



# **NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

## **THESIS**

**DRAGON'S CLAWS: THE IMPROVISED EXPLOSIVE  
DEVICE (IED) AS A WEAPON OF STRATEGIC  
INFLUENCE**

by

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March 2009

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WEAPON OF STRATEGIC INFLUENCE**

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requirements for the degree of

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this research is to identify how the Improvised Explosive Device (IED) is being used as a “weapon of strategic influence” by insurgent groups in Iraq. It is intended to explore how individual IED events, as well as an IED campaign, achieve strategic influence. This thesis will examine how immediate and cumulative effects of IED attacks achieve strategic goals politically, economically, socially and militarily. Particular goals will vary depending on the motivations and objectives of the organization carrying out the attack, so distinctions will be made between Sunni nationalist, Shi’a nationalist, and the jihadi salafist insurgent groups such as Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). Both terrorism and guerilla warfare are used as insurgent tactics in Iraq—sometimes by the same organization. As a symbolic weapon, the IED is particularly suited as a weapon for not only terrorist organizations, but insurgents as well. As a weapon of symbolic violence and instrument of terror, the IED aids in accomplishing the strategic political goals of the insurgent groups. IED events have a “target of attack” specifically chosen to reach the audience of the “target of influence.” Successful influence of the “target of influence” audience achieves both the short and long term objectives through immediate and cumulative effects related to the psychological impact of the event(s). The psychological impact the IED achieves outweighs the immediate physical damage. This thesis is not intended to provide a solution for the current IED problem in Iraq or elsewhere, but is intended to provide framework for understanding the IED problem from a strategic perspective.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

ACF	Anti-Coalition Forces
ASP	Ammunition Storage Point
AQI	Al Qaeda in Iraq
CDIED	Command Detonated IED
CIA	Central Intelligence Organization
CIED	Counter Improvised Explosive Device
COIC	Counter-IED Operations Integration Center
COIN	Counter Insurgency
CPA	Coalition Provisional Authority
CREW	Counter Radio-controlled Electronic Warfare
CTN	Counter Terrorism Network
DBIED	Deep Buried IED
DCGS	Distributed Common Ground System
DoD	Department of Defense
EBO	Effects Based Operations
ECM	Electronic Counter Measure
EFP	Explosively Formed Penetrator
EOD	Explosive Ordnance Disposal
FOB	Forward Operating Base
HME	Home-Made Explosive
HMX	An insensitive nitroamine high explosive
IAI	Islamic Army of Iraq
IED	Improvised Explosive Device

ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
ISI	Islamic State of Iraq
JCAAMP	Joint IED Defeat Capability Approval and Acquisition Management Process
JIEDDO	Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization
KIA	Killed In Action
LBIED	Large Buried IED
LRCT	Long Range Cordless Telephone
LVBIED	Large Vehicle Borne IED
MEDIVAC	Medical Evacuation
MRAP	Mine Resistant Ambush Protected
NCTC	National Counter Terrorism Center
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
OIF	Operation Iraqi Freedom
OMS	Organization of the Martyr Sadr
PBIED	Person Borne Improvised Explosive Device
PETN	Pentaerythritol Tetranitrate
PIRA	Provisional Irish Republican Army (Also referred to as the IRA)
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organization
VOIED	Victim Operated IED
RDX	An insensitive high explosive commonly used in military explosives
RF	Radio Frequency
RCIED	Radio Controlled IED

SIIC	Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council
SIED	Suicide IED
SOCOM	Special Operations Command
SVBIED	Suicide Vehicle Borne IED
TC	Tactical Commander
TTP	Techniques Tactics and Procedures
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
UXO	Unexploded Ordnance
VBIED	Vehicle Borne IED
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction
WWITS	Department of Homeland Security's World Incident Tracking System

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## **I. THE IMPROVISED EXPLOSIVE DEVICE (IED): AN OVERVIEW**

The dismantlers won't be taking this one, Hamza thought, as he crouched low, smoking a cigarette behind the scrub brush overlooking Main Supply Route (MSR) Tampa almost a klik away.<sup>1</sup>

The air began to move with the coming dawn, swirling a strange brew of desert spice, cold copper, the bitter smells of acid, black steel and gun oil, and putrid burning trash. Hamza squinted at the electric pole "marker"; the Eastern sky above the mountains glowed behind him with the approaching heat, vaporizing the coolness of the desert night. Just to the North, the glow of Forward Operating Base (FOB) Brassfield Morra could be seen against the backdrop of the Northward reaching Mountain range stretching out beyond the Tigris. The "marker" stood just beyond the culvert he and several others had spent packing with burlap bags of homemade explosives (HME) over the past week.

A flare in the sky to the South—the prize is on its way, he thought, watching the arcing trail of light fade into the blackness as his stomach tightened. No lights or noise on Tampa to the South, but the rustling of the approaching morning in Samarra could be heard behind him: donkeys, sheep, cranking cars, barking dogs and the occasional rooster crow.

Hamza checked his wire for the fifth time; the copper ends of the two leads felt cold in his hands. The wire stretched out through the plain beyond and into the culvert, where yesterday he primed the detonators. Priming early was risky, but it would be better than risking discovery at the critical time. They must return, he thought. With sweaty palms, he clutched his AK and listened.... THERE—the low hum of the lead vehicle could be felt before heard. He saw the glow of the approaching lights and the occasional spotlight darting purposefully about. Upon second glance, the profile of the RG's (RG-31) turret could be seen against the skyline; he instinctively sunk down, though he was too far to be seen.

He thought of all the work, the bags packed and loaded into a car and dropped unobserved, just beyond view from the road, for he and his counterparts to stack. Hamza checked his camera and pressed record. The

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<sup>1</sup> Dismantler is the term used generically to describe Explosive Ordnance Disposal and Engineers alike by some insurgents in Northern Iraq.

mechanical armed truck (Buffalo) was with them, lumbering forward, stopping to explore dead animals, tires, and other trash that littered the roadside.

Hamza grasped the motorcycle battery and held one of the copper wire leads to the terminal. He thought of his family and how they might get along if things didn't go well for him. He thought of the soldiers inside the armored vehicles—Allah Akbar—the Buffalo straddled the culvert; he touched the second wire....Silence...

In less than a microsecond, a charge of electricity traveled down the copper firing wire, across the tiny bridge wires of the blasting caps. The bridge wires began to glow with the heat of resistance against the high voltage. In an instant, the bridge wire exploded, initiating an extremely sensitive primary explosive,<sup>2</sup> which then propagated an explosive wave, detonating the high explosive PETN.<sup>3</sup> The explosive wave grew larger as the PETN decomposed, erupting from the end of the cap, igniting the plastic high explosive used to prime each of the bags of ammonium nitrate.

And then the dawn ruptured. The white, reddish flame engulfed the truck, the terrifying fiery blast propagated up and out, torquing the cabin as it was launched skyward. Black earth erupted from the culvert, engulfing the flames, and then the gut twisting concussion. Parts, concrete, debris and earth rained down, peppering the gunners who instinctively ducked behind their armored mount, although unprotected above. In the chaos that followed, Hamza grabbed his rifle, collected his video camera and slipped away to work another day; he had earned his pay.

“Trail Blazer Base, this is Two Zero; IED attack at grid LC 92225 78740, Two Seven's been hit, severe damage, casualties unknown—nine line to follow. . .” the Tactical Commander's (TC) voice cracked over the radio as he thought of his injured, dead or dying troops.

The smell of sweat and adrenaline filled his nostrils as he breathed deep to chase down his own terror, his driver positioning the RG a safe distance from the burning shell of the Buffalo.

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<sup>2</sup> Primary explosives are extremely sensitive and are used in initiators such as blasting caps to generate the required energy to ignite more stable and less sensitive high explosives (HE). Examples of primary explosives found in blasting caps are: lead azide, lead styphnate or mercury fulminate.

<sup>3</sup> Pentaerythritol tetranitrate (PETN) is an extremely powerful high explosive.

“Five and Twenty Fives!” the TC yelled, as the crew exited the RG to search for secondaries, and then assist the team in the Buffalo.

Almost 100 feet from the gapping black hole where the culvert was, the Buffalo lay on its back.

“Need a fire Extinguisher over here!” All six wheels had blown off along with the robot arm and all the fairings. Amazingly, the cabin was intact but crumpled bottom and top from the blast and impact. The rear hatch opened with some effort—the smell. Oh, god, the TC thought, as the blast of putrid air escaped from the cabin. Burnt hair, flesh, the ferrous smell of blood, and a scent of something like that of a gutted deer. Snider the medic launched himself into the cabin to assess the three inside; no hope for them, he said. The MEDIVAC was called to transport the KIA Trailblazers back to the FOB; EOD was called to perform the “post blast” investigation; and Headquarters was called to initiate arrangements for notification of next of kin and transportation of the heroes to their final resting places.

Once back on the FOB, the necessary administrative duties couldn’t overshadow the deeper process of healing as small clusters of soldiers spoke of their friends in low tones of admiration, respect, regret, sadness, guilt, and even anguish. They emotionally prepared themselves for loading their friends’ flag-draped coffins onto the Air Force C-17.

After only a few days of time tested battlefield grieving, ending with a memorial service, the soldiers got back to work, but the scars remained with the survivors as they “kitted up,” thinking of their fallen friends and their own loved ones as they headed out on patrol. Half a world away, uniformed soldiers solemnly approached the front doors of the families of the fallen heroes. With lumps in their throats and tears brimming in their eyes, the soldiers delivered the news no one can prepare for.

Although the story related above is fictitious, thousands of similar incidents have occurred throughout the conflict in Iraq and continue as of this writing. The accumulation of these types of ambush attacks against military forces, along with high-profile suicide bombing attacks against civilians, has helped build and maintain the momentum of the insurgency in Iraq. Of course, the specific tactics, the targets and technical aspects of the IED have changed over time, based on practical need, and yet the message has recurring themes: We control the terrain, we control the people, we are

growing, and we will win. What is it about the Improvised Explosive Device (IED) that has allowed the insurgency in Iraq to have such success against the best-trained, equipped, and most powerful military forces in the world? The IED has allowed enemies unseen to deliver terrifying destruction and casualties to Coalition and Iraqi forces virtually at will. It has been used to mobilize support locally and internationally for the jihad against the West. The insurgents have used the IED coercively and as a propaganda tool to force changes in strategy and policies of nation states. It has been used to spark and fuel sectarian violence through the targeting of civilians, further destabilizing Iraq. What is it about this weapon and its utility for the insurgency that has allowed the IED to achieve such success in Iraq? How has the IED spanned the levels of war to achieve strategic influence? These questions and more will be explored within this thesis.

## **A. PURPOSE**

### **1. General**

The purpose of this research is to identify how the Improvised Explosive Device is being used as a “weapon of strategic influence” by insurgent groups in Iraq. It is intended to explore how individual IED events as well as an IED campaign achieve strategic influence. This thesis will examine how the immediate and cumulative effects of IED attacks achieve strategic goals politically, economically, socially and militarily. These particular goals will vary depending on the motivations and objectives of the organization carrying out the attack, so distinctions will be made between Sunni/Shi’a insurgent groups and Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). To achieve their goals insurgents effectively distinguish between sets: the “target of attack” and the “target of influence.”<sup>4</sup> The target of attack is chosen to communicate a message to the target of influence. Successful influence of the target audience leads to a behavior change which aids in achieving the short- and long-term objectives.

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<sup>4</sup> B. Hoffman and G. H. McCormick, ‘Terrorism, Signaling, and Suicide Attack,’ *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 27 (2004): 246.

This thesis is not intended to provide a solution for the current IED problem in Iraq or elsewhere, but is intended to provide a framework for understanding the IED problem from a strategic perspective.

## **2. Military Importance**

The IED is being used as the primary method of attacking U.S. forces in both Afghanistan and Iraq. It is used to attack political leadership, security forces, and infrastructure. It is also being used extensively to target civilians in order to destabilize and perpetuate violence. Certain IED attacks are obviously strategic, whereas others may not appear to be at first look. This thesis will help reveal how the IED is being used to achieve strategic results, not only through the use of high-profile bombings and suicide attacks, but through the daily barrage of IED attacks against military forces. The IED Defeat Manual says that “the enemy will attempt to attack the U.S. national will or the coalition partners will through the use of IEDs (along with Information Warfare; IW) because they provide a tactical weapon with which to achieve strategic goals.”<sup>5</sup> This thesis will provide an explanation of how the effects of the IED are able to transcend the tactical level to achieve strategic consequences. The primary and supporting advantages of using the IED in an insurgent campaign will be discussed. The IED is a unique weapon that spans the levels of war and allows for achieving strategic goals through symbolic violence. More specifically, the IED is a functional weapon; it is “effects based” and thus generates psychological effects in addition to the more obvious physical effects. It is a weapon that aligns well with the tactics of terrorism and guerrilla warfare, allowing the insurgents to challenge a much stronger military force with minimum personnel and resources; while coercing a population into active or tacit support. The IED allows the insurgent, as Hammes puts it, to “stay in the fight until the coalition gives up and goes home.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> HQ, Department of the Army and United States Marine Corps, *Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Manual*, FMI 3-34.119/MCIP 3-17.01, 2005: 2-4.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas X. Hammes, Col., USMC, *The Sling and the Stone: On War in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (St. Paul, MN: Zenith Press, 2006), 183.

Terror is an effective tactic as part of an insurgent strategy for a variety of reasons related to the psychological nature of the effects that the act generates. The IED, better than any other weapon, accomplishes the strategic goals of the various insurgent groups in Iraq through “symbolic violence and the manipulation of violent images.”<sup>7</sup> This thesis will build upon and further the argument that the IED will be the weapon of choice for the insurgent now and in the future, and, therefore, the strategic implications of the IED must be addressed as part of a counterinsurgency (COIN) campaign. This thesis will introduce the IED as a functional weapon with potential strategic consequences. It is functional in that, through its primary and supporting advantages, it is able to achieve objectives at the tactical, operational, and strategic level simultaneously. It also allows the insurgent to demonstrate his information superiority because he is able to show that he maintains the initiative, choosing the time and place of attack. This further demonstrates that the State (in this case Coalition forces as well as Iraqi) controls neither the physical terrain nor the human terrain. The human terrain allowed for the IED to make its way through a social network to be emplaced. A case study of attacks in Iraq will be used to explain how the insurgents achieve their objectives through the IED.

## **B. SCOPE AND RELEVANCE**

*A complex weapon makes the strong stronger, while a simple weapon—so long as there is no answer to it — gives claws to the weak.*  
– George Orwell<sup>8</sup>

There is great irony in the above statement from Orwell’s 1945 piece considering that the cold war ended almost two decades ago with the fall of the iron curtain. The bulk of U.S. combat troops are involved in protracted conflicts against insurgent groups. The current U.S. National Security Strategy is not solely oriented against another single superpower, but also international terrorist organizations. In current military

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<sup>7</sup> Gordon H McCormick and Frank Giordano, "Things Come Together: symbolic violence and guerrilla mobilization," *Third World Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (January 1, 2007): 295-320. <http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed August 22, 2008), 295.

<sup>8</sup> George Orwell, “You and the Atomic Bomb,” (1945), [http://www.george-orwell.org/You\\_and\\_the\\_Atomic\\_Bomb/index.html](http://www.george-orwell.org/You_and_the_Atomic_Bomb/index.html) (accessed January 15, 2009).



engagements, U.S. forces are facing Irregular Forces in COIN campaigns. Many of our complex weapons systems are ill-suited for the current conflicts. In the quote at the beginning of this section, Orwell was referring to the parallels between history and weaponry, and how the weapons that are “cheap and simple” to produce have and will continue to be the great equalizers. He refers to examples such as the musket, longbow, or grenade to illustrate how simple weapons give power to the masses, helping to reverse the power balance. He says that “the one thing that might reverse [the power balance] is the discovery of a weapon—or, to put it more broadly, of a method of fighting—not dependent on huge concentrations of industrial plant.”<sup>9</sup> For modern insurgencies the IED may be that weapon; it is “cheap and simple,” relatively easy to deploy, and most importantly, it is symbolically powerful. The IED allows the insurgents to frustrate a militarily superior force, while using mass media to erode support for the conflict at home. The IED truly is a weapon that gives claws to the weak.

Six years ago in America, the significant influence of the IED as a weapon was known to only a select few in the military, government agencies, and law enforcement. Prior to Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) “. . . the attention devoted to IEDs within the United States. . . [was not] commensurate with their use.”<sup>10</sup> The deadly device only achieved front page news in major but periodic incidents such as the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, the bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut in 1983, or the 2000 bombing of the USS Cole in Yemen. For decades however, many countries worldwide have experienced the devastation and terror of an IED campaign; Northern Ireland, Israel, and Algeria are but a few. The people of these countries witnessed the systematic use of the IED by opposition groups and terrorists; seeking to affect political change. They experienced the targeting of military, government representatives, and civilians alike. They understand the influence of the IED is linked closely with its symbolic nature.

As of 2001, most Americans had no idea what the acronym IED even stood for, but with the numbers of IED incidents in Iraq growing to almost 2500 per year by 2007,

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<sup>9</sup> Orwell, “You and the Atomic Bomb.”

<sup>10</sup> Evan Colbert, “The Devil’s Right Hand: Understanding IEDS and Exploring Their Use in Armed Conflict.” (Master’s thesis: Monterey, CA: The Naval Postgraduate School, December 2007), 5.

according to the National Counterterrorism Center's database the World Wide Incident Tracking System (WWITS), the acronym IED is now becoming a part of everyday American jargon.<sup>11</sup>

There seems to be a general increasing trend of IED use worldwide. According to the WWITS:

Bombing incidents increased approximately 4 percent from those in 2006, while the death and injury tolls in these incidents rose by about 30 percent and 20 percent, respectively. Overall, suicide bombing attacks rose by about 50 percent and suicide car bombings about 40 percent. Suicide bombers operating outside of vehicles increased by about 90 percent, and the ability of these attackers to penetrate large concentrations of people and then detonate their explosives may account for the increase in lethality of bombings in 2007.<sup>12</sup>

It must be kept in mind that these statistics include the peak levels of attacks in Iraq during 2007. That consideration notwithstanding, the general trend of terrorist attacks since the 1970s shows an increased use of the IED, with an obvious spike during the years following the invasion of Iraq. Specifically regarding suicide terrorism, Pape 2003 asserts that despite a decrease in terrorist attacks worldwide, suicide terrorist attacks have increased “from 31 in the 1980s, to 104 in the 1990s, to 53 in 2000-2001 alone.”<sup>13</sup> The Defense Analysis Department, Naval Postgraduate School, *Suicide Terrorism Data Base* shows there were a total of 71 suicide attacks in 2002, and 54 attacks in 2003.<sup>14</sup> The National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC) reports from 2004-2007 on worldwide incidents of terrorism shows that there were 18 suicide attacks in 2004, 390 in 2005, 287

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<sup>11</sup> The World Wide Incident Tracking System (WWITS) is the National Counterterrorism Center's database of terrorist incidents, which began documentation in 2004, <http://wits.nctc.gov/Main.do> (accessed February 14, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> National Counter Terrorism Center, “2007 Report on Terrorism,” 2008. <http://wits.nctc.gov/reports/crot2007nctcannexfinal.pdf> (accessed January 15, 2009), 10.

