraq press briefing, May 4, 2006.
[65] Flynn, et. al. and Tim Arango, "Top Qaeda Leaders in Iraq Reported Killed in Raid," *New York Times*, April 19, 2010.
[66] "State of the Insurgency in al-Anbar," p. 1.
[67] Ellen Nickmeyer and Jonathan Finer, "Insurgents Assert Control Over Town Near Syrian Border," *Washington Post*, September 6, 2005; Carter Malkasian, "A Thin Blue Line in the Sand," *Democracy,* n.5, (Summer 2007); Carter Malkasian, "Did the Coalition Need More Forces in Iraq?" *Joint Forces Quarterly,* n.46 (Summer 2007); and author discussions in Iraq, April 2008.

turn against AQI at some point during mid- to late 2005. These nationalists, operating under a new umbrella organization called the Anbar People's Council (APC), fought against AQI and also sought to help the U.S. military protect the elections for the new national government in December 2005.[68] The table below summarizes these anti-AQI groups.

The August 2006 Marine Corps intelligence assessment detailed AQI efforts against the leadership of these newly created and poorly institutionalized groups: "AQI effectively has eliminated, subsumed, marginalized or co-opted all nationalist insurgent groups in al-Anbar. This very deliberate AQI campaign against rival insurgent groups began shortly after national elections in December 2005… AQI destroyed the Anbar People's Council of Mohammed Mahmoud Latif through a highly efficient and comprehensive assassination campaign, thereby eliminating the sole rival nexus of insurgent leadership in al-Anbar."[69]

Group	**Origin**	**Ideology**	**Institutionalization**	**Predicted Effect Of Leadership Targeting**
Hamza Brigade	Domestic	Tribal/criminal	Poor	Infighting or collapse
Anbar People's Council	Domestic	Iraqi Sunni nationalism	Poor	Infighting or collapse
Rishawi militia	Domestic	Tribalism/criminal	Poor	Infighting or collapse

Table 2: Major Anbari Anti-Insurgent Groups, 2005

Under the direction of Abu Khattab, AQI targeted key personnel, including the well-respected Sheikh Nassir al-Fahadawi, the leader of both Abu Khattab and MML's tribe, in February 2006. Others were intimidated and cowed by these actions, as noted by a captured AQI situation report.[70] MML himself was a target and apparently fled the country after nearly being killed. Other anti-AQI nationalists, possibly including remnants of the APC, formed the Anbar Revolutionaries (often known by its Arabic acronym TAA)

[68] See "State of Insurgency in al-Anbar;" "AQI Situation Report;" Toby Harnden, "US Army Admits Iraqis Outnumber Foreign Fighters as its Main Enemy," *Daily Telegraph*, December 3, 2005; and Multinational Force-Iraq Press Briefing, "Tearing Down al-Qaida in Iraq," December 2006.
[69] "State of the Insurgency in al-Anbar," p. 2.
[70] See "AQI Situation Report."

at about the same time. TAA used a combination of targeted killings and propaganda such as graffiti and leaflets in a campaign intended to weaken and discredit AQI. While this clandestine organization had some success with assassinations of AQI targets, apparently including Abu Khattab, it was simply not sufficient to reverse AQI's growing ascendancy.[71]

The difference in institutionalization between AQI and its rivals was crucial in this period. The Hamza Brigade was only saved from collapse by retreat beyond the reach of AQI (or at least to an area so marginal AQI did not care to dominate it). The death of Sheikh Nassir and the flight of MML collapsed the Anbar People's Council, which was highly dependent on the charismatic and traditional authority of those men.[72] At least for a year the tribal militia of Sheikh Sattar also disappeared, acquiescing to AQI dominance. In contrast, the death of Abu Khattab had little effect on AQI in Ramadi.

Each of these three organizations had deep roots in local social networks through tribal connections. Yet all three were poorly institutionalized. The tribal criminal motivation of both the Hamza Brigade and the Rishawi militia, which both had their roots in smuggling organizations, did not produce institutionalization nor did the Iraqi Sunni nationalism of the APC.

In addition, the various local oppositions by tribesmen and nationalist insurgents demonstrate that it was not AQI popularity that enabled its resilience. By 2006 AQI had alienated large segments of the population yet was so powerful due to its institutionalization that it could not be resisted. As the Marine Corps intelligence assessment of August 2006 noted "[a]lthough most al-Anbar Sunni dislike, resent, and distrust AQI, many increasingly see it as an inevitable part of daily life…"[73]

The "institutionalization gap" between AQI and groups seeking to resist it began to change in November 2005, when Faisal al-Gaoud and others successfully arranged a major partnership between the Hamza Brigade and U.S. forces. This partnership led to the launch of a major offensive around Al Qaim, which eventually drove AQI out and secured the town.[74] Part of this partnership was to provide training and institutionalization to the Hamza Brigade, which was renamed the Desert Protectors, a scout unit for U.S. and Iraqi military units.[75] Institutionalization, combined with the firepower and protection of tribal leadership