<sup>13</sup> Robert A. Pape, “The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism,” *The American Political Science Review* 97 (2003): 1, Proquest database (accessed August 20, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> *Suicide Terrorism Data Base, 1983—Present*, Defense Analysis Department, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA.

in 2006, and 528 in 2007.<sup>15</sup> As of the writing of this thesis, IED attacks have decreased in Iraq, with numbers of corresponding deaths and injuries decreasing to the lowest levels since 2003 against U.S. forces. However, Iraqi deaths have averaged 419 per month during 2008 with a decreasing trend throughout the year leveling out near 250 during the fall months, and there are still spectacular attacks occurring.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, IED attacks are on the rise in Afghanistan; there is growing concern that Al-Qaida is shifting focus from Iraq to Afghanistan, and there is no consensus concerning the cause of the rising violence in Afghanistan. A recent CRS report to Congress states that Gen. James Conway, Commandant of the Marine Corps, supported that proposition telling journalists “that AQI had permanently lost its foothold in large parts of Iraq, that it is no longer welcomed by Sunni populations in Iraq, and that AQI fighters had begun to shift their focus to Afghanistan where their efforts against the United States might be more effective.”<sup>17</sup> The exact causes of the decreasing levels of violence in Iraq are unknown, but some of the contributing factors are the updated counterinsurgency strategy, the Anbar Awakening, the increasing effectiveness of the Iraqi Security Forces, and Muqtada al-Sadr’s “ceasefire.”<sup>18</sup> At the same time, the efforts of the Joint IED Defeat Organization (JIEDDO) must not be discounted, despite the challenge to find a suitable metric for measuring success.<sup>19</sup>

The point here is not to debate the reasons for the security improvements in Iraq; it is instead to explore the IED as a weapon of strategic influence. What contributing factors raised the levels of international and domestic dissatisfaction with progress in Iraq to a critical strategic decision point of withdrawal or “surge”? By gaining a better understanding of the IED through the lenses of insurgency and terrorism literature, with

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<sup>15</sup> National Counterterrorism Center Worldwide Incident Tracking System, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007 reports, <http://wits.nctc.gov/Reports.do> (accessed January 25, 2009).

<sup>16</sup> DoD Report to Congress, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq 2008*, 19.

<sup>17</sup> Kenneth Katzman, “Al Qaeda in Iraq: Assessment and Outside Links,” *CRS Report to Congress*, 2007, 15. Proquest database (accessed August 25, 2008).

<sup>18</sup> DoD Report to Congress, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq 2008*, 21-31

<sup>19</sup> U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations (2008). *The Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization: DOD's Fight Against IEDs Today and Tomorrow* No. 45-137). Washington, DC: House Armed Services Committee, 38-9.

particular attention to the complex situation in Iraq, it is hoped that alternate avenues will be revealed to cope with the IED as a strategic weapon in the future.

To date there is little literature that explains what is meant by the phrase “strategic influence” of the IED, much less how to defeat that influence. The responsibility for Joint IED Defeat is directed to the JIEDDO by DoD Directive 2000.19E which says:

The collection of all DoD-wide efforts to reduce or eliminate the effects of all forms of IEDs used against U.S. and Coalition Forces, including policy, resourcing, materiel, technology, training, operations, information intelligence, assessment, and research.<sup>20</sup>

Despite a great deal of effort and several drafts, the JIEDDO chartered to defeat the IED as “a weapon of strategic influence” has yet to publish a comprehensive strategy. According to the U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations 2008 report:

JIEDDO completed the *National Defense IED Defeat Strategy* in July 2007. However, the Deputy Secretary of Defense did not sign this 47-page strategy, and instead instructed the Director to reduce the plan to a shorter, higher-level document. The revised *Strategic Plan for JIEDDO* constitutes the guidance for all of the Department’s Counter-IED activities. According to JIEDDO officials, the organization is currently updating this plan to include performance measures, goals, and lines of operation strategies. JIEDDO anticipates completing these updates by the end of calendar year 2008.<sup>21</sup>

As of the writing of this thesis it is unknown whether this comprehensive strategy is published.

The recently published US Army and Marine Corps Counter Insurgency (COIN) Field Manual (FM 3-24), as would be expected, refers to the IED in broader terms, as one of many forms of violence used by an insurgency, as a subset of warfare. However, it does not address how to cope with the IED, specifically as a weapon of strategic influence. It does say that today’s operational environment “includes a new kind of

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<sup>20</sup> U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations (2008). *The Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization: DOD's Fight Against IEDs Today and Tomorrow*, 34.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 24.

insurgency, one that seeks to impose revolutionary change worldwide.”<sup>22</sup> This new insurgency uses “time-tested” insurgent tools such as “terrorism, subversion, propaganda, and open warfare,” but also the “precision munitions of extremists—suicide attacks.”<sup>23</sup> To defeat these enemies “requires a global, strategic response—one that addresses the array of linked resources and conflicts that sustain these movements while tactically addressing the local grievances that feed them.”<sup>24</sup> The COIN manual also says that “killing insurgents—while necessary, especially with respect to extremists—by itself cannot defeat an insurgency. Gaining and retaining the initiative requires counterinsurgents to address the insurgency’s causes through stability operations as well.”<sup>25</sup> Although not necessarily a contradiction, one must question the strategic alignment of the direct approach to IEDs advocated by JIEDDO and the indirect approach by the COIN manual—which approach is right, what is the balance, or how can we collaborate to accomplish both in unison? This could be an excellent area for future research.

The closest document to a comprehensive framework for dealing with the IED at the tactical and operational levels was provided by The Headquarters of the Department of the Army, which published the IED Defeat Manual FMI 3-34.119 in September 2005. Unfortunately, that document was only valid through September 2007 and it is unknown whether an update will be published. The IED Defeat manual establishes an IED defeat framework that is derived from “the imperatives and fundamentals of assured mobility. . . [which] encompasses those actions that enable commanders with the ability to deploy, move, and maneuver where and when they desire (without interruption or delay) and to achieve the mission.”<sup>26</sup> It holds that the results of an IED attack “can have operational or strategic impacts, not solely because of the military value of the target, but also the

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<sup>22</sup> United States Department of the Army, Counterinsurgency Field Manual 3-24 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 8.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>26</sup> HQ, Department of the Army and United States Marine Corps, *Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Manual*, FMI 3-34.119/MCIP 3-17.01, 2005, 1-1.

psychological impact on units, the local population, the world community, and political leaders.”<sup>27</sup> Being derived from the operational and tactical tenants of assured mobility, this manual is, understandably, militarily focused. In that regard, it is certainly extremely important to use as many resources as practical for force protection measures; however, hardening U.S., Coalition, and Iraqi security force targets does little to affect the other part of the strategic equation; the attacks on civilians. The shift in the insurgent tactics from targeting military and government forces to suicide attacks targeting civilians (mostly Shia in the case of Iraq) to spark sectarian violence certainly has affected the strategic calculus of coalition forces.

Protection of the civilian population is an essential element of any COIN strategy and has proved extremely difficult in Iraq. Large scale IED attacks against civilians, including attacks involving suicide terrorism, have been extremely successful, affecting responses at both the tactical and strategic levels. The advantages of these types of attacks will be addressed later.

The last important bit of background information germane to this thesis is the current status of the JIEDDO efforts. Despite the general recognition that there is no “silver bullet” technical solution to the IED problem, the “defeat the device” line of military operations still receives 56% of appropriations. More recently, JIEDDO has rearranged the priority order of their lines of operation to give the greatest emphasis to “defeat the network” and the associated mission area, intelligence support. This includes the creation of the Counter-IED Operations Integration Center (COIC) which reached full operational capability in 2007, the COIC “maintains a joint common operational and intelligence picture of the worldwide IED systems and provides commanders fast and accurate fused multi-source intelligence support, operational analysis, technical products, and training support, as well as Distributed Common Ground System (DCGS) capability and new analytical tools.”<sup>28</sup> Despite positive feedback on the COIC’s contributions to

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<sup>27</sup> HQ, Department of the Army and United States Marine Corps, Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Manual, FMI 3-34.119/MCIP 3-17.01, 2005, 1-1.

<sup>28</sup> Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization, Annual Report Fiscal Year 2007, [https://www.jieddo.DOD.mil/ANNUALREPORTS/20080130\\_FULL\\_Annual%20Report%20UNCLS%208.5%20x%2011\\_v6.pdf](https://www.jieddo.DOD.mil/ANNUALREPORTS/20080130_FULL_Annual%20Report%20UNCLS%208.5%20x%2011_v6.pdf) (accessed November 26, 2008), 3.

operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, there seems to be some contention within the Department of Defense (DoD) concerning the creation of the COIC; that there may be overlap or redundancy with its roles and missions. Specifically, Special Operations Command (SOCOM) criticized JIEDDO, stating the COIC conducts Counter Terrorist Network (CTN) functions germane to SOCOM.”<sup>29</sup> These organizational differences must be worked out either through collaboration or a restructuring to integrate Counter IED and Counter Insurgency operations; the IED network is not necessarily the root problem, the larger insurgency and its root causes most likely is, and only through collaboration will the IED be defeated as a strategic weapon. A comprehensive strategy on defeating the IED as a strategic weapon will be a step in the right direction toward providing guidance for collaboration between organizations within and outside of the DoD.

### **C. INSURGENCY, TERRORISM, AND THE IED DEFINED**

To gain a better understanding of the IED we must first look at the insurgency that employs it. Most terrorist and guerrilla organizations end very much like they begin, quietly. “The flowering of insurgencies does not occur instantly or automatically. Would-be insurgents often fail repeatedly or succeed only partly. For every group that becomes an insurgency, dozens—or perhaps hundreds—fail.”<sup>30</sup> Their success or failure depends on a myriad of variables such as their own strength, the state’s strength, external support, the level of popular support, access to resources, environment, strategy, and tactics to name only a few. Being an illicit, underground organization, the cost of failure is extremely high (i.e., death), and, therefore, the insurgents can be counted on to use any advantage at their disposal to overcome challenges they face. Out of necessity, they will be extremely pragmatic in their choice of tactics to achieve short and long term goals. That pragmatism includes their choice of weapon, which may change depending on the

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<sup>29</sup> U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations (2008). *The Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization: DOD's Fight Against IEDs Today and Tomorrow*, 42.

<sup>30</sup> Daniel Byman, "Understanding Proto-Insurgencies," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 31, no.2 (April 1, 2008): 17, Proquest database (accessed January 16, 2009).

success or failure of attacks over time. It may be that there is a weapon that is the perfect match; one that if applied skillfully will help achieve their desired goals; a weapon specifically suited for that particular time in history with consideration given to technical as well as social and political aspects. A weapon that is able to transcend the immediate physical damage to impact a target audience far away psychologically. Common to terrorist and guerrilla groups that use terrorism is the use of symbolic violence to achieve political objectives. Symbolic violence is the use of violence against one target (the target of attack) to influence a different target (the target of influence). With the extraordinary numbers of attacks in Iraq and increasingly Afghanistan, it appears that the insurgencies there are perfecting the use of one of their advantages; the IED. This thesis explores the use of one of the tools of the insurgency in Iraq; the IED and how it is uniquely suited to be the perfect weapon for the insurgent.

To be clear, the IED is currently defined in the JIEDDO lexicon as:

A device placed or fabricated in an improvised manner incorporating destructive, lethal, noxious, pyrotechnic, or incendiary chemicals and designed to destroy, incapacitate, harass or distract. It may incorporate military stores, but is normally devised from nonmilitary components.<sup>31</sup>

The IED is not a new weapon; it has been in use for several centuries with specific tactics that have been used for much longer in non-explosive forms known as “booby traps.”<sup>32</sup> However, the IEDs role in systematic terrorism is relatively new. According to Walter Lacquer, “it is generally believed that systematic political terrorism is a recent phenomenon dating back to the last century. This is true in the sense that the ‘philosophy of the bomb’ as a doctrine is indeed relatively new.”<sup>33</sup> Lacquer explains this philosophy’s “doctrinal origins” date back to the nineteenth century and were born from

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<sup>31</sup> Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization, *Weapons Technical Intelligence (WTI) Improvised Explosive Device (IED) Lexicon*, <https://www.jieddo.DOD.mil/jcwe/inten/default.asp> (accessed March 10, 2008).

<sup>32</sup> Colbert, “The Devil’s Right Hand: Understanding IEDS and Exploring Their Use in Armed Conflict,” 4.

<sup>33</sup> Walter Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (Boston: Little and Brown, 1977), 7.



and matured during the revolutionary struggles in Europe, the Americas, and Russia.<sup>34</sup> As an example Laqueur uses Karl Heinzen, a radical German publicist and democrat who played an important role in creating the “first systematic justification for terrorism” that argued that although murder was immoral, murder could be “transformed into an act of legitimate self-defense when directed against a murderous tyranny.”<sup>35</sup> Heinzen furthered the argument for “propaganda by the deed” in his contemplations of what would now be considered Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD): “For the great strength, training and discipline of the forces of repression could be counterbalanced only by weapons that could be employed by a few people and that would cause great havoc.”<sup>36</sup> Although WMD are outside the scope of this discussion, the key point to relate is the emergence of a moral justification for a weapon that counterbalances the inherent weakness of the revolutionaries. In the context of Iraq the IED is that weapon.

“The high tide of terrorism in Western Europe was the anarchist ‘propaganda of the deed’ in the 1890s,”<sup>37</sup> The genesis of this extremist philosophy is credited to Italian republican extremist Carlo Pisacane.<sup>38</sup> In *Inside Terrorism*, Hoffman credits Piscane, saying that, “violence he [Pisacane] argued, was necessary not only to draw attention to, or generate publicity for, a cause, but also to inform, educate, and ultimately rally the masses behind the revolution. The didactic purpose of violence, Pisacane argued, could never be effectively replaced by pamphlets, wall posters, or assemblies.”<sup>39</sup> The significance of the violent acts of the anarchists, through which many assassinations were carried out in Europe and the U.S. using IEDs, was not necessarily political. The violent acts were significant in the publicity that they generated. “Disparate and uncoordinated

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<sup>34</sup> Walter Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (Boston: Little and Brown, 1977), 21.

<sup>35</sup> Gordon H. McCormick, “Terrorist Decision Making,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, 6 (2003): 475.

<sup>36</sup> Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 27.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>38</sup> Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, rev. and ex. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 5.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

though the anarchists' violence was, the movement's emphasis on individual action or operations carried out by small cells of like-minded radicals made detection and prevention by the police particularly difficult, thus further heightening public fears.<sup>40</sup> What this illustrated for future terrorist groups was that a single event planned and executed by the smallest of terrorist organizations or even an individual, if propagandized, could have short and long term effects that could help them achieve their goals. The IED offered some very distinct advantages that allowed for the execution of an attack while protecting the terrorist organization.

These lessons were not lost on the artisans of internal wars, and the world took note as the Provincial Irish Republican Army (PIRA) executed attacks in Northern Ireland, and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and later Hezbollah executed attacks in Israel, strategically frustrating two of the most militarily powerful states. Extremists also took note as major policy decisions were made following attacks such as the 1983 bombing of the Marine Barracks in Beirut. It seemed, though, as the tactic of terrorism evolved with terrorism's definition over the years, certain themes remained: Symbolic political violence (or the threat of) applied in a systematic manner with careful consideration given to targets (attack and influence) and both physical and psychological effects can have lasting strategic consequences. Insurgent groups such as those operating in Iraq have adopted terrorist tactics including the use of the IED due to the many advantages that support their long term goals.

The DoD defines insurgency as "an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through use of subversion and armed conflict."<sup>41</sup> The DoD's definition does not establish a distinction between insurgency and guerrilla warfare and makes no mention of the role of terrorism. This thesis will use the definition of insurgency provided by the CIA that says that insurgent activity includes terrorism and guerrilla warfare:

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<sup>40</sup> Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, rev. and ex. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 7.

<sup>41</sup> Joint Publication 1-02: Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms (April 12, 2001), 268.

Insurgency is a protracted political-military activity directed toward completely or partially controlling the resources of a country through the use of irregular military forces and illegal political organizations. Insurgent activity—including guerrilla warfare, terrorism, and political mobilization, for example, propaganda, recruitment, front and covert party organization, and international activity—is designed to weaken government control and legitimacy while increasing insurgent control and legitimacy. The common denominator of most insurgent groups is their desire to control a particular area. This objective differentiates insurgent groups from purely terrorist organizations, whose objectives do not include the creation of an alternative government capable of controlling a given area or country.<sup>42</sup>

A moment should be taken to differentiate what is meant by terrorism specifically in an insurgent context. Unfortunately, agreement among scholars as to a definition of terrorism remains elusive. Most contemporary definitions of terrorism include three essential components: a violence element, a political element, and a psychological element.<sup>43</sup> These definitions also typically limit the target to non-combatants. For example, McCormick’s 2003 definition of terrorism “refers to the deliberate use of symbolic violence or the threat of violence against non-combatants for political purposes.”<sup>44</sup> McCormick says his definition stems from the “classic definition of terrorism advanced by Thornton,” who describes terrorism as follows:

Terrorism, in this case, is defined not by the status of the perpetrator but by the nature of the act. Its symbolic quality, which distinguishes it from conventional forms of violence, is due to its indirect and psychological character. Terrorist actions are ultimately designed to influence one target by attacking another. The nature of both target sets varies over time and across cases, depending on the goals and capabilities of the group in question and the circumstances under which it is operating. Terrorism is a purposeful activity, carried out in the name of a larger political objective, regardless of the individual motives or group dynamics that may help explain why a particular action was carried out at a particular time.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency* (Washington, DC), 2.

<sup>43</sup> Michael Freeman (lecture, International Terrorism Class, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, September 2008).

<sup>44</sup> McCormick, “Terrorist Decision Making,” 474.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

Bard O'Neill defines terrorism as, "the threat or use of physical coercion, primarily against noncombatants, especially civilians, to create fear in order to achieve various political objectives."<sup>46</sup> Terrorism is, according to O'Neill, one of three "forms of warfare" associated with an insurgency; guerrilla and conventional warfare being the other two.<sup>47</sup> Thornton provides insight into terrorism in an insurgent context when he says, "in an internal war situation, terror is a symbolic act designed to influence political behavior by extra normal means, entailing the use or threat of violence."<sup>48</sup> Insurgencies may use terrorist tactics, but their chosen targets may expand beyond the civilian populace to any representative of the state including the military, police, government agencies and representatives, and even tribal and religious leaders sympathetic to the state. In "Politics of Terrorism," Albin acknowledges that "civilians are certainly heavily victimized in wars and insurgencies," but says that more recently "military personnel and installations are deliberately targeted by many terrorist groups."<sup>49</sup> When the state rather than the populace is targeted, the insurgency is using guerrilla warfare as an alternative to terrorism. O'Neill explains this distinction by saying that "guerrilla warfare differs from terrorism because its primary targets are the government's armed forces, police, or support units and, in some cases, key economic targets, rather than unarmed civilians."<sup>50</sup> Bruce Hoffman draws a distinction between terrorism and guerrilla warfare as well:

In contrast to insurgents or guerrilla organizations, terrorists do not use violence to confront state control over people and territory. The purpose of a terrorist campaign is, therefore, not as much control as it is fear. As a

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<sup>46</sup> Bard E. O'Neill, *Insurgency & Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2005), 33.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>48</sup> Thomas Perry Thornton, "Terror as a Weapon of Political Agitation," in *Internal War*, ed. Harry Eckstein, 71-99 (London: The Free Press of Glencoe, Collier-Macmillan Limited, 1964), 73.

<sup>49</sup> Cecilia Albin, "The Politics of Terrorism: A Contemporary Survey," in *The Politics of Terrorism: Terror as a State and Revolutionary Strategy*, ed. Barry Rubin, 183-234 (Washington, DC: The Johns Hopkins Foreign Policy Institute, School of Advanced International Studies, 1989), 187.

<sup>50</sup> O'Neill, *Insurgency & Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse*, 36.

result, terrorist groups concentrate their attacks on civilians rather than military or police forces, which are the targets of guerrillas and insurgents . . .<sup>51</sup>

In his revised and expanded edition of *Inside Terrorism*, Bruce Hoffman acknowledges the difficulty of distinguishing between an insurgency and terrorism, specifically with the growing numbers of attacks against civilians in Iraq. Hoffman refers to the State Department's *Patterns of Global Terrorism* to make the distinction that AQI and affiliates who carry out suicide attacks are generally considered terrorists, while nationalist elements such as the former Ba'athist Party loyalists who carry out "guerrilla-like hit-and-run assaults or carry out attacks using roadside IEDs are deemed 'insurgents.'"<sup>52</sup> Hoffman's definition of terrorism in his revised and expanded addition of *Inside Terrorism* allows for some additional flexibility defining it as "the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change."<sup>53</sup>

The situation on the ground in Iraq is complex beyond description and, therefore, "insurgents may use more than one form of warfare, with the combination of terrorism and guerrilla warfare being the most common."<sup>54</sup> In *Insurgency and Terrorism*, Bard O'Neill says that "insurgent terrorism is purposeful rather than mindless violence because terrorists seek to achieve specific long-term, intermediate, and short-term goals."<sup>55</sup> Referring back to Thornton's definition, if the "nature of the act" is considered, then it may be reasonable to suggest that an IED attack against a military target could still be considered symbolic violence and, therefore, psychological in nature.<sup>56</sup>

This thesis will suggest that when the IED is used as a guerrilla warfare tactic the line between the insurgent use of terrorism and guerrilla warfare is blurred. If the

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<sup>51</sup> Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1998, 44.

<sup>52</sup> Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, rev., 36.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>54</sup> O'Neill, *Insurgency & Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse*, 36.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>56</sup> Thornton, "Terror as a Weapon of Political Agitation," 474.

insurgent group is attacking a civilian target it is considered terrorism. If the same group is attacking a military target, then it can be considered guerrilla warfare. However, this thesis argues that if either of these cases involves the use of an IED, then the event can be considered symbolic violence because the targeted audience is separate from the target of attack. As mentioned previously, the IED is an effects-based weapon; whether targeting civilians, military, or government targets, the IED is a terror weapon due to its psychological impact, which extends beyond the physical target to reach the target of influence. To avoid the academic argument of what is terrorism and what is guerrilla warfare, the term *insurgent attack* will be used in place of terrorism when possible.

Insurgencies have used terrorism and guerrilla warfare in internal wars to include the use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IED), but never before Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) have the numbers of IED attacks reached such levels and the percentages of IED attacks outnumbered all other terrorist methods. IED incidents have been greater than 50% and at times greater than 65% of overall incidents including direct and indirect fire since 2004 and have contributed to 70% of all casualties in Iraq.<sup>57</sup> These percentages lead to the question, is there something different about the blend of insurgency that we are dealing with in Iraq?

It may be useful to further define the type of insurgency that we are dealing with in Iraq by looking at insurgent strategic approaches. As mentioned previously, O'Neill 1980 describes three forms of warfare that insurgencies may take: terrorism, guerrilla war, and conventional warfare.<sup>58</sup> According to O'Neill, insurgencies can be further classified as using one of four strategies: a conspiratorial, protracted popular war, military focus, or urban-warfare strategy.<sup>59</sup> Again with these strategies, any of the warfare types can be used to meet the insurgents' desired goals. Traditionally, guerrilla warfare is associated with the Maoist view of the rural guerrilla hiding in the jungles or mountains,

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<sup>57</sup> David H. Petraeus, Gen., USA, *Report to Congress on the Situation in Iraq*, Washington, DC, September 10-11, 2007, <http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/110/pet091007.pdf> (accessed February 8, 2009), Fig. 3, 1.

<sup>58</sup> Bard E. O'Neill, William R. Heaton, and Donald J. Alberts, *Insurgency in the Modern World* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1980), 4.

<sup>59</sup> O'Neill, *Insurgency & Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse*, 45-63.

and attacking the periphery only until such a time that mobilization allows the guerrilla force to face the State in conventional warfare (Protracted Popular War). Iraq more closely resembles what O'Neill calls the "urban guerrilla strategy" where the insurgents use the cities and villages due to their being "vulnerable to terrorism and sabotage" and because the urban terrain renders military "assets, such as aircraft, artillery, mortars, and the like, unusable."<sup>60</sup> Another advantage of using cities and villages is that the insurgent is able to conduct reconnaissance prior to an attack without attracting attention and is able to quickly blend in with the local population following the attack. The insurgents are protected by the population. The trade off for this protection is that the urban insurgents must operate in smaller groups which present challenges for mobilizing the population. Another advantage of the urban strategy is that it creates a very noticeable security predicament; attacks in urban settings—in contrast to attacks in rural areas—draw attention to the security failures of the government, provoke the government to action; transforming the political situation into a military situation.<sup>61</sup>

Here, in this introduction, insurgency is being discussed in somewhat general terms. As alluded to earlier, it must be kept in mind that "the insurgency" in Iraq is really made up of multiple insurgent groups. Mohammed M. Hafez goes as far as to say that there are two separate insurgencies; the Sunni Islamic nationalists making up one group and jihadi salafis and ideological baathist making up the other.<sup>62</sup> Each of these groups is tied to the Sunni Arab ethnic group, including most of the foreign extremists who made their way to Iraq to support AQI. However, this thesis will include the Shia militants as an additional insurgent group whose goals are not necessarily to overthrow the existing regime, but certainly to eject the foreign occupation forces. The main groups will be discussed in more detail in Chapter III to include specifics on their use of the IED.

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<sup>60</sup> O'Neill, *Insurgency & Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse*, 33.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>62</sup> Mohammed M. Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq: The Strategy and Ideology of Martyrdom* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2007), 35-36.

The next chapter will begin with a discussion of what type of weapon the IED is, it will discuss the advantages of using terror as a tactic, and it will explain the advantages of using the IED as an instrument of terror.



## **II. THE PERFECT INSURGENT WEAPON**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter will begin with a discussion of what type of weapon the IED is; specifically, the IED will be explored as a symbolic weapon. The chapter will then discuss terrorism and provide an explanation of the advantages to using terror as a tactic in an insurgent context. Lastly, it will complete the circle by explaining the advantages of using the IED as an instrument of symbolic violence. In the first chapter, a short history of the IED provided some background on how the IED has been used by terrorists and insurgencies.

### **B. THE IED AS A SYMBOLIC WEAPON**

Now, we will undertake a closer examination of the IED as a weapon. The IED is currently defined in the JIEDDO lexicon as:

A device placed or fabricated in an improvised manner incorporating destructive, lethal, noxious, pyrotechnic, or incendiary chemicals and designed to destroy, incapacitate, harass or distract. It may incorporate military stores, but is normally devised from nonmilitary components.<sup>63</sup>

This definition describes the device, but does not help us classify it as a weapon, which is a challenge due to its improvised nature. The IED has long been associated with systematic political violence or symbolic violence. There are numerous advantages of the IED that have lead to this marriage; both tactical and strategic.

Like many weapons that retain their utility over time, the IED is extremely functional. It is extremely versatile and can be used in a virtually unlimited number of ways to achieve an endless variety of goals. Due to its improvised nature it can take any number of forms, the only limitation being the imagination of the “bomb maker.”

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<sup>63</sup> Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization, *Weapons Technical Intelligence (WTI) Improvised Explosive Device (IED) Lexicon*, <https://www.jieddo.DOD.mil/jcwe/inten/default.asp> (accessed March 10, 2008).

A typical tactical weapon such as a tank, artillery, or 50 cal. crew served weapon causes physical damage that is the end in itself; this type of weapons' functionality is the destruction that it is able to cause on the enemy. A tactical weapon contributes to the tactical success **when it “creates low-level, discrete effects on specific systems.”**<sup>64</sup> The IED is different in that regard because the physical damage generated by the IED is only a fraction of its utility. It may be used simply in a tactical manner, but its greatest utility lies with its symbolic qualities. The symbolic aspects of the IED give its effects the potential for strategic influence.

A strategic weapon affects the calculus of grand strategy. Yarger defines strategy as “the art and science of developing and using the political, economic, social-psychological, and military powers of the state in accordance with policy guidance to create effects that protect or advance national interests relative to other states, actors, or circumstances.”<sup>65</sup> A strategic weapon is able to effect the decision making process of senior military or political leadership of a nation-state. For example, the building and testing of a nuclear weapon by the Soviet Union forced a change in the strategy of the U.S. The U.S. no longer retained the monopoly on the most powerful weapon the world had known. The A-bomb had terrifying destructive power, but its mere existence and potential for use generated widespread psychological effects. Since the end of the cold war fears of nuclear holocaust between two great powers has abated somewhat, however there are still very real fears that an IED will be employed in conjunction with a nuclear device or fissile material. The U.S. has spent an enormous amount of money in prevention of that type of attack. The probability of it occurring is low, however the cost if it did occur would be high and therefore the psychological effect is quite strong.

At its core, the IED is a symbolic weapon, its primary advantage. As a symbolic weapon, the consequences of its detonation reach beyond the immediate target to generate terror and the expectation of additional attacks. The IED's effects are projected

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<sup>64</sup> Department of Defense Joint Publication 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC, September 17, 2006), IV-10.

<sup>65</sup> Harry R. Yarger, “Strategic Theory for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Little Book on Big Strategy,” *Strategic Studies Institute*, U.S. Army War College, February 2006, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=641> (accessed January 25, 2009), 1.

onto two different targets; the “target of attack” and the “target of influence.”<sup>66</sup> The IED defeat manual explains that the “results can have operational or strategic impacts, not solely because of the military value of the target, but also the psychological impact on units, the local population, the world community, and political leaders.”<sup>67</sup> As such, the IED exists at a fusion point between the tactical, operational, and the strategic levels of war, largely due to its symbolic value and ability to achieve effects far beyond the immediate target of attack.

Comparing this explanation to our current military terminology, the IED could be considered “effects based,” delivered in a non-linear fashion through both social and physical space. “Linear operations are proportional and additive, and typically produce a predictable, measurable effect,” whereas non-linear operations “can produce disproportionate, often unpredictable, effects.”<sup>68</sup> The IED is non-linear in that it can create large effects with a small action. It is effects based in that it achieves immediate physical effects, but more importantly, psychological effects on two separate targets, “the target of attack” and “the target of influence.”<sup>69</sup> Unlike conventional weaponry, the IED is delivered not just through three-dimensional physical space, it is delivered through social space. Both physical and social space are significant in their symbolism; the physical space where the enemy demonstrates they control the physical terrain, and the social space where the enemy demonstrates they control the human terrain as well.

The power and symbolism of the IED does not begin or end with the detonation. It begins far earlier with the generation of a strategy that includes the IED, and the creation and delivery of the IED through a social system or network. Arguably, the power and symbolism of certain IED won’t fade easily. For example, just a picture or mention of the Marine barracks in Beirut or the rescue worker holding the lifeless child in front of the Oklahoma City Federal Building evokes a variety of emotions for witnesses, victims, and even the general public long after the event. In an interview with Rick

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<sup>66</sup> Hoffman and McCormick, ‘Terrorism, Signaling, and Suicide Attack,’ 246.

<sup>67</sup> HQ, Department of the Army and United States Marine Corps, *Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Manual*, FMI 3-34.119/MCIP 3-17.01, 2005, 1-1.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-7.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

Atkinson for his ground breaking piece “Left of the Boom,” retired four-star Army general Montgomery C. Meigs, the former director of the Pentagon’s Joint IED Defeat Organization, describes the IEDs symbolic effect when he adds, “unlike conventional artillery, IEDs have profound strategic consequences, because the bomber's intent is to ‘bleed us in a way that attacks American political will directly and obviates the advantages we have in military forces. . .’ thousands of bombs have also made U.S. troops wary and distrustful, even as a new counterinsurgency strategy expands the American military presence among the Iraqi people.”<sup>70</sup> More recently, the JIEDDO 2007 Annual Report says the “U.S. forces face adaptive enemies who seek to achieve strategic results by inflicting significant casualties through the systematic employment of IEDs.”<sup>71</sup> By capitalizing on existing social networks, the enemy is able to employ the IED in a manner and with the appropriate numbers to affect policy at the strategic level. The IED Defeat manual describes the IED’s influence this way; “The enemy will attempt to attack the U. S. national will or the coalition partners will through the use of IEDs because they provide a tactical weapon with which to achieve strategic goals.”<sup>72</sup>

The IED is a symbolic weapon whose effects are extremely physical, but even more importantly they are psychological. Because of this it is easy to understand how the IED became associated with symbolic violence. The next section will discuss symbolic violence; specifically it will explain why terrorism is a successful and thus a preferred tactic of an insurgency. There will be a discussion of the challenges facing the insurgent and how symbolic violence helps overcoming those challenges.

### **C. WHY TERROR?**

O’Neill 2007 defines at least nine different types of insurgencies with varying short-term, medium-term, and long-term goals.<sup>73</sup> However, there are some common

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<sup>70</sup> Rick Atkinson, “Left of Boom: the Struggle to Defeat Roadside Bombs,” *The Washington Post*, September 30, 2007, special report, 2.

<sup>71</sup> Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization, Annual Report Fiscal Year 2007, 4.

<sup>72</sup> HQ, Department of the Army and United States Marine Corps, Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Manual, FMI 3-34.119/MCIP 3-17.01, 2005, 2-4.

<sup>73</sup> O’Neill, *Insurgency & Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse*, 19-28.

reasons why terrorism is chosen as a tactic within an insurgent strategy. Terrorism may be a useful tactic due to there being limited alternatives, its ability to mobilize and coerce, its ability to maintain security of the organization, and due to the effects it generates through symbolic violence.

## **1. Limited Options**

The first, and possibly most universal, reason for an insurgency to choose terrorism is because there are limited alternatives, usually related to the group's size and strength, the social and political environment, and/or the available resources. The insurgents are unable to participate in the political process for any number of reasons, such as a repressive regime or foreign occupation. The insurgent must legitimize his actions as essential for freedom or liberation. From the insurgents' perspective, it is critical to the group's future success or failure that his actions are justified. Thornton says the "insurgent must attempt to communicate effectively to his audience the idea that terror is the only weapon appropriate to the situation."<sup>74</sup> If he is unable to communicate this important message, he will be unable to gain the popular support required to achieve his ultimate goals, and, therefore, his movement will likely be destroyed or simply fade away.

## **2. Mobilization**

Leites and Wolf tell us that "like other organizations, [insurgency] starts small. Its long-term objectives are large, but its hard core of entrepreneurs and managers is small, and its initial program of preparation and activity is limited."<sup>75</sup> Common to insurgencies, this small "hard-core" group faces several opening challenges including a mobilization problem or the "mobilization dilemma."<sup>76</sup> Terrorism assists the insurgent organization with overcoming its opening challenges. Terrorism helps generate a

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<sup>74</sup> Thornton, "Terror as a Weapon of Political Agitation," 76.

<sup>75</sup> Nathan Leites & Charles Wolf, *Rebellion and Authority: An Analytical Essay on Insurgent Conflicts* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1970), 51.

<sup>76</sup> McCormick and Giordano, "Things Come Together: symbolic violence and guerrilla mobilization," 295.

perception of strength necessary to mobilize and coerce. To grow, insurgents must give the populace the perception that they are stronger than they actually are in order to gain support. This support will only be granted conditionally; depending on the “costs and benefits of their (the populace’) alternatives” and the “probabilities they assign to each side’s success.”<sup>77</sup> If the population has something to gain (incentives or side payments) by supporting the insurgents (or by not supporting the government) and there is an anticipation that the insurgents are going to win, they support the insurgency. Because the group is small, it is critical that they create a façade surrounding their true numbers and strength. This perception of strength is created through “symbolic violence and the manipulation of violent images.”<sup>78</sup> As part of creating this perception of strength and power to resolve the opening challenges, the insurgent must demonstrate that they are credible and that the state is weak and unworthy of the peoples’ support. In this sense terrorism is a “purposeful activity” of the insurgency intended to target specific sets of targets, namely the target of attack and the target of influence.<sup>79</sup>

### **3. Security versus Efficiency**

McCormick and Giordano 2007 tell us that another opening challenge is that the insurgency must remain hidden in order to be able to survive, yet they must be able to carry out operations to generate the perception of strength required to grow; they refer to this as the “security constraint.”<sup>80</sup> Terrorism provides the means to maintain security while achieving high visibility symbolic events that can be propagandized to further the cause. Another challenge for an insurgent group related to maintaining security is their inefficiency. Bell refers to an insurgency as an “underground” organization and describes how the operational constraints of the underground lead the underground to be

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<sup>77</sup> McCormick and Giordano, “Things Come Together: symbolic violence and guerrilla mobilization,” 301.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 295.

<sup>79</sup> McCormick, “Terrorist Decision Making,” 474.

<sup>80</sup> McCormick and Giordano, “Things Come Together: symbolic violence and guerrilla mobilization,” 295.

inherently inefficient; “the need for cover means that secrecy erodes efficiency.”<sup>81</sup> Terrorism assists with overcoming the security problem because it allows for a small number of insurgents to be exposed, using only a few resources, and being able to achieve disproportionate symbolic or psychological effects.

#### **4. Coercion**

Using symbolic violence, the insurgent is also able to generate the expectation of additional attacks with the intent of influencing the political sphere. The fear or psychological effect far exceeds the physical violence of the act, yet it can, in certain circumstances, alter the behavior of groups or governments. Modifying behavior or making concessions based on fear is bowing to coercion. Crenshaw proposes that:

(a)Terrorism is part of a revolutionary strategy- -a method used by insurgents to seize political power from an existing government. (b)Terrorism is manifested in acts of socially and politically unacceptable violence. (c)There is a consistent pattern of symbolic or representative selection of the victims or objects of the acts of terrorism. (d)The revolutionary movement deliberately intends these actions to create a psychological effect on specific groups and thereby to change their political behavior and attitudes.<sup>82</sup>

Each of Crenshaw’s descriptors of terrorism is related to the concept of using symbolic violence by the insurgency to modify political behavior. In other words; to coerce the government and the populace into action that will meet the desires of the insurgent group.

#### **5. Effects Through Symbolic Violence**

The challenges an insurgent organization faces are overcome through symbolic violence and the effects generated from that violence. Each of the advantages are leveraged through communication using symbolic violence to generate perceptions with

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<sup>81</sup> J. Bowyer Bell, “The Armed Struggle and Underground Intelligence: An Overview,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 17, 1994: 117.

<sup>82</sup> Martha Crenshaw Hutchinson, “The concept of revolutionary terrorism,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* (pre-1986 16, no. 3 (September 1, 1972): 385, <http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed November 26, 2008).

different audiences in mind; often called “signaling.”<sup>83</sup> There are two separate targets: the target of attack and the target of influence. Of course, there is the possibility of multiple audiences with a single event. Since the physical target is usually killed or destroyed in the attack, the primary utility of the terrorist attack is in the symbolism of the act and the effects that result. Thornton says that “the relatively high efficiency of terrorism derives from its symbolic nature.”<sup>84</sup> A related concept is discussed by Crenshaw who says “terrorism’s value to revolutionary movements is not proportional to its expense, but to its psychological effectiveness.”<sup>85</sup> Thornton also says that “one must ask, not only ‘Who got hit by the bomb?’ but also ‘what effects is this particular act likely to entail?’”<sup>86</sup> In other words, what are the immediate, second-, and third-order consequences of a terrorist act beyond the physical target, and how do multiple attacks affect an audience psychologically over time?

In “Things Come Together,” McCormick and Giordano identify three important effects that symbolic violence can have through the manipulation of violent images: agitation effect, provocation effect and demonstration effect.<sup>87</sup> Each of these effects is extremely important during the opening game, particularly the agitation effect. However, they may be used throughout the conflict to invigorate or sustain as needed. Certain effects are immediate; others accumulate over time to achieve strategic results. It must be kept in mind that the overuse of agitation, provocation, or demonstration can have negative results. Both the government and the insurgency require the support of the population to win, and any action can have positive or negative effect on the level of support. McCormick refers to these resulting actions as being “dynamically reinforcing” or “dynamically offsetting.”<sup>88</sup> Dynamically reinforcing is a term used to describe actions

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<sup>83</sup> For a full discussion see B. Hoffman and G. H. McCormick, ‘Terrorism, Signaling, and Suicide Attack,’ *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 27 (2004): 243-281.

<sup>84</sup> Thornton, “Terror as a Weapon of Political Agitation,” 77.