[71] See "State of Insurgency in al-Anbar;" "AQI Situation Report;" Multi-National Force-Iraq press briefing, "Tearing Down al-Qaida in Iraq," December 2006; "Iraqi Rebels Turn on Qaeda in Western City," *Reuters*, January 23, 2006; and Jonathan Finer and Ellen Nickmeyer, "Sunni Leaders Attacked in Iraq," *Washington Post*, August 19 2005.
[72] See interview with Major Alfred B. Connable in Timothy McWilliams and Kurtis Wheeler, eds., *Al-Anbar Awakening, Volume I: American Perspectives* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University, 2009), pp. 123-130.
[73] "State of Insurgency in al-Anbar."
[74] See Malkasian, "Did the U.S…," and John Ward Anderson, "U.S. Widens Offensive in Far Western Iraq," *Washington Post*, November 15, 2005.
[75] See "Operation STEEL CURTAIN Update," Multi-National Force Iraq press release, November 18, 2005.

provided by U.S. forces, began to make a substantial difference in the ability of the Desert Protectors to fight AQI.

The success around Al Qaim remained isolated until Sheikh Sattar and other tribal leaders around Ramadi once again sought to oppose AQI. They formed the Anbar (later Iraqi) Awakening (known by its Arabic acronym SAA, later SAI). This new organization appears to have absorbed TAA.[76] Under Sattar, SAI began cooperating with U.S. forces against AQI, which at this time dominated much of Ramadi.

However, as with the Hamza Brigade/Desert Protectors in Al Qaim, the combination of U.S. firepower and money with the tribal leaders' local knowledge rapidly began to reverse the situation. SAI affiliates and copy-cats began to appear in other parts of the province. Tribesmen either joined the police or were incorporated into quasi-official units known as Provincial Security Forces (PSF) or Emergency Response Units (ERU).[77] This incorporation into police or PSF/ERU units was important as it began a process of institutionalizing what were previously very poorly institutionalized forces.

This institutionalization was important, as AQI succeeded in assassinating Sheikh Sattar in September 2007.[78] In contrast to the summer of 2005, when AQI assassination of Sattar's mid-level leaders collapsed his militia, his death after a year of institutionalization produced minimal effect. His tribesmen, now in the police, continued to fight under the leadership of provincial chief of police Major General Tariq.[79]

By the end of 2007, Anbar was, if not secure, nonetheless radically safer, though AQI attempted a major offensive in Ramadi during August. This offensive was preempted when the insurgents were engaged at their assembly area on the outskirts of the city in what became known as the Battle of Donkey Island.[80] This demonstrated that AQI could, despite leadership targeting, still mount large scale coordinated attacks. In 2008, security in Anbar continued to improve as the number of police topped 20,000 in the province, creating a well-institutionalized security force that proved by and large to be resistant to AQI leadership attacks, which had previously been highly effective. Driven from major

[76] McCary, "Anbar Awakening;" Malkasian, "Thin Blue Line;" Greg Jaffe, "Tribal Connections: How Courting Sheiks Slowed Violence in Iraq," *Wall Street Journal,* August 8, 2007; Mark Kukis, "Turning Iraq's Tribes Against Al-Qaeda," *Time,* December 26, 2006; and author observations in Iraq, August-December 2007 and May-August 2008.
[77] Matthew C. Armstrong, "A Friend in the Desert," *Winchester Star,* April 8, 2008 and author observations in Iraq, May-August 2008.
[78] Alissa Rubin, "Sheikh Who Backed U.S. in Iraq is Killed," *New York Times,* September 14, 2007.
[79] Interview with Major General Tariq Yusif al-Thiyabi in Montgomery and McWilliams, eds.
[80] Ann Scott Tyson, "A Deadly Clash at Donkey Island," *Washington Post,* August 19, 2007.

population centers in Anbar, insurgents either fled the province or went into the hinterlands in order to find new bases of operation, particularly in remote areas of the Lake Thar Thar region.[81]

Despite these setbacks AQI was still able to launch attacks. One of the most dramatic took place in June 2008 when a major meeting of sheikhs, political figures, and U.S. forces in Karmah was struck by a suicide bomber. The blast killed several prominent Iraqis and Americans, including the respected mayor of Karmah and a U.S. Marine battalion commander. This provides another vignette of the effects of leadership targeting on organizations with different levels of institutionalization. The Marine battalion commander was almost immediately replaced, on an interim basis, by one of his subordinates. In contrast, the attack created turmoil in the local tribe, the Albu Jumayli. While it did not kill the tribe's sheikh, it substantially intimidated and discredited him. After some deliberation, during which the tribe's ability to act was limited, he was effectively sidelined in favor of a respected kinsman of a more martial bent.[82]

Despite a decline in Anbar, AQI nonetheless remained active and resilient in the face of the ongoing special operations campaign against its leadership. According to one source, by early 2007 special operations forces had killed 2,000 members of Sunni jihadist organizations (which were principally AQI and its affiliates) and detained many more, with the task force frequently conducting six or more operations a night. The same source indicates that by the beginning of June 2009 the combined U.S. and U.K. special operations campaign had killed or captured roughly 15,000 individuals.[83] While this entire total was not AQI personnel nor was it all in Anbar, a substantial fraction certainly was.