<sup>85</sup> Martha Crenshaw Hutchinson, “The concept of revolutionary terrorism,” 79.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> McCormick and Giordano, “Things Come Together: symbolic violence and guerrilla mobilization,” 307-311.

<sup>88</sup> Discussion with Dr. Gordon McCormick, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, September 10, 2008.



that uphold the “status quo,” essentially the state’s system. Dynamically offsetting describes actions that detract from the state, producing a net gain for the insurgency.

***a. Agitation***

The Agitation effect is “violence. . . as an instrument of armed propaganda . . . to advertise the existence of an emerging opposition, raise the popular consciousness, and define the terms of the struggle.”<sup>89</sup> “Before the opposition can even begin the process of building a base of popular support, it must first be able to disrupt the system’s inertial stability.”<sup>90</sup> The intent of this type of act is to use the power of symbolic violence as a propaganda tool to challenge and disrupt the status quo, jarring the populace into awareness and hopefully (from the insurgents’ perspective) into open opposition to the government. These types of attacks are typically extremely devastating and must be used sparingly by the insurgency or they risk losing any level of support they may have gained. Thornton says that “agitational terror is not the sort of activity that can be utilized effectively over a protracted period of time. It tends to lose its effectiveness with familiarity . . . and it is not appropriate to the legitimacy that an insurgent group must at least claim to have.”<sup>91</sup> For example the bombing campaign carried out by the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) in Northern Ireland initially gained a great deal of support from the Irish Catholic population, however over time and with successive loss of civilian life in the bombings, support dwindled shifting to desire for political solutions rather than violence.

***b. Demonstration***

“Demonstration effect” “is used for the purpose of generating an exaggerated impression of insurgent strength and regime weakness.”<sup>92</sup> McCormick and Giordano advance Debray’s argument that “if the guerillas are to gain strength, they must

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<sup>89</sup> McCormick and Giordano, “Things Come Together: symbolic violence and guerrilla mobilization,” 307.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Thornton, “Terror as a Weapon of Political Agitation,” 89.

<sup>92</sup> McCormick and Giordano, “Things Come Together: symbolic violence and guerrilla mobilization,” 309.

appear to be strong” by demonstrating that the state is not ‘unassailable.’ “The objective in this case, is not to ensure that ‘the populace prefers the authorities or the revolutionaries; what is important is perceived power: what the people believe about the relative power of the two sides and about what will happen to them if they support one side or the other.”<sup>93</sup> Perception of relative strength is key for mobilization, but also the expectation of the ultimate outcome of the conflict is important. An example of the demonstration effect is “Bloody Friday” which took place July 21, 1972 when the PIRA set off 26 bombs in Belfast. This series of coordinated car bombings came within four months of the implementation of direct rule by the British government and was meant to “demonstrate that Northern Ireland was ungovernable” for the British, and to show that the IRA was powerful and in control.<sup>94</sup>

### *c. Provocation*

“Provocation effect” is just what it sounds like: violence used to provoke the state into overreacting and engaging in “excessive countermeasures” and is designed to improve the relative image of the insurgent group.<sup>95</sup> This concept is also related to mobilization and how perceptions of strength or weakness attribute to the growth or decline of the insurgency. McCormick discusses the asymmetrical relationship between the state and the insurgency in terms of information versus force advantages and disadvantages that attribute to the success of the provocation effect:

The state begins the game with a force advantage but an information disadvantage. It is generally able to hit what it sees, but it has a limited ability to see what it wishes to hit. The insurgents, by contrast, enter the game with an information advantage and a force disadvantage. They are generally able to see what they wish to hit, but have a limited ability to hit what they see.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> McCormick and Giordano, “Things Come Together: symbolic violence and guerrilla mobilization,” 309.

<sup>94</sup> Paul Arthur, “The Conflict,” from “Behind the Mask; the IRA and Sinn Fein,” (1997) from PBS and WGBH, *Frontline*, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/ira/> (accessed November 4, 2008).

<sup>95</sup> McCormick & Giordano, “Things Come Together: symbolic violence and guerrilla mobilization,” 308.

<sup>96</sup> McCormick and Giordano, “Things Come Together: symbolic violence and guerrilla mobilization,” 308.

This asymmetry, McCormick states, can be “exploited by provoking the state into striking out at targets it cannot see, alienating the population.”<sup>97</sup> Provocation can also lead to policy and strategy changes that will further alienate the population. During the Londonderry, Ireland civil rights march in January of 1972; British troops were provoked into killing thirteen Roman Catholics (Bloody Sunday). Overnight in the eyes of the Catholic population British troops went from protectors to occupiers in Ireland. This event also led to the abolishment of the Stormont Parliament and direct rule from Westminster.<sup>98</sup>

*d. Cumulative Effect*

Another concept that must be considered is the effect of multiple attacks during a campaign of symbolic violence over time. There is little literature addressing this aspect of an insurgent campaign, probably due to the difficulty of quantifying the effects of cumulative attacks. In recent years it has been referred to as the “Washington Post effect,”<sup>99</sup> the phenomenon of daily attacks being seen on TV and read about in the news affecting the American people. Bard O’Neill asserts that “cumulative acts of violence wreak havoc and create insecurity, which will eventually produce a loss of confidence in the government.”<sup>100</sup> Thornton discusses the concept of “resonant mass or target of intent of the terrorist attack” in the context of an insurgency (in his case, colonial occupation) and how the goal of symbolic violence is to make “repression so costly that the colonial government will prefer to withdraw rather than continue the struggle.”<sup>101</sup> His main point germane here is that “the resonant mass is thus the government and population of the home country, completely removed from personal and direct involvement in the war,” yet they are the ones that will most strongly influence

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<sup>97</sup> McCormick and Giordano, “Things Come Together: symbolic violence and guerrilla mobilization,” 308.

<sup>98</sup> Paul Arthur, “The Conflict,” from “Behind the Mask; the IRA and Sinn Fein.”

<sup>99</sup> Frank Morneau, Joint IED Defeat Organization Deputy Director, Rapid Acquisition & Technology, Interview with author on September 23, 2008.

<sup>100</sup> O’Neill, *Insurgency & Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse*, 62.

<sup>101</sup> Thornton, “Terror as a Weapon of Political Agitation,” 79.

policy resulting in the troops' withdrawal.<sup>102</sup> The insurgency doesn't necessarily have to win outright; only survive long enough for the occupiers to leave. Thus, the cumulative acts of violence particularly when propagandized through the tools of the information age are able to achieve cumulative effects that ultimately change the level of support for the war and even the strategic decision making of the leadership of the target country. These cumulative effects have other audiences as well, including the military forces (indigenous and foreign), the indigenous population, the indigenous government, and the International community. Dr Douglas Borer uses the term "psychological attrition" to describe this mental erosion.<sup>103</sup> Over time the daily attacks affect the morale of the troops, separate the troops mentally and physically from the population, and create disillusionment with the mission. This "psychological attrition" occurs back home in towns across America, as mounting casualties are flashed on the news and regular memorials to the fallen are strewn across the front pages of the papers.

In the beginning insurgents have very limited options and terrorism provides some advantages that allow them to overcome some of their opening challenges. Terrorism allows an insurgency to mobilize a base of support as well as coerce those who would otherwise be unwilling to support. Terrorism may also allow an insurgency to coerce concession from the government. Insurgent organizations may use terrorism to accomplish goals while maintain the necessary security of their organization until a time where they can openly challenge the government. Also, we have seen that through the use of symbolic violence an insurgent organization can generate effects; they can announce their existence through agitation, demonstrate their strength, and provoke the government into overreaction. The aggregation of this symbolic violence achieves cumulative effects that may alter the level of support for the conflict or change the policies of the military or political leadership. Insurgents more and more are relying on the IED as the principle terrorist tactic to leverage the advantages discussed here.

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<sup>102</sup> Thornton, "Terror as a Weapon of Political Agitation," 79

<sup>103</sup> This thought resulted from a discussion with Dr. Douglas Borer on September 5, 2008, at the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA.

#### **D. THE IED ADVANTAGE; AN INSTRUMENT OF TERROR**

This section will discuss the IED and how it is able to leverage the advantages terrorism as a tactic offers. “For the great strength, training and discipline of the forces of repression could be counterbalanced only by weapons that could be employed by a few people and that would cause great havoc.”<sup>104</sup> Largely, the IED is associated as one of the many tactics of terrorism. Its use has increased by terrorist groups and insurgencies. An IED attack that is properly planned and executed, learned from, video-taped, and propagandized provides an insurgent group with a number of primary and supporting advantages. The IED is an extremely powerful and effective symbolic weapon, it is inexpensive to build and deploy, and it gives the desired perception of strength, and allows the insurgent group to minimize exposure. Thornton describes some of the advantages of terrorism saying “among its most prominent virtues is economy. It is a weapon that promises returns far out of proportion to the amount of time, energy, and materials the insurgents invest in it, enabling them to project an image many times larger than their actual strength.”<sup>105</sup> It seems the logical weapon of choice for an insurgency as stated by Evan Colbert:

Facing the prospect of defeat against a numerically, militarily, or industrially superior opponent, the use of IEDs by relatively inferior forces should come as no surprise. From the perspective of the outnumbered, outgunned, and ill-equipped, the decision to employ IEDs is logical because they are cheap, flexible, and highly effective weapons. They can provide a pragmatic guerrilla, insurgent, terrorist, or so-called freedom fighter with a weapon capable of striking a punishing blow against a superior enemy while also avoiding the enemy's combat advantages.<sup>106</sup>

However, like most weapons, the IED is only as good as the strategy and tactics of those who employ it. An insurgency is a contest between the insurgent and the state, and the contest concerns control or power. Also related is the security of the system that is in place; as in, do most people favor the status quo, or is the political climate ripe for

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<sup>104</sup> Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 27.

<sup>105</sup> Thornton, “Terror as a Weapon of Political Agitation,” 88.

<sup>106</sup> Colbert, “The Devil’s Right Hand: Understanding IEDS and Exploring Their Use in Armed Conflict,” 50.

revolution? If the government is strong, then the system is strong, and it will take greater effort for an insurgency to counter it. The IED assists with that effort. All the actions of the insurgent groups will either reinforce the existing system or offset it. The goal of the insurgency is to take power away from the state, and, therefore, the insurgency looks to offset the state's system. Actions that detract from the state's system would be dynamically offsetting. Actions that backfire, such as "over the top" violence, would be dynamically reinforcing to the state's system. The IED is the perfect weapon to dynamically offset the state's system. Using a roadside bomb, a Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device (VBIED), or a suicide vest, the bomber is able to control the time and place of attack, the target audiences, as well the scale of the damage. If applied correctly, the IED will continue to offset the government system, while generating the mobilization needed for the insurgency to grow and go on to win. In contrast, if the insurgent strategy is flawed, the wrong targets are attacked, or the propaganda does not affect the audience as desired, the IED attack will reinforce the state's system.

If applied appropriately the IED is a perfect weapon for an insurgency; there are numerous advantages the IED has that align perfectly with the needs of a terrorist or insurgent group to employ symbolic violence to achieve their political ends. Some primary and secondary advantages will be addressed below.

## **1. Primary Advantages**

### ***a. Mobilization and Coercion***

The IED is the perfect weapon to create the perception of strength. The insurgency has limited forces, and therefore, a great advantage of the IED is that it allows for conservation of or economy of force in generating the desired effect, while preserving the insurgents' precious numbers. Perception of strength is the key; the IED allows the insurgent group to create the perception that they are stronger than they actually are. In addition to providing a perception of strength, the IED allows the insurgent to affect the populace' expectation of the conflict's outcome. The IED influences perceptions and

expectations in several ways. First, the IED has devastating physical effects that create the perception of strength and power for the insurgency. Second, as a symbolic weapon, the IED generates psychological effects that intimidate and coerce due to the expectation of additional attacks. These psychological effects also create the perception of power and relative strength of the insurgency. Attacks against civilian targets give the perception that the government (or occupation force) is weak and is unable to protect the populace by maintaining security. Attacks against military, police, and other government representatives and infrastructure also create the perception of relative strength of the insurgency and relative weakness of the government, but possibly more importantly, it creates the expectation that the insurgency may be strong enough to win. The combination of the perception of relative strength of the insurgency and the expectation that the insurgents may win aids in mobilizing a base of support. If the people see IED attacks along the same stretch of road in their city or village every day, there will be no doubt as to who is in control of the ground. The insurgent is able to show that he maintains the initiative; choosing the time and place of attack. This further demonstrates that the State controls neither the physical terrain nor the human terrain. Similar to the IED attack in the introduction, the physical terrain allowed the insurgent the opportunity to stage the attack undetected. The human terrain allowed for the IED to make its way through a social network to be emplaced and detonated.

Another critical advantage of using the IED to overcome the force disadvantage, whether purposeful or coincidental, is that the IED further separates military forces from the population both physically and symbolically. Although measures to protect forces from the IED are absolutely necessary, it must be remembered that armor and T-barriers only further separate the counter-insurgent from the population and demonstrate that the government is threatened and does not have control.

The IED assists in overcoming the operational constraint of security while creating the perception of strength or power. With little exposure one or two insurgents are able to emplace and detonate an IED, or deliver a VBIED, or employ a suicide vest, and through the IED's instantaneous and devastating effects, the IED is able to "simulate (show) an image of strength and determination, and dissimulate (hide) the group's real

state of play.”<sup>107</sup> The insurgent maintains the perception of being powerful while maintaining concealment through the use of technology such as command detonation devices: Long Range Cordless Telephones (LRCT), cell phones, and command detonating wire. In addition, the insurgent uses hired help and low level operators such as the IED emplacements/trigger men to protect the inner circle of planners, bomb makers, financiers, facilitators, and others.

Related to mobilization through the perception of strength and power is the coercive effect of the IED. As with other types of insurgent tactics, an IED attack by its nature leads to the expectation of additional attacks. This expectation is a byproduct of the psychological effect of surprise, terror, and dread caused by the event. The intent is to change the behavior of the target audience. The behavior the insurgent desires to change may be for political concessions, withdrawal of forces, social policy changes, power sharing, or simply entering into discussions. Regardless of the specific behavioral change desired, the symbolic violence is intended to coerce. Related to coercion is a particular form of symbolic violence incorporating the IED: suicide bombing. Pape argues that “suicide terrorism follows a strategic logic, one specifically designed to coerce modern liberal democracies to make significant territorial concessions. Moreover, over the past two decades, suicide terrorism has been rising largely because terrorists have learned that it pays.”<sup>108</sup> These types of attacks often achieve major political objectives, such as the withdrawal of US forces from Lebanon following the bombing of the Marine barracks in 1983.

#### ***b. Propaganda and the Effects of Symbolic Violence***

IED attacks are not random acts of terror; the types of targets are specifically chosen to create certain effects, to reach a specific audience and to achieve short and long term goals. In *Inside Terrorism*, Bruce Hoffman states:

Terrorism is specifically designed to have far-reaching psychological effects beyond the immediate victim(s) or object of the terrorist attack. It

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<sup>107</sup> Hoffman and McCormick, ‘Terrorism, Signaling, and Suicide Attack,’ 247.

<sup>108</sup> Pape, “The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism,” 2.



is meant to instill fear within, and thereby intimidate, a wider “target audience” that might include a rival ethnic or religious group, an entire country, a national government or political party, or public opinion in general.... Through the publicity generated by their violence, terrorists seek to obtain the leverage, influence and power they otherwise lack to effect political change on either a local or an international scale.<sup>109</sup>

The IED is instrumental in creating the desired effects to reach both audiences and thereby achieving the insurgent goals. The target of attack is a physical target specifically chosen by the insurgent because it represents a wider audience. The target could be a government building, a religious institution, the security forces, the police, or a local market crowded with civilians. “Terrorist actions are ultimately designed to influence one target by attacking another.”<sup>110</sup> The target of influence is the individual or organization that the insurgent is signaling or sending a message to in order to change behavior or policy. The target of influence could be the government, the President of the U.S., the theatre commander, the U.S. government, the international community, or the American people. Without the media the effects of an attack would propagate much slower and would reach only a fraction of the audience.

By manipulating the violent images; choosing the type of IED, the time and place of attack, and the medium for publicizing the event in order to achieve greatest effect and to reach the largest possible audience, the insurgent is able to generate a effects that will influence the outcome of the struggle. “Knowing that casualties from IEDs will be publicized in the media in the United States and other coalition countries, the enemy can use this reporting to affect the U.S. national will and the coalition will.”<sup>111</sup> Additionally, attacks are videotaped and “are frequently disseminated on the Internet for propaganda purposes.”<sup>112</sup> In this sense the symbolic violence of using an IED transcends the tactical to affect the strategic level of decision making. Colonel William Adamson gives a description of how symbolic violence generates influence:

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<sup>109</sup> Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 1998, 44.

<sup>110</sup> McCormick, “Terrorist Decision Making,” 474.

<sup>111</sup> IED Defeat, 2-4.

<sup>112</sup> Colbert, “The Devil’s Right Hand: Understanding IEDS and Exploring Their Use in Armed Conflict,” 33.

Few experiences compare with the helplessness felt by those involved in an IED attack. The experience is searing. An IED attack has many of the attributes of a sniper ambush. . IEDs are weapons of surprise. An IED victim vaults from relative calm to chaos in the blink of an eye. The IED strikes unexpectedly like the piercing crack of a sniper rifle. . Personal involvement with IED attacks begins with the response to a scene of a suspected IED and often moves onto casualty evacuation. . discussions with victims, patients convalescing and coping with daily rehabilitation from wounds. The sense of urgency felt on the battlefield or in the amputee wards enters living rooms via nightly news coverage. Images of IED attacks invoke strategic influence over the public, a public otherwise physically dislocated from combat. . The strategic power of the IED comes from a non-kinetic source, information.<sup>113</sup>

Information concerning an attack when disseminated and propagandized, aids in the generation of effects such as agitation, demonstration and coercion. The IED like no other weapon allows the insurgency to create each of these desired effects, which increases the perception of power and strength. Those actions that are most successful in achieving their overarching goals will likely continue; those that fail will be discarded. The first effect the IED may used for is agitation.

1) Agitation and Demonstration. The detonation of an IED in front of an embassy, parliament building or in a crowded market sends a signal to the population that the government does not have control. The destruction signifies that there is an opposition that is willing to challenge the status quo. Also, with regards to the demonstration effect, the attack sends a psychological shock intended to aid in mobilization by creating the perception of strength of the insurgent and weakness of the state. “Every attack that [the state] fails to prevent is a blow at its standing. Even if the attack does not succeed, it makes a dent in that prestige, and that dent widens into a crack which is extended with every succeeding attack.”<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> William G. Adamson, “An asymmetric threat invokes strategic leader initiative: the Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization,” seminar paper, The Industrial College of the Armed Forces National Defense University, Fort McNair, Washington, D.C. 2007, [http://blog.wired.com/defense/files/adamson\\_final\\_icafe\\_research\\_paper\\_jieddo.doc](http://blog.wired.com/defense/files/adamson_final_icafe_research_paper_jieddo.doc) (accessed May 20, 2008), 7.

<sup>114</sup> McCormick and Giordano, “Things Come Together: symbolic violence and guerrilla mobilization,” 308.

2) Provocation. The IED is an extremely effective tool for the insurgents to provoke a reaction from the state. We have seen this overreaction time and time again in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A suicide attacker is sent to execute an attack against an Israeli target such as a coffee shop or a bus. Israel responds by launching attacks into Gaza further alienating the Palestinians and generating additional support for Hamas. Whether the intent of this IED event in particular was to provoke really doesn't matter because every IED event by its very nature provokes. The IED takes victims from a normal routine moment to chaos and devastation instantaneously, meanwhile the attacker anonymously departs the scene and the victims are left to attend to their dead and wounded. Horror, fear, helplessness, dread and feelings of victimization are all immediate effects of the attack. Some of these immediate effects may fade with time, some may be transferred to others, and some will accumulate if other similar events are experienced. These immediate physical and psychological effects can contribute to an immediate overreaction or can accumulate and contribute to a later overreaction which alienates the population and further separates the population from the state—this constitutes a net win for the insurgency. The IED defeat manual refers to this as the enemy's use of Information Operations or propaganda saying, "the enemy will exploit U.S. mistakes and leverage the media and other information systems to impact the U.S. political decision making."<sup>115</sup> IED effects provoke a reaction that is anticipated and subsequently filmed by the insurgents, or they may film all of the attacks and get a bonus when there is an overreaction. Regardless, they use provocation to further their cause.