Yet AQI operations continued across much of Iraq.[84] In December 2009 multiple car bombings struck a variety of secure locations in Baghdad, including a parking lot just outside the heavily guarded and fortified Green Zone. The Hamra Hotel, which was in a secure area on a well-protected compound with armed guards and multiple checkpoints, was one of three targets in Baghdad successfully bombed on January 25, 2010.[85]

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[81] Multi-National Force Iraq press release, "Coalition Force Destroy Weapons Caches in Lake Thar Thar Region," August 6, 2008.
[82] Hannah Allam and Jamal Naji, "3 Marines Among Dead in Attack on Iraqi Tribal Leaders," *McClatchy Newspapers*, June 26, 2008 and author observations in Iraq, June-August 2008.
[83] Urban, pp. 270-271.
[84] Urban, pp. 242-243.
[85] Timothy Williams and Sa'ad al-Izzi, "3 Sites Hit By Bombs in Baghdad," *New York Times*, December 15, 2009 and Anthony Shadid and John Leland, "Baghdad Blasts Shatter Sense of Security in Capital," *New York Times*, January 25, 2010. Author visited both the Hamra Hotel and Green Zone in December 2009 and assessed both as well-secured.

In April 2010, the top leaders who had replaced Zarqawi, Abu Ayyub al-Masri and Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, were killed.[86] AQI nonetheless was able to survive, with the organization persisting into 2011 and able to conduct attacks across most of Iraq. For example in January 2011 AQI was credited with organizing six bombings in three different provinces in a single day.[87] In March 2011 AQI fighters seized the provincial council office in Tikrit, holding dozens hostage.[88] Over six years of focused leadership targeting by some of the most capable special operations units in the world (in addition to efforts by Iraqi military, the Awakening, and U.S. conventional forces) had neither collapsed AQI nor degraded it to the point of being ineffective.

The evidence available from Iraq, while not dispositive, strongly supports the institutionalization hypothesis. AQI, which quickly became well-institutionalized, survived the largest and most sustained leadership targeting campaign ever launched against an insurgent or terrorist organization while retaining the ability to launch operations across Iraq. Contrary to the assessment that leadership targeting was "a major, even indispensable" component of the campaign, it seems clear that it was at best an adjunct to the factor that actually turned the tide, which was the war within Anbar between AQI and tribal and nationalist insurgents supported by the United States. In contrast to AQI's institutionalized resilience, poorly institutionalized organizations, whether insurgent/terrorist (Fallujah Shura Council) or anti-insurgent (Anbar People's Committee, tribal groupings), proved remarkably frail when their leadership was targeted.

Leadership Targeting in Afghanistan

In Kandahar, the insurgency began in the spring of 2002 with a few small groups of Taliban "stay-behinds," principally in the northwestern district of Shah Wali Kot.[89] These groups were not well-institutionalized or effective, yet the absence of either Coalition or associated Afghan forces in much of the province meant that they had considerable freedom of maneuver. In addition, elements of the fundamentalist and opportunistic Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Islamic Party (known by the acronym HiG) operated in the province. As with Anbar, criminal elements provided another set of violent actors. The opium trade was especially important to this set of actors. Yet for over a year, the insurgency remained

[86] Arango, "Top Qaeda Leaders Reported Killed."
[87] John Leland, "Car Bombings Kill Dozens on Pilgrims' Route in Iraq," *New York Times*, January 20, 2011
[88] Tim Arango, "Iraqi Hostages Die in Attack on Leadership of Province," *New York Times*, March 29, 2011.
[89] This section is, in addition to specific footnotes, based on field research in Afghanistan in July 2009, June 2010, January 2011, and June to August 2011.

limited in scope. According to one analyst "…the insurgency in Kandahar province in 2003 is best described as undeveloped and uncoordinated."[90]

However, 2003 also saw the emergence of a body that would start to provide at least some higher-level organization and coordination to the insurgency. Led by Taliban leader Mullah Omar, this organization was known as the Rahbari Shura (later referred to in western sources as the Quetta Shura after the Pakistani city where it seems to be based). It consisted of Mullah Omar and ten other senior figures, including the semi-autonomous commander Jalaluddin Haqqani, the one-legged veteran mujahedin Mullah Dadullah, and Mullah Omar's confidant Akhtar Mohammad Osmani.[91]

Below this overall command level was a military command, which in turn had four military zones in Afghanistan, as well as two zones in Quetta and Peshawar. Below the level of the zone were provincial, district, and then tactical commanders.[92] This indicates the Taliban was firmly, if loosely, hierarchical, with multiple levels of command.

The Taliban also evinced functional specialization. In addition to the military commands, the Taliban created a media bureau as well as a counter-intelligence apparatus (the latter apparently modest).[93] In addition, the Taliban have a well-developed component dedicated to revenue generation, including particularly but not exclusively the opium trade.[94]

Finally, the Taliban have created bureaucracy and standard operating procedure. In terms of finance, for example, the Taliban keep careful records, even allegedly providing poppy farmers with hand-written receipts for the ten percent tax on their crop. Taliban 'leadership seems to strictly enforce routine reporting when the regional commanders must send a representative to report earnings to the Finance Committee."[95] The Taliban also produces written doctrine, in the form of codes of conduct.[96]

The creation of the Quetta Shura and the reorganization of the Taliban were followed by more rebuilding and reinfiltration by Taliban forces into Kandahar. By 2005, the Taliban began to regain the

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[90] Sean M. Maloney, "A Violent Impediment: The Evolution of Insurgent Operations in Kandahar province 2003-2007," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* v.19 n.2 (June 2008), pp. 202-203, quotation on p. 203.
[91] Syed Saleem Shahzad, "US Shooting in the Dark in Afghanistan," *Asia Times*, June 28, 2003 and Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), pp. 89-90.
[92] Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop,* pp. 90-92.
[93] Joanna Nathan, "Reading the Taliban," and Antonio Giustozzi, "Conclusion," both in Antonio Giustozzi, ed., *Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Afghan Field* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).
[94] Gretchen Peters, "The Taliban and the Opium Trade," in Giustozzi, ed., *Decoding the New Taliban*.
[95] Peters, pp. 8-12; quotation on p. 12.
[96] See "Afghanistan Islamic Emirate: Rules and Regulations for Mujahidin," translated from Pashto, online at: http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/obamaswar/etc/mullahomar.pdf.

initiative in Kandahar with a sophisticated strategy and robust insurgent organization, as detailed below.[97] The insurgency began to adopt a more aggressive posture, with Mullah Dadullah taking the overall lead in Kandahar operations. These operations included a wave of suicide bombing attacks in Kandahar City in the fall. These bombings in many cases targeted key government supporters, an early example of Taliban leadership targeting.[98]

At the same time, U.S. efforts to target Taliban affiliates in Pakistan began to gather momentum. Using Predator drones, this effort also targeted Pakistani militants and Al Qaeda members. However, it had minimal impact on the Quetta Shura, as it was restricted to western Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Area.[99]

As 2006 began, the Taliban continued to use suicide attacks in Kandahar City and IEDs in outlying districts, along with rocket and mortar attacks on ISAF bases such as Kandahar Airfield. In parallel to its more large scale offensive efforts, the Taliban conducted its own leadership targeting campaign against the leaders of pro-U.S. and pro-Afghan government organizations. This campaign began in rural parts of Kandahar as early as 2003 but by 2007 it was in high gear.[100] As noted below, it would prove highly effective due to the poor institutionalization of most of the organizations targeted.

In May 2007, Coalition forces finally succeeded in killing Mullah Dadullah, long a high priority target. Combined with the deaths of other senior Taliban leaders, including Akhtar Mohammad Osmani in December 2006, the death of Mullah Dadullah had a brief disruptive effect on the insurgency. However, the Taliban then rapidly returned to the offensive, overrunning the district center of a rural district in June 2007. Canadian and Afghan forces recaptured the district center five days later but the attack demonstrated the Taliban's continuing ability to mass forces, particularly in the outlying districts away from the ISAF base at Kandahar Airfield. The Taliban also continued to use IED, indirect fire, and suicide attacks throughout the remainder of 2007.[101]

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[97] Maloney, pp. 203-204.

[98] Maloney, pp. 208-209; "Bombers Target Kandahar," *Washington Post*, October 11, 2005; and Voice of America news report, "Two More Suicide Bombings in Kandahar," October 10, 2005, online at: http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2005-10/2005-10-10-voa22.cfm?moddate=2005-10-10.

[99] See Peter Bergen and Katherine Tiedemann, "The Year of the Drone: An Analysis of U.S. Drone Strikes in Pakistan, 2004-2010," (Washington, D.C.: New America Foundation, 2010).

[100] Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop*, pp. 102-110 and Graeme Smith, "What Kandahar's Taliban Say," in Giustozzi, ed., *Decoding the New Taliban*, p. 192.

[101] Smith, p. 194; Maloney, p. 212; Griff Witte and Javed Hamdard, "Taliban Military Leader Killed," *Washington Post*, May 14, 2007; "Ten Afghans and 60 Taliban Killed in Clashes over Districts," *Daily Times (Pakistan)*, June 20, 2007; and "Afghan Government Forces Recapture District Control from Taliban," *People's Daily*, June 25, 2007.