3) Immediate Effects. Effects are both psychological and coercive in nature. The immediate effects of the IED are the instantaneously devastating and shocking violence experienced by the victims and bystanders of the attack; these effects cause physical and deep psychological scars. The immediate agitation effect is complete disruption of the system or any semblance of normalcy, sending a signal to the populace and the state that more violence is to come and there are going to be changes. The immediate demonstration effect creates the impression that the state is weak and cannot even provide security. Immediate effects of an IED are coercive in that they send a message to the local populace

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<sup>115</sup> HQ, Department of the Army and United States Marine Corps, Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Manual, FMI 3-34.119/MCIP 3-17.01, 2005, 2-4.

and government warning to expect future attacks if concessions are not made. The results of immediate effects are also exhibited when an immediate response or overreaction of the state occurs, but there are also long term consequences to consider.

4) Cumulative Effects. Cumulative effects may have strategic implications in a protracted conflict. A 1988 Report of the Commission on Integrated Long-Term Strategy discusses strategic implications saying that “these conflicts in the Third World...have had and will have an adverse cumulative effect on U.S. access to critical regions, on American credibility among allies and friends, and on American self-confidence. If this cumulative effect cannot be checked or reversed in the future, it will gradually undermine American’s ability to defend its interest.”<sup>116</sup> Although speaking of a number of protracted conflicts attributing to the cumulative effect over time, the same principle can be applied to an IED campaign where the cumulative effect erodes the national will. Colbert notes, “The strategic goal of one organization of users might be to inflict mass casualties on their opponent’s forces in an attempt to demoralize them. Such is the case in Iraq where roadside bombs are used to erode the will of U.S. politicians and citizens through high service-member casualty rates.”<sup>117</sup> John Poole speaks about insurgent operations in Iraq and how trends in technique would help define maneuvers (tactics). He also says that those tactics “would almost certainly have collateral psychological and media value. They would inflict enough casualties to erode the foe’s popular support, while being safe enough to bolster friendly morale.”<sup>118</sup>

Subsequent attacks, where the enemy is not engaged immediately, over a period of time will build up in the minds of the soldiers. Described as psychological attrition; the survivors still mourning the loss of their friends are left to their prayers, good luck charms, or hate to carry them through the next mission “outside the wire.” The anxiety rises, and they are more prone to overreaction. They also build up

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<sup>116</sup> “Discriminate Deterrence,” *Report of the Commission on Integrated Long-Term Strategy*, January 1988, 13.

<sup>117</sup> Colbert, “The Devil’s Right Hand: Understanding IEDS and Exploring Their Use in Armed Conflict,” 77.

<sup>118</sup> John H. Poole, *Tactics of the Crescent Moon; Militant Muslim Combat Methods*. (Emerald Isle, NC: Posterity Press, 2004), xxvii.

resentment and disgust for their surroundings, including the population they are trying to protect and win-over. All of these variables contribute to the cumulative psychological effect of low morale for the combat soldier.

The populace experiences the cumulative effects of multiple IED attacks over a period of time as well. Research must be done to establish a threshold of tolerable violence for a specific environment, and, of course, that threshold will vary by culture and exposure.

Cumulative effects play an important role in influencing the American people. Adamson refers to these effects and their influence:

IEDs become “weapons of strategic influence” because images of IED attacks impact the psyche of the American public through daily news broadcasts. Hostile forces count on “sound bite” deep analysis from the media and the American electorate, seeking to overcome the US technological and military advantage with this asymmetric form of fires.<sup>119</sup>

Images shown on the evening news and daily papers of mounting casualties caused by the IED, images shown of IED explosions circulating on the internet, images of faces and names of dead soldiers, marines, sailors and airman coinciding with communities across the nation losing friends and loved ones take a heavy toll on the American public. Each IED event adds up in the collective consciousness of the American people, and it isn't long before the telephones of congressmen begin to ring. Political pressure builds when troops are dying and progress on the ground is slow; soon the Senate and the House are pressuring the Executive branch for withdrawal. Perhaps it is no surprise that there is an inverse relationship between the levels of violence in Iraq (specifically IED attacks) and the support for the Iraq war.

In addition to the primary advantages, there are a number of supporting advantages that contribute to the success of the IED. These advantages would be considered more tactical in nature.

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<sup>119</sup> Adamson, “An asymmetric threat invokes strategic leader initiative: the Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization,” 7.

## 2. Supporting Advantages

The IED is described as being an extremely functional weapon, as such, the IED has a laundry list of tactical advantages; described here as supporting advantages. Several of the most important will be discussed to provide some insight. The IED is extremely versatile and can be built out of a variety of readily available materials and employed with rapidly adaptable tactics against a technologically superior force. To adequately protect the force is extremely expensive and, as General Metz puts it in an interview with Anne Roosevelt of the *Defense Daily* referring to the fielding of the Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicle, “[the MRAPs] have saved a lot of lives with its V-shaped hull, but it’s pitting a multi-million system against a \$100 weapon.”<sup>120</sup> These advantages fall into several categories: resources, production, and employment.

### *a. Resources*

First of all the IED is extremely inexpensive to build, although it may take some effort to acquire the components. Adamson comments on a quote of General Richard Cody: “the Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, recognized ‘the IED is the poor man’s cruise missile.’ IED components are readily available, inexpensive, have relatively simple construction, and offer easy delivery to a target area.”<sup>121</sup>

The IED is made up in its most simple form of a main charge (high explosive), an initiator (blasting cap), a power source (battery), and a switch. The switch could be as complex as a passive infrared sensor, a cell phone, or radio controlled (RC) device, or as simple as touching the two ends of a firing wire to a battery. Of course the main component, the explosives, is easily attainable in war torn failed or failing states. Even if high explosives are controlled, they can be manufactured with ingredients readily available in any semi-industrial or agricultural state with a recipe provided on the internet or training from an experienced bomber.

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<sup>120</sup> Anne Roosevelt, “IEDs Are Strategic Weapons, General Says,” *Defense Daily* 238, no. 58 (2008). 1.

<sup>121</sup> Adamson, “An asymmetric threat invokes strategic leader initiative: the Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization,” 8.

As far as the blasting cap (initiator), it can be obtained from unguarded military ammunition storage points, mining companies, and industrial supply companies. In Iraq, there is “speculation” that military stores were pilfered prior to U.S. forces gaining control of all the ammunition storage points (ASPs), providing the insurgency with virtually a limitless supply of initiators.<sup>122</sup> Smuggling routes are also suspected sources of required parts through Syria for the Sunni and AQI insurgents and Iran for the Shi’a groups.

The other components necessary to build an IED can be acquired at almost any hardware or electronics store. Each of these items is not only readily available in countries such as Iraq or Afghanistan, they are also relatively inexpensive when compared to the cost of an up armored Highly Mobile Multi-Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV) or an MRAP.

Our enemies promote the IED as essential to their cause with materials readily available: “Al-Qaeda doctrine acknowledges ‘that the production of different types of bombs and explosives must be mastered,’ but adds this is not difficult because ‘the ways to do this are available and explained in many places...people with experience ...[are] many in number in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere.’ ”<sup>123</sup>

#### ***b. Production***

Production advantages are many; here only a few will be covered. First, the IED is extremely easy to build with minimal training. With the knowledge of only a few essential safety precautions, simple IEDs can be constructed with little risk. IEDs with more complex design and function, including electronic circuitry will obviously require additional skills to prevent accidental detonation during assembly. Second, due to its improvised nature, the IED is able to be quickly modified to adapt to changes in tactics and technology, easily outpacing the lumbering bureaucratic process to improve weapons systems of a technologically superior force. According to Secretary of Defense

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<sup>122</sup> CRS Report for Congress, *Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) in Iraq and Afghanistan: Effects and Countermeasures* (Washington DC, 2007), 2.

<sup>123</sup> Adamson, “An asymmetric threat invokes strategic leader initiative: the Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization,” 8.

Robert Gates, “As soon as we . . . find one way of trying to thwart their efforts, (the insurgents) find a technology or a new way of going about their business.”<sup>124</sup> In 2007 “JIEDDO established its Joint IED Defeat Capability Approval and Acquisition Management Process (JCAAMP) to identify C-IED requirements and acquire both materiel and non-materiel solutions rapidly. According to JIEDDO officials, this process has shortened the period between recognition of a developing IED threat and the deployment of a C-IED initiative from years to months.”<sup>125</sup> Despite the enormous improvements on the timeline for research and development, acquisition, and fielding of CIED force protection technology by JIEDDO, the process still takes several months at a minimum, whereas the insurgents are able to adapt IEDs within weeks or even days.

### *c. Employment*

Concerning employment of the IED; similar to a jet fighter delivering multiple precision weapons onto strategic targets, the IED emplacer can deliver powerful explosives to a target from an anonymous position. The obvious difference is that it may cost as little as several dollars to several hundred dollars to manufacture and deliver an IED. Even the least expensive guided missile or bomb may cost hundreds of times more. The IED also allows the insurgency to employ a very powerful and symbolic weapon while exposing a very small number of people to possible enemy contact. This exposure is mitigated even further using radio controlled devices such as mobile radios or cell phones, and extremely long sections of firing wire (over 1km is not uncommon). This advantage was recognized nearly a century ago by T.E. Lawrence in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, published in 1935, as noted by Evan Colbert:

Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* repeatedly displays how effective command detonated IEDs were against Turkish railways. While conducting an insurgency campaign against the Turks, "Lawrence of Arabia" explains his strategy, "we decided that to regain the initiative we

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<sup>124</sup> Peter Eisler, “Insurgents Adapting Faster than Military Adjusts to IEDs,” *USA Today*, July 16, 2007, [http://www.usatoday.com/news/military/2007-07-15-ied-evolution-usat\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/military/2007-07-15-ied-evolution-usat_N.htm) (accessed November 26, 2008), 1.

<sup>125</sup> U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations (2008). *The Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization: DOD's Fight Against IEDs Today and Tomorrow*, 16-17.



must ignore the main body of the enemy, and concentrate far off on his railway flank." In describing the equipment used by his raiders he states, "We evolved special dynamite methods, and by the end of the war could demolish any quantity of track and bridges with economy and safety." Using IEDs, T. E. Lawrence was able to conduct an effective offensive campaign that avoided large force on force engagements which he had little or no chance of winning.<sup>126</sup>

There are also numerous advantages associated with employing Large Vehicle Bourne IEDs (LVBIEDs), Suicide Vehicle Bourne IEDs (SVBIEDs), and Personnel Bourne IEDs (PBIEDs, Suicide IEDs or suicide vests). First, with the influx of foreign fighters as well as incensed and depraved Iraqis, there seems to be no shortage of volunteers for martyrdom. When volunteers do run in short supply, insurgents have taken advantage of young people, mentally ill, and mentally challenged to deliver the IED which is then detonated remotely. These types of devices have largely been used to attack Iraqi citizens in public places and when access is restricted to vehicles such as a public market, the suicide vest is used and can be easily concealed.

The IED exists at a fusion point between the tactical and the strategic. Its numerous supporting advantages make it practical from a tactical standpoint, while its primary advantages as a symbolic weapon make it practical from a strategic standpoint.

## **E. SUMMARY**

This chapter begins by describing what type of weapon the IED is and argues that the IED is a symbolic weapon. As a symbolic weapon it is able to achieve effects that extend far beyond the physical damage created by the attack.

Next, terrorism was discussed, looking at the nature of symbolic violence and why terrorism is useful as part of an insurgent strategy. An insurgency uses terrorism in order to mobilize a base of support and coerce the state and the populace into modifying behaviors. Insurgents like nation-states have instruments of power, just in much smaller amounts; "insurgents have devised various strategies intended to maximize the

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<sup>126</sup> Colbert, "The Devil's Right Hand: Understanding IEDS and Exploring Their Use in Armed Conflict," 50.

effectiveness of political techniques and violence.”<sup>127</sup> “The violence comes in the form of terrorism [or insurgency if attacking government forces] and provides a means for the insurgents to achieve long and short term goals intended to achieve specific political purposes: to coerce a target government to change policy, to mobilize additional recruits and financial support. . .”<sup>128</sup>

Finally, the IED is shown to be the perfect insurgent weapon that generates the effects desired to provide the insurgency the primary and supporting advantages necessary to accomplish short and long-term goals. First, the IED is the perfect weapon because it allows for the targeting of multiple audiences: the target of attack and the target of influence. The interaction of the immediate and cumulative effects on these targets assists the insurgents in achieving their objectives. The IED assists the insurgency in overcoming their mobilization dilemma by using symbolic violence to give the perception that the insurgency is stronger than it really is. A shocking IED event can create the agitation effect targeting infrastructure, civilians, or military to announce that there is an opposition. The IED detonation can create the demonstration effect showing that the government does not maintain control and is beatable. This also generates expectations that the insurgency may succeed. The provocation effect is created using the IED to provoke government overreaction, which will further alienate the population. The IED as the primary weapon has the power to coerce the target of influence through fear and anticipation of the next attack. It has the power to mobilize as discussed earlier by demonstrating to the target of influence that the insurgency is powerful and the IEDs devastation is such that it upholds the perception of insurgent strength while creating a perception of government’s weakness. Ultimately, the insurgency wants to win control so that they can fulfill their dream to displace the government and gain the power.

If the insurgents’ strategy and tactics have been well planned and executed resulting in a successful IED attack that does not alienate the populace, the result will be dynamically offsetting to the state’s system—a net gain for the insurgents. If the attack is not successful or alienates the populace, it will be dynamically reinforcing to the state’s

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<sup>127</sup> O’Neill, *Insurgency & Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse*, 5.

<sup>128</sup> Pape, “The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism,” 2.

system—a net loss for the insurgents. The IED’s strategic potential based on immediate and cumulative effects, coupled with its relatively low cost, flexibility, ease of production, and substantive/symbolic effects, makes the IED the perfect weapon of the weak. The Deputy Director of JIEDDO, Dr. Keesee puts it this way, “as long as there are miscreant groups of terrorists around the world interested in using IEDs as a means of communicating or making their voices heard or making a statement, then it is something that could potentially have a strategic influence that we will need to counter.”<sup>129</sup> As such, the IED is now and will continue to be the preferred weapon of terrorists and insurgents worldwide.

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<sup>129</sup> Robert K Ackerman, “Improvised Explosive Devices A Multifaceted Threat,” *Signal*, July 1, 2008, <http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed November 26, 2008), 4.

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### III. THE IRAQI INSURGENCY: STRATEGIC USE OF THE IED

#### A. INTRODUCTION

The situation on the ground in Iraq has been extremely complicated since the US invasion in 2003. Early in the conflict it was very difficult to determine who was carrying out the bulk of the IED attacks against coalition forces, much less the attacks on the civilian population. Even now 58% of suicide attacks are unattributed.<sup>130</sup> However, as our intelligence apparatus improved, we began to realize that we were dealing with multiple insurgent groups in Iraq; sometimes with overlapping goals and sometimes with conflicting goals. There were some groups with alliances of convenience and others who were in competition with each other.

This chapter begins by introducing the various insurgent groups in Iraq and discussing their goals in general terms. Due to the sheer number of organizations, they will be grouped in a fashion similar to Mohammed M. Hafez's classifications in *Suicide Bombers in Iraq: the Strategy and Ideology of Martyrdom*<sup>131</sup> where insurgents are grouped based on goals. The Sunni "Islamic nationalists" wish to remove the coalition, and re-establish Sunni dominance, or at least power sharing within the Iraqi political system. The "jihadi salafists and ideological Ba'athists" wish to defeat and eject the coalition and overturn the political system with the large goal of establishing an Islamic caliphate in the region.

In addition to Hafez's groups, this thesis will discuss a third insurgency; the Shi'a extremists who wish to eject the coalition, maintain the status quo with regard to Shi'a dominating political power, and implement Sharia law in Iraq. The desire to implement Sharia is similar to the jihadi salafists; however, differing in scope with concern only for Iraq and not a regional caliphate. The Shi'a Islamic nationalist group is made up of the armed opposition groups such as the Mahdi militia and the Badr Organization. Often

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<sup>130</sup> Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq: The Strategy and Ideology of Martyrdom*, 107.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 35-36.

classified simply as militias, these groups meet the requirements to be classified as insurgent organizations as previously established.

Each of the three insurgent groups has specific short and long-term goals, and the IED is being used to help accomplish those goals. Subtle or not-so-subtle tactical changes in the use of the IED can have significant effects that contribute to the accomplishment of short and long-term goals, ultimately affecting the strategic outcome. The strategic outcome is able to be affected due to the symbolic nature of the IED. The IED is certainly not the only terrorist tool that these groups employ, and there are other types of attacks such as kidnapping and assassination that may have strategic effects as well. This thesis focuses solely on the IED and primarily on the types of attacks such groups use that may have strategic influence. In addition, these insurgent groups may use many different types of IED attacks, so some generalization is required to group the types of attacks commonly used to meet the specific objectives of the particular group. For pragmatic reasons these groups have chosen specific types of IED tactics, and this thesis shows how those types of attacks achieve strategic effects.

The discussion of the strategic effects of the IED will begin with the high-profile immediate effects generated through two significant AQI attacks. Then the discussion will move on to cumulative effects and how the nationalist groups have used the IED to achieve strategic effect over time. The intent of this chapter is to use the framework from Chapter II to illustrate how the IED can be used to achieve strategic ends using Iraq as an example.

## **B. INSURGENT GROUPS**

### **1. Jihadi Salafist and Ba'athist**

The first classification to be discussed includes those groups that Hafez describes as jihadi salafists and ideological Ba'athists: groups who “are interested not merely in ousting the occupation but in collapsing the political system and sparking sectarian civil

war,” ultimately in hopes of establishing an Islamic state.<sup>132</sup> There is overlap in the classification of these groups. Hoffman emphasizes this point when he clarifies that “the definitional rule of thumb therefore is that secular Ba’athist Party loyalists and other former regime elements who stage guerrilla-like hit-and-run assaults or carry out attacks using roadside IEDs are deemed “insurgents,” while foreign jihadists and domestic Islamic extremists who belong to groups like al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, led by Abu Musab Zarqawi, and who are responsible for most of the suicide attacks and the videotaped beheading of hostages, are labeled terrorists.”<sup>133</sup> When looked at more closely, these two views are not really in contradiction with each other; they only differ in the reasons for the classification. Hafez is focusing on goals, while Hoffman is referring to the State Department’s definition referenced previously, which is based more on the types of attacks used by the group. Here these groups will be referred to as insurgents, even though some of the types of attacks where the IED is used could certainly be considered a form of terrorism. The primary reason for this classification is the CIA differentiation highlighted in introduction that the groups have political goals which include the desire to control territory (establishing an Islamic state) and establish an alternative government, which is generally outside the scope of a purely terrorist organization.<sup>134</sup>

The primary jihadi salafist group in Iraq is Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) with Ansar al-Sunna being the second most prominent. Current literature suggests that Al Qaeda was not operating in Iraq prior to the U.S. invasion in 2003, and the creation of AQI also occurred following the invasion. Although prior to the invasion the administration asserted that there were ties between the Iraqi regime and Al Qaeda, “most experts [now] believe that Al Qaeda and other foreign fighters entered Sunni-inhabited central Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein, from the Kurdish controlled north and from other Middle Eastern countries.”<sup>135</sup> The 2008 CRS report to congress on Al Qaeda in Iraq suggests that

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<sup>132</sup> Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq: The Strategy and Ideology of Martyrdom*, 35-36.