In the fall, the Taliban began to occupy Khakrez district, west of Kandahar City and north of the Arghandab River. Arghandab had long been a bastion against the Taliban thanks to strong tribal resistance. However this resistance, based on charismatic and traditional authority, was not well-institutionalized making it vulnerable to the death of key leaders. Following the death from a heart attack of the major anti-Taliban Alokozai tribal leader Mullah Naqib in October (after months of ill health following an assassination attempt in March), the way was open from Khakrez into Arghandab district. A joint Afghan and ISAF counteroffensive blunted the move into Arghandab in early November but with local resistance weakened after Naqib's death the area remained insecure.[102]

However, some areas of Kandahar proved resistant to the Taliban. Perhaps most notable of these areas was the southern district of Spin Boldak. Located on Highway 4 adjacent to the Pakistan border, Spin Boldak should have been easy prey for the Taliban. This was compounded by the minimal ISAF presence in the district. Yet the area had relatively low levels of Taliban activity. This resilience was due in large part to Abdul Razziq, a local leader who, despite relative youth (early 30s) and lack of education, was effective at leading both his own tribe and building cross-tribal support. He was appointed a colonel (later general) in the Afghan Border Police despite his lack of military or police experience in order to incorporate fighters loyal to him into the formal state security forces. He and his force continue to work aggressively despite taking substantial casualties; Razziq himself was wounded in September 2008 when suicide bombers targeted him at a meeting of government officials in Kandahar City.[103] Razziq's tribal forces have been institutionalized within the formal state and he was promoted to the position of provincial chief of police in 2011 (following the assassination of the previous chief by the Taliban).[104]

In 2008, insurgents continued the same pattern of IED and indirect fire attacks but also launched larger attacks on the population. In February, a bombing in Kandahar City killed nearly one hundred Afghans, including the intended target, Abdul Hakim Jan. Jan was, like Mullah Naqib, an anti-Taliban leader from the Alokozai tribe. He had incorporated his militia into the Afghan National Auxiliary Police, an

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[102] Smith, p. 192 and p. 210, fn. 3; Sarah Chayes, "A Mullah Dies, and War Comes Knocking," *Washington Post*, November 18, 2007; Carlotta Gall, "Taliban Make Afghan Stability a Distant Goal," *New York Times*, May 22, 2008; and CTV news report, "Taliban 'Arghandab' Offensive Halted: Canada," November 1, 2007, online at: http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20071101/arghandab_071101/20071101?hub=CTVNewsAt11.

[103] Maloney, pp. 217-218; Carlotta Gall, "Karzai Announces Pakistani Pledge to Stop Cross-Border Attacks," *New York Times*, April 23, 2003; Carlotta Gall, "Pakistan Arrests Taliban's Chief Spokesman from Afghanistan," *New York Times*, October 4, 2005; Carlotta Gall, "Taliban Rebels Still Menacing Afghan South," *New York Times*, March 2, 2006; "Suicide Bombers Strike Kandahar Police HQ," *Associated Press*, September 7, 2008; and author interviews, Kandahar, July 2009 and January 2011.

[104] "New Kandahar Police Chief Vows Reforms," *Daily Outlook of Afghanistan*, May 30, 2011; online at: http://outlookafghanistan.net/news?post_id=718

organization intended as a bridge to bring militias into the formal security structure yet it failed to provide the institutionalization necessary for his militia to survive his death. Several other bombings across the province in February demonstrated the ongoing capabilities of the insurgency, particularly in terms of leadership targeting.[105] Three of the major groups in Kandahar during this period are captured in the table below.

Group	**Origin**	**Ideology**	**Institutionalization**	**Predicted Effect Of Leadership Targeting**
Quetta Shura Taliban	Domestic	Deobandi Islam	Good	Minimal disruption
Alokozai militias	Domestic	Tribal/Sunni Islam	Poor	Infighting or collapse
Afghan Police	Domestic	Afghan nationalism	Good	Minimal disruption

Table 3: Major Kandahari Armed Groups 2007-2009

Even as the Taliban collapsed its tribal opposition, it shrugged off loss of its own leaders. ISAF forces killed Mullah Mahmoud, a major commander, and detained several mid-level IED facilitators in July.[106] Yet despite leadership targeting the insurgency dominated many parts of Kandahar and. demonstrated its continued ability to mount large-scale operations in June, when it attacked Sarposa Prison in Kandahar City. On the night of June 13, a massive assault began when a tanker truck loaded with explosives demolished the main gate of the prison. Dozens of insurgents on motorcycles then freed more than 800 inmates, at least 300 of whom were linked to the Taliban.[107]

Coalition efforts to target both senior and mid-level Taliban leadership continued to kill or capture individuals, yet with little effect. Journalist Graeme Smith described a 2008 meeting:

[105] Brian Hutchison, "Suicide Attack Kills Scores of Afghans in Canadian Sector," *Canwest News Service*, February 17, 2008; M. Karim Faiez and Laura King, "Anti-Taliban Leader Was Target of Deadly Bombing, Officials Say," *Los Angeles Times*, February 18, 2008; and CBC news report, "Arrests Made in Deadly Kandahar Bombing," February 21, 2008, online at: http://www.cbc.ca/world/story/2008/02/21/arrests-afghnistan.html.
[106] ISAF Press release, "ANSF, ISAF strike insurgent leaders, arrest IED facilitators," July 16, 2008.
[107] Gall, "Taliban Make Afghan Stability a Distant Goal;" Doug Schmidt, "Only Handful of Afghan Prison Escapees Recaptured," *Canwest News Service*, June 15, 2008; Sean Raymond, "Sarposa Prison Break Shows Taliban Are Far From Defeated," *Telegraph (UK)*, June 14, 2008; ISAF press release, "Kandahar City Remains Firmly Under the Control of the Afghan Government and its People," June 18, 2008; "Taliban Prepares for Battle Outside Kandahar," *Associated Press*, June 17, 2008; Carlotta Gall, "Taliban Gain New Foothold in Afghan City," *New York Times*, August 26, 2008; and author interviews, Kandahar, July 2009.

> A Canadian military intelligence officer looked back at his tour of duty with satisfaction in the spring of 2008, believing that nearly all the middle ranks of the local insurgency had been killed or captured during his nine months in Kandahar. The elimination of those field commanders, he calculated, would leave the insurgents with little remaining capacity for the summer fighting season. Sadly, he was proved wrong: the summer of 2008 was the deadliest period Kandahar has witnessed during the latest war. It could be argued that the violence might have been worse if certain Taliban commanders had not been killed, but so far attacks on insurgent commanders have shown no signs of weakening the insurgency.[108]

The lack of effect was demonstrated by another attack on the district center of Ghorak. The insurgents also continued assassinating government officials and any other perceived collaborators.[109]

As 2009 began, despite ISAF and Afghan success in killing insurgent leaders, the insurgents stepped up attacks.[110] In March, a suicide bomber struck a government building in southern Kandahar City. This was followed by a daring attack using multiple suicide bombers and gunmen on a meeting at the governor's palace in Kandahar City in April. Assassinations of government officials and other pro-government leaders continued as well.[111] Fratricide also claimed the life of the effective provincial chief of police, Major General Maitullah Khan, in a June clash with an Afghan security force alleged to be trained by U.S. Special Forces for counterterrorism operations.[112] More mid-level Taliban leaders were detained in August 2009, again with little obvious effect on Taliban operations.[113]

In 2010, the effort to target Taliban leadership expanded dramatically across Afghanistan. According to one media report:

> As recently as early July, Special Operations forces were carrying out an average of five raids a night, mostly in southern Afghanistan. But in a 90-day period that ended Nov. 11, Special Operations forces were averaging 17 missions a night, conducting 1,572 operations over three months that resulted in 368 insurgent

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[108] Smith, pp. 193-194.

[109] See Drew Brown, "In Afghanistan, Waging Battles of Attrition," *Stars and Stripes (Mideast)*, October 3, 2008; ISAF press release, "ANA, ISAF Complete Three Operations in Kandahar," November 27, 2008; ISAF press release, "ANSF, ISAF Successfully Stop Insurgent Attack," September 11, 2008; ISAF press release, "ANSF and ISAF Join Forces to Help Wounded Afghans Following Insurgent Attack in Kandahar Province," October 4, 2008; ISAF press release, "ANSF, ISAF Successfully Disrupt Insurgent Leadership, Supply Lines in Panjwayi," October 12, 2008; ISAF press release, "ISAF Condemns Assassination of Kandahar Government Official," October 14, 2008; and author interviews, Kandahar, July 2009.

[110] Thomas Harding, "Commandos Smash Taliban Bomb Factory," *Telegraph (UK)*, January 13, 2009; Dexter Filkins, "Taliban Fill NATO's Big Gaps in Afghan South," *New York Times*, January 21, 2009; ISAF press release, "Joint ANSF, ISAF Operation Disrupts IED Networks in Kandahar," January 13, 2009; and ISAF press release, "Insurgent leader Killed in ISAF Operation in Kandahar Province," February 22, 2009.

[111] Taimoor Shah, "Suicide Bomber in Kandahar Kills 8," *New York Times*, March 30, 2009; Taimoor Shah and Carlotta Gall, :Militants Storm Government Office in Afghanistan, Killing 13," *New York Times*, April 1, 2009; ISAF press release, "Insurgent Leader Killed in ISAF Operation in Kandahar Province," February 22, 2009; and Soraya Sarhaddi Nelson, "Assassinations on the Rise in Afghanistan," *National Public Radio*, May 19, 2009, online at: http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=104263248.

[112] Craig Pearson, "Kandahar police chief killed in confrontation with U.S.-trained security forces," *Canwest News Service*, June 29, 2009 and CNN news report, "Karzai Demands U.S. Forces Turn Over Afghan Killing Suspects," June 29, 2009, online at: http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/asiapcf/06/29/afghanistan.karzai.dispute/index.html.