<sup>133</sup> Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, rev. and ex. ed., 36.

<sup>134</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency* (Washington, DC), 2.

<sup>135</sup> Katzman, “Al Qaeda in Iraq: Assessment and Outside Links,” 2.

Ansar al-Islam is considered the forerunner of [AQI].”<sup>136</sup> “Ansar al-Islam formed in 1998 as a breakaway faction of the Islamist Kurds, splitting off from a group, the Islamic Movement of Iraqi Kurdistan (IMIK).”<sup>137</sup> There was an Arab contingent within Ansar al-Islam led by Abu musab al Zarqawi, who commanded Arab volunteers in Afghanistan and whose group began to grow following the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan.”<sup>138</sup> This group led by Zarqawi went through a series of name changes in the time following the US invasion of Iraq; first to the “Monotheism and Jihad Group,” then to the “Al Qaeda Jihad Organization in the Land of Two Rivers (Mesopotamia-Iraq)—commonly known now as Al Qaeda in Iraq, or AQI.”<sup>139</sup> The final name change to AQI came after Zarqawi “pledged fealty to Osama bin Laden and the Al-Qaeda network.”<sup>140</sup> Zarqawi, “an Arab of Jordanian origin,” brought a “foreign fighter” flare to his strategy as the senior representative of Al Qaeda in Iraq; attempting “to provoke all out civil war between the newly dominant Shiite Arabs and the formerly pre-eminent Sunni Arabs.”<sup>141</sup> The members of AQI are a blend of foreign and Iraqi extremists. AQI borrows tactics and strategies from both insurgent/guerilla warfare and terrorist organizations.

“In terms of insurgency theory, AQI is difficult to categorize and does not appear to have doctrinal roots in any of the classic forms of insurgency. The jihadi salafist focus on the ethical duty of fighting jihad makes it difficult to categorize alongside ethno-nationalists and other types of insurgents. This may be because it is not a purely political-military organization.”<sup>142</sup> AQI, whose doctrine is largely based in religious ideology also has the political goals of overthrowing the Iraqi government and establishing an Islamic caliphate in the Middle East, and, therefore, may be categorized

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<sup>136</sup> Katzman, “Al Qaeda in Iraq: Assessment and Outside Links,” 5.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>140</sup> Jane’s JTIC database, Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), *JTIC database*, [http://www8.janes.com/JDIC/JTIC/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/binder/jwit/jwita055.htm@current&pageSelected=&keyword=&backPath=http://jtic.janes.com/JDIC/JTIC&Prod\\_Name=JWIT&activeNav=http://www8.janes.com/JDIC/JTIC](http://www8.janes.com/JDIC/JTIC/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/binder/jwit/jwita055.htm@current&pageSelected=&keyword=&backPath=http://jtic.janes.com/JDIC/JTIC&Prod_Name=JWIT&activeNav=http://www8.janes.com/JDIC/JTIC) (accessed January 28, 2009), 40.

<sup>141</sup> Katzman, “Al Qaeda in Iraq: Assessment and Outside Links,” 3.

<sup>142</sup> Jane’s JTIC database, Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), 2.



as a new type of insurgency. A new classification may be necessary because of AQI's involvement in the Iraq insurgent movement while aspiring to and accomplishing transnational terrorist acts. [AQI] is a "Salafist jihadist terrorist/insurgent movement, composed of transnational Arab jihadists and Iraqi Sunni Arabs, held together by a blend of Salafist doctrine, Iraqi Arab nationalism, financial largesse and propaganda."<sup>143</sup> Although many of the individuals who are supporting AQI operations (local and foreign) are religious, AQI as an organization is both religious and political in nature:

...the key religious aim and objective of AQI members is to perform their religious duty by undertaking the lesser jihad of fighting to eject "infidel" forces from Iraq. . . political aims are harder to fathom but regularly surface as calls or actions aimed at the creation of an Islamic caliphate in which strict Sharia is applied and state institutions are established.<sup>144</sup>

They seek to "retard the formation of the Iraqi government institutions and legitimization of the system, and [yet] by simultaneously seeking to build counter-institutions and a virtual state (the Islamic State of Iraq, ISI), there is a sense that AQI is ultimately seeking to overthrow the state."<sup>145</sup> Currently, their strength is insufficient to achieve those political aims; however, they continue to modify their strategy, including "attempts to portray AQI and ISI as Iraqi-led factions,"<sup>146</sup> in an effort to "weave the web of Sunni movements into a cohesive whole with national ambitions."<sup>147</sup>

There is still a great deal of controversy and guesswork involved in trying to determine the size and make-up of AQI. Generally the leadership group is small (less than 50) and made up of mostly foreign fighters (Saudi, Yemeni, Egyptian, Tunisia), while the regional emirs and staff may number 200.<sup>148</sup> "Consensus is growing that whilst many of the leadership cadre. . . are foreigners, most of the AQI rank and file are Iraqi Sunnis. The best unclassified source to date on the numbers of foreigners in AQI are

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<sup>143</sup> Jane's JTIC database, Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), 1.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Jane's JTIC database, Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), 3.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 6.

estimates based on the “Sinjar reports:”<sup>149</sup> around 700 records captured by the U.S. military in a raid in Iraq reveal the personal information of foreign fighters who were brought into Iraq via the Syrian border during August 2006 to August 2007. According to the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, Saudi Arabia was by far the most common country of origin of the fighters in this sample; 41% (244) of the 595 records that included the fighter’s nationality indicated they were of Saudi Arabian origin. Libya was the next most common country of origin, with 18.8% (112) of the fighters listing their nationality stating they hailed from Libya. Syria, Yemen, and Algeria were the next most common origin countries with 8.2% (49), 8.1% (48), and 7.2% (43), respectively. Moroccans accounted for 6.1% (36) of the records and Jordanians 1.9% (11).<sup>150</sup>

“Despite intensive Coalition efforts, AQI is an active insurgent movement in Iraq, with logistical affiliates spread throughout the Islamic World and Europe.”<sup>151</sup> They have lost some of their Sunni insurgent allies and have developed a dangerous competition for resources, power, and control between the ISI and other Sunni groups.

## **2. Islamic Sunni Nationalists**

Hafez classifies the groups based on their overarching goals; the Sunni Islamic nationalist group which includes nominal [secular] Baathist are:

fighting to oust the coalition forces from their country and overturn the political arrangements that have given ascendancy to Shia and Kurdish communities at the expense of the Sunnis...their main objective—at least when they first mobilized—has been to reverse political developments imposed by foreigners and collaborators through occupation...[and] their ultimate goal is to reintegrate Sunnis and nominal Baathists in a political process that does not give disproportionate power to the Shia and Kurds on the basis of narrow communal interests or federalism.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> J. Felter and B. Fishman, “Al Qa’ida’s Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records,” *Combating Terrorism Center*, West Point, New York, 2007, Proquest Database (accessed December 19, 2007), 7-8.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Jane’s JTIC database, Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), 1.

<sup>152</sup> Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq: The Strategy and Ideology of Martyrdom*, 36.

The Islamic Army of Iraq (IAI) is the primary example of this type of group; made up of Sunni Arabs and former Baathists who pursue a system reintegration strategy, they are interested in restructuring the political process in Iraq to guarantee that Sunni Arabs and nominal Baathists (not Saddam loyalists) are not marginalized by sectarian political arrangements.<sup>153</sup>

Perhaps unwittingly the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) dispersed the near perfect seeds of insurgency when they implemented the de-Ba'athification policy in Iraq following the US invasion. "The structure of the Ba'ath Party was defined at the First Party Congress in April 1947, and then it was modified in 1954 at the Second National Congress in June 1954."<sup>154</sup> Cabana explains that the Ba'ath party structure was centered on a cell structure: the smallest unit being the cell made up of five to seven people; the next level, made up of a number of cells, is the party division; next up, is the party section; then the party branch; then the region, the command staff and finally, the party leader. This structure, particularly the cell, allowed the Baath party to adapt quickly following de-Baathification in 2003 to become a dangerous insurgency.

The Baathists are not the only Nationalist Sunni insurgent group; there are a multitude of Sunni insurgent groups that fall into the Nationalist category. There are also a number of Shi'a groups that may be considered Nationalist as well.

### **3. Islamic Shi'a Nationalists**

In addition to Hafez's "Islamic nationalist" and "jihadi salafist and ideological Ba'athist" groups, this thesis will discuss the Islamic Shia nationalists.<sup>155</sup> The Mahdi Army, the armed wing of the Organization of the Martyr Sadr (OMS) and its counterpart the Badr corps, the armed wing of the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council (SIIC), are often referred to as militias, and Jane's JTIC Country Briefing 2007 classifies these groups as

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<sup>153</sup> Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq: The Strategy and Ideology of Martyrdom*, 36.

<sup>154</sup> Joel. L. Cabana, "The Ba'ath Party in Iraq: From its Beginning through Today," (masters' thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, 1993), <http://handle.dtic.mil/100.2/ADA276153> (accessed February 8, 2009), 29.

<sup>155</sup> Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq: The Strategy and Ideology of Martyrdom*, 25-26.

“militant-political Shia Islamist.”<sup>156</sup> However, these organizations, or breakaway factions from these organizations, have executed attacks on coalition forces as well as Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and government representatives. According to Hubbard, “Milicias contribute to the Iraq’s violence and civil unrest in three ways: (1) their overt and covert hostility to the coalition and the central government’s goals; (2) their infiltration of the Iraqi security forces; and (3) their suspicion of operating ‘death squads’ to carry out sectarian violence.”<sup>157</sup> SIIC and Badr Organization have aligned themselves with the coalition and the new Iraqi government and, therefore, are less of a concern; however, their breakaway factions should still be classified an insurgency. Based on their goals and actions, they should be classified an insurgent group and from here on, for the sake of simplicity, will be termed Shi’a Islamic nationalists.

The Shia Islamic nationalists are interested in “the elimination of the foreign presence in Iraq, be it the US-led coalition or the salafist jihadis, and the promotion of an Islamic system within Iraq,”<sup>158</sup> while maintaining the status quo of Shia dominance in political power established through the occupation of Iraq by coalition forces.

### C. THE STRATEGIC APPLICATION OF THE IED

*The costly and frustrating struggle against a weapon barely on the horizon of military planners before the war in Iraq provides a unique lens for examining what some Pentagon officials now call the Long War, and for understanding how the easy victory of 2003 became the morass of 2007.—Rick Atkinson, 2007.*

Few could have anticipated the widespread effects that the IED would have on the technologically superior U.S. forces. Though the IED has been used extensively to effect strategic decision making in IED campaigns against the British by the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) and against the Israelis by the Palestinians, the extent to which insurgent groups in Iraq have systematically used the IED is unprecedented. As of

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<sup>156</sup> Jane’s, “Iraq,” *JTIC Country Briefing October 8, 2007*, <http://jtic.janes.com> (accessed August 15, 2008), 45.

<sup>157</sup> Andrew Hubbard, “Plague and Paradox: Militias in Iraq,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* (2007): 18:3, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09592310701674218> (accessed January 9, 2008), 348.

<sup>158</sup> Jane’s, “Iraq,” *JTIC Country Briefing October 8, 2007*, 44.

September 2007, more than 81,000 IED attacks occurred in Iraq, with more than 25,000 occurring in 2007 alone.<sup>159</sup> As of the writing of this thesis, conditions on the ground in Iraq have dramatically improved. Figure 1 shows the weekly level of IED incidents has dropped from the maximum of almost 1,000 to under 200.<sup>160</sup> This is a significant reduction in violence and is very encouraging; however, the security situation could deteriorate quickly depending on multiple factors. Also discouraging is the parabolic increase in IED attacks in Afghanistan over the last year.

There are numerous factors contributing to the progress in Iraq. Biddle asserts that the positive changes in Iraq can be attributed to “the interaction of AQI’s errors, the surge in U.S. troop levels, the growing capacities of the ISF, and the downstream consequences of all of this for the Shiite militias.”<sup>161</sup> If a viable political solution to the power sharing in government between the Sunni and Shiite is not reached, or AQI is able to generate an additional wave of sectarian violence, the relative calm may be over. The IED is certainly a wildcard that the insurgent groups may play if it suits their goals. AQI continues to execute high-profile suicide attacks to spark reprisal violence between Shiite and Sunni.

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<sup>159</sup> Atkinson, 1.

<sup>160</sup> DoD Report to Congress, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq 2008*, Washington DC, 19.

<sup>161</sup> Stephen Biddle, Michael E. O’Hanlon, and Kenneth M. Pollack, “How to Leave a Stable Iraq,” *Foreign Affairs* (2008): <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20080901faessay87503/stephen-biddle-michael-e-o-hanlon-kenneth-m-pollack/how-to-leave-a-stable-iraq.html> (accessed September 2, 2008), 2.

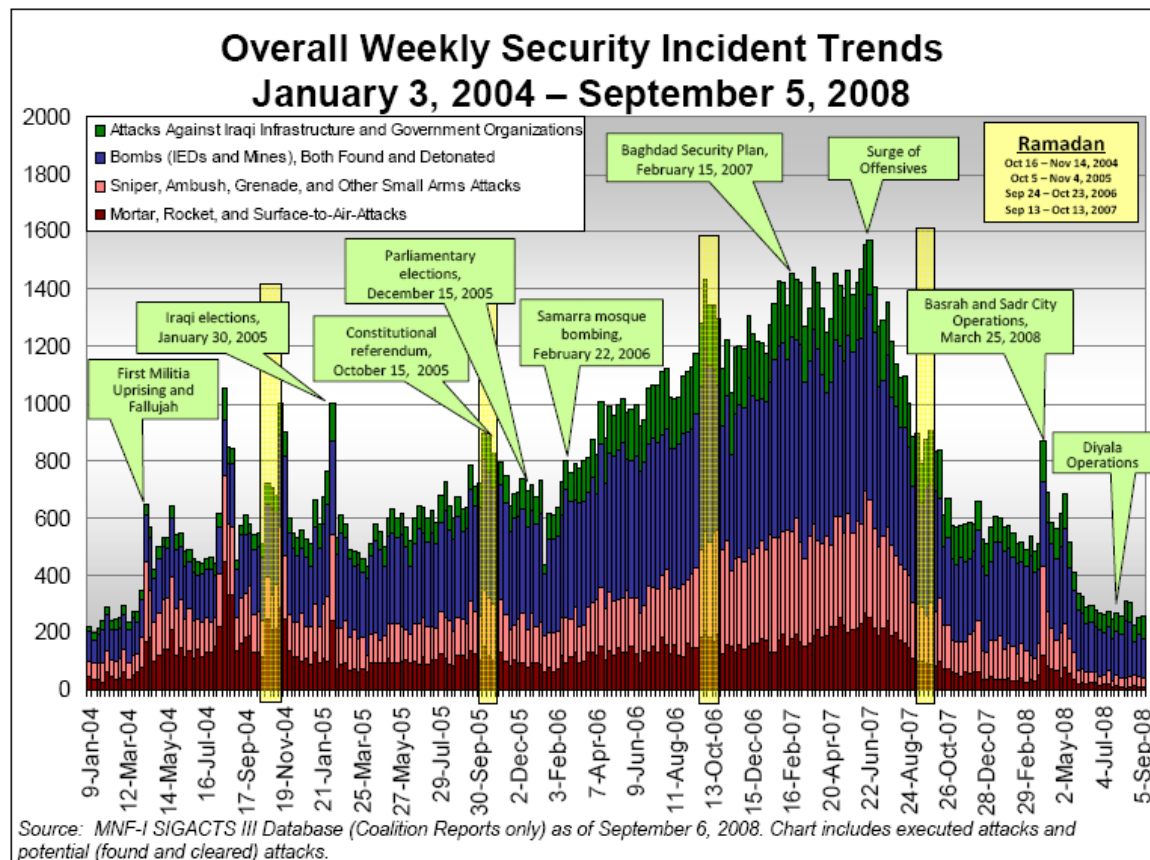


Figure 1. DoD 2008 Report to Congress: Measuring Stability in Iraq

Although there are multiple insurgent groups with varying agendas, there is a common theme: the use of an IED campaign as part of their various strategies. Looking at Figure 1, it can be seen that the numbers of IED attacks are significantly higher than other forms of attacks.<sup>162</sup> We have discussed many of the reasons why the IED is the weapon of choice for an insurgent organization, and this section will use specific examples to look at some of the ways the different groups use the IED. Generally, the attacks will be divided into bombings, suicide attacks and roadside bombs. I will use an example of a high-profile bombing and a suicide attack as part of an IED campaign executed by AQI that is generally considered strategic. These types of IED attacks are clearly categorized as terrorism by most contemporary definitions, including the ones mentioned in this thesis. There will also be a discussion of the cumulative effects of

<sup>162</sup> Report to Congress, Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq 2008, Washington, DC, 18.

roadside bombs in an IED campaign. Roadside bombs are more closely associated with insurgent attacks, rather than terrorism, and have been used in larger numbers by the nationalist groups for targeting ISF and coalition forces. Regardless, each of these attacks can still be categorized as symbolic violence. Due to the nature of the IED, each of these types of attacks may achieve strategic influence as a single incident or over time. As a symbolic weapon, the IED is able to reach both target audiences: the target of attack and the target of influence. As a symbolic weapon, the psychological effects of the IED hold the real power. The IED achieves strategic influence through interaction of the immediate and cumulative effects. The framework established in Chapter II will be used to illustrate how the IED is being used strategically in Iraq by first looking at the immediate effects (agitation, provocation, coercion, mobilization) and then the cumulative effects.

### **1. AQI: Generating a Vicious Cycle of Violence Through Immediate Effects of the IED**

Zarqawi outlined his strategic plan in a 2004 letter, highlighting that the U.S., the coalition, the Shiites, and the Iraqi government and security forces were the primary enemies. He emphasized that martyrdom operations would be the principal tactic and that igniting a sectarian war between the Sunni and the Shiites was the main short term objective of his strategy.<sup>163</sup> Although he did not directly refer to it, the long term objectives of Zarqawi's strategy then and AQI's strategy now include (1) ejecting the occupation forces, (2) uniting (or coercing) Sunni Arabs to uproot the existing Iraqi government and create an Islamic State based in Sharia law, and (3) establishing a Caliphate in the larger Middle East using Iraq as a base.

According to Jane's 2008:

...the group has focused its efforts on key constituencies that could, through a precise use of violence, be coerced into doing whatever AQI wanted them to do...Key targets for intimidation include: the Iraqi Sunni community, particularly its religious, political and tribal leaders, who are

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<sup>163</sup> Zarqawi Letter, *Coalition Provisional Authority English translation of terrorist Musab al Zarqawi letter*, obtained by United States Government in Iraq, February 2004, <http://www.state.gov/p/nea/rls/31694.htm> (accessed February 28, 2009).

encouraged to assist AQI; the Shia community, who are encouraged to strike back at the Sunnis; plus the international community, including international organizations, states and the media, who are encouraged to cease all involvement in Iraq. These targets have no single profile and range from fixed hardened targets to undefended civilian gatherings. More recently, AQI has sought to undertake a range of operations against fielded multinational forces, including attacks on armoured vehicles, outposts and helicopters.<sup>164</sup>

AQI certainly has not limited its operations to the guidelines of Zarqawi's letter. In fact, the group's tactics have evolved over time based on conditions on the ground. Early in the conflict AQI members targeted coalition forces, and then they shifted to international organizations. As the Iraqi Security Forces began to grow and operate, they became a popular target, in addition to any Sunni leadership who did not support the jihadi salafist cause. Finally, the Shiite and their symbolic religious icons were targeted to incite sectarian violence. Kidnapping, shootings, assassinations, rocket and mortar attacks, and roadside bombs were used; however, suicide attacks remain AQI's hallmark: "AQI is best known for its use of suicide vehicle-borne IEDs against both hardened targets and crowds."<sup>165</sup>

***a. Strategic Bombing: the U.N. Embassy in Baghdad***

Next, several types of IED tactics will be discussed that provide examples of the strategic use of the IED. First, will be an attack intended to defeat the will of the U.S., intimidate international organizations such as the U.N. and the Red Cross, as well as to prompt nation-states to withdraw support from the coalition. The second will be a discussion of the bombing of the Samarra mosque which was intended to incite sectarian violence. Within each section will be a discussion of cumulative effects of these types of IED attacks.

Probably the most famous suicide attack attributed to the group that would evolve into AQI was the August 19, 2003, bombing of the U.N. headquarters in Baghdad. Only 10 days following the car bombing of the Jordanian embassy, the event which

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<sup>164</sup> Jane's JTIC database, Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), 4.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.



touched off a wave of bombings later attributed to AQI, a truck packed with military-grade explosives and driven by a suicide bomber approached the U.N. headquarters located in the Canal Hotel in Baghdad and detonated. This was “one of the first major attacks of the Iraqi insurgency and the first to intentionally target foreigners. The 2003 bombing killed 23 people, including the head of the U.N. mission, Sergio Vieira de Mello, the Iraqi coordinator for the U.N. children’s fund (UNICEF), and several World Bank staffers, and injured more than 150.”<sup>166</sup> Al Qaeda posted a statement on a radical Islamic website crediting the planning of the attack to “Thamir Mubarak Atrouz, a Sunni Arab from the town of Khaldiya in Anbar province.”<sup>167</sup>

(1) Limited Options, Security and Efficiency. At this early point in the conflict, Zarqawi was in the process of building his organization, the Monotheism and Jihad Group, which was the predecessor to Al Qaeda Jihad Organization in the Land of Two Rivers or Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). From a rational perspective a suicide bombing against a symbolic building representing the international community and their support for the occupation made sense. Since his organization was small, he was unable to openly confront the security apparatus of the U.S. military, using a terrorist tactic was a good option to minimize exposure while maximizing damage. To maintain the viability of his organization he needed to limit exposure and, therefore, maintain security while stimulating the growth of his organization. The use of an IED in the form of a SVBIED helped with both.

The bombing of the U.N. was also one of the first high-profile attacks of the insurgency. This attack was an act of significantly symbolic political violence that sent signals to the U.S., International organizations, and coalition partners and generated a number of immediate effects.

(2) Mobilization and Coercion. Probably the most significant message sent was coercive in its nature. It signaled that any outside interference in Iraq would not be tolerated. An iconic target was chosen to send a symbolic message, as well

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<sup>166</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman, “Iraq’s Evolving Insurgency: The Nature of Attacks and Patterns and Cycles in the Conflict,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (Washington DC, February 2, 2006), Proquest Database (accessed January 30, 2009), 10.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

as to coerce nonparticipation. It was meant to force the U.N. to withdraw support for Iraq and to remove U.N. personnel from the country, while discouraging other international organizations from participating. Following the attack, “Kofi Annan, the UN’s secretary-general, said that the atrocity would not force the U.N. to leave: ‘We are going to assess all the options but we are not pulling out.’”<sup>168</sup> Yet despite this assertion, the U.N. suspended the majority of its operations in Iraq and relocated the majority of its staff to Cyprus and Jordan.<sup>169</sup> This subsequent response certainly could be considered a strategic effect of the bombing.

In addition, the bombing signaled other would be insurgents and budding insurgent organizations that a group is already organized, trained, and equipped well enough to execute a significant deadly attack. A successful bombing helps generate the perception of strength required to create the expectation that the insurgency may in fact be able to win. That expectation, in conjunction with publishing propaganda from the event, aids in mobilizing additional recruits, thus further strengthening the insurgency.

(3) Agitation and Demonstration. The U.N. bombing was an open declaration that there was an opposition group willing to use violence to achieve its goals. Although the target of the attack was the U.N. building, there were at least four targets of influence. First, it signaled to the population that the insurgency was growing strong and that the Iraqi Security Forces in their infantile state could not protect them. In that regard, it also showed the populace that the U.S. military was not omnipotent and was unable to provide even the most basic security for the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and international organizations that were there to assist the Iraqis. Second, it signaled to the U.N. and other international organizations that they were not safe to conduct operations in Iraq. Third, it signaled to the Iraqi leadership, who were being

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<sup>168</sup> “Rethinking Iraq,” *Economist.com, Global Agenda*, London, August 22, 2003, Proquest database (accessed January 26, 2009), 1.

<sup>169</sup> “UN: Iraq, Middle East, Afghanistan, Africa key issues before Security Council in 2003—Part 1 of 4,” *M2 Presswire*, Coventry, January 19, 2004, 4.

recruited and groomed by the CPA, that it did not pay to be in leadership positions in Iraq; they would not be safe. Finally, it sent a signal to the American leadership that their coalition would be under attack.

(4) Provocation. Insurgent groups “try to find forms of attack that provoke disproportionate fear and “terror” to force the US [and] Iraqi forces into costly, drastic, and sometimes provocative responses: Terrorists and insurgents have found that attacks planned for maximum political and psychological effects often have the additional benefit of provoking over-reaction.”<sup>170</sup> The bombing of the Jordanian embassy and then the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad signified a shift in tactics by insurgents and possibly a corresponding shift in strategy. Prior to August, most suicide attacks were against coalition forces, but “next insurgents began to attack targets such as the United Nations, Red Cross, and Jordanian and Turkish embassies, which could have given the occupation stability and legitimacy” along with many other targets, including the Ayatollah Mohammed Bakr al-Hakim (leader of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq).<sup>171</sup>

This series of suicide attacks against international organizations in conjunction with the growing number of roadside bombings against coalition forces led to growing political pressure to improve the security situation on the ground. Both military and CPA leadership began pushing for improved intelligence collection to increase the available information for targeting insurgent cells. As a result, large numbers of arrests were made leading to a detainee crisis in Iraq, eventually contributing to the Abu Ghraib detainee scandal. Obviously, direct causality cannot be attributed; however, the point remains that the deteriorating security situation provoked a response from coalition forces, which resulted in greater loss of support within the population. Whether that was an intentional strategy is unknown, but the security crackdown after high-profile attacks follows a similar pattern with other governmental responses to a growing insurgency; as was the case in Algiers in 1966 and in Peru in the early 1990s.

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<sup>170</sup> Cordesman, “Iraq’s Evolving Insurgency: The Nature of Attacks and Patterns and Cycles in the Conflict,” 9.

<sup>171</sup> Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq: The Strategy and Ideology of Martyrdom*, 102.

(5) Cumulative Effects. The cumulative effect of the U.N. bombing in Baghdad in conjunction with a number of other attacks within a short period of time is apparent. Hammes discusses this series of attacks as well and says, “their [Anti-coalition forces; ACF] choice of targets showed the clear strategic concept of destroying American will by attacking U.S. forces, any government or NGO [Non-Governmental Organization] supporting the United States, and any Iraqis working for or believed to be collaborating with the United States.”<sup>172</sup> Indeed these attacks sent a clear message to the United States, particularly in an election year, and they were answered with political pressure to shorten the timeline for transition to Iraqi rule.<sup>173</sup>

Next will be a discussion of a bombing, a different type of IED attack that generated different effects with strategic consequences.

***b. Strategic Bombing: the Samarra Mosque***

By late 2005, Zarqawi had solidified AQI’s strategy as “an effort to provoke all out civil war between the newly dominant Shiite Arabs and the formerly pre-eminent Sunni Arabs.”<sup>174</sup> Al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri warned Zarqawi of the potential long-range effects of Zarqawi’s strategy, saying that “committing violence against Shiite civilians and religious establishments would undermine the support of the Iraqi people for AQI and the Sunni ‘resistance’ more broadly.”<sup>175</sup> Ignoring the advice, AQI executed a series of attacks on Shiites and their sacred sites. Arguably the most significant of those attacks was the February 22, 2006, bombing of the Shiite “Golden Mosque” in Samarra. This attack set off a wave of sectarian violence that would last over a year and bring Iraq dangerously close to an all out civil war. In that sense, Zarqawi’s strategy, although possibly short-sighted, was largely successful using high-profile “spectacular suicide bombings intended to cause mass Shiite casualties or to destroy sites

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<sup>172</sup> Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone: On War in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 175.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>174</sup> Katzman, “Al Qaeda in Iraq: Assessment and Outside Links,” 10.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

sacred to Shiites.”<sup>176</sup> These attacks were designed to evoke a retaliatory response and they had the desired effect: “the Samarra bombing was followed by months of violent reprisals by Shiites against Sunnis. Al Qaeda in Iraq, virulently anti-Shiite, became a refuge for aggrieved and beleaguered Sunnis.”<sup>177</sup>

The attack on the Golden Mosque was purportedly planned by an Iraqi native named Haytham Sabah Shakir Mahmood Badri, the leader of a small cell whom he directed to “break into the shrine, tie up the mosque’s guards and plant explosive inside the structure,” before detonating the bombs on the morning of February 22, 2006.<sup>178</sup> Badri apparently had “ties to Saddam Hussein’s toppled regime...and with Ansar al Islam, a northern-based Kurdish Islamic extremist group, before he linked up with the Al Qaeda in Iraq organization run by the late Abu Musab Zarqawi.”<sup>179</sup>

(1) Limited Options, Security and Efficiency. At this point in the conflict, sectarian violence between Sunni and Shi’a was well underway with violence levels, including ethnic cleansing, increasing on a daily basis. AQI targeting of coalition forces, specifically U.S. forces, was less effective due to improvements in armor, tactics, and counter IED technology. Attacks on Iraqi Security Forces key infrastructure continued to increase. However, AQI still had not solidified a coalition of Sunni Arabs. Evidence of this can be seen with the changing political strategy of AQI by going through a series of name changes and creating umbrella organizations to put a more Iraqi face on AQI operations. Many Iraqis had already begun to resent AQI’s ideology and violent tactics, while at the same time questioning their motives as foreigners. They began to question the alliance of convenience established earlier in the conflict. Also, with the increase in violent reprisals from the Shiite militias, the Sunni groups began to question whether their alliance with AQI was the right choice if they were to have any chance at reconciliation.

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<sup>176</sup> Katzman, “Al Qaeda in Iraq: Assessment and Outside Links,” 11.

<sup>177</sup> Bill Marsh, “The Ever-Mutating Iraq Insurgency,” *The New York Times*, January 7, 2007, Proquest database (accessed August 25, 2008), 1.

<sup>178</sup> Solomon Moore, “The World; Samarra Mosque Plot Detailed,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 29, 2006, A4, Proquest database (accessed January 26, 2009).

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 2.

This author believes that AQI leadership sensed many of these doubts from their potential allies and chose a spectacular IED attack of an extremely symbolic nature to generate additional momentum for their movement. The advantages of a bombing are many; in this specific case the physical destruction of the Golden Mosque was significant, but more important was the symbolism of the mosque as a Shiite holy site in a town with a Sunni majority. The attack sent some remarkably clear signals to Sunni and Shiite.

(2) Mobilization and Coercion. The bombing of the Samarra mosque met the intent of Zarqawi's strategy completely. As he alluded to in his 2004 letter, he hoped to spur the Sunni into action through the use of violence against the Shiite. That certainly seemed to be the case as Shiite militias executed retaliatory attacks, driving the Sunni into AQI's waiting arms or those of more nationalist oriented groups. Regardless, many needed protection that the Iraqi Security Forces and Coalition were seemingly unable to provide. To emphasize this point, Iraqi civilian deaths increased from approximately 500 per month in January of 2006 to 2600 in July 2006 and peaked at 3000 per month by December 2006.<sup>180</sup> This exponential increase corresponds to an increase in all forms of violence, but especially suicide bombings and roadside bombs. The increase of civilian deaths corresponds to an increase of sectarian violence as well.<sup>181</sup> The bombing had the dual effect of coercing the Shiite into retaliatory action while mobilizing the Sunni to join AQI and other insurgent groups.

(3) Agitation and Demonstration. Attacks orchestrated to achieve agitation effects seem to be the modus operandi of AQI, even today. These types of attacks must be used sparingly or the group will risk turning its would-be supporters away. However, in the short term there may be some benefit to using this type of symbolic violence, as was the case with the Samarra mosque bombing. Both the Shiite and Sunni communities were shocked by the atrocity, it being particularly despicable to attack and destroy a site with such historical significance to both Sunni and Shi'a Arabs.

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<sup>180</sup> Petreus, *Report to Congress on the Situation in Iraq*, 13.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

(4) Provocation. The strategic significance of the Samarra bombing is particularly poignant in terms of the provocation effect. The first and most obvious provocation that affected the strategic calculus of the conflict was aimed at the Shiites. This attack more than any of the prior attacks was a call to arms for the Shiites, leading to the deployment of the Mahdi Army and the Badr Organization to protect Shiite holy sites, leadership, and the Shiite communities. It led directly to the Minister of Interior hastening the integration of Shi'a into the ISF, particularly the National Police, including those who were members of JAM and the Badr Organization.<sup>182</sup> This further exasperated the sectarian situation resulting in "Sunni communities violently [rejecting] the National Police, seeing it as an extension of Shi'a militia killing squads." As mentioned previously, the violence mobilized the Sunni insurgent groups and militias to protect against incursions from Shi'a death squads. The bombing provoked both communities into what most would consider a civil war; the dramatic jump in civilian casualties on both sides substantiates this proposition.

As a result of the sectarian violence that escalated following the bombing of the "Golden Mosque" in Samarra, U.S. policy decisions at the strategic level were affected:

In December 2006, during the height of the ethno-sectarian violence that escalated in the wake of the bombing of the Golden Dome Mosque in Samarra, the leaders in Iraq at that time—General George Casey and Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad—concluded that the coalition was failing to achieve its objectives. Their review underscored the need to protect the population and reduce sectarian violence, especially in Baghdad. As a result, General Casey requested additional forces to enable the Coalition to accomplish these tasks, and those forces began to arrive in January.<sup>183</sup>

(5) Cumulative Effects. A heated debate to either send more troops or withdraw was underway in the United States during this escalation of violence. The "Golden Mosque" bombing and the sectarian violence that erupted following it had all the hallmarks of civil war. Congress and particularly many Democrats voiced the

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<sup>182</sup> "Hard Lessons; the Iraqi Reconstruction Experience," *Office of the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR)*, Washington, DC, 2008, 288.

<sup>183</sup> Petreus, *Report to Congress on the Situation in Iraq*, 2.

opinion of many Americans that U.S. forces should not be embroiled in an Iraqi civil war. Generally, as the levels of violence increased in Iraq, the level of U.S. support for the war fell. A January 2007 Gallup poll reported, "Americans' assessment of the situation in Iraq has become progressively more negative in recent months, as the percentage saying things are going "badly" for the United States has jumped to a record high of 71% in the latest *USA Today*/Gallup poll. This is up from 64% in October 2006. On the flip side, just 28% think things are going well, down from the previous low of 35% last fall."<sup>184</sup> Public opinion is not necessarily a deciding factor in strategic decision making; however, one of the primary targets of influence of these types of attacks is the American people. When support falls low enough, U.S. Congress may intervene and withhold funding, as we experienced in Vietnam.

The above discussion of public opinion and cumulative effects leads us to how the IED has been used by the nationalists to achieve strategic influence through cumulative effects.

## **2. Iraqi Nationalists: Using Cumulative Effects of the IED for Strategic Influence**

As outlined previously, the Nationalists goals included ousting the coalition, which is seen as an occupation force, and either upholding or changing the status quo with regards to the Shi'a dominated government. In contrast with AQI and other salafist jihadis, targeting civilians is not seen as a means to achieve the Nationalists' desired end state. Generally, the Nationalist groups do not engage in suicide terrorism. However, as sectarian violence increased throughout the conflict, reaching its peak in December 2006, civilians of the opposite sect were targeted with various forms of violence, including the IED, but it is extremely difficult to determine whether the attacks were carried out by AQI in an attempt to incite violence, or by Nationalist Insurgents in retaliation. The main

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<sup>184</sup> Lydia Saad, "Record Number of Americans Say Situation in Iraq Going 'Badly,'" *Gallup News Service*, January 10, 2007, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/26095/Record-Number-Americans-Say-Situation-Iraq-Going-Badly.aspx> (accessed February 4, 2009), 1.



focus of this section will be the attacks against the coalition, ISF, and Iraqi infrastructure that contributed to cumulative effects and how those effects achieved strategic influence.

U.S. military experiences with irregular warfare in Vietnam, Lebanon and Somalia have left our enemies with a distorted picture of our tolerance for conflict, specifically casualties. Even now, some may say that all the insurgents need to do is to kill a few American soldiers and drag their bodies through the streets, as in Somalia, and the U.S. will withdraw its forces. Perhaps, as Americans we do have a lower tolerance for military casualties, and this view may have been influenced by the enormous success of the First Gulf War with minimal casualties taken. However, the lessons of Somalia were certainly not lost on the insurgent groups in Iraq, and it seems they have tailored their strategy around this belief:

Insurgents and Islamists learned the importance of a constant low-level body count and the creation of a steady climate of violence. This forces the U.S. into a constant, large-scale security effort; makes it difficult for Iraqi forces to take hold; puts constant pressure on U.S. and Iraqi forces to disperse; and ensures constant media coverage.<sup>185</sup>

The “constant low-level body count” and “steady climate of violence” was created primarily through the use of the IED by insurgent groups, including the Nationalists. The steady barrage of these types of attacks and the escalation of attacks over time generated cumulative effects that had strategic influence. Hammes refers to this type of campaign as fourth-generation warfare (4GW), where groups:

...seek to win by wearing down the political will of the coalition. They know they must convince coalition members that any potential gains are not worth the cost, and they plan a long, drawn-out struggle to do so. The ACF [anti-coalition forces] are trying to convince America that we cannot prevail and are counting on defeating our political will as well as that of the coalition.<sup>186</sup>

Pinpointing the cumulative effects of an IED campaign is extremely difficult. The main difficulty comes with associating the strategic influence of one relatively

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<sup>185</sup> Cordesman, “Iraq’s Evolving Insurgency: The Nature of Attacks and Patterns and Cycles in the Conflict,” 9.

<sup>186</sup> Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone: On War in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 177.

insignificant tactical event such as a roadside bomb against a military convoy. In this type of attack, the IED is being used in a traditional ambush style tactic used in asymmetric or conventional warfare. However, with ambush attacks, the destruction of the target is typically the end in itself. That is not the case with the IED; as a symbolic weapon, the effects transcend the physical destruction. The key point that must be remembered is that as with the high-profile suicide and bombing IED attacks, there is a psychological factor associated with the roadside IED, or the SVBIED targeting a military or police checkpoint, or the detonation of a PBIED against the ISF, that must not be discounted. The targeted audience, or audience of influence, is not the physical target; it is the will of the Iraqi people, the Iraqi government, coalition members, American leadership, and especially the American people. Even if a single event, or several events, or hundreds of events are treated as simply tactical successes by the enemy, it is impossible to discount the strategic influence of a thousand IED events in a month over the course of months or years. When top military officials and politicians are spending lots of time and energy seeking solutions to the IED problem, the device is having strategic effect. When over \$14 billion dollars in five years are spent not to eliminate a threat, but to defeat its strategic influence, then the weapon has transcended the tactical.

Contemporary military uses a specific term to describe a series of tactical events; operationally planned for with a strategic end in mind—Effects Based Operations (EBO). Recently the term EBO has fallen out of favor with the military; however, the concept still applies here. Drawing from *Joint Forces Command Glossary* and discussions by General Tommy Franks, and Brig. Gen. David A. Deptula in 2005, EBO is described by Lazarus as:

...a conceptual process “for obtaining a desired strategic outcome or ‘effect’ on the enemy, through the synergistic, multiplicative, and cumulative application of the full range of military and nonmilitary capabilities.” This is an adaptive process that takes the shape of a complex, interwoven pattern that spans the tactical, operational, and strategic dimensions of engagement. The enabling foundation of EBO is effects-based targeting, which involves creating and manipulating events

using precision lethal and nonlethal capabilities that change an adversary's behavior and mind-set in a manner close to that which was originally intended.<sup>187</sup>

If we look closely at the explanation, the IED must certainly be considered an effects-based weapon as it involves cumulative application. The insurgency's use of the IED has been adaptive in nature and has spanned the levels of conflict from the tactical to strategic. Lastly, the IED holds precision lethal and nonlethal capabilities, nonlethal being its symbolic and psychological effects. The point here is that the insurgency is using the IED as an effects-based weapon to achieve cumulative effects that will, over time, alter the behavior of the ISF, the coalition, the Iraqi government, the military leadership, the politicians, and even the American people. Let us take a look at several types of IEDs, tactics and targets the Nationalist Groups have chosen and the effects that have resulted.