[113] ISAF press release, "Afghan-International Security Force Arrests Insurgent Leaders," August 6, 2009.

leaders killed or captured, and 968 lower-level insurgents killed and 2,477 captured, according to NATO statistics.[114]

In Pakistan, the drone campaign continued and was bolstered by the arrest of one of the Taliban's most senior leaders, Mullah Baradar.[115] In Kandahar, there were several notable successes in this campaign, including the killing of the senior commander for central Kandahar, Mullah Zergay.[116] Despite these leadership targeting successes, there was little sign of organizational collapse in the Taliban.[117]

The Taliban continued its leadership targeting campaign in 2010 as well. It particularly targeted leaders of a new U.S. and Afghan effort to build local defense forces, including a suicide bombing in Arghandab district. This effort. initially called the Local Defense Initiative and now known as the Afghan Local Police program, differs from earlier efforts, such as the Afghan National Auxiliary Police, in that it embeds a U.S. special operations team with the local defense force. This team is tasked with institutionalizing the Afghan Local Police, which are a formal part of the Afghan Ministry of Interior. While it is too early to assess whether these efforts to institutionalize local defense have been successful, the loss of leadership in Arghandab did not collapse the force in the way that the deaths of Mullah Naqib and Abdul Hakim Jan had earlier.[118]

In addition, the Taliban continued targeting other government leaders, successfully assassinating the Kandahar provincial chief of police in April 2011.[119] As noted earlier, he was replaced by Brigadier General Abdul Razziq, once again highlighting the importance of institutionalization. This was followed by the successful assassination of the mayor of Kandahar City and a suicide bombing at the memorial of Kandahar power-broker Ahmed Wali Karzai (who was killed by an associate rather than the Taliban).

[114] COMISAF Assessment; and Thom Shanker, Elizabeth Bumiller, and Rod Nordland, "Despite Gains, Night Raids Split U.S. and Karzai," *New York Times*, November 15, 2010
[115] Mark Mazetti and Dexter Filkins, "Secret Joint Raid Captures Taliban's Top Commander," *New York Times*, February 15, 2010.
[116] "Taliban Leader's Death Confirmed; Forces Seize Insurgent Sub-Commander," *American Forces Press Service*, June 4, 2010.
[117] This is based on author conversations with U.S. personnel in Kabul, Zabul province, and Kandahar province, January 2011 and author observations in Afghanistan, June-August 2011.
[118] Rajiv Chandrasekaran, "U.S. Training Afghan Villagers to Fight the Taliban," *The Washington Post*, April 27, 2010; Mirwais Khan, "Suicide Attack Kills 40 at Afghan Wedding Party," *The Washington Post*, June 10, 2010; and author conversations and observations in Kandahar, June 2010, January 2011 and June 2011.
[119] Joshua Partlow, "In Afghanistan, Kandahar Police Chief Mohammad Mojayed Killed By Suicide Bomber," *Washington Post*, April 15, 2011.

While this wave of assassinations has created fear in Afghan government leaders, it has yet to collapse the government system in Kandahar.[120]

The evidence available from Afghanistan also supports the hypothesis that institutionalization is the key variable in the effectiveness of leadership targeting. The Taliban, well-institutionalized by 2005, have not been collapsed or even substantially dismantled by an extensive leadership targeting campaign. Likewise the formal Afghan police have experienced the loss of two provincial chiefs in less than two years along with other lower level leaders yet continue to function. In contrast, anti-insurgent tribal militias that were poorly institutionalized did not survive the deaths of their charismatic tribal leaders. However, the attempt to institutionalize these anti-insurgent forces via incorporation into formal security forces such as the Afghan Local Police program may immunize them against leadership targeting.

Size and age of organizations *per se* seems to have little to do with resistance to leadership targeting. For example, Mullah Naqib's militia had its roots in the war against the Soviet-backed Communist regime in the 1980s, making it more than twenty years old at the time of his death. While its exact size is unknown, it had at a minimum dozens of members. Yet it nonetheless lost cohesion after his death.

Conclusion

For the insurgent, organization is the *sine qua non* for survival, much less success. In both Anbar and Kandahar, loose organizations rapidly gave way to increasingly orderly, hierarchical, even bureaucratic organizations. It was the evolution of the "organizational weapon" that in large part enabled AQI to go from non-existent in 2003 to absolute dominance of the insurgency in Anbar by 2006. Moreover, organization permitted AQI to do so despite continuous pressure against its leadership from Coalition forces armed with sophisticated technology and firepower. Similarly, it was the development of the organizational weapon that allowed the Taliban to transform from remnants and stay-behinds with little effectiveness in 2002 to what one analyst has termed "the dominant political force" in Kandahar in 2009.[121]

This conclusion helps clarify Jordan's findings on organizational age and size. While probabilistically speaking, older and larger organizations are more likely to be well-institutionalized neither is a prerequisite. Both the Taliban and AQI achieved robust institutionalization very rapidly and prior to

[120] Joshua Partlow and Sayed Salahuddin, "Kandahar's Mayor Killed in Suicide Attack," *Washington Post*, July 27, 2011; Joshua Partlow and Kevien Sieff, "Suicide Bomber Kills 4 at Karzai Memorial Service," *Washington Post*, July 14, 2011; and author observations in Kandahar, July 2011.