*a. Sunni and Shi'a Nationalists' Iconic IEDs*

Each of these Nationalist groups has perfected the use of a particular devastating variant of the IED. What is extremely interesting about these two types of IEDs, related to the specific group that uses them, is that there is very little, if any, crossover. In other words, there is a distinct sectarian divide. These are two of the most lethal forms of roadside IEDs used: the first used by the Sunni Nationalists is the deep-buried IED, and the second is the Explosively Formed Penetrator (EFP), used by Shi'a Nationalists.<sup>188</sup> These types of IEDs were an insurgent adaptation to the fielding of better armor by U.S. forces. Armor and vehicle design improvements are of little value when the large deep buried IEDs have been known to contain well over 1000 pounds of explosive material, usually homemade explosive (HME), and can toss a 26-ton vehicle into the air to land 15, 20, or more meters away.

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<sup>187</sup> David B. Lazarus, "Effects-Based Operations and Counterterrorism," *Air & Space Power Journal* (2005) <http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/apj/apj05/fal05/lazarus.html> (accessed August 25, 2008), 1.

<sup>188</sup> Glenn Zorpette, "Countering IEDs," *Spectrum*, September 2008, <http://www.spectrum.ieee.org/sep08/6627> (accessed February 5, 2009), 6.

The EFPs are typically armed remotely with a radio-controlled device allowing for selective targeting, and then initiated with a passive infrared sensor that fires when it senses the heat of the vehicle passing in front of it. The EFP will penetrate U.S. armored vehicles.

Although these types of IEDs make up 5% to 15% of all IEDs in Iraq, they account for approximately 40% of the IED casualties.<sup>189</sup> These types of IEDs are typically used to target coalition and ISF, but they have also been used to target contractors supporting reconstruction efforts.

They attribute greatly to the cumulative effect of IEDs for a number of reasons. First, they are politically sensitive because they are highly destructive and cause a large proportion of the casualties. They are also politically sensitive because the deep buried IEDs are usually made with HME that has been manufactured using agricultural products that the Iraqi government is unable to control. The EFPs are politically sensitive because they are “associated particularly with Shia militia groups. The U.S. military has long contended that Iran is a supplier of the EFP’s key component—a concave copper disk, called a liner, that must be properly machined to work well.”<sup>190</sup>

Second, these types of IEDs attribute to the cumulative effects of IEDs because they are extremely costly for the U.S. For instance, a fully equipped Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicle may cost \$1.2 million dollars or more.<sup>191</sup> As of September 2008, there are more than 3200 MRAPs in combat roles in Iraq with plans to spend \$5.4 billion to buy 4000 more.<sup>192</sup> Over time, the damage and destruction of these vehicles with a low-cost weapon such as an IED is economically exhausting.

Lastly, grouping both military effects and information effects together, these types of IEDs demonstrate together that we do not control the physical or human terrain. For the large or deep buried IED (LBIED or DBIED), large quantities of

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<sup>189</sup> Glenn Zorpette, “Countering IEDs,” *Spectrum*, September 2008, <http://www.spectrum.ieee.org/sep08/6627> (accessed February 5, 2009), 6.

<sup>190</sup> Zorpette, “Countering IEDs,” 6.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

fertilizer are required to make the HME, and then it takes time to transport and emplace a large quantity of explosive for an attack. If the preparation goes undetected, the insurgents demonstrate that they maintain the information advantage that translates to a military advantage of knowing the time and place of the attack. The EFP may be even more significant because its components have to be smuggled into Iraq through a covert network with ties to external support (Iran). This once again demonstrates that we control neither the physical terrain nor the human terrain.

***b. The Roadside Bomb***

The previous two types of IEDs make up a very small percent of the overall number of IEDs used in Iraq. Although the physical effects of the EFP and large deep buried IED are devastating when they occur, and the cumulative effects are significant, we cannot ignore how the day to day use of the roadside bomb has a significant cumulative effect. The cumulative effects discussed in the previous section apply to the roadside bomb as well, and so to prevent repetition, this section will discuss the cumulative psychological effect referenced earlier as psychological attrition. This effect impacts the troops on the ground, the populace, the American people, and pretty much anyone who is involved with the conflict directly or indirectly, such as the international community.

First, psychological attrition is related to tactical frustration. When an enemy is able to adapt their tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) more quickly than friendly forces, and is able to execute attacks with damaging effects, troops begin to get frustrated. The IED is such a versatile weapon system; it is able to be rapidly modified to meet tactical requirements or technological countermeasures. This flexibility quickly translates into tactical successes, and in an IED campaign with hundreds of attacks per week, those successes accumulate to achieve strategic influence.

The insurgent groups have been able to quickly adapt the IED to counter any countermeasures that coalition forces may use. As armor gets more effective, the amount of explosive used increases as with the deep buried IEDs. As the U.S. uses technology to counter a triggering device, the insurgent finds a way to overcome the

technological advantage. Early in the conflict, high percentages of attacks were triggered using radio controlled devices (RC). To counter the RC devices, the U.S. started the “jammer program [which] became known as CREW, for “counter radio-controlled IED electronic warfare.”<sup>193</sup> Jammers were installed in vehicles in an attempt to defeat the RC triggering devices. The “insurgents’ response to the first jammers, in late 2003, was swift. It established a Spy vs. Spy—like competition between counter-IED specialists and the bomb makers, in which sometimes a measure was followed by a countermeasure within days.”<sup>194</sup> As the technology improved and the number of jammers fielded increased, their effectiveness resulted in the insurgents shifting tactics once more—going back to using command wire and pressure wire, sometimes called a crush switch. Command wire is a pair of insulated copper wires, which connect the triggering device to the blasting cap and can be several kilometers long. Pressure wire is a victim-operated trigger meaning that it initiates when someone steps on it or a vehicle runs over it. Commonly, flexible tubing is used, which has a number of paired conductors inside the tubing that when crushed together complete the circuit, firing the IED. The point here is that there were still large numbers of IEDs detonating against coalition and ISF; they were just initiated in a different manner than before. This is frustrating to the troops who have this equipment on their vehicles that is supposed to mitigate the risk and reduce the numbers of IEDs detonated against them, yet they are still being hit with devastating results.

The American people also begin to get frustrated when they hear of the billions of dollars being spent on systems to protect the troops from IEDs, yet the number of attacks continues to increase.

As violence levels increased prior to the surge, and prior to “clear and hold,” insurgents were able to hold territory using the IED. This occurred largely due to psychological attrition. A patrol would go through a certain area where insurgents were active and would be targeted with an IED by an enemy unseen. Patrols would repeatedly go into these same areas as part of their patrol requirements and would be repeatedly

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<sup>193</sup> Zorpette, “Countering IEDs,” 6.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

targeted, sometimes with fatalities. After losing enough people in this fashion, a commander may simply find other routes to take; over time these hotspots would be designated as no-go zones. This effect may be magnified even more when the only route in and out of the FOB is the area where these attacks are occurring. Using the IED to control terrain, the insurgent is able to send a clear message that they control the physical and social space.

Second, psychological attrition is related to the physical and symbolic separation between the populace and the coalition forces. Responding to the exponential growth of IED attacks, coalition forces attempted to limit the number of successful attacks through better armor, better counter-IED training, varying routes, creation of no-go zones, limiting patrols, and/or consolidating forces on large FOBs. These tactics had the unanticipated effect of separating the troops from the populace; a clear violation of counterinsurgency (COIN) theory which says that “the civilian population is the center of gravity—the deciding factor in the struggle.”<sup>195</sup> We must separate the insurgent from the populace, not ourselves from the populace. In an attempt to minimize risk and reduce the numbers of casualties, we isolated ourselves from the populace, which prevented the building of trust and credibility necessary to gain the vital information that we needed: establishing who the insurgents were.

The repeated use of the roadside bomb also psychologically isolates the coalition from the Iraqi people. Because we were being targeted by an enemy that hid using the population, we could not distinguish the populace from the insurgent. With repeated attacks, resentment would build in the minds of troops equating to a dislike and distrust of all Iraqis. Alternately, Iraqis would see soldiers through thick armor, Plexiglas, and behind 50-caliber machine guns and begin to wonder who we were there to help. This interplay of psychological attrition would become a major impediment to building the trust and credibility required to succeed in a COIN campaign.

Finally, psychological attrition occurs in the minds of the American people and affects their will. The insurgents understand very well that the IED holds the

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<sup>195</sup> United States Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency Field Manual 3-24* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), XXV.

attention of the news media and that the media is the way to communicate to the Americans. Nightly reports of American casualties, glimpses of flag-draped coffins, and stories of towns rallying behind the families of their fallen heroes accumulate in the American consciousness. Without a clear direction and signs of political or military gain and in conjunction with mounting casualties, the American people will rapidly grow weary of conflict. We experienced this phenomenon acutely in Vietnam and Lebanon, and again in Somalia.

#### **D. SUMMARY**

This chapter began with a discussion of the insurgency in Iraq and expanded Hafez's assertion that there are actually three insurgencies that are occurring. For simplicity, the multiple insurgent organizations were grouped together based on their long-range goals and so classified into the jihadi salafists/ideological Ba'athists, Islamic Sunni Nationalists, and Islamic Shi'a Nationalists. This thesis acknowledged that this may be an oversimplification of the complex situation that exists in Iraq; however, it provides a good starting point for understanding how the IED is used strategically to achieve both short and long term goals.

The jihadi salafists and ideological Ba'athists have aspirations to remove the occupation forces, overthrow the Iraqi government, and establish a base of operations in Iraq for the future creation of a caliphate in the greater Middle East.

The Islamic Sunni Nationalists also wish to remove the occupation forces from Iraq and overthrow (or at minimum gain greater political participation in) the Shi'a dominated government.

The Islamic Shiite Nationalists want to remove the occupation forces and maintain the status quo, retaining the majority of the political power through a Shiite dominated government.

This chapter next discussed how these groups have used the IED strategically. AQI favored the use of high-profile bombings and suicide attacks, first against coalition



forces to discourage the occupation; then against ISF to undermine the fledgling government; and finally, against Shi'a to generate sectarian violence to destabilize the country.

Both the Nationalist groups used the roadside bomb as their preferred variant of the IED and concentrated their attacks on coalition forces and ISF. Their version of high-profile attacks included the use of large deep buried IEDs by the Sunni extremists and the EFP by the Shi'a. These types of IEDs affected the political leadership and will of the people, they affected the coalition economically, militarily and also had additional effects through the use of information operations. These effects were described as cumulative, allowing for the insurgents to maintain a steady stream of IED attacks to achieve strategic influence.

In each case, the IED was used as a symbolic weapon with effects which transcended the damage to the physical target to reach a target of influence. The psychological effects of the IED on the target of influence were cumulative and affected the will of the leadership, the population, and the military as well; ultimately resulting in a behavior change. Cumulative psychological effects that result during a prolonged IED campaign were described as psychological attrition. Through the interaction of immediate effects of the IED attack and the cumulative effects of multiple attacks over time, the insurgents were able to generate strategic effects with a simple, flexible weapon: the improvised explosive device.

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## **IV. CONCLUSION: THE LEGACY OF THE IED**

### **A. UNDERSTANDING THE IED AS A STRATEGIC WEAPON**

To aid in understanding the strategic influence of the IED, this thesis described the IED as a symbolic weapon, one capable of achieving effects that extend far beyond the physical damage created by the attack. Terrorism was discussed, looking at the nature of symbolic violence and why terrorism is useful as part of an insurgent strategy. Specifically, terrorism as a tactic allows insurgents to achieve short and long-term political goals. The IED was described as the perfect insurgent weapon that generates the effects desired to provide the insurgency the primary and supporting advantages necessary to accomplish those short and long-term goals.

This thesis looked at the primary advantages of the IED as a symbolic weapon both in terms of the immediate effects and cumulative effects. With regards to immediate effects, the IED is the perfect weapon because it allows for the targeting of multiple audiences using symbolic violence: specifically, the target of attack and the target of influence. The IED assists the insurgents in overcoming their mobilization dilemma by using symbolic violence to give the perception that the insurgency is stronger than it really is. A shocking IED event can create the agitation effect by targeting infrastructure, civilians, or the military in order to announce that there is an opposition. An IED detonation can create the demonstration effect by showing that the government cannot maintain control and is beatable, thereby allowing the populace to believe the insurgency may succeed. The IED provokes government overreaction, which further alienates the population and adds to the agitation effect. The IED as the primary weapon has the power to coerce the target of influence through fear and anticipation of the next attack.

The cumulative effects are more difficult to describe since they are less tangible; however, they seem to be the most significant in achieving long-term goals for the insurgents. In the case of Iraq, the cumulative psychological effects erode the morale of the coalition forces and ISF; they separate the population from the CI forces; they erode the will of Coalition Allies and International Community; but most importantly, they

erode the will of the American people, the strategic center of gravity. In Iraq IEDs are used in many ways: to coerce the population into active or passive support, to mobilize additional insurgent recruits, and to generate sectarian violence, further destabilizing the situation. Ultimately, the cumulative effects of IEDs may influence the decision making of the military and political leadership, thus affecting strategies and policies.

The IED has supporting advantages that have contributed to its success. Advantages such as relative cost, flexibility, adaptability, availability, ease of production and deployment contribute to its success. These advantages are mostly tactical; however, when the costs of countering the IED are so high, these tactical advantages may have strategic repercussions. Most weapons lose their appeal when effective countermeasures or change in tactics reduce their overall effectiveness. However, the IED is so flexible in its design and particularly in its employment that it has continued to have success against a militarily superior force, despite billions of dollars already having been spent to counter and defeat it. It is this resilience and flexibility as a weapon system that has contributed to the IED's continued use.

The primary and supporting advantages of the IED—that is, its strategic and tactical advantages, along with its recent success in Iraq and Afghanistan—guarantee that the IED will be used in Irregular Warfare for some time to come. It is through the interaction of these immediate effects and cumulative effects that the IED is able to achieve strategic influence. The immediate effects of death and destruction may have strategically significant implications over time. The cumulative effects of symbolic violence will contribute to the psychological attrition and influence political behavior by affecting the will of a population. The cost is low, the damage may or may not be great, but influence is the most significant advantage. As an instrument of symbolic violence, it is able to achieve effects that transcend the physical destruction of the IED event, allowing it to target audiences other than those of the attack. The effects of the IED event are further amplified using the media to reach a wider audience, thus enhancing the effect on the will of a population.

## **B. COPING WITH THE IED AS A STRATEGIC WEAPON**

The IED may no longer be considered simply as an obstacle around which forces must maneuver. It must be evaluated from the tactical, operational and, most importantly, the strategic perspective with a clear understanding of the IED's potential effects. Each attack must be regarded as having potential strategic consequences. The target audiences must be determined in order to discover the strategic intent of the attack. This will help determine the centers of gravity. For example, we have learned in the case of Iraq that the strategic center of gravity is the American people. Insurgents believe that large numbers of attacks will lead to intolerable levels of casualties, the will of the American people will be affected, and support for the conflict will wane, forcing withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq. Similarly, with the appropriate amount of violence against civilians, the Iraqi people will become frustrated with the Iraqi and coalition forces' inability to maintain security and reject the Iraqi government. The Iraqi people will then be forced to choose the side of the expected victor, the insurgent groups. Understanding how the IED achieves strategic influence will allow political and military leaders to adapt policies and strategies to better cope with the IED in the future.

JIEDDO acknowledges that their mission statement as worded: to defeat the IEDs as "weapons of strategic influence," "implicitly suggests that IEDs and the casualties they cause cannot be eliminated."<sup>196</sup> As such, the solution in coping with the IED will not be just military in nature, leveraging the advantages of technology. Notwithstanding that direct action focus of "attacking the network" is an absolutely necessary aspect of reducing the IED usage to a tolerable level, the fact remains that such a focus of attack is not the end-all. These operations must be understood as part of a larger COIN strategy, where a tolerable level of security allows the time and space for political solutions to be reached. Our enemies in the past have shown that they are able to manage and control their numbers of casualties, and if the root problem, whether political or social, is not

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<sup>196</sup> Zorpette, "Countering IEDs," 2.

addressed, attacks will continue. In a discussion of “The Troubles,” an analysis of IED use by the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA), Colbert described the IED coping solution this way:

While the technical and tactical efforts in the counter-IED campaign were measurably effective and indeed invaluable, it was the pursuit of a strategic solution which reduced the factors driving the use of IEDs that had the greatest affect...the successful counter-IED strategy was a combined effort that focused on the technical and tactical IED sub-systems while also pursuing a strategic solution which addressed why IEDs were being used in the first place.<sup>197</sup>

There must be a fusion between military and political strategies with an emphasis on interagency and inter-department, as well as intra-department, collaboration to integrate all available resources and information. This collaboration will be especially critical with the management of intelligence and information related to the IED; commonly referred to as knowledge management. JIEDDO certainly seems to be on the right track through the creation of the COIC and by adding their “strategic planning role” line of operation. As discussed in the first chapter, the responsibility for Joint IED Defeat is directed to JIEDDO by DOD Directive 2000.19E which stipulates that JIEDDO’s role include,

The collection of all DoD-wide efforts to reduce or eliminate the effects of all forms of IEDs used against U.S. and Coalition Forces, including policy, resourcing, materiel, technology, training, operations, information intelligence, assessment, and research.<sup>198</sup>

However, this directive does not guarantee collaboration; that level of cooperation will require creative leadership with exceptional strategic vision. For instance, IED Defeat must be fully integrated into the overall COIN strategy, and, therefore, the perceived overlap between the COIC and integration centers within SOCOM, and other COIN forces must be resolved. Collaboration, not competition, must be achieved. Fluid

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<sup>197</sup> Colbert, “The Devil’s Right Hand: Understanding IEDS and Exploring Their Use in Armed Conflict,” 93-94.

<sup>198</sup> U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations. (2008). *The Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization: DOD's Fight Against IEDs Today and Tomorrow*, 34.

collaboration will allow DoD to more efficiently cope with the IED as a strategic weapon. Moving further “left of the boom” will require the fluid integration of IED defeat and counterinsurgency operations within the framework of a clear politico-military strategy.

### **C. FINAL THOUGHTS FOR THE FUTURE**

Some amazing progress has been made in Iraq in reducing the strategic influence of the IED. Few could have predicted the scope of the problem that we would face in Iraq. Hammes asserts that DoD had “gravitated to a high-tech version of war” and was thoroughly unprepared to deal with the human focused fourth-generation warfare (4GW) we face in Iraq.<sup>199</sup> Leveraging our technological advantages while bolstering our human centric COIN skills will continue to be a challenge for our forces, but will ensure our success in these types of operations. Fortunately, it seems DoD was able to evolve, as seen through its embracing of COIN in Iraq; however, DoD’s Joint Vision 2020 is still remarkably technology focused and leaves very little emphasis on what will likely be the most common type of conflict we will face: Irregular Warfare. If Afghanistan is any indicator, our enemies will continue to use asymmetric strategies to compensate against our strengths. With the steadily rising numbers of IED attacks and corresponding casualties in Afghanistan, it is apparent that the IED will be foremost among our enemies’ methods of fighting in the future. Gaining a thorough understanding of the IED as a weapon of strategic influence is vital to prepare us for future Irregular Warfare engagements.

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<sup>199</sup> Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone: On War in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 6-7.

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