[121] Dorronsoro, p. 24.

major organizational growth. Indeed, institutionalization aided organizational expansion in the case of AQI, as its resistance to leadership targeting allowed it to absorb or co-opt other organizations.

This conclusion explicitly repudiates the hypothesis that insurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan has been fundamentally different in organization from traditional insurgency. The image of these insurgencies as very flat "networked" organizations that are amorphous and fluid, with no central command has gained the status of conventional wisdom. Yet AQI and the Taliban succeeded precisely because they were disciplined, ruthless, and well-administered, traits that successful insurgents such as the Viet Cong in Vietnam would recognize. This is not to say the AQI and the Taliban have not availed themselves of modern technology and communications. Yet cellphones and computers did not substitute for formal organization, they merely enhanced it, as the radio enhanced Viet Cong organization in Vietnam.

The evidence presented also demonstrates the importance of institutionalization for anti-insurgent forces. All of the poorly institutionalized anti-insurgent organizations examined in both Iraq and Afghanistan proved susceptible to leadership targeting. Only extensive efforts to protect the leadership of these organizations combined with at least initiating institutionalization has enabled any of them to survive the insurgents' leadership targeting.

The importance of organizational characteristics such as functional specialization, bureaucracy, standard operating procedure, and hierarchy should come as no surprise to military officers or social scientists. Military organizations and industrial manufacturers both have these characteristics for a reason- they allow for the efficient production of goods, be it military force or microchips. This is no different for insurgent organizations, though the fact that they are clandestine organizations adds additional difficulties and can also conceal the degree to which they are organized.

Note that hierarchy and chain of command does not equate to total lack of autonomy for subordinates. Indeed, many effective military organizations give substantial autonomy to subordinates through what are termed "mission type" orders. This does not indicate lack of central guidance or strategy; rather it enables strategy by giving flexibility in tactical decisions to those best able to make those decisions- the commander in the field.

The foregoing leaves open the question of endogeneity of institutionalization. While it rules out some variables as sources of institutionalization, such as social networks or religious motivation, the question of why AQI was able to effectively institutionalize so rapidly remains perplexing

For policymakers, the evidence from Iraq and Afghanistan offers some lessons. First, the foregoing does not mean that leadership targeting has no effect on well-institutionalized organizations. It is

still disruptive at a minimum as even the effective replacement of leaders is not instantaneous. Moreover, leaders are not totally interchangeable; some are simply better than others. Furthermore, leadership targeting also exerts a suppressive effect on leaders, as they must undertake extensive security measures to avoid being targeted. Alex Wilner's research highlights other potential effects of leadership targeting on insurgent/terrorist activity, such as causing insurgents to shift from difficult "hardened" targets to easier "soft" targets.[122]

Yet these are tactical and operational rather than strategic effects. In terms of President Barack Obama's declared goal of "disrupting, dismantling, and defeating" al-Qaeda, leadership targeting, whether carried out by special operations forces in Afghanistan or drones in Pakistan, can create disruption and temporary dismantling, but it cannot defeat the organization. This in turn suggests that expectations and resource allocation should be managed with an eye to the institutionalization of both hostile and allied organizations. If confronted by poorly institutionalized insurgent organizations, leadership targeting can have a substantial effect and should be resourced accordingly. However, dedicating massive resources to leadership targeting of well-institutionalized groups, while under-resourcing efforts to protect and institutionalize useful anti-insurgent organizations, appears suboptimal.

Additionally, while U.S. leadership targeting is not indiscriminate, there are still mistakes. In Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, individuals have been targeted incorrectly while even accurate targeting can produce collateral damage. These mistakes often produce backlash among the relevant population and/or its political leadership.[123] While this is not a reason to completely abandon leadership targeting, policymakers should evaluate whether the likely gains from targeting an organization's leaders will be sufficiently effective to outweigh these costs.

[122] See Wilner.

[123] Kate Clark, "The Takhar Attack: Targeted Killings and the Parallel Worlds of US Intelligence and Afghanistan," Afghanistan Analysts Network (May 2011); "Afghan President Moves to Stop NATO Night Raids," *Associated Press*, May 28, 2011; Dean Yates, "U.S. Faces Iraqi Anger Over Raid Near Kerbala," *Reuters*, June 29, 2008; and Jane Perlez and Ismail Khan, Deadly Drone Strike by U.S. May Fuel Anger in Pakistan," *New York Times*, April 22, 2011.